

## Preface

### Historical Background

Muharram is the first month of the Islamic calendar, during which Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. Husayn was born on the 3rd of Sha'ban, in the fourth year of Hijrah (625 CE). His grandfather, Muhammad, named him Husayn, which means 'one of beautiful character.'

The Holy Quran refers to the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatimah, her husband 'Ali, and their two sons Hasan and Husayn, in the Verse,

***“Indeed, Allah wants to take away pollution from you, O, People of the House, and purify you [by a special kind of] purification.”***<sup>1</sup>

The Prophet indicated many times that the people of his House were the most qualified for leadership. Referring to Hasan and Husayn, he said, “These two are my sons. They are two Imams (leaders).”

During the lifetime of the Prophet, Abu Sufyan, his family, and other influential families of Mecca tried to stop the Prophet in any way they could. They even attempted to murder him, but they failed. Later, after the Prophet's death, Abu Sufyan's son—Muawiyah claimed to be the leader of the Islamic Nation. 'Ali, the cousin of the Prophet and the true leader of Muslims after the Prophet's death, defended the Islamic Nation against Muawiyah who formed an alliance with the Byzantine Empire and waged war from his capital, Damascus. Although 'Ali challenged Muawiyah to settle their dispute one-on-one rather than with armies, Muawiyah always refused. Eventually, 'Ali was murdered during his prayers.

To attempt justice and peace, Imam Hasan, the true leader of Muslims after 'Ali's death, signed a peace treaty with Muawiyah on the 5th of Jumada I, in the year 41 Hijrah (661 CE). The following is a translation of the original treaty:

“In the name of God, the Most Kind, the Most Merciful. The following shows how Hasan Ibn2 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib made peace with Muawiyah Ibn Abu Sufyan. He made peace with him on the condition that he

takes over the command of the Muslims, rule them according to the Book of God and the tradition of His Prophet; that Muawiyah would not pledge the Caliphate to anyone; that the people would have peace wherever they live in the land of God, whether in Syria, the Yemen, Iraq or the Hijaz; that 'Ali's companions and his followers, their persons, their money, their wives, and their children would be safe wherever they were; that Muawiyah pledges this before God; that he would harbor no evil or harmful schemes, whether in secret or in the open, towards Hasan Ibn 'Ali, his brother Husayn or any of the People of the House of the Messenger of God; that he would not terrorize them in any respect.”<sup>3</sup>

However, immediately after signing the treaty, Muawiyah said, “I trample this treaty under my feet!” He announced that he is creating the Umayyad dynasty and that when he dies, his son Yazid would succeed him as a king.

This goes against Islamic principles of election and justice in leadership in accordance with the Holy Quran and the tradition of the Prophet. Even though Muawiyah broke his agreement in the treaty and was going against Islamic principles, he warned his son, Yazid, not to kill Imam Husayn. Although Yazid wanted to rule the Islamic Nation and perpetuate his father's Umayyad dynasty, he chose to ignore his father's advice about Husayn. Muawiyah and his Umayyad dynasty operated by deception, bribery, bloody violence, and fear, and that is how his son Yazid forced the people to obey him as king.

## **Imam Husayn**

After examining all of the facts involved, it becomes very clear that Imam Husayn was fully aware of his situation. Because he was the grandson of Prophet Muhammad and the spiritual leader of the community, and Yazid was a drunkard, womanizer, and cold-blooded murderer, the Imam had no choice but to stand up to the unjust Umayyad Dynasty.

The Imam even mentioned that if everyone were to pay allegiance to Yazid, “Say goodbye to Islam.” There can be no doubt that the Imam knew that if he had paid allegiance to a drunkard who was not qualified for leadership, the Islamic Nation would have fallen apart. That is why the Imam made it very clear to everyone that his mission was to save the pure principles of Islam and fight against the evil people who try to destroy its purity.

The Imam's acute awareness of the political and social situation at that time is clear from his many sayings to the people and his sermons. Many times people tried to convince the Imam not to go to Kufah, but he always refused, even though he knew he would be killed. Also, on several occasions when the Imam's camp was faced with a military confrontation, Imam Husayn refused the requests of his people to initiate a battle and kill the enemy. The Imam refused and chose to avoid bloodshed by any means possible. Furthermore, the Imam repeatedly insisted upon his followers to leave and save their own lives.

So, we can see that the Imam was not being manipulated by forces out of his control. As a matter of

fact, he was conscious of every decision he made and he always thought carefully before making any decision, because his main concern was to preserve the pure spirituality of the Islamic Nation. In short, the Imam knew that the people did not fully understand how evil Yazid was, and he knew that the only way to awaken the people was by showing them how far Yazid would go to stay in power that he would even spill the blood of the grandson of Prophet Muhammad.

In fact, the martyrdom of Imam Husayn marked the beginning of the end of the Umayyad dynasty.

## The Text

The following text is a free translation of portions of authentic historical documents into English, focusing primarily on English language equivalence of the subject, in meaning, rather than literal translation. The translation consists mainly of selections of text from *Maqatal al-Husayn*, by 'Abdul Razzaq al-Muqarram, but also includes portions of *al-'Amali* by Shaykh Abu Ja'far al-Sadiq, and *Mazarat Ahl al-Bayt*. Al-Muqarram's work, *Maqatal al-Husayn*, was compiled from a variety of sources. It was chosen for translation because the author includes extensive references to his sources. For translation, the *Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* was consulted, and the Library of Congress System was used for transliteration of Arabic words.

The texts have been rearranged to conform to accurate chronological order and have therefore been divided into three sections: Before *Karbala'*, At *Karbala'*, and After *Karbala'*. The only break in the order of events is chapter six, Muslim's sons. Although they were captured after the massacre of *Karbala'*, I feel it is appropriate to place them with the chapter of their father. Also, all references in the original to the Arabic words "Ahl al-Bayt (literally 'people of the house') has been translated as "People of the House of the Prophet," or, "the Prophet's House." The word Shi'a (literally, 'followers', referring to followers of the Prophet's House) has been translated as "the Followers", as a collective name for the group. For consistency, all references to the Holy Quran are detailed in a footnote by mentioning the Chapter (Sura) number and Verse (ayah) number. Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Jalali was consulted for accurate English translations of the original Arabic text. The map, by Hasan Husayn Jalali, is included to improve geographical understanding of the movement of Imam Husayn, as well as probable routes of the Umayyad Army between *Karbala'*, Kufah, Damascus, and Medinah.

'Ali H. Jalali

Chicago, 1994

---

1. The Holy Qur'an; Sura of Ahzab 33:33.

2. Ibn means 'son of'.

3. See: al-Fusul al-Muhimmah by Ibn al-Sabbagh, p. 163

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.al-islam.org/karbala-and-ashura-ali-husayn-jalali/preface>