

Ibn Ziyad Meets Al-Husayn

Al-Hurr sent a message to Ibn Ziyad telling him that al-Husayn ('a) was camping at Karbala', whereupon Ibn Ziyad wrote al-Husayn ('a) saying, "O Husayn! It has come to my knowledge that you have camped at Karbala'. The commander of the faithful, Yazid, had already written me ordering me not to sleep on any soft bed nor drink enough wine till I send you to the Munificent One, the all-Knowing, unless you submit to my authority and to that of Yazid, *Wassalam*."

Having read this letter, al-Husayn ('a) threw it away saying, "*Those who buy the pleasure of the creatures with the price of the Creator's Wrath shall never succeed*".

The messenger asked him to respond to the letter, but the Imam ('a) said to him, "*I have no answer for him because he has already been condemned with the torment*."

She saw him riding one of two,
As the war gnawed its teeth:
Either he surrenders or
Death is to be faced
By a soul whose surrender honours refused;
So he said to her: Seek refuge with destiny,
For honour is a dignified man's decoration.
If you find no attire other than humiliation,
Then through death will the body be dismantled.
He saw firmness till death as the mark of honourable men,
A cause of pride, an ornament;
He got ready for the battle
Wherein knights were subdued by death,
To the depth of the heavens did he ignite it,
Red in blaze, burning in heat.

He stood though the ground beneath him did shake
Under the warriors' feet like an earthquake...[1](#)

The same messenger informed Ibn Ziyad of what Abu 'Abdullah ('a) had said. His rage intensified[2](#) and he ordered 'Umar Ibn Sa'd to march out to Karbala'. The latter had been camping at Hammam A'yan with four thousand men who were being dispatched to Dustaba where the people of Daylam had declared mutiny[3](#).

Ibn Ziyad had written him a promise to place him in charge of governing Rey, Dustaba's fortified border, as well as Daylam[4](#). Ibn Sa'd asked him to relieve him of such a task, so Ibn Ziyad required him to return his written promise to him, giving him one night's respite to reconsider. 'Umar Ibn Sa'd gathered his advisers who advised him not to march to fight al-Husayn ('a).

His sister's son, Hamzah Ibn al-Mughirah Ibn Shu'bah, said to him, "I plead to you in the Name of Allah not to march to fight al-Husayn and thus cut off your offspring and commit a sin against your Lord! By Allah! If you depart from this world after having lost all your wealth and authority, it will be much better for you than having to meet Allah stained with Husayn's blood."[5](#)

Ibn Sa'd said, "If Allah so pleases, I will do so." He spent his night contemplating upon his affairs. He was heard saying:

Should I abandon the domains of Rey
Though it is my ultimate desire?
Or should I return in ignominy,
Shamed for killing al-Husayn?
For killing him there is nothing but the fire
One from which there is no shield though I
See the domains of Rey as the apple of my eye![6](#)

In the morning, he met Ibn Ziyad and said to him, "You have put me in charge of a mission of which people have already heard; so, let me carry it out, and send to the battlefield those who are no less competent than I am."

He then named a number of Kufa's dignitaries. Ibn Ziyad said, "I do not receive orders from you with regard to who I dispatch. If you march, do so with our troops; otherwise, hand me over the covenant which I had written you." When he saw how persistent Ibn Ziyad was, Ibn Sa'd agreed to march[7](#).

He, therefore, went to face al-Husayn ('a) with four thousand men, and al-Hurr and everyone with him joined his forces. 'Umar Ibn Sa'd ordered 'Izra Ibn Qays al-Ahmasi to meet al-Husayn ('a) and to ask

him about what had brought him here, but ‘Izra requested to be relieved of having to do so, saying that he was one of those who had written al-Husayn (‘a). He asked the other prominent chiefs with him, but they, too, asked to be excused for the same reason...

Kathir Ibn ‘Ubaydullah al-Sha’bi stood up, and he was quite a daring man. He leaned on his cane and said, “I can meet him, and if you wish, I shall kill him, too.” Ibn Sa’d said, “No, do not kill him but ask him about what had brought him there.”

Kathir came to meet the Imam (‘a); he was recognized by Abu Thumama al-Sa’idi who stood up in his face and shouted at him to put his sword on the ground before entering the Imam's tent. He refused, so he was turned away. ‘Umar Ibn Sa’d called upon Qurrah Ibn Qays al-Hanzali to ask al-Husayn (‘a) the same question.

Qurrah delivered the message that he had brought from Ibn Sa’d to the Imam who responded by saying, “The people of your land wrote me asking me to go to them; so, if you now hate my presence, I shall go somewhere else.” The messenger went back and conveyed these words to Ibn Sa’d who, in turn, wrote Ibn Ziyad informing him of what al-Husayn (‘a) had said.

Soon the answer came: “Give Husayn and his band the option to swear the oath of allegiance to Yazid. If he does, we will decide what to do with him.”⁸

¹. This poem was composed by Sayyid Hayder al-Hilli, may Allah have mercy on his soul.

². al-Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, Vol. 10, p. 189. ‘Abdullah Nur-Allah al-Bahrani, Maqatal al-‘Awalim, p. 76

³. According to the text at the beginning of p. 76, Vol. 1, of Tajrid al-Aghani by Ibn Wasil al-Hamawi, who died in 697 A.H./1298 A.D., he stated so as he started narrating the events of the Battle of Hunayn. Said he, “This bath-house was known after A’yan, doorman of Bishr Ibn al-Hakam.” On p. 334, Vol. 3, of Mu’jam al-Buldan, however, it is attributed to A’yan, a slave of Sa’d Ibn Abi Waqqas.

⁴. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, p. 232.

⁵. al-Dinawari, Al-Akhbar al-Tiwal, p. 251. According to p. 58, Vol. 4, of Mu’jam al-Buldan, “Dustaba” is written as “Dastaba,” a town between Hamadan and Rey. One part of it is known as “Dustaba al-Razi,” whereas the other is known as “Dustaba Hamadan.” Due to the efforts exerted by Abu Malik, Haznalah Ibn Khalid al-Tamimi, it was annexed to Qazwin (the Caspian).

⁶. The following is stated on p. 385 of al-Maqdisi's book Ahsan al-Ta'asim: “The city of Rey caused the annihilation of the wretch Sa’d till he killed al-Husayn son... as he himself admits, may Allah humiliate him.” Then he cited both verses of poetry as indicated here with the exception of his saying that to be the governor of Rey is his desire.

⁷. Ibn al-Athir, Vol. 4, p. 22. Ibn al-Jawzi, on p. 161, Vol. 3, of Safwat al-Safwa, says that a man in Bara, who was one of the commanders of Ibn Ziyad, fell from his rooftop, breaking his legs. Abu Qulabah visited him and said to him, “I wish this incident will bring you goodness.” His prediction materialized: The man received an order from Ibn Ziyad to join the troops fighting al-Husayn (‘a), so he said to the messenger, “Just look at my condition!” After seven days, news came to him about al-Husayn (‘a) being killed, whereupon he praised Allah for not having anything to do with it.

⁸. al-Tabari, Tarikh, Vol. 6, pp. 233–234.

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