

SUMMER IMMERSION

THE BATTLEFIELDS OF FAITH



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SESSION 4

The Battle of Yarmuk

Introduction

- It was fought near the Yarmuk River along the borders of modern-day Syria and Jordan, against Byzantine allied troops assembled by Heraclius.
- Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab appointed Abu Ubaidah ibn al-Jarrah as the overall commander of the Muslim army, replacing Khalid ibn al-Walid.
- As the commander, Abu Ubaidah humbly handed operational and tactical control of the troops to Khalid as the battle commenced.
- The Byzantine force comprised roughly 250,000 men from diverse groups like Slavs, Armenians, Franks, and Turks, facing a Muslim force of about 40,000 men.
- Khalid spotted these main weaknesses in the Byzantine forces and exploited them:
 - 1. No unity: They had a common enemy, but lacked the shared purpose and strong bonds of faith that united the Muslim army.
 - 2. Bad terrain: The Yarmuk river and steep, rocky ravines blocked their sides and back, leaving them with only one way to escape.
 - 3. Rigid formation: They relied on a big formation; setting up a strict circle to scare the Muslims, but they did not know how to fight once it broke.

EDUCATION | PRESERVATION | APPLICATION

- While the Romans wrongly dismissed the Sahabah as unskilled desert people, during the battle, they fought bravely in every condition, even without basic gear like shoes.

Negotiations Before the Battle

- Before the battle commenced, the two armies camped facing each other and held stalled negotiations for roughly three months.
- Individual commanders walked out alone from the Byzantine lines to negotiate with Khalid.
- On the eve of the battle, a commander named Jarjah (or George) rode out to meet Khalid.
 - He asked if God truly gave him a heavenly sword that breaks earthly blades, and why he held the title Saifullah (Sword of Allah), but Khalid denied the myth.
 - He then asked Khalid sincere questions about God and Islam.
 - He was moved by Khalid's honesty and character, that he recited the Shahada and embraced Islam.
 - Khalid taught him to make wudu and pray. Then, he turned his horse toward the Muslim camp and later fought alongside the Muslim army.
 - The watching Byzantine army was stunned, believing George was busy trying to persuade the Muslims to retreat.
- Another Byzantine commander met Khalid and suggested poverty brought the Muslims to Roman lands and offered food and money to leave.
 - Khalid replied that hunger did not drive them, stating instead that they were a people who drank blood and had heard Roman blood was the sweetest.

The Battle Day

- The Byzantine forces launched their first attack as the Muslims lines held firm, drawing the enemy forward step by step.

- Orders were given by Khalid selectively and only at the exact moment they needed execution.
- The ultimate strategy remained known to Khalid alone until the time came to act. This is aligned with the Prophet's advice to prevent premature exposure.

اسْتَعِينُوا عَلَىٰ إِنجَاحِ الْحَوَائِجِ بِالْكِتْمَانِ، فَإِنَّ كُلَّ ذِي نِعْمَةٍ مَحْسُودٌ

"Be discreet in order to achieve what you want, for everyone who is blessed is envied." (Al-Tabarani)

- George joined the frontline and was among the first to be martyred fighting on the Muslim side.
- It erupted into a massive six-day conflict marked by intense combat, devastating casualties, and horrific carnage that persisted in the aftermath.
- The fourth day:
 - Byzantine forces used heavy volleys of arrows aimed at the faces of the Muslim army, blinding many.
 - Abu Sufyan, who served as one of the commanders, lost an eye during the intense volley of arrows.
 - Hisham ibn al-As fought courageously until sustaining severe injuries where his limbs were cut off in defense.
 - Amr ibn al-As watched his brother Hisham fall and told family members not to disturb his remains so his soul could rest in peace.
- The fifth day:
 - When Byzantine forces heavily pressed and nearly broke the Muslim lines, the Muslim army almost retreated.
 - Ikrimah ibn Abi Jahl showed great bravery as a commander by leading 400 horsemen to protect a Muslim retreat and stop a strong Byzantine attack.
 - Khalid urged him to hold back, but Ikrimah insisted on atoning for his past opposition to the Prophet.

- They plunged deep into enemy ranks to break the siege. All of the men fighting alongside Ikrimah in this unit were either severely hurt or killed during the heavy combat.
- Ikrimah suffered grave injuries from the fighting and passed away later that same day.
- Abu Sufyan's wife, Hind bint Utbah, and other women in the camp rebuked retreating Muslim soldiers, hurling stones at them, driving them back into the battlefield.
- Ikrimah's wife, Umm Hakim bint al-Harith, used a tent pole — to kill 10 or 11 Byzantine soldiers single-handedly.
- The Byzantine forces felt exhausted and demoralized as the revitalized Muslim army shifted the momentum of the fight.
- The sixth day:
 - The Byzantine commander Gregory challenged the Muslim leadership to a duel.
 - Despite Khalid offering to take his place, Abu Ubaidah accepted the challenge and successfully killed Gregory.
 - Following Gregory's defeat, Abu Ubaidah signaled the Muslim line to charge immediately.
 - Khalid trapped the Byzantine army by seizing the Yarmuk River bridge, routing 70,000 enemy troops into the deep ravines.
 - Dirar ibn al-Azwar, known by the Romans as the "naked chested demon," blocked their escape route and compressed enemy lines.
 - The outcome was a decisive Muslim victory with heavy Byzantine losses, ending their rule in Levant.
 - Heraclius was in northern Syria when he received news of the catastrophic defeat.
 - He said goodbye, recognizing the region was lost to the Muslims.
 - He returned to Constantinople, which served as the political heart of the empire.

Administrative and Financial Reforms

- Levant under Muslim rule:
 - Following the departure of the Byzantines from the region, Muslim forces rapidly took over major cities like Jerusalem, Damascus, and Antioch.
 - Patriarch Sophronius of Jerusalem agreed to hand over the keys to the city, but specifically requested that Caliph Umar come in person to sign the treaty, rather than dealing solely with the local commander Abu Ubaidah.
 - The local populations in the Levant experienced justice under Islamic rule.
 - Cities like Damascus and Jerusalem transitioned under agreements that guaranteed safety of life, property, and freedom of worship for non-Muslim subjects in exchange for the jizya tax.
 - The regulated Islamic tax structure was lighter and more equitable than previously demanded by the Byzantines.