



جامعة تكريت
كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية
قسم التاريخ

المرحلة:
دكتوراه تاريخ اسلامي

المادة : نصوص تاريخية باللغة الانكليزية

عنوان المحاضرة
(**Bilal Ibn Rabah**)

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العام الدراسي
٢٠٢٤-٢٠٢٥ م

Bilal Ibn Rabah

Bilal was a black slave, almost certainly the son of slaves, and is believed to have been from Abyssinia (now known as Ethiopia), . Bilal, possibly the first African to convert to Islam.

According to biographer Ibn Ishaq and others¹, Bilal suffered terribly for his immediate acceptance of Muhammad's message. It is said that he was beaten mercilessly, dragged around the streets and hills of Mecca by his neck, and subjected to long periods without food or water. His owner Umayya ibn Khalaf reportedly, "would bring him out at the hottest part of the day and throw him on his back in the open valley and have a great rock put on his chest; then he would say to him, 'You will stay here till you die or deny Muhammad and worship al-Lat and al-'Uzza'"

¹ Ibn Hisham & Talqih Fuham Alil Athar p61.

². Bilal would not renounce Islam, and amidst his suffering he uttered only one word – *Ahad* (meaning One God) ³

News of the slave who cried out ‘God is One!’ even in the midst of torture soon reached Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Abu Bakr, Prophet Muhammad’s closest friend and a wealthy trader of equal status to Umayya was sent to investigate. He came upon the open field where Bilal was being tortured for amusement. Abu Bakr did not lose his temper, for that was not his way, but he remonstrated with the torturers. He said to Umayya, “Have you no fear of God that you treat this poor man like this?” He replied saying: “You are the one who corrupted him, so you save him from his plight!” Abu Bakr replied: “Then sell him to me, name your price.” Umayya, was a businessman and could not give up making a profit, so he sold Bilal for a good price. To humiliate Bilal, he added: “I would have sold him to you even if you had offered me only an ounce of gold.” Abu Bakr answered: “I would have bought him even if you had asked for one hundred ounces.”

² Idols worshipped by the people of Mecca.

³ The Arabic word *Ahad* is used rather than the English one or the Arabic *wahad* because of its meaning – not just one the numeral but One God.

Bilal was cared for and nursed back to health. Upon his recovery he was taken to Prophet Muhammad and he stood by his side giving support and calling others to Islam. At the time of Prophet Muhammad slavery was a worldwide, entrenched institution. The laws of Islam sought to emancipate slaves; God mentions in the Quran the expiation for many sins is to free a slave, and it is regarded as an act of piety.

Bilal loved to be in the company of Prophet Muhammad and became exceptionally close to him. Various traditions mention Bilal having the honour of waking the Prophet each morning and spending as much time as possible in his company. The story of Bilal is often used to demonstrate the importance of pluralism and racial equality in Islam. More importantly it is an example of piety being the measure of a man, rather than race, ethnicity or social status.