

As the number of Muslims increased, the Quraish also increased the persecution of those from their tribes who had turned Muslim. They tortured them, imprisoned them and punished them for their religion. The Prophet told the followers to scatter themselves away from Mecca and they asked him where they should go. He suggested to them to migrate to Ethiopia.

Why did the Muslims choose Africa for migration and not any other country and why the Prophet selected it as a place of refuge for his supporters, and whether it was just a chance or according to some plan.

The fact is that the Prophet was deeply thinking of Africa, despite the fact that Islam had not yet become capable of achieving ends relating to international reforms, and had not prepared any plans for profound emancipation of the people.

Otherwise, it is clear that they were nearer places for the purpose of migration of the persecuted Muslims, and places other than Ethiopia easier to reach and find the necessary support. But Islam selected Africa, despite the sea to be crossed and other difficulties to be experienced on the way. It was quite possible and reasonable to migrate to any area which was not subjected to the authority of the Quraish and other idol-worshipping tribes of Arabia. The migration could have been to those areas of Syria which were under the Byzantian rule, or to those countries which were ruled by the Persian Kings, like Iraq. Any of these areas could have been the destination of the migrating Muslims. But Muhammad did not suggest any other country but Africa, and did not ask his followers to migrate but to the Black Continent.

The reason was simple. His mission was to liberate humanity and ensure equality among all people. When this mission was put into operation, the black man was the most inferior human being in the eyes of others, of whom some did not differentiate between a Negro and any beast of burden.

There was no alternative to severe battles in order to eradicate cruelty of man to man and to ensure liberty and equality. Both the Iranian as well as Byzantian empires at that time were in full domination of their age and represented nothing but evils resulting from tyrannical forms of government. Both these empires supported the whites in their maltreatment of the blacks, and indulged in similar atrocities in different forms.

The clash between these two empires and Islam was therefore inevitable. It was hence not proper that the Muslims should take refuge in these empires when they were weak and invade them when they became powerful.

It was therefore necessary to select a country other than the Iranian as Byzantian empires. The Prophet therefore had no alternative but to choose the country of the blacks whom Islam was first to support and liberate from tyranny and raise their status and social position.

It was necessary to select such an area for migration which was not going to clash with the Muslims in future, because Islam had come to free it from all the insults and degradation to which it was subjected.

This is why the Prophet selected Africa for his followers migrate to. Then he selected a person belonging to that area and raised him to a position that any person would envy. He selected BILAL - the Black African - to become his Mu'adhdhin and, in this way, the black people began to enjoy that respect which no one had ever dreamed of.

(Extract from: Islamic Shi'ite Encyclopedia Vol I)