

Muslim's Alliance with Christians and Jews



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Muslim Alliance with Christians

Introduction

It may sound strange to some ears, these days, to hear about Muslim/Christian or Muslim/Jewish collaborations. However, the fabric of Islam and the reality of history point out the legitimacy of these facts. Many Christians, and perhaps Muslims, do not know that there were several instances of cooperation between Muslims and Christians and Muslims and Jews during the rising of Islam in defense of justice and against the Idolaters.

Islam was born into a community of idol-worshippers in Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula in 622 AD. Christianity and Judaism followers were mainly in the neighboring Medina and Najran regions of the Arabian Peninsula. When Prophet Muhammad delivered Islam to his people, he was faced with much opposition from the Pagan Quraysh of Mecca. During the first few years, the Prophet was only able to convert a handful of people to his cause. Among the converts were merchants, nobles, and slaves. The oppression toward the Muslims accelerated and turned into torture and execution. Several of the slaves were tormented to death by their masters (see our article, Focus on Early History of Islam (A Refreshing Look at the Sirah) for more details. Among the actions, Prophet Muhammad had pursued to save his people, was to seek protection from Christians. During the later stages of the birth of Islam, in Medina, the Prophet and the Jews interred into an agreement for protecting their city, Medina against the Pagans. These facts point to the fact that Christian and Jews have a special status in Islam and therefore special relations with Muslims.

(Muhammad), the unbelievers say: 'you are not a messenger.' Say, 'God and those who know of the Scripture (the Jews and Christians), are sufficient witness (to my prophethood).' Qur'an, 13:43

But those firm in knowledge among them (People of the Book) and the faithful believe in what God has revealed to you (Muhammad) and those before you, and those who are steadfast in prayer, pay their religious tax and believe in God and the day of Judgement. They all will receive a high reward from Us. Qur'an 2:4

(Muhammad), We have sent revelations to you just as were sent to Noah and the prophets who lived after him and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, his decedents, Jesus and Job, Jonah, Aron, And Solomon. We gave the Psalms to David. Qur'an, 4:162-163

And most undoubtedly some of the People of the Book believe in Allah, and (in) that which has been revealed to you (Muhammad), and (in) that which has been revealed to them, bowing in humility to Allah; they will not sell the signs of Allah for a miserable gain! For them is a reward with their Lord; surely Allah is quick in account. Qur'an, 3:199

The Prophet (p) also said:

Know if anyone (Muslim) commits injustice, insults aggravates, mistreats or abuses a person of the People of the Book (protected, by the state or an agreement), he will have to answer me (for his immoral action) on the Day of Judgment. -Abi Yousef, Khiraj, see Izzeddin Blaque, Minhaj Alsaliheen, Page 106

It is apparent in the references above that Muslims not only believe in the messages of the previous prophets but they also revere, honor and practice their teachings. This fact made the Muslims emotionally affected by what happened to the followers of those prophets. For example, the Muslims grieved when the Persian idolaters defeated the Byzantine Christians. Angel Gabriel descended, consoling the Muslims and bringing the good tidings that the Christians would be victorious shortly. This revelation forecasted with perfect certainty in Surah Rum:

Alif. Lam. Mim. Defeated has been the Roman Empire in the lands close-by; yet it is they who, notwithstanding their defeat, shall be victorious within a few years. With Allah rests all power of decision in the past and the future. And on that day the believers shall rejoice in Allah's help. He helps whomever He wills since He alone is almighty, a dispenser of grace. Qur'an, 30:1-5

Muslims' Alliance with the Christians of Abyssinia

In the fifth year after the birth of Islam, Prophet Muhammad proposed to his companions to migrate to Abyssinia in an attempt to deliver them from the persecution and the violence of Quraysh. In this regard, the Prophet stated the following:

I propose that you migrate to Abyssinia, where there is a Christian king, well known for his justice. He is said to have not wronged anyone in his kingdom. Al Hafith, al Bidayah we al Nihayah, Volume 3, Page 58

There are two critical underlying facts in the Prophet's proposal showing grounds of Muslim's tolerance towards Christianity. The first underlying fact is that the Prophet proposed a new home for Muslims that

was governed by a Christian king without any reservation about it in being a Christian one. This point is a given and understood the evidence of Islam's readiness to collaborate and work with Christians in promoting goodness and repelling oppression and evil. The second underlying fact in the Prophet's plan is that the Prophet had no reservation of the Christians not accepting his proposal and to work with the Muslims. These underlying facts are a momentous proof that Muslims and Christians were not in conflict, but rather in cooperation. Thus, despite Muslim's and Christian's differences did not prevent the Prophet and the Christians from working together on the many common elements between them. We invite you to read Dr. William Baker's book, *More in Common Than You Think, the Bridge Between Islam and Christianity* for more information on the common ground existing between Islam and Christianity.

As we learned from history, the Prophet's proposal was put to work, and his companions who emigrated to Abyssinia were welcomed and protected by its Christian King Negus. This protection continued despite the fact that Quraysh attempted to get King Negus to expel the believers from his Kingdom.

It was reported that Quraysh had sent Amr Ibn Al'aas to King Negus with lots of precious gifts enticing him to turn down the companions' request for protection and to send them back to Arabia. However, King Negus did not take Amr's request but called the Muslims to meeting with him and his Patriarchs. When he heard their testimony regarding their new faith, the good manners they were promoting, and the mission of peace they were carrying, he did not accept Quraysh's request to turn the Muslims down. He said to the Muslims: "You are free to go about where you may wish in my kingdom. Where ever you go you shall be protected." See Al Hafith, *al Bidayah we al Nihayah*, Volume 3, Page 60

The Muslim continued to live in Abyssinia, under the protection of its King even after the Muslims at home, in Medina in the Arabian Peninsula, had gained strength and were able to protect themselves against Quraysh. During their stay in Abyssinia, the Muslims showed loyalty and allegiance to the country that hosted them. In fact, al Hafith in *al Bidayah we al Nihayah* relates that the immigrant Muslims in Abyssinia had fought alongside the Christian forces of the King against rebels in their country. Al Hafith reported that Muslims joined the soldiers of King Negus fighting rebels in the Kingdom. He stated that al Zubier Ibn al-Awam, who was the leader of a squadron, had swum across the Nile river with his companions to fight the King's enemy on the other side. This act showed Muslim's alliance with the Christians and was driven by Islamic principle of loyalty in returning a good deed for a good deed. God said:

Is there any Reward for good—other than good? Qur'an, 55:60

The Christian Delegation to Prophet Muhammad

Another significant Christian's alliance with Muslims was the Abyssinian Christian delegation to Prophet Muhammad in his exile. In its campaign of violence against Muslims, Quraysh imposed an economic and social sanction on the Prophet and his family in pressuring them to abandoned Islam.

In the eighth year from the beginning of Islam, Quraysh imposed a boycott on the Prophet and his family and forced them to move out of Mecca to an arid and dry narrow valley known as the Abu-Talib Valley. The boycott went on for twenty-eight long months and was in both the social and economic aspects of life. No member of Quraysh could deal, trade, buy or sell, or socialize with the Prophet's clan.

The boycott took its toll on the Prophet and his family. As a result, they had to eat grass, insects, and roots of shrubs. Some of them could not withstand the hardship and had fallen ill and died. Shortly after the boycott was removed, the Prophet's wife Khadeejah and, soon after, his Uncle Abu Talib died. Their deaths were directly related to the long years of malnutrition and hardship condition in exile.

What is essential for us in this story is that the lifting off of the boycott triggered by the Christian delegation from Abyssinia, who visited the Prophet in his exile in the eighth year after the prophethood. In coordination with Ja'ffar ibn Abi Talib, the cousin of the Prophet, and by King Negus of Abyssinia, a Christian/Muslim delegation of thirty-three people was sent to visit and investigate the condition of the Muslims and the ill-treatment they were exposed to by Quraysh. When the commission visited the Prophet in his exile, they were overwhelmed with his wisdom and the verses of the Qur'an he recited to them. Quraysh leaders insulted the Christian delegation for showing sympathy to the Prophet and his family. However, the commission abstained from returning Quraysh's insult, and for this occasion, Allah revealed this verse in Surah 28, Verses 52-55, which state:

Those to whom We sent the Book before this,—they do believe in this (Revelation); and when it is recited to them, they say: We believe therein, for it is the truth from our Lord: Indeed, we have been Muslims (bowing to God's Will) from before this. Twice will they be given their rewards, for

that they have preserved, that they avert evil with good, and that they spend in charity out of what We have given them. And when they hear vain talk, they turn away from there and say: To us our deeds, and to you yours. Qur'an, 28:52-55

Although Quraysh showed anger towards the Christian delegation on the outside, the act of a foreign investigation into their internal affairs, and exposing their inhumane treatment of their people, was a hidden concern that led to the removal of the siege.

Moved either by the fear of an intervention of a foreign power or by the awakening of their conscientious, several leaders of Quraysh, Hisham bin Amr, Zuhair bin Umayyah, Mut'im ibn 'Addi, and Buhtury ibn Hisham agreed to "stop the fool act of the boycott." They planned to call the rest of Quraysh leaders into a public meeting at the Ka'ba to end the boycott. The meeting was a success, and the removal of the boycott was achieved. Thus, the visiting act of the Christian delegation of Abyssinia could have triggered a chain of actions that led to the lifting off of the boycott. This Christian visit was indeed a considerable act of faith that initiated the process of delivering the Prophet and his family out of the mad boycott.

Muslim and Jewish Cooperation

During the rise of Islam and beyond, Muslims and Jews co-existed in harmony for many years. Tolerance and virtue were indivisible parts of Islam that allowed for this unity. In the year 622 CE, Prophet Muhammad (p) migrated from Mecca to Medina ending a 13-years strive in calling the people of Quraysh to Islam and escaping their latest plot to assassinate him. However, in the city of Medina, the Prophet made alliance treaties with the eleven Jewish tribes and authored and dictated the Constitution of Medina, known as Shaheefatul Madina, to be the law of the land inhabited by different ethnic groups and nationalities. This document constituted the law ever to govern unified Jews and Muslims in a single state. "The Jews of Banu 'Awf are one nation with the Muslims; the Jews have their religion, and the Muslims have theirs," is one of its articles.

This historical manifestation established, political rights, citizen obligations, freedom of belief, freedom of speech and trade, the sanctity of life, the prohibition of bloodshed and crime, and the laws of municipalities and justice. The document also secured and promoted cooperation and fraternity among all people of any creed, color, ethnicity, and lineage, and sets out the criterion of righteousness as the base of distinction.

The constitution also spelled out the duties of both the Jews and Muslims to protect each other and their city from their enemies and to uphold justice and promote ethical conduct.

The following is an English translation of the Constitution of Medina, as recorded by Ibn Hisham.

Note: The text of this translation is copied as a whole from the book, *Sunshine at Madinah*, published by Islamic Publication International. No attempt is made to follow the layout of the original. On the contrary, we have, in some places, deliberately departed from the original paragraphing, and added numeral prefixes to the main paragraphs of the translation, for easy reference and understanding. Also see Minhaj Alsaliheen, Page 777, and Albidayah wa Alnihayah, Volume 3, Page 177.

The Messenger of God wrote a document (Stipulating the relationship) between Immigrants and Helpers, in which he made peace with the Jews and pledged himself to them that they will be established in security regarding their religion, wealth and property. He pledged to honor definite rights for them and demanded that they fulfill certain obligations.

The Constitution of Medina reads:

- 1. In the name of Allah the Compassionate the Most Merciful. This is a document dictated by Muhammad the Prophet (p) (governing the relations) between the believers and Muslims from Quraysh and Yathrib (Medina), and those who followed and joined them and strove with them. They are one nation, distinct from all nations. The Immigrants from Quraysh, according to their established customs are bound together and shall ransom their prisoners in the kindness and justice common among believers.*
- 2. The Banu 'Awf (a Jewish tribe), according to their established customs, are bound together as before, each group shall ransom their prisoners in the kindness and justice common among believers. The Banu Sa'idah, the Banu al-Harith, The Banu Jushm and the Banu an-Najjar (Jewish tribes) are likewise.*
- 3. The Banu 'Amr ibn 'Awf, the Banu an-Nabeet, and the Banu al-Aws (Jewish tribes) likewise.*

4. Believers shall not leave anyone among them in destitution by failing to give for him redemption money or blood-wit in kindness.
5. A believer shall not take as an ally a freedman of another believer against him.
6. The God-fearing believers shall be against whoever rebels or him who seeks to spread injustice, or sin or aggression or spread enmity between believers; the hands of every one of them shall be together against him, even if he be a son of one of them.
7. A believer shall not slay a believer for the sake of an unbeliever nor shall he aid an unbeliever against a believer.
8. The bond of God is one, the least of them (believers) may give protection (to a stranger) on behalf of them. Believers are protectors one of another, to the exclusion of outsiders.
9. The Jew who follows us is surely entitled to our support and the same equal rights as any one of us. He shall not be wronged, nor his enemy be assisted.
10. The peace of believers is one and indivisible; no believer shall make a separate peace without other believers, when they are engaged in war in the way of God, except when conditions are deemed fair and equitable to all.
11. In every foray, a rider must take another behind him. The believers must avenge the blood of one another if anyone of them fails to fight in the cause of God. The God-fearing believers follow the best and most upright guidance.
12. No polytheist shall take the property or person of Quraysh under his protection nor shall he intervene on their behalf against a believer.
13. Whoever is convicted of deliberately killing a believer without legitimate cause, shall be liable to retaliation, unless the next of kin is satisfied (with blood money). The believers shall all be against him, and they are bound to keep him under their custody (until either the next of kin is satisfied, or retaliation takes place).
14. It shall not be lawful to a believer who has accepted this document as binding, and who believes in God and the last day, to help an evil-doer or to shelter him. The curse of God and His anger on the Day of Resurrection will be upon him if he does, and neither repentance nor ransom will be received from him.
15. Whenever you have a disagreement amongst you, it must be referred to God and Muhammad.
16. The Jews shall contribute to the cost of war, so long as they are fighting alongside the believers.
17. The Jews of Banu 'Awf are one nation with the Muslims; the Jews have their religion, and the Muslims have theirs, their freedmen and their persons shall be protected except those who behave unjustly or sinfully, for they hurt but themselves and their families. The same applies to the Jews of Banu an-Najjar, Banu al-Harith, Banu Sa'idah, Banu Jusham, Banu al-Aws, Banu Tha'labah, and the Jafnah, clan of the Tha'labah and Banu al-Shua'ibah. Doing good deeds is protection against sinfulness. The freedmen of Tha'labah are as themselves. The close friends of the Jews are as themselves.
18. None of them shall go out to war, save with the permission of Muhammad. But none shall be prevented from taking revenge for a wound inflicted upon him. Whoever kills a man, kills himself and his household, unless it is one who has wronged him, for God would accept that.
19. The Jews must bear their expenses, and the Muslims bear theirs. Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document. Their condition must be one of mutual advice, consultation, and charity rather than harm and aggression.
20. No man is liable for a crime committed by his ally. Support must be given to him who is wronged. The Jews must spend of their wealth, along with the believers, so long as fighting continues.
21. Yathrib (Medina) shall be a sanctuary for the people of this document. A stranger under protection shall be as his protecting host, unharmed and committing no crime. A woman shall not be given protection without the consent of her family.
22. If any dispute likely to cause trouble should arise among the people of this document, it must be referred to God, and to Muhammad.
23. God approves and is pleased with the piety and goodness in this document.
24. Quraysh and their helpers shall not be given protection.
25. The people of this document are bound to help one another against any attack on Yathrib. If they are called to make peace and maintain it, they must do so; and if they make a similar demand on the Muslims, it must be carried out except with one who insists on fighting against their religion.
26. To every small group belongs the share which is their due as members of the larger group which is party to this covenant. The Jews of the Aws and their clients, are entitled to the same rights as any other party to this document, together with the goodness and charity from all parties to it. Charity and good deeds exclude sinfulness and wrongdoing.
27. There is no responsibility except for one's own deeds.
28. God approves of such truth and goodness as is included in this document.
29. This document shall not constitute any protection for the unjust or the wrongdoers.
30. Whoever goes out to fight or stays at home is safe in the city, unless he has committed an injustice or a crime. God is the protector of whoever honors his commitment to this document, and is God-fearing and so is Muhammad, the Messenger of God.

Tolerance of other faiths and the spirit of cooperation with all members of the human family ingrained in the fabric of Islam. Muslims and Jews and Muslims and Christians lived for thousands of years in peace and harmony. When there were conflict and clash between Muslims and Jews, it was not because of the faith, but because of the breaching of certain agreements or for aggression and injustice. As an example, check out our article, [The Prophet of Islam and the Jews: Basis of Conduct, Acceptance, Respect, and Cooperation](#) and then click on "[Other Historical Accounts.](#)"