

The Companions of the Prophet as seen by the Shi'a and the Sunnis

One of the most important studies which I consider to be the cornerstone for all the studies that lead to the truth is the research into the life of the Companions, their affairs, their deeds and their beliefs; because they were the foundations of everything, and from them we took the principles of our religion, and they enlightened our darkness, so that we can see the rules of Allah. Many Muslim scholars—convinced of the above – embarked on the study of the lives and deeds of the Companions, among them: "Usd al-Ghabah fi Tamyeez al-Sahabah", and "al-Isabah fi Maarifat al-Sahabah", and "Mizan al-I'tidal" and various other books which look critically and analytically at the lives of the Companions, but all from the point of view of the Sunnis.

There is a slight problem here, and that is that most of the early scholars wrote in the way which suited the Umayyad and Abbasid rulers who were well known for their opposition to Ahl al-Bayt and all their followers. Therefore, it is not fair to depend on their works alone without reference to the works of the other Muslim scholars who were persecuted and ultimately killed by these governments simply because they were followers of Ahl al-Bayt and the cause behind the revolutions against the oppressive and deviant authorities.

The main problem with all that was the Companions themselves, for they disagreed about the wish of the Messenger of Allah (saw) to write them a document which would help them to remain on the right path until the Day of Judgment. This disagreement deprived the Islamic nation of a unique virtue, and has thrown it into darkness until it was divided and plagued with internal quarrels and finally ended up as a spent force.

It was they who disagreed on the issue of the Caliphate (the successorship of the Prophet), and were divided between a ruling and an opposing party, thus dividing the nation into the followers of 'Ali and the followers of Muawiyah. It was they who differed in the interpretations of the Book of Allah and the sayings of His Messenger, which led to the creation of the various creeds, groups and subgroups; and from them came many scholars of scholastic theology and schools of thoughts and philosophies inspired

by political ambitions with one aim in mind and that was to obtain power.

The Muslims would not have been divided and in disagreement had it not been for the Companions, for every disagreement that has been created in the past, or is being created at the present time is due to their disagreement about the Companions. There is one God, one Qur'an, one Messenger and one Qiblah, and they all agree on that, but the disagreement among the Companions started on the first day after the death of the Messenger (saw), in the Saqifah (house) of Bani Saidah, and has continued up to the present day, and will continue for as long as Allah wills it.

Through my discussions with the Shiite scholars, I discovered that, in their views, the Companions were divided into three categories:

The first category included the good Companions who knew Allah and His Messenger truly well, and they acclaimed him (the Messenger) to the last moments of their lives. They were truly his friends by words and deeds, and they never abandoned him, but rather stood their ground with him. Allah – the most High – praised them in many places in His Holy Book, and the Messenger of Allah (saw) also praised them in many places. This group of Companions are mentioned by the Shi'a with reverence and respect, they are also mentioned by the Sunnis with the same reverence and respect.

The second category were the Companions who embraced Islam and followed the Messenger of Allah (saw) either through choice or through fear, and they always showed their gratitude to the Messenger of Allah (saw) for their Islam. However, they hurt the Messenger of Allah (saw) on a few occasions, and did not always follow his orders, in fact they often challenged him and challenged the clear text with their points of view, until Allah, through the Holy Qur'an, had to intervene by rebuking them or threatening them. Allah exposed them in many Qur'anic verses, also the Messenger of Allah (saw) warned them in many of his sayings. The Shi'a mention this group of Companions only because of their deeds, and without respect or reverence.

The third type of Companions were the hypocrites who accompanied the Messenger of Allah (saw) to deceive him. They pretended to be Muslims but inside themselves they were bent on blasphemy and on deceiving Islam and the Muslims as a whole. Allah has revealed a complete Surah in the Qur'an about them, and mentioned them in many other places, and promised them the lowest level in Hell. Also the Messenger of Allah (saw) mentioned them and issued warnings about them, and even informed some of his close friends about their names and characteristics. The Shi'a and the Sunnis agree in cursing this group of Companions and have nothing to do with them.

There was a special group of Companions who distinguished themselves from the others by being relatives of the Prophet (saw), in addition to having possessed ethical and spiritual virtues and personal distinctions from Allah and His Messenger that no one else was honored with. These were Ahl al-Bayt (the Prophet's Family) whom Allah cleansed and purified, and ordered us to pray for them in the same way as he ordered us to pray for His Messenger.

He made it obligatory for us to pay them one fifth of our income, and that every Muslim must love them as a reward for the Muhammadan Message. They are our leaders and we must obey them; and they are people firmly rooted in knowledge who know the interpretation of the Holy Qur'an and they know the decisive verses of it, as well as those verses which are allegorical.

They are the people of al-Dhikr whom the Messenger of Allah equated with the Holy Qur'an in his saying "the two weighty things" (al-Thaqalayn), and ordered us to adhere to them¹, He equated them to Noah's Ark: whoever joined it was saved, and whoever left it drowned². The Companions knew the position of Ahl al-Bayt and revered them and respected them. The Shi'a follow them and put them above any of the Companions, and to support that they have many clear texts as proofs.

The Sunnis respect and revere the Companions but do not accept the above classification and do not believe that some of the Companions were hypocrites; rather, they see the Companions as being the best people after the Messenger of Allah. If they classify the Companions then it would be according to their seniority and their merits and their services to Islam. They put the Rightly Guided Caliphs in the first class, then the first six of the ten who were promised with heaven, according to them. Therefore when they pray for the Prophet (saw) and his household they attach with them all the Companions without exception.

This is what I know from the Sunni scholars, and that is what I heard from the Shi'i scholars regarding the classification of the Companions; and that is what made me start my detailed study with the issue of the Companions. I promised my God – if He led me on the right path – to rid myself from emotional bias and to be neutral and objective and to listen to what the two sides said, then to follow what was best, basing my conclusions on two premises:

1. A sound and a logical premise: that is to say that I would only depend upon what everybody is in agreement with, regarding the commentary on the Book of Allah, and the correct parts of the honorable Sunnah of the Prophet.
2. The mind: for it is the greatest gift that Allah has given to human beings, and through it He honored them and distinguished them from the rest of creation. Thus, when Allah protests about what His worshippers do, He asks them to use their minds in the best possible way, and He says: Do they not understand? Do they not comprehend? Do they not see? etc."

Let my Islam primarily be the belief in Allah, His angels, His Books and His messengers; and that Muhammad is His servant and His Messenger; and that the Religion of Allah is Islam; and that I will never depend on any of the Companions, regardless of his relation to the Messenger or his position, for I am neither Umayyad nor Abbasid nor Fatimid, and I am neither Sunni nor Shi'i, and I have no enmity towards Abu Bakr or Umar or Uthman or 'Ali or even Wahshi, the killer of our master al-Hamzah, as long as he became a Muslim, and the Messenger of Allah forgave him. Since I had forced myself into this study in order to reach the truth, and since I had rid myself, sincerely, from all my previous beliefs, I

decided to start, with the blessing of Allah, by considering the attitudes of the Companions.

[1.](#) Kanz al Ummal, vol 1 p 44, Ahmed's Musnad, vol 5 p 182

[2.](#) al Mustadrak, al Hakim (al Dhahabi's abridged), vol 3 p 151, Al Sawaiq al Muhriqah, Ibn Hajar, p 184, 234

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