

CHAPTER NINE



Victorious through terror

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The conquest of Mecca

THE STAGE WAS NOW SET FOR THE CONQUEST OF MECCA AND Muhammad's triumphant return to his home city, where he had first begun to proclaim the message of Allah. He ordered his men to prepare for a foray to Mecca, and prayed: "O God, take eyes and ears from Quraysh so that we may take them by surprise in their land."¹ The surprise was almost given away by a Muslim who sent a letter to the Quraysh informing them of Muhammad's plans; however, the Muslims intercepted the letter. The traitor, Hatib bin Abu Balta'a, explained that he was a believing Muslim

but he had relatives among the Quraysh, including a son. Muhammad forgave him because Hatib was a veteran of the Battle of Badr. Then he received another revelation from Allah, telling Hatib that as a Muslim, his feelings of filial piety toward the Quraysh were misplaced:

Your ties of kindred and your children will avail you naught upon the Day of Resurrection. He will part you. Allah is Seer of what ye do. There is a goodly pattern for you in Abraham and those with him, when they told their folk: Lo! We are guiltless of you and all that ye worship beside Allah. We have done with you. And there hath arisen between us and you hostility and hate for ever until ye believe in Allah only. (Qur'an 60:1-4)

Muhammad then marched on Mecca with an army of, according to some reports, ten thousand Muslims.² When the Meccans saw the size of their force, which Muhammad exaggerated by ordering his men to build many extra fires during the night as his men were assembled outside the city, they knew that all was lost. Many of the most notable Quraysh warriors now deserted and, converting to Islam, joined Muhammad's forces. As they advanced, they were met by Abu Sufyan himself, who had opposed Muhammad bitterly as a leader of the Quraysh; but now Abu Sufyan wanted to become a Muslim. Allowed into Muhammad's presence, Abu Sufyan recited a poem including these lines:

I was like one going astray in the darkness of the night,
But now I am led on the right track.
I could not guide myself, and he who with God overcame me
Was he whom I had driven away with all my might.

According to Ibn Ishaq, when he got to the lines "he who with God overcame me was he whom I had driven away with all my might," Muhammad "punched him in the chest and explained, 'You did indeed!'"³ But when

Muhammad said, “Woe to you, Abu Sufyan, isn’t it time that you recognize that I am God’s apostle?” Abu Sufyan replied, “As to that I still have some doubt.”⁴ At that, one of Muhammad’s lieutenants, Abbas, responded to Abu Sufyan: “Submit and testify that there is no God but Allah and that Muhammad is the apostle of God before you lose your head.” Abu Sufyan complied.⁵

Apostates to be killed

When Muhammad “forced his entry” into Mecca, according to Ibn Sa’d, “the people embraced Islam willingly or unwillingly.”⁶ The Prophet of Islam ordered the Muslims to fight only those individuals or groups who resisted their advance into the city—except for a list of people who were to be killed, even if they had sought sanctuary in the Ka’bah itself. One of those was Abdullah bin Sa’d, a former Muslim who at one time had been employed by Muhammad to write down the Qur’anic revelations; but he had subsequently apostatized and returned to the Quraysh. He was found and brought to Muhammad along with his brother, and pleaded with the Prophet of Islam for clemency: “Accept the allegiance of Abdullah, Apostle of Allah!” Abdullah repeated this twice, but Muhammad remained impassive. After Abdullah repeated it a third time, Muhammad accepted.

As soon as Abdullah had left, Muhammad turned to the Muslims who were in the room and asked: “Was not there a wise man among you who would stand up to him when he saw that I had withheld my hand from accepting his allegiance, and kill him?”

The companions, aghast, responded: “We did not know what you had in your heart, Apostle of Allah! Why did you not give us a signal with your eye?”

“It is not advisable,” said the Prophet of Islam, “for a Prophet to play deceptive tricks with the eyes.”⁷

Apostasy from Islam had always been for Muhammad a supreme evil. When he was master of Medina, some livestock herders came to the city

and accepted Islam. But they disliked Medina's climate, so Muhammad gave them some camels and a shepherd; once away from Medina, the herders killed the shepherd, released the camels, and renounced Islam. Muhammad had them pursued. When they were caught, he ordered that their hands and feet be amputated (in accord with Qur'an 5:33, which directs that those who cause "corruption in the land" be punished by the amputation of their hands and feet on opposite sides) and their eyes put out with heated iron bars, and that they be left in the desert to die. Their pleas for water, he ordered, must be refused.⁸

The traditions are clear that one of the main reasons that the punishment was so severe was because these men had been Muslims but had "turned renegade." Muhammad legislated for his community that no Muslim could be put to death except for murder, unlawful sexual intercourse, and apostasy.⁹ He said flatly: "Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him."¹⁰

It stains credulity, in light of all this, that Islamic apologists in the West assert that, in the words of one Ibrahim B. Syed, President of the Islamic Research Foundation International of Louisville, Kentucky, "there is no historical record, which indicates that Muhammad (pbuh) or any of his companions ever sentenced anyone to death for apostasy."¹¹ This kind of assertion may be comforting to non-Muslims who would prefer to believe that the notorious capital charges levied in early 2006 against the Afghan convert from Islam to Christianity, Abdul Rahman, were some sort of anomaly. Unfortunately, this claim simply does not accord with the facts of Muhammad's life. That such assertions pass unchallenged only underscores the need for Westerners to become informed about the actual words and deeds of Muhammad—which make the actions of Islamic states much more intelligible than do the words of Islamic apologists in the West.

There were several others in Mecca who were on the list of those to be killed immediately: Abdullah bin Khatal, another apostate from Islam; al-Huwayrith bin Nuqaydh, who had insulted Muhammad, and some others.¹²