

Tragedy of Karbala as reported by the Sunnis

Part 1

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In this series we provide the history of the events of Karbala as recorded by the Sunnis. Although dampened, and sometimes inaccurate on the favor of the tyrants, such Sunni documents are the lasting testimony for the undeniable horrible massacre of the household of the Prophet (S). The information, unless otherwise specified, are from the History of al-Tabari. Few remarks on the History of al-Tabari by the Sunni scholars. Shibli Numani wrote:

Among books of historical character, an authentic and very comprehensive book is that of the Imam al Tabari, known as Tarikh Kabir. Al Tabari is a writer whose scholarly attainments and whose sure and extensive knowledge are unanimously recognised by the traditionists. His commentary by far is the best of the commentaries.

The well known traditionist, Ibn Khuzaima, says that he knew no man learned than al Tabari. Al Tabari died in the year 310 A.H – 921 C.E. Some traditionists, al Sulaimani in particular, have remarked that al Tabari coined traditions for the Shi'a. Regarding this charge against al Tabari, Allama al Dhahabi, in his Mizan al-I'tidal says:

This is an allegation based on false misgivings. The fact is that Ibn Jarir is one of the most trust worthy Imam. –Dhahabi has further remarked:

All the authentic and comprehensive books of history, such as Tarikh al Kamil and those written by Ibn al Athir, Ibn Khuldun, Abual Fida etc, are based on his work and abridged Tarikh of al-Tabari.

Sunni reference: Sirah al-Nabi -- The Life of the Prophet, by Shibli

Numani, English version, v1, p25

The Martyrdom Foretold

On the death of Muawiya, when Imam Hussain (as) refused to pledge his allegiance to Yazeed, he went to the tomb of his grandfather, Prophet Muhammad (saw, S). He worshipped there for the most of the night, and also slept there for a while, in his dream he saw the Messenger of Allah, May Allah bless him and his cleansed progeny, surrounded by angels.

The Prophet (saw, S) embraced him and said:

My beloved Hussain, I foresee you when you will be, in the very near future, covered with your blood, slain at the land of Karballa, while thirsty, being deprived of water. This will be done to you by people who claim that they are from my followers.

Imam Hussain (as) in his dream looked at his grandfather and said:

My grandfather, I ask you to admit me into your grave. I do not desire to go back to the earthly world.

The Messenger of Allah (saw, S) answered him:

My beloved Hussain, there are degrees which you will not acquire except through martyrdom.

Before he departed to Iraq, he uttered the following words:

I am as eager to join my ancestors as Jacob was eager to join Yousef. I visualize my body being dismembered by the wolves of the desert which shall fill from my flesh their empty abdomens and hungry stomachs. The pleasure of God is our pleasure. We are patient at His trial and he gives us the reward of the patient. (Men from) the flesh of the Messenger of God will never part with him. They will join him on the Day of Judgement, and he will be very pleased by the re-union.

Yazid's Efforts For Allegiance

According to Hisham b. Muhammad (al Kalbi) – Abu Mikhnaf: Yazid succeeded at the beginning of the month of Rajab in the year 60 (April 8, 680). Al Walid b. Utbah b. Abi Sufyan was governor of Medina, al Numan b. Bashir al Ansari of al Kufah, Ubaydallah b. Ziyad of al Basrah, and Amr b. Said b. al as of Mecca. Yazid's only concern, when he assumed power, was to receive the oath of allegiance from the individuals who had refused to agree with Muawiyah's demand for this oath of allegiance from Yazid. Muawiyah had summoned the people to give an oath of allegiance to him that Yazid would be his heir. Yazid's concern was to bring their attitude to an end.

When he wrote to al Walid, he wrote to him on a patchment as small as a rat's ear:

Seize Husayn, Abdallah b. Umar, and Abdallah b. al Zubayr to give the oath of allegiance. Act so fiercely that they have no chance to do anything before giving the oath of allegiance. Peace be with you.

Therefore, al Walid sent in the night for al Husayn, peace be on him, and summoned him (to attend). Al Husayn, peace be upon him, was aware of what he wanted and so he called a group of his retainers and ordered them to carry arms.

Imam Hussain, peace be upon him, said:

Al Walid has summoned me (to come to him) at this time (of night). I cannot be sure that he might not burden me with a matter I may be unwilling to respond, he is unpredictable man, so remain with me. When I go to him, sit at the door. If you hear my voice raised, come in to prevent him from (doing anything to) me.

Al Husayn, peace be upon him, went to al Walid, and Marwan b. al Hakam was with him. Al Walid gave him news of the death of Muawiya and al Husayn replied with the formula:

We belong to God and to Him we will return.

Then al Walid read out Yazid's letter and his order to get the pledge of allegiance from him. Then al Husayn said to al Walid:

I do not see that my pledge of allegiance to Yazid in private would be sufficient. Wouldn't you prefer me to give it in public so that people are aware ?

Indeed, said al Walid So see what you think about that in the morning, suggested al Husayn, peace be on him.

Go, then, in the name of God but come to us when the people gather, said al Walid.

By God, interrupted Marwan, if al Husayn leaves you now without giving the pledge of allegiance, you will never have the same power over him until there is a great number of slain men between you and him. Imprison the man and don't let him leave you until he has paid homage (to Yazid), or you have executed him.

At that al Husayn said:

O son of a foreign woman, would you or he kill me? By God you are a liar.

With that he went out and walked away accompanied by his retainers until he reached his house.

You disobeyed me, Marwan told al-Walid, No by God he will never give you the same opportunity over

his life. Then blame someone other than yourself, said Marwan

Replied al Walid: Indeed, you had chosen for me something which would have involved the destruction of my own faith. By God, I would not want all the worldly wealth and dominion which the sun rises and sets over, (if it involved) killing al Husayn. Glory be to God, should I kill al Husayn because he said 'I will not swear allegiance' By God, I do not think that on the Day of Resurrection a man who is (responsible) for the blood of al Husayn (will weigh) little in the scale of God."

Al Husayn, peace be upon him, spent that night at his house. It was the night of Saturday when there were three days left on the month of Rajab in the year 680. Al Walid b. Utba was occupied with sending to Ibn al Zubayr about the pledge of allegiance to Yazid, and with his refusal to come to them. Ibn al Zubayr left Medina at night heading for Mecca. In the morning al Walid sent men after him, he sent a party of eighty horse men under the command of a retainer of the Banu Umayya. They pursued him but did not catch up with him, so they returned. Towards the end of Saturday he sent men to al Husayn, peace be upon him, to bring him to pledge allegiance to al Walid on behalf of Yazid b. Muawiyah. Al Husayn peace be upon him, said to them:

Come in the morning. Then you will have time to consider the situation and so shall we.

They left him that night without insisting upon him. He, peace be upon him, left under the cover of the night, it was the night of Saturday night with two days left in the month of Rajab, and he headed towards Mecca accompanied by his sons, his brother's (al Hasan's) sons and his brothers. There was most of the House except for Muhammad b. al Hanafiyyah. Al Husayn, peace be upon him, left for Mecca reciting:

Then he left it out of fear while he kept on the lookout. He said: My Lord, save me from the unjust people. (XXVIII 21)

He kept to the high road and the members of the house suggested:

If you had avoided the high road like Ibn al Zubayr did, the search party could not follow you. No by God, he replied, I will not leave until God judges what He will judge.

When al Husayn, peace be upon him, entered Mecca, his entry occurred on the night of Friday (i.e. Thursday), 3rd of the month of Shaban. As he entered, he recited:

And when he set out towards Madyan, he said: Perhaps my Lord will guide me in the right path. (XXVIII 22)

Then he stayed there and its inhabitants began to visit him frequently, as did those who had come to make the lesser pilgrimage and other people from far and wide. Ibn al Zubayr had settled himself there, near the Ka'ba, where he used to stand in prayer and perform the circumambulation. He came to visit al Husayn, peace be upon him, with the others who came to visit him. He used to come to him at intervals of two consecutive days, and sometimes between the two day interval. He was the most troublesome of

God's creatures to Ibn al Zubayr, who realized that the people of Hijaz would not pledge allegiance to him as long as al Husayn, peace be upon him, was in the land. He was more capable of commanding the people's obedience than him, and was more respected.

Muslim B. Aqil Is Sent To Kufa

In response to the messages that Imam Hussain received from the people of Iraq, asking him to come to them and pledging their full support and promise to die in his defense, that goes as follows

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

To al Husayn b. 'Ali, peace be upon them

From Sulayman b. Surad, al Musayyib b. Najaba

Rifa'a b. Shaddad al bajali, Habib b. Muzahir and the believers and Muslims of his Shi'a among the Kufans.

Greetings, we praise God before you, other than Whom there is no deity. Praise be to God Who has broken your enemy, the obstinate tyrant who had leapt upon this community, stripped it of its authority, plundered its fay and seized control of it without its consent.

Then he had killed the choice members of it and had preserved the wicked members of it. He made the property of God a state (divided) among its tyrants and wealthy. He was destroyed as Thamud were destroyed. (Now) there is no Imam over us. Therefore come; through you, may your God unite us under truth. Al Numan b. Bashir is in the governors palace and we do not gather with him for the Friday (service).

Nor do we accompany him (out of the mosque) for the Festival service. If we learn that you will come to us, we will drive him away until we pursue him to Syria, if God the Exalted, wills.

Imam Hussain's (as) reply was as follows

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate

From al Husayn b. 'Ali,

To the leaders of the believers and the Muslims

Hani and Said have brought me your letters; they are the last two of your messengers who have come to me. I have understood everything which you have described and mentioned. The (main) statement of your great men is: "There is no Imam over us.

Therefore come; through you, may God unite us under truth and Guidance." I am sending you my

brother, Muslim b. Aqil, who is cousin and my trustworthy (representative) from my House. If he writes to me that the opinions of your leaders and the men of wisdom and merit among you is united in the same way as the messengers who have come to me have described and as I have read in your letters, I will come to you speedily, God willing. For by my life, what is the Imam except who judges by the Book, one who upholds justice, one who professes the religion of truth, and one who dedicates himself to the essence of God.

Greetings.

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