

## CHAPTER EIGHT



# Casting terror into their hearts

- ◆ The Battle of the Trench and Muhammad's imperial ambitions
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## The Battle of the Trench

**AFTER THE EXPULSION OF THE QAYNUQA AND NADIR JEWS FROM** Medina, some of those who remained approached the Quraysh, offering an alliance against Muhammad and the Muslims. The Quraysh readily accepted and asked them: "You, O Jews, are the first scripture people and know the nature of our dispute with Muhammad. Is our religion the best or is his?"<sup>1</sup> The Jews replied, as might be expected under the circumstances, that of course the pagan Quraysh religion was better. When Muhammad heard of this, Allah gave him a revelation: "Hast thou not seen

those unto whom a portion of the Scripture hath been given, how they believe in idols and false deities, and how they say of those (idolaters) who disbelieve: "These are more rightly guided than those who believe"? Those are they whom Allah hath cursed, and he whom Allah hath cursed, thou (O Muhammad) wilt find for him no helper" (Qur'an 4:51-52).

Muhammad, forewarned of this new alliance, had a trench dug around Medina. This huge effort required a great deal of manpower: many of the Muslims pressed into this service, however, would slip away. Only a few would ask Muhammad permission to leave, and some of those offered only some trifling excuse. Muhammad accordingly received another revelation, warning them that true Muslims do not take lightly the commands of the Prophet of Islam:

They only are the true believers who believe in Allah and His messenger and, when they are with him on some common errand, go not away until they have asked leave of him. . . . Deem not the summons of the Messenger among yourselves like the summons of one of you to another: Allah doth know those of you who slip away under shelter of some excuse: then let those beware who withstand the Messenger's order, lest some trial befall them, or a grievous penalty be inflicted on them. (Qur'an 24:62-63)

Such incidents reinforced the divinely commanded and exalted status of Muhammad among the Muslims. When the riots over the Danish Muhammad cartoons rocked the world in late 2005 and early 2006, many non-Muslims were puzzled by the fury of the Muslim reaction. At least some of that fury must be ascribed to the fact that in the Qur'an again and again Allah is quite solicitous of his prophet, and ready to command what will please him. To the mind of someone who accepts the Qur'an as an authentic revelation, this places Muhammad in a particularly important position.

During the digging of the trench Muhammad had visions of conquering the areas bordering on Arabia. This story has a legendary cast, but whether

it originated with Muhammad or with the Muslim community, it indicates the imperialistic designs the early Muslims had on the territories surrounding Arabia. One of the earliest Muslims, Salman the Persian, was working on the trench when he began having trouble with a particularly large rock. “The apostle,” explained Salman, “who was near at hand, saw me hacking and saw how difficult the place was. He dropped down into the trench and took the pick from my hand and gave such a blow that lightning showed beneath the pick.”<sup>2</sup> The flash of lightning “shot out, illuminating everything between the two tracts of black stones—that is, Medina’s two tracts of black stones—like a lamp inside a dark room.” Muhammad shouted with the Islamic cry of victory, “Allahu akbar,” and all the Muslims responded with the same shout.<sup>3</sup> This happened again and then a third time, in exactly the same way. Finally Salman asked Muhammad: “O you, dearer than father or mother, what is the meaning of this light beneath your pick as you strike?”

The Prophet of Islam responded: “Did you really see that, Salman? The first means that God has opened up to me the Yaman; the second Syria and the west; and the third the east.”<sup>4</sup> Or, according to another version of the same story, Muhammad declared: “I struck my first blow, and what you saw flashed out, so that the palaces of al-Hirah [in what is today southern Iraq] and al-Madai’in of Kisra [the winter capital of the Sassanian empire] lit up for me as if they were dogs’ teeth, and Gabriel informed me that my nation would be victorious over them.” The second blow illuminated in the same way “the palaces of the pale men in the lands of the Byzantines,” and the third, “the palaces of San’a”—that is, Yemen.<sup>5</sup> Gabriel promised Muhammad victory over each, repeating three times: “Rejoice; victory shall come to them!” To this Muhammad replied, “Praise be to God! The promise of One who is true and faithful! He has promised us victory after tribulation.”

Decades later, when the countries named in this legend were indeed conquered by the warriors of jihad, an old Muslim used to say: “Conquer where you will, by God, you have not conquered and to the resurrection day you will not conquer a city whose keys God had not given beforehand to Muhammad.”<sup>6</sup> But all that conquest was far in the future. In the present was only the siege of the Medina.

As the Quraysh, along with another tribe, the Ghatafan (known collectively in Islamic tradition as “the Confederates”), laid siege to Medina, the trench prevented the invaders from entering the city, but the Muslims were unable to force them to end the siege. Then to make matters even worse, a tribe of Jews in Medina, the Banu Qurayzah, broke their covenant with the Prophet of Islam (perhaps after reflecting upon the fate of the Banu Qaynuqa and Banu Nadir) and began collaborating with the Quraysh.<sup>7</sup>

Muhammad sent spies among the Qurayzah to find out if what he was hearing was true, and if they had really broken their agreement with him. The worst news confirmed, he stood strong amid the fears of his people, saying only: “God is greatest! Rejoice, people of the Muslims!”<sup>8</sup>

As the three-week siege dragged on, the situation of the Muslims grew more perilous. Conditions grew so bad that one Muslim remarked bitterly about Muhammad’s territorial ambitions and his designs on the two great powers that bordered Arabia, the Persian empire of Chosroes and the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) empire of Caesar: “Muhammad used to promise us that we should eat the treasures of Chosroes and Caesar and today not one of us can feel safe in going to the privy!”<sup>9</sup> The Hypocrites pointed to the irony of Muhammad’s visions in light of the present difficult position of the Muslims. Muhammad in response delivered this revelation from Allah: “And behold! The Hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease (even) say: ‘Allah and His Messenger promised us nothing but delusion!’” (Qur’an 33:12).

Muhammad accused the Hypocrites of demoralizing the Muslims and treasonous plotting with the enemies of Islam, and received a revelation to back him up (Qur’an 33:13-14). Allah also told Muhammad to tell the people that desertion would be useless: “Say: ‘Running away will not profit you if ye are running away from death or slaughter; and even if (ye do escape), no more than a brief (respite) will ye be allowed to enjoy!’” (Qur’an 33:16).

Muhammad, meanwhile, sent out feelers for peace negotiations, offering the Quraysh a third of the date harvest of Medina if they would withdraw, but then one of the Muslims, Sa’d ibn Mu’adh, reminded him of the exalted status of the Muslims, saying it was disgraceful to contemplate put-

ting the Muslim Medinans in a worse position before the pagan Quraysh than they had been in when they too were pagans: "Now that God has conferred Islam on us, guided us to it, and strengthened us with your presence, shall we give them our wealth? We have no need for this! By God, we will offer them only the sword, until God judge between us and them."

Muhammad replied, "As you wish," and did not pursue the idea of paying tribute any further.<sup>10</sup>

As the siege continued, one warrior of the Quraysh, Amr, challenged the Muslims to send out one man for hand-to-hand combat and taunted them about Muhammad's promises of Paradise: "Where is your garden of which you say that those you lose in battle will enter it? Can't you send a man to fight me?" As might be expected since Muhammad was himself from Mecca, the home of the Quraysh, Amr had relatives among the Muslims. His nephew was Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law and later the revered figure of Shi'a Islam. To his uncle Ali said: "I invite you to God and His apostle and to Islam."

Amr rebuffed the overture and refused to dismount. But he added, "O son of my brother, I do not want to kill you."

Ali was less sentimental. He replied to his uncle: "But I want to kill you," and he did.<sup>11</sup> Islamic loyalty was deeper than blood.

The Qurayzah agreed to attack the Muslims from one side while the Quraysh besieged them from the other. But then events took a turn for the Muslims. A new convert to Islam, Nu'aym bin Mas'ud, came to the Prophet with a proposition: since his own people, the Ghatafan, did not know that he had become a Muslim, Muhammad could perhaps make use of him to gain an advantage over his enemies. Muhammad immediately recognized the potential of the situation, saying: "You are only one man among us, so go and awake distrust among the enemy to draw them off us if you can, for war is deceit."<sup>12</sup> Nu'aym went to the Qurayzah Jews and reminded them that they had much more at stake than the Quraysh and Ghatafan; after all, their wives and property were close at hand, while those of the Quraysh were back in Mecca. The Qurayzah should demand some assurance that the Quraysh would indeed fight to defend them: they

should ask for hostages from among the Quraysh leaders, who would be released once Muhammad and the Muslims were defeated. The Qurayzah accepted his suggestion, whereupon Nu'aym hurried to the leaders of the Quraysh and Ghatafan and told them that the Jews were having second thoughts about their alliance, and wanted to reconcile with Muhammad. They had gone to the Prophet of Islam, said Nu'aym, offering him the heads of some of the Quraysh and Ghatafan, and Muhammad accepted. "So," Nu'aym concluded, "if the Jews send to you to demand hostages, don't send them a single man."<sup>13</sup>

Soon afterward, Abu Sufyan, a Quraysh chief, sent word to the Qurayzah that the attack must begin immediately. But the Qurayzah protested that it was the Sabbath and also, "we will not fight Muhammad along with you until you give us hostages whom we can hold as security until we make an end of Muhammad; for we fear that if the battle goes against you and you suffer heavily you will withdraw at once to your country and leave us while the man is in our country, and we cannot face him alone." Of course, this reply only confirmed for the Quraysh the suspicions that Nu'aym had fanned, and they indignantly refused to send any hostages. A strong wind blew up around this time also, making it impossible for the Quraysh to keep their tents up or fires going.

Abu Sufyan had had enough. He said to his men: "O Quraysh, we are not in a permanent camp; the horses and camels are dying; the B. Qurayza have broken their word to us and we have heard disquieting reports of them. You can see the violence of the wind which leaves us neither cooking-pots, nor fire, nor tents to count on. Be off, for I am going!"<sup>14</sup> The Quraysh began to abandon their positions around Medina, and soon the Ghatafan followed. Nu'aym's deception had broken the siege and saved Islam.

## Dealing with the Banu Qurayzah

After the successful resolution of the Battle of the Trench, the Angel Gabriel made sure that Muhammad settled accounts with the Qurayzah Jews. According to Aisha, "When Allah's Messenger returned on the day

(of the battle) of *Al-Khandaq* (i.e., Trench), he put down his arms and took a bath. Then Jibril (Gabriel) whose head was covered with dust, came to him saying, 'You have put down your arms! By Allah, I have not put down my arms yet.' Allah's Messenger said, 'Where (to go now)?' Jibril said, 'This way,' pointing towards the tribe of Bani Quraiza. So Allah's Messenger went out towards them."<sup>15</sup>

As his armies approached the fortifications of the Qurayzah, Muhammad addressed them in terms that have become familiar usage for Islamic jihadists when speaking of Jews today—language that also made its way into the Qur'an: "You brothers of monkeys, has God disgraced you and brought His vengeance upon you?" The Qur'an in three places (2:62-65; 5:59-60; and 7:166) says that Allah transformed the Sabbath-breaking Jews into pigs and monkeys.

The Qurayzah Jews tried to soften his wrath, saying: "O Abu'l-Qasim [Muhammad], you are not a barbarous person." But the Prophet of Islam was in no mood to be appeased. He told the Muslims who were with him that a warrior who passed by on a white mule was actually Gabriel, "who has been sent to Banu Qurayza to shake their castles and strike terror to their hearts." The Muslims laid siege to the Qurayzah strongholds for twenty-five days, until, according to Ibn Ishaq, "they were sore pressed" and, as Muhammad had warned, "God cast terror into their hearts."<sup>16</sup>

Also casting terror in their hearts may have been the choices offered them by their own chief Ka'b ibn Asad, who had made and broken the treaty with Muhammad. The first was to accept Muhammad and Islam, "for by God it has become plain to you that he is a prophet who has been sent and that it is he that you find mentioned in your scripture; and then your lives, your property, your women and children will be saved."<sup>17</sup> The second choice was to kill their wives and children, "leaving no encumbrances behind us," and go fight Muhammad. The third choice was to ambush the Prophet on the Sabbath. The Qurayzah rejected all three, but chose to surrender to the Muslims.

After some deliberations Muhammad decided to put the fate of the tribe into the hands of the Muslim warrior Sa'd bin Mu'adh. Sa'd was a

member of the Aws tribe that had previously had an alliance with the Jews of Medina, so perhaps Muhammad thought that the Qurayzah would accept his judgment as impartial, or at least that it would appear to be to any of the followers of the Prophet of Islam who might otherwise question his own ruling because of the close ties many of the Muslims had with the Jews of Medina. When Sa'd rode up on his donkey, Muhammad told him, "These people are ready to accept your judgment."

Sa'd replied: "I give the judgment that their warriors should be killed and their children and women should be taken as captives."

The Prophet of Islam was pleased. "O Sa'd! You have judged amongst them with (or similar to) the judgment of the King (Allah)."<sup>18</sup> He confirmed Sa'd's judgment as that of Allah himself: "You have decided in confirmation to the judgment of Allah above the seven heavens."<sup>19</sup> (Later, when Sa'd died, Ibn Ishaq records several early Muslim traditions asserting that the very throne of Allah shook.<sup>20</sup>)

Sa'd's sentence was duly carried out, with Muhammad himself actively participating. According to Ibn Ishaq, "The apostle went out to the market of Medina (which is still its market today) and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for [the men of the Qurayzah] and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought out to him in batches." One of the Prophet's fiercest enemies among the Qurayzah, Huyayy, proclaimed: "God's command is right. A book and a decree, and massacre have been written against the Sons of Israel." Then Muhammad struck off his head.

In light of Sa'd's judgment to kill the men and enslave the women and children, one of the captives, Attiyah al-Qurazi, explained how the Muslims determined who was a man and who wasn't: "I was among the captives of Banu Qurayzah. They (the Companions) examined us, and those who had begun to grow hair (pubes) were killed, and those who had not were not killed. I was among those who had not grown hair."<sup>21</sup>

Ibn Ishaq puts the number of those massacred at "600 or 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 or 900."<sup>22</sup> Ibn Sa'd says "they were between six hundred and seven hundred in number."<sup>23</sup> As the Qurayzah were being led to Muhammad in groups, someone asked Ka'b



bin Asad what was happening. “Will you never understand?” replied the distraught leader of the Qurayzah. “Don’t you see that the summoner never stops and those who are taken away do not return? By Allah it is death!”<sup>24</sup>

This mass killing is amply attested in various ahadith. One summarizes Muhammad’s dealings with the three Jewish tribes of Medina: “Bani An-Nadir and Bani Quraiza fought (against the Prophet violating their peace treaty), so the Prophet exiled Bani An-Nadir and allowed Bani Quraiza to remain at their places (in Medina) taking nothing from them till they fought against the Prophet again. He then killed their men and distributed their women, children and property among the Muslims, but some of them came to the Prophet and he granted them safety, and they embraced Islam. He exiled all the Jews from Medina. They were the Jews of Bani Qainuqa’, the tribe of ‘Abdullah bin Salam and the Jews of Bani Haritha and all the other Jews of Medina.”<sup>25</sup>

Allah also sent down a revelation referring obliquely to the massacre: “And those of the People of the Book who aided them—Allah did take them down from their strongholds and cast terror into their hearts. (So that) some ye slew, and some ye made prisoners” (Qur’an 33:26). And Muhammad again delivered revelations ascribing victory to Allah alone (Qur’an 33:9-11).

Meanwhile, Muhammad’s cool head and trust in Allah when things looked bleakest for the Muslims stood him in good stead. Allah gave him a revelation, telling the Muslims to imitate him: “Ye have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah” (Qur’an 33:21). Befitting his lofty status, Muhammad also received a revelation in which Allah admonishes the Muslims not to be so familiar with their prophet or his wives:

O ye who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for the proper time, unless permission be granted you. But if ye are invited, enter, and, when your meal

is ended, then disperse. Linger not for conversation. Lo! That would cause annoyance to the Prophet, and he would be shy of (asking) you (to go); but Allah is not shy of the truth. And when ye ask of them (the wives of the Prophet) anything, ask it of them from behind a curtain. That is purer for your hearts and for their hearts. And it is not for you to cause annoyance to the messenger of Allah, nor that ye should ever marry his wives after him. Lo! That in Allah's sight would be an enormity. (Qur'an 33:53)

### Finding excuses for a massacre

The massacre of the Banu Qurayzah has been understandably a source of embarrassment to Muslims. Various Muslim apologists have attempted to deny the incident altogether or to minimize the number of casualties. One Islamic scholar, W. N. Arafat, published a lengthy article in 1976 arguing that the massacre never happened, chiefly for the anachronistic reason that it would have violated Islamic law.<sup>26</sup> This is rather an odd argument given the fact that Muhammad readily set aside his principles on other occasions, as in the incident when his raiders killed Quraysh during the sacred month, and when he conceived his powerful attraction to Zaynab bint Jahsh. Others point to the treachery of the Banu Qurayzah as justifying Sa'd's sentence and Muhammad's approval of it. Yahiya Emerick, in his biography of Muhammad, says of Sa'd's judgment that "Muhammad did not intervene because he had already given up his right to alter the judgment." He does not repeat Muhammad's words affirming Sa'd's judgment as that of Allah.<sup>27</sup>

Karen Armstrong argues that "it is not correct to judge the incident by twentieth-century standards" and that "in the early seventh century, an Arab chief would not be expected to show any mercy to traitors like Qurayzah."<sup>28</sup> That is true, but Armstrong misses the larger issue; as in all the incidents of Muhammad's life, he is still held up by Muslims around the world as "an excellent model of conduct" (Qur'an 33:21). In July 2006,

as Israeli forces prepared to move into Gaza in the wake of the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier by Hamas, a writer on a British Muslim Internet forum declared: “I’m so fed up with these dirty, filthy Israeli dogs. May Allah curse them and destroy them all, and may they face the same fate as Banu Qurayzah!”<sup>29</sup> No one accused him of illicitly importing seventh-century models into the present day.

### The women of the Banu Mustaliq

Muhammad was now the undisputed master of Medina, and the Prophet of Islam enjoyed an immediate economic advantage. A hadith records that “people used to give some of their date-palms to the Prophet (as a gift), till he conquered Bani Quraiza and Bani An-Nadir, whereupon he started returning their favours.”<sup>30</sup> But challengers to his consolidation of power over all Arabia still remained. He received word that the Banu al-Mustaliq, an Arab tribe related to the Quraysh, were gathering against the Muslims, so he led the Muslims out to attack them. And Allah, according to Ibn Ishaq, “put the B. al-Mustaliq to flight and killed some of them and gave the apostle their wives, children and property as booty.”<sup>31</sup>

There were, according to one of the Muslim warriors, Abu Sa‘id al-Khadri, “some excellent Arab women” among the captives of the Banu Mustaliq. “We desired them, for we were suffering from the absence of our wives, (but at the same time) we also desired ransom for them.” The Qur’an permitted them to have sexual intercourse with slave girls captured in battle—“those captives whom your right hands possess” (4:24)—but if they intended to keep the women as slaves, they couldn’t collect ransom money for them. “So,” Abu Sa‘id explained, “we decided to have sexual intercourse with them but by observing ‘*azl*’—that is, *coitus interruptus*. Muhammad, however, told them this was not necessary: “It does not matter if you do not do it, for every soul that is to be born up to the Day of Resurrection will be born.”<sup>32</sup> Conceptions and births were up to Allah alone.

From a twenty-first-century perspective this is one of the most problematic aspects of Muhammad’s status as “an excellent model of conduct”: the

treatment of women as war prizes, with no consideration of their will. Even a contemporary Islamic legal manual stipulates that when a woman is taken captive, her “previous marriage is immediately annulled.”<sup>33</sup> If a jihad warrior takes her captive, she has no say in the matter. The number of women victimized by this across the Islamic centuries cannot be calculated; and even today, women are all too often treated as commodities all across the Islamic world. Of course, this phenomenon has manifested itself to varying degrees in all cultures and societies, but in the Islamic world it is particularly hard to eradicate because of the prophetic sanction it has received.

Muhammad participated in the seizure of female captives. And he gained a wife from among the Banu Mustaliq, but in a way that suggests that at least sometimes, under special circumstances, a captive woman might have some say in her fate. Among the captives from among the Mustaliq was a strikingly beautiful woman named Juwayriya, whom the Prophet of Islam assigned by lot to one of his cousins, Thabit bin Qays bin al-Shammas. Juwayriya thought this was beneath her station, as she was the daughter of the chief of the Mustaliq. So she went to Muhammad to appeal: “You can see the state to which I have been brought. I have fallen to the lot of Thabit or his cousin and have given him a deed for my ransom and have come to ask your help in the matter.”

Muhammad replied, “Would you like something better than that? I will discharge your debt and marry you.” His marriage to Juwayriya made the Mustaliq relatives of the Prophet; on the day he married her, therefore, a hundred families enslaved by the Muslims were released from bondage.<sup>34</sup> Muhammad changed the woman’s name; it had originally been Barra, which means Pious. Said the Prophet of Islam: “I did not like that it should be said: He had come out from Barra (Pious).”<sup>35</sup>

## **Abdullah bin Ubayy and praying for one’s enemies**

Shortly after this battle, Abdullah bin Ubayy, the Hypocrite who had annoyed the Prophet of Islam with his scheming and pleading for the Jewish tribes of the Qaynuqa and Nadir, began to challenge Muhammad more

openly. He called upon the Medinans to rise up against the Muslims who had come from Mecca and expel them from the city. "Nothing so fits us and the vagabonds of the Quraysh," he exclaimed, "as the ancient saying, 'Feed a dog and it will devour you.' By Allah when we return to Medina the stronger will drive out the weaker."<sup>36</sup> But when several of the Muslims reported this to Muhammad, Abdullah bin Ubayy denied having said it, and the Prophet of Islam accepted his denial. Umar, however, doubted Abdullah bin Ubayy, and went to Muhammad with an offer: "Permit me so that I should strike the neck of this hypocrite."

Muhammad refused: "Leave him, the people may not say that Muhammad kills his companions."<sup>37</sup> Then Abdullah's son came to Muhammad offering to kill his father for him. The young man hoped thereby to save himself from the dilemma of having to avenge his father's killing by killing the man Muhammad sent to end his father's life:

I have heard that you want to kill 'Abdullah b. Ubayy for what you have heard about him. If you must do it, then order me to do it and I will bring you his head, for al-Khazraj know that they have no man more dutiful to his father than I, and I am afraid that if you order someone else to kill him my soul will not permit me to see his slayer walking among men and I shall kill him, thus killing a believer for an unbeliever, and so I should go to hell.<sup>38</sup>

Again, Islamic loyalty was thicker than blood. But Muhammad declined, saying, "Nay, but let us deal kindly with him and make much of his companionship while he is with us."<sup>39</sup>

Muhammad's kindness did not move Abdullah bin Ubayy, who continued to be at odds with the Prophet of Islam until his death. Muhammad never gave up on him, however, and even prayed over his grave when he died. Umar, who was with him, was aghast: "Allah's Messenger, are you going to conduct prayer for this man, whereas Allah has forbidden you to offer prayer for him?"

Muhammad answered by interpreting a verse from the Qur'an: "Whether thou ask for their forgiveness, or not, (their sin is unforgivable): if thou ask seventy times for their forgiveness, Allah will not forgive them: because they have rejected Allah and His Messenger: and Allah guideth not those who are perversely rebellious" (9:80). He told Umar that Allah had given him a choice by saying: "Whether thou ask for their forgiveness, or not . . ." and said that while he knew that seventy prayers would be fruitless, he had hope for those beyond seventy.

But Allah put an end to this magnanimity with a new revelation: "And never (O Muhammad) pray for one of them who dieth, nor stand by his grave. Lo! They disbelieved in Allah and His messenger, and they died while they were evil-doers" (Qur'an 9:84).<sup>40</sup>

After that, Muhammad stopped praying at the gravesites of those who opposed him.<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy that when Yahiya Emerick relates the story of Muhammad's difficulties with Abdullah bin Ubayy, he concludes: "He soon fell ill, and on his deathbed, Muhammad came to visit him and asked God to forgive him, telling his stunned companions that he hoped God would."<sup>42</sup> Emerick says nothing about the divine rebuke that Muhammad received for this display of mercy after praying at Abdullah's gravesite.

## The Treaty of Hdaybiyya

Yet another key Islamic principle was formulated by the Treaty of Hdaybiyya and the events surrounding it. In 628, Muhammad had a vision in which he performed the pilgrimage to Mecca—a pagan custom that he very much wanted to make part of Islam, but had thus far been prevented by the Quraysh control of Mecca. But at this time he directed Muslims to prepare to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, and advanced upon the city with fifteen hundred men. The Quraysh met him outside the city, and the two sides concluded a ten-year truce (*hudna*), the treaty of Hdaybiyya.

Some leading Muslims were unhappy with the prospect of a truce. After all, they had broken the Quraysh siege of Medina and were now more

powerful than ever. Were they going to bargain away their military might for the sake of being able to make the pilgrimage? A furious Umar went to Abu Bakr and said, "Is he not God's apostle, and are we not Muslims, and are they not polytheists? Then why should we agree to what is demeaning to our religion?" The two of them went to Muhammad, who attempted to reassure them: "I am God's slave and His apostle. I will not go against His commandment and He will not make me the loser."<sup>43</sup>

But it certainly did not seem as if the treaty was being concluded to the Muslims' advantage. When the time came for the agreement to be written, Muhammad called for Ali and told him to write, "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful." But the Quraysh negotiator, Suhayl bin 'Amr, stopped him: "I do not recognize this; but write 'In thy name, O Allah.'" Muhammad told Ali to write what Suhayl had directed.

But Suhayl was not finished. When Muhammad directed Ali to continue by writing, "This is what Muhammad, the apostle of God, has agreed with Suhayl bin 'Amr," he protested again. "If I witnessed that you were God's apostle," Suhayl told Muhammad, "I would not have fought you. Write your own name and the name of your father." Again the Prophet of Islam, to the increasing dismay of his followers, told Ali to write the document as Suhayl wished.

The treaty finally agreed to read this way:

This is what Muhammad b. 'Abdullah has agreed with Suhayl b. 'Amr: they have agreed to lay aside war for ten years during which men can be safe and refrain from hostilities on condition that if anyone comes to Muhammad without the permission of his guardian he will return him to them; and if anyone of those with Muhammad comes to Quraysh they will not return him to him. We will not show enmity one to another and there shall be no secret reservation or bad faith. He who wishes to enter into a bond and agreement with Muhammad may do so and he who wishes to enter into a bond and agreement with Quraysh may do so.

The Quraysh added: “You must retire from us this year and not enter Mecca against our will, and next year we will make way for you and you can enter it with your companions, and stay there three nights. You may carry a rider’s weapons, the swords in their sheaths. You can bring in nothing more.”<sup>44</sup>

Muhammad had shocked his men by agreeing to provisions that seemed highly disadvantageous to the Muslims: those fleeing the Quraysh and seeking refuge with the Muslims would be returned to the Quraysh, while those fleeing the Muslims and seeking refuge with the Quraysh would not be returned to the Muslims.

The treaty concluded, Muhammad insisted that the Muslims had been victorious despite all appearances to the contrary. He produced a new revelation from Allah: “Verily We have granted thee a manifest victory” (Qur’an 48:1). Muhammad also revealed that “Allah promiseth you much booty that ye will capture, and hath given you this in advance, and hath withheld men’s hands from you, that it may be a token for the believers, and that He may guide you on a right path” (Qur’an 48:18-20).

If any of his followers were still skeptical, their fears would soon be assuaged. A woman of the Quraysh, Umm Kulthum, joined the Muslims in Medina; her two brothers came to Muhammad, asking that they be returned “in accordance with the agreement between him and the Quraysh at Hudaibiya.”<sup>45</sup> But Muhammad refused: Allah forbade it. He gave Muhammad a new revelation: “O ye who believe! When there come to you believing women refugees, examine and test them: Allah knows best as to their faith: if ye ascertain that they are believers, then send them not back to the unbelievers” (Qur’an 60:10).

In refusing to send Umm Kulthum back to the Quraysh, Muhammad broke the treaty. Although Muslim apologists have claimed throughout history that the Quraysh broke it first, this incident came before all those by the Quraysh that Muslims point to as treaty violations. Emerick asserts that Muhammad based his case on a bit of legal hair-splitting: the treaty stipulated that the Muslims would return to the Quraysh any *man* who came to them, not any *woman*.<sup>46</sup> Even if that is true, Muhammad soon—as Emer-



ick acknowledges—began to accept men from the Quraysh as well, thus definitively breaking the treaty.<sup>47</sup> The breaking of the treaty in this way, would reinforce the principle that nothing was good except what was advantageous to Islam, and nothing evil except what hindered Islam. Once the treaty was formally discarded, Islamic jurists enunciated the principle that truces in general could only be concluded on a temporary basis of up to ten years, and that they could only be entered into for the purpose of allowing weakened Muslim forces to gather strength to fight again more effectively.

Subsequent events would illustrate the dark implications of this episode.

## The raid at Khaybar

Allah had promised the Muslims disgruntled by the Treaty of Hudaibiyya “much booty” (Qur’an 48:19). Perhaps to fulfill this promise, Muhammad led them against the Khaybar oasis, which was inhabited by Jews—many of them exiles from Medina. One of the Muslims later remembered: “When the apostle raided a people he waited until the morning. If he heard a call to prayer he held back; if he did not hear it he attacked. We came to Khaybar by night, and the apostle passed the night there; and when morning came he did not hear the call to prayer, so he rode and we rode with him. . . . We met the workers of Khaybar coming out in the morning with their spades and baskets. When they saw the apostle and the army they cried, ‘Muhammad with his force,’ and turned tail and fled. The apostle said, ‘Allah Akbar! Khaybar is destroyed. When we arrive in a people’s square it is a bad morning for those who have been warned.’”<sup>48</sup>

The Muslim advance was inexorable. “The apostle,” according to Ibn Ishaq, “seized the property piece by piece and conquered the forts one by one as he came to them.”<sup>49</sup> Ibn Sa’d reports that the battle was fierce: the “polytheists . . . killed a large number of [Muhammad’s] Companions and he also put to death a very large number of them. . . . He killed ninety-three men of the Jews. . . .”<sup>50</sup> Muhammad and his men offered the *fajr* prayer, the

Islamic dawn prayer, before it was light, and then entered Khaybar itself. The Muslims immediately set out to locate the inhabitants' wealth. Kinana bin al-Rabi, a Jewish leader of Khaybar who was supposed to have been entrusted with the treasure of the Banu Nadir, was brought before Muhammad. Kinana denied knowing where this treasure was, but Muhammad pressed him: "Do you know that if we find you have it I shall kill you?" Kinana said yes.

Some of the treasure was found. To find the rest, Muhammad gave orders concerning Kinana: "Torture him until you extract what he has." One of the Muslims built a fire on Kinana's chest, but Kinana would not give up his secret. When he was at the point of death, Muhammad bin Maslama, killer of the poet Ka'b bin Al-Ashraf, beheaded him.<sup>51</sup>

Muhammad agreed to let the people of Khaybar go into exile, allowing them, as he had the Banu Nadir, to keep as much of their property as they could carry.<sup>52</sup> However, he commanded them to leave behind all their gold and silver.<sup>53</sup> He had intended to expel all of them, but some, who were farmers, begged him to allow them to let them stay if they gave him half their yield annually.<sup>54</sup> Muhammad agreed: "I will allow you to continue here, so long as we would desire."<sup>55</sup> He warned them: "If we wish to expel you we will expel you."<sup>56</sup> They no longer had any rights that did not depend upon the good will and sufferance of Muhammad and the Muslims. And indeed, when the Muslims discovered some treasure that some of the Khaybar Jews had hidden, he ordered the women of the tribe enslaved and seized the perpetrators' land.<sup>57</sup> A hadith notes that "the Prophet had their warriors killed, their offspring and woman taken as captives."<sup>58</sup>

Later, during the caliphate of Umar (634-644), the Jews who remained at Khaybar were banished to Syria, and the rest of their land seized.<sup>59</sup>

## The poisoning of Muhammad

One of the Jewish women of Khaybar, Zaynab bint al-Harith, was brought in to prepare dinner for Muhammad. She prepared a roast lamb—and poisoned it. Muhammad took a bite and spit it out, exclaiming, "This bone

tells me that it is poisoned.” A dinner companion, Bishr bin al-Bara, had already eaten some and died soon thereafter. Zaynab bint al-Harith readily confessed, explaining to Muhammad: “You know what you have done to my people. I said to myself, If he is a king I shall ease myself of him and if he is a prophet he will be informed (of what I have done).” Because she had thus obliquely confessed his prophethood, Muhammad spared her life.<sup>60</sup> According to another tradition, however, he did have her put to death.<sup>61</sup>

The poison had a definite effect on him; afterward one of the Muslims observed, “I continued to see the effect of the poison on the palate of the mouth of Allah’s Messenger.”<sup>62</sup> On his deathbed three years after the poisoning, Muhammad told Bishr’s sister, “This is the time in which I feel a deadly pain from what I ate with your brother at Khaybar.”<sup>63</sup> And likewise he cried out to Aisha: “O ‘Aisha! I still feel the pain caused by the food I ate at Khaibar, and at this time, I feel as if my aorta is being cut from that poison.”<sup>64</sup>

Another tradition represents the poisoning not as the work of an individual woman, but as a plot of the Jews, who are again portrayed as inveterate liars and schemers. According to this version, after the conquest of Khaybar, the Jews gave Muhammad the gift of a roasted sheep which had been poisoned. Muhammad, sensing the plot, commanded: “Let all the Jews who have been here, be assembled before me.” When this was done, Muhammad said: “I am going to ask you a question. Will you tell the truth?” After their affirmative reply, he asked them: “Who is your father?” On hearing their answer (which is not recorded by the tradition), the Prophet of Islam declared, “You have told a lie,” and gave them the correct answer.

The Jews acknowledged that Muhammad was right. He then asked them: “Will you now tell me the truth, if I ask you about something?” Again receiving an affirmative reply, he asked, “Who are the people of the hellfire?”

According to the hadith, they answered: “We shall remain in the (Hell) Fire for a short period, and after that you will replace us.”

Muhammad would have none of this: “You may be cursed and humiliated in it! By Allah, we shall never replace you in it.” And again: “Will you now tell me the truth if I ask you a question?” Receiving yet another assurance that they would, Muhammad asked: “Have you poisoned this sheep?”

They admitted that they had indeed poisoned it. Asked why, they answered as did Zaynab bint al-Harith: “We wanted to know if you were a liar in which case we would get rid of you, and if you are a prophet then the poison would not harm you.”<sup>65</sup>

## The spoils of Khaybar

With Khaybar conquered, it was time to divide up the spoils. Aisha remembered that as the Muslims entered the Khaybar oasis, they exclaimed, “Now we will eat our fill of dates!”<sup>66</sup>

One of the Muslim warriors, Dihya bin Khalifa, came to Muhammad and said: “O Allah’s Prophet! Give me a slave girl from the captives.” The Prophet of Islam was agreeable, telling Dihya: “Go and take any slave girl.” Dihya chose a woman named Safiyya bint Huyayy.<sup>67</sup> Safiyya was the daughter of Huyayy bin Akhtab, who had induced the Banu Qurayzah Jews to repudiate their alliance with Muhammad. Muhammad had killed Huyayy along with the rest of the men of the Qurayzah. Safiyya’s husband was Kinana ibn Rabi, who had just been tortured and killed by the warriors of jihad. Once captured herself, she had won the admiration of the warriors of Islam, who told their prophet: “We have not seen the like of her among the captives of war.”<sup>68</sup> One man added: “O Allah’s Messenger! You gave Safiyya bint Huyayy to Dihya and she is the chief-mistress of (the ladies) of the tribes of Quraiza and An-Nadir, she befits none but you.”<sup>69</sup>

Muhammad accordingly called for Dihya and Safiyya. When the Prophet of Islam saw Safiyya, he told Dihya: “Take any slave girl other than her from the captives.” Muhammad then immediately freed her and married her himself—since she agreed to convert to Islam, she was able to be elevated beyond the position of a slave. That night Safiyya was dressed as a bride and a wedding feast was hastily arranged. On the way out of Khaybar

that night, Muhammad halted his caravan as soon as they were outside the oasis, pitched a tent, and consummated the marriage.<sup>70</sup> Safiyya's feelings on going from wife of a Jewish chieftain, to widow, to captive, to wife of the Prophet of Islam in the course of a single day are not recorded.

Khaybar has become a watchword for present-day jihadists. The chant is popular among Palestinians and their allies: "Khaybar, Khaybar, O Jews, the army of Muhammad will return."<sup>71</sup> That can mean nothing less than the destruction of the State of Israel, as surely as the Jewish stronghold of Khaybar was destroyed.

37. Ibid., 381-382.
38. Bukhari, vol. 5, book 64, no. 4065.
39. Ibn Ishaq, 382.
40. Bukhari, vol. 5, book 64, chapter 22.
41. Ibn Ishaq, 386.
42. Ibid., 387. Muhammed was immediately convinced to forbid mutilation, however, Islamic exegetes have justified it today (notably after the Fallujah incident in Iraq in 2004) by appealing to Qur'an 16:126: "If ye punish, then punish with the like of that wherewith ye were afflicted."
43. Bukhari, vol. 5, book 64, no. 4072; Ibn Ishaq, 376.
44. Sayyid Qutb, *Social Justice in Islam*, translated by John B. Hardie and Hamid Algar, revised edition, Islamic Publications International, 2000, 19.
45. Tabari, vol. VII, 158.
46. Ibid., 159.
47. Muslim, book 19, no. 4326.
48. Ibn Ishaq, 437.
49. Ibid., 437.
50. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 70.
51. Ibn Ishaq, 438.
52. Muslim, book 19, no. 4347.

### **Chapter Eight: Casting terror into their hearts**

1. Ibn Ishaq, 450.
2. Ibid., 452.
3. Abu Ja'far Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabari*, Volume VIII, *The Victory of Islam*, Michael Fishbein, translator, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 11.
4. Ibn Ishaq, 452.
5. Tabari, vol. VIII, 12.
6. Ibn Ishaq, 452.
7. Tabari, vol. VIII, 15.
8. Ibid., 16.
9. Ibn Ishaq, 454.
10. Tabari, vol. VIII, 17-18.
11. Ibn Ishaq, 455.
12. Ibn Ishaq, 458; cf. Bukhari, vol. 4, book 56, no. 3030; Muslim, book 32, no. 6303.
13. Ibn Ishaq, 459.
14. Ibid., 460.
15. Bukhari, vol. 4, book 56, no. 2813.

16. Ibn Ishaq, 461.
17. Ibid., 462.
18. Bukhari, vol. 4, book 56, no. 3043.
19. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 93; cf. Ibn Ishaq, 464.
20. Ibn Ishaq, 468-469.
21. Abu-Dawud Sulaiman bin Al-Aash'ath Al-Azdi as-Sijistani, *Sunan abu-Dawud*, Ahmad Hasan, translator, Kitab Bhavan, 1990. Book 38, no. 4390.
22. Ibn Ishaq, 464.
23. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 93.
24. Ibn Ishaq, 464.
25. Bukhari, vol. 5, book 64, no. 4028.
26. W. N. Arafat, "New Light on the Story of Banu Qurayza and the Jews of Medina," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1976, 100-107.
27. Emerick, 226.
28. Armstrong, 207-208.
29. Yaakov Lappin, "UK Islamists: Make Jihad on Israel," YNet News, July 2, 2006.
30. Bukhari, vol. 4, book 57, no. 3128.
31. Ibn Ishaq, 490.
32. Bukhari, vol. 9, book 97, no. 7409.
33. Ahmed ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveller* [*Umdat al-Salik*]: *A Classic Manual of Islamic Sacred Law*, translated by Nuh Ha Mim Keller. Amana Publications, 1999, o9.13.
34. Ibn Ishaq, 491.
35. Muslim, book 25, no. 5334. Other ahadith say that another of Muhammad's wives, Zaynab, was the one who was originally named Barra.
36. Ibn Ishaq, 491.
37. Muslim, book 32, no. 6255.
38. Ibn Ishaq, 492.
39. Ibn Ishaq, 492.
40. Muslim, book 38, no. 6680.
41. Muslim, book 38, no. 6681.
42. Emerick, 233.
43. Ibn Ishaq, 504.
44. Ibid., 504.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibn Ishaq, 509.
47. Emerick, 239.
48. Ibn Ishaq, 511.
49. Ibid.

50. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 132-133.
51. Ibn Ishaq, 515.
52. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 136.
53. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 137.
54. Bukhari, vol. 4, book 57, no. 3152.
55. Muslim, book 10, no. 3761.
56. Ibn Ishaq, 515.
57. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 137.
58. Bukhari, vol. 5, book 64, no. 4200.
59. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 142.
60. Ibn Ishaq, 516.
61. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 249.
62. Bukhari, vol. 3, book 51, no. 2617.
63. Ibn Ishaq, 516.
64. Bukhari, vol. 5, book 64, no. 4428.
65. Bukhari, vol. 4, book 58, no. 3169; cf. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 144.
66. Bukhari, vol. 5, book 64, no. 4242.
67. Bukhari, vol. 1, book 8, no. 371.
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69. Bukhari, vol. 1, book 8, no. 371.
70. Ibid.
71. Muhammad Al-Munajjid, "The true nature of the enmity between the Muslims and the Jews," Al-Minbar.com, <http://www.alminbar.com/khutbaheng/9022.htm>; Steven Emerson, "Prepared Statement of Steven Emerson Before The Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology and Government Information," February 24, 1998. [Http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/6453/emerson.html](http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/6453/emerson.html).

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2. Ibid., 545.
3. Ibid., 546.
4. Ibid., 547.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibn Sa'd, vol. II, 168.
7. *Sunan Abu-Dawud*, book 38, no. 4346.
8. Bukhari, vol. 7, book 76, no. 5727; cf. online edition, vol. 8, book 82, nos. 794-797. <http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadith-sunnah/bukhari/082.sbt.html>.
9. Bukhari, vol. 9, book 87, no. 6878.
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**Robert Spencer** is the director of Jihad Watch, a program of the David Horowitz Freedom Center, and author of the *New York Times* bestseller *The Politically Incorrect Guide™ to Islam (and the Crusades)*, as well as four other books on Islam and terrorism, including *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions about the World's Fastest Growing Faith* and *Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West*, as well as eight monographs and hundreds of articles. He lives in a secure, undisclosed location.

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