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18) The Sahabah And The Ahl Al-Bayt: Hadith Al-Hawdh (Part 2)

As expected, our 'ulama from the Ahl al-Sunnah have offered various explanations for Hadith al-Hawdh, some of them deliberately aimed at saving certain famous Sahabah. Al-Hafiz (d. 852 H), for instance, states:

Al-Khattabi said: "None of the Sahabah ever apostatized. It was only a group from the Bedouin Arabs, among those who had no help in the religion. Therefore, this does not constitute a blemish on the well-known Sahabah; and his statement usayhabi ("my Sahabah") with tasghir points to their small number.1

Imam al-Mubarakfuri (d. 1282 H) also submits:

Al-Qadhi said: "He intended by them those who apostatized among the Bedouin Arabs who had accepted Islam during his lifetime, like the companions of Musaylamah and al-Aswad and their likes."2

He further adds concerning the ahadith:

.... والثانى أن المراد من كان في زمن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ثم ارتد بعده

Al-Nawawi said: "This is part of what the scholars dispute about its meaning, submitting various opinions:

One of them is that those intended were the hypocrites and apostates....

The second opinion is that those intended were those who lived during the lifetime of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and then apostatized after him....

The third opinion is that those intended are the major sinners who die upon al-tawhid (i.e. as true Muslims) and the heretics whose heresy does not take them out of Islam."3

Therefore, the various Sunni explanations of the ahadith can be summarized in this manner:

The "Sahabah" mentioned in the reports were the Bedouin Arabs who renounced Islam during the rule of Abu Bakr. None of the Muhajirun, Ansar or other major Sahabah were involved or included.

Or, rather, those "Sahabah" were the hypocrites and apostates during the lifetime of the Prophet (and perhaps beyond).

Or, those "Sahabah" are actually the "major sinners" and minor heretics of all times.

The affected "Sahabah" were "few" because the Messenger, sallallahu 'alaihi wa alihi, in some ahadith, called them usayhabi with tasghir.

However, looking at the actual ahadith, one must conclude that none of the Sunni interpretations is accurate. For instance, the reports identify the Sahabah meant as those "who kept me company and saw me" and "I will recognize them and they will recognize me". This rules out the claim that the "Sahabah" in the riwayat are all major sinners and minor heretics.

None of such people in our times, for example, ever saw the Prophet or kept him company! Yet, those descriptions do not match the Bedouin Arabs either. They were nomadic people, who wandered in the desert, round about the city of al-Madinah. Some of them might have seen the Messenger of Allah. But, they certainly were not keeping him company in the city and elsewhere. In fact, the Qur'an distinguishes between them and the people of Madinah:

وممن حولكم من الأعراب منافقون ومن أهل المدينة

And among the Bedouin Arabs round about you, some are hypocrites, and so are some among the people of al-Madinah.4

And:

It was not becoming of the people of al-Madinah and the Bedouin Arabs round about them to remain behind the Messenger of Allah and to prefer their own lives to his life.5

Therefore, the Bedouin Arabs lived outside al-Madinah. So, they were unable to keep company of the Prophet. To do that, they must first settle in the city, which they never did. Moreover, it was impossible for the Messenger to have personally known many of them. They lived far away from him. It was even possible that he never, for once, set his eyes on a lot of them.

Yet, the ahadith are clear that he will recognize the affected Sahabah in the Hereafter!

The bottom-line is that the Sahabah who will be driven into Hellfire for their "innovations" were those who lived with the Rasul in al-Madinah, kept him company, and were known personally to him.

Part of what supports our position are these words of Umm al-Muminin 'Aishah:

I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, saying while he was in front of his Sahabah: "I will be at the Lake-Fount, expecting whosoever from amongst you will meet me."

He was addressing his Sahabah. By default, this took place in al-Madinah, as there is nothing to suggest otherwise. Then, he declared that those who will be driven away from the Lake-Fount were from amongst those same Sahabah "in front of" him. Moreover, al-Bukhari (d. 256 H) documents for us the unmistakable interpretation of a senior Sahabi:

حدثني أحمد بن إشكاب حدثنا محمد بن فضيل عن العلاء بن المسيب عن أبيه قال: لقيت البراء بن عازب رضي الله عنهما فقلت طوبى لك صحبت النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم وبايعته تحت الشجرة فقال يا ابن أخي إنك لا تدري ما أحدثنا بعده

Ahmad b. Ishkab – Muhammad b. Fudhayl – al-'Ala b. al-Musayyab – his father (al-Musayyab):

I met al-Bara b. 'Azib, may Allah be pleased with them both, and I said, "Congratulations to you! You kept company of the Prophet, peace be upon him, and gave him ba'yah under the Tree". As a result of this, he replied, "O son of my brother, you do not know what WE HAVE INNOVATED after him."6

This is important. It confirms that those Sahabah who kept company of the Messenger of Allah and gave him ba'yah under the Tree became innovators after him. The language of al-Bara was general. This shows that the innovations were very widespread among this category of Sahabah; and they were primarily Muhajirun and Ansar! This however does not rule out the fact that some of them also never deviated from the Qur'an and Sunnah.

So, the argument that the "Sahabah" in the Hadith al–Hawdh refers to the Bedouin Arabs or to anyone in the post–Sahabah era simply cannot hold. The innovators were from the inhabitants of al–Madinah and so were able to keep company of the Prophet, and many of them also gave him ba'yah under the Tree of al–Hudaybiyyah. They were people who saw him, and were amongst the very Sahabah he was addressing with the ahadith during his lifetime. A key point in the reports is highlighted in this riwayah of Abu Sa'id al–Khudri:

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "So, I will say, 'My Sahabah! My Sahabah!' It will be said, 'You do not know what they INNOVATED after you.' Then I will say, 'Woe, woe to WHOEVER CHANGED after me.'"7

These Sahabah were upon the upright religion throughout the lifetime of the Messenger, but only "changed" after his death. This indicates that they could not have been the hypocrites – who were never upon al–Haqq, to begin with. This theme prevails throughout the riwayat; and emphasis is laid upon the fact that these Sahabah will be in Hellfire solely for what they innovated after the Prophet.

Their innovations constituted apostasy from Islam, as well. Certainly, some bid'ahs are of such seriousness. In order to apostatize, one must first be upon the true religion. The fact that these Sahabah became apostates through their bid'ahs after the Messenger shows clearly that they were within Islam before then. This obviously was not the condition of the hypocrites.

Al-Khattabi attempts to downplay the significance of these revelations about the Sahabah:

his statement usayhabi ("my Sahabah") with tasghir points to their small number

To him, these heretical "Sahabah" – whom he incorrectly identifies as Bedouin Arabs – were only few in number. His proof is that the Messenger, in some ahadith, called them usayhabi, which is truly a reference to a small number of Sahabah. What al-Khattabi fails to mention, however, is that the Prophet has also called them ashabi (أقوام) in most of the ahadith, as well as aqwam (أقوام), the plural of qawm. Both ashabi (أصحابي) and aqwam (أقوام) are terms that can refer to very large numbers of people. In fact, aqwam itself could mean entire "nations" or "races".9

The most logical explanation for these different terminologies is that the apostate Sahabah will be coming to the Messenger of the Lord in groups of various sizes – some very small, some very big. This equally justifies why the word aqwam (أقوام) [groups] has been used in some riwayat. As for the small groups, the Prophet will call them usayhabi; and he will identify the large groups as ashabi. Imam al-Bukhari documents a report of Abu Hurayrah, which gives additional strength to our submissions:

حدثني إبراهيم بن المنذر الحزامي حدثنا محمد بن فليح حدثنا أبي قال حدثني هلال عن عطاء بن يسار عن أبي هريرة: عن النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم قال بينا أنا نائم إذا زمرة حتى إذا عرفتهم خرج رجل من بيني وبينهم فقال هلم فقلت أين؟ قال إلى النار والله قلت وما شأنهم؟ قال إنهم ارتدوا بعدك على أدبارهم القهقرى .ثم إذا زمرة حتى إذا عرفتهم خرج رجل من بيني وينهم فقال هلم قلت أين؟ قال إلى النار والله قلت ما شأنهم؟ قال إنهم ارتدوا بعدك على أدبارهم القهقرى فلا أراه يخلصمنهم إلا مثل همل النعم

Ibrahim b. al-Mundhir al-Huzami - Muhammad b. Fulayh - my father - Hilal - 'Ata b. Yasar - Abu Hurayrah:

In my dream, a group of persons (zumrah) came. Once I recognized them, a man came between me and them, saying (to them), "Let's go". I said, "To where?" He replied, "To Hellfire, I swear by Allah!" I asked, "What is their offence?" He said, "They apostatized after you!"

Then, another group came, and when I recognized them, a man came between me and them, saying (to them), "Let's go". I said, "To where?" He replied, "To Hellfire, I swear by Allah!" I asked, "What is their offence?" He said, "They apostatized after you."

I do not see any of them escaping except very few. 10

Commenting on the word used in the hadith, Dr. al-Bagha writes:

زمرة (حماعة(

(Zumrah) means a jama'ah. 11

Meanwhile, a jama'ah can refer to any group of two people or more. In fact, a group of millions is still only a jama'ah! For instance, the entire worldwide Sunni population of more than one billion people are a

single jama'ah. This hadith mentions two such groups. However, the use of aqwam (أقوام) elsewhere confirms that they were more than two. The above report has only cut short the long story. In any case, the terms adopted by the Messenger of Allah suggest that the overall numbers of apostate Sahabah were great. This seems to be the message of this part of the hadith too:

I do not see any of them escaping except very few.

Was the Prophet saying "I did not see any of the apostates escaping except a few"? Of course, he never could have said or meant that. Apostates never escape Hellfire in the Hereafter. They enter it inescapably and burn therein eternally 12. The most obvious meaning of the phrase is that only very few from each group (zumrah, qawm) will be free.

Most of each group of Sahabah – whom he knew personally – that will come to the Lake–Fount will be thrown into Hellfire for blasphemous heresies; and only a tiny number of each set will be acquitted. This, of course, confirms absolutely that the overwhelming majority of the Sahabah became first–grade innovators after the death of the Messenger.

- 1. Shihab al-Din Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah li al-Taba'ah wa al-Nashr; 2nd edition), vol. 11, p. 333
- 2. Abu al-'Ala Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Rahman b. 'Abd al-Rahim al-Mubarakfuri, Tuhfat al-Ahwazi bi Sharh Jami' al-Tirmidhi (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1410 H), vol. 9, p. 6
- 3. Ibid, vol. 7, p. 93
- 4. Qur'an 9:101
- 5. Qur'an 9:120
- 6. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Isma'il b. Ibrahim b. Mughirah al-Bukhari al-Ju'fi, al-Jami' al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir; 3rd edition, 1407 H) [annotator: Dr. Mustafa Dib al-Bagha], vol. 4, p. 1529, # 3937
- 7. Abu 'Abd Allah Ahmad b. Hanbal al-Shaybani, Musnad (Cairo: Muasassat Qurtubah) [annotator: Shu'ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 3, p. 28, # 11236
- 8. See Qur'an 4:142, 9:67-68, and 48:6
- 9. Hans Wehr, A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca, New York: Spoken Languages Services; 3rd edition, 1976 CE), p. 800; see also Dr. Rohi Baalbaki, al-Mawrid: A Modern Arabic-English Dictionary (Beirut: Dar al-'Ilm li al-Malayin; 7th edition, 1995 CE), p. 877
- 10. Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. Isma'il b. Ibrahim b. Mughirah al-Bukhari al-Ju'fi, al-Jami' al-Sahih al-Mukhtasar (Beirut: Dar Ibn Kathir; 3rd edition, 1407 H) [annotator: Dr. Mustafa Dib al-Bagha], vol. 5, p. 2407, # 6215
- **11.** Ibid
- 12. See Qur'an 2:39, 4:168-169 and 64:10

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