



Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: The True Imam and Defender of Islam!

Description



Imaam Adh Dhahabi mentioned: He was the true Imam and Sheikh of Islam, Abū ‘Abdullāh Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥanbal ibn Hilāl al-Shaybānī, originally from Merv, but later settled in Baghdad. He was one of the greatest Imams of Islamic history.

Ibn al-Madīnī’s Praise for Aḥmad

Ibn al-Madīnī said:

“Allah strengthened Islam twice—first with Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq during the Riddah Wars, and then with Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal during the Mihna (Inquisition).”

Aḥmad’s Humility and Detachment from the World

Abū Dāwūd said:

“The gatherings of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal were purely for the Hereafter. He never spoke about worldly matters—I never saw him mention the dunya at all.”

His Extreme Caution in Financial Transactions

Sulaymān al-Shādhakūnī narrated:

“I once witnessed an incredible act of piety from Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal in Makkah. He had pawned a small vessel (saṭl) with a baker in exchange for some food. Later, he returned to redeem it, and the baker brought out two vessels instead of one.”

The baker asked:

“Which one is yours?”

Aḥmad replied:

“I do not know. Consider yourself absolved of any wrongdoing. Keep whatever I gave you.”

But the baker insisted:

“By Allah, this one is yours! I only wanted to test your honesty.”

Yet Aḥmad refused to take it.

His Practice of Every Hadith He Wrote

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal said:

“I never wrote a hadith except that I acted upon it.”

“Once, I came across a hadith that the Prophet ﷺ was cupped (hijāma) and gave Abū Ṭaybah (the cupper) a dinar. So when I underwent cupping, I gave my cupper a dinar—simply to practice the hadith.”

How Greek Philosophy Fueled Innovation

Then came al-Ma'mūn, the Abbasid Caliph:

- He was intelligent, articulate, and well-versed in logic.
- He imported Greek philosophy, translated their works, and promoted rationalist theology (kalām).
- This led to the rise of the Jahmiyyah, Mu'tazilah, and extremist Shī'ah.

Aḥmad's Role in Defending Islam

During this era of confusion, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal stood firm against these corrupt ideas. He was tortured and imprisoned but never compromised on the truth.

Thus, just as Abū Bakr saved Islam from apostasy, Aḥmad saved it from theological corruption.

The Ordeal of the Mihna and the Creation of the Qur'an

As events unfolded, the Ummah was coerced into accepting the doctrine that the Qur'an was created, and scholars were put to trial.

But the Mihna (Inquisition) did not last long, for al-Ma'mūn died that same year.

Yet, he left behind an even worse legacy, one that caused great harm to the religion.

The Stance of the Scholars

For centuries, the Ummah had unanimously believed that the Qur'an is the Speech of Allah, His revelation, and His divine message—they knew no other belief.

Then suddenly, a new doctrine arose, claiming:

- That the Qur'an was created,
- That it was merely an object of honor attributed to Allah—just as we say *Bayt Allah* (the House of Allah) or *Nāqat Allah* (the She-Camel of Allah).

The scholars vehemently rejected this doctrine.

During the reigns of al-Mahdī, Hārūn al-Rashīd, and al-Amīn, the Jahmiyyah did not dare to promote their ideology openly.

However, when al-Ma'mūn took the throne, he himself became one of them, publicly adopting their views.

How al-Ma'mūn Was Influenced

Initially, al-Ma'mūn was hesitant about enforcing his doctrine on the people.

According to Ibn al-Jawzī,

"He was surrounded by Mu'tazilī figures, who sweetened the idea of the created Qur'an for him. At first, he hesitated and remained cautious, watching the reaction of the elder scholars. But eventually, his resolve hardened, and he began persecuting those who disagreed."

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal's Defiance

Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Būshanjī narrated:

"In al-Raqqā, they tried to persuade Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal to accept taqiyyah (concealing one's true belief under duress), citing reports that permitted it."

But Aḥmad rejected this approach and said:

“What will you do with the hadith of Khabbāb?”

“Indeed, those before you were sawn in half, but they did not abandon their faith!”

“At that moment, we lost all hope of convincing him to compromise.”

His Fear of the Whip, Not Death

Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was fearless in the face of imprisonment or execution, saying:

*“I do not fear imprisonment—what is prison but the same as my house?
Nor do I fear being killed by the sword.
The only thing I fear is the trial of the whip!”*

Upon hearing this, a fellow prisoner reassured him:

“Do not worry, O Abū ‘Abdullāh. It is only two lashes, and after that, you will not feel the rest.”

This comforted him and eased his distress.

The Legacy of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal

Despite the intense persecution, he remained steadfast. His resistance saved Islam from distortion, just as Abū Bakr had saved it from apostasy after the Prophet’s passing.

Thus, Aḥmad’s resilience in the Mihna remains one of the greatest tests of faith in Islamic history—a reminder that truth must be defended, even in the face of tyranny.

May Allah have mercy on him and grant us the strength to uphold the truth as he did!

Wa Sallallahu ‘Alaa Nabiyyinaa Muhammad

(See Siyar A’laamin Nubalaa: 11/177)

Category

1. Bid'ah

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