

THE PROPHETS AND THE COMPANIONS

1. PROPHET MUHAMMAD (PBUH)

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said:

“Allah, the Exalted, said: ‘There are three whose opponent I will be on the Day of Resurrection, and whomever I oppose, I will defeat ... [The first] a man who sold a free man and consumed his price.’”

Narrated by Al-Bukhari (2227)

The above is an explicit condemnation of human trafficking and the trading of ‘free’ human beings – a term which, according to the Quran, refers to and is comprised of ALL human beings. During his lifetime, the Prophet’s many roles as a trusted businessman inevitably brought him into contact with slaves. But even prior to the receiving of his first revelation, his actions and compassion for those trapped in bondage marked him out as being one whose views upon slavery differed wholly from those around him. He had an unending solicitude for the material and spiritual condition of slaves in society, and his example inspired his companions to emancipate thousands of slaves.

This included the freeing of one of the most prominent former slaves in Islam’s history, Bilal: the man responsible for reciting Islam’s first ever *adhan* (call to prayer).

2. BILAL IBN RABAH

Bilal (may God be please with him) is one of the most beloved companions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He is respected and admired by Muslims everywhere, as the epitome of unwavering faith, loyalty and fortitude.

Of Ethiopian heritage and born into slavery, Bilal worked as housekeeper for a man by the name of Umayyah ibn Khalaf, who was himself the keeper of keys to the much-worshipped idols of the Kaba (the central house of worship in Mecca). Aged 40, Bilal began to listen to the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, and believed in one God as opposed to the idols worshipped by the majority of tribes. He took the *shahadah* (the Muslim profession of faith) and became one of Islam’s first Muslims.

His act of becoming a Muslim and his refusal to renounce Islam, led to endless persecution and torture. Umayyah ibn Khalaf’s modes of torture included having Bilal dragged through the streets of Mecca while calling on others to mock him; followed by his being whipped and beaten while spread-eagled upon the Arabian sands under the burning desert sun, his limbs bound to stakes. When Bilal still refused to renounce Islam, it was ordered that a hot boulder be placed on Bilal’s chest.

On hearing the news of the plight of this slave, Prophet Muhammad sent Abu Bakr, his best friend, to negotiate for the emancipation of Bilal.

Upon obtaining his freedom, Bilal chose to remain with the Prophet Muhammad throughout the

many years of persecution inflicted by the pagan Meccans upon those who chose to become Muslim. The early Muslim community found sanctuary in Medina, where the first mosque was built. Prophet Muhammad did not wish to use bells or horns to signal the call to prayer out of respect to, and to differentiate from, Christian and Jewish traditions. So it was that Bilal was selected to give the *adhan*. Renowned for his melodic voice, Bilal is said to have ascended the highest wall to give Islam's first ever call to prayer. We hear it resound from mosques all over the world to this day.

The very fact of Bilal's ascendance from an emancipated slave to one of Islam's greatest and most beloved companions of the Prophet, is itself a testament of the importance of safeguarding the freedoms of those trapped in slavery.