

The Prophet (p) Received and Allowed Non-Muslims in his Mosque in Medina

a.) The Prophet (p) Hosted the Christians of Najran in His Mosque

Prophet Muhammad (p) hosted a delegation of 60 Christians from Najran in his Mosque in Medina; they spent three days there.¹ This was during the last (9/10th) year after the Prophet's (p) migration to Medina.

Ibn Ishaq said, "Muhammad bin Ja'far bin Al-Zubair said that, *"The (Najran) delegation came to the Messenger of Allah (p) in Medina, and entered his Masjid (mosque) wearing robes and garments, after the Prophet (p) had prayed the Asr prayer. They accompanied a caravan of camels led by Bani Al-Harith bin Ka'b. The Companions of the Messenger of Allah (p) who saw them said that they never saw a delegation like them after that. When their worship time came, they stood up to perform their worship in the Prophet's (p) Mosque. The Messenger of Allah said: "Let them (worship)" and they prayed towards the East."*"²

b.) The Prophet (p) Allowed the Polytheists from Ta'if into His Mosque

The Prophet Muhammad (p) allowed polytheists from the Arab tribe of Banu Thaqif from Ta'if, and many other non-Muslim communities, into his Mosque (Masjid al-Nabawiyy) in Medina during

¹Seerah bin Hisham, (1/573, 584); Seerah bin Kathir (4/100, 108); Tafsir bn Kathir (1/367, 371); Tabaqat Ibn al-Sa'ad (1/357); Zad al-Ma'ad (3/629) – all cited in Ali Muhy al-Din Al-Qaradaghi, *We and the Other: Substantiating the basis of the Ideal Relation between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Light of the Islamic Jurisprudence*, (Transl. Syed Bashir Ahmad Kashmiri), Kuala Lumpur, 2015, p.196. See also: Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ahkam Ahl al-Dhimma*, Dar al-Ilm Lilmaalayin, Beirut, 1964, p.691

² Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar al-Tayba li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'i, Medina, 1999/1420AH, vol. 2, p.50; Muhammad bin Abi Bakr bin Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Zad al-Ma'ad*, Mu'assasah al-Risalah, 1994, vol.3, p.629. Regarding the narration that the Christian delegates prayed in the mosque, some scholars have questioned the strength of the narration. For example, Abdulqadir and Shuaib al-Arnaut in their editing of *Zad al-Ma'ad*, said that the chain is broken because Muhammad bin Jafar bin Zubayr bn Awwam, the narrator of this narration did not meet any of the companions as said by Ibn Hajar in his *Taqrib al-Tahzib*, Dar al-Rashid, Halab, 1406AH, vol.1, p.1, and vol.2, p.471, no: 5782.

the 9th year of *Hijrah* for peace talks and treaty agreements.³ The Prophet did not view their polytheistic beliefs as a barrier to their entering his Mosque for interfaith dialogue and peace-building purposes! It is clear that he did not hold the view espoused by some Muslims that people of other faiths are “not pure enough” to enter any mosque.

c.) The Prophet (p) Welcomed Christian Visitors from Abyssinia

According to Ibn Ishaq, “...About twenty Christian men from Abyssinia came to see the Messenger of Allah (p) while he was in Mecca. News of him had reached them in Abyssinia, and so they came to Mecca and found him in the Mosque. They sat with him and spoke to him, and asked him questions while men from the Quraish were in their meeting places around the Ka’bah...”⁴

d.) A Non-Muslim War Captive was Kept in the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina

The companion Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet (p) sent a cavalry of troops towards Najd and they arrested a man from the tribe of Banu Hanifah who was called Thumama bin Uthal. He was the chief of Banu Hanifah who had assassinated a number of the Prophet’s (p) Companions, and even plotted to kill the Prophet (p) himself.⁵

He was brought to Medina and tied to one of the pillars of the Prophet’s (p) Mosque. *The Prophet (p) went to see him and said, "What have you got, O Thumama?" He replied, "I have got a good thought, O Muhammad! If you should kill me, you would kill a person who has already killed somebody (among you), and if you should set me free, you would do a favour to one who is grateful; and if you want property, then ask me whatever wealth you want."* He was left till the next day when the Prophet (p) said to him, *"What have you got, Thumama?" He said, "What I told you, i.e. if you set me free, you would do a favor to one who is grateful."* The Prophet (p) left

³ Imtiaz Ahmad, “Friendship with Non-Muslims” in *Speeches for an Inquiring Mind*, Al-Rasheed Printers, Madinah, 2001, p.57; Safy al-Rahman Mubarakfuri, *Al-Rahiq Al-Makhtum (The Sealed Nectar: Biography of the Noble Prophet)*, Dar al-Salam Publishers, Riyadh, 2002, p.522.

⁴ Ibn Hisham, *al-Sirah al-Nabawiyah*, vol.2, p.236.

⁵ Al-Bukhari, *Sahih Bukhari*, hadith no.4372; Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, hadith no.1764.

him till the day after, when he said again, "What have you got, O Thumama?" He said, "I have got what I told you." On that the Prophet (p) said, "Release Thumama." So he (i.e. Thumama) went to a garden of date-palm trees near the Mosque, took a bath, then returned to the Mosque and said, "I testify that none has the right to be worshipped except Allah, and also testify that Muhammad is His Apostle! By Allah, O Muhammad! There was no face on the surface of the earth most disliked by me than yours, but now your face has become the most beloved face to me. By Allah, there was no religion most disliked by me than yours, but now it is the most beloved religion to me. By Allah, there was no town most disliked by me than your town, but now it is the most beloved town to me. Your cavalry arrested me (at the time) when I was intending to perform the `Umra. And now what do you think?" The Prophet (p) gave him good tidings (congratulated him) and ordered him to perform the `Umra. So when he came to Mecca, someone said to him, "You have become a Sabian?" Thumama replied, "No! By Allah, I have embraced Islam with Muhammad, the Apostle of Allah. No, by Allah! Not a single grain of wheat will come to you from Yamamah (in the Najd area) unless the Prophet (p) gives his permission."⁶

Supporting Texts

"Let there be no compulsion in religion..." (Qur'an 2: 256)

"There has come to you enlightenment from your Lord. So whoever will see, does so for [the benefit of] his soul, and whoever is blind [does harm] against it. And [say], 'I am not a guardian over you.'" (Qur'an 6:104)

⁶ Al-Baihaqi, *al-Sunan al-Sugrah*, al-Maktabah al-Shamilah 3.13, vol. 3, p.374; Al- Baihaqi, *al-Sunan al-Sugrah*, Maktabah Dar al-Baz, Makkah, vol.1, p.171; Abu Dawud, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut, vol.3, p.9; Ahmad bin Shu'aib Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Nasa'i, *al-Sunan al-Kubrah*, (edited by Abd al-Gafar Sulaiman al-Bandawi and Sayyid Kusrawi Hasan), Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1991, vol.1 p.107; Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, (edited by Muhammad Zuhair bin Nasir al-Nasir), Dar Tawq al-Najat, vol.1, p.472.

"The good deed and the evil deed cannot be equal. Repel (the evil) with one which is better (i.e. Allah orders the faithful believers to be patient at the time of anger, and to excuse those who treat them badly) then verily he, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a close friend." (Qur'an 41:34)

"...Unto every one of you have We appointed a (different) law (Shari'ah) and way of life (Minhaj). And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community, but (He willed it otherwise) in order to test you by means of what he has revealed unto you. Compete, then, with one another in doing good works! Unto God you all must return, and then he will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ..." (Qur'an 5:48-49)

"As for such (of the unbelievers) as do not fight against you on account of (your) faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity: for verily, God loves those who act equitably." (Qur'an 60:8)

The Prophet (p) said, *"Truly, it is better that a leader should err on the side of forgiveness than on the side of punishment."*⁷

Comments

Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali said, "It is understood from this hadith that Thumamah was a polytheist when he was tied in the Mosque, but embraced Islam after he had been set free. So, there is a proof in this hadith that a polytheist can be allowed into the mosque if permitted by Muslims. The Prophet (p) had once allowed non-Muslim delegates of Tha'if into the Mosque in order to ease or soften their hearts. Waqi' reported from Sufyan (who reported) from Hassan who said that a delegation came to the Prophet (p) from Tha'if, and they entered the Mosque to meet him... This is similar to other Arab non-Muslim delegations and the Christian deputation from Najran, all of whom were allowed into the Mosque of the Prophet (p) and they sat therein with

⁷*Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, hadith no.1011.

the Prophet (p). Also, when the polytheists of Quraish came to ransom the captives of the Battle of Badr, they slept in the Mosque.”⁸

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah said, “*In this (incident of the Christians of Najran) is a (precedence of) permission for them to enter the mosques of Muslims; it makes it possible for them to offer their prayers in the presence of Muslims and in their mosques too, if the situation incidentally demands that.*”⁹ It is necessary to emphasize that the place of worship in this case is the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, which is the second most venerated mosque in the world.¹⁰

Ibn Kathir notes that what is prohibited for non-Muslims to enter is (only) the *Masjid al-Haram* (the Inviolable Mosque in Mecca).¹¹ Thus, the majority of Muslim scholars are of the opinion that non-Muslims are not allowed to visit the sacred mosque in Mecca based on an interpretation of verse 9:28 in the Qur’an.¹²

With regard to other mosques, some *fuqaha’* (jurists) say that it is permissible because there is nothing to indicate that it is not allowed; others say that it is not permissible, drawing on the analogy with the Masjid al-Haram.¹³

In conclusion, it is permissible to allow people of other faiths into the mosque if it serves the interests of *shari’ah* or meets a valid need, such as a person hearing something that may invite him to enter Islam, or because he needs to drink water in the mosque, etc. There are many

⁸ Abd al-Rahman bin Shihab al-Din, Ibn Rajab, *Fath al-Bari*, (edited by Abu Mu’adh Tariq bin ‘Iwad Allah bin Muhammad), Dar Ibn al-Jawzi, Saudi Arabia, 1422AH, vol.2, p.560.

⁹Ibn Qayyim, *Zad al-Ma’ad*, Mu’assasah al-Risalah, Beirut, 1994, vol. 3, p.638. Also cited in Ali Mohiuddin Al-Qaradaghi, *We and the Other: Substantiating the basis of the Ideal Relation between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Light of the Islamic Jurisprudence*, (Transl. Syed Bashir Ahmad Kashmiri), Kuala Lumpur, 2015, p.196-197.

¹⁰*Sahih al-Bukhari*, hadith no.1190; *Sahih Muslim*, hadith no.3325; *Sunan Ibn Majah*, hadith no.1404; *Sunan al-Tirmidhi*, hadith no.325.

¹¹*Tafsir Ibn Kathir (Abridged)*, Darussalam Publishers, Riyadh, vol.4, p.388.

¹² Ibn Ashur, *Al-Tahrir wa al-Tanwir*; Alusi, *Ruh al-Ma’ani*; Nasafi, *Madarik al-Tanzil*; Abu Suud, *Irshad al-Aql al-Salim*; Abu Hayyan, *Bahr al-Muhit*; Suyuti, *Tafsir Jalalayn* under commentary of Qur’an 9:28 in *Al-Maktabah al-Shamilah*, 2nd Edition, 2007.

¹³ According to scholars from the Hanafi School of Law (madhhab) however, “*There is nothing wrong with non-Muslims (dhimmis) entering the Haram of Makkah (al-Masjid al-Haram) and all other mosques. This is the sound opinion in the Madhhab, as mentioned in al-Muhit of Sarakhsi.*” (Al-Shaikh Nisam and a group of Indian Scholars *al-Fatawa al-Hindiyyah*, vol.5, p.346). See also Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur’an al-Azim*, (ed. Mahmud Hassan), Dar Fikr, Beirut, 1994, vol. 2, p.422.

benefits offered by doing this: *“They could hear the speeches and sermons of the Prophet (p), see people praying and reciting Qur’an, and other benefits that are gained by those who visit the mosque.”*¹⁴

Implications and Lessons

The narratives above show the permissibility of non-Muslims entering mosques. Also, the fact that Thumama was not forced to convert to Islam, despite being at the mercy of the Muslims, exemplifies the Qur’an’s prohibition of forceful conversion.

Commenting on the case of Thumama, Ibn Hajar lists some lessons for Muslims which include forgiving non-Muslim captives without receiving any ransom or compensation in exchange for their freedom, and how kindness to an existing enemy can eliminate hatred and bring love.¹⁵

Although a number of Christian or Jewish teachings are not accepted in Islam, the Prophet’s (p) actions demonstrate an exceptional degree of tolerance and respect for them especially. As earlier explained by Ibn Qayyim, Jews and Christians may be permitted to worship in their own way, even in a Muslim place of worship.

If the Prophet (p) could accommodate various people of other faiths in his Mosque, the second most sacred mosque on earth, then which other site – Muslim home, hall, mosque, or venue – should non-Muslims be prohibited from, on account of the difference in faith?

Today, millions of non-Muslim visitors and tourists visit many great mosques across the world in Egypt, Turkey, Oman, Bahrain, and Malaysia, etc.¹⁶ Some Muslims (and Mosque Tour Guides) leverage on this rare opportunity to educate the visitors about Islam and clarify common misconceptions they might have about the religion.

¹⁴ Ahmad ibn Abdul Razaq al-Dawish, *Fatawa lajnah al-Daimah li al-Buhuth al- ‘Ilmiyyah wa al-Ifta*, vol.31, p.265, Fatwa Number 16005, Maktabah al-Shamilah 3.13.

¹⁵ Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari*, al-Maktabah al-Shamilah 3.13, vol. 8, p.88.

¹⁶ See AWARENESS THROUGH MOSQUE TOURS (“ATMT”) from www.discoverislam.net; www.alfateh.gov.bh

Also, the fact that the Prophet (p) welcomed non-Muslim delegates for peace talks and interfaith dialogues is proof that Muslims and people of other faith can meet in any suitable environment for promoting better mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence.¹⁷

¹⁷ For more on non-Muslims entering the mosque, see: Da'wah Institute of Nigeria, *Muslim Relations with Christians, Jews and Others*, Islamic Education Trust, Minna, Nigeria, 2018, p.90-93