

## Chapter 57: Representatives of Najran in Madina

The pleasant territory of Najran comprising seventy-two villages is situated on the border of the Hijaz and Yemen. In the early days of Islam this was the only region in the Hijaz which was inhabited by the Christians, who had, for some reasons, forsaken idol-worship and embraced Christianity. [1](#)

Simultaneous with the letters which the Prophet of Islam wrote to the heads of different countries of the world he also wrote a letter to Abu Harith, the Bishop of Najran, and, through that letter, invited the people of that area to embrace Islam. The text of the said letter runs as under:

In the name the Lord of Ibrahim, Ishaq and Ya'qub.

This is a letter from Muhammad, the Prophet and Messenger of Allah to the Bishop of Najran. I praise and glorify the Lord of Ibrahim, Ishaq and Ya'qub, and invite you all to worship Allah instead of worshipping His creatures, so that you may come out of the guardianship of the creatures of Allah and take place under the guardianship of Allah Himself.

And in case you do not accept my invitation you must (at least) pay Jizyah (tribute) to the Islamic Government (in lieu of which it will undertake the protection of your lives and property), failing which you are hereby warned of dangerous consequences. [2](#)

Some of the Shi'ah sources add that the Prophet also wrote down in his letter the verse relating to the people of the Scripture wherein all of them have been invited to worship the One Allah. Here the 64th verse of Surah Ale Imran has been referred to viz: *Muhammad, say to the followers of the Bible, 'We must come to a common term: 'Let us worship no one except Allah' . . .*

The representatives of the Prophet arrived in Najran and delivered his letter to the Bishop. He read the letter very carefully and then, in order to take a decision, called a meeting of the religious and the secular personalities for consultation. One of the persons called for consultation was Shurahbil, who was renowned for his knowledge, intelligence and experience.

He spoke thus in reply to the Bishop: "My knowledge of religious matters is very meagre, and I have,

therefore, no right to express my views about them, but in case you consult me regarding some thing other than this I may be able to suggest a solution of the problem. However, I am obliged to point out one thing that we have heard time and again from our religious leaders that one day the Office of Prophethood will be transferred from the descendants of Ishaq to the descendants of Isma'il and it is not improbable that Muhammad, who is a descendant of Isma'il, may be the same promised Prophet!"

The consultative council decided that a body of men should go to Madina as representatives of Najran so that they might contact Muhammad from near and should scrutinize the proofs of his prophethood.

Sixty most distinguished and wise men of Najran were selected for the purpose; they were headed by three religious leaders namely;

1. Abu Harith bin 'Alqamah, the Grand Bishop of Najran, who was the official representative of the Roman Church in the Hijaz.
2. Abdul Masih, the chief of the representative body, who enjoyed great renown for his wisdom, prudence and experience.
3. Ayham, an aged man, who was considered to be a respectable person of the community of Najran.<sup>3</sup>

The members of the deputation arrived in the mosque in the afternoon, wearing silken clothes, golden rings, and crosses round their necks; saluted the Prophet. However, their repulsive and improper posture and that, too, in the mosque displeased the Prophet. They realized that he had been displeased with them, but did not understand the cause of his displeasure.

They, therefore, immediately contacted Uthman bin Affan and Abdur Rahman bin Awf, who were their former acquaintances, and mentioned the matter to them. They were of the view that the solution of their problem lay with Ali bin Abu Talib. They then met the Commander of the Faithful and he said in reply to them: "You should alter your dresses, and come to the Prophet in a simple dress without any ornamentation Then you will be accorded honour and respect".

The representatives of Najran put on simple clothes and removed the rings and then came to the Prophet. The Prophet replied to their salutation with great respect and also accepted some of the presents, which they had brought with them. Before the commencement of mutual discussions the members of the deputation said that the time for their prayers had set in. The Prophet permitted them to offer their prayers in the Masjid with their faces turned towards the east.<sup>4</sup>

## [The Representatives Of Najran Have Discussions With The Prophet](#)

A large number of biographers, traditionalists and Islamic historians have quoted the text of the discussions between the representatives of Najran and the Prophet. However, the late Sayyid bin Tawus

has quoted the particulars of the discussions and the event of Mubahilah (imprecation) in a more exact, more comprehensive and more detailed manner, as compared with others. He has quoted all the particulars of Mubahilah from the beginning up to the end from Kitab Mubahilah by Muhammad bin Abdul Muttalib Shaybani and Kitab 'Amali Zil Haj by Hasan bin Ismail.<sup>5</sup> However, it is beyond the scope of this book to give details of this great historical event, which, unfortunately, has not even been alluded to by some biographers.

We, therefore, mention here a few aspects of the discussions, as given by Halabi in his Seerah.<sup>6</sup>

The Prophet: I invite you to the religion of monotheism and the worship of One Allah and submission to His commands. (Then he recited some verses of the Holy Qur'an before, them).

The representatives of Najran: If Islam means faith in the only Lord of the World we already believe in Him and act according to His Commands.

The Prophet: Islam carries a few signs and some of your actions show that you do not believe in Islam. How do you say that you worship One Allah when you worship the cross and do not abstain from the meat of the swine and believe that Allah has son?

Representatives: We believe him (i.e. 'Isa) to be God because he brought the dead to life, cured the sick, made a bird with clay and made it fly, and all these things show that he is God.

The Prophet: No. He is the servant of Allah and is His creature. Allah placed him in the womb of Mary. And all this power and strength was given to him by Allah.

One of the representatives: Yes! He is the son of God, because Mary gave him birth without marrying anyone, and it is, therefore, necessary that his father should be the very Lord of the World.

At this juncture the Archangel Jibreel came and advised the Prophet to tell them: "From this point of view the condition of 'Isa resembles that of Adam who was created by Allah with His unlimited power from clay without his having a father and a mother<sup>7</sup> and if one's not having a father is the proof of one's being the son of Allah, Adam is all the more entitled to this position, because he had neither a father nor a mother".

The representatives: Your words do not satisfy us. The best way to resolve the issue is that we should engage in imprecation with each other at an appointed time and may curse the liar and pray to Allah that He may destroy the liar.<sup>8</sup>

At this moment the Archangel Jibreel came and brought the verse pertaining to imprecation and conveyed to the Prophet the Divine command that he should engage in imprecation with those, who contended and disputed with him and both the parties should pray to Allah that He might deprive the liar of His blessings. The Holy Qur'an says,

***If anyone disputes with you after the knowledge has come to you, say, 'Let each of us bring our children, our women, our people and ourselves to one place and pray to Allah to curse upon the liars among us'. (Surah Ale Imran, 3:62)***

Both the parties agreed to settle the issue through imprecation and it was decided that all of them would be ready for it on the following day.

## **The Prophet Goes For Mubahilah (Imprecation)**

The incident of Mubahilah of the Prophet of Islam with the representatives of Najran is one of the most attractive and wonderful events of the history of Islam. Though some traditionalists and biographers have been negligent in quoting its details as well as in analysing it, but a large number of them like Zamakhshari in Kashshaf,<sup>9</sup> Imam Razi in his Tafsir<sup>10</sup> and Ibn Athir in Kamil<sup>11</sup> have been most eloquent on this subject. Here we reproduce a part of Zamakhshari's narrative on the subject.

"The time for Mubahilah arrived. The Prophet and members of the deputation of Najran had already agreed that the ceremonies of Mubahilah should take place at a spot outside the city of Madina in the desert. Out of the Muslims and many relatives of his, the Prophet selected only four persons who were to participate in this significant event.

These four persons were Ali bin Abi Talib, Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet, Hasan and Husayn, as amongst all the Muslims no purer souls could be found. He covered the distance between his house and the place fixed for Mubahilah in a special manner. He stepped into the field of Mubahilah when he was carrying Husayn in his lap, and was holding the hand of Hasan in his own hand, and Fatimah was following him and Ali bin Abi Talib was walking behind them".<sup>12</sup>

Before arriving at the place fixed for Mubahilah he said to his companions: "Whenever I utter an invocation you should pray for its acceptance by saying Amin."

Before facing the Prophet the chiefs of the representatives of Najran were saying to one another: "In case you see that Muhammad has brought his warriors and officers in the field of Mubahilah and has displayed his material grandeur and external strength you should conclude that his claim is not true and he has no faith in his prophethood.

If, however, he comes for Mubahilah along with his children and the dearest ones and appears before the Almighty Allah devoid of every sort of material might and glory, it would mean that he is a true Prophet and has so much faith and self-reliance that he is not only ready to be annihilated personally, but is fully prepared with perfect courage to let his dearest ones also meet destruction and extinction".

While the chiefs of the deputation were engaged in conversation, the Prophet made a sudden appearance before the Christians of Najran along with four of his dear ones, out of whom three were his own offspring. All were wonder-struck to see that he had brought into the field of Mubahilah even the

innocent children of his dear daughter and said: "This man has perfect faith in his call and claim, because a wavering person does not bring his dearest ones into the arena of Divine wrath".

The Bishop of Najran said: "I see such faces that if they raise their hands in supplication and pray to Allah that the biggest mountain may be moved from its place, the same will happen immediately. We should in no circumstances engage in Mubahilah with these sacred and virtuous personalities because it is not improbable that we may be annihilated and it is also possible that the Divine wrath may expand and engulf the entire Christian world and not even one Christian may remain alive on the face of the earth!"<sup>13</sup>

## The Represents Of Najran Give Up The Idea Of Mubahilah

On observing the aforesaid situation the representatives of Najran made mutual consultations and unanimously decided not to participate in Mubahilah at any cost. They also agreed to pay a fixed sum per year as *jizyah* and requested that in lieu of this the Islamic Government might protect their lives and property. The Prophet agreed to this and it was settled that against the payment of that petty amount they should be entitled to the privileges granted by the Islamic Government.

Then the Prophet said: "Trouble had spread its inauspicious shadow on the heads of the representatives of Najran and if they had decided to participate in Mubahilah and cursing they would have lost their human shapes and would have been burnt in a fire which was being kindled in the desert and the torture would have spread up to the territory of Najran".

It has been quoted by A'isha that on the day of Mubahilah the Prophet accommodated his four dear ones under a black cloak and recited this verse:

***O people of the Prophet's House! Allah intends but to ward off all sorts of pollution and blemish from you and to purify you with a thorough purification. (Surah al-Ahzab, 33:33)***

Then Zamakhshari mentions the points connected with the verse of Mubahilah and says in the end of the discussion: "The incident of Mubahilah and the substance of this verse is the greatest evidence of the excellence of the People of the Mantle and is a vital proof of the rightfulness of Islam".

## Contents Of The Agreement Concluded Between The Parties

The representatives of Najran requested the Prophet that both, the amount of annual tax payable by them, and the security of Najran region, might be recorded and guaranteed by the Prophet in the deed. As ordered by the Prophet, the Commander of the Faithful wrote the deed as follows:

***In the name Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful.***

This is a deed from Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah, in favour of the people of Najran and its outskirts.

The order and decision of Muhammad about the entire property and wealth of the people of Najran is that they will supply to the Islamic Government every year two thousand garments the price of everyone of which will not exceed forty dirhams. They will be at liberty to supply half of this quantity in the month of Safar and the remaining half in Rajab.

And in case there is danger of war from the side of Yemen, they (the people of Najran) shall, as a mark of co-operation with the Islamic Government, place thirty coats of mail, thirty horses and thirty camels at the disposal of the army of Islam by way of guaranteed loan and shall also be responsible to entertain the representatives of the Prophet in the territory of Najran for a period of one month.

Furthermore, as and when a representative of his comes to them they shall receive him. And the lives, property, lands, and places of worship of the people of Najran shall be under the protection of Allah and His Prophet, provided that they will immediately give up usury, failing which Muhammad will not be responsible for them and no commitment made by him will be operative. [14](#)

This deed was written on a red skin. Two companions of the Prophet signed below it as witnesses, and thereafter the Prophet sealed it. This Peace Pact, of which a summarized translation has been given above, speaks of the justice and equity of the highest standard, as practiced by the Prophet and shows that the Islamic Government was not like the powerful states of the world which take undue advantage of the weakness of others and impose tributes on them. Islam always kept in view the spirit of conciliation and justice and the principles of humanity; it always shunned transgression.

The event Mubahilah and the verse revealed in connection with it have been the greatest merit and glory for Islam and the followers of Ahl al-Bayt throughout the long span of history, because the words and contents of this verse show the high status enjoyed by those, who accompanied the Prophet to the place appointed for Mubahilah.

For besides calling Hasan and Husayn the sons of the Prophet and calling Fatimah, only the lady belonging to his household, it calls Ali the "self" i.e. the very soul of the Prophet. What honour could be greater than this for anyone?

Is this verse not an evidence of the superiority of the Commander of the Faithful over all other Muslims of the world? Fakhr-i Razi, whose attitude in the discussions of the nature of scholastic theology and matters relating to Imamate is well known, has mentioned the reasoning of the Shi'ah and has ended the discussion with a petty and insignificant objection. Its reply is quite clear to the fair-minded people.

It is learnt from the narratives quoted from our religious leaders that Mubahilah is not particular to the Prophet, and every Muslim can combat his opponent by this means. The invocations connected with it are given in the books on Hadith and the book entitled Nur-al-Thaqalayn may be referred to for further information in this behalf. [15](#)

In the tract written by the respected teacher Allamah Tabatabai we read this: Mubahilah is one of the

permanent miracles of Islam and every true believer can combat with his opponent by means of Mubahilah to prove the realities of Islam, following the first leader of this faith and can request Allah to punish the opponent and condemn him. [16](#)

- [1.](#) Yaqt Hamawi has related the reason for their embracement of Christianity in Majma'ul Buldan, vol. V, pp. 266 – 267.
- [2.](#) al-Bidayah wan Nihayah, page 53 and Biharul Anwar, vol. XXI, page 285.
- [3.](#) Tarikh-i Ya'qubi, vol. II, page 66.
- [4.](#) Seerah-i Halabi, vol. III, page 239.
- [5.](#) The details of this historical event is given in the book entitled "Iqbal" by the late Ibn Tawus, pp. 496 – 513.
- [6.](#) Seerah-i Halabi, vol. III, page 239.
- [7.](#) This is the purport of the verse: To Allah the case of Jesus is as that of Adam whom He created from the earth and then said, "Be and he came into existence". (Surah Ale Imran, 3:59).
- [8.](#) Biharul Anwar, vol. XXI, page 32 as quoted from al-Iqbal by Ibn Tawus. It is, however, learnt from Seerah-i Halabi that Mubahilah was suggested by the Prophet himself.
- [9.](#) Kashshaf, vol. I, pp. 282 – 283.
- [10.](#) Tafsir-i Mafatihul Ghayb, vol. II, pp. 481 – 482.
- [11.](#) Tarikh-i Kamil, vol. II, page 112.
- [12.](#) In some narrations it has been stated that the Prophet was holding the hands of Hasan and Husayn in his own hands and Ali was walking in front of him and Fatimah was following him. Biharul Anwar, vol. XXI, page 338.
- [13.](#) Ibn Tawus quotes this in al-Iqbal: "On the day of Mubahilah a large number of Muhajirs and Ansar had gathered near the place where Mubahilah was to take place. However, the Prophet left his house with the said four persons only and none out of the Muslims was present at the appointed place except those five. The Prophet removed his cloak from his shoulder and flung it on two trees which were situated near each other. He then sat under its shade along with the four others and invited the "representatives of Najran to Mubahilah".
- [14.](#) Futuhul Buldan, page 76.
- [15.](#) Nur-al Thaqaalayn, vol. I, pp. 291 – 292.
- [16.](#) This subject has been clarified in certain Islamic narratives. In this connection refer Usulul Kafi, Book on Invocations, Chapter of Mubahilah, page 538.

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