

**MATERIAL AND INFORMATION FOR THE MINISTRY OF  
THE GOSPEL TO THE WESTERNISED MUSLIMS**

**Volume One**

**Muhammad and  
The Religion of Islam**

**By**

**John Gilchrist**

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# Muhammad and the Religion of Islam

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## Preface

One of the great fruits of the Protestant Reformation has been the missionary movement that today has spread its influence to every corner of the globe. It has proved to be more successful in some areas than in others. Accordingly most of the Protestant missionary force today is involved in those fields that have proved to be more fertile and responsive than others. Only a very small proportion of missionaries is engaged in reaching Muslims for Christ. Yet the Muslim world remains Christianity's greatest challenge for there is no other religion that has succeeded in making such inroads into traditional Christian realms as Islam and no other faith of its magnitude which has resisted the influence of the Gospel as this one has.

Since the end of the Second World War there has been a phenomenon in the East that discerning Christians have identified as providential. Muslims have emigrated by hundreds of thousands from their traditional homelands into Western countries, the customary heritage of Christendom. The Church in the West has been presented with a unique opportunity to evangelise Islam right on its doorstep. A mini world of Islam has mushroomed so that there are today emigrants, migrant-workers, students and the like from just about every Muslim country in the world based in Europe, North America, and other predominantly Christian lands in the West. God has presented the evangelical Church with a new field of mission and one which can be discharged by all Christians, whether trained missionaries or not. Experience has shown that the growth of minority Muslim communities in Christian countries has opened the door for a more comprehensive form of ministry than has hitherto been possible in most Muslim lands.

All over the Christian world there is a rising awareness and consciousness of Islam and the need to evangelise Muslims, especially those who are now our neighbours, fellow-citizens and close associates. It is the firm conviction of many that this is God's day for the salvation of the Muslims and the need to equip the Church for the task it is beginning to assume is being recognised by many.

I have had the privilege of witnessing to many thousands of Muslims during the past twelve years. Although I am a professional man established in business, the presence of a few hundred thousand Muslims in South Africa has given me the opportunity to become involved in a sustained ministry of evangelism among them and in recent years I have become more than ever persuaded that the future of Muslim evangelism in the West lies in the hands of those Christians who live near enough to Muslims to have regular access to them and to befriend them. I am about to prepare the manuscript of my book *The Christian Witness to the Muslim* which will cover the whole field of a potential ministry of comprehensive friendship evangelism among Muslims, provide effective means of communicating the Gospel to them, and supply ways of answering their usual objections to the Christian faith. This book could have been ready for publication even now, were it not for my firm belief that all Christians seeking to become involved in any form of continuing evangelism among Muslims should have a sound, basic knowledge of the religion, heritage and customs of those they hope to reach.

The result of this conviction has been the preparation instead of this volume *Muhammad and the Religion of Islam*. I have sought and endeavoured to inform those who contemplate Muslim evangelism of the history and development of Islam from the time of Muhammad himself down to the present day as well as survey the religion from an evangelical Christian perspective. This book will be followed by the second, God-willing, before the end of 1988. I trust that they will, as companion volumes, reflect the fruits of many years of study and experience and provide in some measure the basic knowledge every Christian should have if he wishes to be effective in this field.

It is being wisely said in these days that we need to "earn the right to be heard", that is, that we must be equipped with a sound knowledge of the religion, convictions, hopes and thought-patterns of those we desire to win to Jesus Christ. Nowhere is this more applicable than in the case of the Muslim. As my own personal knowledge of Islam has increased over the years I have found it easier to communicate with Muslims and to make the message of the Gospel meaningful to them. The average Muslim has not only his religious thinking but even his whole outlook on life conditioned by the mentality of Islam. One cannot speak to him as if he were just another human being. He has to be approached for what he is - a Muslim trained to think like a Muslim, and to have his ideas and beliefs fashioned in accordance with the basic Muslim world-view.

It has also been my pleasant experience to find that many Muslims sincerely respect anyone who has taken the trouble to obtain an inside knowledge of their faith, even if he is, as I am, a Christian evangelist ministering under the conviction that he is called to reach Muslims for Christ. Such a Christian is far more likely to convey his message with an impact than those who know little or nothing of Islam. Indeed it is also my experience that many Muslims, confronted by Christians whose fervour to witness to them is matched only by their ignorance of Islam, are quickly comforted by the

conclusion that the confidence of such men in Christianity is caused purely by their lack of knowledge of the surpassing beauties of Islam. The message is gently pushed aside as the product of "zeal which is not according to knowledge".

A Christian who really knows Islam is able to present the Gospel against the Muslim's background and is far more likely to command a responsive ear. For this reason I was persuaded that the second book would be incomplete by itself and that it needed this book as a companion volume to assist Christians to approach Muslims in a truly comprehensive way.

Although the book covers four hundred pages it is purely introductory. I have supplemented it with a number of quotes which I believe enrich the text, help to document it, and often express matters in a far more effective way than I could. It is also my purpose to acquaint Christians with many of the major works on Islam. Although a number of these will be inaccessible to most of my readers, I trust that many will be encouraged to obtain and read other books on Islam.

I have also had the privilege of relying first-hand on English translations of many of the major works of Hadith literature. When I began working among Muslims in 1973 only the *Sirat Rasulallah* of Ibn Ishaq was freely available in English. Since then a great number of works have been translated and I am indeed privileged to be able to quote directly from them in a work on the heritage of Islam. It is my sincere hope that the remaining three major works of Hadith mentioned in this book will also appear in English in the near future but we can in the meantime be grateful for the translation of the Sahihis of Bukhari and Muslim and the Sunan of Abu Dawud.

While on the subject of books I should perhaps mention that the date of each respective book mentioned in the bibliography at the end of this book is only the date of the copy that I have consulted. It is not necessarily the date of publication of the original work which, where known to me, is quoted in brackets in each case. I must express my considerable debt to Hughes' masterpiece *A Dictionary of Islam*. I have constantly consulted it and believe that it is by far the best resource work available. Every Christian seeking to obtain a basic knowledge of Islam should earnestly endeavour to obtain a copy of this book.

Although the present work is chiefly an assessment of Islam and accordingly does not deal comprehensively with the teaching of the Qur'an about Jesus, the Trinity, etc. (these will be covered in the second book), it is written purposefully from an evangelical Christian perspective. I have at all times sought to be as fair as I can be and have endeavoured to be strictly accurate, but do not claim to have written dispassionately or purely objectively. The writer is a Christian by firm, independent conviction, and accordingly writes as such. This book, therefore, is not only informative but also approaches and evaluates Islam in the light of the Christian faith and on many occasions does so critically and finds Islam wanting.

Many will be inclined to conclude that this book is not only a description of Islam but also a refutation of it. I make no apology for this. I have a healthy respect for Muhammad, his book and his religion, but sincerely believe that he does not compare with Jesus Christ and that Christianity, in its Biblical form, is far superior to Islam.

I have also considered it necessary to deal with the Muslim tendency to place both Muhammad and the Qur'an in a category of perfection. Muslim writers customarily gloss over the defects of both and it is only very rarely that one finds them subduing their sentiments in the cause of presenting a truly historical picture. This has become a universal vogue in the world of Islam and, without any desire to cause offence but with the purpose of obtaining a truer perspective, I have purposefully analysed many of these sentiments in the light of Islam's sources and historical heritage.

It is also common to find Muslims charging Western writers on Islam with a prejudice against it, even when they write somewhat sympathetically. I am persuaded that such complaints are often ill-founded. Many Western scholars, having taken pains to assess Islam as objectively and sincerely as they can, are nevertheless discounted and faulted purely because they will not make any concessions to popular Muslim sentiments. I do not expect Muslim readers to review this book favourably in the circumstances, but do sincerely trust that they will acknowledge that my conclusions and opinions have been based on records drawn from within the heritage of Islam (i.e. the Qur'an, major works of Hadith literature and other Islamic sources) and that they have always been factually stated and carefully documented.

Lastly a brief word should be said about the transliteration of Arabic texts from the Qur'an and other works into English. As the Arabic script is principally phonetic I have sought to reproduce it as phonetically as I can so that the form here set forth conveys as closely as possible the pronunciation of the original. To give an example, whereas some writers are inclined to write the definite article, *al*, as it appears in the consonantal script, I have followed the usual pronunciation, especially where the word to which the article is attached begins with one of the so-called "sun-letters" (*al-hurufush-shamsiyah*), for example *as-Siddiq* (written in the script as *al-Siddiq*).

I have generally not indicated long vowels or the use of the three diphthong letters to elongate a vowel except in direct quotes from the Qur'an. All quotes from the Qur'an in English are from the translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali unless otherwise stated. Translations of particular verses quoted in the original language are usually my own, appearing always within the body of my own text.

As is generally customary today, the feminine *ta marbutah* has been used in the transliteration of words employing this form by the addition of an "h" to the relevant word in each case. I have endeavoured to be as consistent as I can be in transliteration (employing an order coming into general use today), but where a widely accepted form of a word has taken root in writings on Islam, I have retained its traditional arrangement (e.g. *muezzin* for *muadh-dhin*, etc). Readers, I am sure, will recognise that there is great value in having some knowledge of Arabic and I urge those contemplating Arabic studies to pursue them.

This book has been written primarily for evangelical Christians to give them a sound, basic knowledge of Islam and its heritage. It is my fervent hope that it will inspire confidence in those seeking to witness to Muslims and equip them in some measure for the task.

John Gilchrist.

10th July 1984

**PART ONE:**  
**MUHAMMAD: HIS LIFE, PERSONALITY AND MINISTRY**

CHAPTER ONE:

**An Outline of the Life of Muhammad**

## 1. Mecca at the time of Muhammad

In the sixth century after Christ, Mecca (pronounced *Makkah* in Arabic) was hardly known to the outside world but it was the commercial and religious centre of Arabia. Although the Arabs were a divided people, broken up into various tribes who were constantly at war with each other, the fairs at the city served to attract many of them and whatever unity existed among them was generated and expressed through these annual get-togethers. The focal point of attention was the *Ka'aba* (Arabic for "cube"), a shrine in the centre of the city containing over three hundred idols, chief of whom was the god *Hubal* (a probable derivation from the ancient high-god *Baal*, so often spoken of as the chief object of worship of the pagan nations around Israel in the Bible). The various tribes came to Mecca to worship their gods and take part in the various poetical contests that were arranged at the fairs. The composition of poetry was a favourite literary pastime of the Arabs and many *shu'ara* (poets, singular: *sha'ir*) competed at these contests.

When Muhammad began to proclaim the *Qur'an*, a book with a very rhythmic style, the Meccans derided him as one of these poets or, worse still, as a *kahin* (soothsayer). Muhammad expressly repudiated the suggestion that he was either of these. Indeed the rhyme of the *Qur'an* is rarely symmetrical and parts of it are purely narratory. The *Qur'an* says of its own message which he brings:

It is not the word of a poet ... nor is it the word of a soothsayer. *Surah 69.41,42.*

There was no central government of any kind in those days in Arabia. Each tribe looked to its own interests and inter-tribal intercourse was governed by certain unwritten laws - for example, four months in the year were set apart for religious pilgrimages to Mecca and other cities containing the shrines of major idols (such as that of the goddess *al-Lat* at at-Ta'if near Mecca) during which warfare was forbidden. Another such law was the right of retaliation by a tribe if one of its members was injured or killed by a member of another tribe. The offended tribe could accept a ransom or exercise an eye-for-eye (THIS HOWEVER IS NOT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE BIBLE) retaliation against any member of the other tribe.

Commercial trade with the local nomadic tribes and Syrian and other merchants beyond the Arabian peninsula was the lifeblood of the people of Mecca. The *Quraysh* tribe controlled the city and, from the *Banu Hashim*, a sub-tribe Muhammad was born. Hashim was his great-grandfather and for the first two years after his birth, Muhammad was cared for by his grandfather Abdul Muttalib as his father, Abdallah, died before he was born. A strange tale is recorded of a vow made by Abdul Muttalib which, had it been performed, would have given the Arabs a different course through history. He allegedly discovered the well of *Zam-Zam* next to the *Ka'aba* which the Muslims to this day believe is the one Hagar (*Hajira*) found while looking for water for her son Ishmael (*Ismail*). A dispute arose between Abdul Muttalib and the *Quraysh* over two golden gazelles and other treasures which he discovered and, supported by an only son, he vowed to *Hubal* that, if he was given ten sons, he would sacrifice one of them. One by one the ten sons were duly born to him and by the divination of arrows, Abdallah became the unfortunate victim. Nevertheless, as his father was about to perform his vow, he was persuaded to substitute a number of camels instead as an expiatory sacrifice on behalf of his son by his distraught tribesmen. (There is some doubt as to the truth of this story. In his *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 66, Ibn Ishaq begins his narrative by saying *God only knows the truth* of it, his customary way of expressing his reservations about anything he recorded).

## 2. Muhammad's First Forty Years.

Into this environment Muhammad was born in 570 AD of his mother Amina and for a few years was entrusted to the care of Halima, a woman from the *Banu Sa'd*, a sub-tribe of the nomadic *Hawazin* tribe, of whom we will hear more later. After the death of his grandfather, he was protected by his uncle Abu Talib who had an orphan on his hands when Amina died six years after Muhammad's birth.

Little is known of his youth but Islamic history records that he journeyed with Abu Talib to Syria at the age of only twelve years and at this time he must have gained his first impressions of Judaism and Christianity, the monotheistic religions with their respective scriptures so different to the pagan idolatry of his own people. (The *Qur'an* constantly distinguishes Jews and Christians as *Ah! at-Kitab* - people of the scripture - from the pagan Arabs who are usually described as *at-Mushrikin* - the polytheists).

At the age of twenty-five he was commissioned to attend to the mercantile affairs of a wealthy widow in Mecca named Khadija who was fifteen years older than him. Once again Muhammad set out for Syria to trade, this time with Khadija's goods. It appears that he had a very good reputation in Mecca and was especially selected by this dignified woman in consequence. Muhammad duly justified her confidence in him and returned after successfully fulfilling his task of selling her goods and purchasing new items. Although she was a woman of noble birth and considerable charm, she resisted her suitors but was irresistibly attracted to Muhammad and sent a messenger to him with a proposal of marriage, expressing her impression of him in these words:

"O son of my uncle, I like you because of our relationship and your high reputation among your people, your trustworthiness and good character and truthfulness. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 82).

Muhammad duly accepted her proposal and they were soon married. Despite the years between them, the marriage was evidently a happy one. She bore him two sons (who died in infancy) and four daughters: Zaynab, Ruqaiyah, Fatima and Umm Kulthum. Although he took many wives after her death, he stayed married to her alone for the remaining twenty-five years of her life. He is alleged to have said that, in her lifetime, she was the best among women and in later years Ayishah, his youngest and favourite wife, used to say:

"I did not feel jealous of any of the wives of the Prophet as much as I did of Khadija, although she died before he married me, for I often heard him mentioning her, and Allah had told him to give her the good tidings that she would have a palace of Qasab (i.e. pipes of precious stones and pearls in Paradise)". (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, p. 103).

One last incident in his life before his claim to prophethood should be mentioned. At the age of thirty-five a violent storm shattered the Ka'aba and the Quraysh decided to rebuild it. Apart from its idols, its most important feature was a black stone, probably a meteorite, built into its east corner. The stone is there to this day and is known as *al-hajaru'l-aswad* (literally, "the black stone"). It was held in high esteem by the pagan Arabs and, when the time came for its reinstatement in the restored shrine, the various branches of the Quraysh tribe so vied for the right to put it back into its proper place that bloodshed threatened. In the end they agreed that the next person to enter one of the gates would have the privilege of restoring it.

The first person to enter through the gate of Banu Shaybah was the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him. When they saw him they said "This is al-Amin (the Trusted). We agree to what we have decided". Then they informed him of the affair. Thereupon the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, took his mantle and spread it on the earth, then he put the black stone on it. He then said, "Let a person from every quarter of the Quraysh come ... Let every one of you hold a corner of the cloth. Then all of them raised it and the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, put it in its place with his own hand. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 1, p. 166).

One cannot help wondering to what extent this incident moulded the later conviction of Muhammad that he was chosen as a prophet of Allah. Nonetheless, in both this incident and the attitude of Khadija we can see that he was widely accepted as a thoroughly trustworthy person. Explaining the acceptance of Muhammad by all the Quraysh without dissent, one of his biographers tells us:

Quraysh used to call the Apostle of God before revelation came to him "the trustworthy one". (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 86).

The award of this name *al-Amin* to Muhammad in these early days testifies strongly to the subjective sincerity of his prophetic conviction in later years. For the next five years, however, we hear nothing more of him.

### 3. "Iqra" - The Call to Prophethood.

Life only begins at forty, so they say, and of no man was this truer than Muhammad. At about this age he began retiring to a cave on Mount Hira just outside Mecca where he spent many days in quiet contemplation and meditation. On one of these days he returned hastily to Mecca to inform his wife Khadija that he had had a strange vision of an angelic being, with one foot on the other, calling out to him from the horizon. No matter which way he turned, there was the angel. He was much disturbed by the vision and expressed the fear that he might become a soothsayer like those that he despised. It seems clear that his first reaction was that he had been visited by an evil spirit, a *Jinn* (from which comes the word *genie* introduced into the English language chiefly through the story of Aladdin's lamp). The Quran recognises the existence of such beings of whom we will hear more later. The following *hadith* (literally "a saying", generally meaning a tradition from one of the companions of Muhammad about an incident in his life) tells us what happened on the mountain as he experienced this phenomenon he reported:

There came to him the angel and said: Recite, to which he replied: I am not lettered. He took hold of me (the Apostle said) and pressed me, till I was hard pressed; thereafter he let me off and said: Recite. I said, I am not lettered. He then again took hold of me and pressed me for the second time till I was hard pressed and then let me off and said: Recite, to which I replied: I am not lettered. He took hold of me and pressed me for the third time, till I was hard pressed and then let me go and said: Recite in the name of your Lord Who created, created man from a clot of blood. Recite. And your most bountiful Lord is He Who taught the use of the pen, taught man what he knew not. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 1, p. 97).

The last two sentences today form the first four verses of the 96th Surah of the Qur'an. It is generally agreed by all the early biographers that this passage was the first revealed, though Bukhari states that Surah 74, verses 1 to 3, was the initial revelation:

Narrated Yahya bin Abi Kathir: I asked Aba Salama bin Abdur-Rahman about the first Sura revealed of the Quran. He replied "O you, wrapped-up (i.e. Al-Muddaththir)". I said "They say it was, 'Read, in the name of your Lord Who created' (i.e. Surat Al-Alaq, the Clot)". On that, Abu Salama said "I asked Jabir bin Abdullah about that, saying the same as you have said, whereupon he said "I will not tell you, except what Allah's Apostle had told us. Allah's Apostle said, 'I was in seclusion in the cave of Hira, and after I completed the limited period of my seclusion, I came down and heard a voice calling me. I looked to my right, but saw nothing. Then I looked up and saw something. So I went to Khadija and told her to wrap me up and pour cold water on me. So they wrapped me up and poured cold water on me'. Then was revealed 'O you, wrapped up! Arise and warn'"'. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p. 417-418).

The other biographers generally recognise this passage as one of the very earliest but the evidence favours the other as the first revealed. The first word used by the angel was *Iq'ra'* - Recite! From the same root letters the word *Qur'an* is derived, meaning the "Recitation". After Muhammad had stated that he was unable to read, the angel then recited the whole verse: *Iq'ra bismi rabbikallathii khalaq* - "Recite, in the name of thy Lord who created". Muhammad was then led to understand that he was to repeat the words after the angel had first recited them.

Khadija immediately comforted him, stating that Allah would never have allowed anything but a true revelation to come to him. When a cousin named Waraqah, who had renounced the idol-worship of his tribesmen, supported her, alleging that the *al-Namus al-Akbar*, the great angel, had obviously visited him, Muhammad was duly persuaded that he had been commissioned by Allah as a prophet. For some time, however, he remained in doubt:

Then revelations stopped for a time so that the apostle of God was distressed and grieved. Then Gabriel brought him the Sura of the Morning, in which his Lord, who had so honoured him, swore that He had not forsaken him, and did not hate him. God said, 'By the morning and the night when it is still, thy Lord hath not forsaken thee nor hated thee'. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 111).

The last sentence now forms Surah 93.1-3 in the Qur'an. (The angel Gabriel, called *Jibri* in the Qur'an, Surah 2.98, was believed by Muhammad to be the angel who appeared to him and who over the years revealed the whole Qur'an to him). After this the revelations came frequently. (A critical analysis of Muhammad's prophetic experience follows in this book. For the moment it seems appropriate to outline the developing drama just as it is recorded in the traditions). He was told to call the people of Mecca to the worship of the one God Allah, to forsake idol worship, to prepare for the Day of Reckoning, to choose between heaven and hell, and to acknowledge him as a prophet.

After his wife his cousin Ali, son of his protector Abu Talib, who was in his care, and his adopted son Zaid ibn Haritha became his first followers. The first noteworthy person to do so from the Quraysh was Abu Bakr, of whom we will hear more. (He was Muhammad's successor, the first of the caliphs, after Muhammad's death).

Muhammad duly began proclaiming his message to the Meccans and the first companion to follow in doing so was one Abdullah ibn Masud. Ibn Ishaq tells us that, when the Quraysh heard him, they struck him in the face, but this only increased his resolve (*Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 142). This incident deserves mention in the light of what we will discover in another chapter about Ibn Masud's part in the collection of the Qur'an.

#### 4. Persecution and Progress in Mecca.

During the next ten years Muhammad's movement slowly took root in Mecca but much opposition followed. The Quraysh took exception to Muhammad's preaching. Was he to be their leader? Were their gods and goddesses to be dishonoured by him without a defiant response? Was Mecca to cease to be the centre of the pagan worship of Arabia? What would the effect be on their thriving commercial trade with the deputations who came to worship at the Ka'aba? The implications urged the Quraysh into a swift denunciation of Muhammad's preaching and the Meccans soon began persecuting those followers of Muhammad who were unprotected, one of whom was Bilal, an Abyssinian slave purchased and set free by Abu Bakr, who later became the regular *muazzin* of the early Muslims, the one who summons them to prayer.

The Meccans did not object to the proclamation that Allah was the Supreme Being but rather to the denunciation of their idols. The Qur'an does not charge the Meccans with not believing in Allah at all but rather of associating partners with him or of giving him sons and daughters. This is very strongly denounced in the Qur'an as *shirk* - "associating" - an unforgivable sin, from the same root letters as *Mushrikin* (see p.13). Three goddesses, regarded as intercessors by the Quraysh, are repudiated by name in the Qur'an:

Have ye seen Lat, and Uzza, and another, the third, Manat? What! For you the male sex and for Him the female? Behold, such would be indeed a division most unfair! *Surah 53.19-22*.

As the birth of a female was regarded as a dishonour by the Arabs, the Qur'an asks how the Quraysh could have sons and Allah only daughters! (The charge of attributing a son to Allah in the Qur'an is generally levelled against the Christians, though in Surah 9.30 the Jews are accused of making *Uzair*, i.e. Ezra, a "son of Allah" - a strange charge not warranted by the records of Jewish history).

The great God Allah was already regarded as Lord of the Ka'aba by the Meccans and the shrine was known as *al-baitullah* - the house of Allah. Apart from the repudiation of idols it appears that the Quraysh had yet other reasons for opposing Muhammad's preaching:

From some texts and traditions we should gather that the Meccan objection was not to the glorification of *Allah* but to the identification of their familiar deity with him whom the Jews called *Rahman* (the Merciful), a title applied to pagan deities also. (Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, p. 143).

The Quraysh apparently distinguished between Allah and ar-Rahman of the Jews but the Qur'an identifies the two as the same Lord of all:

Say: "Call upon Allah, or call upon Rahman: by whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is well): for to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names". *Surah 17.110*

In some of the earliest Surahs we find the name ar-Rahman being used more often for God instead of the more common name Allah (e.g. Surah 43 where "ar-Rahman" appears seven times and "Allah" on only three occasions).

Chief among the persecutors were Abu Lahab, an uncle of Muhammad (one of Abdul Muttalib's ten sons) and Abu Jahl "that evil man" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 145) who was later killed at Badr.

Most of the direct opposition to Muhammad himself, protected from physical harm by Abu Talib, took the form of ridicule. Ibn Masud tells of an incident near the Ka'aba on one of those early days when Muhammad was praying with Abu Jahl and a number of his friends standing behind him:

Abu Jahl said, referring to the she-camel that had been slaughtered the previous day: Who will rise to fetch the foetus of the she-camel of so and so, and place it between the shoulders of Muhammad when he goes down in prostration? The one most accursed among the people got up, brought the foetus and, when the Prophet (may peace be upon him) went down in prostration, placed it between his shoulders. Then they laughed at him and some of them leaned upon the others with laughter. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 3, p. 986).

After his daughter Fatima had removed the foetus, Muhammad promptly invoked imprecations on them in the name of Allah and, at the battle of Badr to follow, his warriors duly despatched Abu Jahl and six of his associates.

The Qur'an itself denounces Muhammad's other great enemy, Abu Lahab, by name in Surah 111 and consigns him and his wife (who used to place thorns in Muhammad's path) to the fires of hell. "Love your enemies" was neither believed nor practiced by Muhammad, the Arab claimant to prophethood.

Persecution became so severe that Muhammad allowed a number of his followers to flee to Abyssinia. Shortly after this, however, another of his uncles, Hamza (who was only two years older than him) became one of his followers. A courageous man, he later became known as "the Lion of God". Not long after his conversion Muhammad gained a most important addition to his small band of followers in the person of Umar ibn al-Khattab who later became the second caliph. Umar had been a staunch opponent of Muhammad's preaching and physically assaulted his own sister Fatima when he found she too had been converted. Remorse overtook him when he saw her face bleeding and he asked to hear a recitation of the Qur'n. Overwhelmed, he immediately sought out Muhammad to swear his allegiance to him.

The conversion of such men as Umar and Hamza strengthened the cause of Muhammad's companions and for a while public worship became possible. Persecution later revived, however, and a second migration to Abyssinia followed. This only increased the fury of the Quraysh and a ban was proclaimed against Abu Talib and the Banu Hashim until they should remove their protection of Muhammad and leave the rest of the Quraysh free to deal with him. The sub-tribe was shut up and besieged in Abu Talib's quarter for three years (with the exception, naturally, of Abu Lahab) and during this period suffered greatly till the cries of the children could be heard.

Many now began to feel that the boycott of their trite men had gone far enough and when it was discovered that ants had eaten the banning order placed in the Ka'aba with the exception of the words "In thy name, O Allah", the Quraysh agreed that the ban should be lifted.

## 5. Muhammad's Visit to at-Ta'if.

Not long after this Khadija and Abu Talib died. The loss of both his wife and protector was a severe blow and Muhammad had to reassess his position in Mecca. Despairing of any further success in the city, he left it for the first time to preach his message elsewhere and proceeded to at-Ta'if, a city in a fertile valley to the south-east of Mecca, and home of the worship of the Arab goddess *al-Lat*. Accompanied only by his adopted son Zaid, he was soon rejected by the inhabitants of the city and, as they were leaving, both were stoned and partially injured by the unrepentant idolaters. Taking refuge in an orchard, he was solaced and reassured himself of God's favour on his mission. From one point of view, this moment was probably the lowest point of his ministry and the future must have appeared bleak. At the same time we must be objective and sympathise deeply with his unrelenting determination to oppose the paganism of his day in the name of the one true God. From a Christian point of view he perhaps here more than at any other time, comes out with credit.

There is something lofty and heroic in this journey of Mahomet to Tayif; a solitary man, despised and rejected by his own people, going boldly forth in the name of God, like Jonah to Nineveh, and summoning an idolatrous city to repent and support his mission. It sheds a strong light on the intensity of his belief in the divine origin of his calling. (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 109).

## 6. The Treaties of Aqabah and the Hijrah.

Not long after his visit to at-Ta'if, all began to change for the hitherto unsuccessful claimant to prophethood. At the next annual pilgrimage to Mecca, Muhammad met six men from Yathrib, a city just over two hundred miles north of Mecca, who commended his message and said they would return home and proclaim it. The following year they returned after some measure of success and twelve men of Yathrib met him at al-Aqaba near Mecca and took an oath which became known as the first pledge of Aqaba and as the "Pledge of the Women" because they undertook to observe the ordinances laid down in the Qur'an on believing women who sought to take the oath of fealty (Surah 60.12). One of the twelve puts the oath in his own words:

There were twelve of us and we pledged ourselves to the prophet after the manner of women and that was before war was enjoined, the undertaking being that we should associate nothing with God; we should not steal; we should not commit fornication; nor kill our offspring; we should not slander our neighbours; we should not disobey him in what was right; if we fulfilled this paradise would be ours; if we committed any of those sins it was for God to punish or forgive us as He pleased. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 199).

Muhammad sent one of his companions, Musab, to teach them the Qur'an and the spread of the new faith was so swift in the city that seventy men accompanied Musab the following year to Mecca and took the second pledge of Aqaba after their leader, one al-Bare, had made this declaration to Muhammad:

We have listened to what you have said: Had there been some other idea in our mind we would have expressed it. We mean to fulfil (our promises) and want truth, and we are ready to sacrifice our lives for the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 1, p. 257).

They undertook to protect him with their own lives and accept him as leader in Yathrib. What brought about this sudden change in fortunes? There were basically two factors which weighed in favour of success here which had not been present at Mecca or at-Ta'if. Firstly, the city was inhabited by two tribes, the *Aus* and *Khazraj*, who had been at war with each other and who now sought an independent leader to govern them. Secondly, there were many Jews in the city and their monotheistic influence had had a purifying effect on these Arabs and prepared them for such an indigenous monotheistic religion as the Arab prophet of Mecca set before them. The seventy came from both tribes and confirmed that Yathrib was willing to accept him as leader and preparations were made for Muhammad and his followers to emigrate to the city. Soon many of them quietly left Mecca though the Quraysh had already become aware that something was afoot.

As soon as the Quraysh realised fully what was happen they became alarmed. A defiant prophet in their midst was one thing - an immortal enemy governing a hostile city elsewhere was another. Plans were soon afoot to kill Muhammad and one night, with only Muhammad himself, Abu Bakr and Ali left in the city, the Quraysh sought to execute their design against him. But, leaving Ali in his bed, he escaped with Abu Bakr to a cave on Mount Thaur south of Mecca and remained there two days. A legend, widely reported, explains how Allah sent a spider to protect them while the Quraysh sought them:

A spider span a cobweb, some parts of which covered others. The Quraysh made a frantic search for the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him. They even came to the entrance of the cave, but

someone among them said, Verily, spiders haunt this place from before the birth of Muhammad; and they returned. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 1, p. 265).

This incident is universally believed to be true by Muslims throughout the world to this day, but it is probable that this story is adapted from a Jewish fable like many others that are found in the Qur'an, as we shall see.

It is observable that the Jews have a like tradition concerning David, when he fled from Saul into the cave and the Targum paraphrases these words of the second verse of Psalm lvii, which was composed on occasion of that deliverance: "I will pray before the most high God that performeth all things for me, in this manner; I will pray before the most high God who called a spider to weave a web for my sake in the mouth of the cave" (Sale, *The Preliminary Discourse to the Koran*, p. 54)

Another incident related of this sojourn in the cave and one of certain historical accuracy, again commends Muhammad and is one of those moments in his hard life at Mecca for which we are bound to give him credit. The Qur'an itself mentions it in these words:

Allah did indeed help him when the Unbelievers drove him out: he had no more than one companion: - they two were in the Cave, and he said to his companion, "Have no fear for Allah is with us". *Surah 9.40*

Abu Bakr had become quite fearful when they realised the Quraysh were near and asked what the two of them could do against so many, but Muhammad comforted him by saying "We are not two but three - Allah is with us". Abu Bakr corded the poignant moment in these words:

"I was in the company of the Prophet in the cave, and on seeing the traces of the pagans, I said, 'O Allah's Apostle! If one of them should lift up his foot, he will see us'. He said, 'What do you think of two, the third of whom is Allah?'" (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 6, p. 148).

The two finally escaped safely and Ali soon followed. Thus ended Muhammad's years in Mecca and this migration, known as the *Hijrah*, became the turning point in his mission. At Yathrib, renamed *al-Madina* by Muhammad (literally "the city"), Islam was established as a religion and from the date of the Hijrah, 20th June 622 AD, the Muslim calendar significantly begins.

Less than a hundred Meccan believers came to Medina and were given the honorary title *Muhajirun*, Emigrants, a word derived from the same root letters as hijrah (emigration). The Medinan converts who stood by him at al-Aqaba were likewise entitled *Ansar*, Helpers. From now on the Muslim *ummah* (community) was a unit in itself. Tribal loyalties passed away and a new universal loyalty to Allah, his apostle and the believers (*mu'minin*) took over. Henceforth the followers of Muhammad were proud to be called Muslims (*al-Muslimin* - "the Muslims") and adherents of *al-Islam*. Both words come from the same root letters - Islam means "submission" and a Muslim is one who submits himself to the way of Allah.

## THE FOUNDER OF ISLAM AT MEDINA

### 1. The Muslim Community at Medina.

Muhammad and the early Muslims soon settled in Medina though some of the Meccan emigrants suffered fevers from the change of climate. (Mecca is a hot, dry city whereas Medina is set in a fertile valley with a more humid climate). He often praised the virtues of the city that had accepted him as its leader. He stated that Allah would punish those who harmed its inhabitants, that it has its own way of driving out evil people, and that *Dajjal* (the Islamic equivalent of the Antichrist) would not be able to enter it. An indication of the depth of Muhammad's love for the city come out clearly in other proclamations he made about it, such as this one:

"I have declared sacred the territory between the two lava plains of Medina, so its trees should not be cut down, or its game killed"; and he also said "Medina is best for them if they knew. No one leaves it through dislike of it without Allah putting in it someone better than he in place of him; and no one will stay there in spite of its hardships and distress without my being an intercessor or witness on behalf of him on the Day of Resurrection". (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 2, p. 686).

At the beginning of their stay in Medina, however, the early Muslims endured extreme poverty. Muhammad himself soon grew accustomed to the paucity of provisions and possessions and throughout his ten years as ruler of the city (and, in later years, of much of Arabia itself), he allowed himself only the bare necessities of life. At Mecca he had married his second wife Sauda, shortly after Khadija's death and now in Medina, took Ayishah, daughter of Abu Bakr, as wife. Of all his wives, Ayishah was the only one who had never been married before. Muhammad was, in fact, betrothed to her when she was only nine years of age. He had no apartment of his own but took turns in dwelling in the simple apartments he had built for his wives.

His followers also adapted to the new environment and a spirit of brotherhood soon developed between the Ansar and the Muhajirun. Up to fifty of the emigrants were taken individually as brothers by the citizens of Medina and were entitled to inherit from them.

Not all the citizens of Medina welcomed Muhammad. There were three Jewish tribes who caused him much trouble in and around the city, of whose fates more will be said later. Some of the Arabs also were unwilling to acknowledge his leadership but, as the city as a whole had taken him as leader, the disaffected parties generally gave a token outward acknowledgment of his leadership and acceptance of his religion and its practices. Behind the scenes, however, discontent was rarely quiet and Muhammad was constantly aware of the rumblings going on around him.

Such outward conformity, cloaking an opposition ill-concealed, was more dangerous than open animosity. The class soon became peculiarly obnoxious to Mahomet; he established through his adherents a close and searching watch over both their words and actions; and in due time followed up his espionage by acts which struck dismay into the hearts of the disaffected. (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 176).

The leader of this group was one Abdullah ibn Ubayy. He had known nothing of the pledges of Aqabah and at the time had sought to placate the Meccans who were suspicious of the developing kinship between Muhammad and the citizens of Medina who had come to the fairs. Ibn Ubayy had in fact become one of the foremost men in the city and, were it not for the arrival of the Meccan fugitive, he might well have assumed the leadership of its inhabitants instead.

On more than one occasion in later years his followers plotted to replace Muhammad with their leader. At the Battle of Uhud to follow, Ibn Ubayy withdrew from the pending clash with his followers and, although he made an outward profession of Islam, Muhammad's companions constantly sought his demise. Muhammad himself forbade it, however, and at his rival's death even ventured to pray over his grave.

Nonetheless Muhammad was quite apprehensive about this potentially dangerous group and, in the Qur'an, these professors of Islam who gave it no more than lip-service are denounced as *munafiqun*, "hypocrites", and are regarded as the worst of unbelievers. A Surah of the Qur'an, appropriately entitled *Suratul-Munafiqun*, devotes its first eight verses to a particularly vehement condemnation of these pseudo-Muslims. A few of these verses speak for themselves:

When the hypocrites come to thee, they say, "We bear witness that thou art indeed the Apostle of God. Yea, God knoweth that thou art indeed His apostle, and God beareth witness that the hypocrites are indeed liars. When thou lookest at them, their exteriors please thee and when they speak, thou listenest to their words. They are as (worthless as hollow) pieces of timber propped up, (unable to stand on their own). They think that every cry is against them. They are the enemies; so beware of them. The curse of God be on them' How are they deluded (away from the Truth). *Surah 63.1,4*.

Muhammad built his first mosque at Quba just south of Medina but his own mosque, the *masjidun-nabi* (the prophet's mosque), soon became the dominant place of worship in the city. It survives to this day, but has been greatly enlarged many times and today also encloses Muhammad's tomb.

When the Muslims first came to Medina they faced Jerusalem when praying. Not long afterwards, however, Muhammad changed this direction of prayer, the *qiblah*, to the Ka'aba in Mecca even though it was still an idolatrous temple. The rejection of his claim to prophethood by the Jews appears to have made him decide that Islam should be an exclusive faith separate from Judaism, and one with an Arab foundation. He had already identified himself as a prophet in the Biblical line, however, and to justify the change of direction from the *bartul-muqaddas* (the Holy House) in Jerusalem to the *masjidul-haram* (the Sacred Mosque) in Mecca, the Qur'an boldly declares that Abraham first built the Ka'aba with his son Ishmael as a house of worship dedicated to Allah alone!

We covenanted with Abraham and Isma'il, that they should sanctify My House for those who compass it round, or use it as a retreat, or bow, or prostrate themselves (therein in prayer)..And remember Abraham and Isma'il raised the foundations of the House (with this prayer). "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us: for Thou art the All- Hearing, the All-Knowing". *Surah 2.125,127*.

A little further on in the same Surah comes the justification of the about-face in respect of the qiblah as well.

Now shall We turn thee to a Qibla that shall please thee. Turn then thy face in the direction of the sacred Mosque: wherever ye are, turn your faces in that direction. *Surah 2.144*

Islam was taking root as an exclusively new faith. The time had come for a more forceful spread of its dominion and influence and a ready-made opportunity lay close at hand in the form of Meccan caravan traffic to and from Syria.

## 2. Raid on Caravans and the Battle of Badr.

Medina lay right across the path of this caravan traffic and within a year of the hijrah, Muhammad sent out a number of raiding parties to intercept Meccan caravans but none of these were effective. The first raid to succeed took place in inopportune circumstances. During the second year of his rule in Medina Muhammad sent out Abdullah ibn Jahsh with seven others to Nakhlah, a site on the south Arabian trade route between Mecca and at-Ta'if. Two of the party turned back but the remaining six attacked a small Meccan caravan and killed one of its company, took two others prisoner, while the last man returned safely to the city.

There was nothing unusual about a raid of this nature. The nomadic Arabs have been caravan-raiders for centuries and inter-tribal raiding was a fairly common practice. This raid, however, was pursued in one of the four holy months (*Rajab* in this case) when the caravan crews were unarmed and fighting was prohibited throughout the peninsula. Worse still, the Muslim band had posed as pilgrims by shaving their heads and fell on an unsuspecting Meccan company completely deceived by their appearance.

On their return to Medina the whole city was shocked and dismayed at this flagrant breach of Arab custom. Muhammad himself refused to accept the booty at first but then, very conveniently, a "revelation" justifying the raid came from above, one which is now part of the Qur'an:

They ask thee concerning fighting in the Prohibited Month. Say: "Fighting therein is a grave (offence); but graver is it in the sight of God to prevent access to the path of God, to deny Him, to prevent access to the Sacred Mosque and drive out its members". *Surah 2.217*

Because the Meccans had not accepted Muhammad's message and prevented the Muslims from obtaining easy access to the Ka'aba, the Qur'an states that, whereas fighting in a sacred month is indeed wrong, it is justified in the circumstances. Muhammad took one-fifth of the booty for investment in the treasury and distribution to the needy, awarded the residue to the raiding band, and ransomed the two prisoners.

From this moment the impressive image of a tolerant prophet patiently withstanding oppression degenerates into the censurable image of a ruler sanctioning robbery, murder and the like by his companions against all opponents of Islam. In the past biographers of his life were accustomed to draw a clear distinction between the prophet of Mecca and ruler of Medina but a closer examination of the new trend shows that it was purely a logical development of Muhammad's purpose to establish Islam in the traditional way.

In the meantime a general agreement of opinion has grown in modern Western biographies of Muhammad that one must speak of an unbroken unity in Muhammad's personality (Weasels, *A Modern Arabic Biography of Muhammad*, p. 87).

An analysis of the very next verse after the justification of the Nakhlah raid shows how consistent the outbreak of fighting in Islam was with the whole object of the hijrah:

Those who believed and those who suffered exile and fought (and strove and struggled) in the path of God, - they have the hope of the Mercy of God: and God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.  
*Surah 2.218*

In the original Arabic the verse up to the words "path of God" reads *Innallathiina aa-manuu wallathiina haajaruu wa jaahaduu fii sabiilillah*. The link between the word "haajaruu wa jaahaduu" is very significant. From the same root letters come the nouns *hijrah* (emigration) and *jihad* (warfare). Those who "suffered exile" (*haajaruu*) are also those who "fought" (*jaahaduu*) in the path of God. The hijrah was not just a flight from Mecca. It was a preparation for jihad. It was to be the mainspring of the establishment of an ummah (community) that was to spread its influence through warfare. Muhammad's objective was to create a theocratic Muslim state and community by fighting those who stood in its way and who chose to resist it.

Where Islam is potentially universalized in *Hijrah* it is inherently politicized in *Jihad*. The move *out* of Mecca *with* the faith presages the move *against* Mecca *for* the faith. In that transition, not only is the *Hijrah* implemented in its prospective relevance, but Islam is defined in its essential character. (Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'an*, p. 134).

Later the same year one of the most important events in the history of Islam occurred. Apart from the smaller caravans a large caravan set out annually from Mecca for Syria. Muhammad knew of its return and prepared to capture it. Its leader Abu Sufyan, the most prominent man in Mecca and a descendant of Umayya, took steps to avoid the impending crisis and hastened home by the Red Sea. He got to Mecca safely but a messenger sent by him to the city saw to it that a large Meccan army of up to a thousand men was sent out to rescue the caravan. (In later years Abu Sufyan's son Mu'awiya took control of the caliphate and began the Umayyad dynasty which lasted nearly a hundred years. It was replaced by the Abbasid dynasty whose caliphs were descendants of Hashim, Umayya's great rival and great-grandfather of Muhammad).

Muhammad's companions heard of the advent of the Meccan army but, encouraged by Muhammad's declaration that Allah had promised him either the caravan or the army, the band of three hundred and fifty men marched on to Badr near the Red Sea where, in a swift engagement, the Muslims succeeded in destroying most of the Meccan leadership including Muhammad's great enemy Abu Jahl. The Meccans fled before the Muslim offensive leaving forty-nine of their number slain on the battlefield. The Muslim losses were only fourteen. Nothing more than a skirmish, surely? Perhaps - but one of the most fateful battles ever fought in history and to this day held in awe by the Muslims as Islam's finest hour on the battlefield.

No event in the history of Islam was of more importance than this battle: the Koran rightly calls it the Day of Deliverance, the day before which the Moslems were weak, after which they were strong. Its value to Mohammed himself it is difficult to overrate; he possibly regarded it himself as a miracle, and when he declared it one, most of his neighbours accepted the statement without hesitation. (Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, p. 269).

Certainly the success was a tremendous tonic for the fledgling Muslim community and one which increased Muhammad's esteem in Medina. Islam was now firmly established and was . . . gaining ground.

### 3. The Battles of Uhud and the Ditch.

The cry for revenge, however, soon rose from the citizens of Mecca and a year later an army three thousand strong under the leadership of Abu Sufyan marched on Medina. At the plain beneath the hill of Uhud to the north of Medina they halted and plundered the fields round about. Muhammad counselled his warriors to remain in the city as it was easier to defend close in than out in the plains where the Muslims would all be exposed to the Meccan army which was vastly superior in numbers. His longstanding opponent Abdullah ibn Ubayy also pleaded with the citizens of Medina to stay behind but many of the more youthful combatants sought to go out and take the fight to the Quraysh and, as the victory of Badr was still fresh in the minds of all, their enthusiasm won the day and a thousand men ventured out to battle. The next morning Ibn Ubayy, displeased at the rejection of his advice, nonetheless treacherously deserted Muhammad with about three hundred men and returned to the city. The odds were four to one against the Muslims.

Superior motivation, however, soon assisted the Muslims to once again seize the initiative and the Quraysh were forced to retreat. But the Muslims pressed their advantage too far. Archers guarding a rear flank broke their ranks against the orders of Muhammad and recklessly joined the fray thus leaving their flank exposed. Meanwhile Khalid ibn Walid a Qurayshite general who later led many successful Muslim conquests, swept his mounted force around one of the hills on the plain and surprised the Muslims from behind. Their discipline gone, they soon fell prey to the Meccan cavalry. The Quraysh wreaked havoc among them. Hamza, the "Lion of God" was slain and his body later mutilated. Even Muhammad was so badly injured that the rumour soon spread that he had been killed. His closest companions, however, shielded him carefully from any further danger.

At the end of the day the Quraysh held sway but, for reasons which must remain a mystery, failed to press their advantage and withdrew from the field. The Muslims lost seventy-four men in the battle and the Quraysh twenty. Although the Muslims had not won the battle, the city of Medina remained unharmed. The outcome had serious implications, however, for Muhammad and his companions.

This battle of Uhud has sometimes been presented, even in Muslim sources, as a serious defeat for Muhammad, but this - at least from the military point of view - it certainly was not. The serious aspect was the religious or spiritual one. The victory of Badr had been taken as a sign that God was supporting them, and indeed fighting for them. The loss of life at Uhud, therefore, seemed to be an indication that God had deserted them, or that they had been mistaken in the inferences they had drawn from Badr. (Watt, *What is Islam?*, p. 105).

A revelation soon assisted Muhammad to quiet the misgivings of his companions. The Qur'an blames the warriors for disobeying orders and for seeking to share in the booty and states that God inflicted their reverses to teach them to obey orders and not to seek the rewards of this life.

Behold! Ye were climbing up the high ground, without even casting a side glance at any one, and the Apostle in your rear was calling you back. There did God give you one distress after another by way of requital, to teach you not to grieve for (the booty) that had escaped you and for (the ill) that had befallen you. For God is well aware of all that ye do. *Surah 3.153*

After the battle Muhammad had a Qurayshite prisoner, Abu Azzah, beheaded for taking up alms on behalf of the Meccans a second time after he had been released at Badr (because he had five daughters to look after) on the condition that he refrained from joining in hostilities again. The prisoner pleaded with Muhammad to pardon him yet again but Muhammad answered him:

Verily a believer is not stung twice from the same hole. You will not return to Makkah to declare, rubbing your cheeks, that you had befooled Muhammad twice. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p. 51).

The following year the Quraysh returned with ten thousand men to vanquish Muhammad once and for all but he was informed in advance of the pending onslaught and had a trench dug on the northern flank of Medina which was exposed to open attack. The "Battle of the Ditch", as it is known, was no real battle at all. The Quraysh were thoroughly frustrated by the innovation and, despite a few individual contests, were unable to make any impression on the city. After a division between "the Confederates" (the Qurayshite army had many warriors from other tribes around Mecca in their contingent) and a severe storm one evening, they decided to withdraw.

The Meccan cause against Muhammad was now exhausted. Despite their efforts to gather such a large army for a final showdown, Muhammad's growing strength remained unchallenged. The Quraysh, exasperated, gave up their designs on Medina and the initiative lost was soon seized by Muhammad. The tables were about to be turned.

#### 4. Muhammad - the Universal Messenger of Allah.

Let us pause in the narrative to consider the prestige and status of the prophet of the Arabs at this point when he finds himself able at last to take the offensive and begin preparations for a move on Mecca, already declared to be the holy city of Islam.

From being purely a warner, calling the Quraysh to turn away from idols to the worship of the one true God, the Qur'an now represents Muhammad as the last and greatest of all the prophets. He has become the vicegerent of God on earth and his image develops from that of a purely prophetic character to that of messianic proportions. The Qur'an has a number of supreme accolades for him.

1. He is regarded as a universal messenger sent by God, not just to his own people as all previous prophets had been allegedly sent, but to all mankind:

We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin), but most men understand not. *Surah 34.28*

2. The Qur'an not only commands believers to send blessings upon him but claims that even God and all his angels do so in heaven above:

God and His Angels send blessings on the Prophet: O ye that believe! Send ye blessings on him and salute him with all respect. *Surah 33.56*

3. He is given the illustrious title *rahmatallil-alamin*, a "mercy to the worlds", another indication of the now universal character of his ministry:

We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures. *Surah 21.107*

4. Another exclusive title he assumes is *khataman-nabiyin*, the seal of the prophets". As the last and greatest of God's prophets, he cannot be superseded by another prophet:

Muhammad is not the father of any of your men, but (he is) the Apostle of God, and the Seal of the Prophets and God has full knowledge of all things. *Surah 33.40*

5. Obedience to Muhammad and obedience to God are by this time synonymous. Any disobedience of any command of the prophet of Islam incurs God's wrath and acquiescence in his will incurs God's pleasure:

Verily those who plight their fealty to thee do no less than plight their fealty to God; the hand of God is over their hands: Then any one who violates his oath, does so to the harm of his own soul, and any one who fulfils what he has covenanted with God, God will soon grant him a great reward. *Surah 48.10*

The foundation was being laid not only for the final conquest of Mecca and Arabia but also for the conquest of the whole world till all be brought into subjection to Allah through obedience to his will as revealed through the prophet of Arabia, his universal and final messenger for all mankind.

Islam was now an autonomous religion, separate from Judaism and Christianity and professedly superior to them. Its prophet had developed from being a lone human voice against Arab paganism into the voice of God calling all men everywhere to his religion, *al-Islam*. As we shall see in the next chapter, however, the universal nature of Islam was nonetheless simultaneously restricted by the personal failings of its prophet and its claim to supersede all other faiths was compromised by a clear deterioration in the character of its founder during his years of power as leader in Medina.

He now arrived at a point where he completely diverged from the celestial spirit of the Christian doctrines, and stamped his religion with the alloy of fallible mortality. His human nature was not capable of maintaining the sublime forbearance he had hitherto inculcated. (Irving, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 103).

##### 5. The Treaty of Hdaybiyah.

While gaining ground nearer home by various raids, Muhammad continued to cherish a return to Mecca and the next year led one-and-a-half-thousand pilgrims to the city for the *umra*, the lesser pilgrimage. He chose one of the holy months in which war was forbidden, donned the white pilgrim garments traditionally worn for the venture, took the required number of camels for sacrifice, and bade his men carry only a small sword at their sides - the usual form of protection for pilgrim travellers. Although the group was fitted out purely for pilgrimage purposes, the Quraysh were soon alarmed and at al-Hudaybiyah, just outside Mecca where the Muslims stopped, the two parties met. A small deputation came out to discover Muhammad's intentions while the rest prepared the defence of the city. One of the leading Muslims who was later to become the third Caliph, Uthman, went back with a deputation into the city and when his return was delayed, the Muslims suspected he had been killed and prepared to defend themselves. Under a tree each one took a pledge to stand by Muhammad and Uthman, a pledge often remembered by Muhammad as one which evidenced the supreme loyalty of his companions. This devotion was not lost on the Meccan deputation who soon ensured that the Quraysh were suitably impressed by it.

Uthman returned safely despite their fears and with him a leading Meccan, Suhail ibn Amr, who was given a mandate to negotiate a ten-year truce with Muhammad and advise him that he could not enter the city that year but could return the following year when the Quraysh would evacuate it for three days to allow Muhammad and his companions to perform the pilgrimage.

Muhammad duly negotiated a treaty with Suhail, one which keenly upset many of his devoted followers. Umar objected to the whole proceedings on the principle that true Muslims had been called upon to fight and resist infidels and not to negotiate with them on equal terms:

Umar b. Khattab came, approached the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) and said: Messenger of Allah, aren't we fighting for the truth and they for falsehood? He replied: By all means. He asked: Are not those killed from our side in Paradise and those killed from their side in the Fire? He replied: Yes. He said: Then why should we put a blot upon our religion and return, while Allah has not decided the issue between them and ourselves? He said: Son of Khattab, I am the Messenger of Allah. Allah will never ruin me. (The narrator said): Umar went away, but he could not contain himself with rage. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 3, p. 980).

Indeed, far from concluding an equitable agreement, Muhammad appeared to have agreed to terms humiliating to the Muslims. It was stipulated that any member of the Quraysh who became a Muslim and sought to go over to the Muslims was to be returned to Mecca. If any of the Muslims wished to return to Mecca of his own accord, however, he was free to do so and was not to be returned by the Quraysh. The reaction of the party to this unfavourable provision is plainly set out in the following hadith:

When Suhail bin 'Amr agreed to the treaty (of Hudaibiya), one of the things he stipulated then, was that the Prophet should return to them (i.e. the pagans) anyone coming to him from their side, even if he was a Muslim; and would not interfere between them and that person. The Muslims did not like this condition and got disgusted with it. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 3, p. 547).

Muhammad incurred the further wrath of his company when he acquiesced in the demands of Suhail that the treaty should not be headed with the usual Muslim invocation *Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Rahim* (In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful), but rather in the words chosen by the Quraysh: *Bi'ismika Allahumma* (In thy Name, O Allah). The offence was compounded when Muhammad even agreed that he should be described simply as *Muhammad ibn Abdullah* (Muhammad son of Abdullah) and not *Muhammadur-Rasulullah* (Muhammad the Messenger of Allah). Another hadith tells us the whole story:

Then the apostle summoned Ali and told him to write 'In the name of Allah the Compassionate, the Merciful'. Suhayl said "I do not recognise this; but write 'In thy name, O Allah'". The apostle told him to write the latter and he did so. Then he said: "Write 'This is what Muhammad, the apostle of God has agreed with Suhayl b. Amr'". Suhayl said, "If I witnessed that you were God's apostle I would not have fought you. Write your own name and the name of your father". The apostle said: "Write 'This is what Muhammad b. Abdullah has agreed with Suhayl b. Amr'" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 504).

Ali's displeasure was soon expressed in the same way that Umar had vented his grievances. Had Muhammad not commanded an unswerving loyalty from his followers, this could have been a moment of crisis for him.

He said to Ali: Write down the terms settled between us. (So Ali wrote): In the name of Allah, most Gracious, most Merciful. This is what Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, has settled (with the Meccans). The polytheists said to him: If we knew that thou art the Messenger of Allah, we would follow you. But write Muhammad b. Abdullah. So he told Ali to strike out these words. Ali said: No, by Allah, I will not strike them out. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 3, p. 979).

Muhammad then duly struck out the words himself. But, as happened on so many similar occasions when the early Muslims were perplexed about some action or decision of their prophet, a timely revelation in the Qur'an soon settled the issue. The treaty was proclaimed as a victory, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary.

Verily we have granted thee a manifest victory. *Surah 48.1*

One of the most prominent Western biographers of Muhammad's life certainly saw it as such and the events which succeeded it do lend much support to this claim.

But, in truth, a great step had been gained by Mahomet. His political status, as an equal and independent Power, was acknowledged by the treaty: the ten years' truce would afford opportunity and time for the new religion to expand, and to force its claims upon the convictions of the Coreish; while conquest, material as well as spiritual, might be pursued on every other side. The stipulation that no one under the protection of a guardian should leave the Coreish without his guardian's consent though unpopular at Medina, was in accordance with the principles of Arabian society; and the Prophet had sufficient confidence in the loyalty of his own people and the superior attractions of Islam, to fear no ill effect from the counter clause that none should be delivered up who might desert his standard. Above all, it was a great and manifest success that free permission was conceded to visit Mecca in the following year, and for three days occupy the city undisturbed. (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 347).

One of the early successes enjoyed by Muhammad as a result of the treaty was the allegiance of the tribe of Khuza'a. Free to exploit the conclusion of further alliances and concentrate on the elimination of threats from hostile tribes nearer home, he soon set about strengthening his position. The strong Jewish fortress of Khaibar north of Medina was besieged and brought into subjection as well.

A year later a much stronger Muhammad returned to Mecca to duly perform the pilgrimage. The Quraysh left the city unattended for three days as agreed and watched with mixed feelings as Muhammad, clearly enjoying the total devotion of his supporters, honoured the holy places of Mecca and paid his respects to the Ka'aba. Consciously or otherwise, Meccan resistance to Islam was steadily being worn down. The inhabitants of the city, weary of warfare with Muhammad, one of their own kinsmen, now beheld his sustained devotion to their shrine and the city of his birth.

Khalid ibn Walid, the great Meccan general who turned the tide for the Quraysh at Uhud, went over to the Muslim side with a few other leading men of Mecca. The final conquest of Mecca was now becoming a vivid possibility and one enhanced by the probable defection *en masse* of all of its inhabitants to Islam.

In the meantime Muhammad despatched an army of about three thousand men to Muta, a town on the borders of Syria. Here for the first time the Muslims met the strong Byzantine armies and, after putting up a brave but hopeless fight under Khalid's leadership against a force vastly superior in numbers, the Muslims withdrew. Some important men were lost in the battle, however, including Muhammad's adopted son and early convert Zaid ibn Haritha. The indecisive battle nevertheless prepared the way for the great onslaughts to follow after Muhammad's death under the caliphates of Abu Bakr and Umar respectively.

At home his dominion remained ever on the increase and the major obstacle in his path - Mecca - was ready to be tackled. The final triumph of Islam in Arabia was fast approaching and the rolling tide of success was not to be turned back. Before considering it, however, let us examine a chapter in Muhammad's life at Medina hitherto overlooked - his relationships with the Jewish tribes in and around the city.

## THE CONFLICT WITH THE JEWS

### 1. Muhammad and the Jews of Medina.

A constant thorn in the flesh to Muhammad at Medina were the three Jewish tribes quartered near the city - the Banu Qaynuqa, Banu Nadhir and Banu Quraydhah. On his arrival at Medina he negotiated treaties with these tribes and for a short while sought their allegiance through many overtures.

We have already seen that Muhammad made Jerusalem his qiblah at this time and it is noteworthy that the Jewish fast of Ashura was also observed by the Muslims from the time that they first reached Medina. (To this day the tenth of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic year, is a holy day and one on which many Muslims fast - compare Exodus 12.3 and see the section on Muslim festivals and celebrations). The Qur'an also acknowledges the Jews as a people on whom God had bestowed peculiar favours in terms reminiscent of Paul's summary in Romans 9.4-5:

We did aforetime grant to the Children of Israel the Book, the Power of Command, and Prophethood; We gave them, for sustenance, things good and pure; and We favoured them above the nations. *Surah 45.16*

It seems that Muhammad had keenly desired to win their support but was so rudely rejected that they soon became his inveterate enemies. The Jews could hardly be expected to acknowledge an Ishmaelite prophet who proclaimed Jesus as their Messiah! They irked him keenly on two counts - satirical barbs and evidences against his claim to prophethood. The second concerns us more than the first.

Yet the Jews were a constant cause of trouble and anxiety. They plied him with questions of which the point was often difficult to turn aside. The very people to whose testimony he had so long appealed in the Coran proved now a stubborn and standing witness against him (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 179).

Of the Jews there are those who displace words from their (right) place and say: "We hear and we disobey". *Surah 4.46*

It was too late, however, to rectify the unfortunate error that they had succeeded in introducing into the text of the Qur'an. As Muir continues, "Mahomet evidently smarted at this period under the attacks of the Jews" (*The Life of Mahomet*, p. 179). Other authors comment in a similar vein:

It was not that the Jews refused to recognise Muhammad as a prophet, nor even that they engaged in political intrigue against him, serious as such attitudes and actions were. Much more serious was the Jewish attack on the ideational basis of Muhammad's preaching. It had been claimed that the Qur'an was a message from God and thus inerrant; and it had also been claimed that there was a large measure of identity between the Qur'anic message and what was to be found in the previous scriptures. If the Jews, then, maintained that there were errors and false statements in the Qur'an (because it disagreed with their Bible) and that therefore it could not be a message from God, they were threatening to destroy the foundations of Muhammad's whole religious movement. (Watt, *What is Islam?*, p. 102).

Yet, doubtless, the Prophet's ultimate determination to destroy the Jews was due to his secret recognition of their superior knowledge of matters on which he claimed (Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, p. 233).

The end result was as predictable as it was crucial to the success of Muhammad's ministry - the neutralisation of the Jews as an effective force in Medina. This took place chiefly through the deportation of two of the tribes and the annihilation of the third, but at the same time Muhammad also sought to discredit them in other ways and "the portions of the Coran given forth at this period teem with invectives against the Israelites" (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p.180). Here are a few examples of this trend in the last Surah making up the revelation:

The Jews say: "God's hand is tied up". Be their hands tied up and be they accursed for the (blasphemy) they utter . . . Amongst them we have placed enmity and hatred till the Day of Judgment. Every time they kindle the fire of war, God cloth extinguish it; But they (ever) strive to do mischief on the earth. And God loveth not those who do mischief. *Surah 5.67*

Thou seest many of them turning in friendship to the unbelievers. Evil indeed are (the works) which their souls have sent forward before them (with the result) that God's wrath is on them and in torment will they abide. *Surah 5.83*

The contemporary Muslim response to the state of Israel has its roots in passages like these which, allegedly being God's own judgments, control the attitudes of the Muslims throughout the world to their Jewish co-religionists. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the Jews constantly slandered in the Hadith as well. The traditionists blacken them in many passages. For example, Ibn Ishaq assesses the relationship between them and Muhammad in these words:

About this time the Jewish rabbis showed hostility to the apostle in envy, hatred and malice, because God had chosen His apostle from the Arabs. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 239).

Ibn Sa'd even contains a hadith to the effect that the Jews sought to kill Muhammad in his childhood when they discovered that he might become a prophet. His wet-nurse Halima saved him only by claiming to be his actual mother. (*Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 1, p. 125). The story is a pure fiction because it speaks of prophetic phenomena which his mother is supposed to have seen at his birth. Such stories are known to be later embellishments. (Muhammad himself always acknowledged that his mother died in idolatry). Nonetheless it is typical of the anti-Jewish element constantly found in early Muslim records. To this day the prejudice is sustained and this comment on a recent biography of Muhammad by a fairly well-known Egyptian author, Abdur-Rahman Ash-Sharqawi, confirms this negative trend which is unfortunately prevalent in most Muslim writings dealing with Muhammad and the Jews:

The most striking facet of Ash-Sharqawi's apology is certainly his description of the relationship of Muhammad to the Jews. It is his express purpose to dispel the image of Muhammad as an oppressor of the Jews and in its place to portray Muhammad as one who dealt with the Jews with exemplary patience. In order to reach this goal, he typifies the Jews as rich bankers, capitalists, exploiters, financiers, usurers, speculators and manufacturers of weapons. They supposedly attempt constantly to undermine the new Islamic society by economic means. Even when they are exiled, they brood on revenge. Besides this characterization of them, Ash-Sharqawi harps continually on their corrupting influence on morals. Ash-Sharqawi constantly finds enmity, hate, treachery, the breaking of treaties, the lust for power, and feelings for revenge in the Jews. Ash-Sharqawi has established his defence of Muhammad by painting the Jews completely black, a presentation for which he does not give any historical evidence, much less "thousands". (Weasels, *A Modern Arabic Biography of Muhammad*, p. 23).

Against this unfavourable background let us analyse the development of Muhammad's historical dealings with the three Jewish tribes of Medina.

## 2. The Exile of the Banu Qaynuqa and Banu Nadhir.

Shortly after the Battle of Badr relations between Muhammad and the Jews of Medina began to deteriorate and, suspecting treachery from them as a result of alleged breaches of their covenants with him (Surah 8.56-58), he began to move against them. A small altercation in one of the markets of Medina was the spark that set the process in motion. A Jew pinned the skirt of a kneeling Muslim woman to her upper dress so that when she stood up she was publicly embarrassed. Her companion slew the Jew in revenge and was promptly slain himself by the other Jews in the market.

On hearing of it Muhammad sent his uncle Hamsa to the quarter of the Banu Qaynuqa from whom the offending Jew had come. The Jews answered that even though Muhammad had succeeded in routing the Quraysh, he would find them to be far more resolute. The quarter was besieged for fifteen days. Neither of the other two tribes nor their allies under Abdullah ibn Ubayy gave them any assistance or relief. As the siege wore on the tribe surrendered and was exiled from Medina, leaving their fields and many of their other possessions as spoils for the Muslim warriors.

After the Battle of Uhud the Banu Nadhir were the next to go. Claiming that this tribe was plotting his death, Muhammad sent his men against them, this time under Ali's command. Mindful of the fate of their kinsmen, they immediately prepared to leave but promises of support from Ibn Ubayy and others encouraged them to withstand the siege. Once again no assistance was rendered. After fifteen days Muhammad commanded his companions to cut down the palm trees in their date groves. The Jews cried out to him:

"Muhammad, you have prohibited wanton destruction and blamed those guilty of it. Why then are you cutting down and burning our palm-trees?" (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 437).

This charge was well-founded as Moses had, under the direct guidance of the will of God, forbidden such destruction of trees which bore food, even if they belonged to a city which waged war against God's people:

"When you besiege a city for a long time, making war against it in order to take it, you shall not destroy its trees by wielding an axe against them; for you may eat of them, but you shall not cut them down. Are the trees in the field men that they should be besieged by you?" *Deuteronomy 20.19*

Muhammad was once again compelled to resort to a timely revelation to counter the Jews:

Whether ye cut down (O ye Muslims!) the tender palm-trees, or ye left them standing on their roots, it was by leave of God, and in order that He might cover with shame the rebellious transgressors. *Surah 59.5*

Once again, as in the aftermath of the Nakhlah raid, a divine revelation was required to justify a clear breach of Arab custom, let alone a wilful disregard for the Law of God as revealed through the prophet Moses. In his commentary Yusuf Ali has this to say about the verse just quoted:

The unnecessary cutting down of fruit trees or destruction of crops, or any wanton destruction whatever in war, is forbidden by the law and practice of Islam. But some destruction may be necessary for putting pressure on the enemy, and to that extent it is allowed. But as far as possible, consistently with that objective of military operations, such trees should not be cut down.

Both these principles are in accordance with the Divine Will, and were followed by the Muslims in their expedition. (Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an*, p. 1522).

The reasoning is the same as that in Surah 2 regarding the Nakhlah raid. Although the action was forbidden by law, it suddenly became justified because of the animosity of Muhammad's opponents. It was allowed for "putting pressure" on the stubbornly resistant enemy. This is like saying that when a boxer cannot subdue his opponent, hitting below the belt suddenly becomes admissible to put a bit of "pressure" on him - how different the attitude of Moses who taught that laws were to be observed and ethics sustained no matter what the circumstances. Two wrongs do not make a right.

The tribe, deserted by its allies, finally surrendered and was exiled. Most of its members went north to Khaibar while others joined their kinsmen in Syria. The Qur'an censures those who offered help but withdrew their support:

Hast thou not observed the Hypocrites say to their misbelieving brethren among the People of the Book? - "If ye are expelled, we too will go out with you, and we will never hearken to anyone in your affair; and if ye are attacked (in fight) we will help you". But God is witness that they are indeed liars. *Surah 59.11*

### 3. The Destruction of the Banu Quraydhah.

The Banu Quraydhah, quartered in a sector to the east of Medina, were the last to go but in an extreme way. During the siege of Medina by the Quraysh and the Confederates, a pact was made with them by the Banu Quraydhah which seriously exposed the eastern flank of the city. The Jews acted treasonably but, with the fate of the other two tribes fresh in the memory, their gamble was hardly surprising.

Muhammad succeeded in creating distrust between the Quraysh and the Jews and, when the former withdrew, he promptly laid siege to the latter's quarter. Twenty-five days later the tribe surrendered and sought to be exiled like the other two before them. It was agreed, however, that one of the Aus tribe, traditionally the allies of the Jews, should decide their fate. Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, one of the few Muslims injured during the siege of Medina who was shortly to succumb to his wounds, was appointed their judge. (Some say the Jews themselves requested him). What followed is recorded in a matter-of-fact way by an early biographer:

The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, authorised Sa'd ibn Mu'adh to give a decision about them. He passed an order: He who is subjected to razors (i.e. the male) should be killed, women and children should be enslaved and property should be distributed. Thereupon the Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, said: You have decided in confirmation to the judgement of Allah, above the seven heavens. The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, returned on Thursday 7 Dhu al-Hijjah. Then he commanded them to be brought into al-Madinah where ditches were dug in the market. The Apostle of Allah, may Allah bless him, sat with his Companions and they were brought in small groups. Their heads were struck off. They were between six hundred and seven hundred in number. (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p. 93).

The ruthless execution of nearly a thousand men has been generally denounced by Western writers while Muslim writers have, as is to be expected, sought to justify the massacre. The following are typical examples of the spirit of Western criticism of the slaughter:

On this occasion he (Muhammad) again revealed that lack of honesty and moral courage which was an unattractive trait in his character. (Andrae, *Mohammed: The Man and his Faith*, p. 155).

There followed the massacre of the Banu Quraizah which marks the darkest depth of Muslim policy, a depth which the palliatives suggested by modern Muslim historians quite fail to measure. (Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 87).

But the indiscriminate slaughter of eight hundred men, and the subjugation of the women and children of the whole tribe to slavery, cannot be recognised other than as an act of monstrous cruelty...In short, the butchery of the Coreitza casts an indelible blot upon the life of Mahomet. (Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. 312).

One shudders at the recital of this horrible transaction. (Stobart, *Islam and its Founder*, p. 165).

Muslim writers invariably claim that such authors are prejudiced against Islam but the following quote comes from a Western author who wrote a fervent apology on behalf of Muhammad and whose book has been widely acclaimed and reprinted in the Muslim world:

But, judged by any but an Oriental standard of morality, and by his own conspicuous magnanimity on other occasions, his act, in all its accessories, was one of cold-blooded revenge. (Bosworth Smith, *Mohammed and Mohammedanism*, p. 138).

In contrast let us examine a few quotes by Muslim writers in support of Muhammad's action to see the nature of the defence that they raise on his behalf:

No one can dispute the justice of the sentence on the Quraiza. People may admire the courage of the Quraiza in not accepting Islam and thus saving their lives, but no one can complain of the justice of this sentence. (Sarwar, *Muhammad the Holy Prophet*, p. 247).

It was the Divine Will that the judgment should be left to Sa'd, and it was the Divine Will that moved Sa'd to pronounce the judgment that he did, which was in accordance with Deuteronomy 20.10-14. It was also the Divine Will that this terrible judgment, which the treachery and rebellion of Banu Quraidhah had earned, should not be pronounced by the Holy Prophet himself, but that he should be bound to carry it through to the full. (Zafrulla Khan, *Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets*, p. 186).

A recent Muslim writer has questioned whether this whole story is historically genuine. "A detailed scrutiny indicates that the whole story of this massacre is of a very doubtful nature" (Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews*, p. 85). He argues that the narratives contain contradictions about it and that it was right out of character with Muhammad's general magnanimity towards his defeated foes, if not always individually, at least in the main (as at the conquest of Mecca where almost the whole city was spared). There seems to be some support for the latter contention - more of his enemies were slain on that one day than in all the other battles Muhammad was engaged in during his lifetime. The contradictions between the narratives are, however, typical of those found in almost all the historical records of his life and do not affect the main story.

About the primary matters, the broad outline of events, there is practically no doubt. The Banu Qurayzah were besieged and eventually surrendered; their fate was decided by Sa'd; nearly all the men were executed; Muhammad did not disapprove. About all that, there is, *pace* Caetani, no controversy. The Western scholar of *sirah* must therefore beware of paying so much attention to the debates to be traced in his sources that he forgets the solid core of undisputed fact. This solid core is probably more extensive than is usually recognized. (Watt, "The Condemnation of the Jews of Banu Qurayzah" *The Muslim World*, Vol. 42, p. 171.)

Ahmad takes the words of Surah 33.26, "Some ye slew, and some ye made prisoners" as the foundation of his theory that, while some of the more serious offenders may have been proscribed, the bulk of the tribe was probably exiled like the others. At first sight it does seem strange that Muhammad should despatch the whole tribe while he had let the others go free, but there is concrete evidence that he had intended to execute the Banu Qaynuqa in the same way.

According to Ibn Sa'd (*Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p. 32-33), when the tribe surrendered, Muhammad ordered his companions to tie the men's hands behind their backs to prepare them for beheading. It was only the remonstrances of Abdullah ibn Ubayy, then still too influential to be refused that made him abandon their execution and order their banishment instead.

What is most significant about Ahmad's assessment of the historical genuineness of the massacre is that, in querying it, he finds himself free from the need to justify Muhammad and accordingly treats it for what it really was - an unjustifiable atrocity. He says:

No one could come out of such a holocaust - 600 to 900 killed in cold blood in one day - without damage to his personality. 'All and Zubayr's holocaust legacy of massive deadness would not have left them in peace. (Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews*, p. 86).

To behold the slaughter of many men in battle is indeed one thing - to unemotionally witness the execution of a whole tribe is another entirely. Ahmad continues:

The very idea of such a massacre by persons who neither before nor after the killing showed any sign of a dehumanised personality is inadmissible from a psychological point of view. (Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews*, p. 87).

Ahmad has challenged a story whose historical accuracy has hitherto never been questioned and, while the external evidences may weigh against him, he is to be commended for seeing the tragedy for what it truly was - in his own words, a "massacre" and a "holocaust".

In their determination to exonerate Muhammad the Muslims have found themselves in an awkward situation. If they admit the story, they find themselves obliged to counter the suggestion that it had the nature of an atrocity. If, however, this is conceded, they strive to challenge the reliability of the narratives! Either way none dares admit that Muhammad was the leading figure, or at least a willing accomplice, in a "holocaust".

Shortly before the conquest of Mecca Muhammad attacked the remaining Jewish fortress at Khaibar and, while not gaining an outright victory, nevertheless brought it into subjection. Here he was poisoned by a Jewish woman. Although she did not succeed in killing him, Muhammad complained to the day of his death of the effects of her act of revenge. Ibn Sa'd says she was put to death (Vol. 2, p. 249), but this is disputed by Bukhari who states that Muhammad refused to sanction her execution (Vol. 3, p. 475). Which of the two is true, "God only knows".

By the end of his life Muhammad's relationship with the Jews had deteriorated to the point of irreconcilable hostility. We have not spoken of his relationships with the Christians, which seem to have been a bit more amicable though much less frequent, but his contacts with their armies during his latter days seems to have hardened his heart against them also. The later passages of the Qur'an breathe out denunciations of both groups in vehement language. This tradition tells its own story:

It has been narrated by 'Umar b. al-Khattab that he heard the Messenger of Allah (may peace be upon him) say: I will expel the Jews and Christians from the Arabian Peninsula and will not leave any but Muslims. (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 3, p. 965).

This same Umar, on becoming Caliph just two years after Muhammad's death, proceeded dutifully to put this injunction into effect and by the end of his reign all the Jews in the Hijaz had duly been expelled, never to return.

## **THE CONQUEST OF MECCA AND THE FINAL TRIUMPH**

### **1. Muhammad's Triumph at Mecca.**

The Treaty of Hudaibiyah did not make Muhammad and the Quraysh allies. The conquest of Mecca was still the foremost of Muhammad's objectives and the Quraysh, who till now had always taken the fight to him at Medina, knew full well that the Hijrah was the catalyst for an ultimate onslaught on the city. They were under no misapprehensions about this.

In the old Arab law, the Hijra did not merely signify rupture with his native town, but was equivalent to a sort of declaration of war against it. (Lammens, *Islam: Beliefs and Institutions*, p. 27)

We have already seen how closely related the Hijrah was to the active policy of jihad which immediately followed it and it comes as no surprise to find the inevitable conquest being pursued two years after the truce. A small provocation by the Banu Bakr, a tribe allied to the Quraysh, on the Banu Khaza'ah, allied to Muhammad, was all he needed to declare the treaty broken. Abu Sufyan, aware that the balances were now tilted well in Muhammad's favour, went to Medina to restore the treaty but Muhammad refused to accommodate him and he returned to Mecca empty-handed.

Assembling an army ten thousand strong, Muhammad immediately marched on Mecca. On the way he was met by his uncle al-Abbas who now gave in his allegiance and declared himself a Muslim. Muhammad camped just outside the city and encouraged his army to light as many fires as possible so as to strike dismay into the hapless Meccans. Abu Sufyan then came out to investigate reports of the advance and met al-Abbas on the way. He was escorted to Muhammad's tent where he was challenged by his now ascendant foe to become a Muslim. "Has the time not come", Muhammad said, "to declare that there is no god but Allah and that I am his messenger?" "Of the Lordship of Allah I have no doubt", he replied, "but I am as yet hesitant about your claim to be his emissary". Al-Abbas then promptly rebuked him, telling him this was no time for hesitancy, and that he was likely to lose his head if he persisted in his unbelief while standing helpless before Muhammad. The Qurayshite leader tactfully overcame his hesitancy and declared his allegiance. Somewhat to the disgust of the Muslims from Medina who were anticipating a fruitful battle and who murmured that Muhammad had become overawed by his love for his own city, he nonetheless boldly declared:

"Who enters the house of Abu Sufyan will be safe, who lays down arms will be safe, who locks his door will be safe". (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 3, p. 977).

One cannot help wondering whether there was not some plan in this incident. Was the peaceful submission of Mecca dependent purely upon a chance meeting between Abu Sufyan and al-Abbas and the timely conversion of these two men? As Muir has observed, "there are symptoms of a previous understanding between Mahomet and Abu Sofian" (*The Life of Mahomet*, p. 392). It is possible that Abu Sufyan had intimated his allegiance when visiting Medina. This personal deputation by the prime enemy of Muhammad would perhaps have been an unlikely venture by one still committed to his downfall. One writer says:

Opinions differ as to whether Abu Sufyan came to Muhammad's tent by a pre-arranged plan or by accident. As the chief actors in this drama never disclosed their inner knowledge, the matter shall, for ever, remain a guess. The writer of this book agrees with those who say that Abu Sufyan had become a Muslim at heart when he came back unsuccessful from Medina on his mission to renew the treaty of Hudaibiya and that Abbas had arranged for this dramatic meeting between him and Muhammad. But God knows better. (Sarwar, *Muhammad the Holy Prophet*, p. 304).

On the other hand there is evidence that Abu Sufyan was somewhat encouraged at the prospect of Muhammad's defeat by the Hawazin a few weeks later and his offspring were no champions of the faith. His son Mu'awiya, the first Umayyad caliph, though always professing the faith, set himself against many of Muhammad's kinsmen and companions and his grandson Yazid became the scourge of the Muslims and was responsible for the death of Hussain, one of Muhammad's own grandsons. Another Muslim writer describes the Meccan leader in far less favourable terms as "the notorious Abu Sufian, the son of Harb, the father of the well-known Mu'awiyah, the Judas Iscariot of Islam" (Ali, *The Spirit of Islam*, p. 105).

Apart from some resistance in the southern quarter of the city stimulated by some of Muhammad's bitterest opponents among whom were Suhail and Abu Jahl's son Ikrima, Mecca capitulated peacefully.

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"Mecca capitulated peacefully" this fact is misleading in that the only reason for a "peaceful" surrender is that the alternative would have resulted in bloodshed because of Muhammad's aggression.

-Comment added by Ministry To Muslims and not the author.

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Muhammad advanced on the Ka'aba and had its idols and paintings immediately destroyed. As soon as the shrine was purified of these excesses, Bilal, his first muazzin, called the people to prayer. A general amnesty was declared and the people soon warmed to their kinsman who had spared them and confirmed the sanctity of their shrine. For once and for all, Mecca had been won to Islam.

## 2. The Proscription of a few Prominent Enemies.

Not everyone benefited from the amnesty. A dozen leading opponents were proscribed though only a few were eventually executed. Two were apostates from Islam, one was a poetess who had particularly irked Muhammad with her satires, and the last was one of two Meccans who had assaulted Muhammad's daughter Zaynab as she fled Mecca for Medina. The others escaped either by hiding themselves or by seeking pardon. One case is of particular interest.

One of these men was Abdullah ibn Abu al Sarh who once converted to Islam and wrote down the revelation for Muhammad, but who then apostatized, returned to Quraysh, and there spread tales about his falsification of the revelation. (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 410).

The alleged fabrication of the revelation centres on Surah 23.12-14. In the Tafsir-i-Husaini, Vol. 2, p. 80 (quoted in Sell, *The Historical Development of the Qur'an*, p. 150-151) we are told that when the description of the creation of man in these verses was ended, this same Abdullah, recording the verses as Muhammad's amanuensis, exclaimed *fatabaarakallahu-ahsanul-khaaliqlin* - "Blessed be Allah, the best of Creators". Muhammad promptly told him to record his ejaculation in the passage as part of the revelation. Abdullah forsook Islam, claiming that if Muhammad was inspired, so was he! (The words are duly recorded at the end of Surah 23.14).

It is hardly surprising that Muhammad sought his demise. The unfortunate renegade had one source of hope, however. He was the foster-brother of Uthman, later to become the third caliph. Uthman hid him at first and, when the atmosphere at Mecca had subsided after the conquest, brought him to Muhammad and pleaded for clemency. It was only after some time had lapsed, while all sat in tense silence, that Muhammad duly pardoned the offender.

Throughout his course Muhammad was always very sensitive to anyone who challenged his claim to be receiving his revelations from above. (One of the two prisoners executed at Badr had ventured in earlier years to produce passages emulating the Qur'anic text). He was clearly unwilling to spare Abdullah and patiently waited for one of his companions to strike his neck. They obviously did not read his mind and, when they rebuked him for not giving them some sign of his intention, he gave a strange answer.

When Uthman had left he said to his companions who were sitting around him, "I kept silent so that one of you might get up and strike off his head!" One of the Ansar said, "Then why didn't you give me a sign, O Apostle of God?" He answered that a prophet does not kill by pointing. (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasulallah*, p. 550).

The ethics of the prophet of Islam are not always easy to evaluate. He obviously thought little of the destruction of those who irked him by undermining his claim to prophethood but deemed it highly offensive to achieve this by giving any sign of his intention!

### 3. From the Conquest to the Death of Muhammad.

Shortly after the triumph at Mecca the surrounding Bedouin of the Hawazin tribe expressed their alarm at Muhammad's growing influence and launched a major offensive at the valley of Hunain against his army. After initial reverses the Muslim army won the day. Virtually all the booty was awarded to Meccan warriors who had become Muslims only a few weeks earlier, and that only because of the conquest of their city.

When Allah gave to his Apostle the war booty on the day of Hunain, he distributed that booty amongst those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to Islam), but did not give anything to the Ansar. So they seemed to have felt angry and sad as they did not get the same as other people had got. (*Sahih al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, p. 432).

Muhammad promptly asked his companions from Medina whether they would rather have him or camels and sheep. He duly placated them, promising to return with them to Medina after giving the booty as gifts to those whose hearts were but recently "reconciled to Islam".

The Prophet confessed with naive frankness that these presents were meant to confirm the new converts in their faith; as we have often seen, he never troubled himself about the motives which produced conviction. (Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, p. 407).

One really wonders how true faith can be bred in a people firstly by force of conquest and secondly, very soon afterwards, by material inducements. Muhammad is alleged to have told his companions "I have made use of the pelf of this world to gain the love of the people that they may become Muslims" (Sarwar, *Muhammad the Holy Prophet*, p. 321). There is nothing wrong in principle with the generous bestowal of a gift to gain the heart of a man (Luke 16.9), but it does seem to be a very questionable way of cementing faith in God - especially when most religions teach that the desire for possessions is irreconcilable with a true desire for spiritual riches. Jesus despised any form of ulterior or double-motive in those who flocked to him and, knowing what was in the hearts of all men, would not trust himself to those whose faith could only be obtained through the bestowal of one or other form of material benefit (John 2.24-25, 6.26). Another Muslim writer also has the prophet of Islam say:

"O Ansar, are you angry because I have given away some goods to those whom I sought to win to Islam? Because I deemed their faith confirmable by material goods whereas I deemed yours to be based on solid conviction, to be candid beyond all dissuasion?" (Haykal, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 427).

The Son of man, who constantly warned against an abundance of possessions and who told his disciples not to lay up treasures on earth, but rather to sell them and to give alms so as to provide themselves with treasures in heaven which do not pass away (Luke 12.33), would never have considered that the faith of his followers could be won in such a way.

In the remaining days of Muhammad's life deputations from all over Arabia came to declare their allegiance to him and shortly before his death almost the whole Arabian Peninsula had adopted Islam. The last stronghold of idolatry to capitulate was at-Ta'if. Home of the goddess al-Lat, the city withstood a siege by Muhammad shortly after the battle of Hunain. Soon afterwards, however, one of its inhabitants who was a Muslim, Urwa ibn Mas'ud, sought to win his kinsmen to Islam, but they murdered him and in so doing invited on themselves a final and more thorough onslaught. A deputation to Medina, expressing a willingness to capitulate if a few years grace could be given to the city, was rejected out of hand. Muhammad insisted on the destruction of the idol and the immediate observance of the daily prayers.

They were spared the ignominy of destroying their idol. Muhammad wisely ordered Abu Sufyan and al-Mughira, two recent converts from Mecca who were friends of the tribe settled in the city, to raze the great image to the ground. It duly fell but not without being lamented by the women of the city.

Taif was the last stronghold that held out against the authority of the Holy Prophet. It was also the only place where the fate of an idol excited the sympathy of the people. Everywhere else the idols were destroyed by the people themselves without a pang. (Zafrulla Khan, *Muhammad: Seal of the Prophets*, p. 246).

In 632 AD a short illness ended Muhammad's life. He was buried in the chamber of Ayishah, his favourite wife. After a short dispute concerning his successor, Abu Bakr, who had led the prayers during his illness, was elected caliph. During his short two-year reign he put down attempted revolts in the peninsula by Bedouin tribes seeking to throw off the yolk of Islam. Umar followed him and before his death Islam had spread to Iraq and Syria. Within a hundred years it had gone out as far as India in the east and Spain in the west. Today it is predominant in the Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, and other parts of Asia. Its adherents number about eight hundred million throughout the world.