

## CHAPTER SEVEN



# “War is deceit”

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- ◆ The Battle of Badr: Islam’s greatest early jihad victory
- ◆ The theological explanation of the Battle of Badr
- ◆ Controversies over the spoils of war
- ◆ Muhammad’s battles against Jewish tribes
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### The Battle of Badr

**AS THE MUSLIMS' RELATIONS WITH THE JEWS STEADILY** deteriorated, they reached their final breaking point with the Quraysh. The Muslim raids on Quraysh caravans precipitated the Muslims’ first major battle. Muhammad heard that a large Quraysh caravan, laden with money and goods, was coming from Syria. “This is the caravan of the Quraysh possessing wealth,” he told his followers. “It is likely that Allah may give it to you as booty.”<sup>1</sup> Ibn Ishaq reports that “the people answered his summons, some eagerly, others reluctantly because they had not thought that the apostle would go to war.”

Muhammad received a revelation from Allah berating those Muslims who were reluctant to wage war for the Prophet of Islam: “Those who believe say, ‘Why is not a sura sent down (for us)?’ But when a sura of basic or categorical meaning is revealed, and fighting is mentioned therein, thou wilt see those in whose hearts is a disease looking at thee with a look of one in swoon at the approach of death” (Qur’an 47:20).

Allah told Muhammad’s followers to fight fiercely and behead their enemies: “Therefore, when ye meet the Unbelievers (in fight), smite at their necks. At length, when ye have thoroughly subdued them, bind a bond firmly (on them): thereafter (is the time for) either generosity or ransom, until the war lays down its burdens.” He reminded them that this was his will, and a test he was giving them: “Thus (are ye commanded): but if it had been Allah’s Will, He could certainly have exacted retribution from them (Himself); but (He lets you fight) in order to test you, some with others. But those who are slain in the Way of Allah, He will never let their deeds be lost” (Qur’an 47:4).

Muhammad set out toward Mecca to lead the raid. He knew that the Quraysh would be defending their caravan with an army this time, but he was confident: “Forward in good heart,” he told his men, “for God has promised me one of the two parties” — that is, either the caravan or the army. “And by God, it is as though I now see the enemy lying prostrate.”<sup>2</sup> When he saw the Quraysh marching toward the Muslims, he prayed: “O God, here come the Quraysh in their vanity and pride, contending with Thee and calling Thy apostle a liar. O God, grant the help which Thou didst promise me. Destroy them this morning!”<sup>3</sup> One of the Quraysh leaders, Abu Jahl (which means “Father of Ignorance,” a name given him by Muslim chroniclers; his real name was ‘Amr ibn Hisham), also felt as if a defining moment was at hand. Oiling a coat of mail before the battle, he declared: “No, by God, we will not turn back until God decide between us and Muhammad.”<sup>4</sup>

And this time the Quraysh were much more prepared to face the Muslims than they had been at Nakhla. They came out to meet Muhammad’s three hundred men with a force nearly a thousand strong.<sup>5</sup> Muhammad