

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - Ali's Occupation of Basra

Consequences of Ali's victory in the battle of the Camel

Ali won the Battle of the Camel. As a result of this victory, Ali's caliphate came to be acknowledged by the entire Muslim world except Syria. From the victory of Basra the victory of Damascus could have been one step but that was not to be. Basra could not become a stepping stone to further conquests. In the long run, Ali's victory over Basra proved to be more elusive than real. The carnage in Basra had been heavy. Almost every family to whichever side they belonged lost one or more dear ones. Though the people took the oath of allegiance to Ali but they did not feel happy. General discontentment continued to smolder in the hearts of the people. In normal circumstances, Ali's victory of Basra should have strengthened his position, and overawed those who were still opposed to him. Things however did not turn that way. If peace could have been made at Basra, and Talha and Zubair had acknowledged the caliphate of Ali, the position of Ali would have been strengthened. The death of Talha and Zubair, as subsequent events showed worked to the advantage of Muawiyah. If they had been alive, Muawiyah was bound to contend against three rivals, Ali, Talha and Zubair. After the Battle of Basra he had to contend against Ali alone, and this was something in his favor. Heretofore Muawiyah had contented himself with cold war. He had abstained from taking to arms for he was afraid that such rebellion against established authority was likely to be looked by the Muslims with disfavor. The Battle of Basra sanctioned the use of the sword as an arbiter in the matter of succession to the caliphate. It provided an argument to Muawiyah that if the people of Basra could fight against Ali, so could the people of Syria.

The victory of Basra instead of proving a source of strength for Ali, proved in the long run to be a source of weakness. Most of the people had joined Ali in the hope that as in other wars they would amass wealth by plundering the defeated people. When Ali forbade such plunder, that led to discontentment, and those who had participated in the battle came to feel that nothing was to be gained by fighting for Ali. That created difficulties for Ali in recruiting men to fight against Muawiyah.

The Battle of Basra was indeed precipitated by the regicides much against the wishes of Ali. The victory of Basra made the regicides more powerful. That led to very embarrassing results for Ali. In Basra, Ayesha had executed all the regicides of Basra. That provided an argument to Muawiyah and other enemies of Ali, that he was involved in the murder of Othman for he had taken no action against the regicides and was instead protecting them.

As the peace parleys at Basra before the outbreak of the battle showed, Ali did want to take action against the regicides of Kufa as Ayesha had taken action against the regicides of Basra. Subsequent developments however made things difficult for Ali. These people, rebellious by nature, became a source of great headache for Ali. When Ali appointed his cousin Abdullah b Abbas as the Governor of Basra, these men viewed the appointment critically and said, "If every Caliph is to appoint his relatives as the Governors, why did we kill the old man Othman?" As with the passage of time the crisis deepened, those people progressively gained in power and importance, and Ali in spite of all his valor, integrity, and other notable qualities became a virtual prisoner in the hands of those "rebels". The Battle of Basra has cast a fatal shadow across the history of Islam. It was the first civil war between the Muslims, and it set the unfortunate precedent for the Muslims to fight among themselves to seek some secular end. The Battle of the Camel served as a prelude to the massacre of Karbala a generation later. The argument of Yazid was that if Ali could take to the sword to assert his right to the caliphate, so could he when most of the people had in fact taken the oath of allegiance to him. If the people of Basra were rebels, and Ali was justified in military action against them, thus he was justified in taking action against Imam Husain who had rebelled against his authority.

Source : *Alim.org-Ali bin Abu Talib History*