

The Persecution Of The Muslims in Makkah: Its Reasons & Its Consequences

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The article discusses the main reasons and results of the Quraysh opposition to the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) and Islam.

After the revelation of: '**Oh you enveloped. Arise and warn**' (Qur'ān: 74:1-2) the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) began to call his close family and friends to Islam. The Prophet's preaching, and the worship of the Muslims, for the next three years was done secretly. At this stage, the opposition to those who embraced the faith was mainly on a family and individual level.

However after Allah revealed '**And warn your tribe of near kindred**' (Qur'ān: 26:214) the Prophet's (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) call became public. He stood on Mount Safa, called the various tribes, and warned them of a severe torment if they did not accept his message of *tawhīd*. Following this public proclamation, a number of verses were revealed refuting idol worship, describing the idolaters as misguided, and threatening them with Hellfire if they did not abstain from idolatry. This open rejection of idolatry deeply offended the Makkans, galvanising them to start a concerted campaign against the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) and his followers.

There were three main factors behind the Quraysh's opposition to Islam; religious, social and economic. We will take each factor in turn.

The primary division between the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) and his opponents was a religious one, or more specifically, the issue of *tawhīd* and shirk. The Makkans believed that Allah was their Creator, and He was all-Powerful, '**And if you asked them: Who created the heavens and the earth, and subjected the sun and the moon, they would surely say Allah**'. (Qur'ān: 29:61). In times of difficulty they would direct all of their worship to Allah alone. However they would also worship other than Allah. Believing that they were too sinful to approach Allah directly, they invented intermediaries between themselves and Allah, whom they would call upon, and ask them to carry their request to Allah. Their goal was to worship Allah, but the way to reach Allah was through these intermediaries. The Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) declared that every act of worship, including supplication, vows, sacrifice, should be directed to Allah alone.

The Ka'bah had hundreds of idols situated inside it the most famous being Hubal. Al-Uzza an idol situated near Makkah, which was visited by pilgrims from all over Arabia. This veneration of idols, as well as certain trees (Dhat Anwat) and buildings (the tomb of al-Lat) was deeply engrained in the psyche of the Makkans and they deeply resented anyone challenging this practice which they had inherited from their forefathers.

The idea of Prophethood being granted to someone who was poor, and an orphan was antithetical to the Quraysh. Al-Walid in al-Mughirah complained that he was more deserving of Prophethood due to his high status. '**And they said: why is not this Qur'ān sent down to a leading man in either of the two towns**' (Qur'ān: 43:31). They also contended that Allah should send an angel as a Prophet, and not a mere mortal.

Finally, the Makkans rejected the concept of Resurrection believing that it was impossible for decayed bones to be brought back to life. **'They say, what! When we die and become dust and bones, can we really be raised up again'**. (Qur'ān:52:82).

Islam was also a threat to the social customs of the Makkans. It meant that century old traditions; fornication, robbery, deception, oppression of the women, slaves and the poor and the burying alive of female children, would have to come to an end. This is why the Makkans were willing to accept the personal leadership of the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) if he abandoned his mission, as this did not mean an end to their traditional way of life. However, the acceptance of Islam as a religion meant an end to any tradition or belief that conflicted with the Qur'ān.

Tribal differences also played a part in the opposition particularly from Banu Umayyah and Banu Makhzum. Acceptance of Islam meant that the powerful tribal leaders would have to submit to a previously uninfluential man from a rival tribe. There were further consequences. Tribes from all over Arabia made their annual pilgrimage to the Ka'bah to worship their idols in and around Makkah. An important spin off from this was that Makkah become an important commercial centre. Abandoning idol worship would have three main consequences; the Quraysh would lose their position of priestly class, this in turn would threaten their financial gains from the pilgrimage, and finally they feared that a coalition of tribes might oust them as guardians of the Ka'bah. **'And they say, if we followed the guidance with you, we would be ousted from our land'** (Qur'ān: 28:57).

Finally the memory of Abrahah's fateful attempt to destroy the Ka'bah was still fresh in the minds of the Makkans. The latter saw some similarity between the Prophet's message and Christianity, and hence rejected it.

Results of Quraysh's opposition to Islam.

There were three main results of the Quraysh's opposition to Islam.

Mohar 'Alī (rahimahullah) mentions that a number of converts were excommunicated from their tribes rendering them extremely vulnerable to persecution and even death. Sixteen Muslims emigrated to Abyssinia to seek refuge with a Christian king who was known for his justice. A second migration to Abyssinia, involving 98 Muslims, also took place. The effect of this migration showed that the intense persecution by the Makkans had not met its desired objective. Islam was introduced to a new continent, an upshot of this was that a delegation of 20 Christians came to the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) and embraced Islam. The Negus also embraced Islam.

Secondly 'Umar's (may Allah be pleased with him) determined resolve to kill the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) led him on a journey that culminated with his acceptance of Islam. Likewise, Hamzah, (may Allah be pleased with him) the Prophet's uncle, out of tribal loyalty, was outraged that Abū Jahl assaulted his nephew. After, retaliating on behalf of the Prophet, Hamza declared his conversion to Islam.

Thirdly, the intense persecution meant that the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) had to look elsewhere (outside Makkah) to deliver the message and ask for support. Most of the tribes refused him, but a number of prominent Medinians from the Aws and Khazraj tribes, on a visit for pilgrimage, accepted his message, and pledged allegiance to the Prophet (sallallaahu alayhi wa sallam) in what was known as the first and second pledges of Aqabah. Islam spread in Medina,

opening the way for the Muslims to migrate to Medina, to practice Islam openly without fear of persecution, and establish a city state that was to convey Islam far beyond its borders.

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