Explaining Islam before Christian Scholars

In the early days of Islam Muslims were very few in number, and idolaters opposing to Islam used to persecute Muslims. Being so few, Muslims could do nothing to stop their persecution. They thought it would be better to migrate to Abyssinia (presently known as Ethiopia), where they could live freely and in accordance with Islamic principles.

After a trip across the desert, a group of them boarded a ship bound for Abyssinia. The king of Abyssinia was called An-Najashi (Negus) - a Christian. When informed of the Muslims' arrival in his country, he granted them asylum and treated them with kindness.

As soon as the news of the Muslims' secret migration reached the idolaters in Mecca, they became very angry. They sent two of their men, laden with costly gifts, to Abyssinia; it was their task to have the Muslims arrested and sent back to Mecca.

Arriving in Abyssinia, the men went to An-Najashi's court to pay him homage and present their gifts.

An-Najashi asked them, "Where have you come from? And what do you want?"

The Meccans replied, "We have come from Mecca. A number of our youth have given up our religion. They have stopped worshipping our gods and have now taken refuge in your country. The lords and nobles of Mecca call on you to arrest these youths and deliver them to us, so that we may return them to our city to be punished."

An-Najashi told them that the matter would be investigated. Then he summoned the Muslims to his palace and, in the presence of his Christian scholars, asked them, "What was your previous religion? What is your present religion? Why have you emigrated to this country?"

The Muslims' spokesman was Ja'far ibn Abi Talib, a selfless young man who was full of belief. He replied, "In our city, the rich and greedy oppress the weak. The people worship idols. They eat carrion and perform all types of evil deeds. They are not kind with one another and persecute their neighbors. In these circumstances we have been blessed by Allah who has sent us a prophet, a man known for his truthfulness and trustworthiness. He has brought to us from God the religion of Islam."

Hearing this, An-Najashi leaned forward in his seat so as to pay more attention to Ja'far and learn about Islam. Ja'far remained silent for a moment, then looked at the Christian scholars and continued: "The religion of Islam tells us not to worship idols, to worship only the One True God and accept His commandments.

"The religion of Islam tells us to be truthful, trustworthy and loyal. We must be kind and

generous to our relatives and slaves, and treat our neighbors with goodness. Nor should we shed the blood of innocent people for no reason, and we should give up our evil deeds. We should not talk badly of people, nor insult them; we should not speak without purpose. We must not steal the wealth of orphans, we must perform the prayer and spend a portion of our money in acts of charity."

An-Najashi and the Christian scholars listened carefully to these words, and were delighted. But the Meccans were biting their lips.

Ja'far continued, "O King of Abyssinia, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has brought the religion of Islam and we have accepted it. We believe in Allah and in His Messenger and have become Muslims. But as soon as we became Muslims, the idolaters of Mecca became angry and began to persecute us. Thus, we were obliged to leave the city and seek asylum in this country to be free to worship Allah and perform the deeds of our religion."

By this time, An-Najashi was extremely pleased and said to Ja'far, "The words of Jesus and the words of your Prophet (SAW) have descended from the same source. Both are the Words of One God. Therefore, you are free to remain in this country. Perform your devotions freely, and remain followers of Islam. Truly, what a good religion you have!"

Then he turned to the Meccans and said, "I do not take bribes. Pick up the things you have brought and go. You must know that I will never hand the Muslims over to you. Go this very minute and return to Mecca as fast as you can."

The two men, sorry and ashamed, picked up the gifts they had brought and left the court in disgrace.