

BACKGROUND TO HIJRAH

HIJRAH – THE PUSH AND PULL FACTORS! SOME BACKGROUND NOTES

Muhammad and his followers were in a desperate situation in Makkah. They feared for their lives. There was only one solution, and that was to flee for safety, to a place beyond the reach of persecution and oppression. This Muhammad did. It was secretly orchestrated and executed. It is so important an event to Muslims that it marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. It is called the 'Hijrah' ("flight").

Guillaume describes it as a few key events of "a handful of men from Medina who were to change the course of the world's history." Turner refers to the Hijrah as "a psychological turning point of inestimable importance" transforming a "faith minority" into a community and eventually an empire.

Muhammad escaped a final murder plot which appears to have "foundered for lack of agreement" or organisation according to Ruthven. Tradition tells of Ali taking Muhammad's place in bed so that Muhammad and Abu Bakr could escape the night before. Muhammad then spent three days in a cave and was 'miraculously' protected from Qurayshi pursuers.

There were many reasons for this final decision to flee away from the obvious death threats. Such reasons had been increasing for a while. In a sense, while the final decision and move was swift, there had been a gradual build-up of threatening events: Aslan writes, "The emigration to Yathrib occurred slowly and stealthily, with the Companions heading out towards the oasis a few at a time. By the time the Quraysh realized what was happening, only Muhammad, Abu Bakr and Ali were left."

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Not all reasons for the Hijrah were negative and there were many attractive factors about Madinah. We can identify and summarise the key factors that led to the Hijrah under the headings of push factors (reasons why Muhammad and his followers had to leave Makkah) and pull factors (reasons why Muhammad and his followers decided to escape to Madinah).

Indeed, John Esposito states:

“ The Medinan community formed a total framework for state, society, and culture. It epitomized the Quranic mandate for Muslims as individuals and a community “to transform the world itself through action in the world”It inspired Muhammad to transform a local sheikdom into a trans tribal state ”