

26. Al-Khawarij (The Seceders)

The group of readers of the Holy Qur'an who attended with the Imam the Battle of Siffin were the first to call for discontinuation of the war. They were the most insistent on accepting the arbitration and the most violent against the desire of the Imam in continuing the war and refusal of the invitation for arbitration.

But these readers after the document of arbitration was signed swiftly reversed their attitude and turned one hundred and eighty degrees. They viewed that they had committed a grave error in cessation of hostilities and accepting the arbitration of men concerning the religion of God. They viewed that the duty of the Imam and their duty was to go back to war immediately without waiting for the decision of the two arbiters.

Probably they thought after deliberation that the rule of God was clear. Muawiya and his camp were the aggressor party which resorted to war to protect its falsehood. They did not resort to the rule of the Holy Qur'an because they wanted to surrender to its rule but because they believed that their defeat was inevitable.

The rule of God is clear in this matter. There would be no room for accepting the arbitration of two men and letting them try to deliberate and issue a judgment or verdict in a matter which is so clear that it leaves no place for forming any new opinion.

These fanatics forgot that they were the ones who challenged the authority of the Imam and pushed him by force to stop the war and to accept the arbitration and to sign its document. Now they were trying to force him to breach that covenant which he signed and made God and people witnesses on his acceptance.

These religious fanatics raised the slogan of "La Hukma Illa Lillah" (There is no rule but that of God). They meant by this slogan that Islam does not approve choosing two arbitrators for settling a dispute between two Muslim parties. Rule belongs only to God and it is not legal for men to issue a rule in religious matters.

It is amazing that this slogan had attracted thousands and thousands of Muslims who claimed adherence to the teachings of the Holy Qur'an and the Holy Prophet. Yet an arbiter of a matter about which two Muslim parties differ is nothing but a judge who is expected to settle that dispute and declare that one of the two sides is right.

That the two arbiters are two judges is what the document of arbitration spoke of. It started as follows: "This is what 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib and Muawiya Ibn Abu Sufyan litigated for. 'Ali litigated for the people of Iraq and those who are of their followers of believers and Muslims..."¹

When did the faith of Islam forbid litigation and appointment of judges and the judges' exercise of their mission in settling disputes? How would disputes be settled if litigation is forbidden? Did the "Khawarij" (Seceders) believe that the Messenger and the Caliphs were not exercising the mission of judges and appointing judges? The legality of issuing a judgment and the necessity of that is only self-evident in our religion.

The Seceders raised the slogan of "There is no Rule but that of God " and I do not think they understood its meaning. Probably they took this slogan from the following Qur'anic verse:

***"Certainly the rule belongs only to God. He commanded that you shall not worship but Him..."
The Holy Qur'an chapter 12 verse 41.***

Yet what the verse speaks of is one thing and what the Seceders understood from the verse is something else. The verse meant that the Almighty is the One Who reveals the principles and rules of the religion. He commanded that we (His servants) worship none but Him.

An arbiter or a judge is not the revealer of the religion or a worshipped person. He is only a man whose mission is to apply the rules of God.

If he does that and rules according to what God has revealed the Muslims are supposed to surrender to his rules. If he rules p a way contrary to what God has revealed the Muslims are supposed to disobey him.

It is amazing that this extremist party had forgotten that the Almighty said to His Messenger and to the followers of His Messenger:

"And judge between them according to what God has revealed and follow not their illegitimate desires..." The Holy Qur'an chapter 5 verse 53.

The Almighty said also to the people of the Gospel:

"And the people of the Gospel should judge according to what God has revealed in it and whoever rules not in accordance with what was revealed would be the transgressors." The Holy Qur'an chapter 5 verse 51.

He also said to the believers:

"Certainly God commanded you to deliver the trusts to whom they belong. And if you judge among people judge equitably." The Holy Qur'an chapter 4 verse 58.

Had the document of arbitration imposed on the Muslims to obey the two arbiters even if they were devious judging in contradiction with the Holy Qur'an and the instructions of the Holy Prophet the attitude of the Seceders would have some justification. But the document declared that the arbiters have to validate what the Holy Qur'an validates and invalidate what the Holy Qur'an invalidates.

If they do not find in the area of their disagreement an instruction from the Holy Qur'an they should resort to the authentically reported teaching of the Holy Prophet which unites and does not divide. If the two arbiters abide by the stipulation of the document they would be ruling according to what God has revealed.

Had the rebellious extremists said that the two chosen arbiters were not qualified to issue a judgment they would have been right and this was the Imam's opinion. But the extremists were the ones who forced him to accept the two arbiters while he knew they were the worst choice.

Ibn Al-Aws was an arch enemy of the Imam. Abu Musa was extremely limited in knowledge and understanding. His past during the days of 'Umar and Uthman indicates his unscrupulousness in religion.

His recent past at the beginning of the reign of the Imam indicates that he was following selfish interests. He hated the Imam and did everything in his power to discourage people of Kufa from supporting the Imam to regain his authority in Basra.

The two arbiters undoubtedly were not qualified to decide in a matter about which the nation was divided. Yet the Imam was not responsible for choosing them. He accepted the invitation for the arbitration and accepted the two arbiters under pressure and unwillingly. These extremists themselves were a very important part of the power which forced the Imam to do that.

However the lack of qualification of the two arbiters for making a decision does not prevent their commission as arbitrators because the acceptance of their decision was conditioned by their adherence to the teaching of the Holy Book and the instructions of the Holy Prophet.

Violent Extremism

The truth is that the Seceders never were moderate in any of their stands. At the beginning they were the most zealous for arbitration and they threatened the Imam with war if he insisted upon the continuation of the war.

They considered his continuation of the battle after he was invited to accept the rule of the Book of God an unforgivable major sin and a disbelief in Islam.[2](#)

As soon as the document of arbitration was signed the Seceders moved from the extreme right to the extreme left.

They declared that the acceptance of arbitration and the discontinuation of the battle is an unforgivable sin or rather a disbelief in Islam.

They went on moving from one extreme to a bigger extreme. They appointed themselves protectors of the faith and the Islamic law which they did not know. They made themselves inquisitive judges condemning people for their opinions.

They put people to death because they disagreed with them. The Declaration of the Faith: "There is no God but the Almighty and Muhammad is His Messenger" (through which the Prophet secured sanctity of the life and property of its pronouncer) was declared by the Seceders to be insufficient. Neither this nor the compliance with all of God's commandments could represent in their views a religious security.

They invented a new law through which they could test the faith of every Muslim namely: The repudiation of 'Ali and Uthman. Whoever repudiates the two Caliphs his life would be protected and whoever fails to do so would be condemned to death.

Thus repudiation of the Imam 'Ali the Brother of the Messenger and the "Mawla" (guardian) of every believer became an article of the Islamic Faith in the view of these rebels.[3](#)

The Imam came back from Siffin and these extremists also came back separating themselves from his army.

They camped at Harura and to that place they were related afterwards and called: Haruris. The Imam tried to convince them to rejoin his army and he almost succeeded in reaching that goal. They came back to Kufa but they were hoping that the Imam will go back to fight Muawiya without waiting for the result of the arbitration. But the Imam was too righteous to breach a covenant he signed.

When they knew of his determination to honor the document of arbitration they left Kufa after they wrote to those who shared with them their opinion in Basra.

They promised each other to meet at the Land of Nahrawan.[4](#) Five hundred from the Bassrites joined them at that place.

The Imam wanted to go back to resume his campaign against Muawiya after Abu Musa and Amr Ibn Al-Aws ended their mission with disagreement and their deviation from the right path became obvious.

He sent to the Seceders a message calling upon them to rejoin him in his new campaign against Muawiya as they used to urge him to do. But now they refused his invitation accusing him of trying to

avenge for himself because the rule of two arbiters did not come in his favor.[5](#)

The Imam wanted to leave them alone and go back to the battlefield. He called upon the Kufites and the Bassrites to join him in his military campaign. Sixty-two thousand Kufite volunteers responded to his call along with three thousand and two hundred from Basra.

The Seceders in the meantime were waging a campaign of terror unprecedented in the history of the Muslims.

They were interrogating people and killing anyone that refused to repudiate the Imam.

They arrested Abdullah Ibn Khabbab Ibn Al-Arath (companion of the Holy Prophet) and his wife. They asked him about 'Ali before the arbitration and after the arbitration. The man replied saying: "Ali knows more about God than you do. He is more adherent to the religion and more farsighted than you."[6](#)

They said: "You follow your selfish desire. You glorify men because of their names and not because of their deeds. By God we shall kill you in a way with which we never killed anyone before."

They handcuffed him and took him with his wife (who was pregnant and about to give birth) to the orchards of Mawaqeerpalm. They slaughtered him and his blood ran into the river. When they came to his wife she asked: Do you not fear God? I am a lady!! They cut her abdomen.[7](#)

They also killed three other women from the tribe of Tay as well as a well-known righteous lady called: Mother of Sinan Al- Saidawayah.[8](#)

The Imam received this disturbing news while he was about to leave for Syria to resume his campaign against Muawiya. He thought that it would be very dangerous to the people of Kufa and the rest of Iraq if he went on his mission and left these cruel terrorists behind him doing to the people what they were doing. He found it necessary to try to deal with the new danger before leaving for Syria.

The Imam led his army to Nahrawan where the Seceders were camping. He sent them a message demanding from them to hand him the killers of the Muslims in order to punish the criminals for their crimes. He told them that if they do that he will leave them and go to face the people of the west hoping that God may change their hearts and their thinking.

The defiant answer was: "We all killed them and your blood and the blood of your followers are not sacred to us."[9](#) The Imam came to face them in person and spoke to them saying: "You the band that was driven out of the right road by the hostility of arguments and stubbornness and were prevented from seeing the truth by your blind emotion..

I warn you not to become in the future objects of curse by this nation laying at this valley... without any authority from your Lord or a clear evidence.

"Do you not know that I prohibited you from accepting the invitation of arbitration and informed you that it was a conspiracy against you? Did I not tell you that the leaders of your enemies are not people of religion and you disobeyed me?"

"When I did what you wanted I stipulated that the two arbiters shall validate what the Holy Qur'an validates and invalidate what the Holy Qur'an invalidates. They disagreed with each other and disagreed with the rule of the Book and the Holy Prophet. We rejected their decision and we are now on the original position. How did you come to your position?"¹⁰

They said; "We have accepted the invitation for arbitration and when we did that we committed a sin and by this we became unbelievers. And we repented. If you repent we will be with you and from you and if you refuse to repent we will be against you and we will fight you."

He said "... Do you want me to call myself an unbeliever after I believed in the message of the Holy Prophet migrated with him and endeavored in the way of God? Should I do what you are asking I would be of the misguided party."¹¹ Then he left them.

The logic of the Seceders is amazing. They say that they committed a sin by the acceptance of the invitation of arbitration and by this they became unbelievers. Did they mean that whoever commits a sin becomes an unbeliever? If this is what they meant then a person has to be completely sinless in order to be a Muslim. This means that they believed that all Muslim generations were unbelievers.

Prophecies

However what was recorded in the books of history about the battle of Seceders and what the books of Hadith contained indicate that the Imam was not surprised by what happened to these people. He was expecting the battle and he knew its location its outcome and its details before it happened. He spoke of all that as if he were reading from a book.

The Seceders went towards the bridge of the river while the Imam was praying at a place remote from the river.

When some of his companions came to inform him that the Seceders had already crossed the river he said: "They will never pass the river." As he said that one of his companions went to verify the word of the Imam. He looked at them from a distance because he was afraid to come close to them. He thought that they had crossed the river.

He came back to the Imam verifying the news of their passage. The Imam said: "By God they will never cross the river and they will die before coming to the river."¹² People doubted the words of the Imam and some of them became suspicious.

When they went towards the Seceders to verify what he said and found them away from the river the

companions of the Imam exclaimed saying: "Allahu Akbar" (God is Great). When they informed the Imam of their doubt and what they found he said: "By God I never lied nor has my word ever been disproved."[13](#)

The Imam did not only have the knowledge of the location of the battle but also he was aware of its minute details. He told his companions before its beginning: "By God you will not lose ten men from among you and their balance after the end of the battle will not amount to ten." And the result of the battle came to show the truth of his prophecy.[14](#)

He gave Abu Ayyoub Al-Ansari the banner of safety.

Abu Ayyoub called the Seceders saying: "Whoever comes to stand under this banner would be safe and whoever did not commit murder and did not attack people and left this place for Kufa or Al-Mada-in would be safe. Whoever leaves this community would be safe. We do not want to shed your blood. We want to punish the killers of our brothers from among yuo." Many of them left the camp and about half their number remained determined to fight.[15](#)

The Imam ordered his companions not to start the battle against the Seceders but they exclaimed: "Let us travel this evening to Paradis." The Seceders attacked the army of the Imam and the army of the Imam split itself into two portions and they put the Seceders between them.

The marksmen received them with their arrows. The cavalry from the two sides closed in on them. The foot soldiers came to them with their spears and swords. The Seceders perished in one hour as if God told them: "Die" and they died.[16](#)

It became obvious to the companions of the Imam that his prophecy was completely true. The army of the Imam did not lose more than eight men and the balance of the Seceders did not amount to ten.

There was another prophecy which was more important but the companions of the Imam could not verify it after the end of the battle. The Imam informed his companions before the appearance of the Seceders that a group of Muslims will depart from religion as an arrow departs from its bow. The mark of these people is a man with a defect.

When the Imam finished the battle he ordered his companions to seek that person. They did but they did not find the man. Some of his companions said: "The man with the defect is certainly not among the dead."

The Imam repeatedly said: "By God he is among them. By God I never told a lie nor has my word ever been disproved." Finally he personally went accompanied by some of his companions searching for the described man.

They found him in a pit on the bank of the river among fifty corpses. When he drew him out he looked at his arm.

He found a lump of flesh like a woman's breast. When that flesh is extended it extends until it becomes completely parallel to the other hand. If left it shrinks until it takes its original shape! When the Imam found what he sought he exclaimed: "Allahu Akbar " then he said: "By God I never told a lie; nor was I ever proven to be untrue. Had I not feared that you may neglect your devotional duties I would have informed you of what God on the tongue of His Prophet said about the people who fight these Seceders while knowing their deviousness and acknowledging the right on which we are standing."[17](#)

The historians and the hadith-recorders reported that the Messenger informed his companions about the appearance of these Seceders and that he described them graphically. Al-Bukhari recorded in his Sahih that Abu Sa-eed Al-Khidri said:

"While we were with the Messenger of God when he was distributing some of the public funds among the Muslims Thul-Khuwaissirah (a man from Bani Tameem) came to him and said: "Messenger of God be just. The Prophet said: "Woe to you. If do not execute justice who does? I would have failed and lost if I did not execute justice." 'Umar asked the Messenger to permit him to kill that man. The Messenger said: "Leave him. A group will follow the path of this man. Your prayer and your fast would look too small compared to their prayers and fasts.

They read the Holy Qur'an but the Holy Qur'an does not go beyond their throats. They depart from religion as an arrow departs from a bow. Their mark is a man one of his two arms looks like a woman's breast or a lump of flesh. The Seceders antagonize the best group of people.

"I bear witness that I have heard this hadith from the Messenger of God as I bear witness that 'Ali Ibn Abu Talib fought them and I was with him. He ordered his companions to seek that man and he was brought out and I saw him exactly as the Holy Prophet described him."[18](#)

Muslim in his Sahih reported that Zayd Al-Juhani was in the army of the Imam which fought the Seceders. 'Ali said: "O people I have heard the Messenger of God saying: A group of people part with my nation. They read the Holy Qur'an. Your reading compared to their reading is nothing and so is your prayer and your fast compared to their prayer and fast. They read the Holy Qur'an and think that it is with them but it is against them. Their prayers do not go beyond their throats. They depart from Islam as an arrow departs from a bow. If the army that fights them knows what came on the tongue of the Messenger for them they may neglect their duties in reliance on what God promised them of great reward. The mark of this group is a man who has an upper arm only. There is at the end of his upper arm something resembling the end of a breast with some hair coming out of it.

'Ali said: "Seek that defective man." They sought him but they did not find him. 'Ali had to seek him by himself until he came to a group of corpses lying one above another. He commanded his men to bring those dead men out. They did and found the man they were seeking down at the bottom. The Imam exclaimed: "Allahu Akbar." Then he said: "God has fulfilled His Promise and His Messenger has delivered."[19](#)

- [1.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 162.
- [2.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 pp. 171–173–174.
- [3.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 pp. 172–173.
- [4.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 170.
- [5.](#) Taha Hussein Al-Fitna tul-Kubra part 2 p. 104 Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 171.
- [6.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 pp. 172–173.
- [7.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 pp. 172–173.
- [8.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 pp. 172–173 Al-Tabari his History part 5 pp. 81–82.
- [9.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3. p. 173 Al-Tabari his History part 5 p. 83.
- [10.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 173 Al-Tabari his History part 5 p. 84.
- [11.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 pp. 173–174 Al-Tabari his History part 5 p. 84.
- [12.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 pp. 174.
- [13.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 174.
- [14.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 174.
- [15.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 174 Sheikh Muhammad Abdo recorded in his Commentary on Nahjul-Balaghah part 1 p. 107 that only nine of the Seceder survived and only eight of the Imam's army died.
- [16.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 175.
- [17.](#) Ibn Al-Athir Al-Kamil part 3 p. 175 Al-Tabari his History part 5 p. 88.
- [18.](#) Al-Bukhari his Sahih Book of the Beginning of the Creation.
- [19.](#) Muslim his Sahih Book of Al-Zakat.

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