

# The Prophet's ﷺ letters to kings

## Introduction

In the month of Muharram in the seventh year of Hijrah, the Prophet (peace & blessings of Allāh be upon him) sent letters to different rulers of the world. All the letters were simple and had one purpose, to invite them to accept Islam.

No king or leader would consider even reading a letter or message until they were sure it came from the person claiming to have sent it. So a seal was made for the Prophet (peace & blessings of Allāh be upon him). On all the letters the seal of the Prophet (peace & blessings of Allāh be upon him) was stamped, which read 'Muhammad, Messenger of Allāh.' In display form, Allāh was at the top, Messenger in the middle and Muhammad at the bottom. Also, all the letters were hand-given.

The climate was right because a ten-year truce had just been called. This meant the Prophet's envoys could travel without fear (*Ziā al-Nabī*, IV: 179). Overall, Islam was on the ascendancy.

## Overview

King/Leader	Prophet's envoy sent to them
نجاشي	عمرو بن اميه الضمري
هرقل	دحيه بن خليفة الكلبي
برويز	عبد الله بن حذافة السهمي
مقوقس	حاطب بن وهب
هوذة بن علي الحنفي	سليط بن عمرو العامري
حارث بن ابي شمر الغساني	شجاع بن وهب

## The King of Abyssinia, Negus (al-Najāshī).

Al-Najāshī was the title given to anyone who was the king of Abyssinia (just like Fir'awn was the name of anyone who was the king of Egypt). His actual name was Ashamah (اصحمة).

Here is the letter Prophet Muhammad (peace & blessings of Allāh be upon him) sent him (*Ziā al-Nabī*, IV: 181-2):

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم من محمد رسول الله الي النجاشي ملك الحبشة اما بعد فاني احمد اليك الله الذي لا اله الا هو الملك القدوس السلام المؤمن المهيمن و اشهد ان عيسى بن مريم روح الله و كلمته القاها الي مريم البتول الطاهرة المطهرة الطيبة الحصينة فحملت بعيسى فخلق الله من روحه و نَفَخَهُ كما خلق ادم بيده و اني ادعوك الي الله وحده لا شريك له و الموالاة علي طاعته فان تابعتني و توّمتُ بالذي جاءني فاني رسول الله فاني ادعوك و جنودك الي الله تعالي و قد بلغتُ و نصحتُ فاقبلوا نُصحي و قد بعثت اليك ابن عمي جعفرًا و معه نفر من المسلمين و السلام علي من اتبع الهدى

*In the name of Allāh, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allāh, to al-Najāshī the king of Abyssinia. For indeed I praise to you Allāh, there is no God except Him, the Malik, the Quddūs, the Salām, the Mu'min, the Muhaymin. And I testify that Isa, son of Maryam is the spirit of Allāh and His word, He cast it to Maryam, the Virgin, the clean, the pure, the sanctified, the protected. She became pregnant and so Allāh created Isa from his spirit and blew it into him like he created Adam with His hands.*

*I call you to Allāh, the One, He has no partner. And I call you to his obedience. If you follow me and believe in what I have brought, then I am the Messenger of Allāh. So I call you and you people to Allāh the Almighty. For indeed I have conveyed the message and advised you. I have sent the son of my uncle Ja'far and a group of Muslims. And peace be on the one who seeks guidance.*

When al-Najāshī received the letter, he treated it with utmost respect. He remarked:

اشهد بالله انه النبي الامي الذي ينتظره اهل الكتاب

'I bear witness that he is the Ummī Prophet (peace & blessings of Allāh be upon him) for whom the People of the Book waited for.'

He wrote a letter back in which he said that if he could, he would certainly have travelled to al-Madina to meet him. He embraced Islam at the hands of Ja'far (*Ziā al-Nabī*, 4: 183).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) sent a second letter after this, and al-Najāshī kept this and the first safely and securely in a box. As he did so, he said (*Ziā al-Nabī*, IV: 184):

لن تزال الحبشة بخير ما كان هذان الكتابان بين اظهرينا

Abyssinia is in good hands so long as these two letters are in front of us.

Two years later (in the ninth year of Hijrah, when the Prophet was returning from Tabūk), al-Najāshī passed away. In *Sahīh al-Bukhārī*, it is mentioned that the day al-Najāshī passed away, the Prophet (peace be upon him) broke the news of his death to his Companions saying:

مات اليوم رجل صالح فقوموا فصلوا علي اخيكم اصحم

'Today a very pious person has passed away. Stand up and offer the funeral prayer of your brother al-Najāshī.'

It is narrated by Sayyida A'isha (may Allāh be pleased with her) that after his death, the people noticed a constant light emitting from his grave.

عن عائشة رضي الله عنها قالت لما مات النجاشي كان يُتحدث انه لا يزال يُري علي قبره نور (ضياء، 2: 377)

The Hanafī scholars state that the Funeral prayer offered by the Prophet (peace & blessings of Allāh be upon him) was a unique gesture for al-Najāshī. Otherwise, Muslims are not permitted to perform Salāh al-Janāza when the body is absent.

Of all the men who received the letters of the Prophet (peace & blessings of Allāh be upon him), he was the most fortunate.

## Hirqal (Heraclius)

The Prophet (peace & blessings of Allāh be upon him) sent his trusted and handsome Companion Dihya to Hirqal. First, Dihya was instructed to go to Busra, in order to meet Hārith ibn Abī Shammar. He would provide a trusted guide to take Dihya to Hirqal. This guide's name was Addī ibn Abī Hātim.

At the time, Hirqal was in Jerusalem. He was there to fulfil a solemn promise (a *Nazr* to walk to Jerusalem to perform prayer al-Masjid al-Aqsa after defeating the Persians).

Hirqal was a worried man. He had seen signs that his rule was coming to an end. He was a keen astrologer. Very recently, he saw a particular star in the sky that, after interpretation, meant his land would be overcome by men who practice circumcision and that another religion was appearing soon.

It was at this precise moment that Hirqal's trusted aide came into the room, to inform him that a man had appeared wanting to give Hirqal a letter. He talked about a man who was calling to one God, Allāh. Immediately, Hirqal instructed him to find out if this man (Dihya) was circumcised. After confirmation he was, he read the letter. The letter was:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ مِنْ مُحَمَّدٍ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ الْيَهِرْقَلِ عَظِيمِ الرُّومِ سَلَامٌ عَلَيَّ مِنْ اتَّبَعَ الْهَدْيَ أَمَا بَعْدَ فَانِي أَدْعُوكَ  
بِدَعَايَةِ الْإِسْلَامِ أَسْلَمَ تَسْلَمَ وَأَسْلَمَ يَعْطُكَ اللَّهُ أَجْرَكَ مَرَّتَيْنِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّيْتَ فَعَلَيْكَ أَثْمُ الْعَرَسِيِّينَ وَيَا هَلْ الْكِتَابُ تَعَالَوْا إِلَيَّ كَلِمَةً  
سِوَاءَ بَيْنِنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ إِلَّا نَعْبُدُ إِلَّا اللَّهَ وَلَا نَشْرِكُ بِهِ شَيْئاً وَلَا يَتَّخِذُ بَعْضُنَا بَعْضاً أَرْبَاباً مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَقُولُوا اشْهَدُوا بِأَنَّا  
مُسْلِمُونَ

*In the name of Allāh the Compassionate, the Merciful, from Muhammad the slave of Allāh and His Apostle to Hirqal the ruler of Byzantine. Peace be upon him, who follows the right path. Furthermore I invite you to Islam, and if you become a Muslim you will be safe, and Allāh will double your reward, and if you reject this invitation of Islam you will be committing a sin by misguiding your Arisiyin (peasants). (And I recite to you Allāh's Statement:)*

*'O people of the scripture! Come to a word common to you and us that we worship none but Allāh and that we associate nothing in worship with Him, and that none of us shall take others as Lords beside Allāh. Then, if they turn away, say: Bear witness that we are Muslims' (3:64).*

When Hirqal read the letter, he was moved and sweat droplets began to appear on his forehead. He told his aides that certain people were in town, who were also from the same region of Hijaz. He instructed his men to find them and bring them to him.

Abū Sufyān was taking full benefit of the war-free pact rectified in the form of Hudaybiyya. He was in Gaza on trading expeditions. Abū Sufyān and his men were rounded up and brought to Hirqal. Abū Sufyān was a non-Muslim at the time. Hirqal called him and had a detailed conversation with him too about Muhammad (peace & blessings of Allāh be upon him).

Hirqal: What is his family status?

Abū Sufyān: He comes from a noble family.

Hirqal: Has anyone claimed to be a prophet before him from amongst you?

Abū Sufyān: No.

Hirqal: Was anybody from his ancestors a king?

Abū Sufyān: No.

Hirqal: Do the noble (i.e. rich & famous) or the poor follow him?

Abū Sufyān: The poor.

Hirqal: Are his followers increasing or decreasing?

Abū Sufyān: They are increasing.

Hirqal: Are any of his followers becoming Muslims & then leaving Islam later?

Abū Sufyān: None.

Hirqal: Have you accused him of lying ever, meaning even before he announced he was a prophet?

Abū Sufyān: No.

Hirqal: Has he broken his promises?

Abū Sufyān: Not yet. We have a truce with him at the moment [Hudaybiyya], I do not know what will happen to it in the future.

Hirqal: Have you ever had a war with him?

Abū Sufyān: Yes.

Hirqal: What has been the result?

Abū Sufyān: He is sometimes victorious, sometimes we are.

Hirqal: What does he order you to do?

To worship Allāh, to pray, to speak the truth, to be chaste and to be good to relatives.

After hearing all these answers from Abū Sufyān, Hirqal gave a review of them. In short, all the answers assured him that Prophet Muhammad was the final Messenger of Allāh...

Hirqal: What is his family status?

Abū Sufyān: He comes from a noble family.

**Hirqal: All prophets and messengers come from noble and respected families.**

Hirqal: Has anyone claimed to be a prophet before him from amongst you?

Abū Sufyān: No.

**Hirqal: If the answer had been 'yes' I would have thought this man is following the previous man's statement.**

Hirqal: Was anybody from his ancestors a king?

Abū Sufyān: No.

**Hirqal: If the answer had been 'yes' I would have thought this man is trying to get back his family's kingdom.**

Hirqal: Do the noble (i.e. rich & famous) or the poor follow him?

Abū Sufyān: The poor.

**Hirqal: All true prophets have been followed by the poor.**

Hirqal: Are his followers increasing or decreasing?

Abū Sufyān: They are increasing.

**Hirqal: This is a sign of a true religion.**

Hirqal: Are any of his followers becoming Muslims & then leaving Islam later?

Abū Sufyān: None.

**Hirqal: This is a sign of a true religion.**

Hirqal: Have you accused him of lying ever, meaning even before he announced he was a prophet?

No.

**Hirqal: I certainly know that whosoever does not lie to the people, he will certainly not lie to Allāh.**

Hirqal: Has he broken his promises?

Abū Sufyān: Not yet. We have a truce with him at the moment [Hudaybiyya], I do not know what will happen to it in the future.

**Hirqal: Prophets never lie or cheat.**

Although he was still a non-Muslim at the time, Abū Sufyān realised how important Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was; that even the king of Byzantine was aware of him.

Deep inside, Hirqal knew that Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) was the final messenger. All the signs were there. But he was a Christian. More importantly, he was a powerful leader. Hirqal took the Prophet's representative (Dihya) to a secret place and said:

'I know Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) is the genuine prophet of God. All his characteristics are listed in our books. But I fear that if I declare my faith the Byzantines will not spare my life.'

Later In Homs, Hirqal called his Byzantine leaders into a room in his palace, and closed all the doors. He announced:

'O Byzantines! If success is your desire and if you seek right guidance and want your empire to remain then give a pledge of allegiance to this Prophet (i.e. embrace Islam).'

In a huge commotion, all the leaders ran to the doors to flee in fright and despair. They could not believe what they just heard from Hirqal. Hirqal realised their hatred to Islam and he could not convince them otherwise. He called them back and said, 'I was only testing you; I wanted to see how faithful [to me] you all are.'

This was the last of Hirqal (*Ziā al-Nabī*, IV: 185-192).

## What we learn from Hirqal's episode

\*Good manners makes a person; Abū Sufyān did not talk about how much worship Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) performed. He talked about his character.

\*Even the enemies could not hide the perfection of Muhammad's (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) character.

\*Even Hirqal knew the respect of prophets. He said he would wash the feet of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) after hearing the account of Abū Sufyān ('...and if I could reach him definitely, I would go immediately to meet him and if I were with him, I would certainly wash his feet'). He also looked after the Prophet's letter with great care.

\*The story is a reminder of how influential peer pressure can sometimes be. It seems Hirqal succumbed to it, rather than surrendering to Allāh.

## The Egyptian King Muqawqis

In Alexandria, Muqawqis received the Prophet's letter via Hâtib ibn Balta'ah (may Allāh be pleased with him). The letter read:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم من محمد عبد الله ورسوله الي مقوقس عظيم القبط سلام علي من اتبع الهدي اما بعد فان ادعوك بدعاية الاسلام أسلم تسلم يعطك الله أجرًا مرتين فان توليت فعليك اثم القبط يا اهل الكتاب تعالوا الي كلمة سواء بيننا و بينكم الا نعبد الا الله و لا نشرك به شيئاً و لا يتخذ بعضنا بعضاً أرباباً من دون الله فان تولوا فقولوا اشهدوا بانا مسلمون

*In the name of Allāh, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate. From Muhammad, the Messenger of Allāh, to Muqawqis, the king of Copts. Salam upon the one who seek to follow guidance. I indeed call you to Islam. Become a Muslim, you will find peace and Allāh will give you two sets of rewards. And if you turn away, then upon you is the sin of the Copts. O people of the book! Come to a word that is just between us, that we worship none but Allāh, and that we associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allāh. Then, if they turn away, say 'Bear witness that we are Muslim.'*

Muqawqis treated the letter with respect by placing it in an ivory box. He arranged for an Arabic scribe and wrote the following back to the Prophet:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم لمحمد عبد الله من المقوقس عظيم القبط سلام عليك اما بعد قد قرأت كتابك و فهمت ما ذكرت فيه و ما تدعو اليه و قد علمت ان نبيا بقي و كنت اظن انه يخرج بالشام و قد أكرمت رسولك و بعثت اليك بجاريتين لهما مكان في القبط عظيم و بكسوة و أهديت اليك بغلة لتركبها و السلام عليك

*In the name of Allāh, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate. To Muhammad, the servant of Allāh, from Muqawqis, the king of Copts. Salam be upon you. I have read your letter and I have understood what you mentioned in it and what you are calling me to. I knew a prophet was coming [but] I thought he would emerge from Syria. I have shown hospitality to your messenger. I am sending two female servants to you [as a gift], both have an esteemed rank in our society. I am also sending you a garment and I am gifting you a mule to ride on. Peace be upon you.*

The slave girl was Māriya, who later became the bondmaid of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). After she gave birth to Ibrāhīm, she was freed. The other girl was called Sīrīn, who married the poet Hassān ibn Thābit, and was the mother of Abd al-Rahmān. The mule was white and stayed alive till the reign of Mu'āwiya.

Did he accept Islam? He showed utmost respect but it seems he did not accept Islam. It is reported that he said لولا الملك لاسلمت (Were it not for my kingdom, I would accept Islam).



That night, Jibrīl (peace be upon him) appeared in the presence of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and told him that Allāh had brought death to Parvez, killed by his own son in a knife attack. In the morning, when the Prophet met Khur Kusro and Bānawiyya, he instructed them to return to Bāzan, and to pass on the message that Parvez has been killed by his own son. In intrinsic detail, the Prophet told them the time he was killed too. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) had an additional message for Bāzan too; that his land would soon be ruled by the Muslims. If he accepted Islam, then his sultanate would remain there.

When Khur Kusro and Bānawiyya were about to return to Bāzan, they were given lavish gifts by the Messenger of Allāh. They reached Bāzan and told him everything that had happened. Bāzan replied that this is not the words and workings of a king, but that of a prophet. If what he says is true, he explained, then he would be the first to accept faith.

Only a few days later, Bāzan received a letter from Parvez's son, Shirwaih. In it, he informed Bāzan that he had killed his father Parvez, by stabbing him in the stomach. Moreover, he was demanding Bāzan to accept him as the new king. When Bāzan read this letter, he was convinced that Muhammad is the final messenger of Allāh. He and many other Persians accepted Islam, and he passed this glad-tidings on to the Messenger of Allāh (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him).

## Conclusion

\*All letters were void of pride and arrogance. They were straightforward and to the point. Many had Qur'ānic verses in them or paraphrases of the Qur'ān.

\*The letters were tailor made. They were not broadcast messages. They were not copy and paste jobs.

\*None could be described as provocative and challenging to a debate.

\*The messenger sent with each letter was just as important as the letter itself. They were people who knew the traditions and language best. What we learn from this is that when propagating Islam, the medium is just as important as the message.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) carefully thought about which medium to use and how. The process was thoughtful, intricate and personal. Hātib was the medium, the messenger to Muqawqis. He was chosen for his excellent traits. Thanks to his character, Māriya and Sīrīn became Muslims even before they reached al-Madina.

\*Always respect the name of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him). Otherwise an outcome like Parvez's awaits. The likes of al-Najāshī understood the importance of *tabbaruk*. They preserved the letters, precisely because they were now letters of distinction and blessings.

\*When doing Tablīgh, he (peace and blessings of Allāh be upon him) highlighted what they had in common, not the differences. For example, in the letter sent to al-Najāshī (Christian), he wrote (*Ziā al-Nabī* (Urdu) 4:183)



و اشهد ان عيسى بن مريم روح الله و كلمته القاها الي مريم البتول الطاهرة المطهرة الطيبة الحصينة فحملت بعيسى فخلقه  
الله من روحه

When he sent a letter to Hirqal, the emperor of Rome, again he highlighted the similarities between Muslims and Christians.

Today's propagation of Islam perhaps lacks this. We are keen to highlight our differences rather than similarities. The Prophet's methodology was different. He drew on similarities.

\*All the Prophet's letters were successful. The letter to Muqawqis opened up Egypt and North Africa to Islam. It also helped the Coptic Christians there. Thanks to the gift of Māriya, Muslims relationships with Coptic Christians were good and still are today. Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'Deal with the Copts fairly...' due to the peace treaty and the blood relations (*Beloved Wives of the Sublime Messenger*, M.I.H. Pirzada, 112).