

MIFTAAH SEMINAR

FROM SHACKLES TO THE MINARET: THE LEGACY OF BILAL RA



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Introduction

- Bilal RA's mother was Hamamah and his father was Rabah. Both were among those who came with Abraha's army of elephants. When Allah SWT sent His punishment upon Abraha and his forces as described in *Surah al-Fil*. Hamamah and Rabah survived. Afterward, they were taken as slaves by **Umayyah ibn Khalaf**.
- The exact year of Bilal's birth is uncertain. Some reports state that he was born three years after the Year of the Elephant, while others suggest five years after, and some even mention ten years after.
 - Despite these differences, all narrations agree that his birth occurred not long after the famous incident of Abraha's army.

Bilal RA Physical Description

- Bilal RA was tall, dark, and dignified, with hazel eyes and a strong presence. Despite being enslaved, he was respected in Mecca for his voice and character.
- Virtues mentioned by the Prophet ﷺ:
 - The Prophet ﷺ said: *"The forerunners are four: I am the forerunner for the Arabs, Suhayb is the forerunner for the Byzantines, Salman is the forerunner for the Persians, and Bilal is the forerunner for the Abyssinians."*
 - The Prophet ﷺ said: *"Jannah yearns for the three individuals: Ali,*

- *Ammar, and Bilal."*
- At the time of the Fajr prayer the Prophet ﷺ asked Bilal, *"Tell me of the best deed you did after embracing Islam, for I heard your footsteps in front of me in Paradise."* Bilal RA replied, *"I did not do anything worth mentioning except that whenever I performed ablution during the day or night, I prayed after that ablution as much as was written for me."*

Conversion to Islam:

- Bilal RA was tending sheep for Umayyah ibn Khalaf when the Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr RA approached. The Prophet ﷺ asked for milk. Bilal RA replied that the animal had little left. The Prophet ﷺ touched the animal, and milk gushed forth. Bilal RA asked: *"Who are you?"* The Prophet ﷺ said: *"I am Muhammad, The Messenger of Allah."* Bilal RA then asked: *"What do you call towards?"* The Prophet ﷺ answered: *"I call towards the Oneness of Allah."* At that moment, Bilal RA accepted Islam.
- Abdullah ibn Omar RA narrates: *"There were seven who first announced their Islam in Mecca; the Prophet ﷺ, Abu Bakr, Ammaar and his mother Sumayya, Suhayb, Miqdad and Bilal."*
 - They were all tortured severely, and most reluctant under duress, except Bilal who remained firm.

Bilal RA's Persecution and Steadfastness

- Bilal RA was dragged through the streets, crushed under boulders and offered wealth to renounce Islam. His only response was: **احد، احد (One, One).**
 - When Omar RA asked why he only said احد, Bilal RA replied: *"If I had known anything else, I would have said it. That is all I knew."*
 - Saying *Ahad* was not merely a statement of belief in Allah SWT. It was a call to empower all believers, a declaration that even in the most trying times, the identity that comes from Allah will never waver.

- There are many people who are in shackles but are free. And many people who are in prison and incarcerated, but there are many of us who walk freely yet are imprisoned by the shackles of this dunya. Being shackled does not mean being physically confined; it means that the decisions of your heart and mind do not come from Allah, but from someone else.
- Abu Bakr RA, known as al-Atiq for freeing slaves, purchased Bilal RA at a high price. When Umayyah mocked him for paying so much, Abu Bakr RA replied: *"If you had bargained with me, I would have paid one hundred 'uqiyyah, for Bilal is worth far more."*

Virtues and Service

- One day the Prophet ﷺ asked Bilal RA: *"What do you do that Allah allowed you to precede me in Jannah?"* In another narration, during the Miraj, the Prophet ﷺ said: *"O Bilal, I saw your footsteps ahead of me in Jannah. What deeds do you perform that Allah has granted you this honor?"* Bilal RA replied: *"I do two things: I have never committed a mistake except that I prayed two rakat asking Allah for forgiveness. And I never broke my wudu except that I renewed it immediately and prayed two rakat."*

Honor Among the Companions

- Sa'd ibn Abi Waqqas RA narrates: *"We were six people sitting with the Prophet ﷺ, considered among the lower end of society. The leaders of Quraysh came and said: "We are ready to accept Islam on one condition: remove these poor companions from your gathering. Hold one gathering for them, and another for us." The Prophet ﷺ did not agree, and Allah SWT revealed:*

وَلَا تَطْرُدِ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ

"Do not drive away those who call upon their Lord morning and evening, seeking His Face..." (Surah al-Anam 6:52)

- Aisha RA said: *"If the Prophet ﷺ had the ability to conceal a verse, it would have been this one, due to its strength."*
- This verse honored Bilal RA and the poor companions, affirming their closeness to the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ further said:

"On the Day of Judgment, Bilal and I will be raised together. He will hold the reins of my Burāq, and he will be with me in the Hereafter."

Migration to Madina

- Bilal RA was among the first to migrate. In Madina, he and Abu Bakr RA fell ill due to the climate. Thinking he might die, Bilal RA recited a couplet longing for Mecca: *"Would that I could spend one night in Mecca, even if I were to perish."* Despite his persecution there, Bilal RA never despised Mecca. When the Prophet ﷺ heard this he made dua:

"O Allah, bless Madina with rizq as You blessed Mecca through the dua of Ibrahim."

- Imam al-Ghazali said: *"Difficulties can raise a person to the highest levels of Jannah, levels that good deeds alone could never reach."*
- Bilal's life shows that **true freedom is faith in Allah SWT**, and steadfastness in hardship brings eternal honor.

The Origin of the Athan

- The Prophet ﷺ asked his companions how the call to prayer should be made. Some suggested using a horn, but the Prophet ﷺ said: *"That is used by other religions,"* Others suggested fire, but he replied: *"That is the practice of fire-worshipper."* Another suggested a bell, but he said: *"That is the practice of Christians."*
 - The matter was left unresolved until **Abdullah ibn Zayd RA** saw a dream in which Jibril AS taught him the words of the athan. He rushed to the Prophet ﷺ and recited them. The Prophet's heart was filled with contentment. At that moment, **Omar ibn al-Khattab RA** also came, saying he had the same

- dream.
 - The Prophet ﷺ then instructed: *“Teach these words to Bilal, for his voice is stronger and more resonant.”* Bilal RA climbed the highest hill in Madina and called the first athan.

Bilal’s Voice and Honor

- Bilal’s voice, once despised because he was a slave, became the voice that echoed *Allahu Akbar* across the world. The same voice that cried *Ahad Ahad*, under torture now proclaimed the greatness of Allah.
- The Prophet ﷺ said:
 - *“Whoever recited the words of the athan with the same conviction and effort as Bilal will enter Jannah.”*
 - True honor comes from sacrifice and sincerity, not social status. What the world tried to silence became the voice of Islam.
- The Prophet ﷺ would often say to Bilal:
 - ارحنا بها يا بلال
Bring comfort to my aching heart.
 - For the Prophet ﷺ, the athan was not only a call to prayer but a source of relief and reassurance.

Bilal RA's Relationship with the Prophet ﷺ

Executive Assistant and Trusted Companion

- Bilal RA was not only the mu’athin of Islam but also the **executive assistant** of the Prophet ﷺ. Even Abu Bakr RA, when he wished to meet the Prophet ﷺ, he would first go through Bilal. This shows the honor and trust the Prophet ﷺ placed in him
- Aisha RA narrates: The Prophet ﷺ once stood for tahajjud and began to cry. Bilal, whose sunnah was to come near the Prophet’s room at Fajr, heard him and asked: *“Oh Messenger of Allah, what makes you cry? Has Allah not forgiven all of your sins?”* The Prophet ﷺ replied:

“Should I not be a grateful servant of Allah, Oh Bilal?”

- Bilal’s heart broke seeing the Prophet ﷺ cry, showing the closeness and empathy between them.
 - Bilal RA was not only a servant but a confidant, sharing in the Prophet’s most vulnerable moments.
- On one journey, Bilal RA was tasked with waking the Prophet ﷺ for Fajr. They all overslept, and the Prophet awoke distressed. Bilal RA said: *“Whatever overwhelmed you, overwhelmed me.”* The Prophet ﷺ then supplicated, and Allah caused the sun to move back, allowing them to pray Fajr at its proper time.
 - This authentic narration shows Bilal’s humility and the Prophet’s mercy, as well as Allah SWT’s special care for His Messenger.
- Bilal RA also served as the **treasurer and finance minister** in Madina, despite his poverty. He managed the Prophet’s finances and the Bayt al-Mal. When asked how the Prophet ﷺ distributed wealth, Bilal RA explained:
 - If a Muslim lacked clothing, the Prophet ﷺ instructed him to buy clothes for them.
 - If someone lacked food, Bilal was ordered to provide it from Bayt al-Mal.
 - If funds were unavailable, the Prophet ﷺ would give a personal loan, or instruct Bilal to borrow from others to meet the need.
 - Bilal RA also collected zakah and distributed it among the needy.

Bilal’s Humility

- Abu Dharr al-Ghifari RA insulted Bilal by his mother. The Prophet ﷺ told him: *“You still have traces of jahiliyyah within you.”* Abu Dharr repented, placed his face on the ground, and begged Bilal to step on it. Bilal refused, instead forgiving him with a kiss on his cheek.

- When Bilal's proposal was declined in favor of Abdul-Rahman ibn Awf RA, Bilal congratulated him warmly saying: *"Forgive me for trying to take from the rizq Allah had written for you."*
- Later, Bilal married Abdul-Rahman's sister, Hala bint 'Awf.

Conquest of Mecca

- The Prophet ﷺ entered the Ka'bah with Usamah ibn Zayd, Uthman ibn Mazun, and Bilal. He then said: *"Get up, Bilal, our leader."* Bilal RA climbed the Ka'bah and gave the first athan in Mecca, the same land where he was once tortured for whispering *"Ahad."*
 - Then, the Prophet ﷺ echoed the words of Yusuf AS: *"No blame will there be upon you today..."* (Yusuf 12:92)

First Athan in Bayt al-Maqdis

- Years later, Omar RA asked Bilal to call the athan in Quds. Bilal hesitated, saying: *"Every time I say Ashhadu anna Muhammad Rasool Allah, I expect to see him."* He broke down in tears, and the companions wept with him.
 - The love for the Prophet ﷺ was Bilal's greatest motivation, even in his absence.

Final Days with the Prophet ﷺ

- During the Prophet's ﷺ illness, Bilal RA came as usual to announce prayer. The Prophet ﷺ said: *"One last time, call the athan, O Bilal. Then tell Abu Bakr to lead."* Bilal cried, repeating: *وا خليلا "O my beloved, O Messenger, O closest friend."*
- Bilal attempted to call the athan. But when he reached: *اشهد ان "محمد رسول الله"*, he fainted, unable to continue, because the presence of the Prophet ﷺ had been the purpose of his life. Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum RA, the blind companion, completed the athan. This was the last time the people of Madina heard Bilal's voice in prayer. Bilal then asked Abu Bakr RA permission to leave Madina, saying:

"If you freed me to enslave me, then command me. But if you freed me for Allah, then let me go."

- Abu Bakr RA hesitated, but after his passing, Omar RA reluctantly allowed Bilal to move to Sham.

Bilal RA's Return To Madina

- Years later, Bilal saw the Prophet ﷺ in a dream, who said: *"What is this displeasure with me, O Bilal? It has been so long since you visited me."* Bilal awoke in grief, rushed to Madina, and cried at the Prophet's grave, rubbing his face in the soil. The people gathered, and Omar RA asked him to call the athan. Bilal refused, until Hasan and Husayn RA, the grandsons of the Prophet, requested it. Bilal said: *"I could never say no to your grandfather. How can I say no to you?"*
- He climbed the minaret one last time. When he proclaimed "الله اكبر", the city shook with joy. At "اشهد ان محمد رسول الله", the people poured out of their homes, even women without veils, overwhelmed with emotion.
 - The narration says: *"Madina never witnessed more tears after the Prophet's death than on the day Bilal called the athan again."*

His Passing

- Bilal RA later settled in Sham. During the plague of Amwas, he fell ill. His wife cried: *"What a day of sorrow!"* Bilal replied: *"No, what a day of joy, tomorrow I will meet my beloved Prophet and his companions."* He passed away around 20 years after Hijrah, leaving behind a legacy of resilience and devotion.
- Bilal's voice, once silenced in Mecca, became the eternal call of Islam in Madina, Mecca, and Bayt al-Maqdis.
- His love for the Prophet ﷺ was so deep that even absence became his greatest motivation.
 - True honor is not in status but in sacrifice. Allah SWT raised Bilal from a slave to a symbol of victory.