

Hazrat Asaad bin Zarara

Family

Asad was the son of Zurara ibn Udas and Suwad (al-Furaya) bint Rafi, both of the Malik branch of the Najjar clan of the Khazraj tribe in Medina. He had a brother, Saad, and two sisters, al-Faria and Ruwayba. Saad ibn Muadh, an important chief of the Awstribes, was their maternal first cousin. He married Amira (Umayra) bint Sahl, also from the Malik ibn Najjar clan, and they had three daughters: al-Furaya, Habiba and Kabsha. By 620 he had become the leader of the Najjar clan. Asad was a monotheist; yet he hated the Jews.

Conversion to Islam

Medina was a divided city. The Khazraj and Aws tribes fought each other and also raided the Jews. The Jews warned the polytheists: "A prophet will be sent soon. His day is at hand. We shall follow him and kill you by his aid as Ad and Iram perished."

In 620 Asad had a legal dispute with Dhakwan ibn Abd Qays. During the pilgrimage season that summer, they both travelled to Mecca, hoping that Utba ibn Rabia could settle it for them. Utba told them about Rasulullah SAW, "who believes he is a messenger of God." Rasulullah SAW was at that time looking for military allies against the Quraysh. He offered himself as a prophet to any tribe that would listen. Dhakwan, who knew of Asad's monotheism, told him, "Leave him; this is your creed!"

Together with five friends, Asad met up with Rasulullah SAW just outside Mecca. On hearing that they were of the Khazraj tribe, Rasulullah SAW asked if they were allies of the Jews. They said they were, so he invited them to sit with him. He explained Islam to them and recited the Qur'an. When they heard Rasulullah SAW message they said one to another: "This is the very prophet of whom the Jews warned us. Don't let them get to him before we do!" Asad was the first to accept Rasulullah SAW teachings and become a Muslim, and his five friends followed. Rasulullah SAW asked them to support him in bringing his message to his people. They told him, "No tribe is so divided by hatred and rancour as ours. Perhaps God will unite them through you. So let us go to them and invite them to this religion of yours; and if God unites them in it, then no man will be mightier than you."

They returned to Medina as the city's first Muslims. Asad broke his clan's idols. They told their people about Islam, and the news spread around Medina until Rasulullah SAW had been mentioned in every home.

Mission in Mecca

First Aqaba

In the summer of 621 Asad brought eleven friends to the trade-fair, and they met Rasulullah SAW at al-Aqaba. There they gave him the Pledge of Women: although they pledged allegiance to Rasulullah SAW, there was no mention of war.

When they returned to Medina, Rasulullah SAW sent Musab ibn Umayr with them. Musab lodged in Asad's house. Asad built a mosque on the property of two wards of his clan, close to the location of the future mosque built by Rasulullah SAW . He gathered forty men together, and they met to hear Musab read the Quran to them, teach them about Islam and lead the prayers. Asad took Musab out to the Abdul-Ashhal and Zafar clans teach more people about Islam. This annoyed his cousin, Saad ibn Muadh, who was chief of the Abdul-Ashhal clan. One day Saad challenged Asad as a group of Muslims were sitting comfortably in a garden. Musab explained Islam to Saad, and he was converted. This resulted in the conversion of Saad's whole clan. Asad and Musab continued calling people to Islam until nearly every family included some Muslims.

Second Aqaba

In June 622 a large party of Medinans went to Mecca for the trade-fair. They included Asad, Musab and 74 other Muslims. The Muslims left camp in the middle of the night to meet Rasulullah SAW secretly at al-Aqaba. Rasulullah SAW invited them to make a second pledge of allegiance to him "as you would to your women and children."

According to the Najjar clan, Asad was the first to strike his hand in fealty; but the Abdul-Ashhal clan said that it was Abu'l-Haytham and the Jusham clan said it was al-Baraa ibn Maarur. As Asad took Rasulullah SAW hand, he said: "People, do you know on what basis you give allegiance to Rasulullah SAW ? You give allegiance to him on the basis of fighting the Arabs and non-Arabs, jinn and men." The Medinans replied, "We will fight those who fight and make peace with those who make peace." Rasulullah SAW said, "Give allegiance on the basis that you bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that I am Allah's Messenger; establish the prayer and pay alms; hear and obey. Do not contend the business of his family and deny me what you deny yourselves and your people." They all agreed.

Rasulullah SAW selected twelve men to be leaders of the Muslim community in Medina, "sureties for your people just as the disciples of Jesus son of Mary were responsible to him, while I am responsible for my people." Asad was among the twelve.

The hegira

Musab returned to Mecca so that he would formally qualify as an Immigrant. While he was away, Asad led the prayers at the mosque five times a day. The Muslims from Mecca began to arrive in Medina, where they lodged as guests in the homes of the Medinan converts. It is variously claimed that Talha ibn Ubaydallah and Hamza ibn Abdul-Muttalib stayed at Asad's house.

Death

In spring 623 Asad suffered from an illness, similar to diphtheria or meningitis, that entailed a rattling in his throat. Rasulullah SAW visited him in his sickness, exclaiming, "This is an evil death! The Jews say there is no

defence against it.” He advised Asad to be cauterised. He was burned twice in the medial arm vein and twice on his throat, “and his neck was encircled with the cauterisation.”

Asad died within days, at the beginning of Shawwal, i.e., in April 623.

Rasulullah SAW attended his ritual washing and had him shrouded in three garments; he walked in front of the bier and conducted the funeral prayers.

Asad was said to be the first man buried at Al-Baqi’. Rasulallah

SAW considered Asad’s death a grave misfortune. He worried that the Jews and the hypocrites would say that God would not have allowed the friend of a true prophet to die, but “I have no power from God for myself or my friend.”

Asad left his mother, three daughters, an aunt and some gold and pearl jewellery in the care of Rasulallah SAW . Asad’s womenfolk lived as

Rasulallah SAW dependants among his wives, and he later arranged marriages for Asad’s daughters. Since Asad had not left any sons, the Najjar

asked Rasulallah SAW to appoint a new leader for their clan. Rasulallah

SAW replied, “You are my maternal uncles, and we belong together, so I will be your leader.” The Najjar were pleased to have Rasulallah SAW as their new chief.