

Chapter 14: Report of Bahira the Monk

Bahira the monk was also among to those who knew the name, characteristics and traits of the Holy Prophet (S) before his advent; along with his name and genealogy. And he was in anticipation of the Prophet's arrival.

1 – Narrated to us Ahmad bin Hasan al-Qattan; and Ali bin Ahmad bin Muhammad; and Muhammad bin Ahmad Shaibani that they said: Narrated to us Abul Abbas Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Yahya bin Zakariya al-Qattan that he said: Narrated to us Muhammad bin Ismail Barmaki: Narrated to us Abdullah bin Muhammad: Narrated to us my father from Haitham from Muhammad bin Saib from Abi Salih from Ibne Abbas from his father Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib from Abi Talib that he said:

“In the height of the hot season we started for Shaam, taking Muhammad, who was then eight years old. My people remonstrated against taking the child, lest his life should be endangered. But I declared that I could not leave him. I mounted him on a camel which I kept constantly before me so as not to lose sight of the child. As soon as the heat of the sun became oppressive, a small cloud white as snow came, and saluting Muhammad, cast a refreshing shade over him, attending him wherever he went, and often showering down a variety of fruits for his refreshments.

During the journey, water became so scarce in the caravan that a leathern bag of it sold for two gold coins, yet by the blessings of the Prophet, we always had water in abundance, and moreover found excellent vegetation for our camels, any of which becoming exhausted on the road, was immediately restored to soundness and strength by the touch of his hand.

As we approached Busra Shaam, said Abu Talib, the hermitage of a certain Christian recluse was seen advancing towards us with the speed of a race horse. On coming up it stopped before us, with its astonished owner, Bahira by name, who was always so absorbed in contemplation that he never showed the least attention to those that passed his cell; and never even spoke to any person. When he found his hermitage in motion, and saw the caravan approaching, he at once perceived it was the Prophet; and on coming up he said to him: If what I have read and heard is true you are he, and none else.

Our caravan halted under a great tree near the cell of Bahira. The tree was dry and the branches fallen, yet caravans were still in the habit of stopping under it. On the Prophet seating himself under the tree it became agitated and threw out numerous boughs, particularly spreading its branches over the head of its illustrious visitor, and produced three kinds of fruit, two common in summer, and the other peculiar to winter. The people of the caravan on seeing this were astonished, as was likewise Bahira, who, coming down from his cell and bringing some refreshment for the young personage that had inspired him with such admiration, inquired for his guardian.

Abu Talib replied that he was the guardian and uncle of the child. The old monk then said, I testify that he is the one I know, or I am not Bahira. He then asked Abu Talib's permission to present the refreshment he had brought to the wonderful child, who inquired: Is it for me alone, or my fellow travelers can partake of it with me?

The monk said it was little, but all he had; however, he might do as he pleased. Accordingly he said: 'In the Name of Allah' and began to eat, our whole party of one hundred and seventy persons following his example; and after we were all satisfied the little offering of Bahira it seemed to have been untouched.

The monk in astonishment at what he witnessed, stooped down and kissed the blessed head of the Prophet, and said: By the truth of Christ this is he! But the people present did not comprehend what he meant. A man of the caravan then addressed him and said: O hermit, your conduct is wonderful. We have often passed your cell, but you never noticed us in the least. He replied: I am indeed in a wonderful state; I see what you don't, and know certain things unknown to you. There is a child under this tree whom if you knew as I know, verily you would take him on your shoulders and carry him back to his native city.

On my oath, I have paid you no attention but for his sake. When I first saw him from my cell, light was beaming before him to heaven, I beheld men fanning him with fans of ruby and emerald, while others presented him with various fruits, the cloud at the same time shading him. My cell ran to meet him like a race horse, and this tree, which has been dry so long, and was almost branchless, by his miraculous power has become verdant, with numerous boughs, and had instantaneously produced three kinds of fruit.

Moreover, this tank, which has been dry since the time of the apostles, its water having disappeared when they were rejected and abused by the Jews, has now become full. I have read in the book of the apostle Shamoan that he cursed the Bani Israel, on which the water of this tank dried up, and he said: When you see water here again, know that it is by the blessing of the Prophet who will arise at Tahama and flee to Medina. Among his own people he will be called the trustworthy (Amin) and in heaven, Ahmad. He will be of the posterity of Ismail, the son of Ibrahim, and by Allah, this is he.

Bahira then turned to Muhammad and said: I ask you three things, and adjure you by Laat and Uzza to answer. At the mention of these idols the Prophet was angry and said: Ask nothing in their name; verily

they are my greatest enemies in the shape of two stone idols, which my people worship from excessive stupidity. This is one sign, said Bahira, and added, I adjure you by God— the Prophet interrupted, saying: Ask me what you please, since you do it in the name of the Lord, my God and thine, like whom there is none else. Bahira then questioned him about his state while sleeping and awake, and concerning most things relating to his character and condition, and found all to agree with what he had read in books.

Here the monk fell and kissed the feet of the Prophet and said: O son, how grateful is your smell! Your followers are more than those of all the prophets. All the lights of the world are from your light, by your name mosques will be built. As it were, I see you leading armies, mounted on an Arab steed. The Arabs and the non-Arabs will obey you, voluntarily or involuntarily.

I see you break Laat and Uzza, and king of the Kaaba, giving its key to whom you please. What numbers of the non-Arabs and Arab heroes you will cast down in the dust of destruction! Yours are the keys of Paradise and Hell; yours the mightiest sphere of usefulness; you will destroy the idols, and for your sake the judgment will not take place till the kings of the earth are brought to bow to your religion. Again he kissed the hands and feet of the child, and said: Were I to live in the time of your prophethood, I would draw the sword in your cause and attack your enemies.

You are the best of the sons of Adam, the chief of the abstinent, the seal of the prophets, and on my oath, in the name of the Most High, the earth laughed at your illustrious birth, and will laugh till the Judgment Day for joy at your being. And by the same solemn oath I declare that churches, idols, demons, all wept on your account, will continue to weep till the judgment. You are he for whom Ibrahim prayed, and whose joyful advent Isa announced, and you are pure from the abomination of idolatry.

Bahira then turned to Abu Talib and said: What relation do you hold to this child? The chief replied: He is my son. Bahira rejoined: It cannot be so, for his father and mother are dead. That is indeed true, said Abu Talib, I am his uncle. His father died before his birth, and his mother when he was six years old. Now you tell the truth, said Bahira, and in my opinion you had better carry him back to your city, for there is not a Jew or Christian or possessor of a divine book on the earth, that does not know he is born.

All who see him will recognize him as I have done by the marks he bears, and by stratagem and treachery will endeavor to destroy him, in which attempt the Jews will be more inveterate than others. Abu Talib inquired: What will cause such enmity towards him? Because your nephew is a prophet, and he will earn as much fame as did Musa and Isa (a.s.). Abu Talib expressed his hope that no evil would befall Muhammad.

As we approached Damascus, continued Abu Talib, I saw the houses of that country in motion, and light above the brightness of the sun beaming from them. The crowd that collected to see Muhammad, that Yusuf of Egyptian perfection, made the bazaars impassable wherever he went, and so loud were exclamations at his beauty and excellence altogether, that the sound reached the frontiers of Damascus.

Every monk and learned man came to see him. The wisest of the wise, among the people of the book,

who was called Nestor, visited him, and for three days was in his company without speaking a word. At the close of the third day, apparently overwhelmed with emotion, he came near and walked around the Prophet, upon which I said to him: O monk, what do you want of the child? He replied: I wish to know his name. I told him it was Muhammad bin Abdullah.

At the mention of the name the monk's expression changed, and he requested to be allowed to see the shoulders of the Prophet. No sooner did he behold the seal of prophethood than he cast himself down, kissed it and wept, saying: Carry back this sun of prophecy quickly to the place of his nativity. Verily, if you had known what enemies he has here, you would not have brought him with you. The learned man continued his visits to the Prophet, treated him with the greatest reverence, and when we left the country he gave a shirt as a memento of his friendship.

When I saw signs of aversion on the face of the Prophet I took the shirt and kept it with myself saying that I will make him wear it. I carried Muhammad home with the utmost expedition, when the news of our happy return reached Mecca, great and small came out to welcome the Prophet except Abu Jahl – may Allah curse him – who was intoxicated and ignorant of the event.

2 – Through the same chain of narrators from Abdullah bin Muhammad who said: Narrated to me my father, and narrated to me Abdur Rahman bin Muhammad from [Muhammad bin] Abdullah bin Abi Bakr bin Muhammad bin Amr bin Hazm from his father from his grandfather that Abu Talib said:

“When Bahira said farewell to the Holy Prophet (S) he wept much and said: O son of Amina, as if I can see all Arabs having enmity and dispute with you and your relatives will cut off relations with you. If they were aware of your true position they would have considered you dearer than their own sons.

Then he told me: Respected Uncle, have regard for his relationship and be fearful to the bequest of your father. Very soon all the Quraish will become aloof from you. Don't mind it at all. I know that you will not openly display your faith. You will believe in him secretly. A son would be born to you who will make his faith apparent and also render help to him. In the heavens he shall be named the Al-Batal-ul-Hasir – brave lion and (in the earth), Shajja-ul-Anza. He will have two sons who will be martyred.

He would be the chief of Arabs and the Dhulqarnain of the community. He shall be more famous in the divine books than the companions of Isa (a.s.). Abu Talib says: By Allah, I saw most of the characteristics mentioned by Bahira with my own eyes.”

3 – Narrated to us my father (r.a.) that: Narrated to us Ali bin Ibrahim from his father from Ibne Abi Umair from Aban bin Uthman in a rafa'u tradition that he said:

“When the Messenger of Allah (S) reached maturity and Abu Talib decided to undertake a journey to Damascus, the Holy Prophet (S) caught hold of the reins of his camel and asked: On whom are you leaving me, O Uncle? I have neither a father nor a mother. It was at the time when his mother had also passed away. Abu Talib began to weep at this and took him along himself. On the way when it became

hot, a piece of cloud appeared over the Prophet to shade him from the sun.

This continued till we reached a monastery that belonged to a monk named Bahira. He saw the cloud moving with us. He emerged from his cell and sent some servants for us and invited us for dinner. All of us reached the monastery to attend the dinner leaving behind the Prophet with our goods. When Bahira saw that the cloud stopped at the place of our halt, he asked if someone from the caravan has not come. People said that all have come except for a lad whom we left behind with our luggage. Bahira said: It is not suitable that someone should miss my dinner. Call that boy also. The Prophet was summoned and when he set out from there the cloud also accompanied him.

When Bahira saw this he asked: “Whose son is he?” They said: “His”, pointing to Abu Talib. Bahira asked if it was his son. Abu Talib said: “He is my brother’ son.” “Where is your brother?” Bahira asked. “He died before this boy was born.” Bahira said: “Take him back to your native place, because if the Jews recognize him like I have done, they would surely kill him. You should know that he is having a very exalted status. He is the prophet of this Ummah and he shall arise with the sword and Jihad.”

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