

Was Yazid ‘forgiven’?

Strangely enough, there are some Muslims who portray Yazid in a favourable light, much to the dismay of the Ahl Sunna Muslims. Ather Hussain al-Azhari asks whether there is evidence to suggest Yazid was ‘forgiven’.

The month of Muharram is largely associated with the martyrdom of Imam Hussain (may Allah be pleased with him), which took place at Karbala in 61 A.H/680 C.E. The grandson of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) refused to swear allegiance to the despot Yazid, and thus he was brutally martyred by Yazid and his army. In Sunni literature, Imam Hussain has since been treated with utmost respect, and as the personification of true martyrdom and bravery.

In all classic accounts of the episode, Imam Hussain (may Allah be pleased with him) has been viewed as the victor and the oppressed, and Yazid as the oppressor and tyrannical. However, to the astonishment and surprise of countless Sunnis, there are some Muslims (mainly Salafis and the likes) who argue that Yazid should not be categorised as a bad Muslim. In fact, they go as far as suggesting that he is ‘forgiven’. To defend their position they offer in evidence a Hadith narrated in *Sahih Bukhari*:

‘Imam Bukhari narrates from Ishaq ibn Yazid al-Dimashqi, who narrates from Yahya ibn Hamza, who narrates from Saur ibn Yazid, from Khalid ibn Ma’dan that Umair ibn al-Aswad al-Anasi told him that he went to Ubada ibn al-Samit while he was staying in his house at the sea-shore of Himss with (his wife) Um-Haram. Umair said: Um-Haram informed us that she heard the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) saying:

‘Paradise is granted to the first batch of my followers who will undertake a naval expedition. Um-Haram added, I said ‘O Allah’s messenger! Will I be amongst them?’ He replied; ‘You are amongst them.’ The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) then said: ‘The first army amongst the followers who will invade Caesar’s City will have their sins forgiven.’ I asked ‘Will I be one of them, O Allah’s Messenger?’ He replied in the negative.’¹

Claims exist which purport that Yazid was the first to invade Caesar’s City (i.e. Constantinople), and therefore he is deemed as ‘forgiven’.

Historical evidence does not testify that the Hadith is a vindication for Yazid. In fact – as I will show – there is strong proof to suggest that he was certainly not the first to conquer Constantinople. Moreover, it is difficult to find evidence other than this narration to suggest that Yazid was forgiven, or at least a model Muslim.

Firstly, the Hadith does not explicitly mention Yazid as being ‘forgiven’. It simply promises forgiveness for the first batch of Muslims to enter Caesar’s city. Contrasting reports are to be found regarding when the first successful expedition to Constantinople took place. According to Ibn Khaldun, one of the most famous and credible Muslim historians, the first group of Muslims to attack went in the year 42 A.H. He writes:

‘The Muslims first entered the Roman territories in 42 A.H. and they fought with them and killed a number of them.’²

According to Ibn Kathir, in his book *al-Bidaya wal-Nihaya*, Mu’awiya was the first to attack Constantinople, in the year 32 A.H. Sheikh Muhammad Khudri writes: ‘In the year 48 A.H. Mu’awiya prepared a large army to conquer Constantinople.’

These three authentic sources differ with regards as to when the first attack took place (42, 32, or 48 A.H.) But two of the sources believe that it was Mu’awiya who prepared the first mission there.

As for Yazid, his army, by unanimous agreement of the scholars, first went to Constantinople in 52 A.H. According to Ibn Kathir, by this time, Mu’awiya had already been there *sixteen* times. He writes:

‘Mu’awiya prepared armies to Constantinople sixteen times. He used to send an army there twice a year, once in the summer and once in the winter.’³

How do we know with certainty that Yazid’s first visit was in 52 A.H.? The historians all agree that Yazid was head of the army in the year Abu Ayyub al-Ansari passed away. The historians agree that he passed away in 52 A.H. Ibn Hajar writes:

‘Yazid’s mission to Constantinople took place in the year 52 A.H. In this mission, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari passed away. Before he died, he asked to be buried next to the main door of Constantinople.’

Ibn Kathir writes: ‘... Yazid went in 52 A.H., the same year Abu Ayyub passed away.’

Thus, reliable historical sources from credible scholars and historians clearly suggest that the Hadith of al-Bukhari could not be a reference to Yazid. It was Mu’awiya, and thus he was most likely to be ‘forgiven’, in the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

The words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were ‘the *first* army to...who will invade Caesar’s City...’. Yazid was one of the last to go there.

Is there any other evidence to suggest that Yazid is not deserved of his notoriety? Little, or none. On the contrary, there is ample evidence to suggest that he was a wrong-doer (Fasiq). A few examples will suffice in highlighting that Yazid was not a model Muslim.

1. In *Sharh al-Aqa’id al-Nasfiyyah*, Allama Sa’d al-Din al-Taftazani writes:

‘Yazid drank wine, established cabarets and places of entertainment and singing...and caused havoc in his religion.’

2. Imam Bukhari, in his book *Tarikh Kabir* listed the biographical details of 213 people named Yazid. But he intentionally did not make any mention of Yazid ibn Mu’awiya.

3. Imam Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti mentions in his book 'The History of the Rightly Guided Caliphs' (*Taarikh ul Khulufaa al-Raashideen*):

'Nawfal ibn Abi al-Farrat said: 'Once I was with Umar ibn Abdul Aziz when a man said in his presence 'Yazid, the leader of the Believers' [*Ameer ul Mu'mineen*]. Umar ibn Abdul Aziz said [in shock] 'Did you call Yazid the Leader of the Believers? Umar then ordered for the man to be lashed twenty times.'

4. Moreover, discussions about Yazid in classic literature centre largely on whether it is permissible to curse him (*al-La'na*). (See for example, Imam Ghazali's *Ihya Ulum al-Din*⁴) This *per se* suggests that considering Yazid as a decent Muslim is beyond question, according to the scholars. If Yazid was not a bad Muslim, then why are the scholars debating whether we can curse him?

Conclusion.

Our biggest concern is that anyone who shows *any* amount of sympathy towards Yazid is forgetting the magnitude of the crime committed against the 'Sovereign of Martyrs' Imam Hussain (may Allah be pleased with him). After all, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: 'I am from Hussain, and Hussain is from me'. In another Hadith, he said: "Whoever loves [Hasan and Hussain] they love me, and whoever shows hatred towards them, is showing hatred towards me.' By even indirectly showing support or sympathy for Yazid, one can risk being counted as those unfortunate beings who have upset and angered the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Ather Hussain al-Azhari.

¹ Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Jihad; Chapter 93 'What is said about the fighting of the Byzantines'.

² *Tarikh ibn Khaldun*

³ al-Bidaayah wal-Nihaayah.

⁴ Chapter '*Kitaab Aafat ul-Lisaan*', 'the usage of the tongue'. pp. 165-170, vol. III, *Ihya Ulum Uddin*, al-Fajr publications, Cairo.