

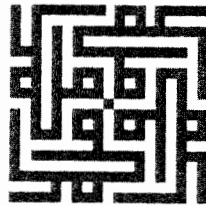
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**IBN 'ABD AL-WAHHĀB, MUḤAMMAD**

(1703–1791), Saudi Arabian conservative theologian and reformer. Born in al-'Uyaynah in Najd, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb belonged to a prestigious family of jurists, both theologians and *qāḍīs* (judges). Under the tutorship of his father, young Muḥammad studied Ḥanbalī jurisprudence and read classical works on *tafsīr* (exegesis), *ḥadīth* (tradition) and *tawḥīd* (monotheism). In his early twenties he began to denounce what he described as the polytheistic beliefs and practices of his society, rejecting its laxity and insisting on strict adherence to the *sharī'ah*.

His beliefs alienated him from the establishment '*ulamā*' and led to the dismissal of his father from the position of *qāḍī*. Subsequently Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's family, including his father, had to leave al-'Uyaynah to neighboring Huraymila in 1726. He himself remained in al-'Uyaynah for a while, but after the '*ulamā*' defamed his reputation and instigated the populace against him, he left al-'Uyaynah and went to Hejaz.

In Hejaz, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb made his pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, where he attended lectures on different branches of Islamic learning. Ibn Bishr reports in *'Unwan al-majd fī tārikh Najd* (Riyadh, n.d., p. 6), that Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb studied under Shaykh 'Abd Allāh ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Sayf and Shaykh Ḥayāt al-Sindī, both of whom were admirers of the Ḥanbalī Ibn Taymiyah. Like Ibn Taymiyah, they opposed *taqlīd* (imitation), which was commonly accepted by the followers of the four Sunnī schools of jurisprudence. Both scholars felt the urgent need to reform the socioreligious situation of Muslims in Najd and else-

where. Their teachings had a great impact on Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, who began to take a more aggressive attitude toward the establishment '*ulamā*'.

Another important event in the intellectual evolution of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb was his visit to Basra. There he widened his study of *ḥadīth* and jurisprudence and came into contact with the Shī'īs, who venerate 'Alī's shrine in Najaf and the tomb of Ḥusayn in neighboring Karbala. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's call to reform the Muslim world was rejected by the '*ulamā*' of both Basra and Karbala, and he was ultimately forced to leave the area.

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb returned to Huraymila to rejoin his father and immediately began to criticize the innovations and polytheistic acts practiced by Najdīs and others. His criticism seems to have been so bitter that he met strong opposition from the '*ulamā*' and even from his own father. During this period he composed his most famous work, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (Book of Monotheism), copies of which circulated quickly and widely in Najd. The year 1740 witnessed the death of his father and the consolidation of the Wahhābī movement. The death of his father allowed Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb to adopt a more aggressive line, because he felt less constrained than before. He declared war on those who by word or act were violating the doctrine of monotheism.

In a relatively short time the influence of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb spread widely. The consolidation of his movement took place when the ruler of al-'Uyaynah, 'Uthmān ibn Mu'ammār, offered him protection. Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb accepted the invitation to reside in al-'Uyaynah because it allowed him to return to his birthplace, where his family enjoyed high social status, and provided the protection he needed to propagate his ideology. To cement his ties with the town's leader, Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb married al-Jawharah, 'Uthmān's aunt.

The ruler of al-'Uyaynah ordered his townsmen to observe the teachings of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, who began to implement the principles of his call. Among his earliest acts was the destruction of the monument where Zayd ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was believed to be buried, as well as the tombs of other companions of the Prophet, all of whom were objects of veneration. He also revived the Islamic law of stoning an adulterous woman to death. Both incidents mark the establishment of a Wahhābī society in which the doctrines of *tawḥīd* were strictly observed; indeed, *tawḥīd* is considered the central theme in Wahhābī doctrine.

Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb's activities and the protection he received from the leader of al-'Uyaynah antagonized the

‘*ulamā*’ of the region and led them to intensify their attacks on the Wahhābī movement, warning the rulers that Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb was encouraging the common folk to revolt against established authority. Consequently, the ruler of al-‘Uyaynah terminated his support and asked the teacher to leave the town.

From al-‘Uyaynah, Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb sought refuge in al-Dir‘īyah at the invitation of its ruler, Muḥammad ibn Sa‘ūd. For more than two years Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb propagated his views and wrote letters to various rulers, scholars, and tribal leaders in Arabia. The response he elicited was as much a product of political and economic considerations as of religious dogma. Some leaders joined the new movement because they saw it as a means of gaining an ally against their local rivals. Others feared that their acceptance of the call would diminish their authority in favor of Ibn Sa‘ūd and oblige them to pay him at least part of the revenues they collected from their subjects.

By 1746 the time seemed ripe for Ibn Sa‘ūd and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb to declare *jihād* on those who opposed Wahhābī teachings. In 1773 the principality of Riyadh fell to them, marking a new period in the career of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb. He concentrated on teaching and worship until his death in 1791. His death, however, did not stop the expansion of the new state. Not only was the movement able to resist its opponents and gain territories in neighboring principalities, it was able within a relatively short period to spread to Mecca and Medina, which were captured in 1805 and 1806, respectively. A new order was established in the Arabian Peninsula, ushering in the period of the first Saudi state and establishing the Wahhābīyah as the religio-political driving force in the peninsula during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

[See also Saudi Arabia; and Wahhābīyah.]

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