

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الحمد لله والصلاة والسلام على رسول الله وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين



Intro to Usul Al Din Lesson 2 Overview

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The Period of Fitnah During the Khilāfah of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib رضي الله عنه

The era of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (al-Khulafā’ al-Rāshidūn) represents the most exemplary period of Islamic governance after the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. However, the final years of this era were marked by severe internal trials, known in Islamic history as *fitan* (sing. *fitnah*), meaning trials, tribulations, and civil strife.

The most intense of these trials occurred during the khilāfah of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib رضي الله عنه (‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, raḍiya Allāhu ‘anhu). Understanding this period requires careful balance: affirming historical truths while maintaining the Islamic obligation of respect and restraint regarding the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ.

Allah says regarding the Companions:

وَالسَّابِقُونَ الْأَوَّلُونَ مِنَ الْمُهَاجِرِينَ وَالْأَنْصَارِ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُمْ بِإِحْسَانٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ

“And the foremost, the first of the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār and those who followed them with excellence—Allah is pleased with them.” (al-Tawbah 9:100)

This verse establishes the foundational Sunni principle that the Companions are people of virtue, even when disagreements occurred among them.

The Martyrdom of ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān رضي الله عنه

Before examining the khilāfah of ‘Alī رضي الله عنه, it is essential to understand the circumstances that preceded it. ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān رضي الله عنه, the third caliph, was unjustly martyred in Madīnah in 35 AH.

Despite criticism directed at some of his administrative decisions, the consensus of Ahl al-Sunnah is that ‘Uthmān رضي الله عنه was a righteous ruler and a مظلوم (*maẓlūm*, one who is wronged). Rebels from outside Madīnah laid siege to his

home. Many Companions offered to defend him, but he refused armed resistance to prevent bloodshed in the city of the Prophet ﷺ.

The Prophet ﷺ had foretold his martyrdom when he said to ‘Uthmān:

يَا عُثْمَانُ، إِنَّ اللَّهَ مُقَمِّصُكَ قَمِيصًا، فَإِنْ أَرَادَكَ الْمُنَافِقُونَ عَلَى خَلْعِهِ فَلَا تَخْلَعْهُ

“O ‘Uthmān, Allah will clothe you with a garment. If the hypocrites seek to remove it from you, do not remove it.” (Reported in Sunan al-Tirmidhī)

His martyrdom shocked the Ummah and became the catalyst for subsequent divisions.

رضي الله عنه Ali ibn Abi Tālib ***The Bay‘ah and Leadership of***

After the martyrdom of ‘Uthmān رضي الله عنه, Madīnah was in a state of unrest. Many Companions hesitated to accept leadership during such chaos. ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib رضي الله عنه initially refused the khilāfah, fully aware of the gravity of leading a divided Ummah.

Eventually, he accepted the bay‘ah (pledge of allegiance) in Madīnah, recognizing that leadership was necessary to prevent further collapse. His acceptance was not motivated by personal ambition but by a sense of responsibility toward the Ummah.

One of the major challenges he faced was that the killers of ‘Uthmān had dispersed among the population, making immediate retribution difficult without causing further injustice or civil war.

The Demand for Justice and the Journey to Basrah

Among those seeking justice for ‘Uthmān رضي الله عنه were prominent Companions, including Ṭalhah ibn ‘Ubaydillāh and al-Zubayr ibn al-‘Awwām

رضي الله عنهما, both from the ten promised Paradise. They were joined by ‘Ā’ishah bint Abī Bakr رضي الله عنها, the Mother of the Believers.

Their intention was not rebellion against ‘Alī رضي الله عنه, but rather to demand accountability for the murder of ‘Uthmān before the political situation stabilized further. This distinction is critical for understanding the Sunni position: the disagreement was over *timing and method*, not legitimacy of leadership.

‘Alī رضي الله عنه, on the other hand, believed that restoring order first was necessary before implementing legal punishment (*qīṣāṣ*).

The Battle of al-Jamal and the Role of the Saboteurs

When the two sides reached the area near Basrah, discussions and reconciliation took place. Historical sources confirm that both parties had reached an agreement to avoid conflict.

However, a group with ulterior motives, widely identified in Sunni historical works as rebels and early Khārijite elements, feared peace because it would expose their crimes. They launched attacks at night on both camps, causing confusion and mutual suspicion.

This led to the Battle of al-Jamal. Despite the outbreak of fighting, the Companions on both sides attempted to limit bloodshed. Ṭalḥah رضي الله عنه was killed during the conflict, and al-Zubayr رضي الله عنه withdrew after remembering a statement of the Prophet ﷺ that indicated he should not fight ‘Alī. He was later killed unjustly by an individual acting independently, an act strongly condemned by ‘Alī رضي الله عنه.

‘Ā’ishah رضي الله عنها was treated with the utmost respect, escorted safely, and returned to Madīnah. This demonstrates the noble character of ‘Alī رضي الله عنه and refutes claims of hostility toward the family of the Prophet ﷺ.

Ṣiffīn, Arbitration, and the Martyrdom of ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir

Another major confrontation occurred between ‘Alī رضي الله عنه and Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān رضي الله عنه at the Battle of Ṣiffīn. Mu‘āwiyah did not claim the khilāfah at this time but demanded justice for ‘Uthmān رضي الله عنه before pledging allegiance.

During this battle, the Companion ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir رضي الله عنه was martyred. The Prophet ﷺ had said:

تَقْتُلُ عَمَّارًا الْفِتْنَةُ الْبَاغِيَّةُ

“‘Ammār will be killed by the transgressing group.” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

This hadith is a key textual proof used by Ahl al-Sunnah to affirm that ‘Alī رضي الله عنه was closer to the truth in this conflict, while still refraining from declaring others sinful or malicious in intent.

The Emergence of the Khārijites

One of the most dangerous outcomes of these conflicts was the rise of the Khārijites (*al-Khawārij*). They rejected both ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiyah رضي الله عنهما, declared major Companions to be disbelievers, and justified violence against Muslims.

The Prophet ﷺ warned about them, saying:

يَمْرُقُونَ مِنَ الدِّينِ كَمَا يَمْرُقُ السَّهْمُ مِنَ الرَّمِيَّةِ

“They will pass through the religion as an arrow passes through its target.” (Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

‘Alī رضي الله عنه attempted dialogue first, sending Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه to debate them using the Qur’ān and Sunnah. Many repented, while those who persisted in violence were later fought to protect the Muslim community.

Ahl al-Sunnah Position on the Companions and the Fitnah

The orthodox Sunni position can be summarized as follows:

‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib رضي الله عنه was the rightful caliph and closer to the truth in these conflicts.

The Companions who differed with him did so based on sincere ijtihād (independent legal reasoning).

All Companions are treated with respect, silence regarding their disputes is encouraged, and their virtues are emphasized over their disagreements.

Imām al-Ṭahāwī رحمه الله states:

“We love all the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and do not exaggerate in love for any of them, nor disassociate from any of them.”

Conclusion

The fitnah during the khilāfah of ‘Alī رضي الله عنه teaches essential lessons about leadership, unity, patience, and the dangers of extremism. It also demonstrates the importance of scholarly restraint when studying sensitive periods of Islamic history.

Students should approach this era with humility, respect, and awareness that these were the best of generations facing unprecedented trials. Their legacy remains one of faith, sacrifice, and devotion to Allah, despite the immense challenges they endured.