

An-Nu`man ibn Muqarrin

The tribe of Muzaynah had their habitations some distance from Yathrib on the caravan route which linked the city to Makkah. News of the Prophet's arrival in Yathrib spread rapidly and soon reached the Muzaynah through members of the tribe who had left and returned.

One evening the chieftain of the tribe, an-Nu`man ibn Maqarrin, sat among the elders and other members of the tribe and addressed them,

"O my people, by God, we have learnt only good about Muhammad, and of His mission we have heard nothing but mercy, kindness and justice. What's wrong with us? Why do we tarry while people are hastening to him?"

"As for myself," he continued, "I have made up my mind to leave early in the morning to join him. Whoever of you wishes to go with me, let him get ready."

An-Nu`man must have been a persuasive chieftain. His words had a wondrous effect on the ears of his people. The following morning an-Nu`man's ten brothers and four hundred horsemen of the Muzaynah were all ready and prepared to go with him to Yathrib to meet the Prophet, may God bless him and grant him peace, and enter the religion of Islam.

An-Nu`man however felt embarrassed to go to the Prophet with such a numerous following without carrying any presents for him and the Muslims. There wasn't much he could carry anyway. That year was a year of drought and famine for the Muzaynah and much of their livestock and crops had perished. Still, an-Nu`man went around the dwellings of his fellow tribesmen and gathered up whatever sheep and goats were left. These he drove before him and made his way to Madinah. There in the presence of the Prophet, he and his fellow tribesmen announced their acceptance of Islam.

The whole of Madinah was agog with excitement with the coming of an-Nu`man and his companions. Never before had there been a single family with all eleven brothers accepting Islam at the same time together with four hundred horsemen. The noble Prophet was exceedingly glad and rejoiced greatly. Indeed, the sincerity of their effort was accepted and commended by God Almighty when He revealed the following words of the Quran to the Prophet:

"And among the nomad Arabs are such as believe in God and the Last Day, and regard all that they spend in God's cause as a means of drawing them nearer to God and of (their being remembered in) the Apostle's prayers. Oh, verily, it shall (indeed)

be a means of (God's) nearness to them, (for) God will admit them into His grace. Verily God is much-Forgiving, most Merciful."

(The Quran, Surah at-Tawbah, 9:99).

An-Nu`man lived under the guidance of the Prophet and participated in all the campaigns he waged with valor and dedication. In the time of Abu Bakr, he and the people of Muzaynah played a major and commendable role in putting an end to the fitnah of apostasy. During the caliphate of Umar al-Farooq, an-Nu`man distinguished himself, in particular, in the encounters with the Sasanian Empire.

Shortly before the Battle of Qadisiyyah, the commander of the Muslim forces Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas sent a delegation to the Sasanian Emperor, Yazdegerd. The delegation was headed by an-Nu`man ibn Muqarrin and its main purpose was to invite the emperor of Islam. When an-Nu`man and his delegation reached Ctesiphon, the Sasanian capital, the people of the city looked upon them with curiosity and some disdain. They remarked on their simple appearance, their rough clothes and shoes and their weak-looking horses. The Muslims were in no way overwhelmed and sought an audience with Yazdegerd. He granted them permission, summoned an interpreter and said to him,

"Say to them (the Muslims): why have you come to our dominions and why do you want to invade us? Perhaps, you have designs on us... and seek to venture against us because we are preoccupied with you. But we do not wish to inflict punishment on you."

An-Nu`man turned to his men and said,

"If you wish, I shall reply to him on your behalf. But if any one of you wants to speak let him do so first."

The Muslims told an-Nu`man to speak and turning to the Emperor, said, "This man speaks with our tongue so do listen to what he says." An-Nu`man began by praising and glorifying God and invoking peace and blessings on His Prophet. Then he said,

"Indeed, God has been Kind and Merciful to us and has sent to us a Messenger to show us the good and command us to follow it; to make us realize what is evil and forbade us from it.

The Messenger promised us if we were to respond to what he summoned us, God would bestow on us the good of this world and the good of the hereafter.

Not much time has elapsed but God has given us abundance in place of hardship, honor in place of humiliation and mercy and brotherhood in place of our former enmity.

The Messenger has commanded us to summon mankind to what is best for them and to begin with those who are our neighbors.

We therefore invite you to enter into our religion. It is a religion which beautifies and promotes all good and which detests and discourages all that is ugly and reprehensible. It is a religion which leads its adherents from the darkness of tyranny and unbelief to the light and justice of faith.

Should you respond positively to us and come to Islam, it would be our duty to introduce the Book of God in your midst and help you to live according to it and rule according to its laws. We would then return and leave you to conduct your own affairs.

Should you refuse, however, to enter the religion of God, we would take the jizyah from you and give you protection in return. If you refuse to give the jizyah, we shall declare war on you."

Yazdegerd was angry and furious at what he had heard and said in ridicule, "Certainly I do not know of a nation on earth who is more wretched than you and whose numbers are so few, who are more divided and whose condition is more evil. We used to delegate your affairs to our provincial governors and they exacted obedience from you on our behalf."

Then softening his tone somewhat, he continued, but with greater sarcasm, "If there is any need which has pushed you to come to us, we would enlist forces to help you make your lands fertile. We would clothe your leaders and the notables of your people and place a king from among ourselves over you who would be gentle to you."

One of an-Nu`man's delegation responded sharply to this and Yazdegerd flew into a rage once more and shouted, "Were it for the fact that ambassadors are not killed, I would kill you all. "Get up. You shall have nothing from me. And tell your commander that I am sending Rustum against him to bury him and you together in the ditch of al Qadisiyyah."

Yazdegerd then called for a basketful of earth and ordered that it should be borne outside the city gates by the one whom the Muslims considered to be the most noble among them as a sign of humiliation. 'Asim the son of 'Umar accepted the load as a happy augury and took it to the commander-in-chief, Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas, and said to him,

"Accept our congratulations for the victory. The enemy has voluntarily surrendered his territory to us."

The Battle of Qadisiyyah ensued and after four days of bitter fighting, the Muslim forces emerged victorious. The victory paved the way for the Muslim advance into the plains of the Euphrates and the Tigris. The Persian capital, Ctesiphon, fell and this was followed by a number of engagements as the Persians withdrew northwards.

Despite other defeats and setbacks, Yazdegerd refused to yield and constantly organized new levies to attack the Muslims and foment insurrection in the provinces which had come under Muslim control.

'Umar had counselled moderation on his generals and ordered them not to press too far eastwards. However he received news of a massive Persian mobilization of about 150,000 warriors against the Muslims. He thought of leaving Madinah and facing the massive threat himself. He was advised against this by prominent Muslims in Madinah who suggested instead that he should appoint a military commander to confront the grave situation.

"Show me a man whom I can appoint for this task." he said.

"You know your army best, O Ameer al-Mu'mineen," they replied and after some thought 'Umar exclaimed,

"By God, I shall appoint as commander-in-chief of the Muslim army a man who, when the two armies meet, will be the most active. He is an-Nu`man ibn Muqarrin al-Muzani."

To him, 'Umar dispatched a letter:

"From the servant of God, Umar ibn al-Khattab, to an- Nu`man ibn Muqarrin:

I have received news that large numbers of Persians have gathered to fight you in the city of Nihawand. When this my letter reaches you go forward (to confront them) with the help of God, with whoever of the Muslims are with you. Don't take the Muslims over too difficult terrain lest they may be hurt, for one Muslim person is dearer to me than a hundred thousand dinars. And Peace be unto you."

An-Nu`man responded to the orders of the Ameer al-Mu'mineen and mobilized the Muslim forces. He dispatched an advanced detachment of cavalry to reconnoiter the approaches of the city. Just outside Nihawand, the horses stopped and despite prodding would go no further. The riders dismounted and discovered iron nails in the horses' hooves. They looked around and found that all approaches to the city were strewn with these iron spikes to halt the advance of the Muslim army. On being informed of this, an-Nu`man ordered the horsemen to remain where they were and at nightfall to light fires for the enemy to see them. They were also to feign fear and defeat in order to entice the enemy to come out to them and in the process clear the approaches of the iron spikes. The ruse worked. When the Persians saw the vanguard

of the Muslim army appearing dejected and defeated before them, they sent workers to clear the area of the spikes. These workers were captured by the Muslim cavalry who gained control of the approaches to the city.

An-Nu`man pitched camp on the outskirts of the city and decided to make a determined assault on the city. He addressed his soldiers:

"I shall say Allahu Akbar three times. At the first time, get yourselves ready (by performing your toilet and making wudu'). At the second time, let every man of you get ready his weapons and gird them on. And the third time, I shall move against the enemies of God and you must join in the attack with me."

He went on:

"And if an-Nu`man is killed, let no one tarry over him. For I shall (now) make a supplication to God Almighty and I want every one of you to say 'Ameen'."

He then prayed,

"May God grant martyrdom to an-Nu`man this day and may He grant victory to the Muslims."

Three times an-Nu`man shouted Allahu Akbar. On the third time, he plunged into the ranks of the enemies and the Muslims rushed on behind him. They were outnumbered six to one but inflicted terrible losses on the Persians.

An-Nu`man received a mortal blow during the battle. His brother took the standard from his hand, and covered him with a burdah (mantle) and concealed his death from the others.

The Muslim forces emerged victorious. The Persians never recovered themselves after this battle which Muslim historians have called "the Victory of Victories".

The battle over, the victorious soldiers asked for their valiant commander. His brother lifted the burdah and said,

"This is your Ameer. God has shown him victory and blessed him with martyrdom."

When the news was brought to 'Umar in Madinah, a companion who was with him said,

"I saw Umar, may God be pleased with him. When he heard of the death of an-Nu`man ibn Muqarrin,

he placed his head in his hands and began to cry."

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