



Supplementary Notes:

HEROES OF YARMŪK



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The Battle of Yarmūk – Adapted from the Biography of Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq by ‘Alī al-Sallābī

Khālīd رضي الله عنه and ‘Amr رضي الله عنه, and their men joined up with the rest of the Muslim army at Yarmūk. Under the leadership of Tidor, a huge Roman army arrived at Al-Wāqisah—which was situated near Yarmūk—made camp there, and prepared for their upcoming battle with the Muslims. The Muslim army, whose leader was Khālīd ibn al-Walīd رضي الله عنه, consisted of 40 000; the Roman army, which was led by Tidor, consisted of 240 000 soldiers. Therefore, the Romans outnumbered the Muslims approximately by a margin of 6 to 1.

With the Muslim army encamped in Yarmūk, Roman forces gathered along the southern bank of the nearby river. ‘Amr رضي الله عنه took the fact that the enemy was blocked by the river as a good sign. He said, “O people, rejoice. For indeed, Allah has blocked the Romans (from crossing easily, placing in their way a river); rarely does a blocked (army) achieve anything good.” [Al-‘Amaliyyāt al-Ta‘arūḍiyyah wa al-Difā‘iyyah, pg. 163]

As for Khālīd رضي الله عنه, he employed a strategy that was never before used by Arabs. [Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah, 7/8] His strategy involved the forming of divisions and subdivisions; in that spirit, he organized his army as follows:

- He formed divisions, with each one having over it a leader, and with each one consisting of somewhere between ten and twenty subdivisions.
- He formed forty subdivisions; each one was a part of an overall division; each one had its own leader; and each one consisted of one-thousand soldiers.

Or more precisely, he organized his army into these groups:

1. The central division of his army, which consisted of eighteen subdivisions (or in other words, eighteen thousand soldiers). This division was headed by Abū ‘Ubaydah ibn al-Jarrāh رضي الله عنه, who had with him ‘Ikrimah ibn Abī Jahl and al-Qa‘qā’ ibn ‘Amr رضي الله عنه.
2. The right wing of the army consisted of ten subdivisions (or in other words, 10 000 soldiers), and it was headed by ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ رضي الله عنه who was accompanied by Shurahbīl ibn Ḥasanah رضي الله عنه.
3. The left wing also consisted of 10 subdivisions, and it was headed by Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān رضي الله عنه.
4. The front division: Because of the nature its mission — which primarily involved guarding against the enemy in the case of a surprise attack — the front division did not require a large force, and instead made do with a relatively small cadre of fighters.
5. The rear division, which consisted of five subdivisions (or in other words, 5000 soldiers), was headed by Sa‘īd ibn Zayd رضي الله عنه. Sa‘īd رضي الله عنه was in charge of certain administrative aspects of running the army. ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd رضي الله عنه also had administrative duties, in addition to being in charge of handing out food rations to the soldiers and gathering the spoils of war from the battlefield.

Other notable Companions present at Yarmūk were Abū al-Dardā’ and al-Miqdād ibn al-Aswad رضي الله عنه, who was known as a skilled reciter of the Qur’an, would walk between the ranks of Muslim soldiers, all the while reciting Sūrah al-Anfāl; as well as other verses that discussing the topic of Jihād; he did this to raise the level of morale among Muslim soldiers. The orator or speech-maker of the Muslim army was Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb رضي الله عنه; he would go from row to row of the army and encourage soldiers to fight bravely and sincerely for the sake of Allah سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى. [Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah, (7/8)]

The overall leader of the army was, of course, Khālīd ibn al-Walīd رضي الله عنه. He was stationed in the middle of his army, and he was surrounded by the most eminent of the Prophet’s Companions.

Realizing that the upcoming battle was near at hand, the leader of each subdivision walked up and down the rows of his men, encouraging them to fight bravely and reminding them to be steadfast and patient on the battlefield.

The leaders of the Muslim army perceived the significance of the upcoming battle. It was, they knew, a battle of epic proportions, one that would decide the fate not just of Yarmūk or nearby cities, and not just of the region, but of Syria in its entirety. Khālīd رضي الله عنه in particular knew that, whichever way the battle went, it was going to be decisive in terms of its long-term consequences.

If the Muslims were to succeed in defeating the Romans in the upcoming battle, the door to conquering the rest of Syria would be swung wide upon: After that, Muslims would perhaps face resistance, but not of the kind that could stop them from achieving all-out victory and expelling the Romans from Syria. Victory, also, would lead directly to further conquests in Asia and Europe. [Al-‘Amaliyyāt al-Ta‘āruḍiyyah wa-Difā‘iyyah ‘Ind al-Muslimīn, pg. 164] Conversely, Khālīd رضي الله عنه knew that, if the Muslims were to lose the upcoming battle, the door to Syria would be closed, if not forever, then at least for a very long time to come.

Encouragement Before the Commencement of the Battle

There were a great many eminent Companions رضي الله عنهم present at Yarmūk, and each one of them was called upon to provide words of encouragement to lesser experienced soldiers in the army. In that spirit, Abū ‘Ubaydah رضي الله عنه delivered this speech:

O slaves of Allah, assist Allah (i.e., help his Cause, the Cause of Islam), and He will both help you and make your feet firm. Verily, the promise of Allah is true. O Muslims, be patient, for patience saves one from disbelief, leads to the Pleasure of Allah, and protects one from shame. Do not leave your rows, do not take one step towards them (i.e., the enemy), and do not initiate fighting with them until I order you to do so, Allah Willing. Begin fighting with spears and protect yourselves with shields. And adhere to silence, the only exception being the remembering of Allah you do within yourselves.

Another eminent Companion, Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal رضي الله عنه, also delivered a speech to his soldiers. He said:

O people of the Qur’ān, and O people who are called upon to guard the Book! O helpers of guidance and supporters of the truth, Allah’s Mercy and His Paradise are not achieved through wishful thinking. And Allah bestows forgiveness and His vast Mercy only upon those who are truthful and who confirm their truthfulness through actions. Have you not heard the Saying of Allah, “Allah has promised those among you who believe, and do righteous good deeds, that He will certainly grant them succession to (the present rulers) in the earth, as He granted it to those before them.” [Qur’an 24: 55]

Mu‘ādh رضي الله عنه continued to say:

Be shy of your Lord by not having Him see you flee from your Enemy, when all the while you are in His grasp, when you have no one to seek refuge in except in Him, and when you have no honour without Him.

‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ رضي الله عنه said:

O Muslims, lower your gazes, lower your stance, and begin (the fighting) with your spears. Then, when they come to attack you, give them a respite (from your blows) until they reach the edges of your spears’ blades. At that moment, pounce on them the way a lion pounces on its prey. By the One Who is pleased with truthfulness, gives rewards for it, despises lying, metes out punishment for it, and rewards goodness with goodness — I indeed heard that the Muslims will conquer it (i.e., Syria) village after village, and castle after castle. So do not allow their size and their numbers to terrify you, for if you are true and sincere in the severity you show them (in fighting), they will flee like the chicks of a partridge bird.

Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه gave this speech:

O group of Muslims, you are now in a foreign land, cut off from your family, and far away from the Leader of the Believers and from other Muslim soldiers who could help you. By Allah, you now face an enemy that is here with large numbers; and they are furious with you, for you have caused them much tension and stress regarding the safety of their lives, of their children's lives, of their wives' lives, of their wealth, and of their homes. By Allah, you will not be saved from these people, and you will not achieve Allah's Good Pleasure tomorrow, unless you are true when you meet the enemy, and patient when the going gets tough. So, defend yourselves with your swords and work together.

Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه then went to the women and advised them, after which he returned and said:

O people of Islam, what you see (i.e., in terms of the formidable foe in front of you) is our present reality (and so we must face it with sincerity and strong Faith). So, remember: Here is the Messenger of Allah and Paradise in front of you, and here is the Shayṭān and the Hellfire behind you.

Having said this, Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه returned to his position among the rows of the Muslim army. [*Tartīb wa Tahdhīb Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, pg. 163]

Abū Hurayrah رضي الله عنه said to his soldiers:

Hurry towards the fair maidens of Paradise, and towards being near your Lord—the Possessor of Might and Majesty—in gardens of bliss. Of all places, this right now is the place that your Lord most loves you to be. Lo! The patient ones are indeed blessed and good.

Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه went to each subdivision and said:

Allah! Allah! Verily, you people are the defenders of Arabs, the helpers of Islam. And they (i.e., the enemy) are the defenders of Romans, and the supporters of polytheism. O Allah, this is a day among Your days; O Allah, send down victory upon your slaves." [*Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, 7/10]

As the two armies faced one another, a Christian Arab, said to Khālīd ibn al-Walīd رضي الله عنه, "How numerous are the Romans today, and how few the Muslims !" True as his remark might have been, numbers, as Khālīd رضي الله عنه reminded him, do not mean everything in war:

Woe upon you! Are you trying to frighten me by mentioning the Romans (i.e., by mentioning the size of their army)? In reality, the true measure of an army's size is not the number of its men, but rather the help it receives (from Allah). If it is helped (by Allah), then it is large; and if it is forsaken (by Allah), then it is small. [*Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, 7/10]

And when Mu'ādh ibn Jabal رضي الله عنه heard the voices of priests and monks emanating from the enemy encampment, he said:

O Allah, shake their feet, instil terror into their hearts, send peace down upon us, make us adhere to the word of piety, make us love to meet our enemy on the battlefield, and make us pleased with your Divine Decrees (i.e., make us pleased with everything that You decree for us)." [*Abū Bakr, Rajal al-Dawlah*, pg. 88]

The Romans

The Romans came with ornaments and displays of elegance which they felt were befitting of their power. And they were accompanied by priests and monks who would recite the Injīl to them and encourage them to fight bravely in the upcoming battle. Their arrogance and pride notwithstanding, the Romans did come with numbers. From the vantage

point of Muslims, the Romans looked like a huge black cloud in the horizon; and, by chanting in loud voices, they seemed all the more numerous.

The Roman army made camp in al-Wāqisah, which was situated near Yarmūk. They were separated from the Muslims by a large valley, a valley that, considering the strategic positioning of both armies, acted as a huge ditch or wide trenches that the Romans would have a hard time traveling across.

The Romans also organized their army into many divisions. They formed two lines of divisions. In the first line, divisions were formed into a number of circles. Each circle was formed by five divisions, and one circle was separated from the next by a sizeable gap. Then, in the second line, the same circles of divisions were formed, except that they were stationed behind the gaps that were left between the circles of the first line.

The Roman army was further organized in the following three groups:

1. Archers: They were in the front of the army, and it was their job to initiate fighting by launching into the air a foray of arrows; then, once they had completed their task, they were to retreat to the rear of the two wings of the army.
2. Horsemen: They were stationed along the two wings of the army, and it was their job to protect the archers until they safely returned to the rear of the army.
3. Divisions of infantrymen: Their task was simple; it was to march forward, attack the enemy, and attempt to break through the enemy's rows of soldiers.

The front of the Roman army was led by Jarjah, and the two wings were led by Māhān and al-Darāqas. [*Al-ʿAmaliyyāt al-Taʾarūḍiyyah wa al-Difāʿiyyah ʿInd al-Muslimīn*, pg. 167]

Last Minute Negotiations

As the two armies slowly approached one another, a team of Muslim delegates marched ahead of their army. That team consisted of Abū ʿUbaydah, Yazīd ibn Abī Sufyān, ʿĪsā ibn al-Azwar, and al-Ḥārith ibn Hishām. They approached in a manner indicating that they had not come to fight, and they called out to the throngs of Romans that faced them, saying, “We want to meet with your leader.” Permission was granted to them, and they were escorted to the inside of the Roman encampment. They were then taken to a commander named Tadhārik, who was waiting for them inside of a tent that was made of silk. The Muslim delegates objected to entering the tent, saying, “We do not think it permissible for us to enter it.” A carpet made of silk was then spread for them, but again, because of the material of the carpet, they objected, saying, “We will not sit on this.” Other arrangements were made, and then the Muslim delegates and Tadhārik sat down to discuss terms of a truce.

Since Tadhārik refused both to enter into the fold of Islam and to pay the Jizyah tax, the negotiations ended quickly and the Muslim delegates returned to their encampment. [*Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, 7/10]

According to an account that is related by al-Walīd ibn Muslim, the Romans also made an attempt to negotiate terms of a truce. Bāhān asked Khālīd رضي الله عنه to come and meet him in the middle of the space that separated the two armies. Bāhān began their meeting by saying, “Verily, we have long known that hunger and hardships have forced your people to leave your lands. So, allow me to give each man among you ten Dīnārs, clothing, and food. I will give you these things if you then return to your lands. Then, next year, we will send you a similar amount of supplies.”

Bāhān meant to humiliate Khālīd رضي الله عنه, but Khālīd رضي الله عنه was not to be outdone. He said to Bāhān, “We have not left our lands because of the things you have mentioned. No, instead, we are a people who drink blood, and it has reached us that no blood is tastier than the blood of Romans. And so that is why we have come!” [Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah, 7/10]

The Fighting Begins

After the negotiations failed to produce a peace agreement, Khālīd رضي الله عنه went to ‘Ikrimah ibn Abī Jahl and al-Qa‘qā’ ibn ‘Amr رضي الله عنه, the leaders of the two wings of the Muslim army, and ordered them to start the fighting. They both called upon their counterparts to engage in duels, and then the fighting began in earnest.

A Roman Commander Embraces Islam on the Battlefield

One of the top leaders of the Roman army, a man named Jarjah, walked ahead of the front row of his army, towards the middle of the space that separated his army from that of the enemy. He then requested Khālīd ibn al-Walīd رضي الله عنه to meet with him. To all observers, both from the Muslim and Roman armies, it appeared as if Jarjah was making a final attempt at negotiating a peace agreement. But the two armies and the battle seemed less on Jarjah’s mind than some questions regarding which he yearned for answers.

When the two men met, they came so close to one another that the neck of each of their horses was touching the head of the other. Jarjah began their meeting by saying, “O Khālīd رضي الله عنه, I want information from you, but be truthful and do not lie to me. Remember that a free man does not lie. And do not deceive me, for an honourable man does not deceive someone who is asking questions about Allah. Did Allah send down to your Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم a sword from the heavens? And did your Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم then give that sword to you, informing you that you will not unsheathe it upon any people without defeating them?”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه replied, “No (that is not true).”

Jarjah asked, “Then why have you been named, ‘The Sword of Allah?’”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه replied, “Verily, Allah sent among us His Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم who invited us (to embrace the Truth). We turned away from him; in fact, all of us distanced ourselves from him. Then a change occurred: Some of us began to believe in and follow him, while others among us disbelieved in and distanced themselves from him. I was among those who disbelieved in and distanced themselves from him. Then Allah took us by our hearts and forelocks and guided us through His Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. And we pledged allegiance to him. He (i.e. the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم) then said to me, ‘You are a sword from the swords of Allah, a sword that Allah has unsheathed so that it can be used against the polytheists.’ [Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah, 7/13] The Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم then invoked Allah to bless me with victory. That is the reason why I have been named ‘The Sword of Allah’. I am the harshest of Muslims against polytheists.”

Jarjah then asked, “O Khālīd, what is it that you are inviting (people) to (follow)?”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه said, “(We are inviting people) to bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah and that Muḥammad is His slave and Messenger. And we further invite people to accept and follow what the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has come with from Allah—the Possessor of Might and Majesty.”

Jarjah said, “What about those who do not answer your invitation?”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه said, “Then we ask them to pay the Jizyah tax, in return for which we protect and defend them (against all foreign enemies, as long as they remain loyal and follow the laws of the land).”

Jarjah asked, “And what if someone refuses to pay the Jizyah tax?”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه said, “We declare war upon him, and then we fight him.”

Jarjah then asked, “And what is the status of someone who, today, answers your invitation and enters into this affair (that you mention (i.e., into the fold of Islam)).”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه said, “Our status will be the same regarding all that Allah has legislated for us. We are all equal, the noble among us and the poor or low-born ones among us, the first among us and the last among us.”

Jarjah said, “Does one who joins you today receive the same reward that you all receive?”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه said, “Yes, and more.”

Jarjah asked, “How can a person who joins you today be your equal when you have embraced Islam (long) before he did?”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه said, “Verily, we are a people who have accepted this Religion after defeat; furthermore, we pledged to follow our Prophet at a time when he was alive, living in our midst. During that time, news from the heavens came down to him, and he would inform us about the Book. And he would show us signs and miracles. And it is only befitting for people such as us, people who have seen what we have seen and heard what we have heard (in terms of signs and miracles), to embrace Islam and pledge allegiance (to the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم). As for you, you have not seen what we have seen, and you have not heard what we have heard, in terms of signs, miracles, and irrefutable proofs. So, if someone among you truly embraces Islam with a good intention, then he is better than us.”

Jarjah then made a statement which he meant as a question: “By Allah, you are telling me the truth, and you are not lying to me.”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه said, “By Allah, I have told you the truth, and Allah is a Guarantor over what you have asked me (and over the answers I have given you).”

At that very moment, Jarjah turned over his shield and went with Khālīd رضي الله عنه to the Muslim encampment. As they were riding together, Jarjah said, “Teach me about Islam.”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه took him back to his tent, where a bucket of water was prepared for Jarjah, who then used it to wash himself. And then Jarjah performed two units of prayer, doing what every other Roman should have also been doing: Embracing the truth and saving himself from the Hellfire. But the other Romans were of a different mind. When they saw Khālīd رضي الله عنه going back with Jarjah, they thought that Khālīd رضي الله عنه was taking one of their men by force, and so they began to attack the Muslim army, forcing Muslim soldiers to leave their positions. Only one unit of Muslims soldiers held its ground, and it was headed by ‘Ikrimah ibn Abī Jahl and al-Hārith ibn Hishām. [*Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, 7/13]

The Left-Wing of the Roman Army Attacks the Right-Wing of the Muslim Army

The entire Roman army began an all-out assault against their Muslim foes. The left-wing of their army attacked the right-wing of the Muslim army, and soon a gap opened up in the centre of the right wing. That gap both widened and deepened, resulting not just in serious losses, but also in a dangerous situation wherein Roman soldiers were able to reach the last rows of the Muslim army. At this dangerous juncture, Mu‘ādh ibn Jabal رضي الله عنه called out to his fellow Muslims, “O Muslim slaves of Allah, these people have been fierce in their onslaught against you; and by Allah, they will not be repelled or pushed back unless you are true when you meet them and patient when you trade blows with them,”

then, descending from his horse, he said, “Whoever wants to take my horse, then let him take it and fight upon it.” He preferred to fight the harder fight, the fight that was fought on foot in the infantry division of the army. [*Al-‘Amaliyyāt At-Ta‘ārūḍiyyah wa al-Difā‘iyyah*, pg. 169]

The ‘Azd, the Madhhaj, the Ḥadramawt, and the Khawlān—each of these tribes stood their ground, not allowing the enemy to get through their ranks. But soon the Romans were too much for them, and the entire right-wing of the Muslim army was pushed towards the heart of the army. As a result, a number of people in the Muslim encampment — which was situated in the rear of the army — became vulnerable and easy targets to the enemy. But the situation improved when a long wall of Muslim fighters stood their ground and, by engaging the enemy, kept enemy soldiers at bay, preventing them from attacking Muslims at the rear of the army.

Some Muslim fighters did flee to the rear of the army, but they were met by Muslim women who began striking them with stones and pieces of wood; those soldiers then returned to their positions, knowing that it was better to stand firm and be killed by the enemy than to run away and be treated as a coward by fellow Muslims. [*Futūḥ al-Shām*, by al-Azdī pg. 222]

One man who certainly did not flee was Ikrimah ibn Abī Jahl رضي الله عنه. At the very suggestion of fleeing, he said, “I (stood firm and) fought against the Messenger of Allah on many occasions, so shall I now (now that I am following the truth) flee from you (i.e., from the enemy)!” He then called out, “Who will make a pledge to die?” His uncle, al-Hārith ibn Hishām, Ḍirār ibn al-Azwar, and four-hundred of the bravest and noblest Muslims made a pledge of death with him. They then fought in front of Khālīd رضي الله عنه’s tent until they all became afflicted with serious wounds; a great many of them were martyred, including Ḍirār ibn Al-Azwar. [*Tartīb wa al-Tahdhīb al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, pg. 170]

A beautiful story has been related about ‘Ikrimah and those who pledged along with him to die on the battlefield at Yarmūk. They continued to fight in spite of their wounds, but when more and more wounds were inflicted upon them, resulting in them all falling to the ground, they asked for water. When a drink of water was procured, it was offered to one of them. He looked to the person beside him and said, “Give it (i.e., this drink of water) to him.” When it was given to that man, he looked to the person beside him and said, “Give it to him.” They continued in this fashion until all of them died, without a single one of them having drunk even a sip of the water. May Allah be pleased with them all. [*Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, 7/12]

It is said that the first martyr on the Day of Yarmūk was a man who went to Abū ‘Ubaydah رضي الله عنه and said, “Verily, I am ready now (i.e., ready to fight and die a martyr). Is there anything you want from the Messenger of Allah?”

Abū ‘Ubaydah رضي الله عنه said, “Yes, extend greetings of peace to him from me, and say, ‘O Messenger of Allah, we have indeed found that what our Lord promised us is true!’”

Having heard Abū ‘Ubaydah’s رضي الله عنه request, the man proceeded to fight until he was killed—may Allah have mercy on him. Every tribe remained steadfast, and the Romans kept circling Muslim units in the hope of crushing their enemy.

All in all, Yarmūk was one of the bloodiest battles that the Prophet’s Companions had ever taken part in. Yarmūk has been described as being a battle during which one saw nothing save decapitated heads falling to the ground and severed hands flying in the air. [*Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, 7/12]

The Right-Wing of the Roman Army Attacks the Left-Wing of the Muslim Army

Qanātīr, the leader of the right-wing of the Roman army, led his troops in an all-out assault on the left-wing of the Muslim army, a wing that was made up of the following tribes: Kinānah, Qays, Khutham, Judhām, Qudā‘ah, ‘Āmilah, and

Ghassān. Given the severity of the attack, these tribes were forced to leave their positions, and as a result, the central part of the left-wing of the Muslim army was left exposed. Roman soldiers chased fleeing Muslim soldiers, continuing their pursuit until they entered the Muslim encampment at the rear of the Muslim army. Fleeing Muslim soldiers were met by Muslim women who struck them on their faces with stones and the poles of tents. And all the while the women were saying, “Where is the honour of Islam? What about your mothers and wives? Are you fleeing and leaving us as easy prey for these disbelievers?” Muslim soldiers, having been thus chastised, felt ashamed for having fled from their positions. They then resumed fighting the enemy, but this time with more energy, more enthusiasm, and less fear.

Then the left-wing of the Roman army tried once more to break down the right-wing of the Muslim army; they focused their attack on ‘Amr ibn Al-‘Āṣ رضي الله عنه and his division of soldiers. Despite the fact that ‘Amr رضي الله عنه and his soldiers tried their best to stave off the enemy attack, Roman soldiers still managed to enter the Muslim encampment. Muslim soldiers, who were pushed back into their own encampment, were met by women who struck the face of any man who attempted to flee. The daughter of ‘Amr رضي الله عنه called out, “May Allah make ugly the man who flees from his wife. May Allah make ugly the man who flees from his honour, his dear one (i.e., his wife).” Other women yelled out, “You are not our husbands if you do not defend us.” With such reminders being yelled out to them, Muslim soldiers regained their resolve to fight until the very end. They resumed their battle duties, this time fighting with a stronger resolve than before. With a fresh burst of energy and determination, Muslim soldiers not only staved off the enemy’s attack, but succeeded in regaining control of the areas that had been won over by the Romans. [Al-‘Amaliyyāt al-Ta‘ārūḍiyyah wa al-Difā’iyyah, pg. 174]

A Shift in Momentum That Led to the End of the Battle

Khālīd رضي الله عنه and a number of horsemen who were under his command attacked the left-wing of the Roman army—which was busy attacking the right-wing of the Muslim army. In this foray, a foray that forced Roman soldiers to move towards the heart of the Muslim army, six-thousand Roman soldiers were killed.

At first, the Romans had the upper hand in the battle, but then they were repelled by Muslim soldiers and, consequently, lost all of the ground they had gained. Then, try as they might, they were not able to inflict any serious harm upon the Muslim army—and this in spite of the fact that they outnumbered the Muslim by a ratio of about six to one. By that point, the morale of the Romans was at an all-time low; that it sunk even lower when Khālīd رضي الله عنه and his men killed six thousand of their fellow soldiers was, to say the least, inevitable. How, they asked themselves, could an army so small be so resilient? Khālīd رضي الله عنه, like any good general, understood the mindset of the enemy. With his successful foray, he knew that he had broken their wills, and he could literally feel, see, and smell the fear in their hearts. The main part of the war, the part that had more to do with psychology than with weapons, was over with. With Allah’s help, Roman soldiers were overcome by two feelings (which was worse than the other, I do not know): Fear and a sense of hopelessness. Confident now that, with the help of Allah, victory was within his grasp, Khālīd رضي الله عنه called out to his soldiers, “By the One Who has my soul in His Hand, their supply of patience and hardiness has been depleted.... And I indeed hope that Allah will grant you power over them (so that you can kill them).”

Khālīd رضي الله عنه then did something that signified his disdain for his own life, his desire for martyrdom, and his wonderful ability to seize opportunities. With a hundred horsemen by his side, he raced towards the heart of the opposing army, where one-hundred thousand Roman soldiers were positioned. Whether it was terror that seized their hearts or the inevitability of defeat or the false impression—because of dust that was being kicked up into the air and because of the tenseness of the moment—that many more than one-hundred horsemen were coming towards them, Roman soldiers began to scatter in various directions. And this was before Khālīd رضي الله عنه and his men even reached them.

Encouraged by what they saw, the rest of the Muslim army raced behind Khālīd رضي الله عنه. Then Muslim soldiers began to slaughter confused and fearful Roman soldiers; meanwhile, the right-wing of the Muslim army blocked every path from which the Romans could escape. And so, the Romans were trapped between the valley of Yarmūk and the al-Zarqā’ River.

Next, the Muslims succeeded in separating Roman horsemen from Roman infantrymen. As a result, Roman horsemen tried to find a point of exit from which they could flee from the scene of the battle. Khālīd رضي الله عنه ordered ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ رضي الله عنه to open up an escape route for Roman horsemen. After ‘Amr رضي الله عنه executed Khālīd رضي الله عنه’s order, every Roman horseman (or almost every Roman horseman) rode away from the scene of the battle, thus leaving the infantrymen to fend for themselves. No thanks to their fellow soldiers who had just fled from the battle, Roman infantrymen were left exposed, and they had no way to escape. What made matters worse was that they were linked to one another in chains, a strategy they had employed in order to prevent soldiers from running away from battle.

Trapped and with no protection from horsemen, Roman infantrymen were trapped along the edges of cliffs, for below them was the valley of Yarmūk. Then, in the darkness of the night, the Muslim army attacked them. Cornered against the edges of cliffs, many Roman fighters fell down into the valley of Yarmūk—a fall so dangerous that it meant almost certain death. And because Roman soldiers were linked together with chains, when one of them fell, a whole group of them fell along with him.

It was in this stage of the battle that the Muslims killed the most Roman soldiers. With tens of thousands of their fellow soldiers dead, the Roman soldiers that did manage to escape sought safety deep inside of Syria, with some of them seeking refuge in Fahl, and the rest in Damascus. [*Al-‘Amaliyyāt al-Ta‘ārūḍiyyah wa al-Difā‘iyyah*, pg. 175]

Among those who performed exceptionally well during the battle were Abū Sufyān and his son, Yazīd ibn Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه. The latter fought with grit and determination, perhaps motivated in part by the advice of his father, who, upon passing by him, said, “O son, cling to two qualities: the fear of Allah and patience. Every Muslim man in this valley is worthy of fighting well. Then imagine how much more worthy of fighting well are the likes of you, men who have been made leaders over other Muslims. Of all people, it is they (i.e., leaders, commanders, generals) who are most worthy of fighting patiently and sincerely. So, fear Allah, my son, and let no one from your companions be more desirous than you of being patient and achieving rewards in this war; furthermore, let no one among them be more intrepid than you against the enemy.”

Yazīd said, “I will do so, Allah Willing.” Fighting with an intensity that was hard to match, Yazīd رضي الله عنه, then fulfilled his promise to his father. As for Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه, he motivated not just his son, but many others as well; for as I have hitherto mentioned, he would go from one Muslim division to another and impart to soldiers words of encouragement and advice.

Sa‘īd ibn al-Musayyib رضي الله عنه reported that his father said, “At a moment when all voices were silenced on the Day of Yarmūk, we heard a voice that seemed to reverberate through all parts of the encampment, “O, now the victory of Allah is near! So, remain steadfast, remain steadfast, O group of Muslims!” We looked to see whose voice it was, and we saw that it was the voice of Abū Sufyān رضي الله عنه, who was calling out from underneath the war banner of his son, Yazīd. [*Tartīb Wa-Tahdhīb Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah*, pg. 173]

Muslim soldiers delayed performing the ‘Ishā prayer until victory was secured. Khālīd ibn al-Walīd رضي الله عنه spent that night in the tent of Tadhāriq, who was the brother of Hiraql and the overall leader of the Roman army that day. Until the morning, horsemen patrolled the area near Khālīd’s رضي الله عنه tent, killing all Roman soldiers they came across. And among the dead was Tadhāriq, who left behind as spoils for the victors many valuable possessions. In the morning, Muslims continued the process of collecting the spoils of war.

The number of deaths at Yarmūk points to just how decisive of a victory the Muslims achieved that day. 3000 Muslims were martyred at Yarmūk, and among them were some of the most eminent of the Prophet’s Companions رضي الله عنه—such as ‘Ikrimah ibn Abī Jahl; his son, ‘Amr رضي الله عنه; Salamah ibn Hishām رضي الله عنه, ‘Amr ibn Sa‘īd رضي الله عنه, and Abān ibn Sa‘īd رضي الله عنه. Quite astoundingly, even though the Romans outnumbered the Muslims by a ratio of six to one, the number of fatalities on

their side was far greater than the amount of Muslim deaths—in fact, about forty times greater. More precisely, 120 000 Roman soldiers died at Yarmūk, a statistic that put the Roman Emperor, Hiraql, into a virtual state of shock.

The news of the defeat at Yarmūk was too much to bear for Hiraql. When he was informed about the humiliating loss and the tens of thousands of Roman soldiers that had died, Hiraql first was put into a state of shock, and then was overcome by extreme grief and sadness. A short while later, bands of Roman soldiers made their way back to Antākiyyah. Wanting a first-hand account of what had gone wrong, Hiraql said to them, “Woe upon you! Inform me about the people who fought against you: are they not human beings like you?”

They said, “Yes.”

Hiraql asked, “And did you not outnumber them?”

They said, “Yes, in every battle we were many times more than them.”

Hiraql asked, “Then what was your problem? Why did you suffer defeat at their hands?”

An old and wise leader among them was the only one who ventured a reply: “We were defeated because they stand up at night (to pray), they fast during the day, they fulfil their covenants, they enjoin good, they forbid evil, and they are just and fair among themselves; and because we drink alcohol, we fornicate, we perpetrate unlawful acts, we violate the terms of our covenants, we become angry and oppress others, we enjoin angry (and senseless acts of violence), we forbid the things that please Allah, and we spread corruption throughout the earth.”

“You have answered me truthfully,” Hiraql then said to him.