

Migration to Abyssinia

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ABSTRACT: The first journey in the history of Islam was the migration of Muslims to Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia). This article offers the reasons for this migration, when it occurred, why Prophet Muhammad (s) chose this country over others, and the actions that came about during the Muslims' stay there. Also, a brief explanation of the Prophet's contact with the king of Abyssinia after the hijrah is given, along with an analysis concerning the significance of this event. From this migration, we learn that 1) when persecuted, Muslims should migrate when the opportunity is available, and seek a land ruled by a just leader, and 2) Muslims have the responsibility of learning how to interact efficiently in clarifying and enlightening others about Islam.

Introduction

During the birth of Islam, the polytheists persecuted the Muslims, those who proclaimed belief in one God and God's messenger, the Prophet Muhammad (s). This resulted in Prophet Muhammad's suggestion to them to leave Mecca and seek protection in Abyssinia. Many questions arise with respect to this migration: What factors led to this migration? When did it happen? Why did the Prophet Muhammad choose this country over others? And what

events took place during the Muslims' stay there? In the following, I seek to answer these questions. Moreover, a brief account will be given on the Prophet's contact with the king of Abyssinia years after the *hijrah*, or the migration to the city of Medina that marks the Islamic calendar. A final analysis will be provided regarding the importance of this event in sustaining and spreading Islam, as well as its lessons in teaching the Islamic approach of interacting with other nations.

Factors that Led to the First Migration

During the first years of the Proclamation of Islam when the Prophet Muhammad (s) extended an open invitation to Islam, the polytheists were furious over the revolutionary ideas Islam brought forth. The Prophet taught people to worship the One God who is the Lord of the universe, to have faith instead of tribal and kinship pride, to provide for the poor, and to realize that all humans are equal regardless of race, geographical contiguity or a specific privilege. Islamic teachings applied to all individuals and this meant that the polytheists would feel propelled to give up their gods, share their wealth and humble themselves with the realization that they are not better than others due to specific privileges. Though Islam attracted people from the lower class economically, the leaders of Quraysh were enraged, worried that these ideas would cause an immense change in the system that gave them power.

Furthermore, the polytheists did not tolerate the Muslims' rejection of their gods and reacted with serious harassment and abuse. In the beginning, the maltreatment of Muslims by the polytheists was confined to jeers and insults. However, Muslims gradually became victims of physical violence in addition to insults.¹ The polytheists harmed the weaker Muslims by instigating others against them, defaming them, or cheating them. Muslims were also left hungry and thirsty until they verbally professed the divinity of the two

¹ Razwi, p. 49.

chief idols of the polytheists i.e. *Lāt* and *‘Uzzā*. And as refraining from hurting people of other tribes was their custom, each leader abused the Muslims of his own tribe and members of other tribes could not intervene. Of course, if they had wanted to do so. Muslims were persecuted by being imprisoned in their own homes (there were no public prisons during that era) and more so by being prevented from seeing the Prophet. In addition to mistreating lower class Muslims, the polytheists blackmailed the rich Muslims, causing a severe decline in business. However, during this period, the Prophet was not yet subject to the same maltreatment because he was under the protection of his uncle Abu Talib and enjoyed the support of the Bani Hashim tribe.

This severe abuse left some Muslims unable to stand firm against it and, full of remorse, they had no choice but to leave Islam. Others hid their monotheistic faith; in other words, they practiced *taqiyyah*, and preserved it thus. There were yet others who resisted and faced imprisonment, torture, and even martyrdom.¹

There were Muslims whose steadfastness made them notable characters in Islamic history. Those to be named and described here are Bilal al-Habashi, Ammar bin Yasir and his parents, and Abdullah bin Mas‘ud. Bilal’s parents were brought as captives from Ethiopia to Arabia. Bilal became a slave of Umayyah bin Khalaf, one of the sworn enemies of the Prophet (s). After learning about Prophet Muhammad and his teachings, Bilal converted to Islam. When Umayyah learned that Bilal had converted to Islam, he ordered that he be taken into to the scorching sun. A large rock was placed on his chest as he was told to give up his faith in monotheism and submit to *Lāt* and *‘Uzzā*. To Umayyah’s dismay, Bilal only replied “Ahad! Ahad!” (One! One!). Upon seeing his condition, Waraqah ibn Nawfil, a Christian Arab scholar, was brought to tears and swore to Umayyah that if Bilal is killed, he will make Bilal’s gravesite become a sacred pilgrimage site.² As

¹ Ja ‘fariya, pp. 339-342.

² Subhani, p. 217.

said in *Tabaqāt* by Ibn Sa‘d, a rope was tied around Bilal’s neck and Umayyah ordered children to drag him in the streets of Mecca.¹

Another group that was among the early Muslims is ‘Ammar and his parents, Sumayyah and Yasir. ‘Ammar’s parents were tortured to death, making them the first martyrs in Islam. Subsequently, ‘Ammar himself was tortured, so much so that he had no choice but to verbally renounce Islam to the polytheists. With great sorrow, he ran to the Prophet, admitted his action, and declared that his heart is still overflowing with faith. The Prophet then advised him to continue to hide his faith to save himself from further discrimination and torture.²

Abdullah bin Mas‘ud, a new convert, participated in a Muslim group discussion where a member suggested that since the people of Quraysh had never heard the verses of the Holy Qur’an, one of them should publicly recite the Qur’an in Masjid al-Harām. Abdullah was willing to do so. He proceeded to the Masjid while the people of Quraysh were assembled there and read in a loud, melodious voice, “In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful. It is the Merciful who has taught the Qur’an” (55:1-2). Upon reading the verses, the polytheists were struck with amazement, and in order to prevent the heavenly verses from affecting them, they pounded on him with their fists until he bled profusely. He ran back to the Prophet (s) in this condition, feeling overjoyed that the verses were heard.³

As a result of the persecutions experienced by the early Muslims, the following verses from the chapter *The Bee* (Al-Nahl) were revealed:

Those who migrate for the sake of Allah after
having been wronged, We will surely settle them

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

² *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³ *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyyah* by Ibn Hisham, p. 314.

in a good place in the world, and the rewards of the Hereafter is surely greater, had they known. Those who are patient and put their trust in their Lord. (16:41-42)

According to historians, these verses were sent specifically as an instruction for migration to Abyssinia.¹ The threat of the polytheists became so serious that the Prophet decided to have the Muslims migrate to Abyssinia to save their lives and faith.

The moment the number of Muslims increased, faith in Islam became apparent, and they began to experience harassment and imprisonment with such intensity that some became apostates, the Prophet told them to scatter themselves on this earth. They asked, "Where should we go?" The Prophet replied, "Abyssinia."

Those who have analyzed this migration say that the actual reason was entirely due to saving the Muslims from the polytheists' harassments and preserving their faith. Urwat ibn Ishaq also confirms that Muslims' becoming apostates was due to the polytheists' abuse. Moreover, he says that the Prophet also knew that his protection was due to God and his uncle Abu Talib.² As a result, the Prophet told them to go to Abyssinia. They, due to fear of turning back to idol-worshipping and in hopes of preserving their faith, headed towards Abyssinia. This became the first migration in Islam. Concerned about this situation, the Prophet supplicated, "Oh Allah, accept my companions and do not let them return back to their previous state."

Rasul Ja'farian adds that had the immigrants stayed in Mecca, more conflicts would have emerged between them and the polytheists, and the Prophet wanted to prevent this. The Quraysh would also feel less threatened by the growing number of Muslims in their

¹ Ja'farian, p. 343.

² *Ibid.* p. 344.

city.¹ Furthermore, the Quraysh felt humiliated by the migration since foreigners may come to know of their persecutions.

Ja'farian points out that the primary reason for the migration is not entirely due to the polytheists' abuse; rather, in the long run, Islam was under the risk of being annihilated, had the Muslims continued to live in Mecca.² It is true that the Muslims were persecuted, and the verse was sent to advise Muslims to leave; however, not all the Muslim migrants left because of abuse. One of these people was Ja'far ibn abi Talib who was under the protection of the Bani Hashim tribe.

The Time of Migration

Historians agree that the migration took place on two different occasions. The first one occurred in the fifth year of the Proclamation of Islam in the month of Rajab. In this month, twelve to seventy men and women migrated to Abyssinia. They stayed there during the months of Sha'ban and Ramadan until some Muslims heard of the *Gharāniq* rumors and returned to Mecca. After learning that the *Gharāniq* reports were false, the Muslims headed back to Abyssinia.

The exact time of the second migration is unknown. However, Ja'farian states that there was only a short gap between the two migrations, because both migrations happened before the Quraysh drafted and signed in the 7th year after the Proclamation a document that ordered the Bani Hashim to surrender or they would be subjected to economic and social boycott.³ Therefore, the time in between the two migrations could not have extended for more than two to three years.

¹ *Ibid.* p. 345.

² *Ibid.*

³ Razawi, p. 67.

Ja'farian refutes Ibn Ishaq's view that the migration took place only once. Eighty people traveled with Ja'far ibn Abi Talib leading the group. Thirty-three people returned, although Ibn Ishaq does not believe in the fiction of *Gharāniq*. Biladhari compiled a list of those who migrated, and according to Ja'farian, this proves that some migrants went twice.

The members of this group did not belong to one family, and according to Ibn Hisham every one of these ten persons belonged to a separate family.¹ Ja'far the son of Abu Talib was the leader of the second migration. This migration was arranged with perfect freedom and some of the migrants were, therefore, successful in also taking their women and children with them. Consequently, the number of the Muslims in Ethiopia reached eighty-three and taking into account the children taken there or born there the number exceeds this figure.

According to Sayyid Ali Asgher Razvy in *A Restatement of the History of Islam and Muslims*, the king of Abyssinia welcomed the Muslim refugees from Mecca into his kingdom. He gave them sanctuary and they enjoyed peace, security, and freedom of worship under his protection. About a year later, the Muslims in Abyssinia heard rumors (*Gharāniq*) that the Quraysh in Mecca had accepted Islam. They were homesick and found no reason to live in exile: thus, they decided to return to Mecca. Upon their arrival, they found out that not only were the rumors they had heard false, but also that the Quraysh had intensified their abuse of the Muslims. For this reason, the Muslims left for Abyssinia once again. Many other Muslims also accompanied them. This new group comprised of 83 men and 18 women. All narrations agree that the Prophet Muhammad selected his first cousin, Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, an elder brother of Ali, as the leader of this group. This second migration of the Muslims to Abyssinia took place in the

¹ *Al-Seerah al-Nabawiyyah* by Ibn Hisham, p. 245, cited in Subhani's *The Message*, chapter 17: The First Migration, p. 234.

sixth year of the Proclamation, or 616 C.E..¹ Ja'far appeared to be the only member of the Bani Hashim to leave for Abyssinia with the other refugees. All other members of Bani Hashim stayed in Mecca.²

Choosing Abyssinia

Upon searching for a solution to the persecution of the polytheists, the companions sought the Prophet's advice regarding migration and he (s) replied:

If you were to go to Abyssinia (it would be better for you), for the king (there) will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country, until such time as Allah shall relieve you from your distress.³

Thus, his companions went to Abyssinia, while afraid of apostasy and fleeing to God with their religion. This was the first *hijrah* (migration) in Islam.

The Prophet's words about the country encouraged his companions to move as soon as possible, mounted or on foot, without the enemies' awareness. He was familiar with Abyssinia, and in comparison to other countries with their oppressive rulers, this was a good choice. The Red Sea passed through Abyssinia and was close to Yemen. Business vessels passed through this path and Muslims made use of this when migrating to the country. The Muslims went to Jeddah, a developed trading port, where two trading vessels were ready to sail for Ethiopia. Though the

¹ *Ibid.* p. 58.

² *Ibid.* p. 59

³ *Al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah* by Ibn Hisham, vol. I, p. 321. and *Tarikh al-Tabari*, vol. II, p. 70, cited in Subhani's *The Message*, chapter 17: The First Migration

Quraysh heard about their departure, by the time they reached Jeddah, the vessels had already left.¹

The Prophet's objective in sending his companions to this country was none other than giving them the freedom to perform their religious duties without insecurity and abuse. He knew that migration to any area inhabited by Arabs, who were idol-worshippers and reluctant to receive Muslims, was dangerous. Migrating to Christian and Jewish areas was also not recommended because conflicts of spiritual penetration between the two existed. In addition to their stance, they considered Arabs to be inferior.²

Yemen was not a preferred option because it was under the rule of Khusrow Parviz, the King of Iran who, upon receiving a letter from the Prophet inviting him to Islam in the year eight A.H., wanted him (s) arrested. Syria, on the other hand, was far from Mecca. Furthermore, Yemen and Syria were not chosen because they were markets for the Quraysh and they had close ties with them. If the Muslims had migrated to either of these areas, they would have been expelled at the request of the Quraysh.³

As the Prophet predicted, the Muslims found Ethiopia to be a prosperous country with a calm and free atmosphere. Umm Salamah, the Prophet's future wife, said, "When we settled in Ethiopia we found ourselves under the protection of the best supporter. We did not experience any trouble."⁴

Quraysh Sends Representatives to Abyssinia

When the chiefs of Mecca learned about the free and peaceful life of the Muslims in Ethiopia, they were furious. The Meccans were

¹ Subhani, p. 234.

² *Ibid.* p. 233.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 234.

terrified that the Muslims might have access to the Negus, and they were especially afraid of the possibility that the Muslims would succeed in attracting him to the religion of Islam. The Negus would then be able to invade the Arabian Peninsula with a well-equipped army.¹

The Quraysh were embarrassed before the Ethiopians because their own people fled to Abyssinia for safety. Thus, they decided to bring the Muslims back. It is also possible that the Quraysh wanted to prevent the spread of Islam in Abyssinia. In some narrations, two Qurayshis, 'Amr ibn 'Ās and Abdullah ibn Abi Rabi'ah, went to Abyssinia. In other narrations, it was 'Amr ibn 'Ās and 'Ammarah ibn Walid who took this responsibility. Ibn Sayyid al-Nas narrates that the Quraysh delegation was sent twice to Abyssinia: once after the first hijrah and the other time after the Battle of Badr.

The first two, 'Amr ibn 'Ās and Abdallah ibn abi Rabi'ah, were not successful in convincing the Negus. When the king gave audience to the emissary of the Quraysh, the latter claimed that the Muslims in Abyssinia were not refugees from persecution but rather fugitives from justice and law, and requested that the king extradite them to Mecca.²

According to Subhani, the ministers of Ethiopia met the representatives of Quraysh and the latter, after presenting gifts, spoke to them thus:

A group of our young men have abjured the creed of their forefathers and have invented a religion which is opposed to our religion as well as yours. They are now residing in your country. The elders and chiefs of Quraysh earnestly request the king of Ethiopia to expel them as soon as possible. Incidentally, we also desire that the council of

¹ *Ibid.* p. 235.

² Razvi, p. 58.

ministers may support us in the presence of the king. And as we are fully aware of the shortcomings and ways and manners of these persons it will be expedient that the matter is not discussed with them at all and the head of the State should not also grant them an audience.¹

The ministers gave the Quraysh full support. The Quraysh conveyed the message to the king, stating that the Muslims are propagating a religion that does not conform to their ancestors' religion or that of the official religion of Abyssinia. They added that the Muslims are taking advantage of the freedom in Abyssinia and requested that the Muslims return to Mecca.

As the ministers agreed with the Quraysh, the Negus would not hand the Muslims over until their situation was carefully investigated. The Muslims were brought to the king by his emissary and it was the courageous Ja'far ibn Abi Talib who eloquently defended the Muslims, saying thus:

O King! We were ignorant people and we lived like wild animals. The strong among us lived by preying upon the weak. We obeyed no law and we acknowledged no authority save that of brute force. We worshipped idols made of stone or wood, and we knew nothing of human dignity. And then God, in His Mercy, sent to us His Messenger who was himself one of us. We knew about his truthfulness and his integrity. His character was exemplary, and he was the well-born of the Arabs. He invited us towards the worship of One God, and he forbade us to worship idols. He exhorted us to tell the truth, and to protect the weak, the poor, the humble, the widows and the orphans. He ordered us to show respect to women,

¹ Subhani. pp. 235-236.

and never to slander them. We obeyed him and followed his teachings. Most of the people in our country are still polytheists, and they resented our conversion to the new faith which is called Islam. They began to persecute us and it was in order to escape from persecution by them that we sought and found sanctuary in your kingdom.

Afterwards, the king asked him to read some of the verses revealed to the Prophet (s). Ja'far read some verses from the chapter *Mary* and the king saw that these verses held much in common with the Christian Gospel. The Negus was impressed and convinced of the authenticity of this religion, and to 'Amr ibn 'As dismay, the king announced that Muslims are free to live in his kingdom for as long as they wish.

The polytheists did not cease to make their case. The next day, 'Amr returned to the king and declared that the Muslims reject the divine nature of Christ. The king asked for Ja'far once again, and after being asked about Islam's view of Christ, Ja'far replied, "Our judgment of Jesus is the same as that of God and His Messenger, viz., Jesus is God's servant, His Prophet, His Spirit, and His command given unto Mary."¹ With this, Negus approved of Ja'far's answer.

Muslims spent many years in Abyssinia. They returned to Medina thirteen years after the Prophet's migration there, synchronized with the Battle of Khaybar.

The Fiction of *Gharāniq*

As mentioned above, the migration to Abyssinia took place during the fifth and sixth years of the Proclamation. Some Muslims returned back to Mecca on account of a rumor that the Prophet (s) had verified the divinity of *Lāt* and *'Uzzā*. It was told that after he

¹ Razvi, p. 59.

read the verse from the chapter *The Star*, “Have you considered *Lāt* and ‘*Uzzā*? And *Manāt*, the third one?” (53:19), that he added the verse, “These are *Gharāniq* who are high in position and their intercession is acceptable.” He allegedly continued to recite the remaining verses until he reached the last verse, which required a prostration, at which point everyone, Muslims and idolaters, prostrated.

According to the *Gharāniq* reports, the polytheists later rejoiced at the “endeavour” the Prophet made to unite the two groups after much dissension and chaos. This news reached the Muslims in Abyssinia; thus, out of homesickness and simply waiting for the moment they could return home, they arrived in Mecca within the next year. Upon arrival, they were told that the conditions had undergone a change, that the Prophet once again opposed the idolaters and was instigated by Satan when that extra verse was read. When they realized it was a rumor, they returned to Abyssinia, making this the second migration to Abyssinia, with Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib as their leader.

The fiction of *Gharāniq* rests on the supposition that the Prophet was weary over the turmoil the polytheists had caused and sought to solve the problem by adding the verse. This cannot be true as the infallibility of the Prophets with all of their actions in harmony with the divine will, patience in guiding others to submission being one of those characteristics. Also, feeling tired of the chaos does not correspond with the Prophet’s past or future deeds.

But the author fails to take into account that the Qur’an is a witness to its falsehood. Allah (swt) says in the chapter ‘Elaborated’ (*Fussilat*), “Indeed it is an august Book: falsehood cannot approach it, from before it nor from behind it” (41-42). Allah (swt) also says in the chapter ‘Stoneland’ (*Hijr*), “Indeed We have sent down the Reminder—the Qur’an—and indeed We will preserve it” (15:9).

These two verses testify that falsehood does not enter the Prophet's path, and that He would protect the Qur'an from all harms.¹

Moreover, the first verses of the chapter entitled 'The Star' (*Al-Najm*) reads, "Nor does he (the Prophet) speak out of his own desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed (to him), taught to him by One of great powers" (53:3-5). Thus, Satan did not instigate the Prophet to add a new verse. It also seems odd for the Prophet to have read these verses in the presence of the idolaters and yet they only heard the verse of *Gharāniq* and spread the rumour.

Ayatollah Subhani adds that according to the Egyptian scholar Muhammad 'Abduh, the word *Gharāniq*, which is plural for "aquatic bird" or "handsome youth," had never been used to refer to gods in the Arabic language or poetry.² The orientalist Sir William Muir also adds his reflection on this event. He states that it was necessary for the Prophet to make peace in Mecca and add the verse of *Gharāniq*. Subhani refutes this, stating that just as spreading false information is a common action, this rumour was set forth to do some damage. Also, if the Prophet truly wanted peace, he could have simply made a promise to discontinue addresses on their beliefs.³

The Aftermath: Contact between the Prophet and the Negus after the Hijrah

In the sixth year of the Prophet's migration to Medina, a pact was made between the Muslims and the Quraysh called the Peace Pact of *Hudaybiyyah*. After nineteen years of continuous conflict between the Quraysh and the Muslims, the agreement included several conditions, some of which were 1) that the two previous rivals no longer fight or abuse one another for the next ten years, 2) Muslims residing in Mecca are free to perform their religious rites

¹ Subhani. pp. 256-257.

² *Ibid.* pp. 258-259.

³ *Ibid.* p. 259.

without interference from the Quraysh's, 3) the life and property of Muslims in Mecca are to be protected, and 4) the two groups may conclude pacts with any tribe they deem necessary.

The outcome of this pact gave the Prophet the freedom to invite foreign kings and rulers towards Islam. With this, the message of Islam was no longer restricted to the Arabian territories; rather, it was to be made universal by the Prophet's invitation. Moreover, his approach to invitation is a complete method by which many Muslim leaders in the past and today have learned from and practiced in dealing with other nations.

The Prophet wrote a total of 185 letters. These letters were invitations towards Islam or pacts formed between the Prophet and the addressee.¹ The most popular invitations described by Ja'fariyan and Ayatollah Subhani were with the Emperor of Rome, King Khusrow Parviz of Iran, al-Muqawqis of Egypt, the Ghassanians of Syria, Bazan of Yemen, and the Negus of Ethiopia.

The Prophet's Letter to the Negus

The Prophet often used the method of clearly inviting the addressee to Islam, promising salvation in this life and the next upon accepting Islam, and then warning of the dangers of rejecting the faith. However, upon reading the letter sent to the Negus of Ethiopia, the same just ruler that accepted the Muslims into his country and treated them kindly, it is apparent that the Prophet used a softer tone. While greeting other rulers with, "Peace be upon the followers of guidance," the Prophet begins with a more personal greeting of "*Salāmun 'Alayk*" (Peace be upon you) to the Negus:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the
Merciful

¹ Haydarabadi & Ahmadi.

This is a letter from Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah to the Negus, the King of Ethiopia. Peace be upon you! I praise Allah except whom there is no god. He is Allah Who is free from all defects and faults; and His obedient servants are safe from His wrath. He sees and witnesses the conditions of His servants.

I testify that Prophet 'Isa ibn Maryam is a spirit of Allah and a 'word' (of Allah) which settled in the womb of pious Maryam. Allah created him in the womb of his mother without a father with the same Power with which He created Adam without parents.

I invite you to the One Allah Who has no partner, and require you to obey Him and to follow my religion. Profess faith in Allah Who has appointed me to the prophetic mission.

The King of Ethiopia should know that I am the Prophet of Allah. I invite you and all your soldiers to the Almighty Allah and I have, by sending this letter and my envoy, discharged the onerous responsibility which devolved upon me and have given you advice. Peace be upon those who follow guidance.¹

In this letter, the Prophet informed the ruler of Allah's attributes, specifying His Oneness. He also rejects the views of the church; that is, Jesus is not the son of God but rather he was created in a womb the same way Prophet Adam was. At the end of the letter, the Prophet clearly invites the Negus and his people to obey Allah.

¹ *Al-Seerah al-Halabi*, vol. III, p. 279, cited in Subhani's *The Message*, chapter 42: The Events of the Seventh Year of Migration, p. 558.

Conversation of the Envoy with the Negus

The envoy of the Prophet thus went to the Negus with the letter, expressed his gratitude to the Negus for his sympathy and kindness towards the Muslim migrants and advised him to believe that the Bible is a witness to the Prophethood of Muhammad. The envoy used the example of how the Jews did not accept the religion of Jesus, which was a continuation of Moses' teachings and warned the Negus not to do the same. Prophet Muhammad's message is a continuation of Jesus' teachings, and it would be wise, the envoy stated, if the Negus accepted the religion of Islam.

The Negus, full of confidence, testified that the Prophet Muhammad is indeed the same messenger awaited by the people of the Scriptures. He wrote a letter in response to the Prophet:

In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the
Merciful

It is a letter to Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah from the Negus. The blessings of One except Whom there is no god and the greetings of One Who guided me towards Islam be upon you. I have read your letter pertaining to the prophethood and human attributes of 'Isa. I swear by the Lord of the heavens and the earth that whatever you have said is absolutely correct and I do not have the least difference with this belief. I have also become acquainted with the reality of your religion and have rendered such services to the Muslim migrants as were expedient. I testify by means of this letter that you are the Messenger of Allah and a truthful person whose prophethood has been confirmed by the Heavenly Scriptures. I have performed the ceremonies of embracement of Islam and allegiance to you in the presence of your cousin (Ja'far ibn Abu Talib).

I am sending my son, Rarha, to your sacred presence to communicate my message and *embracement* of Islam. And I state clearly that I am not responsible for anyone except myself. In case, therefore, you order me I shall present myself to your august presence. Peace be upon you O Prophet of Allah.¹

The Negus affirms with the utmost confidence that the Prophet Muhammad is indeed the Messenger of Allah and is the same Prophet mentioned in the Bible. The Negus sent the letter and several gifts to the Prophet, and at a later time, he also sent 30 priests to Medina to gradually familiarize them with the Prophet's way of life and encouraging them to study Islam. The purpose was not only to learn the message, but to witness that the Prophet was a humble man who ruled with true justice.

Analysis

Muslims can reflect on a number of issues concerning the migration to Abyssinia, among them: 1) when Muslims are being severely persecuted and fear for their faith, they should migrate when they have the option to do so, 2) Muslims are to leave their land if Islam is under attack, 3) When migrating, Muslims must seek a land with a just ruler for protection, and 4) It is important for Muslims to learn to eloquently interact with non-Muslims in clarifying and enlightening others about Islam.

Ja'far ibn Abi Talib's method of invitation during the second migration demonstrates the importance of leadership and knowledge of Islamic doctrines when coming into contact with a foreign nation. He did not merely invited the Negus to Islam in his speech; rather, he described the Prophet, his character, Islam's rulings and its effect upon those who were under the influence of the *Jahiliyya* (or 'Days of Ignorance' which refers to pre-Islamic

¹ Subhani. p. 560.

Arabic) customs. He was also well-acquainted with the view of Jesus in Islam and was therefore able to explain it to the Negus. At the same time, he was able to defend himself after being attacked by the Quraysh.

Indeed, the Prophet Muhammad knew the value of this migration. He empathized with the sorrows of his companions' abuse, sent them to a safe land upon the revelation of the verse from the Qur'anic Chapter *The Bee*, and maintained connections with the Negus after the migration. Following the migration, the Prophet's relationship with the Negus indicates a special method of interaction with rulers of foreign nations. It demonstrates that Muslims are to deal with other nations while being fully aware of Islamic doctrines and values, to invite from a standpoint of honour and not humility, and to speak with intentions of improving the state of humanity from oppression.

The fact that the Prophet extended his hand outside Arab peninsula is a technique Muslims in later generations used to share Islamic teachings with people of other territories. During the Dark Ages of Europe, Muslims migrated to various lands, and instead of subjugating the societies of those regions, Muslims abided by the emphasis the Prophet made in seeking and sharing knowledge and were at the forefront in the sciences and education. The first schools, or madrasahs, were established by the Muslims. Arabic became the scientific and intellectual means of communication. Numerous books were translated from Arabic into Latin to enlighten the Europeans. In contrast with the Christian rule in the Middle Ages, freedom of intellectualism existed under Islamic governance. As a result, people of various faiths and nations – such as the Christians, Jews, and Africans – enjoyed this freedom. Moreover, Muslims made a plethora of contributions in the fields of language, law, education, medicine, philosophy, astrology, art, architecture, and agriculture. This contributed to the emergence of the Renaissance in Europe.

Muslims are to maintain their faith and persevere in doing so. For this to happen, Muslims must continue to seek knowledge as much as possible, and learn about the culture and tactics of the west in order to clearly, kindly, and diplomatically interact with them with confidence. Expanding one's knowledge is to be accomplished under the umbrella of faith and morality, in which Muslims must truly aspire for humanity what the slogan of all the Prophets, angels, and believers always was: Peace.

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