201633 - The story of ‘Umar’s exiling of Nasr ibn Hajjaaj from Madinah

the question

It is said that ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab exiled Nasr ibn al-Hajjaaj for his exceptional good looks. Is this true? What was the reason for that?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The report of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allah be pleased with him) exiling Nasr ibn al-Hajjaaj to Basra lest the women of Madinah be tempted by him has been narrated in many reports, in brief and at length.

It was narrated by Ibn Shabbah in Tareekh al-Madinah (2/762) from Qataadah, by al-Kharaa’iti in I‘tilaal al-Quloob (2/392), and by Ibn al-Jawzi in Dhamm al-Hawa (p. 123), from Muhammad ibn al-Jahm ibn ‘Uthmaan ibn Abi’l-Jahm, from his father, from his grandfather, at length.

It was narrated by Abu Nu‘aym in Hilyat al-Awliya’ (4/322), and by Ibn ‘Asaakir in Tareekh Dimashq (62/21), from ash-Sha‘bi; and by Ibn Sa‘d in at-Tabaqaat (3/216), from ‘Abdullah ibn Buraydah; by Ibn ‘Asaakir in Tareekh Dimashq (62/23) from Muhammad ibn Sireen.

To sum up this story: ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allah be pleased with him) was patrolling in Madinah when he heard a woman chanting some verses of poetry in which she was saying: “Is there a way to get some wine to drink, and is there a way to be with Nasr bin Hajjaj?” He summoned him and found that he was a handsome youth, so he shaved his head, but it only made him better looking. So he exiled him to Basra lest the women be tempted by him. Then he sent word asking to return to his homeland, and stated that he had done nothing wrong, but ‘Umar refused to give him permission and said: Not so long as I am alive.

The story was mentioned by more than one of the scholars, including as-Sam‘aani in al-Ansaab (3/156), Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah in several places in Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (11/552, 15/313, 28/109, 28/371), Ibn al-Qayyim in I‘laam al-Muwaqqi‘een (4/284), al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar in al-Isaabah (6/382), Ibn Muflih in al-Adaab ash-Shar‘iyyah (3/132), and others.

Ad-Daaraqutni (may Allah have mercy on him) said in al-Mu’talif wa’l-Mukhtalif (4/2205):

It was said that Nasr ibn al-Hajjaaj was the son of al-Hajjaaj ibn ‘Alaat as-Sulami. He lived at the time of ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab and was described as very handsome. He is the one concerning whom it was said: “Is there a way to get some wine to drink, and is there a way to be with Nasr bin Hajjaj?” End quote.

Something similar was mentioned by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in al-Isti‘aab (1/326); Ibn Makoola in al-Ikmaal (1/560) and Ibn al-Atheer in Asad al-Ghaabah (1/456)

Al-Haafiz (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

In the book al-Mughribeen by Abu’l-Hasan al-Madaa’ini, I came across (a report) via al-Waleed ibn Sa‘eed who said: ‘Umar heard some people saying: Abu Dhu’ayb is the most handsome of the people of Madinah. He summoned him and said: You are indeed very handsome; you must leave Madinah. He said: If you must expel me, then (send me) to Basra, to which you expelled Nasr ibn Hajjaaj. And he mentioned the story of Nasr ibn Hajjaaj, which is well known.

End quote from Fath al-Baari (12/159-160)

This story is well-known and widely narrated in the books of the scholars. It was narrated via many chains of narration, but not one of them is free of reservations. The soundest of its chains of narration is the mursal chain of ‘Abdullah ibn Buraydah, but the fact that it is widespread and mentioned in the books of the leading scholars of the Muslims and those who are most well versed in history and biography, along with the fact that it has been transmitted through numerous chains of narration, indicate that it has some solid basis.

Secondly:

From the fiqhi point of view, this story comes under the heading of giving precedence to the public interest over private interests; allowing undermining of a personal interest for the purpose of protecting the public interest is a must in general terms.

Badr ad-Deen az-Zarkashi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in al-Manthoor fi'l-Qawaa'id al-Fiqhiyyah (1/348-349):

Ibn 'Abd as-Salaam said: They were unanimously agreed that the greater evil may be warded off by means of the lesser. Ibn Daqeeq al-'Eid said: One of the holistic general principles is that the greater of two evils may be warded off by allowing the lesser, if there is no option but to allow one of them to occur, and that the greater of two interests may be served by foregoing the lesser, if only one option is inevitable. I mean: this is a general rule, but it is not absolute and is not applicable in all cases.

Shaykh 'Izz ad-Deen said:

If there is a conflict between two interests, the greater interest is to be attained by foregoing the lesser.

As-Sarkhasi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in al-Mabsoot (9/45):

If it is proven (in a story) that a person was banished, then this is by way of achieving a purpose and interest, not by way of applying a hadd punishment. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) banished the effeminate man from Madinah, and 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) banished Nasr ibn Hajjaaj from Madinah when he heard a woman saying: "Is there a way to get some wine to drink, and is there a way to be with Nasr bin Hajjaj?" So he banished him, although good looks do not dictate that one should be banished; rather he did that in the public interest. End quote.

Al-Aloosi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The ruler may banish someone in the public interest, as he sees fit, as it was soundly narrated that 'Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allah be pleased with him) banished Nasr ibn Hajjaaj to Basra because

of his good looks, as some of the women were tempted by him.

End quote from Tafseer al-Aloosi (9/280).

If it is said: The women of Basra would be tempted by him after he moved there, so what should we do? We have only transferred the problem from one place to another, and we have not dealt with the root of the problem! The answer is:

Firstly: banishing him from his homeland and exiling him in a way that looks like a punishment would cause the motive of fitnah (temptation) in his heart andin the heart of others to be weakened, and it will teach the people to resist whims and desires, and will serve as a condemnation of immorality. If the people at the time of ‘Umar – whom the Shaytaan feared and was afraid of encountering him – realised that this man was only banished because of fear of fitnah, they would take precautions and be on guard against being tempted by him. So it is as if it was said to the people of Basra: I have banished this man to your land so that he will not be resident in the same city as me, so beware of being tempted by him.

Secondly: the one who is in exile is a stranger and is not like a resident, for he is in a strange land where he will be distracted by his own affairs or by working and earning a living, which will keep him away from the life of ease and luxury that he used to enjoy in his homeland, when he was among his family and clan. This will reduce his good looks and distract him from taking care of himself and of his appearance.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab banished Nasr ibn Hajjaaj from Madinah, from his homeland, to Basra, when he heard women composing poetry expressing their infatuation with him. Before that, he had issued orders that his hair be shaved off, so as to reduce his good looks by which the women were tempted. But after that he saw that he was one of the most handsome of people in terms of his cheeks, and that upset him, so he banished him to Basra. This was not because he had done anything wrong or committed some immoral deed for which he was to be punished; but among the women there were some who were tempted by him, so ‘Umar issued orders that something be

done to reduce his stunning good looks. By moving him from his homeland, his ambition and physical strength would be weakened, and he would feel that he was being punished. This is by way of protective measures for fear of immorality and infatuation before they take place; it was not by way of punishment.

End quote from Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (15/313).

Thirdly: the fact that this happened and was narrated, and people knew of it, teaches the new generation to fight temptation and teaches people in authority how to run people’s affairs from a shar‘i point of view, and how to give the public interest precedence over private interests. It also demonstrates that the temptation of women is one of the greatest temptations.

Fourthly: the sanctity of Madinah requires the banishment of anyone who is a source of temptation to women; he should be made to leave and go to some other land, out of respect for its sanctity.

For more information, please see the answer to question no. 151671

And Allah knows best.