

Abdullah ibn Hudhafah as-Sahmi

History would have by-passed this man as it had bypassed thousands of Arabs before him. He, like them, would have had no claim to attention or fame. The greatness of Islam, however, gave to Abdullah ibn Hudhafah the opportunity to meet two world potentates of his time--Khusraw Parvez the King of Persia and Heraclius, the Byzantine emperor.

The story of his encounter with Khusraw Parvez began in the sixth year of the hijrah when the Prophet decided to send some of his Companions with letters to rulers outside the Arabian peninsula inviting them to Islam.

The Prophet attached great importance to this initiative. These messengers were going to distant lands with whom there was no agreement or treaty. They did not know the languages of these lands nor anything about the ways and disposition of their rulers. They were to invite these rulers to give up their religion and forsake their power and glory and enter the religion of a people who shortly before were almost their subjects. The mission was undoubtedly hazardous.

To make known his plan, the Prophet called his companions together and addressed them. He started by praising God and thanking Him. He then recited the Shahadah and went on:

"I want to send some of you to the rulers of foreign lands but don't dispute with me as the Israelites disputed with Jesus, the son of Mary. "O Prophet of God, we shall carry out whatever you wish," they responded. "Send us wherever you desire."

The Prophet commissioned six of his Sahabah to carry his letters to Arab and foreign rulers. One of these was Abdullah ibn Hudhafah. He was chosen to take the Prophet's letter to Khusraw Parvez, the Persian king.

Abdullah got his camel ready and bade farewell to his wife and son. He set out, alone, and traversed mountains and valleys until he reached the land of the Persian.

He sought permission to enter into the king's presence informing the guards of the letter he was carrying. Khusraw Parvez thereupon ordered his audience chamber to be made ready and summoned his prominent aides. When they had assembled he gave permission for Abdullah to enter.

Abdullah entered and saw the Persian potentate dressed in delicate, flowing robes and wearing a great, neatly arranged turban. On Abdullah was the plain, coarse clothes of the bedouin. His head though was held high and his feet were firm. The honor of Islam burned fiercely in his breast and the power of faith pulsed in his heart.

As soon as Khusraw Parvez saw him approaching he signal led to one of his men to take the letter from his hand.

"No," said Abdullah. "The Prophet commanded me to hand over this letter to you directly and I shall not go against a command of the Messenger of God."

"Let him come near to me," Khusraw said to his guards and Abdullah went forward and handed over the letter. Khusraw then called an Arab clerk who originally came from Hira and ordered him to open the letter in his presence and read its contents. He began reading:

"In the name of Allah, the Beneficent the Merciful. From Muhammad, the Messenger of God, to Khusraw

the ruler of Persia. Peace on whoever follows the guidance . . ."

Khusraw only heard this much of the letter when the fire of anger burst within him. His face became red and he began to perspire around the neck. He snatched the letter from the clerk's hand and began tearing it to pieces without knowing what else it contained and shouted, "Does he dare to write to me like this, he who is my slave". He was angry that the Prophet had not given him precedence in his letter. He then commanded Abdullah to be expelled from his assembly.

Abdullah was taken away, not knowing what would happen to him. Would he be killed or would he be set free? But he did not want to wait to find out. He said, "By God, I don't care what happens to me after the letter of the Prophet has been so badly treated." He managed to get to his camel and rode off.

When Khusraw's anger had subsided he commanded that Abdullah be brought before him. But Abdullah was nowhere to be found. They searched for him all the way to the Arabian peninsula but found that he had gone ahead.

Back in Madinah, Abdullah told the Prophet how Khusraw had torn his letter to pieces and the Prophet's only reply was, "May God tear up his kingdom".

Meanwhile, Khusraw wrote to Badhan, his deputy in the Yemen, to send two strong men to "that man who has appeared in the Hijaz" with orders to bring him to Persia.

Badhan dispatched two of his strongest men to the Prophet and gave them a letter to him in which he was ordered to go with the two men to meet Khusraw without delay. Badhan also asked the two men to get whatever information they could on the Prophet and to study his message closely.

The men set out, moving very quickly. At Taif they met some Quraysh traders and asked them about Muhammad. "He is in Yathrib," they said and they went on to Makkah feeling extremely happy. This was good news for them and they went around telling other Quraysh, "You will be pleased. Khusraw is out to get Muhammad and you will be rid of his evil."

The two men meanwhile made straight for Madinah where they met the Prophet, handed him the letter of Badhan and said to him, "The king of kings, Khusraw, has written to our ruler Badhan to send his men to get you. We have come to take you with us. If you come willingly, Khusraw has said that it will be good for you and he will spare you any punishment. If you refuse, you will know the power of his punishment. He has power to destroy you and your people."

The Prophet smiled and said to them, "Go back to your mounts today and return tomorrow."

On the following day, they came to the Prophet and said to him, "Are you prepared to go with us to meet Khusraw?"

"You shall not meet Khusraw after today," replied the Prophet. "God has killed him and his son Shirwaih has taken his place on such a night and on such a month."

The two men stared in the face of the Prophet. They were completely dumbfounded.

"Do you know what you are saying?" they asked. "Shall we write about this to Badhan?"

"Yes," replied the Prophet, "and say to him that my religion has informed me about what has happened to the Kingdom of Khusraw and that if he should become Muslim, I would appoint him ruler over what he now controls".

The two men returned to the Yemen and told Badhan what had happened. Badhan said, "If what Muhammad has said is true, then he is a Prophet. If not then we shall see what happens to him."

Not long afterwards a letter from Shirwaih came to Badhan in which he said, "I killed Khusraw because of his tyranny against our people. He regarded as lawful the killing of leaders, the capturing of their women and the expropriating of their wealth. When this my letter reaches you, take the allegiance of whoever is with you on my behalf."

As soon as Badhan had read Shirwaih's letter, he threw it aside and announced his entry into Islam. The Persians with him in the Yemen also became Muslim.

That's the story of Abdullah ibn Hudhafah's meeting with the Persian king. His meeting with the Byzantine emperor took place during the caliphate of Umar ibn al-Khattab. It too is an astonishing story.

In the nineteenth year after the Hijrah, Umar dispatched an army to fight against the Byzantine. In it was Abdullah ibn Hudhafah. News of the Muslim force reached the Byzantine emperor. He had heard of their sincerity of faith, and their willingness to sacrifice their lives in the way of God and His Prophet. He gave orders to his men to bring to him any Muslim captive they might take alive.

God willed that Abdullah ibn Hudhafah should fall captive to the Byzantines and he was brought before the Emperor. The Emperor looked at Abdullah for a long time. Suddenly he said, "I shall make a proposal to you."

"What is it?" asked Abdullah. "I suggest that you become a Christian. If you do this, you will be set free and I shall grant you a safe refuge." The prisoner's reaction was furious: "Death is preferable to me a thousand times to what you ask me to do."

"I see that you are a bold man. However, if you respond positively to what I propose to you, I will give you a share in my authority and swear you in as my aide."

The prisoner, shackled in his chains, smiled and said, "By God, if you give me all that you possess and all that the Arabs have in exchange for giving up the religion of Muhammad, I shall not do so."

"Then I shall kill you."

"Do what you want," answered Abdullah.

The emperor then had him put on a cross and ordered his soldiers to throw spears at him, first near his hands and then near his feet, all the while telling him to accept Christianity or at least give up his religion. This he refused over and over again to do.

The emperor then had him taken down from the wooden cross. He called for a great pot to be brought. This was filled with oil which was then heated under a fierce fire. He then had two other Muslim prisoners brought and had one of them thrown into the boiling oil. The prisoner's flesh sizzled and soon his bones could be seen. The emperor turned to Abdullah and invited him to Christianity.

This was the most terrible test that Abdullah had to face up till now. But he remained firm and the emperor gave up trying. He then ordered that Abdullah too be thrown into the pot. As he was being taken away he began to shed tears. The emperor thought that he had at last been broken and had him brought back to him. He once more suggested that Abdullah become a Christian but to his astonishment, Abdullah refused.

"Damn you! Why did you weep then?" shouted the emperor.

"I cried," said Abdullah, "because I said to myself 'You will now be thrown into this pot and your soul will depart'. What I really desired then was to have as many souls as the number of hairs on my body and to have all of them thrown into this pot for the sake of God."

The tyrant then said, "Will you kiss my head? I will then set you free?"

"And all the Muslim prisoners also?" asked Abdullah.

This the emperor agreed to do and Abdullah said to himself, "One of the enemies of God! I shall kiss his head and he shall set me and all other Muslim prisoners free. There can be no blame on me for doing this." He then went up to the emperor and kissed his forehead. All the Muslim prisoners were released and handed over to Abdullah.

Abdullah ibn Hudhafah eventually came to Umar ibn al-Khattab and told him what had happened. Umar was greatly pleased and when he looked at the prisoners he said, "Every Muslim has a duty to kiss the head of Abdullah ibn Khudhafah and I shall start." Umar then got up and kissed the head of Abdullah ibn Hudhafah .

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