

Abdullah ibn Jahsh

Abdullah ibn Jahsh was a cousin of the Prophet and his sister, Zaynab bint Jahsh, was a wife of the Prophet. He was the first to head a group of Muslims on an expedition and so was the first to be called "Amir al-Mumineen"-- Commander of the Believers.

Abdullah ibn Jahsh became a Muslim before the Prophet entered the House of al-Arqam which became a meeting place, a school and a place of refuge for the early Muslims. He was thus one of the first to accept Islam.

When the Prophet gave permission for his Companions to emigrate to Madinah to avoid further persecution from the Quraysh, Abdullah ibn Jahsh was the second to leave, preceded only by Abu Salamah. Emigrating was not a new experience for Abdullah. He and some members of his immediate family had migrated before to Abyssinia. This time, however, his migration was on a far bigger scale. His family and relatives--men, women and children, migrated with him. In fact, his whole clan had become Muslims and accompanied him.

There was an air of desolation as they left Makkah. Their homes appeared sad and depressed as if no one had lived there before. No sound of conversation emanated from behind those silent walls.

Abdullah's clan were not long gone when the alerted Quraysh leaders came out and made the rounds of the districts in Makkah to find out which Muslims had left and who had remained. Among these leaders were Abu Jahl and Utbah ibn Rabiah. Utah looked at the houses of the Banu Jahsh through which the dusty winds were blowing. He banged on the doors and shouted:

"The houses of the Banu Jahsh have become empty and are weeping for its occupants." "Who were these people anyway," said Abu Jahl derisively, "that houses should weep for them." He then laid claim to the house of Abdullah ibn Jahsh. It was the most beautiful and expensive of the houses. He began to dispose freely of its contents as a king would share out his possessions .

Later, when Abdullah ibn Jahsh heard what Abu Jahl had done to his house, he mentioned it to the Prophet, peace be upon him, who said:

"Aren't you satisfied, O Abdullah, with what God has given you instead, a house in Paradise?"

"Yes, messenger of God," he replied, and became at peace with himself and completely satisfied.

Abdullah ibn Jahsh had scarcely settled down in Madinah when he had to undergo one of the most testing experiences. He had just begun to taste something of the good and restful life under the sponsorship of the Ansar--after going through persecution at the hands of the Quraysh--when he had to be exposed to the severest test he had ever known in his life and carry out the most difficult assignment since he became a Muslim.

The Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, commissioned eight of his Companions to carry out the first military assignment in Islam. Among them were Abdullah ibn Jahsh and Sad ibn Abi Waqqas.

"I appoint as your Commander the one who can best bear hunger and thirst," said the Prophet and gave the standard to Abdullah ibn Jahsh. He was thus the first to be made amir over a contingent of believers.

The Prophet gave him precise instructions on the route he should take on the expedition and gave him a letter. He commanded Abdullah to read the letter only after two days' travel.

After the expedition had been on its way for two days, Abdullah looked at the contents of the letter. It said, "When you have read this letter, press on until you come to a place called Nakhlah between Taif and Makkah. From there observe the Quraysh and gather whatever information you can on them for us."

"At your command, O Prophet of God," exclaimed Abdullah as he finished reading the letter. Then he spoke to his colleagues:

"The Prophet has commanded me to proceed to Nakhlah to observe the Quraysh and gather information on them for him. He has also commanded me not to go further with anyone of you who is against the purpose of this expedition. So whoever desires martyrdom and is in total agreement with this expedition can accompany me. Whoever is not in agreement, may turn back without blame. "

"At your command, O messenger of Allah," they all responded. "We shall go with you, Abdullah, wherever the Prophet of God has commanded."

The group continued until they reached Nakhlah and began to move along the mountain passes seeking information on Quraysh movements. While they were thus engaged, they saw in the distance a Quraysh caravan. There were four men in the caravan--Amr ibn al-Hadrami, Hukm ibn Kaysan, Uthman ibn Abdullah and his brother Mughirah. They were carrying merchandise for the Quraysh--skins, raisins and other usual Quraysh stock in trade.

The Sahabah conferred together. It was the last day of the sacred months. "If we were to kill them," they agreed, "we would have killed them in the inviolable months. To do so would be to violate the sacredness of this month and expose ourselves to the wrath of all Arabs. If we leave them alone for a day so that the month will be completed, they would have entered the inviolable precincts of Makkah and thus be secure from us."

They continued consulting until finally they agreed to pounce on the caravan and take whatever merchandise they could as booty. Before long, two of the men were captured and one was killed; the fourth escaped.

Abdullah ibn Jahsh and his men took the two prisoners and the caravan on to Madinah. They went to the Prophet, peace be upon him, and informed him about what they had done. The Prophet was greatly upset and strongly condemned their action.

"By God, I did not command you to fight. I only commanded you to gather information on the Quraysh and observe their movements." He granted a reprieve to the two prisoners and he left the caravan and did not take a single item from it.

Abdullah ibn Jahsh and his men then knew that they had fallen into disgrace and felt certain that they were ruined because of their disobeying the command of the Prophet. They began to feel the pressure as their Muslim brothers censured them and avoided them whenever they passed one another. And they would say, "These went against the command of the Prophet."

Their discomfiture grew when they learnt that the Quraysh had taken the incident as a means to discredit the Prophet and denounce him among the tribes. The Quraysh were saying: "Muhammad has defiled the sacred month. He has shed blood in it, plundered wealth and captured men."

Imagine the extent of the sadness felt by Abdullah ibn Jahsh and his men at what had happened, more so because of the acute embarrassment they had caused the Prophet.

They were sorely tormented and the agony weighed heavily on them. Then came the good news that Allah--Glorified be He--was pleased with what they had done and had sent down revelation to His Prophet about this matter. Imagine their happiness! People came and embraced them, congratulating them on the good news and reciting to them what had been revealed in the glorious Quran about their action.

"They ask you about fighting in the sacred month. Say: Fighting therein is an enormity as well as preventing (people) from the path of God and disbelief in Him. Expelling people from the Masjid al Haram is a greater sin in the eyes of God. Moreover, persecution is greater than killing." (Surah al-Baqarah 2: 212).

When these blessed verses were revealed, the Prophet's mind was eased. He took the caravan and ransomed the prisoners. He became pleased with Abdullah ibn Jahsh and his men. Their expedition was certainly a major event in the early life of the Muslim community . . .

The Battle of Badr followed. Abdullah ibn Jahsh fought in it and was put to a great test, but a test to which his faith was equal.

Then came the Battle of Uhud. There is an unforgettable story involving Abdullah ibn Jahsh and his friend Sad ibn Abi Waqqas concerning an incident that took place during the Battle of Uhud. Let us leave Sad to tell the story:

During the battle, Abdullah came to me and said, "Aren't you making a dua to God?"

"Yes," said I. So we moved aside and I prayed, "O Lord, when I meet the enemy, let me meet a man of enormous strength and fury. Then grant me victory over him that I might kill him and acquire spoils from him." To this my prayer, Abdullah said Ameen and then he prayed:

"Let me meet a man of great standing and enormous fury. I shall fight him for Your sake, O Lord, and he shall fight me. He shall take me and cut off my nose and ears and when I meet You on the morrow You will say, "For what were your nose and ear cut off?" And I would reply, "For Your sake and for the sake of Your Prophet." And then You would say, "You have spoken the truth . . ." Sad continues the story:

The prayer of Abdullah ibn Jahsh was better than mine. I saw him at the end of the day. He was killed and mutilated and in fact his nose and his ear were hung on a tree with a thread. God responded to the prayer of Abdullah ibn Jahsh and blessed him with martyrdom as He blessed his uncle, the Leader of Martyrs, Hamzah ibn Abdulmuttalib. The noble Prophet buried them together in a single grave. His pure tears watered the earth anointed with the fragrance of martyrdom.

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