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11. At Kheibar

Many non-pagan Arab tribes of the inhabitants of Hijaz refused to join the Faith of Islam. The faith itself prevented the Muslims from imposing it on the tribes because they were from the people of the scripture.

At the dawn of the Islamic State in the beginning of the Hijrah the Messenger signed a document by which he regulated the relationship between these tribes (around and in Medina) and the Muslims giving them rights equal to those of the Muslims. In that document the Holy Prophet wrote the following: "Whoever joins the signatories of this scripture would be entitled to our help and would not be subject to any injustice nor should the Muslims cooperate against them.

The children of Ouf are a community of believers. The people of the scripture are allowed to follow their religion as much as the Muslims are allowed to follow theirs and so are their allies except the one who commits injustice or sin, for he does not harm but himself. The people of the scripture from Banu-Al-Harith and Banu Al-Shateebah have rights equal to that of Banu Ouf.

"The people of the scripture shall spend on themselves and the Muslims shall spend on themselves. They shall help each other against anyone that wages war against the people of this document. The signatories of the document are entitled to mutual advice sincerity and assistance rather than fighting each other..."[1]

This document is truly the first of its kind in the history of religious freedom and a cornerstone in declaring the human rights which mankind strove for centuries to acquire.

I do not think any religious minority ever acquired such a security or rights under any government before the recent centuries.

This religious minority was expected to appreciate this generous attitude toward its faith. They should have taken such an attitude towards a religion that respects the message in which they believe and considers it heavenly with undiminished values. For the faith of Islam supports the messages of Jesus and Moses and completes them.

This religious minority had forecast to its pagan neighbors an anticipated Prophet who is mentioned in its book.

They used to threaten their pagan neighbors with the nearness of his advent and promise themselves to be of his followers. When the anticipated Prophet appeared and God showed them in him what they expected they took a hostile attitude towards him and rewarded his tolerance with breaching all covenants they signed with him.

This religious minority evidently was expecting the new Prophet to share with them their hostile attitude towards the Messiah and his followers. When they found the Holy Qur'an spoke of the holiness of Jesus his truthfulness and the purity of his mother they turned against the Messenger.

Probably they did not like something else in Islam. This faith prohibits usury and stands against exploitation and monopoly of the market. This frightened them because it was their way to charge high interests on their loans to their neighbors.

The anarchy which was prevalent in the Arabic Peninsula was a fertile land for them. They were able to move between the tribes seeding and growing hostilities between them. Establishing a strong government with definite rules and regulations would deprive them of benefits they were enjoying.

This religious minority chose to join the pagan camp in order to keep the Arab nation in a state of ignorance poverty and injustice where people lacked security of life honor and property.

Like pagans this minority did not like to see the Arab nation exercising its right of establishing a government unifying the Arab communities and directing them along with other nations to the Creator of the Universe.

This religious minority represented to the new Muslim State a menace equal to that of the pagan tribes. The reader may remember that a delegation from this religious minority was able to mobilize at the Battle of the Moat ten thousand fighters from Mecca and other communities through their war propaganda.

You may remember also that Banu Quraidhah (from this minority) broke their covenant with the Holy Prophet. They joined his enemies when they witnessed the pagan army having the upper hand at that battle maximizing the biggest crisis he ever faced.

The Messenger punished Banu Quraidhah severely after the withdrawal of the Confederate Army from around Medina. He made them pay dearly from their blood and wealth for their flagrant crimes.

However the bulk of this minority was settling in Kheibar and its numerous fortresses which were about eighty miles from Medina. This community represented a danger to the safety of the Islamic State and the time came to subdue these Kheiberites after the Messenger made his temporary truce with the pagan Meccans at Al-Hudeibeyah.

The Prophet Besieged Kheibar

When the Messenger came back from Al-Hudeibeyah he stayed in Medina only fifteen days. Turning his attention to this minority he marched towards Kheibar accompanied by only the sixteen hundred volunteers who attended Al- Hudeibeyah. After traveling three days he and his army camped around fortresses of Kheibar at night.

Leaving to their farms in the morning the Kheiberites were shocked to see the Muslim army. They recoiled back exclaiming: "Muhammad and the army." It is worthy to note that this war was not religious. It did not aim at forcing the people of Kheibar to adopt the Islamic Faith. The Holy Prophet never forced any of the followers of the scripture to change his religion.

We have already mentioned that the document which was written by the Prophet during the first year of the Hijrah had secured to the religious minority inside and around Medina their religious freedom along with their civil rights if they abode by the contents of the document. Unfortunately they did not live up to the letter or spirit of that document.

They rather became a menace to the safety of the State and freedom of the Muslims. Thus the Messenger was duty-bound to try to subdue them.

The reader may remember that the elements of the Islamic defense in the previous three battles were three:

1. The ideal leadership of the Holy Prophet with all it possessed of unequaled firmness and wisdom along with his personality whose holiness commanded the obedience of every volunteer.

2. The heroic actions of the members of the House of the Prophet and.

3. The hundreds of sincere believers whose number was continuously on the increase.

You may remember that the Messenger lost a member of his clan Obeidah Ibn Al-Harith at the Battle of Badr then he lost his uncle Al-Hamzah at the Battle of Uhud. It is reported that the Messenger at the Battle of the Moat prayed to God to preserve ‘Ali for him after He took from him Obeidah at Badr and Al-Hamzah at Uhud.

‘Ali attended the previous three battles and was the hero of every one of them. He was the first and the foremost among the fighters in both defensive and offensive actions.

His actions in each of the three battles were essential factors in directing the course of the battle bringing the battle to a good end and extinguishing its flame.

‘Ali however was not able to be the first in leading the battle of Kheibar. For a health reason he was absent at the beginning of the battle and his absence caused a noticeable vacuum. The Messenger laid

siege around Kheibar and the siege continued for weeks without bringing any result.

Skirmishes between the two sides took place one day after another. The Muslims did not have the upper hand in those skirmishes.

The Muslims' supplies were dwindling rapidly. Because of this the Muslims tried at the Battle of Kheibar to cook the meat of donkeys but the Messenger prevented them from eating the meat.

The Messenger gave the banner to Abu Bakr. He led the army towards the fortress of Na-im. The Kheibarites came out and fought the Muslims and the Muslims could not prevail against them and were forced to retreat. The Messenger on the following day gave the banner to ‘Umar and he was not luckier than Abu Bakr.

Indispensable Man

The Messenger found himself facing a very serious problem. The siege had already continued more than it should. The food supplies dwindled and became scarce.

The Islamic army so far was unable to subdue any of the fortresses. Should the Prophet continue his siege without result or should he lift the siege against the fortresses and go back to Medina? This would be a monumental failure.

If the reader were unable to evaluate the magnitude of ‘Ali's endeavor in the previous battles the Battle of Kheibar proves beyond a shadow of doubt that ‘Ali's presence was indispensable in bringing the decisive battles to their favorable conclusions.

‘Ali Is the Solution

The Holy Prophet was saddened to see that his general offensive in two consecutive days had failed. He decided therefore to bring a drastic solution to the problem and ‘Ali's leadership was the only solution. The two sheikhs Al-Bukhari and Muslim inform us in their two Sahihs (Authentics) of what took place. They recorded that Sahl Ibn Saad (a prominent companion) said:

"The Messenger of God said at Kheibar: I shall give this banner to a man through whom God will bring the victory. He loves God and His Messenger and God and His Messenger love him."

The companions spent the night asking each other: 'Who is the man whom the Holy Prophet meant?' They came in the morning to the Messenger and every one of them was hoping that he would be the man of the banner.

"Where is ‘Ali Ibn Abu Talib?" the Prophet asked. "He is suffering from inflammation of his eyes” they said. The Prophet sent for him. When ‘Ali was brought to the Prophet he treated ‘Ali's eyes with his

blessed saliva and prayed for him. ‘Ali's eyes were cured instantly as if they did not have any inflammation.

The Prophet gave ‘Ali the banner and ‘Ali asked: "Messenger of God shall I fight them until they become Muslims like us?" The Messenger said: "Go on until you reach their dwelling. Invite them to Islam and inform them of their duty towards God and Islam. By God if He leads one man through you to the right road it would be better for you than to own a precious wealth."[2]

The Unique Leadership

‘Ali went on carrying the banner and contrary to the conventional way he literally led the army. Salamah Ibn Al-Akwa said: "By God ‘Ali went out with the banner running and panting. We went following him until he planted the banner into a pile of stones near the fortress." A man from the fortress went up and asked ‘Ali: Who are You? And he replied: I am ‘Ali Ibn Abu Talib. The man said: By what was revealed to Moses you have the upper hand (the name ‘Ali means high). As the Holy Prophet forecast the Almighty granted ‘Ali the victory. He conquered the enemy before he returned to the Prophet."[3]

Salama also said: "Marhab (the outstanding warrior of the Kheiberites) came out boasting and challenging. ‘Ali dealt him a blow with his sword splitting his head and victory was accomplished."[4]

Abu Rafi a companion of the Prophet said: "We went with ‘Ali Ibn Abu Talib when the Messenger of God sent him with his banner. When he came near the fortress the dwellers of the fortress came out and he fought them. A man from them hit ‘Ali and made him lose his shield. ‘Ali took a door at the fortress and shielded himself with it. He kept it in his hand until the battle ended. I found myself with seven men trying to move that door but we could not."[5]

The retreating enemies took refuge in their fortress after a costly battle which did not last long after Marhab's death. They tried to defend themselves by entering into the fortress and locking its door after they lost the battle of confrontation. But this did not avail them. ‘Ali opened the gate and entered the fortress and his soldiers followed him.

How did he open the huge door? Did he or anyone of his soldiers climb above the wall and open the door from inside? Neither the historians nor the recorders of hadiths reported that the Muslims entered the fortress by climbing.

Had ‘Ali through an unusual power dislocated the door as some of the hadiths reported? This is possible and very likely. For another miracle was performed by the Messenger of God on that day in curing the two eyes of ‘Ali through the Messenger's blessed saliva. Dislocation of the door probably was an additional miracle which took place on that day. Probably the door which Abu Rafi informed us that ‘Ali used as a shield was the same door of the fortress.

As ‘Ali entered the fortress he brought the defensive capability of the people of the fortress to an end.

They could not win a second battle of confrontation after they

lost the first one. The fortress fell at the hands of the Muslims before the rear of the army joined its front. Other fortresses followed the fortress of Na–im. They fell one after another until the area of Kheibar completely surrendered to the Muslim State.

Conclusion

The reader may easily come to the following conclusion:

1. The Battle of Kheibar was one of the important battles of destiny for the Muslims. It was preceded by two battles in which the Muslims were not in the best conditions. The Muslims were defeated at the Battle of Uhud and ran away from the battlefield except a few of them.

This was followed by the Battle of the Moat in which the Muslims were on the defensive. They were frightened and terrified except those whom the Almighty fortified. Their hearts went up to their throats. The battle ended and the Muslims did not dare face their enemies or cross from their side to the side of the enemies. They remained behind their Moat.

The Muslims at the Battle of Kheibar outnumbered their enemies. Should they fail to subdue them their failure was expected to show their weakness and entice many hostile tribes to attack the Muslims and the Kheiberites will be the nucleus of the future invading forces.

In addition the Muslims themselves because of their failure in Kheibar will lose their self–confidence and see that their victory against their numerous enemies is a remote possibility. On the other hand if the Muslims obtain victory against the Kheiberites the opposite will be the result.

Victory heightens their morale eliminates a dangerous enemy and makes the rest of the Arab tribes respect the Muslims and hesitate to attack them.

2. The Messenger was unhappy with the sequence of events of the battle. The siege around the fortresses continued for a long time. The food supplies dwindled. If the siege continued and the Muslims could not prevail against the enemies the Muslims would be forced to withdraw and lift the siege. This would be a disastrous failure. The Muslims upon the order of the Prophet therefore conducted two general offensives in two consecutive days under the leadership of Abu Bakr then ‘Umar.

As the Muslims were unable to conquer any of the fortresses in the two offensives the Messenger realized that the Muslims were facing an unusual dilemma. He wanted a drastic solution for that problem.

3. Because ‘Ali's leadership in the view of the Messenger was the only solution the Messenger had to perform a miracle in order to enable ‘Ali to fulfill his mission. ‘Ali was suffering from inflammation of his

eyes and he would not be able to fulfill his difficult task unless his eyes were cured.

Had there been any other person capable of fulfilling the mission the Prophet would not have commissioned ‘Ali with it. ‘Ali was excused from the duty of Jihad because of his unusual condition but the situation was so grave and there was no one other than ‘Ali capable of facing the danger and prevailing against it.

Two Miracles

4. The cure of ‘Ali's eyes by the saliva of the Messenger was one of two miracles. The second miracle was the prophecy of the Messenger: He informed the Muslims that the one who would lead the army on the third day would be able with the help of God to conquer the fortresses. The Prophet as a human could not predict that God would open the fortresses at the hands of ‘Ali. It was possible for ‘Ali to be killed or seriously wounded and that would prevent him from continuing his campaign.

The Messenger did not utter his words in reliance on himself. He uttered them only in reliance on God's revelation. Only God knew what would happen to ‘Ali and that he would come back after God opened the fortress at his hands.

The whole army failed and was unable to conquer the fortress when ‘Ali was absent. The presence of ‘Ali alone was the key to victory. This would substantiate clearly that ‘Ali was the main contributor after the Prophet in founding the Muslim State for he was the implementer of the Prophet's strategy and the eliminator of his adversaries.

To the truth of this statement ‘Umar the Second Caliph attested when he said to the man who accused ‘Ali of being conceited: "A man such as ‘Ali has the right to be proud. By God the pillar of Islam could not be erected without ‘Ali's sword. He is the highest magistrate of this nation its earliest Muslim and its most honorable.".

The natural ministry

The Almighty strengthened His Messenger by his cousin ‘Ali who pledged to him ten years prior to the Hijrah to be his Minister in his great mission. Had ‘Ali not pledged to the Prophet at the clan's conference to be his "Wazeer" (minister) he would not have acted differently from what he did. The attachment of ‘Ali to the Messenger was natural requiring no pledge or pact.

He did not pledge to the Prophet his ministry and full assistance in order to gain the important ranks which the Messenger promised him. He gave his word because he believed that his assistance to the Messenger was the mission for which he was created. The love of God and His Messenger filled his heart and therefore he gave all his existence for their pleasure.

A Divine Choice

When the Messenger conferred on ‘Ali the ranks of brother executor and successor he was speaking by the order of God and God chooses for these ranks only the one who merits them.

The Holy Prophet on the other hand did not bestow upon ‘Ali all these honors because of his promised assistance but because ‘Ali was meritorious.

Had the mission of the Messenger been in no need of

‘Ali's endeavor and sacrifice the Messenger would not have chosen a brother or an executor or a caliph other than

him for ‘Ali was the most resemblant to the Messenger in ethics righteousness and knowledge. He was the first Mus lim and most obedient to God and His Messenger and therefore he was beloved by God and His Messenger. No shining evidence beyond the declaration of the Holy Prophet at Kheibar is needed: "I shall give the banner to a man through whom God will bring victory. He loves God and His Messenger and God and His Messenger love him." Al-Tirmidhi in his Sunan (one of the Six Authentics)6 and Al-Hakim in his Al-Mustadrak7 reported that the Prophet was presented with a grilled bird. He prayed and in his prayer he said: "God send me your most beloved from among your creatures to eat with me this bird." ‘Ali alone came and ate with him.

Because ‘Ali was the only qualified person to be the brother the executor and successor of the Holy Prophet the Prophet bestowed the three honors upon him before the beginning of his monumental sacrifices. This proves that he was the choice of the Prophet for the above honors regardless of the need of the message for his sacrifice.

When the Messenger conferred these ranks on ‘Ali the witnesses of the event did not exceed thirty or forty men.

All of them were from the clan of the Prophet. It was only a matter of course for him to declare to the rest of the Muslims what he declared to the members of his clan when the opportunity presented itself. The Messenger chose to do that gradually. He started by announcing his brotherhood to ‘Ali at the beginning of the Hijrah.

1. Ibn Hisham Biography of Prophet Part 1 p. 503.
2. Sahih Al-Bukhari Part 5 p. 171 and Muslim in his Sahih Part 15 pp. 178-179.
3. Ibn Hisham Biography of the Prophet Part 2 p. 335..
4. Al-Hakim Al-Mustadrak Part 3 pp.28-29.
5. Ibn Hisham Biography of the Prophet Part 2 p.335.
6. Al-Tirmidhi in his Sunan Part 5 p.300 (hadith No.3805)
7. Al-Hakim Al-Mustadrak Part 3 pp.130-131.

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