

Ghazwa Tabuk

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The Campaign to Tabuk was the result of conflict with the Roman Empire that had started even before the conquest of Makkah. One of the missions sent after the Treaty of Hudaibiyah to different parts of Arabia visited the clans which lived in the northern areas adjacent to Syria. The majority of these people were Christians who were under the influence of the Roman Empire. Contrary to all the principles of the commonly accepted international law they killed fifteen members of the delegation near a place known as Zat-u-Talah (or Zat-i-Itlah). Only Ka'ab bin Umair Ghifari the head of the delegation succeeded in escaping and reporting the sad incident. Besides this Shurahbil bin Amr the Christian governor of Busra who was directly under the Roman Caesar had also put to death Haritli bin Umair the ambassador of the Holy Prophet who had been sent to him on a similar mission.

These events convinced the Holy Prophet that a strong action should be taken in order to make the territory adjacent to the Roman Empire safe and secure for the Muslims. Accordingly in the month of Jamadi-ul-Ula A. H. 8 he sent an army of three thousand towards the Syrian border. When this army reached near Ma'an the Muslims learnt that Shurahbil was marching with an army of one hundred thousand to fight with them and that the Caesar who himself was at Hims had sent another army consisting of one hundred thousand soldiers under his brother Theodore. But in spite of such fearful news the brave small band of the Muslims marched on fearlessly and encountered the big army of Shurahbil at M'utah. And the result of the encounter in which the Muslims were fighting against fearful odds (the ratio of the two armies was 1:33) as very favorable for the enemy utterly failed to defeat them. This proved very helpful for the propagation of Islam. As a result those Arabs who were living in a state of semi-independence in Syria and near Syria and the clans of Najd near Iraq who were under the influence of the Iranian Empire turned towards Islam and embraced it in thousands. For example the people of Bani Sulaim (whose chief was Abbas bin Mirdas Sulaimi) Ashja'a Ghatafan Zubyan Fazarah etc. came into the fold of Islam at the same time. Above all Farvah bin 'Amral Juzami who was the commander of the Arab armies of the Roman Empire embraced Islam during that time and underwent the trial of his Faith in a way that filled the whole territory with wonder. When the Caesar came to know that Farvah had embraced Islam he ordered that he should be arrested and brought to his court. Then the Caesar said to him You will have to choose one of the two things. Either give up your Islam and win your liberty and your former rank or remain a Muslim and face death. He calmly chose Islam and sacrificed his life in the way of the Truth.

No wonder that such events as these made the Caesar realize the nature of the danger that was threatening his Empire from Arabia. Accordingly in 9 A. H. he began to make military preparations to avenge the insult he had suffered at

M'utah. The Ghassanid and other Arab chiefs also began to muster armies under him. When the Holy Prophet who always kept himself well-informed even of the minutest things that could affect the Islamic Movement favorably or adversely came to know of these preparations he at once understood their meaning. Therefore without the least hesitation he decided to fight against the great power of the Caesar. He knew that the show of the slightest weakness would result in the utter failure of the Movement which was facing three great dangers at that time. First the dying power of 'ignorance' that had almost been crushed in the battlefield of Hunain might revive again. Secondly the Hypocrites of Al-Madinah who were always on the look-out for such an opportunity might make full use of this to do the greatest possible harm to it. For they had already made preparations for this and had through a monk called Abu Amir, sent secret messages of their evil designs to the Christian king of Ghassan and the Caesar himself. Besides this, they had also built a mosque near Al-Madinah for holding secret meetings for this purpose. The third danger was of an attack by the Caesar himself, who had already defeated Iran, the other great power of that period, and filled with awe the adjacent territories. It is obvious that if all these three elements had been given an opportunity of taking a concerted action against the Muslims, Islam would have lost the fight it had almost won. That is why in this case the Holy Prophet made an open declaration for making preparations for the Campaign against the Roman Empire, which was one of the two greatest empires of the world of that period. The declaration was made though all the apparent circumstances were against such a decision: for there was famine in the country and the long awaited crops were about to ripen: the burning heat of the scorching summer season of Arabia was at its height and there was not enough money for preparations in general, and for equipment and conveyance in particular. But in spite of these handicaps, when the Messenger of Allah realized the urgency of the occasion, he took this step which was to decide whether the Mission of the Truth was going to survive or perish. The very fact that he made an open declaration for making preparations for such a campaign to Syria against the Roman Empire showed how important it was, for this was contrary to his previous practice. Usually he took every precaution not to reveal beforehand the direction to which he was going nor the name of the enemy whom he was going to attack; nay, he did not move out of Al-Madinah even in the direction of the campaign.

All the parties in Arabia fully realized the grave consequences of this critical decision. The remnants of the lovers of the old order of 'ignorance' were anxiously waiting for the result of the Campaign, for they had pinned all their hopes on the defeat of Islam by the Romans. The 'hypocrites' also considered it to be their last chance of crushing the power of Islam by internal rebellion, if the Muslims suffered a defeat in Syria. They had, therefore, made full use of the Mosque built by them for hatching plots and had employed all their devices to render the Campaign a failure. On the other side, the true Believers also realized fully that the fate of the Movement for which they had been exerting their utmost for the last 22 years was now hanging in the balance. If they showed courage on that critical occasion, the doors of the whole outer world would be thrown open for the Movement to spread. But if they showed weakness or cowardice, then all the work they had done in Arabia would end in smoke. That is why these lovers of Islam began to make enthusiastic preparations for the Campaign. Everyone of them tried to surpass the other in making contributions for the provision of equipment for it. Hadrat Uthman

and Hadrat Abdur Rehman bin Auf presented large sums of money for this purpose. Hadrat Umar contributed half of the earnings of his life and Hadrat Abu Bakr the entire earnings of his life. The indigent Companions did not lag behind and presented whatever they could earn by the sweat of their labor and the women parted with their ornaments. Thousands of volunteers, who were filled with the desire of sacrificing their lives for Islam, came to the Holy Prophet and requested that arrangements for weapons and conveyance be made for them so that they should join the expedition. Those who could not be provided with these shed tears of sorrow; the scene was so pathetic that it made the Holy Prophet sad because of his inability to arm them. In short, the occasion became the touchstone for discriminating a true believer from a hypocrite. For, to lag behind in the Campaign meant that the very relationship of a person to Islam was doubtful. Accordingly, whenever a person lagged behind during the journey to Tabuk, the Holy Prophet, on being informed, would spontaneously say, "Leave him alone. If there be any good in him, Allah will again join him with you, and if there be no good in him, then thank Allah that He relieved you of his evil company".

In short, the Holy Prophet marched out towards Syria in Rajab A.H. 9, with thirty thousand fighters for the cause of Islam. The conditions in which the expedition was undertaken may be judged from the fact that the number of camels with them was so small that many of them were obliged to walk on foot and to wait for their turns for several had to ride at a time on each camel. To add to this, there was the burning heat of the desert and the acute shortage of water. But they were richly rewarded for their firm resolve and sincere adherence to the cause and for their perseverance in the face of those great difficulties and obstacles.

When they arrived at Tabuk, they learnt that the Caesar and his allies had withdrawn their troops from the frontier and there was no enemy to fight with. Thus they won a moral victory that increased their prestige manifold and, that too, without shedding a drop of blood. In this connection, it is pertinent to point out that the general impression given by the historians of the campaigns of the Holy Prophet about the Campaign of Tabuk is not correct. They relate the event in a way as if the news of the mustering of the Roman armies near the Arabian frontier was itself false. The fact is that the Caesar had begun to muster his armies, but the Holy Prophet forestalled him and arrived on the scene before he could make full preparations for the invasion. Therefore, believing that "discretion is the better part of valor," he withdrew his armies from the frontier. For he had not forgotten that the three thousand fighters for the cause of Islam had rendered helpless his army one hundred thousand strong at M'utah. He could not, therefore, even with an army of two hundred thousand, dare to fight against an army of thirty thousand, and that, too, under the leadership of the Holy Prophet himself. When the Holy Prophet found that the Caesar had withdrawn his forces from the frontier, he considered the question whether it would be worthwhile to march into the Syrian territory or to halt at Tabuk and turn his moral victory to political and strategic advantage. He decided on the latter course and made a halt for twenty days at Tabuk. During this time, he brought pressure on the small states that lay between the Roman Empire and the Islamic State and were at that time under the influence of the Romans, and subdued and made them the tributaries of the Islamic State. For instance, some Christian chiefs Ukaidir bin Abdul Malik Kindi of Dumatul Jaiidal, Yuhanna bin D'obah of Ailah, and the chiefs of Maqna, Jarba' and

Azruh also submitted and agreed to pay Jizyah to the Islamic State of Al-Madinah. As a result of this, the boundaries of the Islamic State were extended right up to the Roman Empire, and the majority of the Arab clans, who were being used by the Caesar against Arabia, became the allies of the Muslims against the Romans. Above all, this moral victory of Tabuk afforded a golden opportunity to the Muslims to strengthen their hold on Arabia before entering into a long conflict with the Romans. For it broke the back of those who had still been expecting that the old order of 'ignorance' might revive in the near future, whether they were the open upholders of shirk or the hypocrites who were hiding their shirk under the garb of Islam. The majority of such people were compelled by the force of circumstances to enter into the fold of Islam and, at least, make it possible for their descendants to become true Muslims. After this a mere impotent minority of the upholders of the old order was left in the field, but it could not stand in the way of the Islamic Revolution for the perfection of which Allah had sent His Messenger.