

Bismillah Walhamdulillah Was Salaatu Was Salaam 'ala Rasulillah As-salaamu `alaykum wa Rahmatullah wa Barakatuhu!!

I am sending you a brief history of Waqia e Karbal in English to refresh our memory and to be shared with our children and family members. You could never be able to tell that event in a way that they could understand. Here are some information that would help you to guide kids in coming days and years. In Sha Allah, I will send you another email on the significance of Imam Husayn.

The Battle of Karbala

The Battle of Karbala took place on Muharram 10, 61 AH (October 9 or 10, 680 CE) (Persian: هجدهم یا نوزدهم مهر ماه 59 شمسی) [1] [2] in Karbala, in present day Iraq. On one side were supporters & relatives of the prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Salma Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Salma's grandson Husayn ibn Ali and on the other side were a military detachment from the forces of Yazid I, the Umayyad caliph.

The size of Husayn ibn Ali's group was very small, and included many notable members of the Muhammad Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Salma Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Salma's family. There were only 73 male members, and of which many were either very old or very young. Husayn's group had many women and children as well, including Husayn's own 6-months old son. On the other side were over 30,000 heavily armed forces of Yazid ibn Muawiya lead by his General Umar Ibn Sa'ad.

On 7th Muharram, 61 AH (October 6th, 680 CE), Yazid's forces followed and surrounded the traveling group of Husayn ibn Ali and cut-off their access to food and water. For three days in the heat of Iraqi desert, these men, women & children were made to suffer the thirst and hunger before they were brutally slaughtered on the deserts of Karbala.

Battle of Karbala, has significance in Islamic History for many reasons but mostly for the stories of courage and great sacrifices that were displayed by prophet Muhammad Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Salma Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Salma's family & friends for the protection of the true teachings of Islam from being hijacked by the corrupt, brutal and power-hungry regime of Yazid ibn Muawiya.

This battle and Martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali, his family & supporters is mourned by an annual 10-day commemoration, Ashurah, held every year in the Month of Muharram (the first month of Muslim Lunar Calender).

Battle based on Islamic traditions

Political Backgrounds

When Uthman was killed by rebels, most of the Ummah (Muslim's nation)[10] pressed Ali ibn Abi Talib to take the caliphate. But his policies was not accepted by some companions and specially Muawiya I refused his allegiance. Thus the Muslim community fell into the three battles of Camel, Seffin and Nahrawan respectively. Kharijites planned assassination of Ali ibn Abi Talib and Muawiya I at the same day to end the civil war. The 4th caliph has been killed but Muawiya I rescued.

[edit] Kufa's opposition to Damascus

Kufa, a garrison town in what is now Iraq, had been Ali's capital, and there were still many people in Kufa claiming they are still supporters of Ali. Husayn ibn Ali received many letters from the Kufans, expressing their strong supports if he claimed the caliphate. In fact most of them was trying to recover Kufa's power against Damascus, the capital of Umayyad.

Particulars of the event

Medina: Yazid I, the new ruler, feared that Husayn ibn Ali would revolt. Therefore he sent a letter to Walid ibn Utbah, governor of Medina, and ordered him to take allegiance from Hosayn ibn Ali or to kill him if he refrains. Walid ibn Utbah consulted Marwan ibn al-Hakam and he advised Walid ibn Utbah to kill Husayn ibn Ali since he will never accept Bay'ah with Yazid I. But Walid ibn Utbah did not accept this advice since he did not want Husayn ibn Ali be killed by him.

Walid ibn Utbah held a meeting with Husayn ibn Ali to convince him of Bay'ah with Yazid I but he refused. The day after Marwan ibn al-Hakam asked Husayn ibn Ali for Bay'ah but he replied: "Say farewell to Islam while Ummah are afflicted by a ruler such as Yazid".

Husayn ibn Ali departed Medina and arrived Mecca on Sha'ban 3, 60 AH to perform the Hajj ritual.

Makkah

Husayn ibn Ali stayed in Mecca from the beginnings of the Sha'ban and all of the Ramadan, Shawwal, as well as Dhu al-Qi'dah.

When many letters came from Kufa assuring Husayn ibn Ali of Kufan support, he answered their calls and sent Muslim ibn Aqeel, his representative, to Kufa in an attempt to consider their last situation and opinions.

Abd-Allah ibn Abbas and Abdullah ibn Zubayr held a meeting with Husayn ibn Ali in Mecca to advise him to refuse traveling toward Iraq.

Abdullah ibn Umar in another meeting asked him to be reconciled with strayed people and to prevent war. But he warned Abdullah ibn Umar not to desist from supporting him.

Meanwhile Husayn ibn Ali corresponded with nobels of Basrah and asked them to support him. Major tribes of Basrah gathered and got ready for fight against Yazid I and informed Husayn ibn Ali. At the same time Ubayd-Allah ibn Ziyad, governor of Basrah, executed one of the messengers of Husayn ibn Ali and then addressed people and warned them to avoid insurgency. Next day ibn Ziyad, now governor of both basra and Kufa, left Basra toward Kufa leaving his brother as deputy governor of Basra. Basrah rebels army never reached Husayn ibn Ali and they became aware of his martyrdom midway of Kufa.

Considerable military units under Umar ibn Sa'ad entered Mecca to confront or attack Husayn ibn Ali on Tarwiyah day, or Dhu al-Hijjah 8, 60AH. [5]

Husayn ibn Ali gave a speech to people the day before his departure and said: "... Everyone, who is going to devote his blood for ours sake and is prepared to meet Allah, must depart with us... (Arabic: من كان باذلا فينا مهجته و موطننا علي لقاء الله نفسه فليرحل معنا)"

He also willed before his journey his half-brother Muhammad Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Salma ibn al-Hanafiyyah. Mohammad ibn Hanafiyyah was preventing him from going to Kufah knowing hypocrisy and insincerity of its people even with Ali. But Husayn departed toward Kufa to avoid the battle inside holy Mecca.

Husayn ibn Ali left Mecca toward Kufa with his family members plus some supporters on Dhu al-Hijjah 3 or 8, 60AH.

Husayn's representative to Kufa, Muslim ibn Aqeel, welcomed by people of Kufa. And most of them swore allegiance to him. But he and his host, Hani ibn Urwah, executed by the new governor of the Kufa, Ubayd-Allah ibn Ziyad, on Dhu al-Hijjah 9, 60AH without any considerable resistance of the people. And almost all the Kufan supporters of Husayn turned into his enemies.

Toward Kufa

Husayn ibn Ali came across with a convoy in the Tan'im (Arabic: التنعيم) station carrying some gifts from governor of Yemen for Yazid I. He confiscated all of their consignments and made the cameleers free to select between making a new contract with him or being payed for the amount of the way they had travelled so far. Some cameleers accompanied him. [6]

He met with Boshir ibn Ghalib (Arabic: بشر ابن غالب) in the Zat-Erq (Arabic: ذات عرق) station who was coming from Iraq and asked about his opinions about Iraq political situation. Boshir replied: "I left the hearts which are adherents of yours and the swords which are adherents of the Umayyad!". And Husayn confirmed his analysis and news.

Zuhair ibn Qain left Mecca toward his town at the same time but was trying to be away from convoy of Husayn ibn Ali due to the political disputes he had with Ali ibn Abi Talib before. After a while and passing away some stations, Zohair forced to camp near Husain's camp caused by some limitations. At this time Husain sent a messenger toward Zohair and called him for a meeting. Zohair's wife encouraged him to visit offspring of the Prophet. Zohair visited Husain. After the meeting Zohair ordered to move his tent to Husain's camp and asked his wife to left him and told her: "I have decided to accompany Husain in order to sacrifice myself for him and to shield him by my soul."

The word came about martyrdom of Muslim ibn Aqeel in Zobalah (Arabic: زبالة) station. This sad news caused a great sorrow in the convoy. A group of fellow travellers left Husain alone after that and only his family members and loyal followers remained with him. Husayn continued to advance toward Kufa even after receiving news of the loss of Kufan support. Now, nowhere is safe for him and for his family.

Husain sent Qais ibn Musahhar al-Saydavi (Arabic: قيس ابن مصهر الصيداوى) as messenger toward nobels of Kufa, such as Solayman ibn Sorad al-khozaei (Arabic: سليمان ابن سرد الخزاعى). He was captured in the vicinity of Kufa but managed to tear the letter to pieces to hide names of its recipients. Ibn Ziyad forced him to reveal the names or curse Husain and his father and brother before people to survive from death. He accepted the later but cursed ibn Ziyad and encouraged people to join Husain ibn Ali. Ibn Ziyad ordered his execution by dropping him from the top of the palace afterward.

Clash with Vanguard

It was only two days journey remaining to Kufa that Husayn was intercepted by vanguards of Yazid's army of around 1000 men headed by Hurr ibn Yazid Al-Riyahi. Hurr refused Husayn's request of his return to Medina and also prevented him from advancing toward Kufa. Hurr was continuously preventing them to move further or was making them deviate from their way. Hurr prevented Husayn from moving to any direction after reciving a threatening letter from ibn Ziyad to halt them.

Husain ibn Ali gave a speech and said: "... Don't you see that the truth is not put into action and the false is not prohibited? The believer have got to be fond of meeting his God justly. So I do not consider the death but blessedness and living with the opressors other than abjectness." Some of his followers asserted their loyalty and he started moving.

Karbala

Husain ibn Ali, his family as well as his supporters arrived Karbala on Moharram 2, 60AH. He was forced to pitch a camp at this dry and bare land and Hurr stationed his army nearby.

[Ibn Ziyad]] appointed Umar ibn Sa'ad to command the battle against Husain ibn Ali. Umar ibn Sa'ad was not a military man but he was famous for being a clergyman. At first he rejected the leadership of army but he accepted after Ibn Ziyad thretened to depose him from governorship of Ray city. Umar ibn Sa'ad moved toward battlefield with 4000 men army and arrived Karbala on Moharram 3, 60AH. Ibn Ziyad was continuously sending reinforcements toward his army such that they became a 20,000 army on Moharram 6, 60AH [7] and finally 30,000 of horsemen and infantrymen. [8]

Ibn Ziyad asked Shabath ibn Reb'ei, also another clergyman of Kufa, to join Umar ibn Sa'ad. At first he feined illness but finally accepted. He together with 1000 horseman was dispatched toward Karbala.

On Moharram 7, 60AH ibn Sa'ad orderd 500 horsemen to cut the Husain's camp off from the Euphrates branches to prevent them from accessing to water. The camp now had no supply of water and might be forced to surrender from thirst.

Some negotiations between two sides occurred. The leader of the force, Umar ibn Sa'ad, finally agreed to Husayn's proposal that the siege be lifted so that Husayn, his family, and his companions could leave Iraq. He sent word to his superiors, asking them to ratify the offer. The governor, ibn Ziyad, liked the proposal, but another Umayyad

grandee, Shimr ibn Dhil-Jawshan, vetoed it. Umar ibn Sa'ad was commanded to destroy Husayn or be killed himself.

Choice between life and death

On the 9th of Muharram, the camp had exhausted its water and could choose only between surrender and death. Husayn asked ibn Sa'ad for yet more delay, until the next morning, so that he and his men could spend the night praying. Ibn Sa'ad accepted this proposal.

Husayn then told his men that he did not intend to surrender, but to fight. Since they were so heavily outnumbered, all of them were sure to die. He told them that if they wished to flee the camp in the middle of the night, rather than face certain death, they were free to do so. None of Husayn's men wished to defect. Instead they displayed their wish of being killed on the name of Husayn repeatedly if they were brought back to life by Allah(T.A)

Day of battle

The next day, Husayn's followers went to the front lines and one by one, addressed their relatives and friends in the enemy forces. They asked them to refuse to fight. Husayn himself addressed the enemy troops. The speech was so affecting that one of Yazid's generals, named Hurr who actually stopped Husayn from his journey to Najaf, abandoned Yazid's army and joined Husayn's small force and was the first amongst the Martyrs of Karbala.

Ibn Sa'ad feared that this might be the first of many defections, therefore hurried to join battle. He shot an arrow towards Husayn and the unequal battle began.

First Husayn's friends and followers went out to battle. One by one, loyal men like Hurr, Habib ibn Mazahir, Muslim ibn Ausaja, and Zuhair ibn Qain, many of whom were once close companions of Ali ibn Abu Talib, laid down their lives. Then came the relatives' turn. The men of Banu Hashim, the clan of Muhammed and Ali, went out one by one. Casualties included Abbas, the half-brother and flag-bearer of Husayn, Ali Akbar, son of Husayn, Qasim, son of Hasan ibn Ali and nephew of Husayn, and Aun and Muhammad, the sons of Zainab bint Ali.

The women and children were huddled in the tents, waiting for the battle to end. Husayn's son Imam Ali ibn Husayn was there among the women, because he was too ill to fight. Another son, Ali Asghar, was but six months old, and close to death from lack of water.

Husayn took the child in his arms and marched out to face Yazid's army. He asked for water for the child. But Hurmala ibn Kahil, on orders of Umar ibn Sa'ad, shot an arrow at the child. It pierced him in the neck and he died in the arms of his father.

Husayn buried his son and again went out to face the army. He is said to have demonstrated extreme courage and bravery, forcing the enemy into retreat. Eventually, however, as the time for the Asr prayer approached, Husayn desisted. As he dismounted from his steed to offer the prayer, he was attacked by arrows and spears,

even though Yazid's army was still too shaken to approach him. However, he began his prayer. As he prostrated on the ground, Shimr ibn Dhil-Jawshan, one of Umar ibn Sa'ad's commanders, approached Husayn and cut off his head. Husayn's head was raised on a spear for all to see. The men took off all valuables from his person, leaving the corpse semi-naked.

Aftermath

Husayn's head was raised on a pike for all to see. His body was looted and then trampled by horsemen.

As night approached, Yazid's army advanced to Husayn's tents. They were looted and set on fire. Jewelry and veils (hijab) were taken from the women, and the children were beaten.

The next day, the women and children were loaded on camels and taken to Yazid's court in Damascus via Kufa. The Shi'a say that the captives were humiliated and harried, so that fatigue, hunger, and thirst were added to their grief at the death of Husayn and his men. Yazid believed that by doing so, he could humiliate and ridicule them to the point where Husayn's followers would lose all public support.

However, during the journey from Kerbala to Kufa, and from Kufa to Damascus, Husayn's sister Zaynab bint Ali and son Ali ibn Husayn gave various speeches that vilified Yazid and told the Muslim world of the various atrocities committed in Kerbala. After being brought to Yazid's court, Zaynab courageously gave a famous speech in which she denounced Yazid's claim to the caliphate and eulogized Husayn's uprising.

The prisoners were held in Damascus for a year, during which Husayn's 4 year old daughter, Sakina bint Husayn, is believed to have passed away due to grief and sorrow. The people of Damascus began to frequent the prison, and Zaynab and Ali ibn Husayn used that as an opportunity to further propagate the message of Husayn and explain to the people the reason for Husayn's uprising. As public opinion against Yazid began to foment in Syria and parts of Iraq, Yazid ordered their release and return to Medina, where they continued to tell the world of Husayn's cause and Yazid's atrocities. The Shiites' commemoration of Ashurah thus began and has persisted to this day.

Casualties of Husayn ibn Ali army

See also List of Martyrs of Battle of Karbala

There were seventy-two dead in all (see [11], [12]). Here are the names of casualties from Banu Hashim tribe.

Hussain ibn Ali
Abduallah ibn Muslim
Muhammad Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Salma ibn Muslim
Jaffar ibn Aqeel
Abdul Rehman ibn Aqeel
Abduallah ibn Aqeel

Moosa ibn Aqeel
Aun bin Abdullah
Mohammed bin Abdullah
Qasim ibn Hassan
Abdullah ibn Al-Hassan
Abdullah bin Ali
Usman bin Ali
Jafar bin Ali
Abbas ibn Ali (Husayn's half brother)
Ali Akbar ibn Husayn
Muhammad Sallallahu Alayhi Wa Salma bin Aqil
Ali Asghar ibn Hussain
Hurr (the officer who changed sides)
Habib ibn Mazahir

Historiography of the battle of Karbala
See also: Maqatal Al-Husayn

Primary sources

The first historian to systematically collect the reports of eyewitnesses of this event was Abi Mikhnaf(died in 157 AH , 774 CE) in a work titled "Ketab Maqatal Al-Husayn". [10] Abi Mikhnaf's original seems to have been lost and that which has reached today has been transmitted through his student Hisham Al-Kalbi (died in 204 AH.) There are four manuscripts of the Maqatal, located at Gotha (No. 1836), Berlin (Sprenger, Nos. 159-160), Leiden (No. 792), and St. Peters-burg (Am No. 78) libraries. [11]

Rasul Jafarian has counted 5 Primary source which are now available Among the original works on maqàtil (pl. of maqatal or place of death / martyrdom and hence used for books narrating the incident of Karbalà), the ones that could be relied upon for reviewing the Karbala happenings, are five in number. All these five maqtals belong to the period between the 2nd century AH (8th CE) and the early 4th century AH (10th CE). These five sources are the "Maqatal al-Husayn" of Abu Mikhnaf, the "Maqatal al-Husayn" of Ibn Sa'd-Sunni Historian- , the "Maqatal al-Husayn" of Baladhuri -Sunni Historian-, the "Maqatal al-Husayn" of Dinawari, and the "Maqatal al-Husayn" of Ibn A'tham[12]. How ever some other historians have recognized some of these as secondary sources. For example Veccia Vaglieri has found that Baladhuri (died 279AH/892-893CE) like Tabari has used Abi Mikhnaf but hasn't mentioned his name.[13] On the basis of the article of "Abi Mikhnaf" in "Great Islamic Encyclopedia" Ibn A'tham has mentioned Abi Mikhnaf in "Al-Futuh" thus he should be recognized as secondary source. [14]

Secondary sources

Then latter Muslim historians have written their histories on the basis of the former ones especially Maqatal Al-Husayn of Abi Mikhnaf. However they have added some narrations through their own sources which weren't reported by former historians.

Tabari narrated this story on the basis of Abi Mikhnaf's report through Hisham Al-Kalbi in his history , History of the Prophets and Kings.[15] Also there is fabricated version of

Abi Mekhnaf's book in Iran and Iraq[16]. Then other Sunni Muslim historians including Balazari and Ibn Kathir narrated the events of Karbala from Abi Mikhnaf. Also among Shi'a Shaykh al-Mufid used it in Irshad.[17] However, followers of Ali -- later to be known as Shi'a Muslims -- attached a much greater importance to the battle and have written too many monographs known as Maqtal Al-Husayn.

Shi'a writings

Salwa Al-Amd has classified Shi'a writings in three groups [18]:

Religious texts: The legendary character of this category associates the chronological history of Al-Husayn with notions relating to the origin of life and the Universe, that have preoccupied the human mind since the beginning of creation, and in which Al-Husayn is eternally present. This category of writing holds that a person's stance toward Al-Husayn and Ahl al- Bayt is a criterion for reward and punishment in the afterlife. It also transforms the historical boundaries of Al-Husayn's birth in 4 Hr. and his martyrdom in 61 Hr. to an eternal presence embracing the boundaries of history and legend.

Historic texts: This category is the nearest to Sunni writings because it fully cherishes the historical personality of Al-Husayn and regards the Karbala ' incident as a revolt against oppression; dismissing the legendary treatment, while using the language of revolt against tyranny and despotic sovereignty. These oral traditions were later collected and recorded by Shi'a historians such as Abi Mekhnaf and Ibn A'tham.

Tragic poems, plays, and other narratives intended for popular consumption, which may contain material not strictly supported by the hadiths or the histories. This category comprises the literary works common in rituals and lamentations (poetic and prose) and is characterized by its melodramatic style, which aims to arouse pity and passion for Ahl al- Bayt's misfortunes, and charge feelings during tempestuous political circumstances on the memory of Ashura'.