

Ja'far Al-Tayyar, The Refugee Who Brought Islam to Africa

When the Holy Prophet Muhammad (S) began to preach religion of Islam in Mecca, those who did not believe in him and his message, opposed and troubled him. They called him a lunatic and a sorcerer. They offered bribes to persuade him to stop preaching the religion. When all these ways failed, they used harsh threats against the Prophet and the new Muslim converts.

During all these years, the Holy Prophet enjoyed the protection of his uncle Abu Talib. He always stood by his nephew and did not let anyone harm him. The sons of Abu Talib, one by one, accepted Islam. Imam Ali (a) was right, from his childhood, under the care of the Prophet and was the first one to declare his true faith, Islam, when the Prophet proclaimed his Prophethood. He always stood by the Prophet firmly and faithfully both in good and difficult times. Among the other sons of Abu Talib (a), Ja'far also accepted Islam and so did Aqeel, the other son of Abu Talib.

The torture and oppression which the Holy Prophet and the small group of his followers had been subjected to, had increased so much that life became unbearable. The Holy Prophet decided on an action which not only saved the lives of his followers but also spread the message of Islam to other countries. He therefore, decided to send some of his followers to Abyssinia, which was just across the Red Sea, to the south of Mecca.

The Holy Prophet had great faith in Ja'far the son of Abu Talib (a) and brother of Imam Ali (a). A handful of Muslim refugees including men and women under the leadership of Ja'far crossed the Red Sea. This is known to be the first migration in the history of Islam, which occurred in the fifth year after the Prophet had proclaimed Islam in 615 A.D. They were joined by more immigrants who had become the victims of the enemies of Islam. The number of the refugees rose to eighty-two men and eighteen women.

On arrival at the capital of Abyssinia, Ja'far and his companions paid a visit to the Emperor Negus. The Emperor was very much impressed with the knowledge, behaviour and the politeness of Ja'far and he received him with much honour and entertained him as a respected guest.

When the non-believers of Quraish in Mecca came to know of this, Abdulla Bin Rabih and Amr Bin 'Aas together with some other people took some expensive gifts and arrived at the court of the Emperor Negus. On entering the court, they prostrated (bowed in sajda before the Emperor and presented him with the gifts. Then they said, "Someone in our country has invented a new religion and some people have joined him. We tried to stop this, but some of his followers have taken refuge in your country. Now, we appeal to you to throw them out and hand them over to us." The Emperor replied that he had already given protection to them and would not throw them out of the country, but he would ask them to come there before them. So saying, the Emperor called in the Muslim refugees.

Hazrat Ja'far took with him some close companions and arrived at the court. But he did not prostrate (bow in sajda) before Negus. People in the court criticised him for this and asked him why he had not bowed down before the Emperor as was customary. Hazrat Ja'far promptly retorted, "We do not bow down before anybody except God. The Emperor knew that this was the true and basic teaching of divine religions. He called Ja'far and gave a respectful place near him. He then informed Ja'far that some people from his country of origin had come there with a complaint that he had deserted his old religion and started a new one which rejected the original idol-worship. Hazrat Ja'far in very impressive language, replied:

"O King! We were in deep ignorance and barbarism: we adored idols, we lived in unchastity; we ate dead animals, we disregarded the duties of hospitality and neighbourhood; At that time, God raised among us a man, who is pure, truthful and honest. He called us to believe in One God and taught us not to associate anything with Him. He forbade us to worship idols, enjoined us to speak the truth, to be faithful to our trusts, to be merciful and to regard the rights of neighbours. He forbade us to speak evil of women. He ordered us to keep away from vices, to offer prayers, to pay alms and to observe the fast."

Negus told Ja'far to recite some words from the Holy Qur'an. Ja'far commenced with Bismillah and proceeded to recite a few lines from Surah Maryam with such sincerity and sweet voice that the Emperor and his people were very much moved and began to weep. When the Emperor heard the verse concerning Prophet Isa (Jesus), he was very touched and said that the words resembled those which were bestowed upon Prophet Musa (Moses) and Prophet Isa (Jesus).

The Emperor rejected the appeal of the Quraish and ordered Amr bin 'Aas to take away the gifts he had brought. Amr bin 'Aas went away but having thought of something, he returned to the court the next day. He made a cunning move by suggesting to the Emperor to ask the Muslims as to what their belief was concerning Prophet Isa? Hazrat Ja'far was called to the court again and was given a very respectful welcome. The Emperor then asked: "What does your Prophet (Muhammad) say about Prophet Isa (Jesus)?"

The Muslims became worried but Hazrat Ja'far, with great peace of mind, replied: "O King! Our Prophet is guided by God in what he says." Saying this, he proceeded to show an Ayat from the Holy Qur'an and requested Negus to read it: "The messiah (Isa), son of Maryam is only a messenger of Allah and His

word and His spirit which He sent to Maryam.”

Negus was extremely pleased to learn this and said: “This actually is also there in our book of Injil.” He then expelled Amr bin 'Aas and the infidels of Quraish from Abyssinia. From then onwards, Negus had high regard for and faith in Islam.

Thus Ja'far had done a great service to Islam. He preached the true message of Islam in Abyssinia and stayed there for fifteen years before returning to Madina.

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