

History and Origin of the term Wahhabi

Explained by Shaykh al Albani

Summary Translation

Shaykh al Albani: This term “Wahhabi”, in reality is a Turkish political term. It spread during the era when the Turks turned away from ruling according to Islam. This was during the time when the native son of our homeland was in Egypt. What is his name? Muhammad Ali Pasha; his origin is from Albania. He was a ruler in Egypt during his time. Naturally, he claimed he was living under the Sultanate of the Ottoman Empire.

A man from the people of knowledge appeared from the land of Najd, his name was Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab; not Abdul Wahhab, but his name was Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab. He went to various Islamic countries that were known for knowledge during those days, such as Egypt, Cairo, and Sham and he acquired knowledge. Then he returned to his homeland which was called Diriyah.

As expected, when someone becomes learned, he will recognize the ignorance his people are upon. They were worshipping graves, as is still the case today in many Islamic countries, in Sham – my land, and Egypt the land of our brothers; no offense. This calamity has flooded every country.

What did this man begin with? He began to teach the people and to warn them against polytheism and idolatry. His Dawah benefitted and was strengthened due to the ruler, the king of Saud during that era, who was the first grandfather (of Saudi Arabia). Our Lord guided him and he followed the Shaykh. Therefore they combined authority and knowledge together. If authority and knowledge are paired together they will bring about benefit. As Uthman ibn Affan may Allah be pleased with him said: Indeed Allah will prevent by way of the ruler that which He will not prevent by way of the Quran¹. The movement grew, due to the strength of the ruler. The Dawah spread and they formed an Islamic army for the first time. They began calling the neighboring villages to worship Allah alone without partners. Some of the villages responded positively to the Dawah and the Dawah reached Iraq. As you know in Iraq there were Shia, and what will let you know who the Shia are? They have with them polytheism, misguidance, and other matters as well. Ahlus Sunnah living there was influenced by some of this polytheism.

¹ Translator’s note: Shaykh bin Baz explained this by saying: Some people have weak faith and the reminders in the Quran will not prevent them from sinning. But if they know the ruler will punish them if they commit this sin, this will prevent them from this sin.

Unfortunately fierce battles took place. Who instigated the battle? Muhammad Ali Pasha from Egypt instigated the battle. What army was sent to attack? The Turks were sent. This is because the Caliph was in their hands. They ruled over all the Islamic countries. Thus when they saw this Arab movement starting in the Arabian Peninsula they feared the outcome of this movement. They feared they would bring an end to the Ottoman rule, or the Turkish rule; which is the more correct terminology. For that reason they instructed Muhammad Ali to send an army to kill those from Najd; and I don't not say "to kill the Wahhabis"; and this shall be explained later.

Muhammad Ali Pasha sent his son Ibrahim Pasha with a huge enormous army from Egypt to the land of Najd and blood flowed like rivers. The result was the brute strength overpowered the correct Dawah and many were killed. The Turks also used means of propoganda, as is the case today you will see that perhaps propoganda will have a greater effect than weapons. They sent out propoganda throughout the Islamic world against this group so the Islamic world would side with the Turks and oppose this group whom they viewed as a new Dawah. This is because this group called the people to the statement of monotheism that "nothing has the right to be worshipped except for Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah".

They spread amongst the Muslims that this group does not have a Madhhab (school of thought); rather they have created a fifth Madhhab. They told the Muslims that members of this group say their stick is more honorable than the Messenger peace be upon him. This propoganda they spread was disbelief, sin and slander. This affected the Islamic groups in every country. From the greatest impacts and mistakes they made was they named this group, what? They named them Wahhabis. This is the argument of Allah against His slaves for those who reflect.

Wahhabi is an ascription to Wahhab. Wahhab, if we studied the Arabic language is an ascription to whom? It is an ascription to al-Wahhab. Who is al Wahhab? He is Allah the Blessed and Exalted. Thus this is an honorable ascription. This does not degrade the one given this ascription. But most of those who were under the banner of the unjust Turkish political system were non-Arabs and they did not have understanding of the Arabic language. They say 'Wahhabi, Wahhabi', such that this term during that time was equivalent to calling someone a heretic.

Unfortunately a long time passed while the Islamic world was misled by this term until Allah the Blessed and Exalted willed. Then King Abdul Aziz entered Riyadh and ruled over it and expelled the House of Rashid. And he began to rule according to the Islamic legislation to a great extent.

Security was established in the land of Najd which was previously filled with theft, looting and murder and the land of Hejaz followed. Before this, the pilgrims were not able to perform Hajj except with a military escort. The Turkish army would protect them from thieves and highway robbers. When Abdul Aziz came to power the land of Hejaz became a place of ease and safety. This news spread by word of mouth from country to country. People began to say 'by Allah, we have not seen these people disbelieving in the Messenger of Allah peace be upon him, we have not seen them disbelieving in Allah'.

There is an anecdote the people tell and it may be a true story concerning a real event or it may be a depiction of the actual event. Two men had a discussion surrounding this topic. They debated what the Wahhabis believe concerning the Messenger of Allah peace be upon him. As they were discussing the matter the ambassador of Saudi Arabia drove by with their flag on his car, written on the flag is "nothing has the right to be worshipped except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." The man said: "Look, fear Allah. You say they do not believe in the Messenger of Allah while they have the only flag in the entire world like this. We do not find a flag in the Islamic world from Arabs or Turks that has written on it "nothing has the right to be worshipped except Allah; Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah;" except for this group whom you accuse of not believing in the Messenger of Allah."

Furthermore, have you heard the call to prayer in Mecca, and the call to prayer in Madinah; they do not add anything to the beginning of it or to the end of it. Rather they say in the call to prayer "I bear witness that nothing has the right to be worshipped except for Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah". As time went by it became clear to the people that this accusation was a deceitful lie with no truth to it.

In addition to this they send salutations upon the Messenger of Allah peace be upon him. Many of you have performed Hajj to the sacred house of Allah, and you visited the Masjid of the Messenger peace be upon him so you have heard their Friday sermons. Each time they mention the Messenger of Allah peace be upon him, they send salutations upon him.

Therefore the dust was removed from the Islamic world due to a large amount of Muslims traveling to this country. And they realized they had been misguided by the false propaganda of the Turks in an effort to squash the Islamic movement by Muhammad ibn Abdul Wahhab which was supported by King Saud who was not a king during those days but he was an Amir.

It is from the evil mistakes to call this group Wahhabis, why? This is because in its origin this is a repugnant statement. While in reality from the standpoint of the language it is an honor for them because it is an ascription to al-Wahhab, and He is Allah the Blessed and Exalted.

In conclusion I advise every Muslim who is in awe of Allah and fears Him, to remove the notion that there is a group called Wahhabis. There is a group called Zaidiyyah, there is a group called Shia, and there is a group called Ibadi. None of these groups deny these names because they are reality. But there is not a single group on the face of the earth that says 'we are Wahhabis'; rather they say 'we are Ahlus Sunnah wa Jamah'.

Translated by Rasheed ibn Estes Barbee