

## THE BATTLE OF THE TRENCHES

The two great armies faced each other across the battlefield. On one side were the Muslims of Madina who were much smaller in number but were now fighting for their very survival. On the other side were the army of the Kuffar which was made up of many different tribes gathered from all over Arabia. The army included Quraish, Gatfan and other Jewish and Arab tribes. This huge army was much bigger than the whole Muslim population.

Between the two armies was a trench (Khandak in Arabic). It had just been completed by the Muslims as their only means of defence against the Kuffar. This was not a common tactic used by the Arabs so the Kuffar were unsure how they would contend with it. It was deep enough and wide enough to be a formidable barrier against any army.

The Kuffar tried their best to cross the trench so that they could march onto Madina. However, the Muslims repelled all their attacks and attempts to cross the trench by shooting arrows at them. There were many attempts made by the Kuffar but none were successful. There was a narrow section in the trench where some Kuffar forces managed to break through. They took control of that small area and their leader 'Amr bin 'Abd-e-Wudd demanded a man-to-man battle with a Muslim fighter.

Ali stepped forward and quickly finished 'Amr causing the small group of Kuffar to retreat. The Muslims soon had re-gained this area that the Kuffar had occupied. The battle continued for days with more futile attempts to cross the trench by the Kuffar. The Muslim were utterly exhausted in defending Madina but despite this they continued fighting. The Kuffar had resigned to the fact that they would not be able to cross the trenches so they laid siege to Madina, preventing supplies entering Madina. It was only a matter of time before the Muslims would begin to starve.

The Kuffar did not rest in this siege but tried many new tactics to penetrate Madina and attack the Muslim forces through volleys of arrows. The Muslims held

onto their position and braved these difficult and trying circumstances.

The Muslims would often be late for Salah and would need to pray them late. In one incident, Umar cursed the Kuffar army because they had caused him to miss his Asr Salah. The fighting had been so intense that day that the Prophet (pbuh) prayed the Asr Salah (mid Afternoon prayer) after sunset followed by the Maghrib Salah, the sunset prayer.

The Jewish tribes decided that they would try their own tactics and went to see Bani Quraizah, their allies in the past. Bani Quraizah would not even let them into their forts let alone join them in battle. After some coaxing from the K'ab bin Asad - the former leader of Bani Nadir, Bani Quraizah finally let them into the fort to listen to their proposals.

The Jews said that this was the best opportunity to attack the Muslims who had concentrated all their defences on the northern side. If the Kuffar had access through their forts, they would attack them from behind and crush the Muslims. The women and children were located in this part of Madina so there would be no resistance from anyone.

Bani Quraizah were not convinced, they had seen the success Allah had granted the Prophet (pbuh) in the past and they knew that this would be treachery of the highest order. However, after lots of convincing, the sweet words of K'ab and other delegates convinced Bani Quraizah that the Muslims would not stand a chance against their attacks. All the Kuffar army needed was a way of getting into Madina and then the Muslims would be decisively finished.

Bani Quraizah began to make preparations for battle against the Muslims. This move would leave the Muslims defenses wide open. The second front would make defending Madina impossible and defeat for the Muslims would be imminent. The rumours were now spreading that Bani Quraizah were preparing for war, which was one of their worst fears. It was in breach of the treaty the Muslims had with Bani Quraizah who were supposed to help the Muslims defend Madina and not help the enemy.

The Prophet (pbuh) commanded some of his trusted companions to investigate if there was any truth in the rumours that Bani Quraizah were preparing to fight them. After making some discrete investigations they returned to inform the Prophet (pbuh) of the bad news. This came as a shock to the Muslims who they were shaken by this disastrous news. However, despite everything stacked against them they knew that Allah had promised them victory and they would succeed.

Safiyah, the aunt of the Prophet (pbuh) saw a Bani Quraizah warrior wandering about outside their quarters. In these quarters, there were only women and children but had no men guarding. Every able man was needed on the battlefield to defend Madina and fight off the Kuffar army.

Safiyah herself went outside and attacked the lone warrior with a piece of wood. Soon the warrior was dead so Safiyah checked his clothes and remove his weapons. She then threw the body over the wall which made Bani Quraizah think that this area was also well guarded.

This act of bravery was a deterrent to anyone thinking of attacking the Muslim position from behind. Bani Quraizah had been sure that this place was unguarded but this casualty put doubts in their minds so they were reluctant to attack. However, they continued to send supplies to the Kuffar army who were camping outside the trench.

When the rumour of the Bani Quraizah reached the Hypocrites they began to play their usual games. They took this opportunity to weaken the Muslim ranks by mocking them about the prediction that they would conquer the Persians, Syria and Yemen. How could they conquer such super powers when they were almost defeated now!

The Hypocrites announced that they were retreating back to their homes to defend their women and children. This left the Muslims army weakened on the battle front, just as it had been weakened at Uhud with their departure. The situation was dire and the morale of the Muslim army was greatly reduced. Despite

this, the Muslims remained steadfast and watched the Hypocrites retreat from the battlefield for the second time.

A short while later, one of the warriors from the Kuffar army, Na'im bin Masud, sneaked across the trench and came to the Prophet (pbuh). He had accepted Islam in secrecy and was now a Muslim. He asked the Prophet (pbuh) how he could help the Muslims in their time of need. The Kuffar were not aware of his conversion to Islam, which he could use to his advantage.

After consulting the Prophet (pbuh), he returned to the Kuffar to try and cause distrust between them and break them up. This would break their resolve and would force them to return to their homes. He went to Bani Quraizah first and said that the Quraish were planning on leaving the battle and no longer wanted to fight. They would leave Bani Quraizah to face the Muslims once it was over. He told them not to trust the Quraish and to ask for hostages from their nobles as a sign of their willingness to fight. He parted from Bani Quraizah telling them that he was their friend and to keep this conversation secret.

Na'im then went to the Quraish and said that the Bani Quraizah are regretting turning against the Muslims. He said that they no longer wanted to fight but wanted to hand over some of the nobles of Quraish as compensation to the Muslims. He advised them not to trust Bani Quraizah and also request that this conversation be kept secret.

He went to the Ghatfan and did a similar sort of trick which caused them to doubt the other parties. This divided the different tribes who began to see everyone intentions in a different light.

A delegation of Quraish and Ghatfan went to see the Bani Quraizah and told them to prepare for a major offensive against the Muslims the following day. The Bani Quraizah refused saying that it was against their religion to fight on Saturday. The Makkans felt that the Jews no longer had the will to fight and wanted to make amends with the Muslims. Bani Quraizah then asked for a few of their dignitaries as reassurance to prove their desire to fight.

The Makkans were sure that Bani Quraizah were trying to trick them and wanted the prisoners so that they could hand them over to the Muslims. When both the parties left there was a feeling of mistrust and double crossing. This was the objective that Na'im wanted to achieve as the resolve of the kuffar army was finally broken.

Allah sent strong winds that turned over the cooking pots of the Kuffar army and blew their tents down. The weather was so cold and uncomfortable that they couldn't wait to leave the battle. As dawn broke, they began to prepare for marching back. Before long the armies started to leave Madina and return home.

The Prophet (pbuh) commanded Hudaifah to go and check on the Kuffar army. Although Hudaifah bin Al-Yaman was very tired, hungry and cold, he immediately got up and checked on the Kuffar army. He returned with the good news of their departure and the Muslims thanked Allah for this clear victory.

After thanking Allah for his blessing and favours, the Muslims too began to return to their homes. As the Muslims returned, the Angel Jibrael came to the Prophet (pbuh) and asked him why he was removing his armor. He said the angels still had their armor and were ready to march onto Bani Quraizah for their treachery.

The Angel departed saying that they were going ahead and would shake the forts of Bani Quraizah, instilling fear into their hearts. The Prophet (pbuh) commanded his men to get ready for battle and march to Bani Quraizah.

The Muslims marched to Bani Quraizah's quarters, which was a fortified city. It would be difficult to fight Bani Quraizah there because it was well protected and had ample supplies that could last for many months. Bani Quraizah had plenty of weaponry and armed men, which would make them a formidable opponent for any army.

The Muslims laid siege to the Bani Quraizah's quarters with many short skirmishes taking place. The Jews knew that if they were captured, they would all be killed because of their high treason. The punishment for breaking such a treaty was known to be death.

The siege had lasted for a few days now and Bani Quraizah were very worried about the possible outcome. They considered all the options available to them. They considered killing all their women and children so that they had nothing to live for. Then they would fight to the death. They also thought about launching a surprise attack on the Saturday, which was normally a day that Jews would not fight. They also considered becoming Muslims so that they could be freed from their previous sins.

They were indecisive so they spoke to the Muslims and asked for a truce. They wanted someone to be judge between the two parties in this situation. Sa'd bin Muadh was proposed and both sides accepted him as judge. Both parties would be bound by his decision. In the past, Sa'd bin Muadh was a great ally of Bani Quraizah and was known to be a just and wise person.

He insisted on both parties to abide by his judgement, regardless of whose favour it would be in. After considering the situation, he judged that Bani Quraizah should be put to death for their treachery and double-crossing during the battle of the trenches. This judgment was made in accordance to the law of the Tawrah.

After Bani Quraizah affair, an important chapter was closed in the history of Islam. Many people who had created problems and friction within Madina were finally banished. The armies of Arabia had been soundly defeated and the Muslims had gained a great victory.