**The prophet hood of Muhammad**

**The early converts**

The first to believe in the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) and his divine message was Khadijah, followed shortly afterwards by ‘Ali bin Abi Tālib (May Allah be pleased with him). Ali was ten years old at the time and was living in the house of the Messenger .

Zayd bin Harithah, a servant of the prophet, also became a Muslim.

Among the men, Abu Bakr bin Abi Quhafah (May Allah be pleased with him), a close companion of the Prophet and a man known for his intellect and uprightness, also embraced Islam. These people were the closest to the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) and daily witnessed his truthfulness, sincerity and good behaviour. It was only natural for them to be the first converts to Islam.

For the first three years, the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) was told to spread the message privately, to evade any mischief from the Quraysh.

**The Great Warner**

The prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) kept his mission secret for three years. Then Allah commanded him to proclaim the message openly.

According to Arab custom, people used to climb a hill when they had to announce some important news. So, the Prophet one day climbed up on a small hill called Safa, located near the Ka`bah. He called out to the people, who quickly gathered around him. He then addressed the people thus: “If I told you that a big army is hiding behind that mountain and is ready to attack you, would you believe me?”

They all answered, “Of course, for we trust you. We know you always speak the truth.” Then the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) said: “Allah has commanded me to warn you, my people, that you should worship none

but the one and only God. If you fail to do so, you will invite Allah’s anger. And I will not be able to do anything to help you, even though you are my own people.”

Sadly, his message fell on deaf ears, with many of the people leaving without caring to give any thought to the words of the prophet. Rejection There was one primary reason for the leaders of Quraysh to oppose the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him), and prevent him from spreading his message. Makkah was a centre of pilgrimage because of the Ka`bah, which housed many idols of the neighbouring tribes. The leaders feared that if the concept of worshiping Allah alone became accepted, the tribes would stop visiting the idols and therefore have an adverse effect on the economy of the city and their monopoly of it.

After years of acknowledging Muhammad as the most kind and honest among them, the Quraysh started insulting him, ridiculing him and even calling him insane. Yet with all this abuse hurled upon him, he would never speak a bad word in return. The Prophet was subjected to every kind of brutality and insult. Thorns were spread in his path and he was pelted with dirt and stones.

Once, the prophet went to pray near the Ka`bah. Some men from the Quraysh, quickly surrounded him and attacked him all together. One of them took of his cloak and tried to strangle him. Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with him) quickly came to the rescue, shouting, “Would you kill a man just for saying, 'My Lord is Allah?'”.

When persecution failed, the Quraysh tried other methods to stop the Prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) from preaching his message. Once, ‘Utbah bin Rabi’ah came to the Prophet with an offer which he thought was too enticing to be rejected. He said: “If you want money, we will collect some of our property and make you the richest among us. If you want honour, we will make you our chief so that every decision is yours. If you want kingdom, we will make you our king.” When ‘Utbah had finished, the prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) without any hesitation recited some verses from Surah Fussilat and refused the offer. ‘Utbah, dumfounded, went back to his companions and described what he heard of the amazing Qur’an. He said: “By God! I have heard words I have never heard before. By God! It is neither poetry nor magic. O men of Quraysh! Listen to me! Leave this man alone. Be kind towards him and don’t get in his way.” Sadly, even the words of ‘Utbah had no influence on the Quraysh, who bluntly refused to give heed to his advice.

**Persecution**

Muslims were subjected to persecution. They were treated with contempt and mocked, but when that failed, the Quraysh turned to physical attacks and punishment. Every clan targeted those who had become Muslims among them. They began to imprison them and torture them with beatings, hunger and thirst.

Bilal, a black Abyssinian slave who had accepted Islam, was laid flat on his back in the midday heat. A huge stone was then placed on his chest. He was told by his persecutors to renounce Islam, but each time he would respond by saying, “Allah is One, Allah is One.” The Banu Makhzum clan took ‘Ammar bin Yasir, his mother and father, who were all Muslims, into the midday heat. They tortured them and then left them exposed to the burning sun of Makkah. The prophet (blessings and peace be upon him) would pass by them and tell them to be patient.

Finally, after much persecution, Ammar’s mother, Sumayyah was killed, her only crime being, her refusal to renounce Islam.