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BILLĀL



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*In the Name of Allāh,
the Beneficent, the Merciful*

Our aim for the publication of these series is to introduce some aspects of biography from the history of Islam. These biographies include both types of individuals who either played a good and useful role or a bad and harmful role. We had always cherished the idea that we would be able to produce a short sketch of hard facts from the history of Islam in this field to be written exclusively to capture the interest of young children and teenagers.

We pray to the Almighty Allāh to assist us in proving our present and future efforts to be accomplished facts — thus making a useful contribution to the learning of young children and teenagers and help us in this cause. He is the Best Guide and the Best Helper.

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In the Name of Allāh

A long time ago a young boy lived in Ethiopia. Then fate brought him to Mecca from Ethiopia. This young boy was called Bilāl. Bilāl was a thin, black-faced, tall boy. He was not handsome like the other people of Ethiopia. After being brought to Mecca a rich and stony-hearted man, who was an enemy of Islam chose him as slave. From the beginning, at a time when Islam had not yet spread from Mecca, Bilāl became Muslim of his own free choice. He did not accept the false gods and idols that the people made with various tools and

different materials, and hatred of them always appeared in his heart.

As he had accepted Allāh through thoughtful consideration, he knew Him to be One, yet these idols were merely the handwork of man and Allāh can in no way be made to resemble man. He believed in the Oneness of Allāh. He always insisted on his belief that Allāh is one and has no associate. People praised his courage and bravery for he was a Muslim yet at the same time the slave of an idol-worshipper who was an enemy of

Islam and who was constantly trying by all possible means, to prevent the spread of Islam. This ignorant idol-worshiper was called Umayyah ibn Khalaf; he was from the nobles of Quraysh.

The bravery and moral heroism of Bilāl became proverbial to the people of that time as well as to the Muslims of this age. Umayyah had understood what had happened and realized that Bilāl had put his faith in the Messenger of Islam. It is from this moment that he began abusing and torturing Bilāl in every way.



In order to make him turn away from his belief and trust, Umayyah tortured him in the most terrible way. For days on end, in the heat of midday, beneath the sun's burning rays, so hot that even walking was impossible he laid the defiant and brave Bilāl, stripped naked, on the burning stones of Mecca and put big rocks on his body. Again and again he insisted that Bilāl reject Islam, otherwise he would be left on the scorching sand until he dies. Many times during the torture Bilāl heard the names of the idols 'Lāt' and 'Manāt' from Umayyah who ordered Bilāl to pray

to these two famous idols and to reject the new dīn of Islam. But Bilāl remained defiant, never showing the slightest sign of any weakening of his *imān* and he accompanied his answers to the words of the cruel idol-worshippers with a painful smile and several times called out '*aḥad*', '*aḥad*'!! "He is the only God of the sky and the earth and the sun and the sea. We believe only in Him and we do not believe in your magic idols at all". After several days, since Umayyah realized how defiant and invincible Bilāl was and how determined he was not to reject his *dīn*, he

tried even crueller methods and tortured him in a more terrible and agonizing way than before.

One day Umayyah threw a smelly and d'irty cow-skin over him and imprisoned him under it for many minutes, until Bilāl was on the point of suffocating! But the brave Bilāl in spite of all these tortures did not reject his dīn and by his unshakeable belief he made the idol-worshippers hear his cry of *tawḥīd*: 'aḥad', 'aḥad'. Although all the Messenger's close friends had the same resistance and devotion to their *dīn*, the



majority of the Meccan people were surprised at Bilāl's boldness. Similarly, a certain man of wisdom who had become a Christian was also surprised at this resistance, for compared to his own power of resistance, he saw a great distance between Bilāl and himself.

One day he (the Christian) exclaimed angrily to Umayyah: "The resistance of this Abyssinian black man attracts me; his devotion and his *Īman* for the dīn of *tawḥīd* unparalleled." His praise of Bilāl was so great that he said to Umayyah: "This man Bilāl is so firm in his faith that

if he were to die *shahīd* in this belief, I myself would make his tomb a shrine and go to visit it out of respect for his grave".

This is how Bilāl's resistance became renowned. Other followers of the Prophet were not safe from torture and abuse. Some of them were made to wear armour and were put in the burning sunshine until the armour became scorching-hot and their bodies began to burn. And sometimes they were placed in deep wells whose entrance was blocked until they had almost drowned.

It was during this time too, that they

fastened a rope around Bilāl's neck and made him run over mountainous country full of rocks and boulders, so that this determined Muslim might reject his dīn and honour the idols. To this black Muslim these difficult days seemed to last for years. This Muslim, who believed in Allāh and the final *dīn*, the last Prophet and the last revealed book had been so seriously injured by the torture that they talked about taking him from Mecca to Medina, but it was at this moment that news reached them from the slave of Abu Bakr which changed Bilāl's situation. Abu Bakr had bought Bilāl and had set him

free; but Abu Bakr expected something in return for this service to Bilāl.

When Bilāl was released he again joined the company of the holy Prophet (s.a.w.a.) . Suddenly a battle took place between the Muslims and the *kuffār* (polytheists) which was called the battle of Badr. It was happened that Umayyah and his son were made captive by the Muslims in this battle. There were some people among the Muslims who did not want them to be killed. Bilāl was informed that his former cruel master and his son had been captured. When

Bilāl saw them the memory of the torture returned and without stopping to reflect shouted: "O my Muslim brothers! Umayyah is from the *kuffār* and is a leader of the idols worshippers. He is one of those who is establishing *shirk*. He should not be alive, he is an enemy of Islam. The people were so affected by his words that they gave Umayyah and his son to him to be killed and this he did.

By having him killed he thus destroyed one of the barriers in the way of the spread of Islam. Bilāl had always wished to be able to live in Mecca freely. Many times he had said : "Is it possible a

day will come when I will be able to live in Mecca among the perfumes of the fine flowers? Is it possible that I will be able to drink from the water of Majannah in Mecca."

The love for the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) in the heart of this black Abyssinian was endless. One day while the Prophet was sitting among his companions, Bilāl suddenly entered. The Prophet with beautiful eloquence said : "If we should want to take one particular person as the shining example of good behaviour and *adab* then you would be the clear and

obvious example. Gradually he became famous amongst the Muslims. One of the angels called Jibrīl (Gabriel) revealed and taught the *adhān* to the Prophet. He called Bilāl and taught the *adhān* to him and ordered him to call the *adhān* for *ṣalāt* in his loud, attractive voice and so for the first time this black Abyssinian, who was no longer a slave, called the *adhān* as the first *mu'adhdhin*.

In the dīn of Islam the voice of the *adhān* calls the Muslims to prayer. The holy Prophet told the Muslims, Bilāl is a punctual man, do your *ṣalāt* with him and

break your fast with his *adhān*. After the victory of Mecca the Muslims entered and began to break down the idols and take them out of the Ka‘bah. The Prophet ordered Bilāl to go upon the roof of the Ka‘bah and call the *adhān*. This was the first time that the calling of the *adhān* was heard at the House of Allāh. The sound of the *adhān* spread around Mecca and both children and men trembled as they heard this sound.

As Bilāl pronounced the 'sh' like 's' when he called the *adhān* he said 'as-had' instead of 'ashhad' but the Prophet

always used to say that the 's' of Bilāl in the eyes of Allāh is '*sh*'. In the battle of Khaybar Bilāl caused one of the daughters of an enemy to pass by the side of the corpses of her people; the girl was very much disturbed. For the first time the Prophet became very angry with Bilāl and spoke sharply to him: "Is there no mercy in you? You cause the captive to pass by the side of the corpses of her people!"

Finally the light of Islam, the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) closed his eyes for the last time on earth; the people then became two

groups. The first group accepted the caliphate of Abu Bakr and the other declared it was illegal. Bilāl's devotion to the Prophet was such that he did not call the *adhān* from then on. Abu Bakr expected Bilāl to be his *mu'adhdhin* as he had been the Prophet's. Since he did not accept, 'Umar met Bilāl and told him : "You should not stop calling the *adhān* for Abu Bakr because it was he who released you." Bilāl answered him : "If he has released me for Allāh's sake he will be rewarded by Allāh, but if he has released me to make me his slave I am not prepared to give him this satisfaction.

How could I obey a caliph whom the Prophet has not chosen? How could I be satisfied with another caliph?" And thus 'Umar became angry and ordered him to leave Medina. From then on the followers of Abu Bakr put pressure on him but he told Abu Bakr : "I will not call the *adhān* for anybody after the Prophet of Allāh."

The pressure did not end, until one day of *Jum'ah* (Friday) when Abu Bakr was sitting up on the *minbar* Bilāl suddenly shouted: "O Abu Bakr, have you released me for the sake of Allāh or for yourself?" Abu Bakr answered : "For

Allāh". Bilāl said : "So in that case allow me to leave Mecca for *jihād!*" Pleased with what had happened he then left Medina for Syria, saying aloud to himself: "It is Allāh, not Abu Bakr who has saved me from the *kuffār*. If Allāh had not saved me, these wild animals would have torn me to pieces". And thus it happened as Imām aṣ-Ṣādiq (a.s.) has said: "When the *mu'adhdhin* was changed, a part of the *adhān* was omitted (*Ḥayya 'alā khayri 'l 'amal* — come to the best of actions)." Some time after the death of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.), the dear daughter of the Prophet asked Bilāl to

call the *adhān* once more in memory of her father. Bail accepted and when he began to call the *adhān* from the roof of the building the people trembled and wept bitterly at this familiar sound. The *adhān* had not yet ended when someone brought news to him to stop calling *adhān*. He did not call the rest of the *adhān*, because the daughter of the Prophet had fainted.

The pressure of his opponents forced him to go to Syria and there he stayed as a guardian of *Dāru 'l -Islām* . One night he dreamt he saw the Prophet who told him:

"You do us wrong; it is several years that you have forgotten to visit our family." When Bilāl woke up, he decided to set out and travel to Medina. When he reached Medina he went quickly to visit the tomb of the Prophet. He was crying beside the Prophet's grave when he saw the children of Ali (a.s.) whom he embraced and kissed.

Although he had decided not to call the Whim again he once more began the *adhān* in memory of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.).

The people heard him and their bodies trembled. All the people

remembered the Prophet when the words "I witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allāh" were being called. All the men and the women came out of their houses and wept bitterly.

During the illegal caliphate of ‘Umar, Bilāl lived in Syria. At that time a man called Khalid was the commander of the Islamic army in Syria. For a long time Damascus was surrounded by the Islamic army. When some bad reports of Khalid reached ‘Umar, the caliph wrote a letter to Khalid's deputy — ‘Ubaydah in which he informed him of Khalid's dismissal as commander and chose `Ubaydah in his

place. But `Ubaydah was afraid of reading this letter to him! As no news reached the caliph he became worried and wrote another letter which he ordered `Ubaydah to arrest Khalid and to fasten his hands and feet with his own turban and then to try him. But `Ubaydah was frightened this time too. As Bilāl had found out about the affair he bravely decided to read the letter out loud to the people. After reading the letter to them, he fastened with his turban the hands and feet of that powerful man (who was the son of a renowned philosopher) and tried him in a military court. All the people remembered him for

his bravery : an Abyssinian freed-slave had questioned the greatest commander of the army even as an old man, he still did the most difficult work and he still guarded the frontiers of *Daru 'l-Islam*.

Finally Bilāl, the *mu'adhdhin* of the Prophet (s.a.w.a.) died in the twentieth year after *hijrah* in Syria and was buried in a place called Babu 'ş-Şaghīr in Damascus. And thus one of the greatest men in the history of Islam passed away and began the path to the garden. May Allāh bless him.

