

Jafar Tayyar- The Refugee Who Brought Islam to Africa

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When Prophet Muhammad (SAW) began to propagate the religion of Islam in Mecca and Medina, those who didn't believe in him and his message, opposed and troubled him. They called him a lunatic and a sorcerer. They offered bribes to persuade him to stop preaching the religion. When all these failed, they used harsh treatment against the Prophet (SAW) and the new Muslim converts.

During all these years, the Prophet (SAW) enjoyed the protection of his uncle Abu Talib. He always stood by his nephew and didn't let anyone harm him. The sons of Abu Talib, one by one, accepted Islam. Imam Ali (AS) right from his childhood, was under the care of the Prophet (SAW) and was the first one to declare his true faith - Islam, when the Prophet (SAW) proclaimed his prophethood.

He always stood firmly and faithfully by the Prophet (SAW) both in peaceful and difficult times.

Among the other sons of Abu Talib, both Ja'far and Aqeel accepted Islam. The torture and oppression which the Prophet (SAW) and the small group of his followers had been subjected to, had increased so much that life became unbearable. The Prophet (SAW) decided on an action which not only saved the lives of his followers but also spread the message of Islam to other countries. Therefore, he decided to send some of his followers to Abyssinia (now Ethiopia), which was just across the Red Sea, to the south of Mecca. The Prophet (SAW) had great faith in Ja'far, the son of Abu Talib and brother of Imam Ali (AS). The handful of Muslim refugees including men and women under the leadership of Ja'far crossed the Red Sea. This is known to be the first migration in the history of Islam, which occurred in the 5th year after the Prophet had proclaimed Islam in 615 AD. They were joined by more immigrants who had become the victims of the enemies of Islam. The number of the refugees rose to 82 men and 18 women.

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

When the unbelievers of Quraish in Mecca came to know of this, Abdullah ibn Rabia and Amr ibn Aa's together with some other persons took some expensive gifts and arrived at the court of the Emperor Negus. On entering the court, they prostrated before Emperor Negus and presented him with gifts. Then they said, "Someone in our country has invented a new religion

and some people have joined him. We tried to stop this, but some of his followers have taken refuge in your country. Now, we appeal to you to throw them out and hand them over to us.” Emperor Negus replied that he had already given them protection and would not throw them out of the country, but he would ask them to come before them. So saying, the emperor called in the Muslim refugees.

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

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

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

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

The Muslims became worried but Ja’far with great peace of mind, replied: “O King! Our Prophet (SAW) is guided by God in what he says. Saying this, he proceeded to

show one verse from the Qur'an and requested Negus to read it:
"The Messiah (Isa), son of Maryam is only a messenger of Allah, and His word and His spirit
which He sent to Maryam."

Emperor Negus was extremely pleased to learn this and said: "Actually this is also in our Book of Injeel." Then he expelled Amr ibn Aa's and the infidels of Quraish from Abyssinia. From then onwards, Negus had high regard for and faith in Islam. Thus Ja'far had done a great service to Islam. He preached the True Message of Islam in .Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and remained there for 15 years before returning to Medina