

The Great Battle of Badr as Reflected in al-Ṭabari's *Tarīkh* and *Tafsīr*

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ملخص

تعتبر معركة بدر الكبرى حدثًا كبيرًا ومهما ولها معنى ستراتيجية في التاريخ الإسلامي القديم. فقد مضت عدة من السنين من النضال الدؤوب والتي لم تثمر أي نتائج مسرة ولكن من خلال معركة بدر حصل النبي محمد (ص) على النصر الكبير. أن نتصار المسلمين في معركة بدر يقوى من مركز النبي محمد (ص) في المدينة المنورة والى جانب ذلك يقوى ايضا ثقة المسلمين بصحة نبوة محمد صل الله عليه وسلم .

لأهمية معركة بدر هذه فقد وليت اهتماما كبيرا ليس من قبل المؤرخين فقط ولكن من قبل القرآن أيضا. وخلدت هذه الحادثة من قبل الكثير من كتابات المؤرخين المسلمين المشهورين، مثل ابن هشام والواقدي. واعتبر الطبري في كتابه المشهور "تاريخ الرسل والملوك" بأنها أهم حادثة وقعت في السنة الثانية للهجرة. والى جانب اعتباره كأحد المؤرخين فإنه واحد من المفسرين الذين اهتموا بهذه الحادثة الكبرى من خلال شرحه لسورة الأنفال في تفسيره "جامع البيان في تفسير القرآن".

ويحاول الكاتب من خلال هذه المقالة أن يعيد بناء هذه الحادثة الكبرى من خلال شرح الطبري في كتابيه "التاريخ" و"التفسير". ربط بعض آيات القرآن ببعض الأحداث التي مرت بالرسول (ص) يعتبر ميزة مشتركة لكثير من

المؤرخين المسلمين. وفي الحقيقة فإن بعض آيات القرآن نزلت من أجل الإجابة على بعض المسائل الخاصة التي واجهت الرسول وأصحابه وبما أن القرآن ليس كتاب تاريخ فإن هذه الأحداث لم توضح بشكل دقيق. ويهتم القرآن بالمعاني المهمة التي تحتويها هذه الأحداث، ومن ضمنها معركة بدر. والمعنى من معركة بدر يقع في قدرة الرسول (ص) في بناء ورفع التزام المسلمين لأداء التعاليم المشتركة بالاعتماد على دليل رباني. وفي الحقيقة فإن القرآن أشار إشارة تاريخية من خلاله تأكيداً على المعنى الديني والخلقي في جميع الحوادث التي ذكرت فيه.

Abstrak

Perang Badr merupakan peristiwa besar dan memiliki makna yang amat strategis dalam sejarah Islam klasik. Setelah bertahun-tahun berjuang tanpa membuahkan hasil yang menggembirakan, melalui perang Badr, Muḥammad memperoleh kemenangan yang amat gemilang. Kemenangan ummat Islam dalam perang tersebut telah memperkokoh posisi Muhammad di Madinah, di samping juga telah memperteguh keyakinan ummat tentang kebenaran kerasulan Muḥammad.

Karena pentingnya makna perang Badr tersebut maka tidak mengherankan jika peristiwa ini mendapatkan perhatian yang cukup besar, bukan saja dari para ahli sejarah tetapi juga dari al-Qur'ān sendiri. Peristiwa ini telah diabadikan dalam karya para sejarawan Muslim terkenal, seperti Ibn Hishām dan al-Wāqidī. Al-Ṭabarī, dalam karya monumentalnya *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Muluk*, juga menganggapnya sebagai peristiwa paling penting yang terjadi pada tahun kedua Hijriyah. Namun, di samping sebagai sejarawan, al-Ṭabarī juga dikenal sebagai *mufasssir* yang mengulas peristiwa besar ini dalam uraiannya mengenai Surat al-Anfāl dalam tafsirnya, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*.

Paper ini berusaha merekonstruksi peristiwa besar tersebut berdasarkan kajian al-Ṭabarī dalam kitab *Ta'rikh* dan *Tafsir*nya. Adalah suatu hal yang umum dilakukan oleh para sejarawan Muslim untuk mengkaitkan ayat-ayat tertentu dalam al-Qur'ān dengan berbagai peristiwa yang terjadi pada masa Rasulullah. Sebenarnya ayat-ayat tertentu telah diturunkan oleh Allah untuk meresponsi problem-problem khusus yang tengah dihadapi oleh Muḥammad dan para pengikutnya. Namun karena al-Qur'ān bukan buku

sejarah maka ia tidak memberikan deskripsi kronologis yang mendetail tentang peristiwa-peristiwa tersebut. Al-Qur'ān lebih peduli dengan nilai-nilai tertentu yang terkandung dalam suatu peristiwa yang direkamnya, termasuk dalam perang Badr. Signifikansi perang Badr terletak pada kesuksesan Rasulullah dalam membangun komitmen ummat Islam untuk mentaati aturan bersama berdasarkan petunjuk wahyu Ilahi. Al-Qur'ān, sebenarnya, telah memberikan suatu kesadaran historis dengan memberikan makna keagamaan dan moral pada setiap peristiwa sejarah yang dibawakannya.

The battle of Badr, which took place during the month of Ramaḍān in the second year of Hijrah (March 624), is a great event in the history of Islam. After years of hardship and persecution and after weary months when nothing seemed to succeed, the battle was an astonishing success for Muḥammad. The Muslim victory strengthened Muḥammad's position in Medina, which had deteriorated over the previous months. In addition, the battle has been regarded as encouraging a deepened faith in Muḥammad's prophetic vocation.¹

It is therefore understandable that this battle has received a great deal of attention, not only in the works of historians and other scholars, but also in the Qur'ān itself. This battle has been recorded comprehensively in the works of early Muslim historians, like Ibn Hishām and al-Wāqidī. More interestingly, al-Ṭabarī also considers it the most striking event of the second year of the Hijrah in his *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Muluk*.² Al-Ṭabarī is not only a

¹W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 15.

²Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Muluk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1977), vol. 2, pp. 421-479. For the English translation of this part, see *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Muluk)*, vol. 7: "The Foundation of the Community," translated and annotated by W. Montgomery Watt and M.V. McDonald (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 26-85. For other references of the battle of Badr, see, among other works, Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. Wāqid (al-Wāqidī), *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. Marsden Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 19-172; Muḥammad b. Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 249-387; Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, translated with introduction and notes by A. Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 289-360. See also Muḥammad Aḥmad Bāshumail, *The Great Battle of Badr* (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 1970); Aḥmad Muḥammad al-'Alīmī Bāwazīr, *Marwīyāt Ghazwat Badr* (Medina: al-Ṭayyibah, 1970).

Other events in the second year of Hijrah recorded by al-Ṭabarī in his *Ta'rikh*,

historian but also a scholar of broad expertise, whose knowledge encompassed the fields of law, Qur'ānic science, *ḥadīth*, theology, religious ethics, and history.³ His Qur'ānic exegesis, *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, is one of the most celebrated treatises on *tafsīr* of the classical period.⁴ As *sūrat al-Anfāl* (8), revealed soon after the event, is wholly devoted to issues related to the battle of Badr,⁵ it would be interesting to examine and compare al-Ṭabarī's treatment of the event in his historical *Ta'rikh* and his exegetical *Tafsīr*.

This paper is an attempt to "reconstruct" that great event in the light of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* and *Tafsīr*. It is common for Muslim historians to relate specific Qur'ānic verses to certain historical events taking place during Muḥammad's prophetic career. In fact, certain *sūrahs* or verses were revealed to the Prophet in response to particular problems encountered by Muḥammad and his followers. As the Qur'ān is not meant to be a historical work, it does not provide a detailed, chronological description of the events at the battle of Badr but focuses on certain values exemplified by the battle and concrete problems faced by Muslims at that time, such as the problem of booty. The

among the others, are *ghazwat al-Abwā'*, *ghazwat al-'Ushayrah*, *sariyat 'Abd Allāh b. Jahsh*, the injunction of fasting in Ramaḍān, of giving the *zakaṭ al-fiṭr*, and of celebrating the 'īd al-fiṭr with a congregational prayer. Still in the second year of Hijrah, there were two other battles after the battle of Badr, i.e. *ghazwat Banī Qaynuqā'* and *ghazwat al-Sawīq*.

³For the biography of al-Ṭabarī see, among other works, Franz Rosenthal "The Life and Works of al-Ṭabarī" in his General Introduction to *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), vol. 1, pp. 5-134; Abdulkader Ismail Tayob, "Islamic Historiography: The Case of al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk* on the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Temple University, 1988), pp. 51-90.

⁴*Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* is considered al-Ṭabarī's most outstanding scholarly achievement, which took him many years to complete. Concerning its greatness, al-Farghānī states: "Among his completed works is his excellent *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. He explained in it the legal data derived from the Qur'ān, its abrogating and abrogated verses, its difficult passages, and its rare words. (He also discussed) the disagreements between commentators and religious scholars with respect to the Qur'ān's legal data and its interpretation together with an indication of what he considered the correct view of each case...." See, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 1, *ibid.* The title of al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* varies as either *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* or *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*. See for the discussion on this subject Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 42-45.

⁵*The History of al-Ṭabarī*, *ibid.*, p. 80; *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 321. See also 'Abdullāh Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corp., 1992), p. 413 (Introduction to *Sūrat 8 - al-Anfāl*).

real significance of such values is their success in establishing an Islamic community under the guidance of divine revelation. Indeed, for Muslim historians, *ta'rikh* (history) indicates both a specific date and the significant events associated with it. The Qur'ān itself has generated the historical consciousness, imbuing each event in history with moral and religious significance.⁶

Al-Mas'ūdī points out that al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk* is "a work superior to all other historical works because of the abundant information it contains.... It excels all other works in brilliance and substance, as it includes all different kinds of historical information, comprises a great variety of memorable data, and contains all sorts of knowledge. It is an extremely useful work."⁷ Al-Mas'ūdī argues that al-Ṭabarī's position as a leading jurist and religious scholar of his time made it possible for him to have access to variety of knowledge. In addition, this work, written in accordance with the basic characteristics of Muslim historiography, was never superseded by other works of scholarship. "It remained the unique source for the period it covered, even when other sources for it were available."⁸

Al-Ṭabarī was widely reported to have quoted Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* extensively in his *Ta'rikh* and *Tafsīr*. Ibn Ishāq's vision of world history set the pattern for al-Ṭabarī's scholarship and that of other scholars after him.⁹ Al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* and *Tafsīr* both contain significant portions of Ibn Ishāq's writings, through the transmission of Salamah b. al-Faḍl al-Abrash through Muḥammad b. Ḥumayd b. Ḥayyān al-Tamīmī al-Rāzī. He uses this transmission almost to the exclusion of all others. Newby points out that al-Ṭabarī may have preferred this source since Salamah b. al-Faḍl was Ibn Ishāq's closest disciple. "He heard all of the material from his master, had his notes checked, and received his master's lecture notes."¹⁰ In addition, al-Ṭabarī appears not only to have had access to the best copy of Ibn Ishāq's original material, but also to have followed it somewhat slavishly.¹¹

Al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* as a whole, based on the Islamic vision of history, provides a chronological ordering of human history from creation to al-

⁶Tayob, "Islamic Historiography," p. 28.

⁷Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), p. 508. See also Rosenthal in his "General Introduction" to *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, p. 135.

⁸"General Introduction," *ibid.*, p. 136.

⁹Gordon D. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muhammad* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), p. 4.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 16, citing Yāqūt, *Irshād*, vol. 6, p. 430.

Ṭabarī's own time. More-over, the *Ta'rikh* expresses al-Ṭabarī's concept of the will of God on earth.¹² This corresponds to Newby's description of Ibn Ishāq's purpose in writing the *Sīrah*: to write "salvation history" for the sake of kerygma, the preaching of the religious message.¹³ The *Ta'rikh*, which differs only slightly from the *Sīrah*, is indeed sacred biography, allowing its writer to recount the process through which a new religious ideal is established even as he participates in this process.¹⁴

THE GREAT EXPEDITION OF BADR

Al-Ṭabarī begins his account of the great battle of Badr in the *Ta'rikh* with a discussion of the date of the battle. Some sources, based on the reports of Ibn Ḥumayd - Hārūn b. al-Mughīrah - 'Anbasah - Abū Ishāq - 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. al-Aswad - his father - Ibn Mas'ūd; Muḥammad b. 'Umārah al-Asadī - 'Ubayd Allāh b. Mūsā - Isrā'īl - Abū Ishāq - Ḥujayr al-Tha'labī - al-Aswad - 'Abd Allāh, and Abū Kurayb - 'Ubayd b. Muḥammad al-Muḥāribī - Ibn Abī Zinād - his father - Khārijah b. Zayd - Zayd, claim that the battle took place on the 19th of Ramaḍān (March 15, 624). These transmissions, suggesting that the battle took place on the nineteenth of Ramaḍān, were intended to supply a date for the *laylat al-qadar*. Descriptions applied to the *laylat al-qadar* explain that it happened when "God distinguished between Truth and Falsehood," or "the day when the two armies met,"¹⁵ signifying that the battle of Badr coincided with the *laylat al-qadar*.

Other sources insist that the battle took place on Friday, the morning of the 17th of Ramaḍān (March 13, 624). This is based on the report of Ibn al-Muthannā - Muḥammad b. Ja'far - Shu'bah - Abū Ishāq - Ḥujayr - al-Aswad and 'Alqamah - 'Abd Allāh b. Mas'ūd. Another report was narrated by Ibn Ḥumayd - Yaḥyā b. Wāḍiḥ - Yaḥyā b. Ya'qūb Abū Ṭālib - Abū 'Awn

¹²Tayob, "Islamic Historiography," p. 83.

¹³Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, p. 2, citing John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁵*Laylat al-qadar* (the night of power or decision) is mentioned in Sūrah 97 (al-Qadar), which describes it as "better than a thousand months." Muslims believe that any prayer made on this night will be granted, but the precise date is not specified. The 19th of Ramaḍān is only one suggestion. It might also be the 21st, 23rd, 25th and 27th of Ramaḍān. See, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, p. 27. See also Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 1676.

Muḥammad b. 'Ubayd Allāh al-Thaqafī - Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥabīb - al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. This report provides another description of the event; by mentioning the "*laylat al-furqān*," the day when the two armies met, it suggests the date of the seventeenth of Ramaḍān.¹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī does not offer an opinion as to which of the two dates is more acceptable.

On the authority of 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr, al-Ṭabarī suggests that the killing of 'Amr b. al-Ḥaḍramī by Wāqid b. 'Abd Allāh al-Tamīmī incited the battle of Badr (and the other battles that took place between Muslims and the polytheists of Quraysh).¹⁷ Muḥammad sent 'Abd Allāh b. Jaḥsh b. Ri'āb al-Asadī with eight other companions of Emigrants on a special expedition to Nakhlah. Muḥammad gave him a sealed letter of instruction, ordering him not to open it until after he had completed two days' journey. On the due date, they opened the letter and found they were ordered to proceed to Nakhlah on the road from al-Ṭā'if to Mecca where they were to lie in wait for a Meccan caravan. Eventually a caravan of Quraysh, including 'Amr b. al-Ḥaḍramī, 'Uthmān b. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Mughīrah, Nawfal al-Makhzūmī and al-Ḥakam b. Kaysān, a freedmen of Hishām b. al-Mughīrah, came by carrying dry raisins and leather and other merchandise. When the caravan saw that 'Abd Allāh b. Jaḥsh and his company had camped near by they grew afraid. Their fear was mollified when they saw that 'Ukkāshah b. Miḥṣan, one of 'Abd Allāh b. Jaḥsh's companions, had shaved his head; they then assumed that the Muslims were pilgrims. The raiders were hesitant to attack the caravan on the last day of Rajab, a sacred month for the Arab people; fighting during this month was a serious transgression. If they did not take immediate action, however, the caravan would soon escape to the sacred area and the Muslims would have failed to complete their expedition. Thus they encouraged each other, deciding to kill as many members of the caravan as they could, and seize their goods. During a suitable opportunity, they attacked. Wāqid b. 'Abd Allāh, another companion of 'Abd Allāh b.

¹⁶This description appears in the Qur'ān 8:41. It is difficult to translate the word *furqān* into English. It might be understood as "discrimination" or "deliverance," meaning that God discriminated between Believers and Unbelievers, and delivered the Believers. See *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, *ibid.*, p. 28. Yūsuf 'Alī translates it as a "testing" or "criterion between right or wrong, decision between the forces of faith and unbelief." It is further said that the battle of Badr is called by this name. See Yūsuf 'Alī, *ibid.*, p. 424, n. 1210.

¹⁷*The History of al-Ṭabarī*, *ibid.*

Jah)sh, shot 'Amr b. al-Ḥaḍramī with an arrow and killed him. While 'Uthmān and al-Ḥakam surrendered to the Muslims, Nawfal escaped and evaded them. 'Abd Allāh b. Jah)sh and his companions brought the caravan and the two prisoners to Medina. At Medina, 'Abd Allāh b. Jah)sh set aside a fifth of the caravan for the Prophet, and divided the rest among his companions.¹⁸

When they spoke to the Prophet, they found that he had not meant them to fight in the sacred month, and he held the caravan and the two prisoners in abeyance, refusing to take anything from them. This approach inevitably sent the raiders into despair, feeling doomed or reproached for their actions. Revelation was soon sent down justifying what they had done, however.¹⁹ Ibn Ishāq's commentary on this revelation, as restated by Guillaume, points out that although the Muslims had violated the sacred month, the pagan Quraysh had prevented their access to the way of God and the sacred mosque, and had driven them from it when they were its people. For God this is a far more serious matter than slaying an enemy during the sacred month.²⁰ Through this revelation, God relieved Muslims of their anxiety, making it clear that the Prophet himself was justified in taking the caravan and the prisoners.

In his *Ta'rikh*, al-Ṭabarī based his account of the battle on three different sources. The first is the transmission of 'Alī b. Naṣr b. 'Alī and 'Abd al-Wārith b. 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. 'Abd al-Wārith - 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. 'Abd al-Wārith - his father - Abān al-'Aṭṭār - Hishām b. 'Urwah. Using this transmission, al-Ṭabarī narrated the writing of 'Urwah to 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān.²¹ This

¹⁸For the complete account of this raid, see, among other works, A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 286-289 and W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, pp. 5-9.

¹⁹Qur'ān 2.217: "They ask thee concerning fighting in the prohibited month. Say: Fighting therein is a grave (offense); But graver is it in the sight of Allah to prevent access to the path of Allah, to deny Him, to prevent access to the sacred mosque, and drive out its members. Tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter." See Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 86. However, Watt does not consider the raid as a real violation on the part of Muḥammad. He, Watt claims, did not mean to do anything scandalous or dishonorable. The sacredness of the month of Rajab was bound up with the pagan religion he was denouncing; violation of the sacred months would be identical to destruction of idols. See Watt, *ibid.*, p. 8. The verse admits that the violation was "serious," yet it points out that the Quraysh's offenses against God were more serious, implying that punishment is more likely to fall on the Quraysh. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²⁰A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 288.

²¹*The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, pp. 28-32; *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk*, vol. 2, pp. 421-424. 'Urwah in this transmission was 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr (d. 94/712), one of the

writing is 'Urwah's response to the Caliph's inquiry on the expedition of Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb to Syria where he had been trading with the money and merchandise of all clans of Quraysh. This appears to be one of al-Ṭabarī's most reliable sources for his account of the battle. It notes that after Muḥammad and his companions were informed about the expedition, he called them all together and told them that Abū Sufyān, accompanied by a small number of people, had brought back a large amount of wealth. Ibn Ishāq reports that the Prophet said: "This is the Quraysh caravan containing their property. Go out to attack it, perhaps God will give it as a prey."²² The Muslims set out with no object besides Abū Sufyān and his wealth. They were interested only in the great booty this raid would enable them to obtain, and never imagined that it was only a prelude to a great battle. The Qur'ān reminded them of this position, saying "Ye wished that the one unarmed should be yours."²³

When Abū Sufyān heard that Muslims were on their way to seize his caravan, he dispatched a message by a fast camel-rider to the Quraysh informing them of danger to their merchandise.²⁴ Already provoked by the

earliest and foremost authorities on tradition in Medina. His mother was the celebrated Asmā' bt. Abī Bakr and his father, al-Zubayr b. Awwām b. Khuwaylid, was a nephew of Khadījah. In 73 he fled to Damascus and won 'Abd al-Malik's favor. Thereafter he returned to Medina where he lived in studious retirement until his death. In Medina he wrote a series of communications on the earliest period of Islam at the request of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, probably in the form of letters.

He had spoken frequently with his maternal aunt, 'Ā'ishah bt. Abī Bakr, and collected a great number of important traditions from her as well as from both his parents, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Abū Hurayrah. His important collection of historical material was known to al-Ṭabarī, partly through Ibn Ishāq and partly through other channels. See V. Vacca, " 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st. edition, vol. 8, p. 1047. However, Ibn Ishāq did not refer to this letter of 'Urwah; it could be that he did not know of it. See *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, *ibid.*, p. 8, n. 16. For further discussion on 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr and his position among the authors of early biography of the Prophet, see Josef Horowitz, "The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and their Authors," in *Islamic Culture*, No. 1 (1927), especially pp. 542-557. Horowitz has placed him as one of the four experts in the *Maghāzī*, together with Abān b. 'Uthmān, Shurahbīl b. Sa'd and Wahb b. Munabbih. See *ibid.*, p. 558.

²² A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 289.

²³ Qur'ān 8:7. The complete verse is "Behold! Allah promised you one of the two parties, that it should be yours: Ye wished that the one unarmed should be yours, but Allah willed to justify the truth according to His words, and to cut off the road of unbelievers." *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 415.

²⁴ 'Urwah did not identify the person Abū Sufyān sent to Mecca to summon the Meccans to protect their property against the Muslim raid. In Ibn Ishāq's account, as also

earlier killing of Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī, the Meccan people hastened to assist the caravan. With only little time for preparation, about a thousand volunteers, including a hundred horsemen, set off for Badr. However, the Prophet and his companions were not aware of this Meccan force until they reached Badr, a point on the Meccan caravan's route to Syria.²⁵ On the other hand, Abū Sufyān, well aware of the danger the Muslim forces represented, doubled back from Badr; keeping to the coastal road, he managed to escape from the Muslim attack, and reached Mecca in safety a few days later.²⁶

The Prophet marched forward and spent the night near Badr, sending al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwām to investigate the situation at the water of Badr. However, he and his companions did not assume that Quraysh had come against them. When the Prophet was standing in prayer, some water-carriers of Quraysh, including a black slave of the Banū al-Ḥajjāj, suddenly came to draw water at the well of Badr. Al-Zubayr and his companion seized him, while the others escaped to the Quraysh. They brought him to the Prophet who was still in his prayer. Having no idea that the slave did not come from Abū Sufyān's caravan, they began to question him. Unfortunately, he could not provide them with any information about Abū Sufyān, but instead recounted what he knew of the protecting force of the Qurayshī expedition. As the only object of the Muslim expedition was Abū Sufyān and his caravan, the captors began to beat the slave, and call him a liar and even accuse him of concealing the whereabouts of Abū Sufyān. Unable to endure their beating, the slave finally told them: "Yes this is Abū Sufyān." The Muslims did not

referred to by al-Ṭabarī, the man was identified as Ḍamḍām b. 'Amr al-Ghifārī. See *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, pp. 35, 37.

²⁵ Badr is about 160 kilometers to the southwest of Medina, close to the coast. It was a junction where the routes to Syria, Mecca and Medina converged, and thus served as a large station frequently visited by caravans. This area is called Badr after Badr b. Quraysh b. Mikhlah b. al-Nadīr b. Kinānah of the clan of Ghifār, the first person known to dig a well at this place. See Bāshumail, *The Great Battle of Badr*, p. xxxi. See also Muhammad Hamidullah, *The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad: A Contribution to Muslim Military History* (Hyderabad-Deccan: Stockiest, 1973), p. 18.

²⁶ Abū Sufyān appears to have taken a different route from that of the Meccan army, as the two are not reported to have met half-way. Meanwhile, the Meccan forces are believed to have taken a week to reach Badr. During that time the Prophet and his companions must have been staying at Badr, despite Abū Sufyān's escape from their seizure. They did not return to Medina, their base and stronghold. It may be suggested that Muḥammad intended to take this journey as an opportunity to contact local tribes and conclude pacts of friendship and alliance if possible, thus extending his sphere of influence. See Hamidullah, *The Battlefields of the Prophet Muhammad*, *ibid*.

understand that while Abū Sufyān and his caravan had escaped, the forces of the Quraysh were exactly below them, as indicated by the words of the Qur'ān: "Remember ye were on the hither side of the valley, and they on the farther side, and the caravan on lower ground than ye. Even if ye had made a mutual appointment to meet, ye would certainly have failed in the appointment. But (thus ye met), that Allah might accomplish a matter already enacted."²⁷ This verse pointed out to the Muslims that the encounter between them and the armed party of Quraysh could not have taken place in the normal course of events; it was God who brought it about, through this unpredicted event.²⁸

The Prophet, realizing the slave's difficulties, left his prayer in a hurry. He was reported to have reprimanded his companions, saying: "By Him in Whose hand my soul rests, you beat him when he tells the truth and leave him alone when he lies." When his companions told him that the slave had spoken of the coming of the Quraysh, he replied that the slave had told them the truth. The Quraysh had come to protect their merchandise from the Muslims. Eventually the Prophet himself called the slave and asked him about the Quraysh. The slave insisted once again that he knew nothing about Abū Sufyān. The Prophet tried to get further information about the Qurayshī forces, questioning him about the number of camels they had slaughtered each day on their way from Mecca to Badr. When the slave told him they had slaughtered nine or ten camels, the Prophet calculated that the Qurayshī forces must consist of nine hundred to one thousand fighters.

'Urwah's writing ends with an account of the Prophet's arrival at the well of Badr before the Meccan forces. Thus the Meccans found that the Prophet had reached Badr and occupied it, even before they arrived. Upon their coming, the Prophet is reported to have said, "This is Quraysh, who have come with their hubbub and their boasting to oppose you and to show your Messenger to be a liar. O God, I ask you for what you have promised me."²⁹ Furthermore, it has been noted that when the Quraysh advanced, the

²⁷ Qur'ān 8:42, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, pp. 424-425.

²⁸ *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, p. 31, note 59.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32. It is not clear enough whom this saying was addressed to. Considering that the saying ends with a prayer, it seems to reflect Muḥammad's grievance to God. This idea is evidently in line with the Qur'ān 8:47: "And be not like those who started from their homes insolently and to be seen of men, and to hinder (men) from the path of Allah." *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 426.

Prophet met them and threw dust in their faces, an act through which God forced them to flee.³⁰

The second source for al-Ṭabarī's history of the battle is the channel of Hārūn b. Ishāq - Muṣ'ab b. al-Miqdām - Isrā'īl - Abū Ishāq - Ḥārithah - 'Alī.³¹ Their account begins directly with the Prophet's arrival at Badr prior to the Meccan polytheists. There the Muslims found two Meccans, a Qurayshī and a *mawla* of 'Uqbah b. Abī Mu'ayt.³² It is also reported that the Muslims captured the slave, while the Qurayshī escaped. In contrast to 'Urwah, this account does not present the Muslims as asking explicit questions about Abū Sufyān and his caravan, but simply: "How many men are there?" This ambiguous question could have referred to either the men of Abū Sufyān or the men of Quraysh. When the slave replied, "By God, they are many and formidable," the Muslims began to beat him. The subsequent account corresponds to 'Urwah's description: the slave was brought before the Prophet who, insightfully alert to the true meaning of the slave's information, reached the conclusion that the Qurayshī army was comprised of nine hundred to one thousand men.

It was reported further how the Prophet and the Muslim army spent their night at Badr. As there was a light drizzle during the night, they took shelter from the rain under trees or through the use of leather shields.³³ While the Muslim fighters were sleeping, the Prophet spent the entire night awake, calling on God: "O God, if this group perishes you will not be worshipped on earth." When dawn broke, he called his followers to prayer, led them in

³⁰ A note in *The History of al-Ṭabarī* mentions that this is said to be evidence of a belief in magic (See, *ibid.*, p. 32), and is related to the Qur'ān 8.17: "When thou throwest (a handful of dust), it was not thy act, but Allah's." As mentioned in the subsequent report, the Prophet picked up some gravel and faced Quraysh saying "May their faces be deformed!" Then he threw it at them, and ordered his companions to attack, *The History*, *ibid.*, p. 56. This account is also available in al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, pp. 135-137, but none of the reports discusses the belief in magic.

³¹ *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, pp. 32-34; *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk*, vol. 2, pp. 424-427.

³² These two were the water-carriers of the Quraysh mentioned previously but were not fully identified in 'Urwah's account.

³³ This is recorded in Qur'ān 8.11: "Remember He covered you with a sort of drowsiness, to give you calm as from Himself and He caused rain to descend on you from heaven, to clean you therewith, to remove from you the stain of Satan, to strengthen your hearts, and to plant your feet firmly therewith." (*The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 416). The rain was meant to purify Muslims and remove the stain of Satan, which would enable them to encounter the polytheists with strong hearts on the following day.

prayer and urged them to fight. The army of the Quraysh, he told them, was on the hillside not far away from them.

As the two parties approached each other, they readied themselves for the fight. Suddenly the Muslims saw a man on a red camel moving among the Qurayshī army. A Muslim fighter who had stayed close to the enemy, H{amzah, reported to the Prophet about the man and what he had said to the Quraysh. It was 'Utbah b. Rabī'ah, and was telling the Quraysh not to fight against the Muslims. Those who fought against them, he claimed, would fight to the death, without achieving any good for themselves. A heated quarrel then arose among the enemies of the Muslims, many of whom called the man a coward.

Shamed by the accusation and the quarrel, 'Utbah asked his brother, Shaybah, and his son, al-Walid, to join him at front of the army. In an inflamed fighting frenzy, 'Utbah challenged the Muslims to single combat. Six young Anṣārī men leaped forward in spontaneous response to the challenge. But 'Utbah refused each of them, preferring his cousins, the sons of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. Accordingly, the Prophet summoned 'Alī, Ḥamzah and 'Ubaydah b. al-Ḥārith of the Banū 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib to come forward and respond to the challenge. In this prelude to the fighting, 'Utbah and Shaybah were killed, while al-Walid b. 'Utbah and 'Ubaydah b. al-Ḥārith were wounded.

The real battle began directly after that. However, this account does not contain an elaborate discussion of the battle between the two armies, except that after it was over, seventy soldiers in the Meccan army had been killed and seventy others taken prisoner. Al-'Abbās, 'Āqil and Nawfal b. al-Ḥārith, all of whom were of the sons of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, were among the prisoners. Al-'Abbās was captured by a short Anṣārī soldier. When he was brought to the Prophet, he argued that he was not captured by that Anṣārī, but by a handsome man with bald temples, riding a piebald horse, whom he could not see among the Muslim fighters. The Anṣārī, however, insisted that he had taken al-'Abbās captive. After listening to both sides, the Prophet told them that a noble angel had been sent by God to assist the Anṣārī.³⁴

³⁴It is clear that this event was meant to highlight the interference of divine power in the battle, especially the role it played in helping the Muslim army achieve victory. This is believed to be a response to the Prophet's all night prayers to God before the battle. This is recorded in Qur'ān 8.9: "Remember ye implored the assistance of your Lord, and He answered you: 'I will assist you with a thousand of the angles, ranks on ranks.'" See *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, pp. 415-416.

In addition to these account, al-Ṭabarī's description of the battle includes a report narrated by Ibn Ishāq, mostly on the authority of Ḥumayd - Salamah - Muḥammad b. Ishāq. Ibn Ishāq's account is more comprehensive than the earlier ones, describing several episodes of the battle in some detail. It begins with "the dream of 'Ātikah" and extends through some related issues that took place after the battle, such as the treatment of the captives, the conversion of Abū al-'Āṣ (the husband of Zaynab, the Prophet's daughter), and includes a discussion about the lawfulness of taking captives.³⁵ As the major events of the battle have been examined thoroughly in the previous accounts, it is not necessary to examine these issues here.

The dream of 'Ātikah is an interesting episode in Ibn Ishāq's account, as quoted by al-Ṭabarī.³⁶ Three days before Ḍamḍām b. 'Amr arrived in Mecca to deliver the message from Abū Sufyān,³⁷ 'Ātikah bt. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib had a horrifying dream that she interpreted as signifying that the Meccan people would be afflicted by evil. In her dream, 'Ātikah saw a rider approach up on a camel. He stopped in the valley, shouting loudly, "Hasten to your deaths, you people of treachery, in three days' time." As many people gathered around him, he entered the mosque, followed by those who accompanied him. Still surrounded by the crowd, his camel climbed on the top of the Ka'bah with the rider on its back. There he shouted another three times just as he had before. Then the camel climbed to the peak of the mount Abū Qubaysh, where he shouted again. He then picked up a boulder and threw it down the mountain. When it reached the bottom it broke into pieces, which entered every house in Mecca.

In spite of 'Ātikah's unwillingness to reveal her dream, it inevitably became known to all people of Quraysh, which caused considerably dissension among the notable figures of Mecca, especially between al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, 'Ātikah's brother who first heard the dream, and Abū Jahl

³⁵ *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, pp. 34-85; *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa-l-Mulūk*, vol. 2, pp. 427-479.

³⁶ Al-Ṭabarī based his account on the authority of Ibn Ḥumayd - Salamah - Ibn Ishāq - one whose veracity he did not doubt - 'Ikrimah, the *mawla* of Ibn 'Abbās - Ibn 'Abbās. See, *ibid.*, p. 35. With regard to Ibn Ishāq's usage of the *isnād*, especially his quotation of vague authorities, such as "whose veracity I do not doubt," "one of the learned," "a man of the family of so and so," etc., see James Robson, "Ibn Ishāq's Use of the *Isnād*" in *Bulletin of the John Ryland Library*, vol. 38 (1955-56), pp. 452-453.

³⁷ See note 24, on p. 9 above.

b. Hishām al-Makhzūmī.³⁸ Abū Jahl condemned 'Ātikah as another claimant to prophecy. He challenged al-'Abbās if nothing happened to prove the dream true within three days, he swore to put it in writing that al-'Abbās' family were the greatest liars among the Arabs. This is because Abū Jahl considered Muḥammad, who is of the same clan as al-'Abbās, to be a liar as well. The dispute continued until the third day after 'Ātikah's dream, when Ḍamḍām b. 'Amr al-Ghifārī appeared, startling the Meccans. He shouted from the bottom of the wadi: "O people of Quraysh, The caravan! The caravan! Your wealth is with Abū Sufyān, and Muḥammad and his companions have set off to intercept it, and I do not think you will reach it. Help! Help!" Ḍamḍām's stunning bad news made the Meccans forget their dispute, as they hastily equipped themselves to protect their wealth against interception by Medinan expedition. They were alarmed that what had happened to Ibn al-Ḥaḍramī's caravan would soon befall theirs.³⁹

When they had finished equipping themselves and were ready to set out, they remembered that they were at war with the Banū Bakr, an important section of the nomadic tribe of Kinānah. Diminishing their morale, this almost caused them to call off their advance. According to Ibn Ishāq (on the authority of 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr), Iblīs manifested himself in the form of one of the nobles of Kinānah, promising them security against any undesirable vigilance from Kinānah. They then immediately left.⁴⁰

There is a difference of opinion over the number of Muslims who participated in the battle. According to Ibn Ishāq and other narrators, over three hundred and ten Muslim fighters participated. Other sources claim three hundred and thirteen, including seventy-seven Emigrants and two hundred and thirty-six Anṣārs. This amount equals the number of Saul's people who crossed the river with him.⁴¹ Another report numbers the Muslims at three hundred and eighteen, while yet a fourth account gives the number as three

³⁸ Abū Jahl al-Makhzūmī was about the same age as Muḥammad, and was his particular opponent. He was the leader of the Meccan force in the battle of Badr, where he was finally killed by Muslim fighters. See *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, *ibid.*, p. 36, n. 70. For the account of the death of Abū Jahl and some of his Meccan fellows, see *ibid.*, pp. 61-63.

³⁹ *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, *ibid.*, p. 37.

⁴⁰ *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴¹ Saul, king of Israel, is mentioned in the Qur'ān as Ṭālūt. See *ibid.*, p. 39, n. 74, quoting al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj al-Dhahab*, edited and translated by C. Barbier de Meynard and Pavet de Courteille (Paris, 1861), i.102.

hundred and fourteen men.⁴²

THE BATTLE OF BADR IN AL-ṬABARĪ'S *TAFSĪR*

The discussion of the battle of Badr in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* and *Tafsīr* shares several points in common. He seems to have used the same authorities to discuss certain events related to some verses in the *suṭrat* al-Anfāl. In this section, I would like to highlight some issues of the battle reflected in al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* of this *suṭrah*. However, since the major parts of the episodes of the battle have been discussed previously, I will focus my discussion here on the problem of booty (*anfāl*, *ghana'im*) and the polytheists' behavior during the battle in light of al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* with some other references, especially his *Ta'rikh*, to analyze the similarities between the two works.

As has been mentioned earlier, soon after the battle was won, God sent down a special revelation to the Prophet in the form of the whole *suṭrat* al-Anfāl.⁴³ This *suṭrah* concerned the participants in the battle of Badr who disagreed about the booty and grew very bad-tempered over this topic.⁴⁴ The *suṭrah* begins with an allusion to the questions arising among the Muslims about the ownership of the *anfāl*. Some Muslims had even asked the Prophet to secure them a part of the booty. The Prophet was then told that the *anfāl* belongs to God and His Messenger. Referring to al-Muthannā - Ishāq - Ya'qūb al-Zubayrī - al-Mughīrah b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān - his father - Sulaymān b. Mūsā - Makhūl, *mawla* of Hudhayl, - Abū Salām - Abū Amāmah al-Bāhilī - 'Ubadah b. al-Ṣāmit, al-Ṭabarī insists that the *suṭrah* was revealed concerning the people of Badr, who had quarreled over the booty. God took it out of their hands when they displayed tendencies to selfish behavior and evil character, and gave it to the Prophet, who then divided it equally among them. This was meant to enforce fear of God, obedience to His Prophet's decision

⁴²In regard to this difference of opinion, see *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, pp. 38-40. Ibn Ishāq has recorded the names of all the Muslims present at Badr. See *The Life of Muḥammad*, pp. 327-337. See also Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah*, vol. 2, pp. 321-345.

⁴³References to al-Ṭabarī's examination of the battle of Badr in his *Tafsīr* can be seen in his *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1986), vol. 9, pp. 114-163; vol. 10, pp. 2-41. See also Ibn Hishām, *ibid.*, pp. 309-320; *The Life of Muḥammad*, *ibid.*, pp. 321-327.

⁴⁴In regard to this disputation see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, *ibid.*, p. 116; *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, pp. 63-64.

and peace among themselves.⁴⁵

Al-Ṭabarī opens his *Tafsīr* on this *su'rah* by examining the notion of *al-anfal*, (plural of *nafl*) which is synonymous with *al-ghana'im* (plural of *ghanimah*), meaning "spoils," "booty," "loot," or "prey." On the authority of Abū Kurayb - Jābir b. Nūḥ - 'Abd al-Malik - 'Atā' and some other channels, however, al-Ṭabarī insists that the *anfal* signifies everything that the Muslims collected from the polytheists, including riding animals (*dabbah*), slaves, and other goods, obtained without waging war against them. All this had to be handed over to the Prophet who would decide about it as he wished.⁴⁶

Another account reported Ibn 'Abbās as saying that *al-anfal* means "plundering" or "looting" (*al-salb*), in addition to setting aside horses, coats of mail and clothes.⁴⁷ Yet al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* also reveals that in Arabic the word *nafl* originally means "addition to something else" (*al-ziyādah 'alā al-shay'*). Al-Ṭabarī also adopted this, insisting that *al-anfal* means additional presents or payment given to some or all fighters, either because they deserved it or because there were extra goods left to be distributed, that would strengthen Muslim morale, fortifying and improving Muslim affairs in general.⁴⁸

Concerning the distribution of the booty, the Qur'ān says: "And know that out of all the booty that ye may acquire (in war), a fifth share is assigned to God and the Apostle, and to near relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer."⁴⁹ Based on this verse, al-Ṭabarī, on the authority of Bishr b. Mu'adh - Yazīd - Sa'id - Qatādah, explains that a fifth of every booty should be assigned to God and His Messenger, while the other four fifths should be distributed among those who took part in the battle. In regard to the one fifth assigned to God and His Messenger, al-Ṭabarī clarifies further that this fifth should be divided into five more shares: one for God and His Messenger, one for the near relatives of Muḥammad (*dhawī al-qurba*),⁵⁰ one for the

⁴⁵ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, ibid.; *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 321.

⁴⁶ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, ibid., p. 114.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Reference to the word *salb* (plundering, looting), signifies that *al-anfal* was also achieved through warfare.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 115.

⁴⁹ Qur'ān, 8.41; *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 424.

⁵⁰ On the authority of Ibn Wakī' - his father - Sharīk - Khaṣīf - Mujāhid it was reported that as it is not lawful for the family of Muḥammad to accept charitable gifts, they received a fifth of the fifth (from the booty). Scholars disagree in determining who is included in the family of Muḥammad. Some say that it includes all the members of the

orphans, one for the needy, and one for the wayfarer.⁵¹ However, God's share and the Prophet's share are only one fifth, meaning the share of God is to be included in that of the Prophet. Another account, narrated by al-Muthannā - Abū Ṣāliḥ - Mu'āwiyah - 'Alī - Ibn 'Abbās reveals that booty should be divided into five shares: four fifths for those who marched into battle, while the final fifth is distributed in four quarters: a quarter for God and His Messenger—including Muḥammad's close relatives (*dhawī al-qurba*), a quarter for the orphans, a quarter for the needy, and another quarter for the wayfarer. Thus the share of God and that of the Prophet, which is only one quarter, was assigned to the Prophet's close relatives and he did not take any of the fifth.⁵²

Another important issue related to the problem of booty is mentioned in the Qur'ān 8.67-69:

It is not fitting for an Apostle that he should have prisoners of war until he hath thoroughly subdued the land. Ye look for the temporal goods of this world, but God looketh to the hereafter; and God is Exalted in might, Wise. Had it not been for a previous ordinance from God, a severe penalty would have reached you for the (ransom) that ye took. But (now) enjoy what ye took in war, lawful and good, but fear God, for God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.⁵³

In these verses, God reminds the Prophet that war should not be undertaken for temporal goods of this world, such as the opportunity to occupy more extensive territory, revenge or military glory. War in Islam is only permitted for the pure defense of the faith and to reinforce the actualization of God's law on earth. Muslims must therefore strive to exclude all baser motives. The greed for ransom that can be made from captives has no place in such a holy war. However, as seventy Meccans had been taken captive during the battle of Badr, it was decided to ask ransom for them.⁵⁴ While the

Banū Hāshim. Another account by Aḥmad b. Ishāq - Abū Aḥmad - Sharīk - Khasīf - Mujaḥid reveals that: The Prophet and his household did not take almsgiving, so (God) made a fifth of the fifth (from the booty) for them. Abū Aḥmad - 'Abd al-Salām - Khasīf - Mujaḥid say: God knew that many among the Banū Hāshim were needy, so He made a fifth of the booty available to them in place of almsgiving. See *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, p. 5.

⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

⁵² Ibid., p. 4.

⁵³ *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 432-433.

⁵⁴ For the treatment of the Badr captives by the Muslim army, see *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, p. 31; *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, pp. 69-73.

general principle of fighting simply to take captives and demand ransom is reprimanded, the particular action in this case was justified. God made ransom lawful for Muḥammad and his followers, as approved by the above quoted verse (8.69).

Ibn Hishām cited Ibn Ishāq as saying that God censured the Prophet for the approach he took to the prisoners of war and the booty taken by the Muslims. No prophet before him took booty from his enemies. The Prophet himself was well aware of his behavior; he may have felt guilty when he decided to follow Abū Bakr's advice to accept ransom rather than 'Umar's suggestion that he punish all the prisoners.⁵⁵ The day after the Prophet ransomed the captives, 'Umar saw both the Prophet and Abū Bakr weeping. Eager to know what had happened, 'Umar said: "O Messenger of God, tell me, what has made you and your companion weep? If I find cause to weep, I will weep with you, and if not, I will pretend to weep because you are weeping." The Prophet answered that they were weeping because of his decision to ransom the captives.⁵⁶ This implies that the Prophet realized he should have punished them. Once justified by the above verse (8.69), however, Muḥammad was reported to have said, "I was helped by fear, the earth was made a place to pray, and clean; I was given all-embracing words; booty was made lawful to me as to no prophet before me; and I was given the power to intercede; five privileges accorded to no prophet before me."⁵⁷

⁵⁵The Prophet consulted Abū Bakr, 'Umar and 'Abd Allāh b. Rawāḥah concerning the best treatment for the prisoners of the Badr war. Abū Bakr advised him to accept ransom for them in order to strengthen the Muslims, that God might guide them aright. 'Umar, on the contrary, suggested killing all of the prisoners, refraining from showing any leniency in their hearts to the Unbelievers. 'Abd Allāh b. Rawāḥah suggested that they should be brought to a wadi where they could be burnt alive. See *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, pp. 81-82. See also *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, p. 31.

⁵⁶*The History of al-Ṭabarī*, *ibid.*, p. 81. Al-Ṭabarī also refers to the chain of Ibn Ḥumayd - Salamah - Ibn Ishāq who said that when it was revealed "It is not for any Prophet to have captives" [8.67 cited above] the Messenger of God said: "If punishment were to ascend from Heaven, none would escape from it but Sa'd b. Mu'adh, because he said, 'O Prophet of God, extensive killing is dearer to me than sparing men's lives.'" See *ibid.*, p. 83.

⁵⁷See Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyah*, vol. 2, p. 319, based on the authority of Ibn Ishāq from Muḥammad Abū Ja'far b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. A note in Ibn Hishām's *Sīrah* points out that the *ḥadīth* is quoted by al-Bukhārī in several parts of his *Ṣaḥīḥ* for discussion on *Tayam-mum*, *Kitāb al-Ṣalāh*, *Kitāb al-Jihād wa-l-Siyar*, and others. Muslim does the same thing in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. See also *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, p. 34; *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 326.

The Qur'ān also clearly describes the behavior of the Qurayshī polytheists during the battle of Badr. From the time they set out for the battle, God continued to remind the Muslims not to imitate the polytheists who went into battle contemptuously and hypocritically. "And be not like those who started from their homes insolently and to be seen of men, and to hinder (men) from the path of God, for God compasseth round about all that they do" (8.47).⁵⁸ This refers to Abū Jahl's response to Abū Sufyān. After Abū Sufyān had assured his caravan's safety, he sent a messenger to the Quraysh, informing them that there was no need to continue in their preparations for battle, as their duty was only to protect the caravan, their men and their property. Abū Sufyān proposed them to cancel their movement and to go back to Mecca. But Abū Jahl b. Hishām who was in charge of this movement insisted that the Quraysh army should proceed straight to Badr, which was one of the locations of the Arab annual festivals. He commanded them to remain there for three days, slaughtering camels and distributing food and wine while Qurayshī female singers performed beautiful songs, to earn the admiration of all the Arabs. This general report of the issue has been adopted by al-Ṭabarī from several different authorities: 'Abd al-Wārith - 'Abd al-S{amad - his father - Abān - Hishām b. 'Urwah - 'Urwah; Ḥumayd - Salamah - Ibn Ishāq from Muḥammad b. Muslim, 'Āṣim b. 'Amr, 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Bakr and Yazīd b. Rūmān - 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr and other scholars - Ibn 'Abbās.⁵⁹ Other channels, however, simply assert that the verse is meant to describe the behavior of Abū Jahl and his companions on their way to Badr; the subject indicated by the verse, they claim, is Abū Jahl and his companions during the event of Badr.⁶⁰

Meanwhile, confident of their superiority in number, equipment, and experience, the Meccans assumed they could easily subdue the Muslims army at Badr. On the other hand, considering that God would be on his part and that Muḥammad had devastated kinship relationship among Quraysh, Abū Jahl sought judgment from God, saying: "O God, he who is the worst in severing relations and bringing us things that are unacceptable destroy him this morning."⁶¹ This episode is known as *istiftāḥ*, praying for what is just; it

⁵⁸ *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 427.

⁵⁹ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 10, p. 12. See also *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 7, p. 41; *The Life of Muḥammad*, p. 325.

⁶⁰ See *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶¹ *The Life of Muḥammad*, p. 322.

is recorded in Qur'ān (8.19): "(O Unbelievers!) if ye prayed for victory and judgment, now hath the judgment come to you; if ye desist (from wrong), it will be best for you. If ye return (to the attack), so shall We. Not the least good will your forces be to you even if they were multiplied. For verily Allah is with those who believe."⁶² Most of Al-Ṭabarī's references notes that this *istiftāḥ* was undertaken by Abū Jahl. As the subject of the verb in the passage is the second person plural—*antum* (*in tastaftihū faqad ja'akum al-faḥ*), it seems misleading to assume that only Abū Jahl himself sought judgment. However, one channel cited by al-Ṭabarī mentions that when the polytheists set out to Badr, they prayed to God for victory, holding the black cover of the Ka'bah and reciting: "O God help the one which is more powerful of the two armies, the one which is more eminent of the two groups, and the one which is better of the two tribes." "The two groups" clearly refer to the Quraysh and the Muslims. God's response to their prayer was His decision on the day of Badr as approved by the above verse.⁶³ Another channel reports almost the same idea conveyed in the above passage, indicating that it was the people of Mecca who sought judgment. Unlike the one quoted above, their prayer was mentioned in the Qur'ān (8.32): "Remember how they said: 'O Allah! if this is indeed the Truth from Thee, rain down on us a shower of stones from the sky, or send us a grievous penalty.'"⁶⁴

The polytheists were also reprimanded for their attempts to spend their wealth to prevent people from embracing Islam. The Qur'ān 8.36 reads: "The Unbelievers spend their wealth to hinder (men) from the path of Allah, and so will have (only) regrets and sighs. At length they will be overcome: and the Unbelievers be gathered together to hell."⁶⁵ In his interpretation of this verse al-Ṭabarī explains that the polytheists had distributed their wealth among themselves to strengthen each other and encourage the fight against the Prophet and the Believers. They hoped such actions would ultimately prevent people from believing in God and His Messenger. However, they

⁶² *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 418. Yūsuf 'Alī mentions that *fah*, the word from which *istiftāḥ* is derived, means victory, decision, and judgment. However, al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān* only indicates the meaning of judgment. Thus *istiftāḥ* in al-Ṭabarī's interpretation signifies seeking for judgment, an act undertaken by Abū Jahl before his advance to Badr.

⁶³ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, p. 138, based on the authority of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn - Aḥmad b. al-Mufaḍḍal - Asbāṭ - al-Sudī.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, based on the authority of Yūnus - Ibn Wahb - Ibn Zayd.

⁶⁵ *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, p. 422.

would end up regretting these actions, as their wealth would be spent as useless attempts to extinguish the light of God. They would even be defeated by the Believers, at which point God would gather them into hell where He would punish them and make them realize their regrets. Al-Ṭabarī insists that this verse refers specifically to Abū Sufyān b. Ḥarb and his plan to take reprisal against the Muslims by spending much of his wealth to finance the subsequent battle of Uhḍ. This is based on the authority of Ibn Ḥumayd - Ya'qūb al-Qummī - Ja'far - Sa'īd b. Jabīr, and some other channels.⁶⁶

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Through the battle of Badr, God guided Muslims toward victory, an astonishing success that allowed Muḥammad and his companions to establish certain principal foundations of the earlier Islamic community. At first, however, the Believers, not so confident of their own abilities, were hesitant to encounter their enemy on the battlefield. When the injunction to set out for battle was issued, some were reluctant to fulfill it. The Qur'ān describes them in verses 8.5-6: "Just as thy Lord ordered thee out of thy house in truth, even though a party among the Believers disliked it, disputing with thee concerning the truth after it was made manifest, as if they were being driven to death and they (actually) saw it."

Al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* has recorded this episode as the most striking event of the second year of the Hijrah. Since al-Ṭabarī was not only a historian but also an exegete, this event is also recorded in part in his *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, one of the most celebrated ancient works of Qur'ānic interpretation. Unlike other exegetes who rely on rational interpretation in deciphering the words of God, al-Ṭabarī relies heavily on traditional reports or *riwāyah*. In doing so, al-Ṭabarī tried to collect as many traditions as he could to determine the true meaning intended by the Prophet. This approach seems very

⁶⁶ *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, vol. 9, pp. 159-160. It is reported that Abū Sufyān hired two thousand Ethiopian fighters of the Banū Kinānah. This amount seems to have been exaggerated, however, since another source mentions only three or four hundred soldiers. The money spent by Abū Sufyān cost about forty *awqīyah* of gold. Each *awqīyah*, at that time, was equal to forty *mithqāl*. This is based on the authority of Ibn Wakī' - Ishāq b. Ismā'il - Ya'qūb al-Qummī - Ja'far - Ibn Abzī. In the modern system of weight, *awqīyah* or *uqīyah* and *wiqīyah* is equivalent to an ounce. See Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979), pp. 43 and 1282.

helpful, especially in dealing with certain verses that relate to historical events occurring in the early development of the Islamic community. This approach corresponds to that used in his *Ta'rikh*. Special attention has been drawn to al-Ṭabarī's interpretation of *sūrat al-Anfāl*, which is completely devoted to placing the battle of Badr and some related issues in Qur'ānic perspective.

Al-Ṭabarī's exposition of the battle of Badr as recorded in his *Ta'rikh al-Rusul wa'l-Mulūk* is based on three major chains of authorities: 'Alī b. Naṣr and 'Abd al-Wārith b. 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. 'Abd al-Wārith - 'Abd al-Ṣamad b. 'Abd al-Wārith - his father - Abān al-'Aṭṭār - Hishām b. 'Urwah - 'Urwah b. al-Zubayr; Hārūn b. Ishāq - Mus'ab b. al-Miqdām - Isrā'īl - Abū Ishāq - Hārithah - 'Alī; and Ibn Ḥumayd - Salamah - Muḥammad b. Ishāq. These sources appear to complement each other in describing the battle. Although rough Muḥammad b. Muslim al-Zuhri, 'Āsim b. 'Umar b. Qatādah, 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Bakr and Yazīd b. Rūmān - 'Urwah), he apparently did not have access to 'Urwah's letter to the Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, an important source for a full account of the battle. Nevertheless, Ibn Ishāq's account remains the most authoritative, providing the most comprehensive examination of the battle.

While al-Ṭabarī focuses on these three major channels in his *Ta'rikh*, he bases his *Tafsīr* of *sūrat al-Anfāl* on many different authorities. To some extent, these different authorities indicate the varied understandings that prevailed among the Prophet's companions, especially in attempts to deal with some ambiguous words or problematic issues. The definition of the word *al-anfāl* can serve as an example: al-Ṭabarī records no less than six different interpretations based on different authorities. However, al-Ṭabarī did not offer conclusions for every subject discussed by those different authorities. Sometimes he left the issue unresolved, indicating it is clear enough for his readers, or is not involved in a serious controversy. In certain cases, however, al-Ṭabarī proposes his own conclusion to the diversities of interpretation, showing his inclination to accept a particular meaning of a word as the strongest. The phrase used by al-Ṭabarī to indicate his conclusion varies slightly, but is generally written in the form: "*Qāla Abū Ja'far* [means al-Ṭabarī] *wa-awlaḥadhihi al-aqwal bi'l-ṣawāb...*" or "*qāla Abū Ja'far wa'l-ṣawāb min al-qawli fī dhalika...*" etc.

Through his *Tafsīr*, al-Ṭabarī manages to clarify the Qur'ānic verses in their historical context, based on the testimony of the companions of the Prophet who were involved in certain events, such as the battle of Badr. Al-Ṭabarī's reliance on traditional transmission, which is commonly applied in

Islamic historiography, gives a special sense of accuracy in their reflecting of the historical facts recorded by the Qur'ān. Combining the information available in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* and his *Tafsīr* it provides a comprehensive account of the battle of Badr that neither provides alone.

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