The Sermon of Fadak

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Abstract

Fadak was a fertile farm of date-palms outside Madinah. The Holy Prophet (S) gifted it to his daughter Fatimah al-Zahraʾ ('a) but after he passed away, it was taken as the general property of Muslims. Fatimah al-Zahraʾ went to see the caliph and delivered a sermon in which she demanded what was rightfully hers. This momentous sermon came to be known as the Sermon of Fadak. In this paper we first examine the sources and narrators of this sermon and then proceed to translate the entire sermon.

Introduction

The Sermon of Fadak is one of the two famous sermons delivered by the daughter of the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad ibn ʿAbdillah, may Allah shower His blessings on him and his progeny. Fatimah al-Zahraʾ ('a) was the daughter of Muhammad (S) and his first wife Khadijah bint Khuwaylid. During his lifetime, the Prophet gifted a parcel of land full of date-palms, called Fadak, to his beloved daughter. After his death, however, the first caliph, Abu Bakr ibn Abi Quhafah, took this land claiming that it belonged to the Muslims.
When news of this reached Fatimah, she went to the Prophet’s masjid to face Abu Bakr and ask for her rights. At that time, the mosque was full of the Muhajirin and Ansar. Fatimah entered with a group of women surrounding her. A special place was kept for her and she stood behind a curtain as she addressed Abu Bakr and all those who were present. When she had finished the first part of her sermon, Abu Bakr responded to what she had said. She then confuted his response using evidence from the Qurʾan.

Though this sermon is known as the Sermon of Fadak, it contains other discussions such as the philosophy of worship, the state of Arabs before Islam and the importance of the Qurʾan.

Sources

It can be evinced from biographical accounts that this sermon was recorded in the earliest sources. Lut ibn Yahya, better known as Abu Mikhnaf al-Azdi (d. 154 A.H.), penned a monograph titled Khutbat al-Zahra which is no longer extant. The famous fourth century historian–cum–hadith scholar Abu al-Faraj Isfahani, also wrote a book titled Kalamu Fatimah fi Fadak which, similarly, has not reached us. The teacher of al–Najashi and al–Tusi, Ahmad ibn ʿAbd al–Wahid al–Bazzaz (d. 423 A.H.) is similarly said to have written a book called Tafsir Khutbat Fatimah al–Zahra.

Aside from these early works, we find that many scholars recorded this sermon in their books, either in its entirety or partially. The following is a list of all the extant works, that were compiled before the end of the 7th century A.H., wherein the sermon of this holy lady has been mentioned:

1. **Balaghat al–Nisaʾ by Ahmad ibn Tayfur:** Abu al–Fadhl Ahmad ibn Abi Tahir, better known as Ibn Tayfur (d. 280 A.H.), is reported to have authored about fifty works. His magnum opus was Tarikh Baghdad and another famous work by him is al–Manthur wal– Manẓum. The latter work was penned in fourteen volumes out of which only the eleventh and twelfth volume have reached us. Part of the eleventh volume is currently available under the title: Balaghat al–Nisaʾ. This monograph contains the speeches of some influential women. Ibn Tayfur narrates the sermon of al–Sayyidah Fatimah (‘a) after the speeches of ʿAishah, wife of the Prophet (S). This is one of the earliest written sources where the sermon of the Prophet’s daughter has been recorded with its chain of transmission.

2. **Mukhtasar Basaʾir al–Darajat by al–Hasan ibn Sulayman al–Hilli:** Saʿd ibn ʿAbdillah al– Ashʿari al–Qummi (d. 300 A.H.), one of the well–respected Shiʿa scholars of his time, wrote a book called Basaʾir al–Darajat. This book contained numerous traditions related to Shiʿa beliefs and was extant until the eight century. al–Hasan ibn Sulayman al–Hilli, related some traditions from Basaʾir al–Darajat, to which he then appended other traditions in a work known as Mukhtasar Basaʾir al–Darajat. In this book, the author mentions the themes of the Sermon of Fadak without relating the actual sermon itself.

3. **al–Saqifah wa Fadak by Ahmad ibn ʿAbd al–Aziz al–Jawhari:** Ahmad ibn ʿAbd al–Aziz (d. 323 A.H.) was a second century Sunni hadith scholar. His work al–Saqifah wa Fadak, as the name suggests,
recounts these two important historic events during the early period of Islam. This book is not extant. However, Ibn Abi al–Hadid has related some portions of it in his commentary on the Nahj al–Balagha. The book that is currently available under the title al–Saqifah wa Fadak is actually a compilation of what has been related by Ibn Abi al–Hadid. al–Jawhari narrated parts of al–Sayyidah Fatimah’s sermon with its chains of transmission.

4. **Maqatil al–Talibin by Abu al–Faraj Isfahani**: ʿAli ibn al–Husayn, better known as Abu al–Faraj Isfahani (d. 356 A.H.), authored many tomes, the most famous among which is the encyclopedic work al–Aghani. One of his other important works is Maqatil al–Talibin. In it he recounts the history of the progeny of ʿAbd al–Muttalib. He mentions the existence of this sermon when he surveys the life of Zaynab al–Kubra (ʿa) and notes that Ibn ʿAbbas narrated Fatimah’s sermon from her saying: “Our ʿaqilah, Zaynab bint ʿAli (ʿa), narrated to me...”

5. **Sharh al–Akhbar fi Fadhaʾil al–Aʾimmat al–Athar by Nuʿman ibn Muhammad**: Nuʿman ibn Muhammad, better known as Qadhi Nuʿman al–Maghribi (d. 363 A.H.), was a Shiʿi Ismaʿili scholar. He wrote this book with the aim of compiling the merits and virtues of the Ahl al–Bayt (ʿa). In it he narrates part of the sermon of al–Sayyidah al–Zahraʾ (ʿa), without its chain of transmission, from ʿAbdullah ibn Salam.

6. **Man La Yahdhuruhu al–Faqih by Shaykh al–Saduq**: Muhammad ibn ʿAli ibn Babawayh al–Qummi, commonly known as al–Shaykh al–Saduq (d. 381 A.H.), was one of the luminaries of the Shiʿa world. His work, Man La Yahdhuruhu al–Faqih, is considered one of the four main sources of Shiʿa hadith. In this book, al–Shaykh al–Saduq narrates part of the Sermon of Fadak from al–Sayyidah Zaynab (ʿa), after which he says: “The sermon is lengthy; we have taken from it that which we require [for our discussion].”

7. **ʿIlal al–Sharaiʿ by Shaykh al–Saduq**: Being a prolific writer, al–Saduq wrote and compiled numerous works. In this book, he tries to examine the wisdom behind religious injunctions and narrates the same part of the sermon that he narrated in Man La Yahdhuruhu al–Faqih but with two different chains of transmission.

8. **al–Manaqib by Ahmad ibn Musa ibn Mardawayh (a. 410 A.H.)**: This book is not currently extant. However, Asʿad ibn Shaqarwih (d. 635 A.H.) related this sermon in his book al–Farāʾiq (which is also non–extant) and Sayyid Ibn Tawus, in turn, narrated this in his work al–Taraʾif. Thus the book of Ibn Mardawayh that is currently available has actually been recompiled from al–Taraʾif and is not the original.

9. **Nathr al–Durar by Mansur ibn al–Husayn al–Razi**: The author was a fifth century (A.H.) Shiʿi scholar from Rayy and had been, for some time, the vizier to Majd al–Dawlah. He compiled this work in seven volumes and though he had named it Nathr al–Durar, it was published and is well known as Nathr al–Durr. His other works include Nuzhat al–Adib and al–Tarikh. This work contains a large part of
the al-Sayyidah Fatimah’s sermon, but without any chain of narrators.17

10. al-Shafi fi al-Imamah by al-Sayyid al-Murtadha: Ali ibn al-Husayn al-Musawi, better known as al-Sayyid al-Murtadha, was one of the luminaries of the Shi'a world. He wrote prolifically on numerous subjects such as jurisprudence, hadith and history. As the name suggests, al-Shafi fi al-Imamah is a book that contains traditions related to the subject of imamah. In this work, al-Sayyid al-Murtadha relates part of the Sermon of Fadak from his teacher with three different chains of transmission.18

11. Dala'il al-Imamah by Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari: This author should not be confused with the famous early Sunni historian Ibn Jarir al-Tabari or with the Shi'a scholar Muhammad ibn Jarir, author of al-Mustarshad fi al-Imamah. This author is known as al-Tabari al-Saghir and was a fifth century scholar.19 The most detailed narration of the Sermon of Fadak has been recorded in this work and hence it is commonly referred to by the late and contemporary scholars. al-Tabari has listed eight different chains of transmission for this sermon.20

12. Maqtal al-Husayn ('a) by Muwaffaq ibn Ahmad al-Makki (d. 568 A.H.), better known as al-Khatib al-Khwarazmi. In this work, he narrates part of the sermon from Aishah.21

13. al-Ihtijaj ala Ahl al-Lijaj by Abu Mansur al-Tabarsi: Ahmad ibn Ali ibn Abi Talib al-Tabarsi (d. 588 A.H.) was a Shi'a scholar of the sixth century. His book al-ihtijaj contains the debates of the Prophet (S), the Imams ('a), their companions and some Muslim scholars, against their opponents. In this work, al-Tabarsi narrates Abdullah ibn al-Hasan’s exposition of the Sermon of Fadak.22


15. Tadhkirat al-Khawas min al-Ummah fi Dhikr Khasais al-A'immah by Sibt ibn al-Jawzi: Abu Muhammad Yusuf ibn Abdillah, commonly known as Ibn al-Jawzi, was a Hanafi scholar who died in 654 A.H. In this book, he discusses the merits and virtues of the Ahl al- Bayt ('a). He narrates part of the Sermon of Fadak from al-Sha'bi without mentioning the chain of transmission.24

16. Sharh Nahj al-Balagha by Ibn Abi al-Hadid (d. 656 A.H.): This is the most important commentary of the Nahj al-Balagha by a non-Shi'a scholar. It also contains significant historical information. In it, the author relates the Sermon of Fadak from al-Jawhari’s al-Saqifah wa Fadak.25

17. Sharh Nahj al-Balagha by Ali ibn Maytham al-Bahrani (d. 679): In this work, a small part of the sermon has been mentioned without its chain of transmission.26

18. Kashf al-Ghummah fi Ma'rifat al-A'immah by al-Irbili: Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Maytha ibn Abu al-Fath al-Irbili (d. 692 A.H.) was a Shi'a scholar. In this work, he relates the sermon from al-Jawhari’s al-
Saqifah wa Fadak. Some of the above are primary sources and others are secondary. Regardless, it is interesting to see that many non-Shiʿi sources have related this sermon. The oldest extant source of this sermon is Ibn Abi Tayfur’s Balaghat al-Nisa. In addition to these sources, many other early works mention the existence of this sermon, albeit in passing. These include:

I. Kitab al-ʿAyn by al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi (d. 175 A.H.)
II. Muruj al-Dhahab by ʿAli ibn al-Husayn al-Masʿudi (d. 283 A.H.)
III. Tahdhib al-Lughah by Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Azhari (d. 370 A.H.)
IV. al-Faʾiq fi Gharib al-Hadith by Mahmud ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhshari (d. 538 A.H.)
V. al-Nihayah fi Gharib al-Hadith wal-Athar by Ibn Athir al-Jazari (d. 606 A.H.)

**Narrators**

**First Level (tabaqah)**

- ʿAbdullah ibn ʿAbbas (d. 68 A.H.)
- Aishah bint Abi Bakr (d. 58 A.H.)
- al-Husayn ibn ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (d. 61 A.H.)
- Zaynab bint ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (d. 62 A.H.)

**Second Level**

- al-Hasan ibn al-Hasan ibn ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (d. 97 A.H.)
- ʿAli ibn al-Husayn Zayn al-ʿAbidin (d. 95 A.H.)
- ʿIkrimah ibn ʿAbdillah ibn Musa ibn ʿAbbas (d. 104 A.H.)
- Urwah ibn Zubayr ibn ʿAwam (d. 93 A.H.)
- Zaynab bint al-Husayn (ʿa), the wife of Hasan ibn al-Hasan

**Third Level**

- Abd al-Rahman ibn Kathir al-Hashimi (d. 120 A.H.)
• ʿAtiyyah ibn Saʿd ibn Junadah al-ʿAwfi (d. 111 A.H.)

• Jabir ibn Yazid al-Juʿfi (d. 128 A.H.)

• Muhammad ibn Ḥāli al-Baqir ('a) (d. 114 A.H.)

• Muhammad ibn Muslim ibn Ubaydillah al-Zuhari (d. 124 A.H.)

• Salih ibn Kaysan (d. 140 A.H.)

• Zayd ibn Ḥāli ibn al-Husayn al-Shahid (d. 121 A.H.)

**Fourth Level**

• Aban ibn Taghlib (d. 141 A.H.)

• ʿAbdullah ibn Hasan ibn al-Hasan (d. 145 A.H.)

• ʿAbdullah ibn Muhammad al-ʿAlawi (d. 145 A.H.)

• al-Hasan ibn Salih ibn Hayy (d. 168 A.H.)

• al-Ṣārqi ibn al-Qutami (d. 158 A.H.)

• ʿAmr ibn Shimr ibn Yazid al-Juʿfi (d. after 160 A.H.)

• ʿAwanah ibn al-Hakam ibn ʿAyadh (d. 158 A.H.)

• Harb ibn Maymun al-Ansari (d. ~ 160 A.H.)

• Jaʿfar ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq ('a) (d. 148 A.H.)

• Muhammad ibn Ishaq ibn Yasar (d. 151 A.H.)

• Muhammad ibn Saʿib al-Kalbi (d. 146 A.H.)

**Fifth Level**

• Aban ibn ʿUthman al-Ahmar (d. 182 A.H.)

• ʿAbdullah ibn Yusuf

• al-Ḥusayn ibn Ῥulwan al-Kalbi (d. 2nd Century A.H.)

• al-Ḥusayn ibn Zayd ibn ʿAli (d. 190 A.H.)

• ʿAli ibn Hassan ibn Kathir al-Hashimi
• Muhammad ibn ʿAmr ibn ʿUthman al-Juʿfi (d. 2nd Century A.H.)
• Musa ibn ʿĪsa ibn Muhammad al-ʿAbbas al-Hashimi (d. 183 A.H.)
• Naʿīl ibn Najih al-Basri
• ʿUbaydullah ibn Musa al-ʿAmri (d. 175 A.H.)

**Sixth Level**

• ʿAbdullah ibn al-Ḍahhak (d. 206 A.H.)
• Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Nasr al-Bazanti (d. 221 A.H.)
• al-ʿAbbas ibn Bakkar al-Ṭabbi (d. 222 A.H.)
• Hisham ibn Muhammad (d. 206 A.H.)
• Ismaʿil ibn Mihran (d. 220 A.H.)
• Muhammad ibn Abi ʿUmayr (d. 217 A.H.)
• Muhammad ibn al-Husayn al-Qasabani (d. 221 A.H.)
• Muhammad ibn Sulayman
• Muhammad ibn ʿUmarah
• Muhammad ibn Ziyad al-Ziyadi (d. 3rd Century A.H.)
• ʿUbaydullah ibn Muhammad (d. 228 A.H.)
• ʿUbaydullah ibn Musa al-ʿAbsi (d. 221 A.H.)

**Seventh Level**

• ʿAbd al-Jalil al-Baqilani
• al-Hasan ibn Musa al-Khashshab (d. 260 A.H.)
• Jaʿfar ibn Muhammad (d. 260 A.H.)
• Jaʿfar ibn Muhammad ibn ʿUmarah
• Mufadhdhal ibn Ibrahim al-Ashʿari
• Muhammad ibn Aslam (d. 270 A.H.)
• Muhammad ibn Khalid al-Barqi

• ʿUthman ibn ʿImran al-ʿUjayfi

• Yahya ibn al-Husayn ibn Zayd (d. 237 A.H.)

• Zayd ibn ʿAli ibn al-Husayn ibn Zayd (d. 270 A.H.)

**Eighth Level**

• ʿAbdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Sulayman

• Ahmad ibn Abi ʿAbdillah al-Barqi (d. 274 A.H.)

• Ahmad ibn Abi Tahir, better known as Ibn Tayfur (d. 280 A.H.)

• Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Saʿid al-Zayyat

• Ahmad ibn ʿUbayd ibn Nasih (d. 273 A.H.)

• Muhammad ibn Mufadhdhal ibn Ibrahim al-Ashʿari

• Muhammad ibn Qasim al-Saymami (d. 282 A.H.)

• Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Basri (d. 298 A.H.)

• Sulayman ibn Ibrahim (d. 288 A.H.)

**Ninth Level**

• Ahmad ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAziz al-Jawhari (d. 323 A.H.)

• Ahmad ibn Abdillah ibn Qudhaʿah al-Safwani (d. 4th Century A.H.)

• Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Makki (d. 322 A.H.)

• Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Yazid (d. 307 A.H.)

• ʿAli ibn al-Husayn al-Saʿd Abadi

• Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Katib (d. 322 A.H.)

• Muhammad ibn Musa ibn al-Mutawakkil (d. after 310 A.H.)

**Tenth Level**

• ʿAbd al-ʿAziz ibn Yahya al-Jaludi (d. 332 A.H.)
Eleventh Level

With over 25 chains of transmission and 90 narrators, there is little room to doubt the historicity of al-Sayyidah Fatimah’s sermon in which she presented her case for the rightful ownership of Fadak. Only the specific contents of the sermon, in terms of wording and expression, may be debated. Different versions exist, but the differences are minor and do not in any way impugn the sermon itself.

The Sermon

Glory be to Allah for His great blessings, and gratitude to Him for that which He has inspired, and praise be to Him for what He has brought to pass. From the all-encompassing blessings that He grants to the ever-expansive grace that He bestows and all the bounties that He continuously confers. Its magnitude is greater than can be enumerated, its extent is beyond measure and its limit is beyond comprehension. He has invited the people to express their gratitude in order to seek its increase and continuity, called upon them to praise Him by augmenting it and followed up by bidding them to ask for more of its like [in the Hereafter].
I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, alone, having no partners – a statement the inner meaning of which has been defined as sincerity, its means have been instilled in the hearts and its meaning gleams in the minds. He cannot be perceived by sight, described by words or depicted by imaginations. He originated everything from nothing that existed before, and created everything without following any previous model. He fashioned everything with His power and made it all with His will, without any need for bringing it into being or any possible benefit that could come from forming it; only the affirmation of His wisdom, the proclamation of His obedience, the manifestation of His power, the servility of His subjects and the exaltation of His call. Then He placed reward in obedience and punishment in disobedience to Him, in order to turn His servants away from His chastisement and urge them towards His Paradise.

I bear witness that my father, Muhammad, is His servant and Prophet. He chose him even before sending him [with the Message], named him before picking him [for prophethood] and selected him before appointing him [as a Messenger] – at a time when the creation was hidden in the unknown, covered by the curtain of uncertainty and close to the edge of non-existence – out of the knowledge of Allah, the Most High, about the final outcome of every matter, the complete awareness of events that will transpire and cognizance of the end of all affairs. Allah sent him in order to complete His mission, establish His order and execute His mercy. He found the people divided in their beliefs, secluded around their sacred fires, worshipping their idols and denying Allah, despite having intrinsic knowledge about Him. So, through my father Muhammad (S), Allah illuminated their darkness, removed the ambivalence from their hearts and illumined the obscurity of their sight. He rose among the people with guidance, saved them from perversion, removed their [spiritual] blindness, led them to the right faith and called them towards the straight path. Then Allah took him back with kindness and election, affinity and preference.
Thus Muhammad (S) is now in ease and comfort, [free] from the hardships of this world, surrounded by the blameless angels and the pleasure of the Forgiving Lord, in the company of the Almighty King. May Allah bless my father, His Prophet, the custodian of His revelation, His chosen servant, the one whom He selected from all His creatures and whom He is most pleased with. Peace, blessings and mercy of Allah be upon him.

Then she turned to the people who were present in the gathering and said:

You are the servants of Allah, the recipients of His commandments and prohibitions, the bearers of His religion and revelation and the trustees of Allah over your souls. You are the propagators of His message to all people. His true proxy is present among you, as the legacy that he (the Prophet) bequeathed and left behind with you, giving it authority over you – the Articulate Book of Allah, the True Qur’an, the Radiant Light, the Effulgent Illumination – with proofs that are manifest and mysteries that are evident. Its apparent message is clear and those who follow it are envied. Those who adhere to it are led to Allah’s pleasure and those who heed to it are saved. Through it the enlightened proofs of Allah, His explicative verdicts, His forewarned prohibitions, His unambiguous statements, His sufficient evidence, His mandated virtues, His bestowed leniency and His ordained laws, are attained.

Allah made faith (Iman) as a means to purify yourselves from polytheism, prayer (Salat) a means of freeing yourselves from arrogance, the poor-rate (Zakat) a means of cleansing the soul and increasing sustenance, fasting (Siyam) a means of establishing sincerity, pilgrimage (Hajj) a means of upraising the religion, justice a means for maintaining harmony of the hearts, obedience to us (the Ahl al-Bayt) a means of maintaining order in the community, our leadership (Imamah) as a security from disunity, holy struggle (Jihad) as a glory for Islam, patience as an aid in making one deserving of recompense, enjoining good (amr bil-ma‘ruf) as a reformation for the masses, honoring parents a means of protection from [divine] wrath, keeping ties with family a means of increasing your numbers, sanctioned retaliation (Qisas) a means of preventing bloodshed, fulfilling promises a means of earning forgiveness,
honesty in weighing and measurement a means of avoiding diminution, forbidding the drinking of wine a means of becoming free of filth, eschewing defamation as a screen against imprecation and shunning theft a means of maintaining virtue. He prohibited polytheism in order to make His Lordship exclusive, "so observe your duty to Allah with the dutifulness due to Him, and do not die except as Muslims." (3:102)

"Obey Allah in that which He has commanded and forbidden, 'for indeed only those who possess knowledge fear Allah.'" (35:28)

Then she continued:

O People, know that I am Fatimah and my father is Muhammad (S). I say again to you, and what I am saying is not false and what I am doing is not in transgression.

"There has certainly come to you a messenger from among yourselves; grievous to him is your distress; he is full of concern for you, and compassionate and merciful to the believers." (9:128)

So if you honor him and know him, you will realize that he is my father and not the father of anyone amongst your women. He is the bother of my cousin [and husband], and not of any of your men. How excellent it is to be related to him. He propagated the message, warned the people openly, and turned against the ways of the polytheists, breaking their backs and strangling their throats. He called [them] to the way of his Lord

"with wisdom and good advice." (16:125)

He broke the idols and struck the heads, until they were defeated and forced to flee. Then night gave way to day and the pure truth shone forth. The leader of faith spoke and the camel–frothings of the devils were silenced. The servants of hypocrisy perished and the knots of disbelief and schism were undone.

**ذّکر الله الإيمان تطهيراً لِكَم مِن الشَّرَك والصَّلاة تنزهيَّا لِكَم عِن الكِبر والزِّكاة تزكيَّةً للْنَفْس ونُعْمَاءً في الزَّرع والصِّيام تنبيهاً للإخلاص والحجّ تشييداً لِلْذَين والعمل تنسيقاً للقلوب طاعتنَا نقاماً للَّه وِإمامتنا أمانًا للفرقة والجهاد عرَّا لِلإسلام والصَّبر موعونَاً على استجابَ الرُّأي والأمر بالمعروف مصلحةً للعالمين وِيرَالوالدين وَقايةً مِّن السُّلَّخ وَصِلَة الأرحام منناءً للعذاب والقصاص حقناً للذَّناء وِالوفاء بالتَّنَّذَر تربياً للمغفرة وتوفيق المكالم والمواريز تغييراً للمحسَّن والثني عن شرب الخمر تنزيهاً عن الرجُل واجتناب الغذف حجاباً عن الله وترك السَّرِّقة إنجبّاً للعفة وحَرَّم الله الشرك إخصاداً له بالزَّبيبيَّة فاتقوا الله حقَّ حقَّه ولا تموتونّ إِلا وأَنتُم مسلمونٌ وأطيعوا الله فيما أُمركم به وناهاكم عنه فإنه إنما يخشى الله من عباده العلماء.
You uttered the words of faith in the presence of the bright-faced and empty-of-stomach, while you were on “the brink of a fiery pit.” (3:103). A mere draught for the drinker and opportunity for the lustful [were you]. A flickering flame and a treading ground for others [were you]. You would drink from polluted water and eat dried animal skins and leaves. Abased and spurned, you feared being dispossessed by those around you.

Then Allah, the Almighty, rescued you through Muhammad (S), after all these calamities and after suffering at the hands of barbarians, the wolfish Arabs, and the rebellious People of the Book.

“Whenever they ignited the flame of war, Allah extinguished it.” (5:64)

Whenever the horn of Satan appeared or the polytheist’s maw opened [in defiance], he would dispatch his brother [ʿAli (a)] into its midst and he would not return until he had trampled on its ear with the soles of his feet and put out its blaze with his sword.

He strove for the sake of Allah and struggled in the way of Allah. He was close to the Prophet of Allah, a leader among the friends of Allah, always prepared and diligent, sincere, earnest and hardworking – never fearing the reproach of any reproacher. Meanwhile, you were living lives of ease and comfort; relaxed, unperturbed and secure, awaiting the reversal of our fortunes, keenly waiting for news [of our failures], retreating during conflict and fleeing from battle.

So when Allah chose to take His Prophet to the abode of His Prophets and the dwelling of His sincere
servants, the thorny tree of hypocrisy appeared amongst you and the robe of religion became ragged. The misguided, who were previously silent, began to speak, the unknown few arose, and the liars came forward, braying [like camels] as they strutted, wagging their tails in your courtyards. Satan raised his head from his hiding place and called out to you. He found you responsive to his call and attentive to his deception. Then he enticed you and found you easy to arouse; he exasperated you and found you easy to anger. So you branded camels that were not yours and proceeded to other than your own watering holes.

This, while the era [of the Prophet] had only just ended, the gash was still wide and the wound still fresh. The Prophet had yet to be buried when you made haste, claiming that you were afraid of dissension;

“Lo, they have fallen into dissension! And indeed Hell surrounds the unbelievers.” (Q9:49)

Far be it! What is wrong with you? And where are you heading to while the Book of Allah is in your midst? Its affairs are distinct, its rulings manifest, its signs radiant, its prohibitions evident and its commands are clear. Yet you have cast it behind your backs. Do you wish to turn away from it out of aversion? Or do you wish to judge by another [book]?

“Evil would be the exchange for the wrongdoers!” (18:50)

“And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, then it will not be accepted from him and he will be among the losers in the Hereafter.” (3:85)

Then you only waited for as long as it took the feral [camel] to calm down and accept a rider taking control of its reins before reigniting its flames and kindling its embers. You have responded to the cries of the misguiding Satan and have attempted to extinguish the lights of the splendent religion and suppress the teachings of the pure Prophet. You secretly drank the milk while pretending to sip the froth and stalked his family and children, hiding in the trees and trenches, yet we endure patiently with you through what feels like the stabbing of daggers and the piercing of [our] sides with spearheads.

And now you claim that we have no inheritance!
“Do they seek the judgment of [the age of] ignorance? And who is a better judge than Allah for the people who have certainty?” (5:50)

Do you know not? Indeed, it is as obvious as the midday sun that I am his daughter!

O Muslims, will I be denied my inheritance?!

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O Muslims, will I be denied my inheritance?!

“You have certainly come up with a strange thing!” (from 19:27)

Have you purposely abandoned the Book of Allah and cast it behind your backs? When it says:

“And Sulayman inherited from Dawud” (27:16)

and when relating the story of Yahya ibn Zakariyya, where he (Zakariyya) said:

“So grant me from Yourself an heir who will inherit from me and inherit from the family of Yaʿqub” (19:5–6)

and it further states:

“…but blood relatives are more entitled [to inherit] from one another in the Book of Allah” (8:75)

and:

“Allah enjoins you concerning your children: for the male shall be the like of the share of two females” (4:11)

and:

“…if he leaves behind any property, he should make a bequest for his parents and relatives in kindness, an obligation for the Godwary” (2:180)

yet you claim that I have no entitlement and inherit nothing from my father?!
Has Allah revealed a special verse [of the Qurʾan] for you from which He excluded my father? Or do you say that people of two separate faiths cannot inherit from one another? Are my father and I not upon the same faith? Or is it that you have greater knowledge of the particular and general injunctions of the Qurʾan than my father and cousin? So take hold of its reins, muzzled and saddled, for it will surely meet you on the day you are assembled; and Allah is the best judge and Muhammad the best leader. The [final] rendezvous is on the Day of Resurrection, and when it comes, the falsifiers will be the losers and your remorse will be of no benefit.

“For every tiding there is an appointed term” (6:67)

“Soon you will know whom a disgraceful punishment will overtake and on whom a lasting punishment will descend.” (11:39)

Then addressing the Ansar, she said:

O people of understanding, supporters of faith and defenders of Islam, what is [the cause of] this negligence in defending my rights and laxity before the injustice being done to me? Did my father, the Prophet of Allah (S), not say: “A man is honored through his offspring”? How quickly have you changed, and how hastily have you have betrayed us, while you possess the ability to assist me and the strength to support me in what I seek and pursue.

Do you say: “Muhammad (S) has died”? This is indeed a grave matter whose damage is extensive, its breach is vast and its weavings have been rent apart. The world has become dark by his absence; the sun and moon have been eclipsed and the stars scattered because of his loss, hopes have been
dashed, mountains have crumbled, sanctities have been violated and all that is sacred has been disregarded upon his death. This is, by Allah, a great tribulation and a dire calamity, no tribulation can be compared to it and no adversity is as grievous. The Book of Allah – glory be to Him – announced it in your courtyards, in your evenings and mornings, calling and crying out, recited and chanted, that the Prophets of Allah and His Messengers who came before were not able to overcome the definitive verdict and the inescapable decree [of death].

“And Muhammad is but a messenger, other messengers have passed away before him. If he dies or is slain, will you turn back on your heels? Anyone who turns back on his heels will not harm Allah in the least, and soon Allah will reward the grateful.” (3:144)
proclamation? Why have you retreated after being at the forefront? And why have you opted for polytheism after believing [in Allah]?

“Will you not make war on a people who broke their pledges and resolved to expel the Messenger, while they attacked you first? Do you fear them? But Allah is worthier of being feared by you, should you be faithful.” (9:13)

Lo, I see you now inclined to a life of ease, having distanced yourselves from the one who is more worthy of giving and withholding. You have withdrawn into comfort and have escaped from hardship to abundance. You have thus spit out what you had retained and vomited out what you had swallowed.

“If you are ungrateful, you and those on earth all together, most surely Allah is Self-sufficient, Praised.” (14:8)

I have said what I had to say, being fully aware of your intention to forsake me and of the betrayal that has sprung in your hearts. But this was the unbosoming of the soul, the outburst of anger, the inability to further endure, the expression of the heart and the advancing of proof. So, take its reins and saddle it, with its sore back and suppurating hooves, ever disgraceful, branded with the wrath of Allah and eternal dishonor, leading to

“the fire, set ablaze by Allah, that roars over the hearts” (104:6–7),

for what you are doing is witnessed by Allah, “and they who act unjustly shall know to what final place of turning they shall turn back.” (26:227)

I am the daughter of

“a warner unto you, before a severe chastisement” (34:46)

So act, we too shall act,

“and wait, we too shall wait.” (11:122)
After having heard this, Abu Bakr said:

O daughter of the Messenger of Allah! Your father was indeed affectionate, generous, gracious and merciful to the believers, and the disbelievers shall face painful chastisement and severe retribution. If we look at his relationships, we find that he was your father to the exclusion of other women, and the brother of your husband to the exclusion of all [his] other close companions. He preferred him over every close friend and he, on his part, assisted him in every important matter. None love you save the felicitous and none despise you save the wretched. You are the pure progeny of the Messenger of Allah, the best of the chosen ones, our guides towards virtue and our path to Paradise. And you, O best of all women and daughter of the best of Prophets, are true in your words and foremost in the prodigiousness of your intellect. You will not be denied your right nor will your truth be contested.

By Allah, I have never opposed the opinion of the Messenger of Allah, and have never done anything but by his permission. The herald does not lie to his people; I take Allah as my witness, and He suffices as a witness, that I heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say: “We, the company of Prophets, neither bequeath gold nor silver, nor houses nor land; we only bequeath the Book, wisdom, knowledge and prophethood, and whatever we possess of [revenue generating] property, it is for the ruler who comes after us to dispense with according to his own judgment.” And we have already spent what you are asking for, to procure horses and weapons that the Muslims may use in battle, to fight against the unbelievers and quash the insurgency of rebels. This was done by the consensus of all the Muslims; I did not make this decision alone and I never enforced my opinion on anyone.

This is my state and my wealth, it is at your disposal and I place it before you. Nothing will be withheld from you and nothing will be kept from you. You are the noblewoman of your father’s nation and a pure [maternal] tree for your children. Your merits cannot be disputed, and your honorable lineage and roots cannot be disparaged. Your command with respect to what I possess shall be enforced. Do you think I should act against the will of your father (SAWW) in this matter?
She replied:

Praise be to Allah! My father, the Messenger of Allah (S), never turned away from the Book of Allah, nor did he oppose its injunctions. Rather, he followed its directives and abided by its lofty teachings. Do you add on to your treachery by ascribing falsehood to him? And this [plot] after his death is similar to the pernicious plots that were staged against him during his lifetime. Here is the Book of Allah, a just adjudicator and a decisive articulator, [clearly] saying:

“[An heir] who may inherit from me and inherit from the House of Yaʿqub” (19:6)

and

“Sulayman inherited from Dawud…” (27:16)

And the Almighty clarified how the shares are to be allotted and legislated the laws of [filial] obligation and inheritance, prescribing the proper share of males and females, thereby removing the excuse of the falsifiers and eliminating suspicions and doubts in those left behind. No,

“but your souls have made the matter seem decorous for you; yet patience is beautiful, and Allah is the one whose help is sought against what you allege.” (12:18)

Abu Bakr replied:

Allah spoke the truth and so did his Prophet. And his daughter has also spoken the truth. You are indeed a source of wisdom, a fountainhead of guidance and mercy, a pillar of faith and a wellspring of proof. I do not repudiate your apposite speech, nor do I reject what you say. These Muslims in front of us are the ones who compelled me to accept what I have accepted and it is by their unanimity that I took what I did; neither by coercion, nor obstinacy, nor self-importance and they are all witnesses to this.
Fatimah (‘a) then turned to the people and said:

O people who hasten towards false speech! O those who are complacent with the ugly action that will bring ruin!

"Do they not reflect on the Qurʾan or are there locks on the hearts?" (47:24)

No, rather your hearts have become rusted by the evil that you have done. Thus your hearing and sight have been taken away and you have gravely misinterpreted it (the Qurʾan); how wrongly you have referred to it, and how evil is your construal from it. By Allah, you will surely find its burden heavy and its consequence dire, when the veil is lifted and the great adversity that follows becomes evident to you, and there will appear to you from your Lord what you never reckoned,

“it is then that those who stood by falsehood will be the losers.” (40:78)

Finally, she turned to face the grave of the Holy Prophet (S) and recited the following couplets:

lothān šahīda la mūktakhārul kāthab

wa ḫamaqum fāshadhām waḏdān tābūna

al-ḥāl li al-ḏawān muqattūb

līma māṣyit wa ḥallat dināk al-ṭarrāb

līma fāqit wa kūlul ard muqṭasib
عليك بنزل من ذي العزة الكتب
فقد فقدت وكل الخير محتجب
لمًا مضيت وحالت دونك الكتب
قد كان بعدك أنباء وهمينة
إذا فقدناك فقد الأرض وابليها
 وكل أهل له قربى ومنزلة
أبدت رجال لنا نجوى صدورهم
تجهمنا رجال واستخفنا
وكنت بدرًا وثورة يستضاء به
وكان جبرئيل بالآيات يؤمننا
فلبئ قبلك كان الموت صادفنا

After you [passed away], reports and chaos followed,
Had you been present, tribulations would not abound
We miss you just as parched land misses its rain,
And your nation is confused, see how they have turned around
Every family has relatives but the position
before God, is for those with the greatest proximity [to you]
People manifested against us what was hidden in their hearts,
As soon as you departed and the barrier of dust separated us from you
They frowned at us and insulted us
when you were gone, and all the land was usurped
You were a full moon and an illuminating light
from the Almighty, upon you was the book revealed
Jibra’il would comfort us with the verses he brought,
But now you are not here and all goodness has disappeared
O how I wish death would have come to us before you,
When you passed and were, by the dune, from us covered

Conclusion

The sermon delivered by the Prophet’s daughter, Fatimah al-Zahra (‘a), soon after his death, clearly shows that she was displeased with the prevailing state of affairs. In her sermon, she alludes to usurpation of the caliphate in more than one instance and describes it as a “camel with a sore back.” Though she speaks of her ‘inheritance’, historical accounts as well as traditions show that the land of Fadak was actually gifted to her by the Prophet (S) during his lifetime.

One of the interesting sections of this sermon is the discussion on the philosophy of ritual acts of worship. al-Sayyidah Fatimah beautifully explains why we have been commanded to pray, fast, go for pilgrimage etc. There is a lot to be said about the profundity of her statements and scholars have written volumes expounding on her words. Her mentioning the precepts of Islam in a sermon such as this shows that even when she was distressed, she took the opportunity to impart some of the knowledge she had gained from her father.

The boldness with which Fatimah al-Zahra (‘a) speaks to the caliph shows that she was brave and fearless. On the other hand, the manner in which Abu Bakr responded to her indicates that she was a lady who was greatly admired and respected by the Muslim community. Furthermore, her copious use of Qur’anic verses, upon which she bases her arguments, speaks to her mastery over the contents of the divine book.

Many questions crop up when one examines of this historic sermon, such as:

(a) Why was Fadak taken away in the first place?

(b) Why did the Muslims not come to her aid when she called for their support?

(c) Why did she allude to the caliphate being usurped?

(d) If Abu Bakr held her in such high regard and considered her a ‘noblewoman of the Prophet’s ummah’, why did he not acquiesce to her demands and return Fadak to her?
(e) Why does she demand Fadak as her inheritance if it was, as history attests, a gift?

(f) What role did ʿAli ibn Abi Talib (as) play in attempting to get Fadak returned to his wife?

These questions are beyond the scope of this paper, but the answers to these questions may be found in available works of hadith and Islamic history.

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1. al-Dhāriʿah, vol. 7, p. 203
2. Ibid. vo. 18, p. 109
3. Rijal al-Najashi, p. 87
5. Balaghah al-Nisa, p. 23
6. Not to be confused with al-Saffar’s Basaʾir al-Darajat fi Fadhaʾil Al Muhammad
7. Mukhtasar Basaʾir al-Darajat, p. 456
8. al-Saqifah wa Fadak, p. 98
9. al-Ālam, vol. 4, p. 276
10. Maqatil al-Talibin, p. 95
11. Sharh al-Akhbar, vol. 1, p. 71
12. Ibid. vol. 3, p. 34, hadith 174
14. Ẓillal al-Sharaiʿ, vol. 1, p. 248
15. al-Taraṣṣif, p. 263, hadith 367
16. al-Ālam, vol. 7, p. 289
18. al-Shafi fi al-Imamah, vol. 4, p. 71
19. Dalaʾil al-Imamah, p. 63
20. Ibid. p. 111
22. al-Iḥtijaj, vol. 1, pp. 97–107
24. Tadhkiraṭ al-Khawas, p. 317
32. al-Nihayah fi Gharib al-Hadith, vol. 4, p. 273
33. The horn(s) of Satan refer to Satan’s people and his followers (See: Tāj al-ʿArūs, vol. 18, p. 446)
34. In the first two phrases, al-Sayyidah al-Zahrāʾ (ʿa) uses the analogy of a camel and in the following two phrases she uses the analogy of fire to refer to the caliphate (See: al-Zahrāʾ wa Khuṭbatu Fadak, p. 99)
35. This is an Arabic proverb that alludes to a person’s hypocrisy, for he pretends that he wants to sip the froth that forms over the milk, but then drinks the milk as well. (See: Faṭimah al-Zahraʾ – min al- Mahd ila al-Lahd, p. 367)
36. This is another Arabic proverb used to refer to one’s deception and fraud. (See: al-Zahrāʾ wa Khuṭbatu Fadak, p. 100)
37. The one “who is more worthy of giving and withholding” is Amir al-Muʾminin (ʿa) (Ibid. p. 121)

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