

Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum

Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum was a cousin of Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, Mother of the Believers, may God be pleased with her. His father was Qays ibn Said and his mother was Aatikah bint Abdullah. She was called Umm Maktum (Mother of the Concealed One) because she gave birth to a blind child.

Abdullah witnessed the rise of Islam in Makkah. He was amongst the first to accept Islam. He lived through the persecution of the Muslims and suffered what the other companions of the Prophet experienced. His attitude, like theirs, was one of firmness, staunch resistance and sacrifice. Neither his dedication nor his faith weakened against the violence of the Quraysh onslaught. In fact, all this only increased his determination to hold on to the religion of God and his devotion to His messenger.

Abdullah was devoted to the noble Prophet and he was so eager to memorize the Quran that he would not miss any opportunity to achieve his hearts desire. Indeed, his sense of urgency and his insistence could sometimes have been irritating as he, unintentionally, sought to monopolize the attention of the Prophet.

In this period, the Prophet, peace be upon him, was concentrating on the Quraysh notables and was eager that they should become Muslims. On one particular day, he met Utbah ibn Rabiah and his brother Shaybah, Amr ibn Hisham better known as Abu Jahl, Umayyah ibn Khalaf and Walid ibn Mughirah, the father of Khalid ibn Walid who was later to be known as Sayf Allah or 'the sword of God'. He had begun talking and negotiating with them and telling them about Islam. He so much wished that they would respond positively to him and accept Islam or at least call off their persecution of his companions.

While he was thus engaged, Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum came up and asked him to read a verse from the Quran. "O messenger of God," he said, "teach me from what God has taught you."

The Prophet frowned and turned away from him. He turned his attention instead to the prestigious group of Quraysh, hoping that they would become Muslims and that by their acceptance of Islam they would bring greatness to the religion of God and strengthen his mission. As soon as he had finished speaking to them and had left their company, he suddenly felt partially blinded and his head began to throb violently. At this point the following revelation came to him:

"He frowned and turned away when the blind man approached him ! Yet for all you knew, (O Muhammad), he might perhaps have grown in purity or have been reminded of the Truth, and helped by this reminder. Now as for him who believes himself to be self-sufficient, to him you gave your whole attention, although you are not accountable for

his failure to attain to purity. But as for him who came unto you full of eagerness and in awe of God, him did you disregard.

Nay, verily, this is but a reminder and so, whoever is willing may remember Him in the light of His revelations blest with dignity, lofty and pure, borne by the hands of messengers, noble and most virtuous.'

(Surah Abasa 80: 116)

These are the sixteen verses which were revealed to the noble Prophet about Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, sixteen verses that have continued to be recited from that time till today and shall continue to be recited.

From that day the Prophet did not cease to be generous to Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum. to ask him about his affairs, to fulfill his needs and take him into his council whenever he approached. This is not strange. Was he not censured by God in a most severe manner on Abdullah's account? In fact, in later years, he often greeted Ibn Umm Maktum with these words of humility:

"Welcome unto him on whose account my Sustainer has rebuked me." When the Quraysh intensified their persecution of the Prophet and those who believed with him, God gave them permission to emigrate. Abdullah's response was prompt. He and Musab ibn Umayr were the first of the Companions to reach Madinah.

As soon as they reached Yathrib, he and Musab began discussing with the people, reading the Quran to them and teaching them the religion of God. When the Prophet, upon whom be peace, arrived in Madinah, he appointed Abdullah and Bilal ibn Rabah to be muadh-dhins for the Muslims, proclaiming the Oneness of God five times a day, calling man to the best of actions and summoning them to success .

Bilal would call the adhan and Abdullah would pronounce the iqamah for the Prayer. Sometimes they would reverse the process. During Ramadan, they adopted a special routine. One of them would call the adhan to wake people up to eat before the fast began. The other would call the adhan to announce the beginning of dawn and the fast. It was Bilal who would awaken the people and Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum who would announce the beginning of dawn.

One of the responsibilities that the Prophet placed on Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum was to put him in charge of Madinah in his absence. This was done more than ten times, one of them being when he left for the liberation of Makkah.

Soon after the battle of Badr, the Prophet received a revelation from God raising the status of the mujahideen and preferring them over the qaideen (those who remain inactive at home). This was in order to encourage the mujahid even further and to spur the qaid to give up his inactivity. This revelation affected ibn Umm Maktum deeply. It pained him to be thus barred from the higher status and he said:

O messenger of God. If I could go on jihad, I would certainly do." He then earnestly asked God to send down a revelation about his particular case and those like him who were prevented because of their disabilities from going on military campaigns.

His prayer was answered. An additional phrase was revealed to the Prophet exempting those with disabilities from the import of the original verse. The full ayah became:

"Not equal are those who remain seated among the believers, except those who possess disabilities, and those who strive and fight in the way of God with their wealth and their persons."

(Surah an-Nisaa, 4: 95).

In spite of thus being excused from jihad, the soul of Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum refused to be content with staying among those who remained at home when an expedition was in progress. Great souls are not content with remaining detached from affairs of great moment. He determined that no campaign should by-pass him. He fixed a role for himself on the battle field. He would say: "Place me between two rows and give me the standard. I will carry it for you and protect it, for I am blind and cannot run away. "

In the fourteenth year after the hijrah, Umar resolved to mount a major assault against the Persians to bring down their State and open the way for the Muslim forces. So he wrote to his governors:

"Send anyone with a weapon or a horse or who can offer any form of help to me. And make haste."

Crowds of Muslims from every direction responded to Umar's call and converged on Madinah. Among all these was the blind mujahid Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum. Umar appointed Saud ibn Abi Waqqas commander over the army, gave him instructions and bade him farewell. When the army reached Qadisiyyah, Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum was prominent, wearing a coat of armor and fully prepared. He had vowed to carry and protect the standard of the Muslims or be killed in the process.

The forces met and engaged in battle for three days. The fighting was among the most fierce and bitter in the history of the Muslim conquests. On the third day, the Muslims achieved a mighty victory as one of the greatest empires in the world collapsed and one of the most secure thrones fell. The standard of Tawhid was raised in an idolatrous land. The price of this clear victory was hundreds of martyrs. Among them was Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum. He was found dead on the battlefield clutching the flag of the Muslims