

The Islâmic Conquest of Syria

A translation of Futûhushâm: the inspiring history
of the Sahâbah's ﷺ conquest of Syria as narrated
by the great historian of Islâm,

al-Imâm al-Wâqidî

Translated by
Mawlânâ Sulaymân al-Kindî



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Contents

Translator's Foreword	v
Map : Middle East	xiii
Map : Roman Syria	xiv
Part 1: Damascus	1
Part 2: Hims	151
Part 3: Al - Yarmûk	251
Part 4: Baytul Muqaddas	373
Part 5: Antioch	457
Appendices	577



Translator's Foreword

Futūḥushām is an Arabic book by al-Imām al-Wāqidī describing the Sahābah's ﷺ conquest of ash-Shām (which today includes Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan and parts of Arabia, Irāq and Turkey). Having been requested to translate this book into English, I accepted primarily to earn Allāh's pleasure from whatever good might arise from it and also to attain two secondary goals.

Firstly, Rasūlullāh ﷺ said with regard to loving the Sahābah ﷺ, "Whoever loves them, loves them because he loves me." So if this book can be used to inculcate the love of the Sahābah ﷺ in the reader's heart, love for Rasūlullāh ﷺ is also increased. This subject needs no elaboration since 'Ulamā have extensively dealt with it.

However, the second goal of making Muslims realise the importance of History needs more elaboration. Muslims are generally ignorant of their history, thus developing an inferiority complex towards the West. This is, in fact, a deliberate strategy by the West. In the past, great 'Ulamā of all mathāhib have rendered service to the science of History. Ibn Khaldūn al-Mālikī is globally recognised to be the father of the principles of studying history. Ibn Jawzī al-Hambalī noted, "A faqīh has to have knowledge of other sciences like history..." The Mufasssīr, Ibn Kathīr ash-Shāfi'ī put great effort in compiling his celebrated history book, 'Al-Bidāyah wan-Nihāyah'. Similarly al-Imām al-Bukhārī also saw the need for studying and compiling works on history. Today we feel qualified to dissect the works of these Ulamā and pick and choose what we want. Thus we will quote the Tafsīr of Ibn Kathīr and the Ḥadīth of al-Bukhārī but never spare a glance at the Histories. What authority do we have to decide that such-and-such a subject must be

preserved while other sciences of our ancestors should be thrown away? Mawlânâ Abu al-Ḥasan ‘Ali an-Nadwî was one of the greatest Ḥanafî ‘Ulamâ of our time and both ‘Arabs and Indians acknowledge his status, but would he have attained this status if he had not mastered History? Amongst his most popular compilations are Târikhul-Islâm (on the life of the Prophet ﷺ). An important benefit of studying History is that it is necessary for the preservation of Ḥadīth. Thus the Muḥaddith Ibn Ḥajr al-‘Asqalânî says in Nukhbatul-Fikr, “Breaks in chains of narrators are discovered by knowing that the narrators did not meet. There is therefore a need to know History.”

Mawlânâ an-Nadwî narrates an example of the use of History to the ‘ālim - the Jews produced a scroll of crumbling paper with writing in the old script. It claimed that Rasūlullāh ﷺ had exempted the Khaybar Jews from payment of Jizyah and was signed by Sa’d bin Mu‘āth ؓ. ‘Ulama unversed in History gave fatwâ that they should be exempted. Ibn Taymiyah however declared it a fake based on his knowledge of History - Sa’d died before the Battle of Khaybar so he could not have signed the treaty!

Allāh ﷻ Himself makes use of History to remind us of His favours. For example, Allah lists in the Qurân various favours He bestowed upon Banu Israel during their history.

يَبْنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ أَذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتِيَ

If one considers the number of historical events mentioned in the Qurân, one will realise that for a clear understanding of Tafsîr some knowledge of History is essential. The same also applies to understanding Ḥadīth.

It can also be inferred from the Qurân that an important function of History is for us to take lessons and rectify ourselves. Thus Allāh often refers to past events by way of warning, for example:

أَلَمْ يَأْتِهِمْ نَبَأُ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ...

*Has the news of those before you not reached you – the nation
of Nûh, ‘Âd and Thamûd? [9:69]*

The Prophets also adopted this approach and reminded their people of the past. Thus Shu‘ayb عليه السلام said to his people,

وَيَقَوْمٍ لَا تَجْرَمَنَّكُمْ شِقَاقِي أَن يُصِيبَكُمْ مِثْلُ مَا أَصَابَ قَوْمَ
نُوحٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ هُودٍ أَوْ قَوْمَ صَالِحٍ وَمَا قَوْمُ لُوطٍ مِّنْكُمْ بِبَعِيدٍ

*O my people! Let not my opposition cause you to suffer a fate
similar to that of the people of Hûd, Nûh or Sâlih and the
people of Lût are not far off from you. [11:89]*

The believer at Fir‘awn’s court also warned his people of past punishments,

وَقَالَ الَّذِي ءَامَنَ يَقَوْمِ إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ مِثْلَ يَوْمِ الْأَحْزَابِ
مِثْلَ دَابِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَعَادٍ وَثَمُودَ وَالَّذِينَ مِن بَعْدِهِمْ ...

*And the Believer said, “O my people! Verily I fear for you a
fate like that which befell the groups. Like the fate of the
people of Nûh, ‘Ad, Thamûd and those who came after
them...” [40:30]*

These verses amply demonstrate the admonitory nature History is supposed to have on us, but unfortunately we rarely take heed of History.

One of the saddest events in the History of Islam is the loss of al-Andalus [now Spain and Portugal]. This was an Islâmic land with a majority Muslim population. The Muslims were defeated and Islâm banished until not a single Muslim remained in the land. Five hundred masâjid were converted into churches. All the causes for al-Andalus’s collapse can be found amongst us

today - laziness for Jihād; lack of inviting to Allāh; the Muslim governments not implementing Sharī‘ah; drinking of wine; Muslims helping Christian armies against other Muslims etc. It is sad that we do not pay heed whereas our enemies study these events. VT Rajashekar, the editor of Dalit Voice noted, “Islam’s ejection from Spain was a subject for keen study by the Hindu extremists in the 30’s and the Muslims in India are totally ignorant of the History of Islamic decline in Spain and the events surrounding it.” Will we wake up before disaster hits us too?

It is commonly acknowledged that by pondering over the Creation, recognition of the Creator is gained. Allāh ﷻ says:

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَآخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لَآيَاتٍ
لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ

*Verily in the creation of the Heavens and Earth and in the
alternating of night and day are signs for the ones of
intelligence... [3:190]*

However, few realise that Allāh ﷻ is free from time and space restrictions which are also creations. So time and its passage (i.e. History), if pondered over, is also a means of gaining His recognition if we ponder over Allāh’s planning. Allāh ﷻ says,

يُدِيرُ الْأَمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يَعْرُجُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ
مِقْدَارُهُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ مِّمَّا تَعُدُّونَ

*He regulates every affair from the Heavens to the Earth then it
goes up to Him in one day the length whereof is 1000 years of
your reckoning. [32:5]*

One tafsîr of this verse is that one thousand years before an event comes to pass Allâh ﷻ creates such things which eventually leads to its materialisation one thousand years later. Thus an examination of such events will make one realise that there is a Power higher than Man which controls events - that there is one All-Powerful Creator, Allâh.

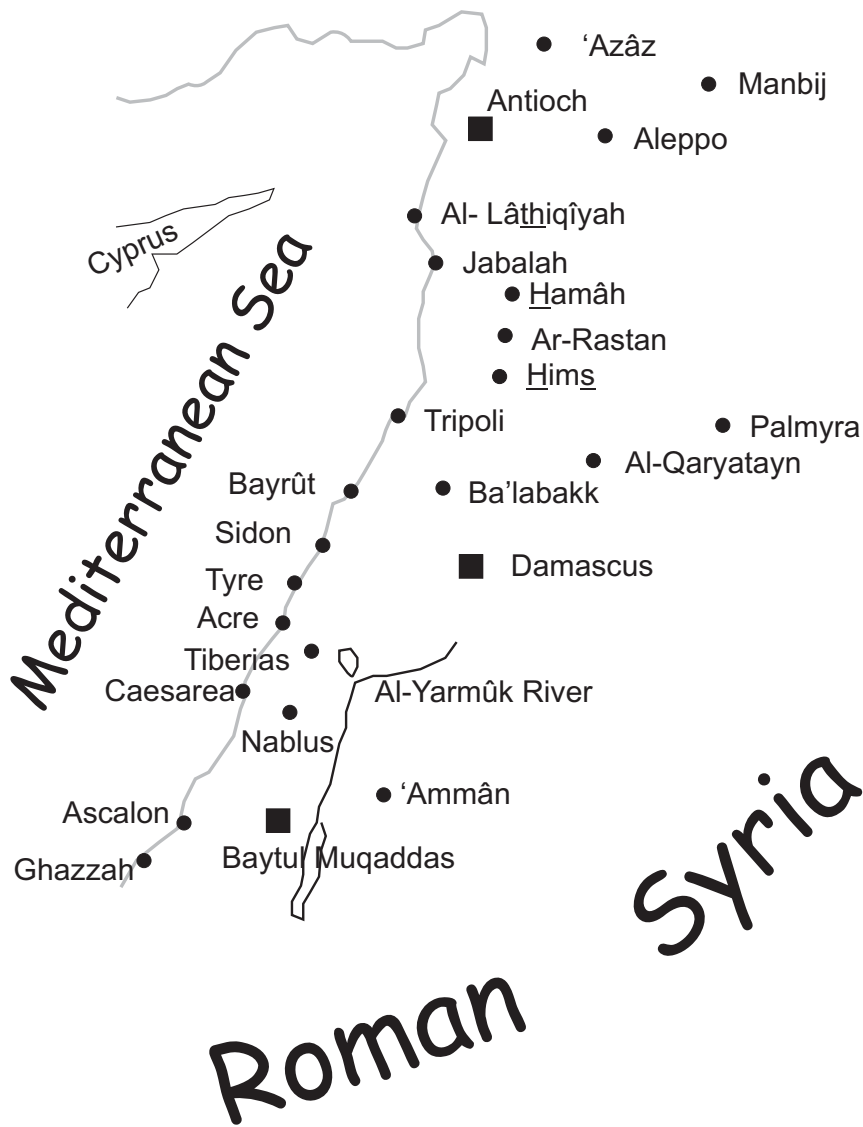
Let us take half of one thousand years and examine how Allâh used the tribe of Khuzâ'ah for five centuries (525 years) to implement Rasûlullâh's ﷺ conquest of Makkah

In 120 A.D., the impending bursting of the great Marib Dam led to the dispersal of the Saba Nation of which three tribes (Aws, Khazraj and Banu 'Uthmân) headed for Yathrib (now Madînah). On the way, Banû 'Uthmân broke off from the other tribes and settled down in Marr azh-zhahrân and were hence named Khuzâ'ah (the seceders). Marr azh-zhahrân was close to Makkah so Khuzâ'ah were in a position to conquer the Holy City and rule there for two hundred years. Quṣayy, the chief of Quraysh, married Hubbâ bint Hūlayl, daughter of the chief of Khuza'ah, and conquered Makkah in 440 A.D. Their son, 'Abd Manâf, was the next chief and then, after him, Hâshim bin 'Abd Manâf. A man named Nawfal usurped Hâshim's son, 'Abdul Muṭṭalib, of his position and so Khuzâ'ah again entered Makkah's history and entered into alliance with Banû Hâshim in support of 'Abdul Muṭṭalib whom they regarded as the grandson of their son, 'Abd Manâf.

According to the Treaty of Hudaibîyah which Rasûlullâh ﷺ signed with the Quraysh, each tribe could join the Muslims in alliance or they could join the Quraysh. Lineage played a great role in 'Arab politics and since Khuzâ'ah had close relations with Rasûlullâh ﷺ, the grandson of 'Abdul Muṭṭalib, and were already allies of the tribe, Banû Hâshim, Khuzâ'ah joined the Muslims while their enemies, Banû Bakr, joined the Quraysh. In 8 Hijrî, Banû Bakr and Quraysh jointly attacked Khuzâ'ah thus breaking the treaty and so in a process that led back 525 years, Khuzâ'ah joined Rasûlullâh ﷺ to conquer Makkah in Ramaḍân 8 Hijrî. "And Allâh is the best of planners!"

Sulaymân al-Kindî (Translator)

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Part 1

Damascus

1) Prelude

Abû Bakr bin Aḥmad narrates from 'Umar bin 'Uthmân bin 'Abdurahmân, Nawfal bin Muḥammad, Muḥammad bin 'Abdillâh bin Muḥammad, Rabî'ah bin 'Uthmân, Yûnus bin Muḥammad, Mâin bin Yahyâ bin 'Abdillâh, Muḥammad bin 'Umar ar-Râfiqî, Mu'âth bin Muḥammad al-Anṣâri, Abdurahmân bin Abdil-Azîz, Abdullâh bin Majîd *et al*:

Rasûlullâh ﷺ passed away and Abû Bakr ؓ became the Khalîfah. Abû Bakr ؓ eliminated the false prophets, Musaylamah and Shujâ' Wâlûd, while Tulayhah fled to Syria. He conquered Yamâhah and destroyed Banû Hanîfah and the 'Arabs submitted to him. The Khalîfah then resolved to invade Syria and fight the Romans. Hence, he gathered the Ṣaḥabah ؓ and said, "O people, may Allâh have mercy upon you. Remember that Allâh has blessed you with Islâm, made you the Ummah of Muḥammad ﷺ, increased your Faith and Conviction and granted you complete victory. He has said:

...الْيَوْمَ أَكْمَلْتُ لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَأَتِمَمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ

لَكُمْ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا ...

Today I have perfected for you your religion and completed my favour unto you and have chosen Islâm for you as a religion...

[5:3]

Know that Rasûlullâh ﷺ intended to wage Jihâd in Syria and desired that effort should be made in that direction but then Allâh recalled him to Himself. So be clear

on this point, that I intend sending a Muslim army together with their families and dependants to Syria. Rasûlullâh ﷺ told me before his demise,

‘I was shown the Earth and saw its East and West and that my Ummah would soon conquer whatever I was shown.’

So you should all come to an agreement and express your opinion to me. May Allâh have mercy upon you.”

The Sahabah رضي الله عنهم unanimously replied, “O Khalifah of Rasûlullâh ﷺ, we are under your command. We are prepared for whatever you order because Allâh has made it incumbent upon us to obey you by saying:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا أَطِيعُوا اللَّهَ وَأَطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأُولِيَ الْأَمْرِ
مِنْكُمْ ...

*Obey Allâh and obey the Messenger and those in authority
over you... [4:59]*

2) Abû Bakr رضي الله عنه summons the Yamanîs for Jihâd

Abû Bakr رضي الله عنه was very pleased with this reply and therefore wrote to the kings of Yaman, the ‘Arab chiefs and the people of Makkah:

In the name of Allâh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

From : ‘Abdullâh al - ‘Atîq bin Abî Quhâfah.

To : All Muslims.

As-salâmu ‘Alaykum.

*All Praise to Allâh alone and salutations to His Messenger.
Know that I intend sending an army to Syria to expel the
Disbelievers and those who do not tread the straight path from*

there. Whoever amongst you intends to wage Jihâd should hasten to obey Allâh and make preparations for Allâh says:

أَنْفِرُوا خِفَافًا وَثِقَالًا وَجَاهِدُوا بِأَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنْفُسِكُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ
اللَّهِ ...

Go forth lightly armed or heavily armed and wage Jihâd with your wealth and lives in the path of Allâh... [9:41]

Abû Bakr ؓ gave these letters to Anas bin Mâlik ؓ, the attendant of Rasûlullâh ؐ, and awaited their reply.

Jâbir bin 'Abdillâh ؓ narrates:

Anas ؓ returned after a short while with the glad tidings that the people of Yaman were coming. He told Abû Bakr ؓ, "Whoever I read your order out to immediately obeyed Allâh and accepted your order. These people will present themselves with their equipment and war materials and armour. O Khalîfah of Rasûlullâh ؐ, I have presented myself ahead of their coming to give you glad tidings. In obeying you they accept having their hair dishevelled and their bodies covered in dust. They are extremely brave and excellent horsemen – the chiefs of Yaman. They will soon be arriving with their families and dependants. You should prepare to meet them."

Abû Bakr ؓ was extremely pleased to hear this.

The next day, signs of the coming of the Mujâhidîn were seen and so the people of al-Madînah informed him. Abû Bakr ؓ ordered them to mount their conveyances and went with them out of al-Madînah to welcome the arrivals.

Soon legion after legion of Mujâhidîn arrived, each tribe with their emblems and with their flags in their hands happily marching behind each other. The first Yamanî tribe to come was Himyar, wearing good armour and carrying expensive swords or Arab bows. Their chief, Thul Kalâ' al-Himayrî ؓ, was wearing a turban. He approached Abû Bakr ؓ, greeted him, identified his abode and tribe and then recited the following poem:

أنتك حمير بالأهلين والولد
أهل السوابق والعالون بالرتب
أسد غطارفة شوس عمالقة
يردوا الكماة غداً في الحرب بالقضب
الحرب عادتنا والضرب هممتنا
وذو الكلاع دعا في الأهل والنسب

*Himyar is my tribe, and these people you see
Are first in battle and high in genealogy.
Lions of bravery, in courage they are leaders.
With curved blades they strike great armed warriors.
Our habit is battle, firm whether we kill or fall
Thul Kalâ al-Himayrî is commander of all.
Our army has come and on the Roman Empire is our sight
Syria will be made home with our might.
For us is Damascus.
We will fling her people into an abyss!*

Hearing this, Abû Bakr ﷺ smiled and said to ‘Âlî ﷺ, “Abû al-Ḥasan, have you not heard Rasûlullah ﷺ saying, ‘When the Ḥimayr come with their women carrying their children then rejoice at Allâh’s help for the Muslims against all Polytheists.’”

‘Âlî ﷺ replied, “You have spoken the truth. I have indeed heard Rasûlullah ﷺ saying this.”

Anas ؓ narrates:

When the Ḥimayr passed by with all their families, dependants, provisions and equipment, the Mathhij tribe came after them. They were riding extremely fine, expensive horses and carried sharp spears in their hands. Their leader, Qays bin Hubayrah al-Murâdî approached Abû Bakr ﷺ, introduced himself and his tribe and then recited this poem:

أنتك كتائب منا سراعاً
ذوو التيجان أعني من مرادٍ
فقدمنا أمامك كي ترانا
نبيد القوم بالسيف النجادي

*Our Army hastened unto thee,
Kings of Murâd are we,
We have come so that you can see,
How we kill Romans with the swords we carry.*

Abû Bakr ﷺ made du‘â for them and they went ahead. The tribe of Tayy came next. Their chief, Habis bin Saïd at-Tâî, wanted to dismount and walk to the Khalîfah. Abû Bakr ﷺ took an oath and prevented him from doing so. When Habis came near they greeted and shook hands and Abû Bakr ﷺ thanked them. Next came an enormous contingent of the tribe of Azd under the command of Jundub bin ‘Amr ad-Dawsî. Amongst them was Abû Hurayrah ﷺ carrying a bow and quiver. Abû Bakr ﷺ burst out laughing upon seeing him like this and asked, “Why have you come? You do not know the art of warfare!”

Abû Hurayrah ﷺ replied, “Firstly, I wish to participate in the reward of Jihâd, and secondly, if Allâh wills, I will get to eat Syrian fruits!”

Abû Bakr ﷺ laughed a lot at this reply.

After this, Banû ‘Abs arrived under the command of Maysarah bin Masrûq al-‘Absî followed by the Kinânah under Fathm bin Ashyam al-Kinânî. All the tribes of Yaman who came brought their children, wealth, women, horses and camels etc. along with them. Abû Bakr ﷺ was very happy to see this display and thanked Allâh.

The tribes encamped separately around al-Madînah. Since the army had become numerous, food and space became insufficient. Food supplies became low and there was difficulty in finding grain and pasturage for the horses. Their chiefs therefore consulted each other and decided to ask the Khalîfah to despatch them to Syria due to the problem of overcrowding at al-Madînah. They went to him, made salâm and sat down. They then looked at each other wondering who would speak first until eventually Qays bin Hubayrah said, “O Khalîfah of Rasûlullâh ﷺ, you summoned us to a task to which we responded immediately in obedience to Allâh and His Rasûl ﷺ and out of eagerness for Jihâd. Through Allâh’s grace our army is prepared and all war provisions made. However, our troops are undergoing difficulty since your city cannot accommodate all the horses, mules and camels, nor are all the men’s needs fulfilled. We therefore request you to either permit us to fight, or if the decision for war has been cancelled, then permit us to return to our homeland.”