

Said ibn Zayd

Zayd the son of Amr stood away from the Quraysh crowd as they celebrated one of their festivals. Men were dressed in rich turbans of brocade and expensive Yemeni burdabs. Women and children were also exquisitely turned out in their fine clothes and glittering jewelry. Zayd watched as sacrificial animals, gaily caparisoned were led out to slaughter before the Quraysh idols. It was difficult for him to remain silent. Leaning against a wall of the Kabah, he shouted:

"O people of Quraysh! It is God Who has created the sheep. He it is Who has sent down rain from the skies of which they drink and He has caused fodder to grow from the earth with which they are fed. Then even so you slaughter them in names other than His. Indeed, I see that you are an ignorant folk."

Zayd's uncle al-Khattab, the father of Umar ibn al-Khattab, seethed with anger. He strode up to Zayd, slapped him on the face and shouted: "Damn you! We still hear from you such stupidity. We have borne it until our patience is exhausted."

Al-Khattab then incited a number of violent people to harass and persecute Zayd and make life extremely uncomfortable for him. These incidents which took place before Muhammad's call to Prophethood gave a foretaste of the bitter conflict that was to take place between the upholders of truth and the stubborn adherents of idolatrous practices. Zayd was one of the few men, known as hanifs, who saw these idolatrous practices for what they were. Not only did he refuse to take part in them himself but he refused to eat anything that was sacrificed to idols. He proclaimed that he worshipped the God of Ibrahim and, as the above incident showed, was not afraid to challenge his people in public.

On the other hand, his uncle al-Khattab was a staunch follower of the old pagan ways of the Quraysh and he was shocked by Zayd's public disregard for the gods and goddesses they worshipped. So he had him hounded and persecuted to the point where he was forced to leave the valley of Makkah and seek refuge in the surrounding mountains. He even appointed a band of young men whom he instructed not to allow Zayd to approach Makkah and enter the Sanctuary.

Zayd only managed to enter Makkah in secret. There unknown to the Quraysh he met with people like Waraqah ibn Nawfal, Abdullah ibn Jahsh, Uthman ibn al-Harith and Umaymah bint Abdul Muttalib, the paternal aunt of Muhammad ibn Abdullah. They discussed how deeply immersed the Arabs were in their misguided ways. To his friends, Zayd spoke thus: "Certainly, by God, you know that your people have no valid grounds for their beliefs and that they have distorted and transgressed from the religion of Ibrahim. Adopt a religion which you can follow and which can bring you salvation."

Zayd and his companions then went to Jewish rabbis and Christian scholars and people of other communities in an attempt to learn more and go back to the pure religion of Ibrahim.

Of the four persons mentioned, Waraqah ibn Nawfal became a Christian. Abdullah ibn Jahsh and Uthman ibn al-Harith did not arrive at any definite conclusion. Zayd ibn Amr however had quite a different story. Finding it impossible to stay in Makkah, he left the Hijaz and went as far as Mosul in the north of Iraq and from there southwest into Syria. Throughout his journeys, he always questioned monks and rabbis about the religion of Ibrahim. He found no satisfaction until he came upon a monk in Syria who told him that the religion he was seeking did not exist any longer but the time was now near when God would send forth, from his own people whom he had left, a Prophet who would revive the religion of Ibrahim. The monk advised him that should he see this Prophet he should have no hesitation in recognizing and following him.

Zayd retraced his steps and headed for Makkah intending to meet the expected Prophet. As he was

passing through the territory of Lakhm on the southern border of Syria he was attacked by a group of nomad Arabs and killed before he could set eyes on the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace. However, before he breathed his last, he raised his eyes to the heavens and said:

"O Lord, if You have prevented me from attaining this good, do not prevent my son from doing so."

When Waraqah heard of Zayd's death, he is said to have written an elegy in praise of him. The Prophet also commended him and said that on the day of Resurrection "he will be raised as having, in himself alone, the worth of a whole people".

God, may He be glorified, heard the prayer of Zayd. When Muhammad the Messenger of God rose up inviting people to Islam, his son Said was in the forefront of those who believed in the oneness of God and who affirmed their faith in the prophethood of Muhammad. This is not strange for Said grew up in a household which repudiated the idolatrous ways of the Quraysh and he was instructed by a father who spent his life searching for Truth and who died in its pursuit.

Said was not yet twenty when he embraced Islam. His young and steadfast wife Fatimah, daughter of al-Khattab and sister of Umar, also accepted Islam early. Evidently both Said and Fatimah managed to conceal their acceptance of Islam from the Quraysh and especially from Fatimah's family for some time. She had cause to fear not only her father but her brother Umar who was brought up to venerate the Kabah and to cherish the unity of the Quraysh and their religion.

Umar was a headstrong young man of great determination. He saw Islam as a threat to the Quraysh and became most violent and unrestrained in his attacks on Muslims. He finally decided that the only way to put an end to the trouble was to eliminate the man who was its cause. Goaded on by blind fury he took up his sword and headed for the Prophet's house. On his way he came face to face with a secret believer in the Prophet who seeing Umar's grim expression asked him where he was going. "I am going to kill Muhammad..."

There was no mistaking his bitterness and murderous resolve. The believer sought to dissuade him from his intent but Umar was deaf to any arguments. He then thought of diverting Umar in order to at least warn the Prophet of his intentions.

"O Umar," he said, "Why not first go back to the people of your own house and set them to rights?" "What people of my house?" asked Umar.

"Your sister Fatimah and your brother-in-law Said. They have both forsaken your religion and are followers of Muhammad in his religion..."

Umar turned and made straight for his sister's house. There he called out to her angrily as he approached. Khabbab ibn al-Aratt who often came to recite the Quran to Said and Fatimah was with them then. When they heard Umar's voice, Khabbab hid in a corner of the house and Fatimah concealed the manuscript. But Umar had heard the sound of their reading and when he came in, he said to them: "What is this haynamah (gibbering) I heard?"

They tried to assure him that it was only normal conversation that he had heard but he insisted: "Hear it I did," he said, "and it is possible that you have both become renegades."

"Have you not considered whether the Truth is not to be found in your religion?" said Said to Umar trying to reason with him. Instead, Umar set upon his brother-in-law hitting and kicking him as hard as he could and when Fatimah went to the defence of her husband, Umar struck her a blow on her face which drew blood.

"O Umar," said Fatimah, and she was angry. "What if the Truth is not in your religion! I bear witness that there is no god but Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

Fatimah's wound was bleeding, and when Umar saw the blood he was sorry for what he had done. A change came over him and he said to his sister:

"Give me that script which you have that I may read it." Like them Umar could read, but when he asked for the script, Fatimah said to him:

"You are impure and only the pure may touch it. Go and wash yourself or make ablutions."

Thereupon Umar went and washed himself, and she gave him the page on which was written the opening verses of Surah Ta-Ha. He began to read it and when he reached the verse, 'Verily, I alone am God, there no deity but me. So, worship Me alone, and be constant in Prayer so as to remember Me,' he said: "Show me where Muhammad is."

Umar then made his way to the house of al-Arqam and declared his acceptance of Islam and the Prophet and all his companions rejoiced.

Said and his wife Fatimah were thus the immediate cause which led to the conversion of the strong and determined Umar and this added substantially to the power and prestige of the emerging faith.

Said ibn Zayd was totally devoted to the Prophet and the service of Islam. He witnessed all the major campaigns and encounters in which the Prophet engaged with the exception of Badr. Before Badr, he and Talhah were sent by the Prophet as scouts to Hawra on the Red Sea coast due west of Madinah to bring him news of a Quraysh caravan returning from Syria. When Talhah and Said returned to Madinah the Prophet had already set out for Badr with the first Muslim army of just over three hundred men.

After the passing away of the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, Said continued to play a major role in the Muslim community. He was one of those whom Abu Bakr consulted on his succession and his name is often linked with such companions as Uthman, Abu Ubaydah and Sad ibn Abi Waqqas in the campaigns that were waged. He was known for his courage and heroism, a glimpse of which we can get from his account of the Battle of Yarmuk. He said:

"For the Battle of Yarmuk, we were twenty four thousand or thereabout. Against us, the Byzantines mobilized one hundred and twenty thousand men. They advanced towards us with a heavy and thunderous movement as if mountains were being moved. Bishops and priests strode before them bearing crosses and chanting litanies which were repeated by the soldiers behind them.

When the Muslims saw them mobilized thus, they became worried by their vast numbers and something of anxiety and fear entered their hearts. Thereupon,

Abu Ubaydah stood before the Muslims and urged them to fight. "Worshippers of God" he said, "help God and God will help you and make your feet firm."

"Worshippers of God, be patient and steadfast for indeed patience and steadfastness (sabr) is a salvation from unbelief, a means of attaining the pleasure of God and a defence against ignominy and disgrace."

"Draw out your spears and protect yourselves with your shields. Don't utter anything among yourselves but the remembrance of God Almighty until I give you the command, if God wills."

"Thereupon a man emerged from the ranks of the Muslims and said: "I have resolved to die this very hour. Have you a message to send to the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace?"

"Yes" replied Abu Ubaydah, "convey salaam to him from me and from the Muslims and say to him: O Messenger of God, we have found true what our Lord has promised us."

"As soon as I heard the man speak and saw him unsheathe his sword and go out to meet the enemy, I

threw myself on the ground and crept on all fours and with my spear I felled the first enemy horseman racing towards us. Then I fell upon the enemy and God removed from my heart all traces of fear. The Muslims engaged the advancing Byzantines and continued fighting until they were blessed with victory."

Said was ranked by the Prophet as one of the outstanding members of his generation. He was among ten of the companions whom the Prophet visited one day and promised Paradise. These were Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, Abdur-Rahman ibn Awf, Abu Ubaydah, Talhah, az-Zubayr, Sad of Zuhrah, and Said the son of Zayd the Hanif. The books of the Prophet's sayings have recorded his great praises of the Promised Ten (al-'asharatu-l mubashshirun) and indeed of others whom on other occasions he also gave good tidings of Paradise.

[View Page](#)

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