

The Caliphate of Imam Ali

Lesson 3



tasneeminstitute
ENRICHING THE SOUL

The Second Civil War in Islam

- The Muslims had already fought one civil war during the caliphate of Abu Bakr which were known as the Ridda wars.
- The first civil war was waged by the government against some of its dissident subjects;
- the second civil war was waged by some of the dissident subjects against their government.

Prelude to War

- A'isha was returning to Medina from Makkah after Hajj when she heard the news of the assassination of Uthman, and the rise of Imam Ali to the position of caliphate, whereupon she decided not to go to Medina, and to return to Makkah.
- Talha and Zubayr also arrived in Makkah. They were also joined by Marwan b. al-Hakam and other members of the Umayyad clan.
- All of them held a meeting and resolved that they would seek vengeance for the blood of Uthman. They raised an army in Makkah of 3000 fighters, and decided, after some discussion, to march towards Basra.

Prelude to War

- Why Basra?
- Basra is a seaport in southeast Iraq and is one of the wealthiest cities in the Islamic empire.
- They occupied Basra, seized the treasury, and they killed 600 Muslims whom they suspected to be opposed to them, and spread terror in the city.
- The quest of vengeance for Uthman's blood was only a pretext for war. It was a mask not only for the ambitions of the rebel leaders but also for their crimes.

Prelude to War

- The rebel leaders worked out their strategy: first they would take possession of Basra; with Basra as their base, they would occupy Kufa where Zubayr had many supporters. With Basra and Kufa in their hands, they figured, it would be possible for them to isolate Ali in Hijaz, invade his territories; defeat him, and snatch the caliphate from him.
- The professed aim of the rebels was to kill those men who had killed Uthman, however the men who had killed Uthman, were all in Medina so why were they marching upon Basra – 800 miles to the east, in Iraq! This indicates that their rebellion had nothing to do with Uthman's murder.

Prelude to War

- Talha and Zubayr requested Abdullah b. Umar also to accompany them to Basra but he refused to go.
- A'isha pressed Hafsa bint Umar and the other widows of the Prophet who were still in Makkah after Hajj, to go with her to Basra, and to take part in the war against the caliph. All of them refused except Hafsa. She was willing to go with A'isha but her brother, Abdullah b. Umar, forbade her to do so.
- A'isha also sent a letter to Umm Salama inviting her to take part in her campaign, but the latter refused and rebuked A'isha for rebelling against Imam Ali.

Prelude to War

- Umm Salama reminded A'isha of the Quranic injunction that God has imposed on the wives of the Prophet:

وَقَرْنَ فِي بُيُوتِكُنَّ

“And stay in your houses...” Quran 33:33

Prelude to War

- The Prophet prophesied A'isha's rebellion against Imam Ali:

لَيْتَ شِعْرِي أَيَّتُكَنَّ صَاحِبَةُ الْجَمَلِ الْأَدِيبِ تَخْرُجُ فَيَنْبَحُهَا كِلَابُ حَوَّابٍ ، فَيُقْتَلُ عَنْ يَمِينِهَا وَعَنْ
يَسَارِهَا قَتْلًا كَثِيرًا

“Which one of you will be the rider of the trained camel, at whom the dogs of Haw'ab will bark, and many men to her right and left will be killed.”

Prelude to War

- During the journey towards Basra A'isha heard dogs barking at her and is said to have remembered the Prophet's warning, and to have said: "Take me back! Take me back!" But Talha and Zubayr brought 50 men and bribed them to testify in front of her that the place was not the Plain of al-Haw'ab, in order to quell her fears.
- Many Sunni historians believe that those fifty men gave the first falsified testimony in the history of Islam.

Prelude to War

- When rumors of the defection first reached Medina, Imam Ali refused to move against them so long as no overt act of rebellion threatened the unity of Islam.
- It later became clear that Basra was vulnerable because fewer of the leading chiefs were there, able to curb the people and repress rebellion.
- When Imam 'Ali was informed about the army of Aisha, Talha, and al-Zubayr, he appointed Sahl b. Hunayf as his deputy and hurried out of the city with an army of 700 soldiers (including 400 soldiers of Muhajirun and Ansar)

Prelude to War

- On striking the Makkah road he found that they had already passed. Not being equipped for further advance, he halted there. Messengers were sent to Kufa, Egypt and elsewhere, demanding reinforcements, for which the Caliph waited before he went forward.
- Imam Ali sends Ammar b. Yasir and Imam Hassan to gather troops from Kufa.

Prelude to War

- The rebel army reached Basra and encamped close by. Messages were exchanged, and Uthman b. Hanif, the governor of Basra, aware that the cry of vengeance on the regicides really covered designs against Ali, called an assembly to gauge the temperament of the people. Finding from the uproar that the strangers had a strong party in the city, he put on his armor, and, followed by the larger portion of the citizens, went forth to meet the enemy. A parley ensued. Talha, Zubayr, and A'isha all declaimed against the murderers of Uthman and demanded justice for his murder.

Prelude to War

- The other side were equally loud in their protestations against A'isha and her attack upon their city.
- They argued that Ali had been elected and saluted Caliph; and now Talha and Zubayr were disloyally violating the allegiance which they had been the first to swear.
- Both of those men protested that the oath had been forced upon them. On this point the controversy turned, and from words they fell to blows.

Prelude to War

- An agreement was made on the understanding that the facts regarding the contested oaths of allegiance should be ascertained from Medina. If force had really been applied to Zubayr and Talha to take the oath of allegiance to Ali, then Uthman Ibn Hanif, the governor, would retire and leave the City in their hands.
- An envoy accredited by both sides was dispatched to Medina.
- He arrived there and proclaimed his mission before the assembled citizens. The people were silent at first. Eventually, one of them declared that both Talha and Zubayr had paid homage to Ali under compulsion, whereupon a great tumult arose. The envoy, having seen and heard enough to prove a diversity of viewpoints, departed immediately.

Prelude to War

- When news of these events reached Imam Ali, who was with his army in Nejd, he addressed a letter to Uthman b. Hanif, his governor. "There was no compulsion," he wrote, "on either Talha or Zubayr; neither of my adversaries was constrained other than by the will of the majority. By the Lord! If their object is to make me abdicate, they are without excuse; if it be any other thing, I am ready to consider it."
- When the envoy returned from Medina and made his report, the insurgents called on Uthman b Hunayf to evacuate the city accordingly.

Prelude to War

- He produced the Caliph's letter and refused to do so, but the insurgents had already obtained a firm footing in the city. Arming themselves, they repaired to the congregational Mosque for evening prayers, and, under cover of night, were not discovered until they had overpowered the governor's guards. They entered the adjoining palace and made a prisoner of the governor, Uthman b. Hunayf.

Conquer of Basra

- On the following day, a severe conflict raged throughout the city, and the local government passed into the hands of Talha and Zubayr.
- They took 70 of the governor's officers who were in charge of the public treasury as prisoners and brought them to A'isha who ordered that they be put to death.
- The life of Uthman b. Hunayf, the governor, was spared. Set free, his head and beard were shaven, and his eyelashes and moustaches clipped; in this shamed state the ousted governor made the best of his way back to Imam Ali.

Conquer of Basra

- Talha and Zubayr then made the proclamation that every citizen who had engaged in the attack on Uthman, the Caliph, should be brought forth and executed. The order was carried out, and great numbers of men were put to death. It is reported there were 400 men killed in this way.
- The insurgents communicated tidings of their success to allies in Syria, where the Umayyad governor Muawiyah ruled. A'isha also sent letters to Kufa, Medina, and Yemen, in an attempt to dissuade people from their allegiance to Imam Ali and stirring them up in the name of avenging the death of Uthman.

Conquer of Basra

- Meanwhile the citizens of Basra swore allegiance to Talha and Zubayr conjointly. To avoid the appearance of rivalry, prayers were conducted alternately by a son of each of those two men.
- Talha proclaimed an expedition against Ali, but when no one responded to his call, his spirits fell. Thus some weeks passed, till the city was aroused by the announcement that Ali was in full march upon it with an army.

The Army of Imam Ali

- As mentioned earlier, Imam Ali sent Imam Hassan and Ammar b. Yasir to recruit fighters from Kufa.
- Soon 10,000 men, some by land, some by river, set out to join the Caliph, who, advancing slowly, awaited their arrival. Thus reinforced, Ali was able at last to take the field effectively, and march on the rebellious city.

Negotiations

- Basra itself was not wholly hostile, and scores of the citizens came out to join the camp of Imam Ali.
- The insurgent army, which still nearly equalled that of the Caliph, now marched forth with Talha and Zubayr b. al-Awwam at their head, and A'isha herself seated in a well-fenced litter of her camel.
- According to several sources, the number of Imam Ali's army was nineteen to twenty thousand soldiers while his opponents' army were thirty thousand soldiers or more

Negotiations

- Imam Ali did not intend to fight; he sent messages to rioters for three days to abandon the battle and join him. Also before the start of the battle, the Imam invited the opponents' soldiers, from morning to noon, to abandon the battle.
- In his letter to Talha and al-Zubayr, Imam Ali mentioned his legitimate caliphate, people's oath of allegiance to him and his innocence in the death of Uthman. He also believed Talha and al-Zubayr are not rightful to take revenge of Uthman and they have disobeyed the Quran's order in taking the Prophet's wife out of her house.

Negotiations

- Moreover, Imam Ali sent a letter to A'isha and mentioned, she has left her house against the Quran's order with excuses such as reforming society and taking revenge of Uthman, accompanying an army and she has committed a great sin.
- Also Talha and al-Zubayr sent a letter to Imam Ali insisting on their intentions of disobeying Imam's orders, while A'isha did not respond to the Imam's letter.

Negotiations

- Imam Ali privately talked to Talha and al-Zubayr, he also recited a hadith from the Prophet to al-Zubayr.

قال علي للزبير : أما تذكر يوم كنت أنا وأنت في سقيفة قوم من الأنصار ، فقال : لك رسول الله (ص) : أتحبه ؟ فقلت : وما يمنعني ؟ ، قال : أما إنك ستخرج عليه وتقاتله وأنت ظالم قال : فرجع الزبير .

“Ali said to Zubayr: Do you remember when you and I were with a group of the Ansar and the Prophet asked you: Do you love Ali? And you replied: What would prevent me [from loving Ali]. The Prophet replied: Indeed one day you shall rebel against him and fight him while you are an oppressor.”

Negotiations

- Then al-Zubayr intended to abandon the battle and informed A'isha. But his son, Abdullah b. al-Zubayr said, You have prepared this battle and brought soldiers against each other, now you want to leave? You have seen flags of Ali's army in the hands of brave young men, and you became frightened.
- According to al-Tabari, 'Abdullah convinced al-Zubayr to stay, and finally al-Zubayr prepared to start the battle.

The Battle

- Before the start of the battle, Imam Ali gave a copy of the Quran to Muslim b. Abdullah and ordered him to invite the rebels to follow Quran and try to keep Muslims united together. However they killed him as well as a number of Imam's companions. Then Imam ordered his soldiers to commence the battle.
- Imam Ali had ordered his soldiers not to start the battle, not to kill the injured nor mutilate anybody, and not to enter any house without permission.

The Battle

- Malik al-Ashtar was commander of the right wing of the army of Imam Ali and Ammar b. Yasir was commander of the left wing of Imam's army. Also the flag was in the hands of Muhammad al-Hanafiyya. Imam al-Hasan was fighting in the right wing and Imam al-Husayn was fighting in the left wing of Imam's army.
- The battle lasted for 3 days.
- On the 3rd day, when victory for Imam's army was imminent, Talha tried to escape.
- Marwan b. al-Hakam shot Talha with an arrow in his foot. Talha was moved to a house in Basra, he died there after heavy bleeding.

The Battle

- According to sources, Marwan told Aban b. Uthman: “I have killed one of those people who killed your father.”
- According to a number of sources, al-Zubayr was regretful, and he left the battle before the battle commence. Other sources mentioned that al-Zubayr ran away to Medina after the battle. However, when al-Zubayr ran away from the battle, 'Amr b. Jurmuz followed him with several soldiers, and finally killed him in an ambush.

The Fate of A'isha

- After the battle, Aisha came off the camel and settled in a tent.
- Imam Ali denounced her actions which led to this battle and told her brother, Muhammad b. Abi Bakr, to take her to Basra. Aisha stayed in Basra for some days in order to return to Medina.
- However after she delayed her return to Medina, Imam Ali sent Abdullah b. Abbas to warn her to go back to Medina soon. As a result, by the order of Imam Ali a number of his soldiers along with a number of women of Basra while wearing men's clothes accompanied Aisha respectfully escorting her back to Medina.

The Casualties

- Imam Ali's army consisted of about 12,000 fighters
 - 500-600 casualties
- The army of A'isha, Talha and Zubayr numbered close to 30,000.
 - Some reports put the casualties at 20,000