

## A Concise Introduction to the Khawārij<sup>1</sup>

The word خَوَارج “Khawārij” is the plural form of the singular word, خَارِجَة “Khārijah” (from the Arabic root verb: “kharaja” meaning to go out or leave)<sup>2</sup>. They are called that because of their leaving the (fundamentals of the) religion and for their opposing the best Muslims (the companions of the prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم)).<sup>3</sup> And the first opposition and insurgency from them occurred against the leader of the believers, ‘Alī Ibn Abī Tālib (رضي الله عنه) when the issue of who has the right to pass rulings was debated. The Khawārij gathered at a place called Harūrā<sup>4</sup> near Kufa (in Iraq). There, ‘Alī (رضي الله عنه) fought fiercely with them at a place called al-Nahrawān but only after advising and debating with them and clearly establishing the evidences against them. In that battle, less than ten of the Khawārij remained and less than ten Muslims were killed. After the Khawārij’s defeat, two of them fled to Oman, two to Karmāan (near Khorasan in Iran and Sijistān), two to Sijistān (Seistan), two to the Arabian Peninsula, and one fled to Yemen.<sup>5</sup>

The scholar al-Shahrastānī said, “The innovated beliefs and methods of the Khawārij appeared in these places from them (the nine people who were defeated and fled) and they’ve remained ever since up until today.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Selected excerpts taken from the book: “Maḥqī’ Ahlis-Sunnah wal-Jamā’ah min Ahl al-Aḥwā wal-Bid’a” by Dr. Ibrāhīm Ar-Ruḥaylī (pgs. 137-140).

<sup>2</sup> The Khawārij are often called “Kharijites” in English. This label of theirs may be translated as separatists, insurgents, rebels, nonconformist, etc. [Translator’s Note]

<sup>3</sup> See “Faṭḥ al-Bārī” (vol. 12, pg. 283).

<sup>4</sup> Harūrā was a village said to be about two miles outside of Kufa (in Iraq). The Khawārij are also sometimes referred to as “Hārūriyyah” because they chose that place to gather. See “Mu’jam al-Buldān” from Yāqoot Al-Hamawī (vol. 2, pg. 245).

<sup>5</sup> See “al-Milal wal-Nihal” by al-Shahrastānee (vol. 1 pgs. 115-117) and “al-Farq bayna al-Firaq” by al-Baghdādee (pg. 75).

<sup>6</sup> “al-Milal wal-Nihal” by al-Shahrastānī (vol. 1 pgs. 117).

The Khawārij are known by other (Arabic) names such as “al-Hārūriyyah,” “al-Shurāh,” “al-Māriqah,” and “al-Muḥakkimah”. They don’t mind these labels except for “al-Māriqah”...<sup>7 8</sup>

The Khawārij collectively agreed that both ‘Uthmān and later ‘Alee (the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> caliphs of Islam) were in fact disbelievers as were the other companions...And they think revolting against the leaders and governments is permissible.

They also believe that any major sin is an act of disbelief...

Many authentic ḥadīth from the prophet ( صلى الله عليه وسلم ) condemning them have come in ten different forms of narration like what al-Khalāl narrated from Imam Ahmad that he said, “The Khawārij are wicked people, and I don’t know of any people on earth more evil than they.” And he said, “The prophet’s ( صلى الله عليه وسلم ) ḥadīth about them are authentic in ten different forms.”<sup>9</sup>

The famous scholar of Islam, Ibn Taymiyyah,<sup>10</sup> mentioned that Muslim recorded some of them in his authentic collection as did al-Bukhārī.<sup>11</sup>

And the scholars unanimously agree to the permissibility to fight the Khawārij whenever they begin challenging and revolting against the leader, opposing the mainstream community of Muslims, and renouncing obedience – but after they’ve been warned. This has been mentioned by al-Nawawī<sup>12</sup> and Ibn Taymiyyah.<sup>13</sup>

As for considering the Khawārij to be disbelievers themselves, some scholars differ about this. There are two different narrations from Ahmad about this, mentioned by Ibn

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<sup>7</sup> See “Maqālāt Al-Islāmiyyīn” by al-Ash’arī (vol. 1, pgs. 206, 207).

<sup>8</sup> al-Māriqah happens to be the name taken from the Hadeeth when the prophet described them as those who “maraqa” or “go through” or “pass in and out” of the religion. [T.N.]

<sup>9</sup> “al-Sunnah” by al-Khalāl (vol. 1, 145, no. 110).

<sup>10</sup> See “Majmū’ al-Fatāwá” (vol. 3, pg. 279).

<sup>11</sup> See “Muslim” (vol. 2, pgs. 740-750) and “Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī” with “Fath al-Bārī” (vol. 12, pgs. 282, 283, 390).

<sup>12</sup> See al-Nawawī’s explanation of “Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim” (vol. 7, pg. 170).

<sup>13</sup> See “Majmū’ al-Fatāwá” (vol. 3, pg. 282).

Taymiyyah.<sup>14</sup> And Ibn Hajar went into detail about the issue in “Fatḥ al-Bārī” by mentioning the various opinions of the scholars and their evidences.<sup>15</sup>

However, the more correct opinion is not to consider them disbelievers because Ibn Taymiyyah mentioned that no narrations from the Companions have been recorded mentioning they were disbelievers. None of the Companions used to declare them to be disbelievers, neither ‘Alee nor any other Companion. Instead, they judged them as oppressive Muslim transgressors.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See “Majmū’ al-Fatāwá” (vol. 28, pg. 500).

<sup>15</sup> See “Fatḥ al-Bārī” (vol. 12, pgs. 299-301).

<sup>16</sup> See “Majmū’ al-Fatāwá” (vol. 3, pg. 282; vol. 5, pg. 247; vol. 7, pg. 217).