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DISCIPLES OF ʿĪSĀ, UPON HIM PEACE**ḤAWĀRIYYŪN, ANṢĀR ALLĀH**

This article comprises the following sections: i. Introduction; ii. Qurʾānic Mentions; iii. Parallels with the Anṣār of the Prophet; iv. Bibliography.

Introduction

The Qurʾān calls the disciples of Prophet ʿĪsā, upon him peace, *ḥawāriyyūn* (sing. *ḥawārī*). The term appears five times, in four verses (Q 3:52; 5:111-112; 61:14 x2), always in the plural, in the context of affirming their faith (*īmān*, see BELIEF) and submission (*islām*, *q.v.*) and their support for ʿĪsā, upon him peace (*q.v.*). According to Q 61:14, the disciples called themselves the “helpers of God” (*Anṣār Allāh*), meaning those who support the prophets Allah has sent with Truth (Ṭabarī).

The word *ḥawāriyyūn* comes from the root *ḥ-w-r*, which bears the meaning of “becoming white” (Ibn Manzūr). A *ḥawārī* is “one who whitens or bleaches garments”. The related term *ḥawr* means “to return”, whether physically or figuratively, as in Q 84:14: *Indeed he thought he would never return* (*yaḥīr*) [to Allah] (Ibn Fāris). Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Ṭabarī (224-310/839-923) suggests that they are more likely to have received that epithet because some of them were cloth dyers or fullers (*qaṣṣārīn*) (*sub* Q 3:52). Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Rāzī (544-606/1150-1210) offers, amongst others, the more figurative interpretation that they had “become purified from all defects and blemishes” and thus were “sincere friends”. Imād al-Dīn Abū-l-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl b. ʿUmar b. Kathīr al-Dimashqī, commonly known as Ibn Kathīr (701-774/1301-1373) says they may have gained this name because it was to them that ʿĪsā, upon him peace, would turn for support (*sub* Q 3:52).

The Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace, said, “Every Prophet has a *ḥawārī*, and

my *ḥawārī* is al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām” This hadith is classified as *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ* (Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Manāqib, manāqib al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām raḍī Allāh ʿanh). Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Maḥallī (863 H) and Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī (849-911/1445-1505) refer to Prophet ʿĪsā’s *ḥawāriyyūn* as “the elect companions of ʿĪsā (*aṣḥāb* ʿĪsā)” (*Tafsīr*, *sub* Q 3:52).

Though the Qurʾān does not enumerate them, scholars such as Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī al-Naysābūrī (d. 427/1035), Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Abī Bakr al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Qurṭubī (600-671/1204-1273) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī state that they were twelve in number (*Tafsīrs*, *sub* Q 3:52). According to al-Rāzī, they were fishermen who witnessed some of Prophet ʿĪsā’s miracles and believed in his prophethood (*sub* Q 3:52). He adds that some maintained they witnessed a miracle of ʿĪsā, upon him peace, either dying clothes of different colors (*q.v.*) while using a single colourant, or giving them food directly from the earth at their request (see MIRACLES); others hold that ʿĪsā had a bowl of food that never emptied, and that when a certain king witnessed this he and his close followers became the *ḥawāriyyūn*. Al-Rāzī concludes all of these theories are plausible, but ultimately the disciples were given this name because they were the close companions of the Prophet ʿĪsā, upon him peace, and they were sincere in their affection, obedience and service to him (*fī maḥabbatih, wa ṭāʿatih wa khidmatih*).

Qurʾānic Mentions

Q 3:52-54

Then when ʿĪsā sensed disbelief in them, he said: “Who are my helpers for Allah?” The disciples (ḥawāriyyūn) said: “We are Allah’s helpers (anṣār Allāh); we believe in Allah and bear witness that we have surrendered [to Him]. Our Lord, we believe in what You have sent down, and we follow the Messenger; so record us as being among the witnesses.” And [others] plotted, and Allah plotted; and Allah is the best of plotters. And [remember] when Allah said: O ʿĪsā, I am going to take you, raise you to Myself, and purify you from those who disbelieve; and to make those who follow you superior to those who disbelieve until the Day of Reckoning. Then you shall return to Me, and I will judge between you concerning that in which you used to differ.

The disciples describe themselves here as those who surrender (*Muslimīn*), not as Christians. Al-Ṭabarī notes that these verses were revealed when a group of Christians from Najrān visited Madīna (*q.v.*), in