

*Whenever we mention the name of the last and final Prophet, Muhammad, we always add the salutation, 'Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam' which means, may the peace & blessings of GOD be on him.

MAKKAH- A SHELTER FOR IDOLS

In the last part on the history of Muhammad (Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Sallam) we read of the rediscovery of the well of the Zam-Zam and also the dispute that followed with the control of this well. We also lived through the experience with Abd al Mutallib when he had to decide either to sacrifice his son Abdullah, or the 100 camels.

After the life of his son was spared, life continued in Makkah where the local people lived their daily lives engaged in prayers to their favourite idols. The Kaaba housed some 360 idols ranging from very small ones belonging to families, to the larger ones representing the different tribes and clans. The idol, Hubal was placed inside the Kaaba because the Quraysh believed that he was a personification of the blessings and spiritual influence on the people. Other idols called the 'daughters of god' were 'al-lat' who was the lady of Taif, 'al uzzah' was from the valley of Nakhlah and 'manta' from the Red Sea.

As Abd al Mutallib was the host to so many visitors to Makkah, he fulfilled their physical needs and also accommodated their spiritual requirements to worship the idols of their choice. The visitors welcomed his hospitality and also felt at home with the freedom accorded to them to fulfil their spiritual needs. Although Abd al Mutallib believed that God was the Greater Reality, as it was in the life of his forefathers, Abraham (alayhis salaam), he did not impose his thinking on them.

Most of the homes in Makkah and even in the greater area of Arabia, also had their own idols, who enjoyed a very prominent place in the home as the god of that household. A man would stroke the idol to obtain its blessings, as his final act before leaving home, on a journey. On his return his first act would be to stroke the idol as thanks giving for his safe return.

Soon Abd al Mutallib was also looking for a bride for his favourite son, Abdullah. He finally selected Aminah, the daughter of Wahb. Wahb, the chief of the Zuhrah tribe had passed away and Amina was living with her uncle, Wuhayb. Word soon got out that the handsome Abdullah was paired off to Amina and the wedding was to take place. There was great rejoicement among the family of the Quraysh and the Zuhrah tribes. A year after their marriage a memorable incident took place known as the year of the elephant.

YEAR OF THE ELEPHANT

Yemen, in the south of Arabia was under the rule of Abyssinia who appointed Abrahah al-Ashram to govern it. Abrahah built a magnificent Cathedral in Sana in honour of his king, Negus, who was the ruler of Abyssinia. This cathedral was constructed of the finest marble, which was brought in from distant places. He had the crosses cast in gold and silver and even built the pulpit from ivory and ebony. When

he completed his superb structure he wrote to his king, "O King Negus, I have built you a church, the like of which was not built for any other King before you. I shall not rest until I make Sana and the Cathedral the centre of Arabia. I want all the Arabs to use Sana as their central place of trade and the Cathedral as their place of pilgrimage. O King I shall not rest until I have diverted all the activities of Makkah to Sana."

Abraham was very determined to achieve what he set out to do. He became a very powerful leader in Yemen and dominated the smaller tribes and drove fear into the people who showed the slightest signs of resistance or even refused to obey his instructions. His reputation soon spread throughout the region as an aggressor and invader.

Abraham did not keep his intention a secret and when word spread all over Arabia it angered not only the Quraysh but also the tribes living throughout the Hijaz and Najd. Talk of Abraham's intentions of moving the activities from Makkah to Sana infuriated a number of people. One enraged person from the Kinanah tribe decided to go to Sana with the intention of damaging and defiling the Cathedral. After spending a few days on the camel he finally reached Sana and managed to sneak into the Cathedral one night and damaged parts of its interior. He also managed to slip out of Sana undetected and reach his tribe safely.

When Abraham was alerted of the damage caused by some stranger from the north that visited the town, he became very angry and irritated. He was fuming and in his rage decided to assemble his army to march to Makkah and in revenge destroy the Kaaba or any resistance he encountered. His large army was made up of horsemen, a very large number of well-armed foot soldiers as well as camels carrying their loads and a few elephants. He also took along a great and powerful elephant that had such a huge body the like of which had never been seen before. This huge elephant driven by Unays was called, Mahmud. Some of the Arab tribes immediately north of Sana felt that it was their duty to defend the Kaaba by attempting to stop this army by blocking their way. Abraham's strength and the brutality of the army soon put them to flight and they captured their leader, Dhu Nafr, who pleaded for mercy and as ransom for his life he agreed to act as a guide to Makkah.

On their way another attempt was made by the Shahrani and Nahis tribes to stop Abraham from destroying the Kaaba. These tribes were met with such power and strength that they succumbed and their leader, Nufayl was captured and also forced to act as second guide to Makkah.

When they reached Taif, the people came out of their town to welcome them and hastened to advise them that Makkah was not far away from there. They also hoped that their friendliness and cooperation would deter them from destroying their temple of 'al-lat' which they used for their spiritual needs. They managed to save their skin, save their temple and in addition they also provided a guide, Abu Righal, to show them the way to the Kaaba.

On the way Abu Righal passed away at a place called Al-Mughammas where he was buried. It is mentioned that the Arabs stoned this man's grave for the hypocrisy of his actions, after this incident. Abraham made camp at this place and ordered a group of horsemen to raid the outskirts of Makkah and capture cattle, camels and other grazing

animals. On their return they took with them 200 camels, which belonged to Abd al Mutallib. The Quraysh and the neighbouring tribes called an urgent meeting to discuss the possible actions to take against the invaders. As they realised that they were out-numbered and did not have any hope of stopping this powerful and well equipped army, they decided not to offer any resistance.

ABRAHAH REACHES MAKKAH

Abraham was pleased with the raid of his horsemen and decided to send a messenger, Hanatah, to the Quraysh to invite their chief to come over for talks on his mission to destroy the Kaaba. Abd al Mutallib and one of his sons accompanied the messenger back to the camp. When Abd al Mutallib entered the tent, Abraham rose from his royal seat to greet him and also to sit next to him on the carpet.

“I am Abraham the ruler of Yemen appointed by Negus, the King of Abyssinia. I am here to destroy the Kaaba and do not wish to fight with the Quraysh. I want to avoid all bloodshed.” When Abd al Mutallib did not respond, as he was fully aware of the intentions of his invader, Abraham turned to his interpreter to ask if the visitor had a request or wanted any favours. Without any hesitation Abd al Mutallib replied, “Your army has taken 200 of my camels and I ask that they be returned to him.” A little dismayed, Abraham replied, “I am surprised and disappointed at your request. I have come to destroy the Kaaba and with it your forefathers religion and all you can think of are your camels and not a word about saving the house of your Lord.” His quick reply was, “I am the lord of the camels and the temple has its own Lord who will guard, defend and protect it.” This angered the raider who reacted, “Your Lord cannot defend your temple against me. We shall see.” The camels were released and returned to Abd al Mutallib’s at his second request.

When Abd al Mutallib and his son returned to Makkah, he advised the Quraysh and people of Makkah to withdraw from their homes and seek shelter in the hills surrounding Makkah. When the people had evacuated, Abd al Mutallib and a few of his close family and friends went to the Kaaba and knelt down in prayer, “O Lord, your slaves will protect their houses and YOU, O Lord protect your house. After completing their prayer they joined the others in the hills of Makkah.

ABRAHAH ATTACKS THE KAABA

The next morning Abraham marched into Makkah to accomplish his mission of quickly destroying the Kaaba and returning home to Sana. However he had a big surprise waiting for him. The army was lead by Mahmud, the huge elephant, which was decorated with lots of trimmings and glitter. When they were close to the Kaaba, the elephant suddenly stopped, slowly sat down and refused to move any further. The elephant driver was baffled at the action of the elephant. His instructions and commands grew louder and louder but the elephant remained on the ground and refused to move. They did everything they could to bring him to his feet. They beat him about the head with their iron spears and even stuck iron hooks into his belly but nothing helped.

As no amount of prodding got Mahmud on his feet, they tried to fool him by asking the troops to retreat. When Mahmud saw this he got up and followed the soldiers in retreat. When he was on his feet the soldiers once again turned and headed for the

Kaaba. As soon as Mahmud was facing the Kaaba he again sat down and refused to move.

Abraham was not deterred by these actions as he was determined to fulfil the mission that he came for. While everyone's attention was focussed on the strange behaviour of Mahmud, the western skies grew black and a strange sound was heard coming from the skies. As the noise grew louder and the dark sky approached the Kaaba, one could see a multitude of birds hovering at great height over the Kaaba. Each bird was carrying a pebble in its beak and one clasp in each of its claws. As they swooped on the army they released their lethal and toxic pebbles. These pebbles, which rained on the army from a great height, penetrated their steel armoury and killed them. And wherever it touched, their flesh started rotting away. It was the most painful death that these soldiers experienced. Chaos broke out among the rank and file and a number of survivors hastily retreated and headed for home. Although Abraham was not killed, he was struck by one of these stones, which caused his flesh to start rotting away. Dhu Nafir and the elephant were spared but most of the soldiers died on the spot or were buried on their way home or what ever remained of their rotting bodies. The rest of them made it home but died soon after. Abraham's rotten body where the rotten parts fell off and with very little signs of life was eventually carried into Sana on a stretcher, only to be buried a few days later.

People who had witnessed this ordeal and torment accepted the message that the Lord of the Kaaba had not only protected his home but also witnessed the punishment meted out to the arrogant people who wanted to destroy the Kaaba. After that day this incident was called the 'year of the elephant' and the Quraysh gained the reputation as "the people of God." This incident earned the keepers of the Kaaba greater respect and admiration than before.

When the incident of the elephant took place Abdullah was returning to Makkah from his trade to Syria and Palestine. When he reached Yathrib (Madinah) he rested there and stayed with some of his relatives. That night he fell ill and was not in the position to travel home to Makkah. When word reached his father, Abd al Mutallib, he sent his eldest son, Harith to go to Madinah and accompany his brother back home when he was well enough to travel.

THE DEATH OF ABDULLAH

When Harith reached Madinah he was met with the sad news that Abdullah had passed away. Harith had now the great task of returning home and breaking the news of the death of Abdullah to his father and to his wife, Aminah.

To be continued in the next issue.