

Abu Bakr – The First Caliph

Early Life

Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was born at Makkah some time in 573 CE. His father was Uthman, surnamed Abu Qahafa, and his mother was Salma, surnamed Umm-ul-Khair. They belonged to the Bani Taim section of the Quraysh. The genealogy of Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه joined with that of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم eight generations back in their common ancestor Murrah.

When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم announced his prophetic mission, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was the first person outside the family of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to accept Islam. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was a rich merchant, and he commanded great influence in the social circles of Makkah. Through his influence many distinguished persons among the Quraysh were converted to Islam. Most of his wealth was used in the liberation of Muslim slaves. He was the first person to build a mosque. After conversion to Islam he was constant companion of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم conferred on him the title of “Siddiq”, the Veracious for his power to discern the truth.

On the occasion of the Hijrah, he was the companion of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and was referred to in the Holy Qur’an as “the Second of the Two.”

At Madina, his daughter ‘Ayesha رضي الله عنها was married to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. That brought him still closer to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. He participated in all the battles fought by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. He was the first person to be appointed as Amirul Hajj in the history of Islam. When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم fell sick, he was commissioned by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to lead the faithful in prayer.

When on the death of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, even men like ‘Umar رضي الله عنه said that the Holy Prophet was alive and had gone to meet God, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه said, “Know that Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم being mortal is dead, but God of Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم being immortal is alive and will live for ever.”

Caliphate of Abu Bakr

After the death of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was elected as the Caliph. On assuming office, in his inaugural address, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه said that he was not the best among them, and needed their advice and help. He held that to tell the truth to a person commissioned to rule was faithful allegiance, and to conceal it was treason. He declared that in his sight the strong and the weak were to be alike, and he would render justice to all without fear or favor. He laid down the following criterion for the obedience of the people:

“As I obey Allah and His Prophet, obey me. If I neglect the laws of Allah and His Prophet, I have no more right to your obedience.”

Situation at the time of the accession of Abu Bakr

The situation that Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه faced on assuming the caliphate was very grim. Many tribes apostatized from Islam and refused to pay Zakah. Many false prophets rose throughout the length and breadth of Arabia, and many people offered allegiance to them.

The argument that weighed with them was that a living prophet was to be preferred to one who was dead.

Usamah's Expedition

Immediately before his death, the Holy Prophet ﷺ had ordered that an expedition should be sent to Syria under the command of Usamah, the son of Muslim commander Zayd who had been martyred in the battle of Mautah in 629 CE. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was advised that as Madina was surrounded by hostile tribes, the expedition should be abandoned. He repudiated the suggestion and said that he could not withhold the expedition that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had ordered to proceed. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was next asked that if the expedition was to be necessarily undertaken, the command should be entrusted to some veteran General instead of Usamah who was a mere boy. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه said that as the Holy Prophet ﷺ had appointed Usamah to the command, he could not, as a representative of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, countermand such orders. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه accordingly sent the force under Usamah to the Syrian front.

Confrontation with the Tribes

After Usamah's army had left for the Syrian front, the tribes around Madina sent a deputation to wait on Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه. The tribes said that they were prepared to owe allegiance to Islam, but they were not prepared to pay Zakah. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه was advised that in view of the circumstances on the ground, the terms of the tribes should be accepted. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه held that as the payment of Zakah was a compulsory obligation under Islam, he had no authority to allow any relaxation. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه remained firm, and told the tribes that if they withheld with regard to Zakah, even as much as a string to tie a camel, he would fight against them for the vindication of the injunction of Islam. Thus rebuffed, the recalcitrant tribes marched to Madina one night and launched the attack. The tribes met some initial success, but the Muslims under the command of Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه rallied, and in a counter attack repulsed the tribes.

Battles of Dhu Qissa and Abraq

Driven away from Madina, the tribes gathered at Dhu Qissa at some distance from Madina, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه marched to Dhu Qissa as the head of a Muslim force and launched an attack against the tribes. After some resistance, the tribes broke rank and retreated to Abraq. When the main Muslim army under Usamah returned from the Syrian front after completing its job, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه marched at the head of a large Muslim force and proceeded to Abraq. The tribes were routed, and their lands were confiscated by the Muslims.

Campaign against the Apostates

After the battle of Abraq, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه decided to take military action against the apostate tribes. The Muslim force was divided into eleven corps each under its own commander. Each commander was handed over a standard, and assigned a specified objective. These corps were to operate in various parts of the country. The commanders were instructed that before taking any action against an apostate tribe it should be called upon to return to Islam and punitive action should be taken only in the event of the refusal

of the tribe to offer allegiance to Islam. If the call of “Athar” rose from the quarters of tribes, that was indicative of the tribe’s return to Islam.

The Battle of Buzakha

The Banu Asad tribe held the region to the north of Madina. They were led by Taleaha, a false prophet. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه commissioned a column under Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه to lead the campaign against Taleaha. The two armies met at Buzakha, where after some hard fight the Banu Asad were defeated. Taleaha escaped to Syria, and most of his followers submitted and accepted Islam.

After Battle of Zafar

After the Battle of Buzakha some of the followers of Taleaha took refuge with Salma alias Umm Zummal, a firebrand leader of Bani Fazara. Salma mustered a considerable force at Zafar. From Buzakha, Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه marched to Zafar. There was some hard fighting, but ultimately Salma was killed, and with her death the apostate tribes offered submission and were readmitted to the fold of Islam.

The Battle of Naqra

The Bani Sulaim had their concentration at Naqra. After the battle of Buzakha and Zafar, the Muslim force under Khalid bin Waleed launched the attack against Bani Sulaim at Naqra. The Bani Sulaim were defeated, and their leader Abu Shajra was captured alive. Abu Shajra was sent to Madina where he accepted Islam.

Campaign against Bani Tamim

Having reduced the tribes in the north, Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه marched against the Bani Tamim who lived in a plateau bordering the Persian Gulf. When the Muslim force reached Butaha, the headquarters of Bani Tamim, there were no forces of Bani Tamim to oppose the Muslims. Malik, the chief of Bani Tamim, and his people neither came forward to offer their submission, nor did they come forward to oppose the Muslims. Khalid رضي الله عنه directed his soldiers to search for Malik. Malik and Laila, his wife, were taken captive and brought before Khalid رضي الله عنه.

Malik’s wife Laila enjoyed fame for her extraordinary beauty. During the night Malik was killed and the next day Khalid رضي الله عنه married Laila, the widow of Malik. On the death of Malik, the entire tribe of Bani Tamim surrendered and professed faith in Islam. The campaign led to considerable scandal. Khalid رضي الله عنه was charged of murdering a Muslim (Malik) in order to marry his beautiful wife. Khalid رضي الله عنه was summoned to Madina and put to explanation. Khalid’s رضي الله عنه defense was that if according to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, he was the “Sword of God”, how could such a sword fall on the neck of a Muslim? Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه exonerated Khalid رضي الله عنه of the charge and commissioned him to lead a force against the false prophet Musailma in the Yamama valley.

Campaign against Musailma the Liar

Of all the imposters and false prophets who rose in Arabia after the death of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, the most notorious was Musailma who led the Banu Hanifa in Yamama. Musailma further gained in strength when he made common cause with Sajjah, a lady who claimed to be a prophetess and married her. A Muslim column under Ikramah attacked the

Banu Hanifa in the first instance, and was beaten back. Another Muslim force under Shurahbil attacked Musailma thereafter but was also defeated. That emboldened Musailma and he boasted of his invincibility. At this critical juncture Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه called upon Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه to undertake operations against Musailma.

Khalid رضي الله عنه had his headquarters at Bataha. From there he marched south to the valley of Yamama. The Muslim army came across some men of the Banu Hanifa led by Maja'a bin Murrah. All of them except Maja'a were put to death. Maja'a was kept in custody to serve as a hostage. He was put in chains and entrusted to the custody of Laila, the new wife of Khalid رضي الله عنه who accompanied him on the battlefield.

The advance of the Muslim forces was intercepted by Musailma on the plain of Acraba. Here the two opposing armies arranged their ranks for the battle. The battle that followed was hotly contested. By the close of the day, the forces of Musailma increased their pressure and the Muslim force had to fall back. When the battle for the first day ended there was much jubilation in the camp of Musailma. Though Khalid رضي الله عنه had been forced to withdraw, he refused to admit defeat. He regrouped the army in tribal commands. From within the Makkan and Madinite horsemen he created a reserve force of a thousand cavalry men, and kept them under his personal command.

The next day the two armies faced each other in a headlong combat. While the front ranks of the two armies grappled with each other in hand to hand fight, Khalid رضي الله عنه collected the cavalry reserves and carrying out a wide outflanking movement dashed for the mound where the camp of Musailma was located. The boldness of the move of Khalid رضي الله عنه took Banu Hanifa completely by surprise. The bodyguards of Musailma fought valiantly but they could not hold guard for long. As Khalid رضي الله عنه increased his pressure, Musailma lost his nerves, and retreated to a neighboring fortified garden.

With the withdrawal of Musailma, his army lost the will to fight and they too found safety in seeking refuge in the garden. The garden was surrounded by a huge wall and the fugitives closed the gate thus shutting access to the pursuing Muslims. The Muslim army broke open the gate and rushing into the garden let loose a reign of slaughter on Banu Hanifa. Banu Hanifa were cut to pieces in large numbers and the garden was virtually drenched with blood. So bloody was the "Battle of the Garden", that in Arab annals it came to be known as "The Battle of Death." When Musailma fell dead, the Banu Hanifa surrendered, accepted terms and were readmitted to the fold of Islam.

Campaign in Bahrain

After the conquest of Yamama, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه directed a campaign against Bahrain. Bahrain comprised the coastal strip along the Persian Gulf. During the lifetime of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, Mundhir was the ruler of Bahrain. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم sent a mission to invite Mundhir to Islam. Mundhir accepted the call and was converted to Islam. Under the influence of Mundhir most of the people of Bahrain accepted Islam. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم appointed al-Hadrami as the Muslim Resident at the court of Bahrain.

Mundhir died soon after the death of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. His death led to anarchy and chaos, and like the other people, the people of Bahrain also apostatized. Jarud, the leader

of Banu Abdul Qais remained firm in his allegiance to Islam, and he dissuaded his tribe from apostatizing. Other tribes, apostatized. In the anarchy power was captured by Munhiz, a descendant of the Arab kings of Hirah. He was crowned as the king of Bahrain, and he took the pledge to fight against Islam. He brought pressure on Jarud and his people to denounce Islam but they remained steadfast. Thereupon the Bahrain forces led an attack against the Muslims. The Muslims shut themselves in the fort of Jarasi and the non-Muslims pressed the siege with considerable vehemence.

Al-Hadrami went to Madina to seek help from Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه, and returned to Bahrain with a Muslim force. As the non-Muslims were sufficiently strong, al-Hadrami remained on the defensive. He had a ditch dug round his camp and waited for a suitable opportunity to overpower the enemy. One night there was considerable noise from the non-Muslim camp. It was found that they were celebrating their national festival and were dead drunk. Al-Hadrami ordered his forces to take up arms, cross the ditch and pounce upon the enemy. The surprise attack unnerved the Bahrain forces. They ran helter skelter in all directions and were cut to pieces by the pursuing Muslim forces. The Bahrain forces laid down their arms and surrendered. Munhiz and his people repented and were admitted to the fold of Islam.

Campaign in Oman

In Oman, a false prophet, Laquit bin Malik rose to prominence and captured political power. A Muslim force under Hudhaifah was sent to Oman. In the battle of Daba, Laquit and ten thousand of his followers were killed. The Oman forces surrendered, and the people of Oman were converted.

Campaign in Mahrah

In Mahrah the people apostatized but instead of fighting against the Muslims they began to fight among themselves for political power. The Muslims allied themselves with the minority section and fought against the majority section which was led by al Musabbah. Al-Musabbah was defeated, the people of Mahrah repented, and were reconverted to Islam.

Campaign in Yemen

In Yemen a false prophet Aswad Ansi came to power and won a considerable following. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه ordered a two pronged attack on Yemen. Ikramah marched with a force from Mahrah to Yemen. Muhajir bin Umayya marched with another force from Makkah to Yemen. In the battle that followed the apostate tribes were overpowered and were reconverted to Islam after Aswad Ansi had been killed.

Campaign in Hadramaut

In Hadramaut there was a revolt led by Ash'as. When the Muslim forces marched against Ash'as he shut himself in the fort at Nujeir. The fort was carried by the Muslims by assault. Thereafter Ash'as and his people repented and were readmitted to the fold of Islam.

End of Apostasy Campaigns

The apostasy campaigns began in August 632 CE and these operations were over by February 633 CE. Within the short space of six months, Abu Bakr succeeded in exterminating apostasy and winning back all the tribes in Arabia to the fold of Islam.

Muthanna Raids Iraq

Muthanna was the chief of the tribes of Bani Bakr who inhabited north eastern parts of Arabia. In the war in Bahrain, Muthanna fought on the side of the Muslims. In the apostasy wars the Persians had sided with the apostate tribes. After the success of the Muslim army in suppressing apostasy, a stage was set for taking some action against the Persians across the borders. There was considerable disarray in the Persia, and Muthanna felt that the position could be exploited to the advantage of the Muslims. With his band of followers Muthanna made raids in Iraq. The Persian could take no action against Muthanna because his ghost like riders struck rapidly and then disappeared into the desert. These raids brought home the point that Iraq was vulnerable, and that if active operations were undertaken, there were chances of success.

The Battle of Kazima

In March 633 CE, a Muslim column under Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه marched to Iraq and started operations in the regions of Uballa on the Persian Gulf. The two forces met at Kazima. In the opening duel, Khalid رضي الله عنه killed the Persian commander Hormuz. The Muslims then launched the attack which was withstood by the chain-linked Persian infantry. The Muslims increased their pressure and the Persians were forced to fall back. The Persians found their chains to be a death trap and as they retreated, held together in chains, they were slaughtered in thousands. The Battle of the Chains at Kazima unchained the gate of Iraq for the Muslims.

The Battle of Mazar

The next confrontation with the Persians took place at Mazar on the Tigris. The Persian forces were led by the three Generals Qarin, Qabaz and Anushjan. All the three Generals died in fighting duels against the Muslim commanders. In the battle that followed the Persian army was routed with a death toll exceeding 30,000.

The Battle of Walaja

The next encounter took place at Walaja. The Persian forces were led by Andarzaghar. The battle began with a duel in which Khalid killed his adversary. The Persians gained some initial success but in the Muslim counterattack the Persians were routed, and the bulk of their army was annihilated.

The Battle of Ulleis

The next battle took place at Ulleis 10 miles from Walaja. It was a bloody battle in which over 70,000 Persians perished. So large were the killings that the river on the bank whereof the battle was fought virtually became a river of blood.

Conquest of Hirah

From Ulleis the Muslim forces marched to Hirah. There was Persian force to resist the Muslims. The citizens of Hirah surrendered and agreed to pay Jizya to the Muslims.

The Battle of Anbar

Towards the close of June 633 CE, Khalid رضي الله عنه marched with his army to Anbar. The town was situated at a height and the Muslim army had to camp in the plain at a lower level. The Persians stood at the top of the walls thinking their position to be invulnerable.

Khalid رضي الله عنه collected the best of archers and commanded them to shoot at the eyes of the Persians. The Muslim archers shot several rounds, and as a result, thousands of Persians lost their eyes. That created a panic among the Persians and they surrendered agreeing to pay Jizya.

The Battle of Ain-at-Tamr

From Anbar the Muslim force proceeded to Ain-at-Tamr. Here the Christian Arabs led by their chief Aqqa offered resistance. Aqqa was taken captive and the citizens of Ain-at-Tamr offered submission on the usual terms.

The Battle of Daumatul Jandal

When Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه began his operation in Southern Iraq, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه sent another Muslim column under Iyaz bin Ghanam to operate in Daumatul Jandal sector. Iyaz laid siege to Daumatul Jandal but failed to capture it. As a last resort, Iyaz wrote to Khalid رضي الله عنه for help. From Ain-at-Tamr, Khalid رضي الله عنه marched to Daumatul Jandal covering the journey of 300 miles in 10 days. Khalid رضي الله عنه pressed the siege and Daumatul Jandal fell in August 633 CE.

The Battle of Firaz

In December 633 CE, Khalid رضي الله عنه occupied Firaz at the outer most edge of Persian Empire in the Euphrates valley. By the end of 633 CE, the Muslims were masters of Euphrates valley in Iraq.

Defeat of Khalid Bin Saeed

When active operations were being undertaken in Iraq, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه stationed a garrison at Tayma to the east of Tabuk to protect the borders against any attack by the Byzantines in Syria. The Muslim detachment was commanded by Khalid bin Sa'eed and he was directed that he should undertake operations on a reconnaissance scale only and no attempt should be made to get involved in any serious hostilities. Contrary to instructions, Khalid bin Sa'eed advanced a good deal in Syria, and suffered with a serious defeat at the hands of the Byzantines.

Call of Jihad on Syrian Front

In February 634 CE, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه issued a call for Jihad on the Syrian front. By March 634, a large force mustered at Madina ready to march to Syria. These were formed into four corps of 7000 men each and sent to Syria under the command of Abu Ubaidah رضي الله عنه.

Khalid Bin Waleed's March from Iraq to Syria

The Byzantine emperor Heraclius planned action on a large scale. He mustered forces at Ajnadein numbering over a hundred thousand. The four small corps of the Muslim that were operating in Syria were no match for the large concentration of the Byzantine forces. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه ordered Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه to march from Iraq to Syria and take over the chief command on Syrian front.

The Battle of Busra

The first encounter of Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه with the Byzantine army took place at Busra in July 634 CE. It was a hardly contested battle which was ultimately won by the Muslims.

Siege of Damascus

From Busra, Khalid bin Waleed رضي الله عنه marched northward to Damascus. The Byzantine emperor Heralcius garrisoned all forts in Syria and ordered a huge concentration of forces in the south at Ajnadein. The situation was critical for Muslims. If they pressed the siege of Damascus, the danger was that the Byzantine army from Ajnadein might attack the Muslim army from the rear. The Muslims accordingly raised the siege of Damascus and marched to Ajnadein.

The Battle of Ajnadein

The total strength of the Muslim forces assembled at Ajnadein was about 40,000 while the strength of the Byzantine forces was over one hundred thousand. It was hardly contested battle in which the Muslims won an astounding victory. As many as 50,000 Byzantine soldiers were killed while only 450 Muslims were martyred.

Damasus Again

After winning the battle of Ajnadein, the Muslims marched to Damascus in August 634 CE. The Byzantines tried to intercept the advance of the Muslims. There was a confrontation at Yaqusa on the Yermuk in which the Byzantines were defeated and Muslims pushed forward to Damascus. There was another confrontation at Marjus Saffar, 12 miles from Damascus. Here again the Byzantines were defeated and the Muslims pushed forward to Damascus. The siege of Damascus began on 21st August 634 CE, and on 23rd August, Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه nominated Umar رضي الله عنه as his successor.

Assessment

Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه became the Caliph on the 6th of June 632 CE, and he died on 23rd August 634 CE. His period of caliphate extended over two years and two months. Judged by the usual standards this was certainly too short a period to make an impact on history. Surprisingly enough, the caliphate of Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه not only made the impact on history, it changed the very course of history. The suppression of apostasy, the unification of Arabia and the conquests of Iraq and Syria within the short space of two years are the extraordinary marvels of history. The speed, the magnitude, the extent and the permanence of these operations excite wonder and evoke admiration. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه commands a unique position in the history of the world in general and the history of Islam in particular. Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه came to power in the midst of crises-loaded situation. The crises which he was called upon to encounter were multidimensional, being physiological, political, religious and international in charter. At the time of his accession, Islam stood at the brink of precipice and any wrong step on the part of Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه would have led the disintegration of Islam. That he not only averted the process of disintegration, but made Islam a world force that could successfully contend against the giant empires of Byzantium and Persia, speaks for the dynamics of his leadership.

According to the assessment of Muir (The Caliphate – Its Rise, Decline and Fall):

“But for Abu Bakr, Islam would have melted away in compromise with the Bedouin tribes or likelier still would have perished in the throes of birth.”

Abu Bakr رضي الله عنه proved to be the savior of Islam and he launched Islam on the course of its destiny.