

The History of the Four Caliphs

Itmām al-Wafā' fī Sīrat al-Khulafā'



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AL-KHUDARĪ BAK AL-BĀJŪRĪ

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Introduction



ALL PRAISE BELONGS to Allah, as He ought to be praised and peace and salutations be upon our master Muḥammad, who made the ways clear and passed on the message exactly as he received it. May Allah be pleased with his noble and righteous Companions who followed his upright way, to which kings and nations yielded and submitted in awe.

Muḥammad al-Khuḍarī (the author), son of Shaykh ‘Afīfī al-Bājūrī says:

My brother, may Allah ﷻ inspire you and me. After I wrote a book on the life of the Prophet ﷺ which I named *Nūr al-Yaqīn*, you asked me to follow it with a book on the history of the Prophet’s ﷺ Rightly-Guided Caliphs. It was in their era that Islām expressed its highest manifestations and it was through their words and actions that it displayed its most beautiful jewels. My brother, you asked me to follow the style of my previous book in simplicity of expression, and to strive to gather the histories of these caliphs, scattered here and there in the voluminous works that would otherwise tire the reader. You mentioned to me that one of the greatest ways of disseminating a spirit of energy and endeavour in the ummah is to remain devoted to studying the history of its elders, so that it may know how they overcame the numerous hardships which almost came between them and their lofty goals and so it may know the fruits of following Islām and following its systems of regulation.

I realised your noble objective, your genuine faith, and your solicitude for your community. I therefore decided to help you in achieving your objective and to overcome the obstacles that prevent me from fulfilling this immense task seeking the help of Allah ﷻ, and what an excellent helper He is! I have divided the book into two sections:

One: The Era of Unity

This era comprises the Islamic conquests during the time of the two caliphs, Abū Bakr ﷻ and ʿUmar ﷻ, and a major portion of the time of ʿUthmān ibn ʿAffān ﷻ. I follow this part with a small section on the system of regulations of the Muslim nation of that time, the exemplary brotherly interaction of the Muslims and the efforts they made to realise what the Messenger of Allah ﷺ spoke of regarding the spread of Islām in east and west.

Two: The Era of Differences and Tribulations

This era extends from the last days of the caliphate of ʿUthmān ﷻ until ʿAlī ﷻ was killed and his son Ḥasan ﷻ handed over the reins of the caliphate to Muʿāwiyah ﷻ (may Allah be pleased with all of them). I follow this with a small section illustrating the consequences of differences and schisms in the Muslim ummah. This I have done so that the book may be a valuable lesson, by the help of Allah, for the Muslims in general.

I precede these two sections with a small introduction on the subject of the caliphate and anything related to it.

I hope that this book is warmly received by my Muslim brothers, as they warmly received my previous book. All praise is due to Allah ﷻ that I have full confidence in my efforts, for I seek nothing thereby but the pleasure of Allah ﷻ. I ask that this book be a means for attaining wonderful treasure in the Hereafter, that it be an inspiration for the Muslims which increases their strength and that Allah ﷻ sends His help to them.

The following are the works I refer to in compiling this book:

- The *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū ‘Abdillāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī al-Ju‘fī (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*); the places where he paid particular attention to information on the Companions ﷺ.
- The *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Abū’l-Ḥusayn Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*).
- *Tārīkh ar-Rusul wa’l-Mulūk* (‘History of Kings and Prophets’), Abū Ja‘fār Muḥammad ibn Jarīraṭ-Ṭabarī, except for the section of Ṣiffīn because I did not have the volume which contains this information (*Tārīkh aṭ-Ṭabarī*).
- *Al-Kāmil fī ’t-Tārīkh* (‘The Complete History’) Abū ’l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Abī ’l-Karam Muḥammad, popularly known as Ibn al-Athīr al-Jazarī.
- *Tārīkh*, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn al-Maghribī.
- *Tārīkh*, ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan al-Mas‘ūdī, a descendent of ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd ﷺ, the Companion of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.
- *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm ad-Dīn* (‘Vivification of the Religious Sciences’), Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī.
- *Sirāj al-Mulūk* (‘The Lamp of Kings’), Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Fihri aṭ-Ṭartūshī.

I have taken upon myself to specify reference sources wherever I see it as important, as I am aware of your eagerness for it.

Allah is the giver of success.

The Caliphate



THE MEANING OF THE CALIPHATE

ALLAH ﷻ SENT His Prophet, Muḥammad ﷺ, with an upright religion and a straight path. Those who follow it will be successful and those who deviate from it will be destroyed. This religion comprises of rules upon which rest the integrity of human society in this world and the Hereafter. Muḥammad ﷺ conveyed the message exactly as he received it, and then passed on to his Lord, pleased with Allah ﷻ, and Allah ﷻ pleased with him. It was necessary for the people to have a leader (imām) who would succeed him in making the people adhere to this religion, so that every person may live within its limits; the strong and the weak, the eminent and the humble, each equal before the truth. Accordingly, such a leader would be the caliph (successor) of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, as far as safeguarding the religion and administering worldly affairs.¹

THE OBLIGATION OF APPOINTING THE CALIPH

After the demise of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the Islamic community unanimously agreed on the obligation of appointing this caliph.² The Muslims who came after them concurred with them in this regard. None deviated from this unanimous decision (*ijmāʿ*) except for a few Khārijites³ and Aṣamm⁴ from the Muʿtazilites.⁵ These groups held that the caliphate in itself was unnecessary if the

Muslim community was sufficiently sound to follow the upright religion and put the Qur'an and Sunnah into practice. Their real stimulus however, was their flight from authority because of the tendency of its people to become presumptuous, overbearing and indulgent in worldly pleasures. They adopted this position because of the Shari'ah itself holds such tendencies in contempt and reproaches and rejects such individuals.⁶

A SINGLE IMĀM

Likewise, the Muslims unanimously agree that it is not valid to have two caliphs at the same time⁷ because of the inevitable rivalry and mutual hatred which will ensue, both resulting in failure and damaging consequences. The events that have befallen the Muslims since fragmenting under several leaders are sufficient proof to disallow this. The enemies of the Muslims have been able to feign friendship with one leader to use him against the other. The kings of Rome used their favourable relations with the Andalusian kings to protect them against the advances of the Abbasids. In our times, the situation has deteriorated to such an extent that we attempt to befriend those who desire our fall and collapse. Muslim rulers would not sink to this low, had they been apprised of what was good for them, did away with arrogance and held on to Islām firmly. "Truly in this there is a lesson for those who see." (Sūrah Āl 'Imrān, 3:13).

THE PERSON AT THE HELM OF THE CALIPHATE

The caliph commands great power, and this has brought about conflicting ideas about it and differences in the Muslim community as to who is most eligible for it. Years and centuries have passed by with this question remaining in the forefront of the minds of the leading Muslim scholars. Disagreement first arose after the passing away of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, with the Companions ﷺ divided into three groups:

1. Those who left the matter open to the Muslim community and considered them free choose whoever was deemed suitable as the imām, provided he was able to safeguard the religion and administer its affairs. In this, there is no difference between a Qurayshī and a non-Qurayshī. This was the opinion of the majority of the Anṣār (Helpers) who were the residents of Madīnah, may Allah ﷺ be pleased with all of them. For this reason, they requested this office themselves and intended to give the pledge of allegiance to Sa‘d ibn ‘Ubādah ﷺ, the leader of the Khazraj. This opinion was adopted later on by the Mu‘tazilites and the majority of Khārijites. The evidence for this opinion is the statement of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: “Listen and obey even if an Abyssinian slave with [a head] like a raisin is appointed over you”.⁸
2. Those who also said that the person is elected by the Muslim community, but that it can only be someone from Quraysh. This was the opinion of the majority of the Muhājirūn (Emigrants), may Allah ﷺ be pleased with all of them. Their opinion was adopted by the majority of the Ahl as-Sunnah. The evidence for this opinion is the statement of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ reported by Abū Bakr ﷺ: “The imams are from Quraysh”.⁹
3. Those who felt that the most eligible were those related to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the foremost of them ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ, since he was amongst the first to embrace Islām and made an exceptional contribution to the religion. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to him when he left him behind with his family on his departure to Tabūk: “Would it not please you to hold the position which Hārūn held in place of Mūsā, except that there is no prophethood after me?”¹⁰ This was the opinion of the majority of the Banū Hāshim and those who supported them. It was adopted by the Shī‘a who followed them. This was the opinion of ‘Alī ﷺ as well, as his

statement to Abū Bakr ﷺ, recorded in a ḥadīth of Muslim, shows: “We were of the opinion that we had a right [to the caliphate] because of our relationship to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.”¹¹ ‘Alī ﷺ did not consider any factor that made him more eligible for the caliphate than this relationship. Had there been any testament in his favour or in favour of anyone else, it would not have been concealed from the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

The second opinion won out over the others shortly after the demise of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. However, the differences mentioned here led to unfortunate circumstances later on. Calamities befell the Muslim community one after another and it fragmented, becoming completely powerless. Had the underlying reason for reserving the caliphate for the Quraysh been considered there would have been neither differences nor disunity.

THE UNDERLYING REASON FOR RESERVING THE CALIPHATE FOR THE QURAYSH

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ singled out the Quraysh for the caliphate because of their strong tribal bonds and influence by which an individual secures protection. Their influence is sufficient to dissolve any division and opposition to the caliph, leading to acceptance and unity. It is well established that the Quraysh enjoy status and prestige over all the Arabs and that the Arabs universally acknowledge their standing and honour.

Disunity is the likely outcome of placing the caliphate in the hands of anyone else, not least because the Quraysh will oppose and resist it. The disintegration of unity is precisely what the Shari‘ah warns against. However, when the caliphate is placed in their hands this is prevented from coming about. This is because they have the authority to lead the people to carry out their duties. There is no fear of opposition to them, nor any fear of secession, though if this

were to happen they would be responsible for controlling it and protecting the people from it.

This is what Ibn Khaldūn writes in his *al-Muqaddimah* then says:

Once it is established that the requirement for a Qurayshī caliph is to prevent discord because of the influence which they enjoyed, and when we know that the Legislator [Allah ﷻ] does not ordain injunctions for a specific generation, time or community, we can conclude that this is merely for the sake of efficiency. We therefore confine it [i.e., this law] to efficiency, and generalise the underlying reason that includes the object behind specifying the Quraysh, which is ‘influence’. So we posit the following as a prerequisite for a leader of the Muslims; that the leader be from a people that has influence and power over the other peoples of the time, so that other people follow and the Muslims are united through the protective influence of that people. This is not known of anyone as it was known of the Quraysh. The message of Islām which was revealed to them was universal. Arab tribal sympathies met well with Islām and the Quraysh therefore achieved supremacy over all other nations. Each region shall endow this position only to someone who enjoys this supreme tribal influence. Realising this secret of Allah ﷻ in the caliphate prevents one from trespassing it, since Allah ﷻ made the caliph His vicegerent who sees to the affairs of His servants and urges them to do what is to their advantage and prevents them from doing what is to their detriment. Such are the duties the caliph is charged with, and only someone with the capability to carry them out is addressed with these duties.¹²

At present, we do not know of any tribal influence sufficiently strong for the protection of the Muslim community other than that of those presently in charge; the Banū ‘Uthmān¹³ in Constantinople. May Allah ﷻ inspire them to struggle for His upright religion and to follow the way of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs ﷺ.

PREREQUISITES FOR THE CALIPH

It is essential for the person who holds this great position to possess the following four prerequisites:

1. Knowledge; because he is to implement the laws of Allah ﷻ and if he is ignorant of these laws he cannot put them into effect.
2. Justice; since the imamate is a religious office which involves dealing with all injunctions in which justice is a legal requirement, it is most appropriate that this be applied to the office of imamate as well.
3. Competence; in the sense that he must have the courage to uphold the *ḥudūd* (Islamic Penal Code) and embark on wars, to have full knowledge of them, and be responsible in leading the people into them. He has to have knowledge of the prevailing circumstances and the strength to overcome those who oppose his administration. He will be competent enough to undertake his responsibilities of protecting the religion, waging war against the enemy, upholding the rule of law and seeing to matters of public benefit.
4. To be physically and mentally sound; if he is lacking in either of the two, it will have an effect on his thinking and actions. A debilitating handicap such as childhood or being in a state of captivity are examples that would make a person ineligible in this regard.¹⁴

CHOOSING THE CALIPH

In Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān, verse 159, Allah ﷻ addresses His Prophet ﷺ saying: “And take counsel from them in all matters.”¹⁵ The entire Muslim community is addressed in this verse. Based on this, consultation underlies all great tasks undertaken by the Muslims, and at the forefront is the appointment of the caliph. Consequently, he cannot be appointed without the consultation of the Muslims and winning their approval, and it is the approval of the influential people which is sought in this regard. These were the senior Companions ﷺ who were distinguished with lengthy companionship with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and had the insight to recognise eligibility for the leadership of the Muslim community.

This was in the first era. In latter eras the influential people were those who were prominent in Islām. However, the unanimous decision of these individuals is not necessary, rather consideration is given to the majority, i.e. more than half of those gathered. The proof for this is the end of the reign of ‘Umar ﷺ. When they agreed on one of them, they pledged obedience to him, and to practise in accordance with the Book of Allah ﷻ and the Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ.

Through this pledge of allegiance it becomes obligatory for Muslims to obey him and carry out his orders provided they are harmonious with the Book of Allah ﷻ and the Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ. Obedience to the imām is not confined to his life alone, but continues after his death. Once another believer is made the next caliph by the acting caliph, the pledge of allegiance must be made and it becomes obligatory to obey him. Abū Bakr ﷺ made ‘Umar ﷺ caliph in this way, and the Muslims sanctioned it. If the consultation is confined to a limited number of influential persons, it is accepted and their selection (of caliph) will be valid, as ‘Umar ﷺ did for ‘Uthmān ﷺ.

These three ways of choosing the imām (general consultation, specific consultation of a group chosen by the previous imām, or succession to the post) are the three ways which were practised in the first era of Islām. There is a fourth way which the scholars after the first era instituted for the establishment of the imamate, and that is by way of dominance. This happens when the Muslims have no imām, there are differences among them, and they cannot agree on a particular person. In such a situation, it is lawful for a person who knows that he has the capacity to lead the Muslim community because of his knowledge or the influence of his tribe, to demand this post of caliph. He would hence oblige the people to obey him, whether they responded willingly or by force. Once the situation subsides and his claim is accepted, his caliphate will be established and obedience to him will become obligatory.



OBEDIENCE TO THE IMĀM



Allah ﷻ says in Sūrat an-Nisā' verse 59: "O believers! Obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those of authority amongst you." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Listen and obey even if an Abyssinian slave with a head like a raisin is appointed over you."¹⁶


The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "He who obeys me has obeyed Allah. He who disobeys me has disobeyed Allah. He who obeys the leader has obeyed me and he who disobeys the leader has disobeyed me."¹⁷

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to Abū Hurāyrah ؓ: "It is incumbent on you to listen and obey whether it is difficult or easy for you, whether it appeals to you or not, and even if the leaders give preference to others over you."¹⁸ The "giving of preference" refers to preferential treatment in giving people their rights.


The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "If a slave is appointed over you and he leads you by the Book of Allah, then listen to him and obey him."¹⁹


Abū Dharr  said: “My bosom friend [the Messenger of Allah ] advised me to listen to and obey [the leader] even if he is a slave and an amputee.”²⁰


‘Ubādah ibn aṣ-Ṣāmit  narrates: “We pledged allegiance to the Messenger of Allah  to hear and obey in difficulty and ease, whether we liked it or not, even when it is against us, to refrain from disputing with those with authority over us, and to say the truth for the sake of Allah wherever we are, without fearing the attacks of critics.”²¹

Another narration states: “We pledged allegiance to the Messenger of Allah  to hear and obey, whether in difficulty or ease and whether we like it or not, to obey even when it is against us, and to refrain from disputing with those with authority over us unless we see a clear act of unbelief.”²² A clear act of unbelief is a conspicuous, unmistakable act that leaves no room for other interpretation.²³

DISOBEYING THE IMĀM

This obedience to the imām is circumscribed by the limits set by the Sharī‘ah. If he issues an order that accords with the teachings of Islām, is not openly in conflict with the Qur’an, and does not violate the distinct and clear Sunnah, his order must be obeyed and carried out. Similarly, if [his command] is based on his own discretion which is substantiated by the Book of Allah or the Sunnah. But if he issues an order that clearly contradicts the Qur’an or the Sunnah, he is not to be obeyed. The Messenger of Allah  said: “There is no obedience to the creation if it entails disobedience to the Creator.”²⁴




The Messenger of Allah  said: “If he orders an act of disobedience, neither listen to him nor obey him.”²⁵

For example, if he orders the drinking of alcohol or the abandoning of prayer, it becomes obligatory for a Muslim to disobey him. Instead, he should carry out the order of Allah  and not fear the criticism of anyone in doing so.









DECLARING WAR ON THE IMĀM


If the imām goes beyond the limits of the Shari‘ah in his actions, meaning that he becomes oppressive, treats certain people preferentially in giving dues or commits an open sin like drinking alcohol or abandoning the prayer; it becomes obligatory for the Muslims to enjoin him to do good and to prohibit him from evil. They should not fear the criticism of anyone in this regard. This places them within the ḥadīth of ‘Ubādah رضي الله عنه: “[And we pledged] to say the truth for the sake of Allah wherever we are, without fearing the attacks of critics.” This is on condition that it does not prevent them from obeying him. It is therefore unlawful to revolt against him and to draw weapons against him irrespective of how much preference (he shows to others), and no matter what he does unless he commits clear unbelief which cannot be explained away. The Ḥadīth of ‘Ubādah رضي الله عنه states: “that we refrain from disputing with those with authority over us unless we see a clear act of unbelief.” In such a case, he can expect neither to lead nor be obeyed. In fact, it becomes incumbent on every Muslim to stand up against him until he is disgraced and dealt an exemplary punishment.


The majority of the Companions رضي الله عنهم during the era of Yazīd followed this course. Yazīd did what he did, none of the Companions رضي الله عنهم apart from Ḥusayn ibn ‘Alī رضي الله عنه openly revolted against him. Ḥusayn رضي الله عنه felt that he was indisputably entitled to do so, though he was unable to realise his objective. His brother Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, his cousin ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar رضي الله عنه, and ‘Abdullāh ibn az-Zubayr رضي الله عنه all counselled him against revolting against Yazīd but he did not heed their advice. This was a matter already decided by Allah سبحانه. At that time, there were many Companions رضي الله عنهم in the Ḥijāz, the Levant (Shām), Baṣrah, Kūfah, and Egypt, none of whom revolted against Yazīd, either individually or by joining Ḥusayn رضي الله عنه. At the same time they did not join Yazīd and instead avoided the tribulation.

It is possible that Ḥusayn  acted upon the words of Allah : “There should be among you a group that continually invites towards good, and continually commands good deeds, and forbids the evil” (Sūrah Āl ‘Imrān, 3:104). What further prompted him was that the armies of Iraq sent messages asking him to come to them so that they may pledge their allegiance to him. He felt that he was entitled to this together with his close relationship to the Messenger of Allah . What was preordained therefore came to pass.²⁶

PUNISHMENT OF THOSE WHO WAGE WAR ON THE IMĀM

The imām is the deputy of the Messenger of Allah  so he who disobeys the imām disobeys the Messenger of Allah , and he who disobeys the Messenger of Allah  disobeys Allah . One who wages war on the imām wages war on Allah  and His Messenger , and one who wages war on Allah  and His Messenger  bears a very grave sin.²⁷

Allah  expounded the recompense for such people in Sūrat al-Mā'idah, verses 33–34: “Those who wage war on Allah and His Messenger and strive to spread corruption in the land should be punished by death, crucifixion, the amputation of a hand and foot on opposing sides, or banishment from the land. This will be their humiliation in this world, and they will face a terrible punishment in the Hereafter, unless they repent before you overpower them: then you should know that Allah is forgiving, merciful.”

Allah  placed those who wage war into four categories: (1) The one who wages war and is guilty of killing. His punishment is death. (2) The one who wages war and is guilty of killing and theft. His punishment is crucifixion. (3) The one who wages war and is guilty of theft. His punishment is the chopping off of his hand. (4) The one who wages war and is guilty of terrorising travellers. His punishment is banishment. It is the pure Sunnah which laid down these categories.

Some jurists hold that there is no sequence in these punishments, rather the imām has the option to choose whichever one he feels appropriate. If those that wage war belong to a group of rebels then the rulings which apply to them are detailed in the books of jurisprudence. Allah ﷻ then promises His pardon for those who repent before they can be overpowered. It is therefore incumbent on the imām to invite them to obey him before fighting them,²⁸ and this is what ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ did with the Ḥarūrīyyīn²⁹ who had rebelled against him.

It is my observation that very few of those who rebelled against the imams in the past centuries had Islamic justifications for their revolt.³⁰ The majority had personal, egotistic reasons, thus we see that they were rarely successful in their objectives. The Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is the light by which the heart of a Muslim is illuminated, and the Sunnah vociferously prohibits rebellion against the imām for fear of causing division among the Muslims and breaking their ranks.

THE DUTIES OF THE IMĀM


We know that the responsibility of the imām is the protection of the religion and seeing to the needs of the Muslim community.³¹ He is therefore obliged to keep the Sharī‘ah as his guide. He should not deviate from the Book of Allah ﷻ which is not touched by falsehood, nor the just and sound Sunnah of His Messenger ﷺ and the unanimous decisions of the Muslims of the first era. If he is able to do this, following the guidance of the one who is the representative of Allah ﷻ (i.e. the Messenger of Allah ﷺ) and the way of his Rightly-Guided Caliphs, his rank will be that of the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous. And what excellent companions they are! Furthermore, he will be from among those whom Allah ﷻ provides with shade on a day when there will be no shade except His.³²

If he turns away and deviates from the Shari‘ah following his personal desires, the warning will be severe and the punishment shall be painful.³³ The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “When a leader takes charge of the affairs of the Muslims but does not strive for their well-being and does not give them counsel, he will not enter Paradise with them.”³⁴

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “When Allah ﷻ puts a person in charge of the people and he does not protect them with his advice, he will not savour the fragrance of Paradise.”³⁵

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “When a person is put in charge of the affairs of the Muslims and he does not protect them with his counsel just as he would with his own family, then let him take his place in the Hellfire.”³⁶

There are other similar ḥadīths warning leaders, so that their actions do not cause them to fall into the lowest pit of Hellfire, and we seek refuge in Allah ﷻ from that.

O Allah! Inspire our leaders to rectitude and make clear to them what is right so that they may emulate the way of Your Prophet ﷺ, the leader of the Prophets, and the way of his Rightly-Guided Caliphs .

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