

Bilʿal Habash, the Role Model of Islamic Resistance

The pseudonym of Bilʿal ibn Ribʿh, the Ethiopian [Habash¹], is Abū ‘Abd Allāh. He was one of the slaves who lived in Mecca at the time of Prophet Muhammad’s (S) commencement of the prophetic mission. His mother’s name was Hamqamah and he used to live in the village of the tribe of Banū Jumh.

Bilʿal, who had responded affirmatively to the divine call of Islam, used to resist the tortures of the infidels of Mecca resiliently and withstand the torments of the polytheists with constancy. According to popular belief, Bilʿal, who was Umayyah ibn Khalaf’s slave, came from that same tribe and used to live in Umayyah’s house.

Umayyah used to bring Bilʿal out during the afternoon on very hot days and make him lie down on the hot pebbles of Mecca. After that, he would put a big hot stone on Bilʿal’s chest. Then, he would say, “I swear by God that you will stay in this state until you die, unless you renounce the God of Muhammad (S) and worship the idols Lot and ‘Uzz.” But whenever this ‘model’ of resistance and perseverance was under this kind of torture, he always used to defiantly shout out, ‘One! One!’ He implied that his God, Allah, is one, the One and Only God.

One day, Warqah ibn Nawfil, the cousin of Khadijah (the Noble Prophet’s (S) honorable wife), was passing by and saw Bilʿal undergoing this same kind of torture. Bilʿal was defiantly shouting out as usual, ‘One! One!’ Warqah also said, ‘One! One!’ Then, he turned towards Umayyah and the others around him and said, “I swear upon Allah that if Bilʿal dies while undergoing this inhuman torture, I will be one of those who will consider his grave a holy place of pilgrimage and I will start seeking divine gifts and graces therefrom.”

Some historians have narrated that the man who used to torture Bilʿal was Abū Jahl. Bilʿal continued to live under these unbearably difficult and hard conditions, until the Noble Prophet (S) bought him and then set him free from servitude for the sake and pleasure of Allah!

They say that one day the Noble Prophet (S) said to Abū Bakr, “If I had something with which to buy Bilāl, I would do so.” Upon hearing this, Abū Bakr went to ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib and recounted the Prophet’s (S) words to him. ‘Abbās, the Prophet’s (S) uncle, prepared the ground for Bilāl’s freedom by buying him from his owner, the woman belonging to the tribe of Banū Jumh.

Bilāl was the Prophet’s (S) Caller of *Adhān* [*mu’adhhdhin*]. That is why after the Prophet’s (S) sad demise, he always held Imām ‘Alī (‘a) in high esteem and never paid allegiance to any one else save ‘Alī ibn Abū Tālib (‘a). He said, “I will never pay allegiance to anyone who was not named or suggested by Allah’s Prophet (S). Up to the day of resurrection, I will always owe my allegiance to only him who was introduced by Allah’s Prophet.” ‘Umar told him, “Then, you do not have any right to stay in these territories.” Upon hearing these words, Bilāl and a group of other people left Medina and went to Syria where he died in 20 AH.

Bilāl was a prolific youth who patiently bore all the hardships that came his way but did not surrender his faith. He endured all trials and resisted all oppression up to the last moments of his life.

Bilāl was one of the Noble Prophet’s (S) loyal and faithful companions [*sahābah*] who participated in all the wars that Allah’s Prophet (S) fought.²

¹. Habashah is the ancient name of Ethiopia. Anyone who originates from Ethiopia is called Habashī, like Bilāl Habashī [Bilāl, the Ethiopian]. [trans.]

². Al-Isbah, vol. 1, p. 165; A’yūn al-Shāh, vol. 3, p. 601; Ibn Sa’d, Tabaqāt, vol. 3, p. 174; Sifat al-Safwah, vol. 1, p. 171. Hilyat al-Awliyā’, vol. 1, p. 147; Tārīkh al-Khamīs, vol. 2, p. 245; Al-Sahāh min Sūrat al-Nabī al-A’zam, vol. 2, p. 34; Tārīkh Ya’qūbī, vol. 2, p. 42; Ibn Kathīr, Al-Sūrat al-Nabawiyah, vol. 2, p. 336; Hayāt al-Sahābah, vol. 2, p. 132; Ibn Hishām, Al-Sūrat al-Nabawiyah, vol. 1, p. 339; Usd al-Ghābah, vol. 1, p. 206; Safīnah al-Bihār, vol. 1, p. 104; Bihār al-Anwār, vol. 22, p. 264; Wafī’ al-Wafī, vol. 2, p. 477; Ibn Abī al-Hadīd, Sharh Nahj al-Balāghah, vol. 17, p. 283.

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