

Ammar ibn Yasir

Ammar ibn Yasir was one of the first people to embrace Islam. He and his parents suffered terribly at the hands of the elite tribe of Mecca known as the Quraish. Ammar was with the small group that migrated to Abyssinia and also made the migration to Medina where he was part of the group that built the first mosque. He fought fearlessly in all the battles the new Muslim nation took part in, and Ammar is known to have narrated several ahadith[1]. He is particularly remembered for his hadith about dry ablution .

Ammar ibn Yasir is believed to have been born in Mecca around 570 CE. He was roughly the same age as Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, and they were known as close friends. Ammar is said by some historians to have played some part in arranging Prophet Muhammad's marriage to his first wife Khadijah. Thus, when Prophet Muhammad began to call his family and friends to Islam, Ammar and his parents were amongst the first to heed the call. Ammar's father Yasir is said to have dreamed that his wife and son were calling to him from across a valley divided by fire. They embraced Islam together. At first, they attended the secret and private lessons at the house of Al-Arqam, but when their belief became known they began to undergo public abuse and humiliation at the hands of the enemies of the new religion.

Most of the rich and powerful men in Mecca rejected the Prophet's call while most of their slaves and many of the poor were drawn to the comfort of Islam. When the slaves and the poor or downtrodden began to question their treatment and their rights as human beings the elite started to systematically torture and abuse the new Muslims. The man known as Abu Jahl was notorious. He is said to have designed such gruesome tortures as walking over hot coals, being staked out in the noontime sun and piling stones and rocks upon the chests of his victims. Ammar and his family were tormented so consistently that Prophet Muhammad would urge them to be patient by reminding them that they were destined for Paradise.

Ammar's mother was Summaya and she is known as the first martyr in Islam. She was a staunch and enthusiastic member of the new Muslim community. All the suffering she was subjected to did nothing to lessen her faith. One day in a fit of rage Abu Jahl stabbed her in the lower stomach with a spear; she dies almost immediately. After this Abu Jahl and his wicked companions tortured and killed Ammar's father and brother. Ammar was a broken man. He was overwhelmed with grief and fear and did what his parents had died refusing to do; he cursed Islam and Prophet Muhammad. Abu Jahl released Ammar. The grief-stricken man ran straight to Prophet Muhammad who comforted him and reminded of God's forgiveness. The following verse of the Quran is said to have been revealed in response to Ammar's despair.

"Whoever disbelieves in God after having believed in Him—not the one who is compelled (to utter a word of disbelief) under duress while his heart is at peace with faith, but the one who embraces disbelief wholeheartedly—upon such people is wrath from God, and they will suffer a great punishment." (Quran 16: 106 (

Many of the new Muslims who were just learning their faith did not understand Prophet Muhammad's actions. They criticized Ammar and called him a disbeliever but Prophet Muhammad soon taught them the error of their ways. He said "No (he is not a disbeliever), indeed Ammar is full of faith from head to toe." [2]

God did not allow the persecution to go on much longer. Prophet Muhammad sent a small band of Muslims, including Ammar and others who were tortured relentlessly, to Abyssinia, where they sought refuge with a good Christian king. After some time, Ammar returned to Mecca and joined the migration to Medina.

Prophet Muhammad took an interest in Ammar. When the first mosque was built after the migration to Medina, Ammar was one of the men who worked tirelessly on its construction. Prophet Muhammad noticed that while everyone else was carrying one brick at a time Ammar was carrying two bricks. He said,

"They will get one reward whereas you (Ammar) will get two." [3] Ammar put his heart and soul into bettering himself, and worked consistently for the religion of Islam. He was involved in every battle the fledgling nation faced including the Battle of Badr in which Abu Jahl was killed. At that time Prophet Muhammad is said to have turned to Ammar and said, "The murderer of your mother is dead." In addition to this Ammar was a witness at Prophet Muhammad's farewell sermon.

Ammar is known to have related several ahadith. He is particularly remembered for his narrations about dry ablution. A man came to Umar ibn Al-Khattab and said, "I became impure but no water was available." Ammar ibn Yasir said to Umar, "Do you remember that you and I became impure while we were together on a journey and you didn't pray but I rolled myself on the ground and prayed? I informed the Prophet about it and he said, 'It would have been sufficient for you to do like this.' The Prophet then stroked the earth lightly with his hands, blew off the excess dust and passed his hands over his face and hands." [4]

This narration not only gives us excellent information about dry ablution but it also demonstrates to us just how close Ammar was to Prophet Muhammad and the inner circle of his companions. He felt comfortable nudging the memory of Umar ibn Al-Khattab. He was also appointed Governor of Iraq during Umar ibn Al-Khattab's rule. Ammar was more than a young man who sobbed with Prophet Muhammad after the murder of his family .

Ammar was a fearful youth but grew into the strong capable man whose love for Islam never wavered. He died in the Battle of Siffin at around the age of ninety. Prophet Muhammad had previously predicted the nature of his death. "Alas! A rebellious group which swerves from the truth will kill Ammar. Ammar will be calling them towards Paradise and they will be calling him towards Hell. His killer and those who strip him of arms and clothing will be in Hell." [5]

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Ahadith (singular: hadith) – sayings and teachings attributed to Prophet Muhammad.

[2] Ibn Majah.

[3] Saheeh Bukhari.

[4] Saheeh Bukhari.

[5] Saheeh Bukhari, At-Tirmidhi, and Imam Ahmad among others, and transmitted through 25 companions of Prophet Muhammad.