161540 - Was Ibn Hazm From Ahl as-Sunnah?

the question

Was Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) one of Ahl as-Sunnah?

Summary of answer

Ibn Hazm is one of the senior scholars and one of those who respected the Sunnah and its people, and were keen to learn it and follow it. Ibn Hazm differed from Ahl as-Sunnah with regard to many important issues having to do with both fundamental and minor matters, which made many of the scholars criticize him and highlight his mistakes in beliefs.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Who is Ibn Hazm?

Abu Muhammad ‘Ali ibn Ahmad ibn Sa‘id ibn Hazm was of Persian origin; he came from Qurtubah (Cordoba) in Andalusia. He was the author of numerous books.

No one who has the least amount of knowledge and of scholars will have any doubt that Ibn Hazm was very smart and was very quick-witted, and he had a great deal of respect for the Sunnah and hadith. But perfection in all aspects is something extremely rare, and there is no one (among the scholars) but his opinion is subject to acceptance or rejection.

Ibn Hazm and following the Salaf

Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) said that he was a follower of the salaf (early generations) in general, and that he was opposed to the people of innovation (bid‘ah):

He said:

“When we mention the scholars, we mean those who are known to be qualified to issue fatwas among the Sahabah, Tabi‘in and their followers, the scholars of the regions, the leading scholars of hadith and those who followed them – may Allah be pleased with all of them. We do not mean Abu’l-Hudhayl, Ibn al-Asamm, Bishr ibn al-Mu‘tamir, Ibrahim ibn Sayyar, Ja‘far ibn Harb, Ja‘far ibn Mubashshir, Thumamah, Abu Ghaffar, ar-Raqqashi, the Azariqah, the Safariyyah, the ignorant Abadiyyah or the Rafidis. These people did not put any effort into examining the reports so that they might know the sound reports from the weak ones, nor did they examine and study the rulings mentioned in the Quran so that they might know correct fatwas from incorrect ones on a sound basis. Rather they were preoccupied with arguing about fundamental beliefs, and each group has its own focus.”(Maratib al-Ijma‘, p. 12-15)

Ibn Hazm’s views that differed from the sunnah

Despite the fact that Ibn Hazm respected the Sunnah and its scholars, and despite his great knowledge of hadith and its sciences, and his vast memory and immense knowledge, he had views in which he differed from the Sunnah and its scholars concerning some well-known issues of both fundamental and minor matters.

Adh-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his biography of him in as-Siyar (18/186-187):

“He grew up in luxury and ease, and was blessed with extreme intelligence and quick-wittedness, and he owned many precious books. His father was one of the prominent figures of Qurtubah, who served as a vizier in the ‘Amiri state, and Abu Muhammad was also a vizier of that state when he was young. He initially became prominent in the fields of literature, history and poetry, as well as mantiq (dialectics) and other branches of philosophy, which left its mark on him and we wish that it had never had an impact on him. I came across a book of his in which he encouraged study of mantiq (dialectics) and gave it precedence over other branches of knowledge, and I felt sad for him, because he is prominent in the Islamic sciences, with a great knowledge of hadith reports, and he has no equal, even though he is rigid in his thinking and extremely literalist in minor

issues, although not in the fundamentals.

It was said that he studied the Shafi'i madhhab first, then his research led him to adopt the view that using analogy (qiyas) is invalid in all cases, whether it is clear or implied, and that the apparent meaning of the text and the general meaning of the Quran and hadith should be followed. He wrote many books on that, and he debated with others to prove his point, and he argued his point at length, both verbally and in writing. He did not show respect to the imams (leading scholars) when debating; rather he used rough words, impugning and slandering, and his recompense suited his action to the extent that many leading scholars shunned his books and ignored them, and warned others against them, and on one occasion they were burned. But other scholars took an interest in his books, and they examined them, critiqued them and benefited from them; they learned from them and criticized them, and they saw in them precious pearls mixed with cheap beads. Sometimes they would be excited and amazed, then they would mock some of his idiosyncratic ideas. In general, perfection is something extremely rare and the view of any individual is subject to acceptance or rejection, except the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

Ibn Hazm was well versed in many branches of knowledge, including hadith, and he excelled in writing both poetry and prose.

He was sincerely devoted and there was much goodness in him; his aims were good and his books are useful. He showed no interest in positions of leadership; he stayed in his house, focusing on knowledge. Therefore we should not exaggerate about him or undermine him or his status. Rather he was praised by senior scholars before us."

Adh-Dhahabi also wrote a comprehensive biography of him in as-Siyar (18/184-212):

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

"Even though with regard to issues of faith and the divine decree Abu Muhammad Ibn Hazm was more sincere and had more knowledge of hadith and more respect for hadith and the scholars of hadith than others, his views on these issues were nevertheless influenced by the ideas of the

philosophers and Mu‘tazilah with regard to issues of the divine attributes, which led to his view not being in harmony with the people of hadith with regard to these issues. His wording was in agreement with Ahl al-hadith but the meanings were in harmony with the other group. Similar criticisms were made by those among the fuqaha, ahl al-kalam and scholars of hadith who criticized him for being a literalist with no depth to what he said. He also denied the wisdom behind what is enjoined and prohibited, and he denied the extraordinary events and similar things which may be classified as acts of the hearts. Moreover, he also criticized some prominent figures and went to extremes in denying the wisdom behind rulings, and he claimed to follow the apparent meanings. However he had faith, religious commitment and a great deal of knowledge, that no one can deny except one who is stubborn, and the content of his books highlights his deep knowledge of various views and different circumstances, as well as his respect for the fundamentals of Islam and for the Messenger, which is a combination that cannot be found with anyone else.

So for example, if there is a discussion about a hadith, his view will clearly be the more correct view, and his ability to distinguish between sound and weak reports, and his knowledge of the views of the early generations, can hardly be found with anyone else among the fuqaha.” (Majmu‘ al-Fatawa) (4/19-20).

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

“Abu Muhammad Ibn Hazm was knowledgeable about hadith and he supported the way of Dawud and others among the literalists who do not accept the validity of analogy (qiyas). However, he went to extremes in denying the divine attributes and referred their meanings to the knowledge of Allah. He also claimed that the names of Allah, such as al-‘Alim (the All-Knowing) and al-Qadir (the All-Powerful) do not refer to knowledge and power; and he attributed himself to Imam Ahmad and other similar leading scholars of the Sunnah, and claimed that his view was the view of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Hadith , and he criticized al-Ash‘ari and his companions a great deal, and claimed that they drifted away from the view of Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Hadith with regard to the divine attributes.

What is well established, and no one can deny, is that the view of al-Ash‘ari and his companions

concerning the divine attributes is closer to the view of Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Hadith than the view of Ibn Hazm and his peers concerning that issue." (Dar Ta'arud al-'Aql wa'n-Naql, 3/24)

Ibn Hazm's views on the beautiful names of Allah

Shaykh al-Islam also said:

"Ibn Hazm claims that the beautiful names of Allah, may He be exalted, do not refer to their meanings… And the reason for this mistaken notion is their denial of the divine attributes and going to extremes in denying any likening thereof (to human attributes), which is the view of the Jahmis and those who agreed with them in denying the divine attributes. They said: if we say that 'Alim (All-Knowing) refers to knowledge and Qadir (All-Powerful) refers to power, in that case affirming the names will lead to affirming the attributes.

This is the criticism against Ibn Hazm, because he is one of those who denied the divine attributes even though he showed a great deal of respect towards the hadith, the Sunnah and Imam Ahmad. He persisted in his claim that what he said was the view of Ahmad and others, and his mistake is the result of his having learned the views of the philosophers and Mu'tazilah from some of his shaykhs, and he did not come across anyone who could explain to him where they had gone wrong. He also transmitted mantiq (dialectics) through an isnad from Matta at-Tarjuman." (Minhaj as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyyah, 2/353)

Ibn Hazm and criticizing scholars

Ibn Kathir (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"He used to criticize the scholars a great deal, verbally and in writing, which led to the generation of resentment in the hearts of his contemporaries; they kept trying until they made the people in authority hate him, and they expelled him from his city, until he died in a village in Sha'ban of that year, when he had passed the age of ninety.

What is amazing is that he was a confused literalist with regard to minor issues, and he did not

believe in analogy (qiyas), whether it was clear or otherwise. This caused the scholars to lose respect for him, and it caused him to make serious mistakes in his views and conduct. Yet despite that he was the one who tried to find interpretations other than the apparent meaning when dealing with basic issues and the verses and hadiths that speak of the divine attributes, because he first of all acquired deep knowledge of dialectics (mantiq), which he learned from Muhammad ibn al-Hasan al-Madhhaji al-Kinani al-Qurtubi, as was mentioned by Ibn Makula and Ibn Khallikan. That led to him in developing a wrong understanding of the divine attributes." (Al-Bidayah wa'n-Nihayah (12/113). See also: Tabaqat 'Ulama al-Hadith by Ibn 'Abd al-Hadi (3/349)

The scholars of the Standing Committee said:

"Ibn Hazm was one of the prominent scholars of both fundamentals and minor issues, and in knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah, but he disagreed with the majority of scholars in many issues, in which he was mistaken, because of his rigid adherence to the apparent meaning and his refusal to accept clear analogy that fulfilled the conditions. His mistakes with regard to beliefs, because of his interpretation of the verses that speak of the divine names and attributes in a manner other than the apparent meaning, were even more serious." (Fatawa al-Lajnah ad-Daimah, 12/223)

To sum up, Ibn Hazm differed from Ahl as-Sunnah with regard to many important issues having to do with both fundamental and minor matters, which made many of the scholars criticize him and highlight his mistakes in beliefs, as explained above.

In conclusion, Imam Abu Muhammad Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) is one of the senior scholars and one of those who respected the Sunnah and its people, and were keen to learn it and follow it. But some of the principles of the philosophers and people of innovation were entrenched in his heart, which led to him forming opinions in which he differed from Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Hadith with regard to the divine names and attributes in particular, as well as other fundamental and minor issues.

Hence we cannot say of him that he is one of Ahl as-Sunnah in an absolute sense, or with regard

to issues of the divine attributes in particular, although he did not step beyond the bounds of the Sunnah and its people altogether, to such an extent that he could be regarded as an innovator, because of his veneration for the Sunnah and his encouragement to people to follow it and shun that which went against it. However he was mistaken in some details.

And Allah knows best.