

Khalifa Umar bin al-Khattab - Mecca and Tabuk

Battle Of Hunain And Taif

After the fall of Mecca, the neighbouring tribes of Howazin and Sagef had to choose between Islam and war against Muslims. They chose the war path, and the two tribes along with their allies mustered in considerable strength at Autas to the west of Mecca. The coalition was led by Malik bin Auf a fiery commander of considerable skill.

When the Holy Prophet came to know of the hostile intention of the tribes, he decided to take action against them. On a cold day in January 630 A.D. the Muslim forces set out from Mecca. The army consisted of 12,000 persons fully armed. Out of these 10,000 were from Madina who had attacked Mecca and 2,000 were the newly converted Muslims from Mecca.

As on the way to Autas the Muslim army passed through the valley of Hunain, some eleven miles north east of Mecca, a rain of arrows fell on the Muslims let loose by a group of archers of the hostile tribes who lay hid in the mountain pass. Taken unawares the advance guard of the Muslim army fled in panic. There was considerable confusion, and camels, horses and men ran into one another to seek cover.

The Holy Prophet stood firm. There were only nine companions around him including Umar. All the rest had fled. Under the instructions of the Holy Prophet, Abbas shouted at the top of his voice, "O Muslims, come to the Prophet of Allah".

The call was heard by the Muslim soldiers, and they gathered round the Holy Prophet. When the Muslims had gathered in sufficient number, the Holy Prophet ordered a charge against the enemy. In the hand to hand fight that followed, the tribes were routed and they fled to Autas.

The Holy Prophet posted a contingent to guard the Hunain pass, and led the main Muslim army to Autas. In the confrontation at Autas, the tribes could not withstand the Muslim onslaught. Finding the resistance useless the tribes broke the camp and retired to Taif.

From Autas the Muslim forces set out for Taif. The tribes shut themselves in the fort and refused to come out in the open. The Muslims employed catapults to throw stones in the town, but this did not lead to any tangible results. The Muslims tried the testudo device "hereunder a group of soldiers shielded by a cover of cowhide advanced to set fire to the gate. The enemy threw red hot scraps of iron on the testudo which made it ineffective.

The siege dragged on for two weeks, and still there was no sign of the fall of the fort. The Holy Prophet held a council of war. The companions including Umar advised that the siege might be raised and that God would Himself make arrangements for the fall of the fort.

The advice was accepted, and in February 630 the siege of Taif was raised, and the Muslim army returned to Mecca. A few days later, Malik bin Auf came to Mecca of his own accord and became a Muslim. Thus God Himself arranged for the surrender of Taif to Islam.

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