



The Story of
Bilal
the Abyssinian





In the Name of Allah,
the Most Gracious,
the Most Merciful



◆ Introduction

Bilal was a mere slave before his conversion to Islam. After his conversion, he became a “master” in Islam, and was honored in Islam to be chosen to regularly make the Adthan (call to prayer).

Whenever Umar mentioned Abu Bakr he would say, “Abu Bakr is our master and the emancipator of our master.” (Bukhari) Umar gave the title “Our

Master” to Bilal who was very dark in complexion, had a slender build, was very tall, thick-haired, and had a sparse beard, as described by the narrators. Whenever he was praised, he would lower his head and weep, saying, “Indeed, I am an Abyssinian. Yesterday, I was only a slave!”

● **So, who is this Abyssinian who was yesterday only a slave?**

He was Bilal, son of Rabah, the one who gave the call to prayer. Out of every ten Muslims, from the beginning of Islam until today and until Allah wills, we will meet seven, at least, who know Bilal. That is, there are hundreds of millions of people throughout the centuries and generations who knew Bilal, remember his name and know his role just as they know the two greatest

Caliphs in Islam, Abu Bakr and Umar!

If one was to ask a child in his first years of primary school about Bilal, he would answer, “He was the one who called the Adthan.” He was the slave whose master would torture him with hot burning stones, and he, Bilal, would chant, “God is One”, “God is One.”





◆ Before Islam

Bilal would tend to his master's sheep and livestock for a handful of dates. Had it not been for Islam, it would have been his fate to remain a slave, wandering among the crowd until death swept him off the earth. However, his faith proved to be true, and the magnificence of the religion which he believed in gave him, during his lifetime and in history, an elevated place among the great and noble men of Islam. Indeed, many

human beings of distinction, prestige, or wealth have not obtained even one-tenth of the immortality which Bilal, the Abyssinian, gained. Indeed, the black color of his complexion, his modest lineage, and his contemptible position among people as a slave did not deprive him when he chose to embrace Islam, of occupying the high place which his truthfulness, certainty, purity, and self-sacrifice qualified him for.

The people of Makkah thought that a slave like Bilal would neither have power over anything, nor become anything. But he went beyond all expectations and possessed great faith that no one like him could possess! He was an Abyssinian of African ethnicity. His mother was, as well, from Abyssinia. Her name was Hamaama, and she was a slave to Umayyah B. Khalaf Al-Jumahi in Makkah.



◆ Becoming Muslim

Yet eventually, the news of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ message reached the ears of Bilal. In fact, the Prophet ﷺ was the buzz of Makkah; people from every walk of life were talking about him. It so happened that Bilal was doing some work, and his master, along with other noblemen of Quraish, were sitting nearby. They were talking about the Prophet and his Message. His own master, Umayyah Bin Khalaf spoke quite harshly

about the Prophet ﷺ and his words were usually filled with hatred, rage, and malice! As Bilal listened to them, he found out about the characteristics of Islam. He also heard from them that Muhammad was a noble man, trustworthy and very loyal. They said to one another, “Muhammad was never a liar, magician, or insane, but we have to describe him this way so that people will abandon his religion.” Bilal heard them whispering about the reasons which caused them to challenge and antagonize him. The reasons were as follows:

First was their allegiance to the religion of their ancestors.

Second was their fear over the loss of the glory of the Quraish. This religious status was bestowed upon them because they were a center of idol worship and the caretakers

of the pilgrimage in the whole of the Arabian Peninsula;

Third was their envy of the tribe of Bani Hashim; that anyone from among them would claim to be a prophet or messenger.

After hearing so much about the religion of Islam, Bilal accepted it and converted to Islam. It did not take long before the news of his embracing Islam was spread. It was a shock to the chiefs of Bani Jumah (the tribe who owned Bilal).

Umayyah Ibn Khalaf, the owner of Bilal, considered it a great shame and disgrace, but he said mockingly: "It does not matter. The only one who will accept Islam is this slave!" However, the direct opposite occurred. Islam spread, and the practice of idolatry in the Arabian Peninsula was brought to an end in less than twenty-five years.



◆ The Harshest Forms of Torture

Bilal honored not only Islam, but all of humanity. He resisted the harshest forms of torture. Allah made him an example of the fact that blackness of skin and slavery would not decry the greatness of the soul if it found its faith and adhered to its Creator. Bilal gave a profound lesson to those during his time and afterwards as well - freedom and supremacy of conscience could

not be bartered either for gold or punishment, even if its quantity was enough to fill the earth.

He was stripped naked and laid on hot coals in order to make him reconsider and denounce his faith, but he refused. He would be taken out in the heat of the day and his body would be dragged on top of the burning stones. A huge stone that took several men to lift would also be placed on his body and chest. This savage torture was repeated every day until the hearts of some of his torturers took pity on him. They told him, "If you speak well of our idols, we will let you free." The Quraish did not want it to be said that they were unable to convince or forcefully bring a slave out of Islam. Even with this, Bilal refused, and he began to repeat his lasting chant: "God is One, God is One!" His torturers shouted at him, imploring him, "Mention the

name of Al-Laat and Al-'Uzza." But he answered, "God is One, God is One!"

So, Bilal remained in his state and was tortured ever more severely. By sunset they tied a rope around his neck and ordered their boys to take him around the mountains and streets of Makkah. Bilal continuously chanted "God is One, God is One!"

When the night fell, they told him, "Tomorrow, you will speak well of our idols and we will leave you alone. We are tired of torturing you, and now the task is so cumbersome that it seems to us that we are the tortured ones." Bilal remained resolute; he shook his head and said, "God is One, God is One!" Umayyah Ibn Khalaf exploded with fury and kicked him. He shouted, "How unlucky I am! What a wretched slave you are! By Al-Laat and Al-'Uzza, I'll make you an example for slaves and

masters.” But Bilal answered with the greatness and certainty of a believer, “God is One, God is One!”

Yet, as they were torturing Bilal, one of the pagans who was present decided to play the role of a sympathizer, and he said: “Take it easy, Umayyah. By Al-Laat, he will not be tortured again. Indeed, Bilal is one of us; his mother is our slave girl. He will not be pleased to talk ill about us or to ridicule us because of his conversion to Islam.” But Bilal gazed at their lying, cunning faces and with a serene calmness that shook them violently, he again chanted “God is One, God is One!” The next day, Bilal was taken out to the open sun and extreme heat. Bilal knew what was to come and he was patient, brave and knew that if he remained in this state, a great reward awaited him in the Hereafter.



◆ Freedom

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq went to them while they were torturing him and shouted at them, “Are you killing a man because he says, ‘Allah is my God!’” Then he shouted at Umayyah ibn Khalaf, “Take more than his price and set him free.” It was as if Umayyah was drowning and had caught a lifeboat. It was to his liking and he was very much pleased when he heard Abu Bakr offering the price of his freedom, since they had

lost all hope that he would ever leave Islam. And as they were merchants, they realized that selling him was more profitable to them than his death.

They sold him to Abu-Bakr and he then emancipated him immediately. Finally, Bilal took his place among free men. When Abu Baker put his arm around Bilal, Umayyah said to him, "Take him, for by Al-Laah and Al-'Uzza, if you had re-fused to buy him except for one ounce of gold, I would have sold him to you." Abu Bakr realized the bitterness of despair and disappointment hidden in those words. It was best not to answer, but because these words had violated the dignity of this man who had become his brother and his equal, he did reply to Umayyah. He said, "By Allah, if you had refused to sell him except for a hundred ounces, I would have paid it."



◆ After the Hijrah

After the Hijrah of the Messenger ﷺ and the Muslims to Al-Madinah, the Messenger enjoined that a call to prayer be made. Who was to be given this honor to call the people to the prayers? It was none other than Bilal, who had called out thirteen years before while he was being tortured, “God is One, God is One!” He was chosen by the Messenger that day to be the first caller to prayer in Islam. With his melodious voice, he filled the hearts with faith and the ears with awe when he called:

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

I bear witness that there is no true god but Allah

I bear witness that there is no true god but Allah

I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah Come to Prayer

Come to Prayer

Come to Success

Come to Success

Allah is the Greatest, Allah is the Greatest

There is no true god but Allah



● The Battle of Badr

Subsequent to this, the Muslims and the polytheists engaged in battle. The Battle of Badr was the first battle that took place between them. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ made the slogan of the Muslims during this momentous confrontation: “God is One, God is One!” In this battle, 70 were killed and 70 were taken as prisoners of war. The noblemen of Quraish were finished off.

Umayyah Ibn Khalaf, who had been Bilal's master, had initially not wanted to go out of Makkah to face the Muslims. So, he did not prepare himself. His friend, Uqbah Ibn Abi Muait, was upset, so he made a point of going to humiliate him while he was sitting amongst his people. He gave him an incense burner and said to him, "O Abu Ali, use this. As it seems that you are one of the women."

Umayyah shouted at him, saying, "May Allah make you and what you came with ugly!" After this he found no way out; he had to go into the battle. Uqbah Ibn Abi Muait had been the greatest supporter of Umayyah throughout the torture of Bilal and other weak Muslims. And on that day, he himself was the one who urged Umayyah to go to the Battle of Badr where he and Uqbah would both die!

It is truly amazing how Allah executes His command.

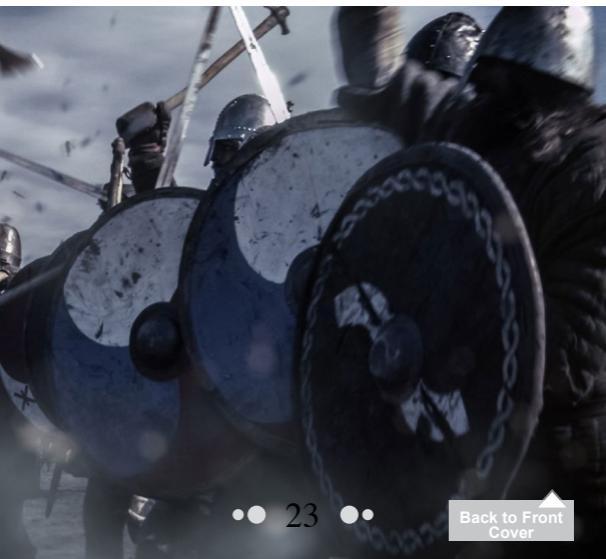
Umayyah reached his demise at the hands of none other than Bilal. When the fighting began between the two sides, and the Muslims began shouting, “God is One, God is One!” The heart of Umayyah sunk! These were the same words his slave used to repeat years before under torture and today it rocked the battlefield from all sides and was the cry of an entire nation of people! Umayyah thought to himself, had Islam spread so quickly amongst the people?

The swords clashed in the battle and the fighting became severe. As the battle neared its end, Umayyah Ibn Khalaf noticed Abdurrahmann Bin Auf, the Companion of the Messenger of Allah. He sought refuge with him and

asked to be his captive, hoping that this would save his life. Abdurrahmann accepted and granted him refuge. He took him and walked with him amidst the battle to the place where the captives were held.

On the way, Bilal noticed him and shouted, “The very head of disbelief, Umayyah Ibn Khalaf! May I not be saved if he is saved!” He lifted his sword to strike Umayyah, but Abdurrahmann Bin Auf shouted to him, “O Bilal, he is my captive!” Bilal thought, a captive while the war is still raging? A captive while his sword is still dripping from the blood of Muslims? This cannot be! Bilal realized that he would not be able to attack Umayyah himself, so he called on his fellow Muslims, “O Ansaar! The head of disbelief, Umayyah Ibn Khalaf! May I not be saved if he is saved!”

A band of Muslims approached and surrounded Umayyah and his son, who was also fighting with the Quraish. Abdurrahmann Bin Auf could not do anything. He could not even protect his armor, which the crowd removed. Bilal gazed long at the body of Umayyah, who fell beneath the smashing swords. Then he hastened away from him shouting, "God is One, God is One!"



I do not think it is our right to examine the virtue of leniency in the case of Bilal during this occasion. If the meeting between Bilal and Umayyah had taken place under any other circumstances, we would have been allowed to ask Bilal to show mercy and leniency, and a man like him in faith and piety would not have withheld it. But they met each other on the battlefield, the swords were gleaming and the killed were falling. He saw him in the arena of battle and fighting. If Umayyah were able to, he would have killed Bilal. It is unfair for one to say to Bilal under these circumstances, “Why did you not forgive him?”



◆ The Conquest of Makkah

The days went by and Makkah was soon conquered. The Messenger ﷺ entered it, at the head of 10,000 Muslims, gratefully and humbly saying, “Allah is the Greatest.” He headed for the sacred masjid (Ka’bah) immediately. It was filled with many idols, each for one day of the year. As the Prophet ﷺ destroyed them, he called out “The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished.”

Ever since that day almost 1500 years ago, there has been no Uzza, no Laat and no Hubal . Man bows down only to worship Allah, the most High. The Messenger ﷺ entered the Ka'bah, accompanied by Bilal. He had hardly entered it when he faced a carved idol representing the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) drawing lots. In anger he said, "May Allah destroy them. Our ancestors never drew lots. Ibrahim was not a Jew or Christian, but he was a true Muslim and was never a polytheist." Then he ordered Bilal to ascend to the top of the Ka'bah to call the Prayer. He called the Adthan. How magnificent was the time, place, and occasion!

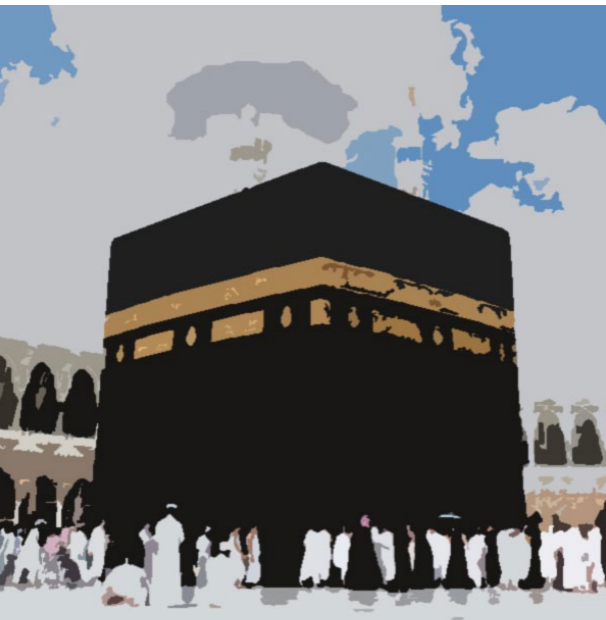
Life in Makkah came to a standstill, and thousands of Muslims stood motionless, repeating in submissiveness the words of the Adthan after Bilal while the

Polytheists were in their homes hardly believing what was happening. The Prophet ﷺ addressed them saying “Go, you are free!” (Ibn Hisham)

Bilal lived with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and witnessed all the Battles with him, calling to Prayer and observing the rites of this great religion that took him out of darkness to light, and from servitude to freedom. With each passing day, Bilal became more beloved to the Prophet ﷺ who described him as “one of the inhabitants of Paradise.”

But Bilal remained just as he was, noble and humble to a fault, always considering himself “the Abyssinian who only yesterday was a slave.” One day, Bilal was proposing to two girls for himself and his brother, so he said to their father, “I am Bilal, and this is my brother. We were two slaves from Abyssinia. We were astray, and Allah

guided us. We were two slaves, and Allah emancipated us. If you agree to us marrying your daughters, all praise is to Allah. If you refuse, then Allah is the Greatest.”



● Leaving Makkah and fighting in the cause of Allah

The Messenger ﷺ passed away and Abu Bakr As-Siddiq took the command of the Muslims after him. Bilal went to the Caliph (Successor) of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and said to him, “O Caliph of the Messenger of Allah, I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ saying, ‘The best deed of a believer is Jihad in the cause of Allah.’” Abu Bakr said to him, “So what do you want, Bilal?” He said: “I want to go in the path of Allah and die in that cause.”

Abu Bakr replied, “And who will call the Adthan for us?” Bilal said, with his eyes overflowing with tears, “I will not call the Adthan for anyone after the Messenger of Allah.” Abu Bakr said, “Stay and make the Adthan for us,

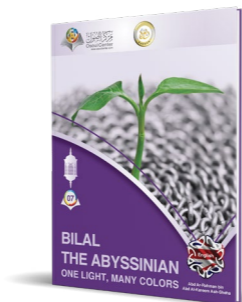
Bilal.” Bilal said, “If you emancipated me to be for you, I will do what you want, but if you emancipated me for Allah, leave me to the One for whom I was emancipated.” Abu Bakr said, “I emancipated you for Allah, Bilal!” He then let him go on his way. The last time he called the Adthan was when the Commander of the Faithful, Umar visited Greater Syria and the Muslims begged him to ask Bilal to call the Adthan for them. They wept as they never did before, and Umar most strongly.

Bilal died in Syria, fighting in the cause of Allah just as he had wanted.

This is an excerpt
of a larger book titled
**“Bilal the Abyssinian One Light,
Many Colors”**

by Abd Ar- Rahman
bin Abd Al-Kareem Ash-Sheha.

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