بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

HEROES OF ISLAM

SERIES 15

‘UQBAH IBN NAFI‘

Conqueror of North Africa and Founder of Kairouan, According to the Qur'an, Authentic Hadith and the Books of History

۞إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱشۡتَرَىٰ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ أَنفُسَهُمۡ وَأَمۡوَٰلَهُم بِأَنَّ لَهُمُ ٱلۡجَنَّةَۚ يُقَٰتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَيَقۡتُلُونَ وَيُقۡتَلُونَۖ وَعۡدًا عَلَيۡهِ حَقًّا فِي ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةِ وَٱلۡإِنجِيلِ وَٱلۡقُرۡءَانِۚ وَمَنۡ أَوۡفَىٰ بِعَهۡدِهِۦ مِنَ ٱللَّهِۚ فَٱسۡتَبۡشِرُواْ بِبَيۡعِكُمُ ٱلَّذِي بَايَعۡتُم بِهِۦۚ وَذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ١١١

“Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise. They fight in the cause of Allah, so they kill and are killed. [It is] a true promise [binding] upon Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah? So rejoice in your transaction which you have contracted. And it is that which is the great attainment.”

Surah At-Tawbah 9:111

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise is due to Allah, who has purchased from the believers their lives and their wealth in exchange for Paradise. May blessings and peace be upon our master, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, upon his family and Companions, and upon the Successors who followed them in excellence — among them ‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘ رضى الله عنه, the conqueror of North Africa.

This book is specially dedicated to my beloved wife,

ZAHARAH MOHD LATIF;

my dear children,

MUHAMMAD HAFIZ, NOOR HAZWANI, ABDUL HAKIM, NOOR HIDAYAH, NOR AQILA and **NOR ATIQAH**;

and my sons- and daughters-in-law,

FAZILAH, MALEK, HANIN, FAIRIZAL and **FIRWAN**.

This fifteenth book of Heroes of Islam tells the story of ‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘ رضى الله عنه: the commander who fought alongside ‘Amr ibn al-‘As in Egypt and Barqah, founded the city of Kairouan, carried Islam to the shores of the Atlantic Ocean, and was martyred at Tahudha. His story is told with honesty about its sources. May this knowledge be ‘ilmun yuntafa‘u bih — knowledge that brings benefit.

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ABOUT THE COVER OF THIS EBOOK

This eBook's cover does not depict any human being or animal. It shows ***the Atlantic coast*** of Morocco at sunset, with great waves breaking on the shore and an endless ocean.

In the foreground, ***a spear planted in the sand*** at the water's edge, with ***a shield*** leaning against it. It symbolises the moment 'Uqbah ibn Nafi' reached the far west and prayed that, if there were land beyond the sea, he would cross it to strive in the path of Allah.

In the distance are ***the Atlas mountains*** and ***a square minaret*** in North African style — a reminder of the Great Mosque of Kairouan founded by 'Uqbah.

The ***dark blue band*** at the bottom, framed by ***fine gold lines***, is where the author's name appears — the same as on the covers of Series 1 to Series 14, so that all the covers of Heroes of Islam match.

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Colour guide: green box = verses of the Qur'an; gold box = Hadith; brown box = sirah note (report from the books of sirah); blue table = comparison.com.

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‘UQBAH IBN NAFI‘

The history books relate that when a commander reached the shore of the Atlantic Ocean at the far west of the Maghrib, he rode his horse into the waves and prayed: ***“O Allah, if I knew there was land beyond this sea, I would cross it to strive in Your path.”*** That commander was ***‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘ al-Fihri*** رضى الله عنه, the conqueror of North Africa and founder of the city of ***Kairouan***.

He was born in Makkah a year before the hijrah, grew up under the rule of the caliphs, and fought alongside ‘Amr ibn al-‘As in Egypt and Barqah. In 50 AH he founded Kairouan as a lasting centre of Islam in Ifriqiyah (today’s Tunisia). He was finally martyred in 63 AH at Tahudha, in what is today Algeria.

This eBook is the fifteenth in the ***Heroes of Islam*** series. ‘Uqbah’s story comes mostly from the histories of the conquest of the Maghrib, not from the books of Hadith. For this reason, the source and grade of every story are stated honestly, and its lessons are grounded in the Qur'an and authentic Hadith.

The story of ‘Uqbah is the story of a tireless commander: from the deserts of Libya to the Atlas mountains and the Atlantic shore, he carried Islam to lands that today are home to hundreds of millions of Muslims.

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WHO WAS ‘UQBAH IBN NAFI‘?

His full name was ***‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘ ibn ‘Abd Qays al-Fihri al-Qurashi***, of Banu Fihr, one of the clans of Quraysh. He was born in Makkah about a year before the hijrah. His father, Nafi‘, embraced Islam early. The historical sources describe him as a close relative of ‘Amr ibn al-‘As (see Series 10).

He is called ***Fatih Ifriqiyah*** (the conqueror of Africa) and is known in the history books as a righteous man whose supplications were answered. His tomb in today’s Algeria lies in a town named after him, ***Sidi ‘Uqbah***.

NAME AND TITLES

NAME OR TITLE	EXPLANATION
‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘	His real name
Al-Fihri al-Qurashi	From Banu Fihr, of Quraysh
Fatih Ifriqiyah	Conqueror of North Africa
Founder of Kairouan	The city he founded in 50 AH
Sidi ‘Uqbah	The town in Algeria where his tomb lies

LESSONS

A person’s honour does not lie only in the era of his birth, but in what he does for his religion. ‘Uqbah grew up after the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, yet carried on his mission to the edge of the known world.

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COMPANION OR SUCCESSOR?

The scholars differed over whether 'Uqbah is counted among the Companions.

SOURCE NOTE: BORN IN THE TIME OF THE MESSENGER ﷺ

'Uqbah was born in the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, about a year before the hijrah. For this reason some writers list him among the Companions. But there is no authentic report that he heard or narrated from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. The biographers say: "It is said that he had companionship (suhbah), but the more apparent view is that he did not."

Conclusion: He was born in the time of the Messenger ﷺ but his companionship is not established; he is counted among the early Successors. The phrase رضى الله عنه is used in this eBook as a prayer of divine pleasure for a mujahid of the early generations, as was the custom of the scholars.

REFERENCES:

Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, al-Isti'ab; Ibn 'Asakir, Tarikh Madinat Dimashq; Ibn Hajar, al-Isabah; adh-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam an-Nubala'.

LESSONS

Scholarly honesty requires us to distinguish what is established from what is not, even about figures we admire.

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WITH ‘AMR IBN AL-‘AS IN EGYPT AND BARQAH

HISTORICAL NOTE: THE FIRST STEPS WEST

When ‘Amr ibn al-‘As conquered Egypt (20–21 AH) and then Barqah in Libya (22 AH), ‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘ was in his army. ‘Amr sent ‘Uqbah south as far as ***Zawilah*** in Fezzan, and its people made peace with the Muslims. After that ‘Uqbah lived for a long time in Barqah and its surroundings, guarding the frontier and calling the Berber tribes to Islam.

Status of the report: Narrated in the histories of the conquest of the Maghrib without an authentic chain. The story is well known and accepted as history, but it cannot be used as proof in the way an authentic hadith can.

REFERENCES:

Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, Futuh Misr wa al-Maghrib; al-Baladhuri, Futuh al-Buldan.

LESSONS

Great leaders are usually trained by great leaders. ‘Uqbah learned strategy and patience from ‘Amr ibn al-‘As before leading on his own.

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YEARS ON THE FRONTIER

'Uqbah spent much of his life on the frontiers, far from Makkah and Madinah, guarding the lands of Islam from attack. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ explained the virtue of guarding the frontier (ribat):

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 2892

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ مُنِيرٍ، سَمِعَ أَبَا النَّضْرِ، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ دِينَارٍ، عَنْ أَبِي حَازِمٍ، عَنْ سَهْلِ بْنِ سَعْدٍ السَّاعِدِيِّ ـ رضى الله عنه ـ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ " رِبَاطُ يَوْمٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا عَلَيْهَا، وَمَوْضِعُ سَوْطِ أَحَدِكُمْ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا عَلَيْهَا، وَالرَّوْحَةُ يَرُوحُهَا الْعَبْدُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوِ الْغَدْوَةُ خَيْرٌ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا عَلَيْهَا ".

TRANSLATION:

Sahl ibn Sa'd as-Sa'idi narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: ***"Guarding the frontier for one day in the path of Allah is better than the world and all that is on it.*** The space of one of your whips in Paradise is better than the world and all that is on it. And a journey in the evening or the morning that a servant makes in the path of Allah is better than the world and all that is on it."

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from 'Abdullah ibn Munir, from Abu an-Nadr Hashim ibn al-Qasim, from 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn 'Abdullah ibn Dinar, from Abu Hazim Salamah ibn Dinar, from Sahl ibn Sa'd as-Sa'idi رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Jihad and Expeditions, Chapter: The Virtue of Guarding the Frontier for a Day, Hadith No. 2892.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: sunnah.com/bukhari:2892

LESSONS

Some heroes are famous for a single great battle, and some for years of patience in a distant place. 'Uqbah belongs to the second kind.

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GOVERNOR OF IFRIQIYAH

HISTORICAL NOTE: A RECURRING PROBLEM

In 50 AH the Caliph Mu‘awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan appointed ‘Uqbah as leader of ***Ifriqiyah*** (Tunisia and its surroundings). ‘Uqbah noticed a recurring problem: whenever the Muslim army came, some Berber tribes embraced Islam; but when the army withdrew to Egypt, they returned to their old religion. He told his army that the Muslims needed to build a city where the army would settle, so that Islam would remain in the land.

Status of the report: Narrated in the histories of the conquest of the Maghrib without an authentic chain. The story is well known and accepted as history, but it cannot be used as proof in the way an authentic hadith can.

REFERENCES:

Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, Futuh Misr wa al-Maghrib; Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi at-Tarikh; Ibn ‘Idhari, al-Bayan al-Mughrib.

LESSONS

Da‘wah needs continuity, not merely temporary victory. ‘Uqbah thought far ahead: Islam had to take root in the land, not just pass through.

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FOUNDING THE CITY OF KAIROUAN

HISTORICAL NOTE: A CITY IN THE WILDERNESS

'Uqbah chose a site far from the coast, safe from the attacks of the Roman fleet, and close to the Berber lands for da'wah. The site was full of thickets and wild beasts. The history books relate that 'Uqbah stood and called on the wild beasts and snakes to leave the place because the mujahidin would settle there, and the animals came out carrying their young. The building of ***Kairouan*** began in 50 AH and was completed about five years later.

Status of the report: The building of Kairouan by 'Uqbah in 50 AH is agreed upon by historians. The story of the wild beasts leaving is narrated in the history books without an authentic chain; it may be told as a historical report, not as certain fact.

REFERENCES:

Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, Futuh Misr wa al-Maghrib; Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi at-Tarikh; Yaqut al-Hamawi, Mu'jam al-Buldan.

Kairouan later became a great centre of Islamic learning in the Maghrib for centuries, birthplace of many scholars of the Maliki school.

LESSONS

Building lasting institutions has a greater effect than a momentary victory. A city founded with the intention of da'wah produced scholars for centuries.

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THE GREAT MOSQUE OF KAIROUAN

At the heart of Kairouan, ‘Uqbah built a mosque. The historians mention that he and his companions took care to determine its qiblah precisely. The mosque, rebuilt and enlarged by later rulers, is known today as ***the Mosque of ‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘*** or the Great Mosque of Kairouan, one of the oldest mosques in North Africa. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ promised a reward for the builder of a mosque:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 450

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ سُلَيْمَانَ، حَدَّثَنِي ابْنُ وَهْبٍ، أَخْبَرَنِي عَمْرٌو، أَنَّ بُكَيْرًا، حَدَّثَهُ أَنَّ عَاصِمَ بْنَ عُمَرَ بْنِ قَتَادَةَ حَدَّثَهُ أَنَّهُ، سَمِعَ عُبَيْدَ اللَّهِ الْخَوْلاَنِيَّ، أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ عُثْمَانَ بْنَ عَفَّانَ، يَقُولُ عِنْدَ قَوْلِ النَّاسِ فِيهِ حِينَ بَنَى مَسْجِدَ الرَّسُولِ صلى الله عليه وسلم إِنَّكُمْ أَكْثَرْتُمْ، وَإِنِّي سَمِعْتُ النَّبِيَّ صلى الله عليه وسلم يَقُولُ " مَنْ بَنَى مَسْجِدًا ـ قَالَ بُكَيْرٌ حَسِبْتُ أَنَّهُ قَالَ ـ يَبْتَغِي بِهِ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ، بَنَى اللَّهُ لَهُ مِثْلَهُ فِي الْجَنَّةِ ".

TRANSLATION:

‘Ubaydullah al-Khawlani heard ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan say, when people spoke about him as he (re)built the mosque of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: “You have said a great deal. I heard the Prophet ﷺ say: ***‘Whoever builds a mosque — Bukayr said: I think he said: seeking thereby the Face of Allah — Allah will build for him the like of it in Paradise.’***”

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from Yahya ibn Sulayman, from ‘Abdullah ibn Wahb, from ‘Amr ibn al-Harith, from Bukayr ibn al-Ashajj, from ‘Asim ibn ‘Umar ibn Qatadah, from ‘Ubaydullah al-Khawlani, from ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Prayer, Chapter: Whoever Builds a Mosque, Hadith No. 450.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: sunnah.com/bukhari:450

LESSONS

The mosque is the heart of a Muslim community. ‘Uqbah began his city with a mosque, and that mosque still stands today.

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DA'WAH TO THE BERBERS

The aim of conquest is not to seize land, but to bring people to guidance. Many Berber tribes embraced Islam in the time of 'Uqbah and the leaders after him, until they themselves became carriers of Islam to al-Andalus and West Africa. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ taught this aim to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib at Khaybar:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 2942

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ مَسْلَمَةَ الْقَعْنَبِيُّ، حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الْعَزِيزِ بْنُ أَبِي حَازِمٍ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ سَهْلِ بْنِ سَعْدٍ ـ رضى الله عنه ـ سَمِعَ النَّبِيَّ صلى الله عليه وسلم يَقُولُ يَوْمَ خَيْبَرَ " لأُعْطِيَنَّ الرَّايَةَ رَجُلاً يَفْتَحُ اللَّهُ عَلَى يَدَيْهِ ". فَقَامُوا يَرْجُونَ لِذَلِكَ أَيُّهُمْ يُعْطَى، فَغَدَوْا وَكُلُّهُمْ يَرْجُو أَنْ يُعْطَى فَقَالَ " أَيْنَ عَلِيٌّ ". فَقِيلَ يَشْتَكِي عَيْنَيْهِ، فَأَمَرَ فَدُعِيَ لَهُ، فَبَصَقَ فِي عَيْنَيْهِ، فَبَرَأَ مَكَانَهُ حَتَّى كَأَنَّهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ بِهِ شَىْءٌ فَقَالَ نُقَاتِلُهُمْ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا مِثْلَنَا. فَقَالَ " عَلَى رِسْلِكَ حَتَّى تَنْزِلَ بِسَاحَتِهِمْ، ثُمَّ ادْعُهُمْ إِلَى الإِسْلاَمِ، وَأَخْبِرْهُمْ بِمَا يَجِبُ عَلَيْهِمْ، فَوَاللَّهِ لأَنْ يُهْدَى بِكَ رَجُلٌ وَاحِدٌ خَيْرٌ لَكَ مِنْ حُمْرِ النَّعَمِ ".

TRANSLATION:

Sahl ibn Sa'd heard the Prophet ﷺ say on the day of Khaybar: "I will give the banner to a man through whose hands Allah will grant victory." They stood up, each hoping to be given it. The next morning every one of them hoped it would be him. He asked: "Where is 'Ali?" It was said: "His eyes are sore." He ordered that he be called, then spat lightly into his eyes, and he was cured at once as if he had never been ill. 'Ali said: "We will fight them until they become like us." He said: ***"Go gently until you reach their courtyard. Then invite them to Islam and tell them what is obligatory upon them. By Allah, that Allah should guide a single man through you is better for you than owning red camels."***

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from 'Abdullah ibn Maslamah al-Qa'nabi, from 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Abi Hazim, from Abu Hazim Salamah ibn Dinar, from Sahl ibn Sa'd رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Jihad and Expeditions, Hadith No. 2942.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: sunnah.com/bukhari:2942

LESSONS

The guidance of a single human being is worth more than the most precious wealth. The true success of the conquest of the Maghrib is the millions of people who are Muslim to this day.

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DISMISSED, THEN RESTORED

HISTORICAL NOTE: PATIENCE WITH THE RULER’S DECISION

In 55 AH, ‘Uqbah was dismissed as governor of Ifriqiyah, and ***Abu al-Muhajir Dinar*** was appointed in his place. The historical reports mention that relations between the two were tense, and that Abu al-Muhajir once imprisoned ‘Uqbah. ‘Uqbah returned to the East and did not rebel. In 62 AH the Caliph Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah restored ‘Uqbah to Ifriqiyah, and he began a great campaign westward.

Status of the report: Narrated in the histories of the conquest of the Maghrib without an authentic chain. The story is well known and accepted as history, but it cannot be used as proof in the way an authentic hadith can.

REFERENCES:

Ibn ‘Abd al-Hakam, Futuh Misr wa al-Maghrib; Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi at-Tarikh; Ibn ‘Idhari, al-Bayan al-Mughrib.

Abu al-Muhajir himself was a commander of merit: in his time, the Berber chief named ***Kusaylah*** embraced Islam.

LESSONS

Office is a trust that comes and goes. ‘Uqbah accepted his dismissal without dividing the ummah, and returned to the struggle when given the chance.

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REACHING THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

HISTORICAL NOTE: "IF I KNEW THERE WAS LAND BEYOND IT"

In his second campaign (62–63 AH), 'Uqbah advanced west through al-Zab, Tahert and Tangier, then south to ***Sus*** in Morocco, until he reached the shore of ***the Atlantic Ocean***. It is reported that he rode his horse into the sea until the water reached its chest, and prayed: ***"O Allah, if I knew there was land beyond this sea, I would cross it to strive in Your path."*** Another report says: "O Allah, bear witness that I have reached the end, and were it not for this sea I would go on through the lands striving in Your path."

Status of the report: Narrated in the histories of the conquest of the Maghrib without an authentic chain. The story is well known and accepted as history, but it cannot be used as proof in the way an authentic hadith can.

REFERENCES:

Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi at-Tarikh; Ibn 'Idhari, al-Bayan al-Mughrib; al-Maliki, Riyad an-Nufus.

Allah promises guidance to those who strive in His path:

SURAH AL-'ANKABUT 29:69

وَٱلَّذِينَ جَٰهَدُوا۟ فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا ۚ وَإِنَّ ٱللَّهَ لَمَعَ ٱلْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾

And those who strive for Us - We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allāh is with the doers of good.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/29:69

LESSONS

A believer's aspiration does not stop at a border. 'Uqbah did not stop out of weariness, but only because there was no more land before him.

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“THE PEOPLE OF THE WEST” AND THE TRUTH

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ told of a group that would always remain upon the truth:

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 1925

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ يَحْيَى، أَخْبَرَنَا هُشَيْمٌ، عَنْ دَاوُدَ بْنِ أَبِي هِنْدٍ، عَنْ أَبِي عُثْمَانَ، عَنْ سَعْدِ بْنِ أَبِي وَقَّاصٍ، قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم " لاَ يَزَالُ أَهْلُ الْغَرْبِ ظَاهِرِينَ عَلَى الْحَقِّ حَتَّى تَقُومَ السَّاعَةُ " .

TRANSLATION:

Sa‘d ibn Abi Waqqas said: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: ***“The people of the West (Ahl al-Gharb) will continue to prevail upon the truth until the Hour comes.”***

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Yahya ibn Yahya, from Hushaym ibn Bashir, from Dawud ibn Abi Hind, from Abu ‘Uthman an-Nahdi, from Sa‘d ibn Abi Waqqas رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Government, Hadith No. 1925.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim, the second most authentic book of Hadith after Sahih al-Bukhari.

Source: sunnah.com/muslim:1925

The scholars differ about the meaning of “Ahl al-Gharb”. Imam Ahmad held that they are the people of Sham, since Sham lies west of Madinah; other scholars held that it refers to the Arabs, or to the people of the Maghrib. An-Nawawi mentions this difference in his commentary. We therefore do not claim that this hadith refers specifically to the lands conquered by ‘Uqbah.

LESSONS

We do not force the meaning of a hadith to fit the story we are telling. Honesty in understanding hadith comes before the beauty of a story.

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KUSAYLAH AND THE IMPORTANCE OF GENTLENESS

HISTORICAL NOTE: A COSTLY MISTAKE

The historical reports mention that when 'Uqbah returned to Ifriqiyah, he brought Abu al-Muhajir in chains, and was harsh toward ***Kusaylah***, the Berber chief who had embraced Islam. It is reported that 'Uqbah ordered Kusaylah to skin a sheep in front of the army, so that Kusaylah felt humiliated. Abu al-Muhajir advised 'Uqbah to be gentle with a tribal chief who had newly embraced Islam, but the advice was not heeded. Kusaylah later left the Muslim army and harboured resentment.

Status of the report: Narrated in the histories of the conquest of the Maghrib without an authentic chain. The story is well known and accepted as history, but it cannot be used as proof in the way an authentic hadith can.

REFERENCES:
Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi at-Tarikh; Ibn 'Idhari, al-Bayan al-Mughrib.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ taught that gentleness opens doors that harshness cannot:

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 2593

حَدَّثَنَا حَرْمَلَةُ بْنُ يَحْيَى التُّجِيبِيُّ، أَخْبَرَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ وَهْبٍ، أَخْبَرَنِي حَيْوَةُ، حَدَّثَنِي ابْنُ الْهَادِ، عَنْ أَبِي بَكْرِ بْنِ حَزْمٍ، عَنْ عَمْرَةَ، - يَعْنِي بِنْتَ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ - عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، زَوْجِ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ " يَا عَائِشَةُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ رَفِيقٌ يُحِبُّ الرِّفْقَ وَيُعْطِي عَلَى الرِّفْقِ مَا لاَ يُعْطِي عَلَى الْعُنْفِ وَمَا لاَ يُعْطِي عَلَى مَا سِوَاهُ " .

TRANSLATION:

'A'ishah, the wife of the Prophet ﷺ, narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: ***"O 'A'ishah, Allah is Gentle and loves gentleness. He gives for gentleness what He does not give for harshness, and what He does not give for anything else."***

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Harmalah ibn Yahya at-Tujibi, from 'Abdullah ibn Wahb, from Haywah ibn Shurayh, from Yazid ibn al-Had, from Abu Bakr ibn Hazm, from 'Amrah bint 'Abd ar-Rahman, from 'A'ishah رضى الله عنها.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Righteousness, Kinship and Manners, Hadith No. 2593.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim, the second most authentic book of Hadith after Sahih al-Bukhari.

Source: sunnah.com/muslim:2593

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LESSONS

Great heroes can also make mistakes. This story is told not to disparage ‘Uqbah, but to take a lesson: honouring people’s dignity, especially those new to Islam, is part of da‘wah.

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MARTYRDOM AT TAHUDHA

HISTORICAL NOTE: THE END OF A MUJAHID

On the way back from the Atlantic in 63 AH, 'Uqbah divided his army and returned with only about three hundred men. Kusaylah gathered a large army of Berbers and Romans and attacked them near ***Tahudha***, close to Biskra in today's Algeria. It is reported that 'Uqbah released Abu al-Muhajir from his chains and asked him to go home, but Abu al-Muhajir chose to fight beside him. Both of them, together with almost the entire army, were martyred. Kusaylah then held Kairouan for a time, before it was retaken by later Muslim leaders.

Status of the report: 'Uqbah's martyrdom at Tahudha in 63 AH is agreed upon by historians; the details of the story are narrated in the history books without an authentic chain.

REFERENCES:

Ibn al-Athir, al-Kamil fi at-Tarikh; Ibn 'Idhari, al-Bayan al-Mughrib; Ibn Khaldun, Tarikh.

Allah has purchased the lives and wealth of the believers:

SURAH AT-TAWBAH 9:111

۞إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱشۡتَرَىٰ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ أَنفُسَهُمۡ وَأَمۡوَٰلَهُم بِأَنَّ لَهُمُ ٱلۡجَنَّةَۚ يُقَٰتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَيَقۡتُلُونَ وَيُقۡتَلُونَۖ وَعۡدًا عَلَيۡهِ حَقّٗا فِي ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةِ وَٱلۡإِنجِيلِ وَٱلۡقُرۡءَانِۚ وَمَنۡ أَوۡفَىٰ بِعَهۡدِهِۦ مِنَ ٱللَّهِۚ فَٱسۡتَبۡشِرُواْ بِبَيۡعِكُمُ ٱلَّذِي بَايَعۡتُم بِهِۦۚ وَذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ١١١

Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise. They fight in the cause of Allah, so they kill and are killed. [It is] a true promise [binding] upon Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah? So rejoice in your transaction which you have contracted. And it is that which is the great attainment.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/9:111

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And the Messenger of Allah ﷺ promised the rank of the martyrs to whoever sincerely asks for it:

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 1909

حَدَّثَنِي أَبُو الطَّاهِرِ، وَحَرْمَلَةُ بْنُ يَحْيَى، - وَاللَّفْظُ لِحَرْمَلَةَ - قَالَ أَبُو الطَّاهِرِ أَخْبَرَنَا وَقَالَ، حَرْمَلَةُ حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ وَهْبٍ، حَدَّثَنِي أَبُو شُرَيْحٍ، أَنَّ سَهْلَ بْنَ أَبِي أُمَامَةَ بْنِ سَهْلِ، بْنِ حُنَيْفٍ حَدَّثَهُ عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ جَدِّهِ، أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ " مَنْ سَأَلَ اللَّهَ الشَّهَادَةَ بِصِدْقٍ بَلَّغَهُ اللَّهُ مَنَازِلَ الشُّهَدَاءِ وَإِنْ مَاتَ عَلَى فِرَاشِهِ " .

TRANSLATION:

Sahl ibn Abi Umamah ibn Sahl ibn Hunayf narrated from his father, from his grandfather, that the Prophet ﷺ said: ***“Whoever sincerely asks Allah for martyrdom, Allah will raise him to the ranks of the martyrs even if he dies on his bed.”***

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Abu at-Tahir and Harmalah ibn Yahya, from ‘Abdullah ibn Wahb, from Abu Shurayh ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Shurayh, from Sahl ibn Abi Umamah, from Abu Umamah ibn Sahl, from Sahl ibn Hunayf رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Government, Hadith No. 1909.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim, the second most authentic book of Hadith after Sahih al-Bukhari.

Source: sunnah.com/muslim:1909

LESSONS

A good ending is a gift. ‘Uqbah and Abu al-Muhajir, who had once disagreed, fell together on one field — the quarrels of this world faded, and what remained was the struggle in the path of Allah.

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'UQBAH'S LEGACY: ISLAM IN NORTH AFRICA

After 'Uqbah's martyrdom, Muslim leaders such as Zuhayr ibn Qays, Hassan ibn an-Nu'man and Musa ibn Nusayr completed the conquest of the Maghrib. From that land, Tariq ibn Ziyad, a Muslim Berber, crossed to al-Andalus in 92 AH (in sha' Allah in Series 16). Kairouan became a centre of learning, and 'Uqbah's tomb in the town of Sidi 'Uqbah, Algeria, is still visited today.

Musa عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ reminded his people that the earth belongs to Allah:

SURAH AL-A'RAF 7:128

قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ ٱسْتَعِينُوا۟ بِٱللَّهِ وَٱصْبِرُوٓا۟ ۖ إِنَّ ٱلْأَرْضَ لِلَّهِ يُورِثُهَا مَن يَشَآءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِۦ ۖ وَٱلْعَٰقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١٢٨﴾

Said Moses to his people, "Seek help through Allāh and be patient. Indeed, the earth belongs to Allāh. He causes to inherit it whom He wills of His servants. And the [best] outcome is for the righteous."

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/7:128

LESSONS

A hero may fall before seeing the fruit of his struggle, but the seed he planted keeps growing. The best outcome belongs to the righteous.

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THE CHARACTER AND QUALITIES OF 'UQBAH

According to the historical reports, 'Uqbah is described with the following qualities. Since most of the sources are history books, these qualities are presented as a historical portrait, and their lessons are grounded in authentic evidence.

QUALITY	EXAMPLE FROM HIS STORY
Patience on the frontier	Years in Barqah and Ifriqiyah
Far-sighted	Founding Kairouan as a permanent centre
Love of the mosque	Beginning his city with the Great Mosque
High aspiration	His prayer on the Atlantic shore
Obedience to the caliph	Accepted his dismissal without rebelling
A human who could err	His harshness toward Kusaylah
Longing for martyrdom	Fell at Tahudha (63 AH)

LESSONS

We take example from the good in heroes, and lessons from their mistakes, without disparaging them and without sanctifying them.

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SOURCES OF THE STORIES OF 'UQBAH

This table summarises the source and grade of each story, so that the reader can distinguish what is authentic from what is merely well known.

STORY	SOURCE	GRADE
Born in the time of the Messenger ﷺ	Ibn 'Abd al-Barr; Ibn Hajar	Companionship not established
With 'Amr in Egypt and Barqah	Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam; al-Baladhuri	History
The virtue of ribat	Sahih al-Bukhari 2892	Sahih
Founding of Kairouan (50 AH)	History books	Agreed upon
Wild beasts leaving Kairouan	History books	No authentic chain
Reward for building a mosque	Sahih al-Bukhari 450	Sahih
Guiding a single man	Sahih al-Bukhari 2942	Sahih
Prayer on the Atlantic shore	Ibn al-Athir; Ibn 'Idhari	History
"The people of the West will prevail"	Sahih Muslim 1925	Sahih; meaning disputed
The story of Kusaylah	Ibn al-Athir; Ibn 'Idhari	History
Allah loves gentleness	Sahih Muslim 2593	Sahih
Martyrdom at Tahudha (63 AH)	History books	Agreed upon
Sincerely asking for martyrdom	Sahih Muslim 1909	Sahih

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PEOPLE AND PLACES IN THE STORY OF ‘UQBAH

PERSON	ROLE
‘Amr ibn al-‘As	His relative and commander in Egypt and Barqah (Series 10)
Mu‘awiyah ibn Abi Sufyan	Caliph who appointed him in 50 AH
Abu al-Muhajir Dinar	His successor, later martyred with him
Yazid ibn Mu‘awiyah	Caliph who restored him in 62 AH
Kusaylah	Berber chief who attacked him at Tahudha
Zuhayr ibn Qays	Commander who retook Kairouan

PLACE	EVENT
Makkah	Birthplace (c. 1 BH)
Barqah and Zawilah, Libya	With ‘Amr ibn al-‘As (22 AH)
Kairouan, Tunisia	The city he founded (50 AH)
Tangier and Sus, Morocco	The westward campaign (62–63 AH)
The Atlantic shore	His famous prayer
Tahudha, Algeria	Where he was martyred (63 AH)
Sidi ‘Uqbah, Algeria	Where his tomb lies

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TIMELINE OF 'UQBAH'S LIFE

YEAR	EVENT
c. 1 BH	Born in Makkah
20–22 AH	With 'Amr ibn al-'As in Egypt, Barqah and Zawilah
50 AH	Appointed governor of Ifriqiyah; founded Kairouan
55 AH	Dismissed; Abu al-Muhajir Dinar replaced him
62 AH	Restored to Ifriqiyah by Yazid ibn Mu'awiyah
62–63 AH	Westward campaign to the Atlantic Ocean
63 AH	Martyred at Tahudha with Abu al-Muhajir

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT ‘UQBAH

This chapter answers questions often asked about ‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘ رضى الله عنه. The answers are brief; details are in the earlier chapters.

1. WHAT WAS ‘UQBAH’S FULL NAME?

‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘ ibn ‘Abd Qays al-Fihri al-Qurashi.

2. WAS ‘UQBAH A COMPANION?

He was born in the time of the Messenger ﷺ, but his companionship is not established; he is counted among the early Successors.

3. WHAT WAS HIS RELATIONSHIP TO ‘AMR IBN AL-‘AS?

He was ‘Amr’s relative and fought with him in Egypt and Barqah.

4. WHEN WAS KAIROUAN FOUNDED?

In 50 AH, completed about five years later.

5. WHY DID ‘UQBAH BUILD KAIROUAN?

So that the Muslim army would settle in Ifriqiyah and Islam would remain there.

6. WHAT WAS ‘UQBAH’S PRAYER ON THE ATLANTIC SHORE?

That if there were land beyond the sea, he would cross it to strive in the path of Allah (historical report).

7. WHAT DOES “AHL AL-GHARB” IN SAHIH MUSLIM 1925 MEAN?

It is disputed: the people of Sham according to Imam Ahmad, or the Arabs, or the people of the Maghrib according to other views.

8. WHO WAS KUSAYLAH?

A Berber chief who embraced Islam, then attacked ‘Uqbah at Tahudha.

9. WHAT IS THE LESSON FROM THE STORY OF KUSAYLAH?

Gentleness and guarding people’s dignity, as the Prophet said: “Allah loves gentleness” (Sahih Muslim 2593).

10. WHEN AND WHERE WAS ‘UQBAH MARTYRED?

In 63 AH at Tahudha, near Biskra in today’s Algeria.

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11. WHO WAS MARTYRED WITH HIM?

Abu al-Muhajir Dinar and almost his entire army.

12. WHAT IS THE GREATEST LESSON FROM THE STORY OF 'UQBAH?

High aspiration, patience on the frontier, and far-sighted da'wah.

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LESSONS AND CONCLUSION

The story of ‘Uqbah ibn Nafi‘ رضى الله عنه begins with a young man of Quraysh following ‘Amr ibn al-‘As to Egypt, and ends with a martyr in the land of Algeria, after carrying Islam to the shore of the Atlantic Ocean.

LESSON	FROM THE STORY OF ‘UQBAH
Patience on the frontier	“Guarding the frontier for one day…”
Lasting da‘wah	The founding of Kairouan
The mosque as the heart of society	The Great Mosque of Kairouan
Guidance is worth more than wealth	“…better than red camels”
Gentleness in da‘wah	“Allah loves gentleness”
High aspiration	The prayer on the Atlantic shore
Honesty about sources	Distinguishing authentic Hadith from historical reports

May we follow the example of ‘Uqbah: aspiring high for our religion, patient in long struggles, building something lasting for the ummah, and gentle in calling to Allah.

In sha’ Allah, the Heroes of Islam series will continue with the story of another hero of Islam.

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SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:261

مَّثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنۢبَتَتۡ سَبۡعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنۢبُلَةٖ مِّاْئَةُ حَبَّةٖۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُضَٰعِفُ لِمَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ٢٦١

The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/2:261

SURAH SABA' 34:39

قُلۡ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبۡسُطُ ٱلرِّزۡقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ مِنۡ عِبَادِهِۦ وَيَقۡدِرُ لَهُۥۚ وَمَآ أَنفَقۡتُم مِّن شَيۡءٖ فَهُوَ يُخۡلِفُهُۥۖ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ ٣٩

Say, "Indeed, my Lord extends provision for whom He wills of His servants and restricts [it] for him. But whatever thing you spend [in His cause] - He will compensate it; and He is the best of providers."

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/34:39

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HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 2588

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ، وَابْنُ، حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - وَهُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « مَا نَقَصَتْ صَدَقَةٌ مِنْ مَالٍ وَمَا زَادَ اللَّهُ عَبْدًا بِعَفْوٍ إِلاَّ عِزًّا وَمَا تَوَاضَعَ أَحَدٌ لِلَّهِ إِلاَّ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Charity does not decrease wealth.

Allah does not increase a servant who forgives except in honour. And no one humbles himself for the sake of Allah except that Allah raises him in rank."

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Yahya bin Ayyub, Qutaibah bin Sa'id and 'Ali bin Hujr, from Isma'il bin Ja'far, from al-'Ala' bin 'Abd al-Rahman, from his father 'Abd al-Rahman bin Ya'qub, from Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه .

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Virtue, Good Manners and Joining the Ties of Kinship (Kitab al-Birr wa al-Silah wa al-Adab), chapter on the encouragement of forgiveness and humility, Hadith No. 2588.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim.

Source: sunnah.com/muslim:2588

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 1631

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ، - يَعْنِي ابْنَ سَعِيدٍ - وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - هُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « إِذَا مَاتَ الإِنْسَانُ انْقَطَعَ عَنْهُ عَمَلُهُ إِلاَّ مِنْ ثَلاَثَةٍ إِلاَّ مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ جَارِيَةٍ أَوْ عِلْمٍ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "When a person dies, his deeds come to an end except for three: an ongoing charity, knowledge that is benefited from, or a righteous child who prays for him."

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Yahya bin Ayyub, Qutaibah bin Sa'id and 'Ali bin Hujr, from Isma'il bin Ja'far, from al-'Ala' bin 'Abd al-Rahman, from his father 'Abd al-Rahman bin Ya'qub, from Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه .

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Wills (Kitab al-Wasiyyah), chapter on the reward that reaches a person after his death, Hadith No. 1631.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim.

Source: sunnah.com/muslim:1631

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