

What Happened at Ghadeer Khumm

BY THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MOST BENEFICENT, THE MOST MERCIFUL

The Background:

On the 18th of Dhul-Hajjah, after completing his “farewell pilgrimage” (*Hajjatul-Wida'a*), the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his progeny) had departed Makkah en route to Madinah. He and the entire Muslim caravan, numbering over 100,000, were stopped at Ghadeer Khumm, a deserted-yet-strategically situated area that lies between Makkah and Madinah (near today’s Juhfah). In those days, Ghadeer Khumm served as a point of departure, where the various Muslims who had come to perform the pilgrimage from neighbouring lands would disperse and embark upon their own routes back home. It was in this place that the Angel Jibra’eel descended upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) and revealed the following urgent command of Allah:

“O Apostle! Deliver what has been sent down to you from your Lord; and if you do not do it, you have not delivered His message (at all); and Allah will protect you from the people ...” (5:67).

Some of the famous commentators of the Qur’an who have verified the revelation of this verse at Ghadeer Khumm include Fakhrudeen ar-Razi, Hafiz Abu Nu’aym, as-Suyuti, and Muhyadeen an-Nawawi (all under commentary of the verse 5:67).

Preparations:

Immediately upon revelation of this verse, The Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) stopped at once and ordered that all the people who had gone ahead should be called back, and waited for those who had fallen behind to catch up. It was around noon time in the summer, and due to the extreme heat in that valley, the Muslims had taken shade under their cloaks from the burning sun, and were sitting on their robes to protect themselves from the burning desert sands. When the entire caravan had converged, the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) ordered his companions to use the saddles from the Muslims’ camels and set up a makeshift pulpit.

The Speech

Upon ascending the pulpit, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his progeny) delivered a lengthy sermon in which he recited nearly one hundred verses from the Qur’an, and warned people of their deeds and future.

Then he delivered a long speech, in which he said:

“It seems the time approached when I shall be called away (by Allah) and I shall answer that call. I am leaving for you two precious things and if you adhere both of them, you will never go astray after me. They are the Book of Allah and my progeny, that is my Ahlul-Bayt. The two shall never separate from each other until they come to me by the Pool (of Paradise).”

The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his progeny) then continued: “Do I not have more right over the believers than what they have over themselves?” The people cried out: “Yes, O’ Messenger of God.” Then Prophet then held up the hand of ‘Ali and said:

“For whoever I am his leader (Mawla), ‘Ali is his leader (Mawla). “O Allah! Love those who love ‘Ali, and be the enemy of the enemy of ‘Ali; help him who helps ‘Ali, and forsake him who forsakes ‘Ali.”

This incident has been recorded by so many *Muhaditheen* (recorders of ahadeeth) that it is considered *mutawatir* (undeniably authentic). The list of sources includes Sahih Tirmidhi, Sunan ibn Majah, Khasa’is an-Nisa’i, Mustadrak al-Hakim, Musnad ibn Hanbal, Fadha’il as-Sahaba of ibn Hanbal, Tasfeer al-Kabir by Fakhrud Deen ar-Razi, al-Bidayah wa Nihaya by Ibn Kathir, and many others. All of these scholars are among the most renowned and well-respected scholars in Islamic history.

Revelation of Verse 5:3

Immediately after the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) finished his speech, the following verse of Holy Qur’an was revealed:

“This day have those who disbelieve despaired of your religion, so fear them not, and fear Me. This day have I perfected for you your religion and completed My bounty upon you and chosen for you Islam as a religion.” (5:3)

Some of the Ahle-Sunnah scholars who mention the revelation of this verse at Ghadir Khum include as-Suyuti, ibn Asakir, ibn Katheer, Abu Nu’aym, and many others.

Laudation from the Muslims

After his speech, the Messenger of Allah asked every body to give the oath of allegiance to ‘Ali (as) and

congratulate him. Among the first Muslims to congratulate ‘Ali were ‘Umar and Abu Bakr, who said:

“Well done, O son of Abu Talib! Today you have become the leader (Mawla) of all believing men and women.”

[Found in Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, Tafsir al-Kabir by Fakhrudeen al-Razi, Kitabul Wilayah by at-Tabari, and many others]

The Meaning of Mawla

The schools of thought differ on the interpretation of the word “Mawla.” In Arabic, the word “Mawla” has many meanings. It can mean master, friend, slave, or even client. If a word has more than one meaning, the best way to ascertain its true connotation is to look at the association (*qarinah*) and the context. There are scores of “associations” in this hadith which clearly show that the only meaning fitting the occasion can be “master”. Some of them are as follows.

First: The question which the Holy Prophet asked just before this declaration: “Do I not have more authority (*awla*) upon you than you have yourselves?” When they said: “Yes, surely,” then the Prophet proceeded to declare that: “Whoever whose *mawla* I am. ‘Ali is his *mawla*.” Without doubt, the word “*mawla*” in this declaration has the same meaning as “*awla*” (having more authority upon you). At least 64 Sunni traditionalists have quoted that preceding question; among them are Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Ibn Majah, an-Nasa’i and at-Tirmidhi.

Second: The following prayer which the Holy Prophet uttered just after this declaration:

“O Allah! Love him who loves ‘Ali, and be the enemy of the enemy of ‘Ali; help him who helps ‘Ali, and forsake him who forsakes ‘Ali.”

This prayer shows that ‘Ali, on that day, was entrusted with a responsibility which, by its very nature, would make some people his enemy; and in carrying out that responsibility he would need helpers and supporters. Are helpers ever needed to carry on a friendship?

Third: The declaration of the Holy Prophet that: “It seems imminent that I will be called away (by Allah) and I will answer that call.” This clearly shows that he was making arrangements for the leadership of the Muslims after his death.

“The Prophet Muhammad said: I am the City of Knowledge, and ‘Ali is the gate. So let those who seek knowledge enter through its gate.” -- Sahih Tirmidhi,

Fourth: The congratulations of the Companions and their expressions of joy do not leave room for doubt concerning the meaning of this declaration.

Fifth: According to the verse revealed before the announcement (5:67), Allah had commanded something of great importance and concern to the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny), which if not delivered would have jeopardized the entire message of Islam. This matter was of such significance that the Prophet feared opposition and interference, and had been awaiting suitable circumstances to proclaim it, until finally there came a definite and urgent order from Allah to execute this command without delay and not to fear anyone.

Sixth: The verse revealed immediately after the proclamation (5:3) shows that the non-believers had hopes that a day would come when Islam would die out. But Allah, through the actualization of this particular event, made them lose forever the hope that Islam would be destroyed. The same verse shows that this very event was the cause of the perfection of Islam and the completion of Allah's bounty upon humankind. Of necessity, therefore, Ghadeer Khumm could not have been a minor occasion, such as the promulgation of a simple injunction of religion, or the announcement that 'Ali was just a "friend" of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny).

An Appeal to Common Sense:

Allah, the All-Knowing, describes the sublime character of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) as follows:

Certainly a Messenger has come to you from among yourselves; grievous to him is your falling into distress, excessively solicitous respecting you; to the believers (he is) compassionate... [9:128]

The Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) was an extremely kind-hearted and compassionate. He always took every effort to ensure the well-being and comfort of his followers, and was never known to impose any extra burden or hardship upon others. He was even known to shorten his prayers upon hearing the voice of a baby crying. It is impossible to infer that the Prophet, who was sent as "a mercy unto the worlds" had ordered his followers to sit in the burning heat of the Arabian desert, without any shade, for several hours, only to announce to them that 'Ali ibn Abi Talib was his "friend."

Such a claim is yet more absurd when one considers the fact that 'Ali already had an exalted status in comparison with the other Muslims.

- He was the first male to embrace Islam [Sahih Tirmidhi, v5; Musnad Ibn Hanbal v4; Mustadrak al- Hakim, v3]
- He had been given the title "Brother" of the Prophet [Sahih Tirmidhi v5; Sirah Ibn Hisham]
- He held the same position to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) as Haroon had held to Musa. [Sahih Bukhari, 5.56, 5.700]

In light of all this, it does not seem logical for the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) to keep more than a hundred thousand people in such unbearable heat, just to tell them that 'Ali was his "friend."

Conclusion:

Although the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him and his progeny) had made several statements throughout his Prophethood that indicated the superiority of 'Ali to the other Muslims (see the ahadeeth of "Da'wa Dhu'l Ashirah," Manzila, Safinah, Wilayat, and many others) Ghadeer Khumm represented the formal appointment and proclamation of 'Ali as "leader of the Muslims." The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him and his progeny) went through great lengths to ensure that all the Muslims knew he had appointed 'Ali as his successor, and 'Ali was even congratulated afterwards by some prominent Companions for his newly announced rank. Once the declaration was made, Islam had become perfect and complete. With all this evidence from undisputed Sunni texts, it is impossible to conclude that the Prophet (peace be upon him and his progeny) did not appoint a successor.

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At a Glance



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