

## **Thumamah ibn Uthal**

In the sixth year after the hijrah, the Prophet, may the blessings of God be on him, decided to expand the scope of his mission. He sent eight letters to rulers in the Arabian peninsula and surrounding areas inviting them to Islam. One of these rulers was Thumamah ibn Uthal.

Thumamah was one of the most powerful Arab rulers in pre-Quranic times. This is not surprising since he was a chieftain of the Banu Hanifah and one of the rulers of al-Yamamah whose word no one dared to challenge or disobey.

When Thumamah received the Prophet's letter, he was consumed by anger and rejected it. He refused to listen to the invitation of Truth and goodness. More than that, he felt a strong desire to go and kill the Prophet and bury his mission with him.

Thumamah waited and waited for a convenient time to carry out his design against the Prophet until eventually forgetfulness caused him to lose interest. One of his uncles, however, reminded him of his plan, praising what he intended to do.

In the pursuit of his evil design against the Prophet, Thumamah met and killed a group of the Prophet's companions. The Prophet thereupon declared him a wanted man who could lawfully be killed on sight. Not long afterwards, Thumamah decided to perform umrah. He wanted to perform tawaf around the Kabah and sacrifice to the idols there. So he left al-Yamamah for Makkah. As he was passing near Madinah, an incident took place which he had not anticipated.

Groups of Muslims were patrolling the districts of Madinah and outlying areas on the lookout for any strangers or anyone intent on causing trouble. One of these groups came upon Thumamah and apprehended him but they did not know who he was. They took him to Madinah and tied him to one of the columns in the mosque. They waited for the Prophet himself to question the man and decide what should be done with him.

When the Prophet was about to enter the mosque, he saw Thumamah and asked his companions, 'Do you know whom you have taken?'

"No, messenger of God," they replied.

"This is Thumamah ibn Uthal al-Hanafi," he said. "You have done well in capturing him."

The Prophet then returned home to his family and said, "Get what food you can and send it to Thumamah ibn Uthal." He then ordered his camel to be milked for him. All this was done before he met Thumamah or had spoken to him.

The Prophet then approached Thumamah hoping to encourage him to become a Muslim. "What do you have to say for yourself?" he asked.

"If you want to kill in reprisal," Thumamah replied, "you can have someone of noble blood to kill. If, out of your bounty, you want to forgive, I shall be grateful. If you want money in compensation, I shall give you whatever amount you ask."

The Prophet then left him for two days, but still personally sent him food and drink and milk from his camel. The Prophet went back to him and asked, "What do you have to say for yourself?" Thumamah repeated what he had said the day before. The Prophet then left and came back to him the following day. "What do

you have to say for yourself?" he asked again and Thumamah repeated what he had said once more. Then the Prophet turned to his companions and said, "Set him free."

Thumamah left the mosque of the Prophet and rode until he came to a palm grove on the outskirts of Madinah near al-Baqi' (a place of luxuriant vegetation which later became a cemetery for many of the Prophet's companions). He watered his camel and washed himself well. Then he turned back and made his way to the Prophet's mosque. There, he stood before a congregation of Muslims and said: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and His messenger." He then went to the Prophet, upon whom be peace, and said: "O Muhammad, by God, there was never on this earth a face more detestable than yours. Now, yours is the dearest face of all to me." "I have killed some of your men," he continued, "I am at your mercy. What will you have done to me?"

"There is now no blame on you, Thumamah," replied the Prophet. "Becoming a Muslim obliterates past actions and marks a new beginning."

Thumamah was greatly relieved. His face showed his surprise and joy and he vowed, "By God, I shall place my whole self, my sword, and whoever is with me at your service and at the service of your religion."

"O Rasulallah," he went on, "when your horsemen captured me I was on my way to perform umrah. What do you think I should do now?"

"Go ahead and perform your umrah," replied the Prophet, "but perform it according to the laws of God and His messenger." The Prophet then taught him how to perform umrah according to Islamic rules.

Thumamah left to fulfill his intention. When he reached the valley of Makkah, he began shouting in a loud, resonant voice:

"Labbayk Allahumma labbayk. Labbayka Laa shareeka Laka labbayk. Innal hamda wan ni'mata Laka wall mulk. Laa shareeka Lak. (Here I am at Your command O Lord, Here I am. Here I am. No partner have You. Here I am. Praise, bounty and Dominion belong to You. No partner have You.)"

He was thus the first Muslim on the face of the earth to enter Makkah reciting the talbiyah.

The Quraysh heard the sound of the talbiyah and felt both anger and alarm. With drawn swords, they set out towards the voice to punish the one who had thus assaulted their preserve. As they came closer to him, Thumamah raised his voice even higher while reciting the talbiyah and looked upon them with pride and defiance. One of the Quraysh young men was particularly incensed and was about to shoot Thumamah with an arrow when the others grabbed his hand and shouted:

"Woe to you! Do you know who this is? He is Thumamah ibn Uthal, ruler of al-Yamamah. By God, if you should harm him, his people would cut our supplies, with dire consequences for us."

Swords were replaced in their scabbards as the Quraysh went up to Thumamah and said:

"What's wrong with you, Thumamah? Have you given in and abandoned your religion and the religion of your forefathers?"

"I have not given in," he replied, "but I have decided to follow the best religion. I follow the religion of Muhammad. "

He then went on: "I swear to you by the Lord of this House that after my return to al-Yamamah, no grain of wheat or any of its produce shall reach you until you follow Muhammad."

Under the watchful eyes of the Quraysh, Thumamah performed umrah as the Prophet, peace be upon

him, had instructed him. He dedicated his sacrifice to God alone.

Thumamah returned to his land and ordered his people to withhold supplies from the Quraysh. The boycott gradually began to have effect and became more and more stringent. Prices began to rise. Hunger began to bite and there was even fear of death among the Quraysh. Thereupon, they wrote to the Prophet, saying:

"Our agreement with you (the treaty of Hudaibiyyah) is that you should maintain the bonds of kinship but you have gone against that. You have cut the bonds of kinship. You have killed and caused death through hunger. Thumamah ibn Uthal has cut our supplies and inflicted harm on us. Perhaps you would see fit to instruct him to resume sending us what we need."

The Prophet immediately sent a messenger instructing Thumamah to lift the boycott and resume supplies to the Quraysh. This Thumamah did.

Thumamah spent the rest of his life in the service of his religion, abiding by the undertaking he had given to the Prophet. When the Prophet died, many Arabs began leaving the religion of God in great numbers. Musaylamah, the impostor, began calling the Banu Hanifah to believe in him as a Prophet. Thumamah confronted him and said to his people:

"O Banu Hanifah, beware of this grievous matter. There is no light or guidance in it. By God, it will only bring distress and suffering to whoever joins this movement and misfortune even to those who do not join.

"O Banu Hanifah, two prophets do not come at the same time and there shall be no Prophet after Muhammad and no Prophet to share in his mission."

He then read out to them the following verses of the Quran: "Ha Mim. The revelation of this Book is from God the Almighty, the Knowing. He forgives sins and accepts repentance. He is severe in punishment and has a long reach. There is no god except Him. To Him is the journey's end." (Surah Ghafir; verses 1-3).

"Can you compare these words of God with the uttering of Musaylamah?" he asked.

He then gathered together all those who had remained in Islam and began to wage a jihad against the apostates and to make the words of God supreme. The loyal Muslims of Banu Hanifah needed additional help to stand against the armies of Musaylamah. Their arduous task was completed by the forces dispatched by Abu Bakr but at the cost of many a Muslim life.

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