

BATTLE OF Qādisiyyah

In 15 AH, when ‘Umar رضي الله عنه learned that the Persians were making fresh military preparations to fight the Muslims, he instructed Muthannā ibn Hārithah رضي الله عنه to recruit whoever was able to participate in battle. ‘Umar رضي الله عنه himself summoned every able-bodied man with a horse and weapons to come to Madīnah.

While this was transpiring, however, Yazdegerd III had consolidated his power and strengthened the government. He commanded the Persians to collect every type of weapon from across the country and also sent his emissaries to the tribal leaders forcing them to break their agreements made with the Muslims, and renew their pledge to their former rulers.

‘Umar رضي الله عنه had prepared an army to assist the Muslims in Iraq and the Ṣaḥābah suggested Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ رضي الله عنه be appointed their leader. Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ رضي الله عنه was one of the ten promised Paradise by Nabī ﷺ and also the maternal uncle of Nabī ﷺ from the Quraysh tribe of Banū Zuhrah. Nabī ﷺ once said, “He is my maternal uncle. Let anyone who thinks he has a better uncle show the likes of him.” [Al-Tirmidhī]

The Muslims soon received word that a Persian Army under the commandship of the legendary and famed Persian general Rustam was marching towards them. Rustam camped near the river ‘Atīq in the vicinity of Qādisiyyah. The army of the Persians consisted of more than 200,000 men, made up of horsemen, infantry, and 80,000 reserve forces. This army was equipped with the finest weapons; and they also had 33 elephants. While the Muslim army consisted of only 32,000 soldiers. They were later joined by reinforcements of 6,000 soldiers from Syria, but still this only increased their number to 38,000.

The Battle of Qādisiyyah lasted four days. On the first day, the first detachment of the Persian army consisted of 13 elephants, behind each elephant was 4,000 troops. The elephants bore down on the Muslim lines, which frightened the Arab horses. Sa’d رضي الله عنه asked ‘Āṣim ibn ‘Amr رضي الله عنه to devise a plan to stop the elephants. ‘Āṣim رضي الله عنه instructed some men to get near to the elephants and cut the girths of the carriages. The young warriors drew close to the elephants, and did as they were instructed, killing the riders and causing the elephants to turn back. [Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī] The fighting continued until sunset and the Muslims managed to hold the Persians at bay.

On the second day of battle, the Muslims received reinforcements from Syria, 6,000 soldiers, at the head of them a contingent of 1,000 under Qa‘qā’ ibn ‘Amr رضي الله عنه. The elephants had wreaked havoc amongst the Muslims on the first day; however, on the second day the Muslims devised an ingenious plan. They mounted huge canopies on the back of the camels and covered the camels’ heads with black veils and attached bells to them. When the camels advanced towards the enemy cavalry, their horses took flight. The fighting continued on the second day until midnight. [Tārīkh al-Islāmī]



On the third day, fighting also continued deep into the night. When the soldiers on both sides were finally exhausted and retired to their respective camps to rest; Qa‘qā’ رضي الله عنه dispatched his companions to the

hillocks beyond the sight of both armies, with the instruction that when the sun rises, they should enter the battlefield marching forth in groups of 100 each. They acted accordingly and the Muslims were jubilant seeing them rushing down the hills, thinking that reinforcements had arrived. [Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī]

The Persians still had the advantage though, in both numbers and provisions. They prepared their elephants once again and this time sent infantrymen with each, to ensure their girths were not cut. The infantrymen were, in turn, shielded by horsemen. Sa’d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ رضي الله عنه asked the Persian Muslims how they could deal with the elephants and they advised that the eyes and the trunks should be targeted. A squadron of Ṣaḥābah رضي الله عنهم surrounded the elephants and succeed in their task. Blinded and wounded, these creatures bore down on their own army, charging right into the Persian line. The entire herd followed them, trunks aloft, trumpeting fiercely as they trampled everything in front of them. [Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī]

On the fourth day Rustam, the Commander of the Persian forces, planned an all-out attack on the Muslims. They fought from early in the night until the morning. More than 10,000 polytheists were killed on this night and their spirits sank. Both sides were exhausted after fighting continually for 24 hours, but the Muslims knew that they could only be victorious if they tore into the enemy lines.

Just before noon, Qa‘qā’ رضي الله عنه and his soldiers were able to penetrate deep into the enemy ranks. Fearing for his life, Rustam threw himself into the river ‘Atīq and began to swim. Hilāl bin ‘Ullafah رضي الله عنه, however, saw him and killed him. Seeing their general killed, the Persians fled with the Muslims following hot on their heels. [Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī] 8 500 Muslims were martyred in this great battle.

The Battle of al-Qādisiyyah is a major chapter in our golden history. We are often left mesmerized by western portrayals of their own bravery, wherein they have lionized their heroes, to the point where we have been left overawed by them, even though these portrayals are historically inaccurate, containing more fiction than fact. Our heroes on the other hand—the noble Ṣaḥābah رضي الله عنهم—are not in need of such fiction and hyperbole. They set the standard for self-sacrifice, courage, and bravery for all to come after them. It is indeed high time we recognize our own heroes, award them the honour and respect that they deserve, and follow in their footsteps so that we too can achieve the same success that they did.

May Allah ﷻ inspire us to emulate these great personalities and infuse within us a deep love for them—the disciples of Nabī ﷺ—and for their teacher and mentor Nabī ﷺ, and unite us with all of them in the everlasting gardens of Paradise.

