



# Year of the Elephant



Abraha, who came from Abyssinia - a country in Africa-conquered Yemen and was made vice-regent there. Later, he noticed that at a certain time of the year large numbers of people would travel from all over Yemen and the rest of Arabia to Mecca. He asked the reason for this and was told that they were going on pilgrimage to the Ka'bah.

Abraham hated the idea of Mecca being more important than his own country, so he decided to build a church of coloured marble, with doors of gold and ornaments of silver, and ordered the people to visit it instead of the Ka'bah. But no one obeyed him.

Abraham became angry and decided to destroy the Ka'bah. He prepared a large army led by an elephant and set off towards Mecca. When the Meccans heard that he was coming they became very frightened. Abraham's army was huge and they could not fight it. But how could they let him destroy the Holy Ka'bah? They went to ask the advice of their leader, 'Abd al-Muttalib. When Abraham arrived outside Mecca, 'Abd al-Muttalib went to meet him. Abraham said, 'What do you want?'

Abraham had taken 'Abd al-Muttalib's camels, which he had found grazing as he entered Mecca, so 'Abd al-Muttalib replied, 'I want my camels back.' Abraham was very surprised and said, 'I have come to destroy your Holy Ka'bah, the holy place of your fathers, and you ask me about some camels?' 'Abd al-Muttalib replied calmly, 'The camels belong to me; the Ka'bah belongs to Allah and He will protect it.' Then he left Abraham and went back to Quraysh and ordered them to leave Mecca and wait for their enemies in the mountains.

In the morning Abraham prepared to enter the town. He put armour on his elephant and drew up his troops for battle. He intended to destroy the Ka'bah and then return to Yemen. At that moment, however, the elephant knelt down and refused to get up, no matter how much the soldiers tried to get it to move by beating it. But when they turned its face in the direction of Yemen it immediately got up and started off. In fact, it did the same in any other direction, but as soon as they pointed it towards Mecca it knelt down again.

Suddenly, flocks of birds appeared from over the sea. Each bird carried three stones as small as peas and they dropped them on Abraham's army. The soldiers suddenly fell ill. Even Abraham was hit by the stones and fled in fear with the rest of his army back to Yemen, where he later died. On seeing their enemy flee the Arabs came down from the mountains to the Ka'bah and gave thanks to Allah.

After this, Quraysh gained great respect and became known as 'the people of Allah', and the year in which these events took place, 570 A.D., was named the 'Year of the Elephant'. In that year Allah had saved the Ka'bah and he would soon bring forth a Prophet from among Quraysh.

*In the Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful; Hast thou not seen how they Lord dealt with the owners of the Elephant?; Did He not bring their stratagem to naught And send against them swarms of flying creatures, Which pelted them with stones of baked clay, And made them like green crops devoured (by cattle)?*  
(Quran CV. 1-5)

