Heroes of Islam

Series 9

‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah

Poet of the Messenger ﷺ and Third Commander at Mu’tah, According to the Qur'an and Authentic Hadith



Hj Che Alim Hj Che Haron
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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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‘ABDULLAH IBN RAWAHAH

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وَإِن مِّنكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا ۚ كَانَ عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا مَّقْضِيًّا ﴿٧١﴾

“And there is none of you except he will come to it. This is upon your Lord an inevitability decreed.”

Surah Maryam 19:71

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

All praise is due to Allah, who taught man to speak and made the tongue of the believer an instrument of truth. May blessings and peace be upon our master, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, and upon his family and Companions — and especially upon ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah رضى الله عنه, the poet of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and the third commander martyred at Mu’tah.

This eBook is specially dedicated to my beloved wife,

ZAHARAH MOHD LATIF;

my dear children,

MUHAMMAD HAFIZ, NOOR HAZWANI, ABDUL HAKIM, NOOR HIDAYAH, NOR AQILA and **NOR ATIQAH**;

and my sons- and daughters-in-law,

FAZILAH, MALEK, HANIN, FAIRIZAL and **FIRWAN**.

This ninth book of Heroes of Islam tells the story of ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah رضى الله عنه: a naqib at the Pledge of ‘Aqabah, a poet whose verses the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself chanted, a worshipper who fasted on a scorching day, the just assessor of Khaybar, and the third commander martyred at Mu’tah. May this knowledge be ‘ilmun yuntafa‘u bih — knowledge that brings benefit.

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ABOUT THE COVER OF THIS EBOOK

This eBook’s cover does not depict any human being or animal. It shows ***a date-palm grove of Madinah*** before sunrise: tall palms beneath a deep blue sky still scattered with stars, and the golden light of dawn breaking behind the hills. Madinah was the home of ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah, an Ansari of the tribe of Khazraj.

The breaking dawn recalls Ibn Rawahah’s verse about the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: “Among us is the Messenger of Allah, reciting His Book when the bright light of dawn breaks” (Sahih al-Bukhari 1155).

On a mud-brick wall rest ***a burning clay lamp***, ***a rolled parchment*** and ***a reed pen*** — symbols of Ibn Rawahah as a poet and one of the few people of Madinah who could write, who used his tongue and his pen to defend Islam.

The ***dark blue band*** at the bottom, framed by ***fine gold lines***, is where the author’s name appears — the same as on the covers of Series 1 to Series 8, so that all the covers of Heroes of Islam match.

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Colour guide: green box = verses of the Qur'an; gold box = Hadith; brown box = sirah note (report from the books of sirah); blue table = comparison. Underlined blue narrator names can be clicked to open the narrator's page on sunnah.com.

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‘ABDULLAH IBN RAWAHAH

While digging the trench around Madinah in the Battle of al-Khandaq, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ carried earth with his own hands, chanting verses of poetry: «اللَّهُمَّ لَوْلَا أَنْتَ مَا اهْتَدَيْنَا، وَلَا تَصَدَّقْنَا وَلَا صَلَّيْنَا» — “O Allah, were it not for You, we would not have been guided, nor given charity, nor prayed.” Al-Bara’ said these were ***the words of Ibn Rawahah*** (Sahih al-Bukhari 4106).

That poet was ***‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah*** رضى الله عنه, an Ansari of the tribe of Khazraj. He was one of the twelve *nuqaba’* (leaders) at the Pledge of ‘Aqabah, took part in Badr and the battles after it, used his poetry to defend Islam, and became the third commander martyred at ***Mu’tah***.

This eBook is the ninth in the ***Heroes of Islam*** series, and completes the story of the three commanders of Mu’tah after Series 7 (Zayd ibn Harithah) and Series 8 (Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib). As in the earlier books, his story is gathered first from the Qur'an and authentic Hadith, and then from the trusted books of sirah and history. The source of every report is given. Famous stories with weak chains are explained honestly.

The story of Ibn Rawahah is the story of a poet who submitted his tongue to faith. His verses were chanted by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and his life ended with words proven by deeds.

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WHO WAS ‘ABDULLAH IBN RAWAHAH?

His full name was ***‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah ibn Tha‘labah*** al-Ansari al-Khazraji, of Banu al-Harith ibn al-Khazraj in Madinah. His kunyah was ***Abu Muhammad***, and some say Abu Rawahah. His sister, ***‘Amrah bint Rawahah***, was the mother of the Companion ***an-Nu‘man ibn Bashir***.

The books of biography mention that he was among the few people of Madinah who could write before Islam, and a well-known poet among his people.

NAME AND TITLES

NAME OR TITLE	EXPLANATION
‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah	His real name
Abu Muhammad	His well-known kunyah
Al-Ansari al-Khazraji	From the Ansar, of the tribe of Khazraj
Naqib of Banu al-Harith	One of the twelve nuqaba’ at the Pledge of ‘Aqabah
Poet of the Messenger ﷺ	Together with Hassan ibn Thabit and Ka‘b ibn Malik

LESSONS

Gifts that Allah grants, such as the skill of writing and poetry, become noble when they are used for the truth.

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A NAQIB AT THE PLEDGE OF 'AQABAH

In the Hajj season of the 13th year of prophethood, more than seventy men and two women from Madinah secretly pledged allegiance to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ at ***'Aqabah*** in Mina. They promised to protect him as they protected their own families.

HISTORICAL NOTE: THE TWELVE NUQABA'

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ asked them to choose twelve ***nuqaba'*** (leaders) to be responsible for their people: nine from Khazraj and three from Aws. 'Abdullah ibn Rawahah was one of the nuqaba' of Khazraj, representing Banu al-Harith ibn al-Khazraj.

Status of the report: The list of nuqaba' is well known in the books of sirah.

REFERENCES:

Ibn Hisham, as-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah (narrated from Ibn Ishaq); Ibn Sa'd, at-Tabaqat al-Kubra.

LESSONS

Ibn Rawahah was chosen as a leader of his people from the very first day. His people's trust in him was a sign of his character and wisdom.

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“WHAT A PROFITABLE SALE!”

The Pledge of ‘Aqabah was a covenant: the Ansar gave their lives and wealth to defend the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and the reward was Paradise. Allah describes such a covenant as the most profitable of sales:

SURAH AT-TAWBAH 9:111

۞إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ ٱشۡتَرَىٰ مِنَ ٱلۡمُؤۡمِنِينَ أَنفُسَهُمۡ وَأَمۡوَٰلَهُم بِأَنَّ لَهُمُ ٱلۡجَنَّةَۚ يُقَٰتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ فَيَقۡتُلُونَ وَيُقۡتَلُونَۖ وَعۡدًا عَلَيۡهِ حَقّٗا فِي ٱلتَّوۡرَىٰةِ وَٱلۡإِنجِيلِ وَٱلۡقُرۡءَانِۚ وَمَنۡ أَوۡفَىٰ بِعَهۡدِهِۦ مِنَ ٱللَّهِۚ فَٱسۡتَبۡشِرُواْ بِبَيۡعِكُمُ ٱلَّذِي بَايَعۡتُم بِهِۦۚ وَذَٰلِكَ هُوَ ٱلۡفَوۡزُ ٱلۡعَظِيمُ ١١١

Indeed, Allah has purchased from the believers their lives and their properties [in exchange] for that they will have Paradise. They fight in the cause of Allah, so they kill and are killed. [It is] a true promise [binding] upon Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Qur'an. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah? So rejoice in your transaction which you have contracted. And it is that which is the great attainment.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/9:111

HISTORICAL NOTE: “WE WILL NEVER CANCEL IT”

It is reported that on the night of ‘Aqabah, ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah said to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ: “Set conditions for your Lord and for yourself as you wish.” He stated the conditions. They asked: “What will we have if we do that?” He said: “Paradise.” They said: “What a profitable sale! We will never cancel it, nor ask for it to be cancelled.”

Status of the report: A *mursal* report mentioned by the commentators; its meaning agrees with the verse and with the story of the Pledge of ‘Aqabah.

REFERENCES:

Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-‘Azim (At-Tawbah 9:111), from the report of Muhammad ibn Ka‘b al-Qurazi.

LESSONS

The believer sees sacrifice in the path of Allah as the most profitable trade, not a loss. Ibn Rawahah proved his words at Mu’tah.

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WITH THE MESSENGER ﷺ IN BATTLE

Ibn Rawahah took part in ***Badr***, ***Uhud***, ***al-Khandaq***, ***al-Hudaybiyah*** and ***Khaybar***. After Badr, he and Zayd ibn Harithah were sent to Madinah with the good news of victory (see Series 7: Zayd ibn Harithah).

> **HISTORICAL NOTE: A TRUST OF LEADERSHIP**
>
> The books of sirah mention that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ appointed Ibn Rawahah as his deputy over Madinah when he went out to ***Badr al-Maw‘id*** (4 AH). In 6 AH, he sent him to lead a small force to Khaybar.
>
> ***Status of the report:*** Narrated in the books of sirah and maghazi.
>
> **REFERENCES:**
> Ibn Hisham, as-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah; al-Waqidi, al-Maghazi; Ibn Sa‘d, at-Tabaqat al-Kubra.

LESSONS

Ibn Rawahah was not only a poet of words, but a fighter present on every field with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ.

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POETS IN THE QUR'AN

In the days of ignorance, poetry was often used to praise falsehood, to insult, and to boast of things never done. Allah says about such poets:

SURAH ASH-SHU‘ARA’ 26:224

وَٱلشُّعَرَآءُ يَتَّبِعُهُمُ ٱلْغَاوُۥنَ ﴿٢٢٤﴾

And the poets - [only] the deviators follow them.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/26:224

But Allah excepted the believing poets, who used their poetry for the truth:

SURAH ASH-SHU‘ARA’ 26:227

إِلَّا ٱلَّذِينَ ءَامَنُواْ وَعَمِلُواْ ٱلصَّٰلِحَٰتِ وَذَكَرُواْ ٱللَّهَ كَثِيرًا وَٱنتَصَرُواْ مِنۢ بَعْدِ مَا ظُلِمُواْ ۗ وَسَيَعْلَمُ ٱلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوٓاْ أَىَّ مُنقَلَبٍ يَنقَلِبُونَ ﴿٢٢٧﴾

Except those [poets] who believe and do righteous deeds and remember Allah often and defend [the Muslims] after they were wronged. And those who have wronged are going to know to what [kind of] return they will be returned.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/26:227

TAFSIR NOTE: THE TEARS OF THREE POETS

It is reported that when the verse about poets was revealed, ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah, Hassan ibn Thabit and Ka‘b ibn Malik came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ weeping and said: “Allah has revealed this verse, and He knows that we are poets.” So he recited to them the verse of exception: “Except those who believe and do righteous deeds…”

Status of the report: A *mursal* report mentioned by the commentators; the exception in verse 227 is clear from the Qur'an itself.

REFERENCES:

At-Tabari, Jami‘ al-Bayan; Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-‘Azim (Ash-Shu‘ara’ 26:224–227).

LESSONS

Islam is not hostile to art and beautiful language. What matters is the content: poetry that reminds of Allah and defends the truth is worship.

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IBN RAWAHAH’S VERSES AT THE TRENCH

In 5 AH, the Muslims dug a trench north of Madinah to face the army of al-Ahzab. In exhaustion and hunger, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself carried earth while chanting the verses of Ibn Rawahah:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 4106

حَدَّثَنِي أَحْمَدُ بْنُ عُثْمَانَ، حَدَّثَنَا شُرَيْحُ بْنُ مَسْلَمَةَ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي إِبْرَاهِيمُ بْنُ يُوسُفَ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنِي أَبِي، عَنْ أَبِي إِسْحَاقَ، قَالَ سَمِعْتُ الْبَرَاءَ، يُحَدِّثُ قَالَ لَمَّا كَانَ يَوْمُ الأَحْزَابِ، وَخَنْدَقَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم رَأَيْتُهُ يَنْقُلُ مِنْ تُرَابِ الْخَنْدَقِ حَتَّى وَارَى عَنِّي الْغُبَارُ جِلْدَةَ بَطْنِهِ، وَكَانَ كَثِيرَ الشَّعَرِ، فَسَمِعْتُهُ يَرْتَجِزُ بِكَلِمَاتِ ابْنِ رَوَاحَةَ، وَهْوَ يَنْقُلُ مِنَ التُّرَابِ يَقُولُ اللَّهُمَّ لَوْلاَ أَنْتَ مَا اهْتَدَيْنَا وَلاَ تَصَدَّقْنَا وَلاَ صَلَّيْنَا فَأَنْزِلَنْ سَكِينَةً عَلَيْنَا وَثَبِّتِ الأَقْدَامَ إِنْ لاَقَيْنَا إِنَّ الأُلَى قَدْ بَغَوْا عَلَيْنَا وَإِنْ أَرَادُوا فِتْنَةً أَبَيْنَا قَالَ ثُمَّ يَمُدُّ صَوْتَهُ بِآخِرِهَا.

TRANSLATION:

Al-Bara’ said: On the day of al-Ahzab, when the Messenger of Allah ﷺ dug the trench, I saw him carrying earth from the trench until the dust covered the skin of his belly from my sight — and he was a hairy man. ***I heard him chanting the words of Ibn Rawahah as he carried the earth: “O Allah, were it not for You, we would not have been guided, nor given charity, nor prayed. So send down tranquillity upon us, and make our feet firm if we meet the enemy. They have wronged us; if they want fitnah, we refuse.”*** He said: Then he would lengthen his voice at the end.

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from Ahmad ibn ‘Uthman, from Shurayh ibn Maslamah, from Ibrahim ibn Yusuf, from Yusuf ibn Ishaq, from Abu Ishaq as-Sabi‘i, from Al-Bara’ ibn ‘Azib رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Military Expeditions, Chapter: The Ghazwah of al-Khandaq, Hadith No. 4106.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4106

LESSONS

Good poetry gives strength and reminds of Allah in hard times. Ibn Rawahah’s honour is that his words were chanted by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ himself.

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“YOUR BROTHER DOES NOT SPEAK OBSCENITY”

Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه once mentioned the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in his admonitions, and quoted the verses of Ibn Rawahah describing him reciting the Qur'an at dawn and rising at night in worship:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 1155

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ بُكَيْرٍ، قَالَ حَدَّثَنَا اللَّيْثُ، عَنْ يُونُسَ، عَنِ ابْنِ شِهَابٍ، أَخْبَرَنِي الْهَيْثَمُ بْنُ أَبِي سِنَانٍ، أَنَّهُ سَمِعَ أَبَا هُرَيْرَةَ ـ رضى الله عنه ـ وَهُوَ يَقُصُّ فِي قَصَصِهِ وَهُوَ يَذْكُرُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم إِنَّ أَخًا لَكُمْ لاَ يَقُولُ الرَّفَثَ. يَعْنِي بِذَلِكَ عَبْدَ اللَّهِ بْنَ رَوَاحَةَ وَفِينَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ يَتْلُو كِتَابَهُ إِذَا انْشَقَّ مَعْرُوفٌ مِنَ الْفَجْرِ سَاطِعُ أَرَانَا الْهُدَى بَعْدَ الْعَمَى فَقُلُوبُنَا بِهِ مُوقِنَاتٌ أَنَّ مَا قَالَ وَاقِعُ يَبِيتُ يُجَافِي جَنْبَهُ عَنْ فِرَاشِهِ إِذَا اسْتَثْقَلَتْ بِالْمُشْرِكِينَ الْمَضَاجِعُ

TRANSLATION:

Al-Haytham ibn Abi Sinan heard Abu Hurairah, while giving admonition and mentioning the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, say: ***“Your brother does not speak obscenity,”*** meaning ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah, (in his verses):

“Among us is the Messenger of Allah, reciting His Book when the bright light of dawn breaks. He showed us guidance after we were blind, so our hearts are certain that what he says will come to pass. He spends the night keeping his side away from his bed, while the beds weigh heavy with the polytheists.”

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from Yahya ibn Bukayr, from Al-Layth ibn Sa‘d, from Yunus ibn Yazid, from Ibn Shihab az-Zuhri, from Al-Haytham ibn Abi Sinan, from Abu Hurairah رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Night Prayer, Chapter: The Virtue of One Who Wakes at Night and Prays, Hadith No. 1155.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:1155

Imam al-Bukhari placed this hadith in the chapter on the virtue of rising at night, because Ibn Rawahah’s verses describe the night prayer of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ so beautifully.

LESSONS

Ibn Rawahah’s poetry was free of obscenity and full of faith. A guarded tongue leaves words that are still read centuries later.

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FASTING ON A SCORCHING DAY

Ibn Rawahah was known for his devotion in worship. Abu ad-Darda’ رضى الله عنه describes a journey with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 1945

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ يُوسُفَ، حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ حَمْزَةَ، عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ يَزِيدَ بْنِ جَابِرٍ، أَنَّ إِسْمَاعِيلَ بْنَ عُبَيْدِ اللَّهِ، حَدَّثَهُ عَنْ أُمِّ الدَّرْدَاءِ، عَنْ أَبِي الدَّرْدَاءِ ـ رضى الله عنه ـ قَالَ خَرَجْنَا مَعَ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم فِي بَعْضِ أَسْفَارِهِ فِي يَوْمٍ حَارٍّ حَتَّى يَضَعَ الرَّجُلُ يَدَهُ عَلَى رَأْسِهِ مِنْ شِدَّةِ الْحَرِّ، وَمَا فِينَا صَائِمٌ إِلاَّ مَا كَانَ مِنَ النَّبِيِّ صلى الله عليه وسلم وَابْنِ رَوَاحَةَ.

TRANSLATION:

Abu ad-Darda’ said: We set out with the Prophet ﷺ on one of his journeys on a hot day, so hot that a man would put his hand over his head because of the intense heat. ***None of us was fasting except the Prophet ﷺ and Ibn Rawahah.***

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from ‘Abdullah ibn Yusuf, from Yahya ibn Hamzah, from ‘Abd ar-Rahman ibn Yazid ibn Jabir, from Isma‘il ibn ‘Ubaydillah, from Umm ad-Darda’, from Abu ad-Darda’ رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Fasting, Hadith No. 1945.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:1945

The scholars explain that a traveller may choose to fast or to break the fast; breaking it is a concession from Allah. Ibn Rawahah chose to fast with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ even in the hardest conditions.

LESSONS

Ibn Rawahah took the Messenger of Allah ﷺ as his example even in difficult matters. Devotion in worship did not weaken because of heat or travel.

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BEFORE THE MESSENGER ﷺ AT ‘UMRAT AL-QADA’

In 7 AH, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ entered Makkah to perform ***‘Umrat al-Qada’***, while Quraysh watched from the hills. The one walking in front of him, holding the rein of his camel, was ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah.

HADITH NOTE: “IT STRIKES THEM FASTER THAN ARROWS”

Anas narrated that the Prophet ﷺ entered Makkah during ‘Umrat al-Qada’, and ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah was walking in front of him reciting poetry: “Clear the way for him, O sons of the disbelievers…” ‘Umar said to him: “O Ibn Rawahah, in front of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and in the Sanctuary of Allah you recite poetry?” The Prophet ﷺ said: ***“Leave him, O ‘Umar. It strikes them faster than the shooting of arrows.”***

Status of the report: *Hasan* according to Darussalam. Jami‘ at-Tirmidhi 2847

REFERENCES:
Jami‘ at-Tirmidhi 2847; Sunan an-Nasa’i 2873.

LESSONS

True words in their proper place can be a weapon sharper than arrows. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ valued the talent of each Companion and used it for Islam.

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THE JUST ASSESSOR OF KHAYBAR

After the conquest of Khaybar, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ let its Jewish inhabitants work the date groves on condition that half the harvest went to the Muslims. Each year he sent ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah to assess (*kharas*) the date harvest.

HADITH NOTE: “BY THIS THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH STAND”

It is reported that the people of Khaybar gathered their women’s jewellery and said to Ibn Rawahah: “This is for you; make the assessment lighter for us.” He replied: “O Jews, by Allah, you are among the creatures of Allah most hateful to me, yet that will not make me wrong you. As for the bribe you offer, it is unlawful, and we do not consume it.” They said: ***“By this (justice) the heavens and the earth stand.”***

Status of the report: Narrated by Malik from Sa‘id ibn al-Musayyab as *mursal*; Ibn Rawahah’s role as assessor of Khaybar is supported by other reports.

REFERENCES:

Malik, al-Muwatta’, Book of Sharecropping; Ahmad, al-Musnad.

LESSONS

Islamic justice does not change even towards those one dislikes. Ibn Rawahah refused the bribe and was just, so that his own opponents acknowledged the truth.

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FAINTING AND THE WEEPING OF ‘AMRAH

Once Ibn Rawahah fell ill and lost consciousness. His sister ‘Amrah wept, listing his virtues in the manner of pre-Islamic wailing. His nephew, an-Nu‘man ibn Bashir, narrates:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 4267

حَدَّثَنِي عِمْرَانُ بْنُ مَيْسَرَةَ، حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ فُضَيْلٍ، عَنْ حُصَيْنٍ، عَنْ عَامِرٍ، عَنِ النُّعْمَانِ بْنِ بَشِيرٍ ـ رضى الله عنهما ـ قَالَ أُغْمِيَ عَلَى عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ رَوَاحَةَ، فَجَعَلَتْ أُخْتُهُ عَمْرَةُ تَبْكِي وَاجَبَلاَهْ وَا كَذَا وَا كَذَا. تُعَدِّدُ عَلَيْهِ فَقَالَ حِينَ أَفَاقَ مَا قُلْتِ شَيْئًا إِلاَّ قِيلَ لِي آنْتَ كَذَلِكَ.

TRANSLATION:

An-Nu‘man ibn Bashir said: ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah fainted, and his sister ‘Amrah began to weep, saying: “O my mountain! O such-and-such!” — listing his virtues. ***When he came to, he said: “Whatever you said, it was said to me: ‘Are you really like that?’”***

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from ‘Imran ibn Maysarah, from Muhammad ibn Fudayl, from Husayn ibn ‘Abd ar-Rahman, from ‘Amir ash-Sha‘bi, from An-Nu‘man ibn Bashir رضى الله عنهما.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Military Expeditions, Chapter: The Ghazwah of Mu’tah in the Land of Sham, Hadith No. 4267.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4267

In the next report, an-Nu‘man adds: ***“When he died (at Mu’tah), she did not weep (wail) over him”*** (Sahih al-Bukhari 4268). Imam al-Bukhari placed both hadith in the chapter on the Battle of Mu’tah.

LESSONS

Ibn Rawahah gently taught his family that excessive praise of the sick or the dead may become a heavy question for them. ‘Amrah accepted the advice and was patient when her brother truly departed.

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TEARS BEFORE SETTING OUT FOR MU’TAH

In Jumada al-Ula of 8 AH, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ sent 3,000 soldiers to Mu’tah and appointed three commanders in turn: “If Zayd is killed, then Ja‘far; and if Ja‘far is killed, then ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah” (Sahih al-Bukhari 4261).

HISTORICAL NOTE: WHY DO YOU WEEP?

Ibn Ishaq narrates that as people bade farewell to the commanders, ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah wept. They asked: “What makes you weep?” He said: “By Allah, it is not love of this world or longing for you. But I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ recite a verse from the Book of Allah mentioning the Fire: ‘And there is none of you except he will come to it…’ I do not know how I will come out after coming to it.”

Status of the report: Narrated by Ibn Ishaq in the books of sirah.

REFERENCES:

Ibn Hisham, as-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah (narrated from Ibn Ishaq); Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah.

SURAH MARYAM 19:71

وَإِن مِّنكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا ۚ كَانَ عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا مَّقْضِيًّا ﴿٧١﴾

And there is none of you except he will come to it. This is upon your Lord an inevitability decreed.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/19:71

LESSONS

Ibn Rawahah set out for jihad not with pride, but with fear of Allah. The bravest of people are those who fear their Lord the most.

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“WE DO NOT FIGHT BY NUMBERS”

When the Muslim army reached Ma‘an, news came that Heraclius had gathered the Roman army and its Arab allies in vast numbers. They consulted for two nights; some suggested writing to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ for reinforcement or instructions.

HISTORICAL NOTE: IBN RAWAHAH’S SPEECH AT MA‘AN

Ibn Rawahah rose to stir their hearts: “O people, by Allah, what you now dislike is the very thing you came out seeking — martyrdom. We do not fight people by numbers, strength or multitude, but by this religion with which Allah has honoured us. Go forward! It is only one of two good things: victory or martyrdom.” The people said: “By Allah, Ibn Rawahah has spoken the truth,” and they advanced.

Status of the report: Narrated in the books of sirah; the size of the enemy army differs between reports.

REFERENCES:

Ibn Hisham, as-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah (narrated from Ibn Ishaq); al-Waqidi, al-Maghazi; Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah.

LESSONS

The true victory of the believers is not measured by numbers. The words of a sincere man can revive the courage of an entire army.

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THE THIRD COMMANDER AT MU’TAH

At Mu’tah, Zayd fell, then Ja‘far fell. The banner of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was then taken by ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah. In Madinah, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ announced it before the news arrived:

HADITH — SAHIH AL-BUKHARI, NO. 4262

حَدَّثَنَا أَحْمَدُ بْنُ وَاقِدٍ، حَدَّثَنَا حَمَّادُ بْنُ زَيْدٍ، عَنْ أَيُّوبَ، عَنْ حُمَيْدِ بْنِ هِلاَلٍ، عَنْ أَنَسٍ ـ رضى الله عنه ـ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ صلى الله عليه وسلم نَعَى زَيْدًا وَجَعْفَرًا وَابْنَ رَوَاحَةَ لِلنَّاسِ، قَبْلَ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ خَبَرُهُمْ فَقَالَ " أَخَذَ الرَّايَةَ زَيْدٌ فَأُصِيبَ، ثُمَّ أَخَذَ جَعْفَرٌ فَأُصِيبَ، ثُمَّ أَخَذَ ابْنُ رَوَاحَةَ فَأُصِيبَ ـ وَعَيْنَاهُ تَذْرِفَانِ ـ حَتَّى أَخَذَ الرَّايَةَ سَيْفٌ مِنْ سُيُوفِ اللَّهِ حَتَّى فَتَحَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ ".

TRANSLATION:

Anas narrated that the Prophet ﷺ announced the deaths of Zayd, Ja‘far and Ibn Rawahah to the people before news of them arrived. He said: “Zayd took the banner and was struck down. Then Ja‘far took it and was struck down. ***Then Ibn Rawahah took it and was struck down.***” — and his eyes were shedding tears — “until a sword from among the swords of Allah took it, and Allah granted them victory.”

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari: from Ahmad ibn Waqid, from Hammad ibn Zayd, from Ayyub as-Sakhtiyani, from Humayd ibn Hilal, from Anas ibn Malik رضى الله عنه.

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam al-Bukhari in Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Military Expeditions, Chapter: The Ghazwah of Mu’tah in the Land of Sham, Hadith No. 4262.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih al-Bukhari, the most authentic book of Hadith after the Qur'an by consensus of the Hadith scholars.

Source: https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4262

HISTORICAL NOTE: “I SWEAR, O SOUL”

Ibn Ishaq narrates that when Ibn Rawahah took the banner, he hesitated a little, then urged himself on with verse: “I swear, O soul, you shall go down (to battle), willingly or unwillingly… Why do I see you averse to Paradise?” Then he dismounted. A cousin brought him a piece of meat to strengthen him; he took a bite, then threw it away saying: “Are you still (busy) with the world?” He took his sword and fought until he was martyred.

Status of the report: Narrated by Ibn Ishaq in the books of sirah; the details are not in Sahih al-Bukhari.

REFERENCES:

Ibn Hisham, as-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah (narrated from Ibn Ishaq); Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah.

After him the banner was taken by Khalid ibn al-Walid, “a sword from among the swords of Allah”, who saved the Muslim army (see Series 3: Khalid ibn al-Walid).

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LESSONS

Ibn Rawahah did not hide that his soul had hesitated. His honour is that he subdued his soul to the truth, just as he had subdued his poetry to faith.

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THE GRIEF OF THE MESSENGER ﷺ

‘A’ishah رضى الله عنها narrated that when news came of the killing of Zayd ibn Harithah, Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib and ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ sat down and grief was clearly visible on his face (Sahih al-Bukhari 4263).

Three noble Companions — a former slave, the Prophet’s own cousin, and a poet of the Ansar — fell on one day under one banner. Together they represent the unity of the ummah: Muhajirun and Ansar, Quraysh and non-Quraysh.

LESSONS

Grief at the passing of the righteous is mercy, not weakness. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ grieved, yet remained content with the decree of Allah.

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THE CHARACTER OF IBN RAWAHAH

The story of Ibn Rawahah portrays a believer who combined eloquence, worship and courage.

QUALITY	EXAMPLE FROM HIS LIFE
Leadership	A naqib at the Pledge of ‘Aqabah
A clean tongue	“Your brother does not speak obscenity” (Sahih al-Bukhari 1155)
Poetry for faith	His verses chanted by the Messenger ﷺ at the Trench (Sahih al-Bukhari 4106)
Devotion in worship	Fasting on a scorching day (Sahih al-Bukhari 1945)
Justice	Refused a bribe when assessing the dates of Khaybar
Fear of Allah	Wept over Maryam 19:71 before Mu’tah
Courage	Third commander at Mu’tah (Sahih al-Bukhari 4262)

LESSONS

Ibn Rawahah proves that a poet can be a worshipper and a hero, when his tongue and heart are submitted to Allah.

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SOURCES OF THE STORIES OF IBN RAWAHAH

This table summarises the source and grade of each story, so that readers can distinguish the authentic from the merely famous.

STORY	SOURCE	GRADE
His verses at the Trench	Sahih al-Bukhari 4106	Sahih
Verses on the Prophet’s night prayer	Sahih al-Bukhari 1155	Sahih
Fasting on a hot day	Sahih al-Bukhari 1945	Sahih
Fainting and ‘Amrah’s weeping	Sahih al-Bukhari 4267, 4268	Sahih
The three commanders of Mu’tah	Sahih al-Bukhari 4261	Sahih
The Messenger ﷺ announces their martyrdom	Sahih al-Bukhari 4262, 4263	Sahih
Poetry before the Messenger ﷺ in Makkah	Jami‘ at-Tirmidhi 2847	Hasan
Naqib at the Pledge of ‘Aqabah	Ibn Ishaq	Sirah
Speech at Ma‘an	Ibn Ishaq	Sirah
Weeping over Maryam 19:71	Ibn Ishaq	Sirah
“I swear, O soul”	Ibn Ishaq	Sirah
Refusing the bribe at Khaybar	Muwatta’ Malik	Mursal
“What a profitable sale!”	Ibn Kathir (Muhammad ibn Ka‘b)	Mursal
The tears of three poets	At-Tabari; Ibn Kathir	Mursal

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PEOPLE IN THE STORY OF IBN RAWAHAH

PERSON	ROLE
‘Amrah bint Rawahah	His sister
An-Nu‘man ibn Bashir	His nephew, narrator of his fainting
Hassan ibn Thabit	Fellow poet of the Messenger ﷺ
Ka‘b ibn Malik	Fellow poet of the Messenger ﷺ
Al-Bara’ ibn ‘Azib	Narrator of the verses at the Trench
Abu Hurairah	Quoted his verses on the Messenger ﷺ
Abu ad-Darda’	Narrator of his fasting
‘Umar ibn al-Khattab	Questioned his poetry in Makkah
Zayd ibn Harithah	First commander at Mu’tah (Series 7)
Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib	Second commander at Mu’tah (Series 8)
Khalid ibn al-Walid	Took the banner after him (Series 3)

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PLACES IN THE STORY OF IBN RAWAHAH

PLACE	EVENT
Madinah	His home town; deputy governor (4 AH)
‘Aqabah, Mina	The Pledge of ‘Aqabah; appointed naqib
Badr	Fought; bearer of the news of victory (2 AH)
The Trench (al-Khandaq)	His verses chanted by the Messenger ﷺ (5 AH)
Makkah	‘Umrat al-Qada’; poetry before the Messenger ﷺ (7 AH)
Khaybar	Assessed the date harvest justly
Ma‘an	His speech stirred the army (8 AH)
Mu’tah (southern Jordan)	Third commander; martyred (8 AH)

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TIMELINE OF IBN RAWAHAH’S LIFE

YEAR	EVENT
Before Islam	A Khazraji poet who could write
13th year of prophethood	Second Pledge of ‘Aqabah; naqib of Banu al-Harith
2 AH	Battle of Badr; carried the news of victory
3 AH	Battle of Uhud
4 AH	Deputy over Madinah (Badr al-Maw‘id)
5 AH	Battle of the Trench; his verses chanted by the Messenger ﷺ
6–7 AH	Al-Hudaybiyah, Khaybar and ‘Umrat al-Qada’
8 AH	Third commander at Mu’tah; martyred

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT IBN RAWAHAH

This chapter answers questions often asked about ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah رضى الله عنه. The answers are brief; details are in the earlier chapters.

1. WHAT WAS IBN RAWAHAH’S FULL NAME?

‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah ibn Tha‘labah al-Ansari al-Khazraji; his kunyah was Abu Muhammad.

2. WHAT WAS HIS ROLE AT THE PLEDGE OF ‘AQABAH?

He was one of the twelve nuqaba’ (leaders) chosen.

3. DID THE MESSENGER ﷺ REALLY CHANT HIS VERSES?

Yes, while digging the trench in the Battle of al-Khandaq (Sahih al-Bukhari 4106).

4. WHAT DO HIS VERSES ABOUT THE MESSENGER ﷺ SAY?

That he recited the Qur'an at dawn and rose at night in worship (Sahih al-Bukhari 1155).

5. HOW DOES THE QUR'AN JUDGE POETRY?

Believing poets who do righteous deeds are excepted from blame (Ash-Shu‘ara’ 26:227).

6. WHAT HAPPENED AT ‘UMRAT AL-QADA’?

He walked before the Messenger ﷺ reciting poetry (Jami‘ at-Tirmidhi 2847).

7. WHAT WAS HIS TASK AT KHAYBAR?

Assessing the date harvest each year — and he refused a bribe.

8. WHY DID HE WEEP BEFORE MU’TAH?

He remembered the verse that everyone will pass over the Fire (Maryam 19:71).

9. WHAT DID HE SAY AT MA‘AN?

“We do not fight by numbers, but by this religion” — victory or martyrdom.

10. WHO WERE THE THREE COMMANDERS OF MU’TAH?

Zayd ibn Harithah, Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib and ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah (Sahih al-Bukhari 4261).

11. WHO TOOK THE BANNER AFTER HIM?

Khalid ibn al-Walid, “a sword from among the swords of Allah” (Sahih al-Bukhari 4262).

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12. WHAT IS THE GREATEST LESSON FROM THE STORY OF IBN RAWAHAH?

Submitting one's tongue and soul to Allah, and proving words with deeds.

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LESSONS AND CONCLUSION

The story of ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah رضى الله عنه begins with a poet of Madinah who pledged allegiance at ‘Aqabah, and ends with a commander martyred at Mu’tah after urging his soul on with his final verses.

LESSON	FROM THE STORY OF IBN RAWAHAH
Talent for the truth	Poetry that defends Islam and reminds of Allah
Trade with Allah	“What a profitable sale!” — life exchanged for Paradise
Devotion in worship	Fasting and rising at night
Justice	No wrong even to those one dislikes
Fear of Allah	Weeping at the thought of the Fire
Words proven	He called to martyrdom, and was martyred

With this book, the story of the three commanders of Mu’tah is complete: Zayd ibn Harithah, Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib and ‘Abdullah ibn Rawahah رضى الله عنهم. May Allah gather us with them and with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in His Paradise.

In sha’ Allah, the Heroes of Islam series will continue with the story of another hero of Islam.

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RELATED SERIES ON QURANSCIENCE.MY

Heroes of Islam, Series 1: Hamzah ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib to Series 8: Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib; especially Series 7: Zayd ibn Harithah and Series 8: Ja‘far ibn Abi Talib (Mu’tah). https://quranscience.my/#pahlawan

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SURAH AL-BAQARAH 2:261

مَّثَلُ ٱلَّذِينَ يُنفِقُونَ أَمۡوَٰلَهُمۡ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنۢبَتَتۡ سَبۡعَ سَنَابِلَ فِي كُلِّ سُنۢبُلَةٖ مِّاْئَةُ حَبَّةٖۗ وَٱللَّهُ يُضَٰعِفُ لِمَن يَشَآءُۚ وَٱللَّهُ وَٰسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ ٢٦١

The example of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed [of grain] which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies [His reward] for whom He wills. And Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing.

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/2:261

SURAH SABA’ 34:39

قُلۡ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبۡسُطُ ٱلرِّزۡقَ لِمَن يَشَآءُ مِنۡ عِبَادِهِۦ وَيَقۡدِرُ لَهُۥۚ وَمَآ أَنفَقۡتُم مِّن شَيۡءٖ فَهُوَ يُخۡلِفُهُۥۖ وَهُوَ خَيۡرُ ٱلرَّٰزِقِينَ ٣٩

Say, "Indeed, my Lord extends provision for whom He wills of His servants and restricts [it] for him. But whatever thing you spend [in His cause] - He will compensate it; and He is the best of providers."

Translation: Sahih International — quran.com/34:39

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 2588

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ، وَابْنُ، حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - وَهُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « مَا نَقَصَتْ صَدَقَةٌ مِنْ مَالٍ وَمَا زَادَ اللَّهُ عَبْدًا بِعَفْوٍ إِلاَّ عِزًّا وَمَا تَوَاضَعَ أَحَدٌ لِلَّهِ إِلاَّ رَفَعَهُ اللَّهُ ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Charity does not decrease wealth.

Allah does not increase a servant who forgives except in honour. And no one humbles himself for the sake of Allah except that Allah raises him in rank.”

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Yahya bin Ayyub, Qutaibah bin Sa‘id and ‘Ali bin Hujr, from Isma‘il bin Ja‘far, from al-‘Ala’ bin ‘Abd al-Rahman, from his father ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Ya‘qub, from Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه .

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Virtue, Good Manners and Joining the Ties of Kinship (Kitab al-Birr wa al-Silah wa al-Adab), chapter on the encouragement of forgiveness and humility, Hadith No. 2588.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:2588

HADITH — SAHIH MUSLIM, NO. 1631

حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ أَيُّوبَ، وَقُتَيْبَةُ - يَعْنِي ابْنَ سَعِيدٍ - وَابْنُ حُجْرٍ قَالُوا حَدَّثَنَا إِسْمَاعِيلُ، - هُوَ ابْنُ جَعْفَرٍ - عَنِ الْعَلاَءِ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صلى الله عليه وسلم قَالَ « إِذَا مَاتَ الإِنْسَانُ انْقَطَعَ عَنْهُ عَمَلُهُ إِلاَّ مِنْ ثَلاَثَةٍ إِلاَّ مِنْ صَدَقَةٍ جَارِيَةٍ أَوْ عِلْمٍ يُنْتَفَعُ بِهِ أَوْ وَلَدٍ صَالِحٍ يَدْعُو لَهُ ».

TRANSLATION:

Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه narrated that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “When a person dies, his deeds come to an end except for three: an ongoing charity, knowledge that is benefited from, or a righteous child who prays for him.”

CHAIN OF NARRATION: Narrated by Imam Muslim: from Yahya bin Ayyub, Qutaibah bin Sa‘id and ‘Ali bin Hujr, from Isma‘il bin Ja‘far, from al-‘Ala’ bin ‘Abd al-Rahman, from his father ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Ya‘qub, from Abu Hurayrah رضى الله عنه .

REFERENCE: Narrated by Imam Muslim in Sahih Muslim, Book of Wills (Kitab al-Wasiyyah), chapter on the reward that reaches a person after his death, Hadith No. 1631.

GRADE: SAHIH — contained in Sahih Muslim.

Source: https://sunnah.com/muslim:1631

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