

MIFTAAH SEMINAR

THE LEGEND SERIES



Imam Yousef Wahb

SESSION 4

Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal

- He is the last of the 4 great Imams.
- He was born in the month of Rabi ul Awal in the year 164 AH in Baghdad, Iraq.
- He is originally from an Arab tribe called Shaybaan.
 - This was a very large tribe and they had a good status among the Arabs.
- His lineage meets with the lineage of the Prophet SAW at their grandfather, Adnan.
- Some of his family members worked for the government including his father and grandfather.
 - Imam Ahmad did not really like this and this would later influence his opinions and lifestyle.
- His father died when he was young and his family was very poor.
- He never mentioned his lineage to brag or boast and he would always give away any gifts to those who were more needy.

- People said: You would never see a poor person being more honored than in the gatherings of Ahmad ibn Hanbal.
- He memorized the Quran, studied language, and worked in the Diwaan (the city hall) to get better at writing
 - He did all of this by the age of 14.
- When any Caliph would go to war with the army, they would write letters to their family. Some of the wives and family members were illiterate so they would go to Imam Ahmad because they trusted him to read the letters to them and to write a letter back for them.
- One person said: If this person stays alive, he will be a proof against all people who lived during his time.
 - This shows how smart people thought he was.
- After studying Arabic, he began studying hadith.
 - He would gather hadith and classify them based on the region which he heard them from, which no one had done before.
- He said about himself: My mother would push me so much to gain knowledge but sometimes even she would tell me to relax because of how hard I was on myself.
 - He would wake up before fajr to get to the gathering early.
- He traveled from Iraq to Hijaz five times and met with Imam Al-Shafi'i.

- Imam Al-Shafi'i would tell him that if he hears an authentic hadith he should tell him about it and he will take it right away (meaning that he trusted its authenticity from him).
- He said that he performed hajj 5 times and 3 out of the 5 times, he went walking.
 - He would walk from Iraq to Mecca for hajj.
 - He said that one time, he got lost while on his way to hajj and he had no one with him to help so he kept walking and shouting out "oh servants of Allah show me the way" until someone saw him and showed him the correct way.
- On one of his trips to hajj he had one of his close friends, Yahya bin Ma'in, with him. He told him that his intention was to do hajj and then continue to Yemen to meet with one of the great scholars of hadith, Abdul Razzaq Al-San'ani, and learn from him. While they were doing tawaf, Yahya saw this great scholar doing tawaf as well so he went to him and introduced himself and Imam Ahmad. Then, Yahya asked the scholar if they could make an appointment to sit down and learn hadith with him. Imam Abdul Razzaq gave them a time to sit with him the next day. After they left, Imam Ahmad asked Yahya why he would do that and Yahya explained that Allah SWT had saved them a whole month's journey to Yemen and back because the scholar was with them at hajj.

- Imam Ahmad said that he would not change his intention with Allah and that he is still going to go to Yemen to meet with him after they finish hajj.
 - This shows how dedicated he was to gaining knowledge.
 - After hajj, they went to Yemen and met with this scholar.
- Imam Ahmad would say: I am with my ink until I enter the grave.
- He also said: A person is considered a scholar as long as they continue seeking knowledge. Once that person thinks that he is a scholar and he is done seeking knowledge, he is ignorant.
- The Prophet SAW said: Allah will send at the end of every 100 years, one who will renovate the religion for them.
 - Imam Ahmad said: "For the first 100 years it was Omar bin Abdul Aziz and I hope that for these 100 years that it is Imam Al-Shafi'i."
- He did not start teaching hadith until he was 40 years old.
 - This is relatively old compared to the other 4 imams.
 - He began teaching so late because he said that he can not teach people while his teachers are still alive.
- On average, 5,000 people would attend each one of his sessions.
 - Not all of these people would be actual students of knowledge.

- Out of the 5,000 people, about 500 would be writing the hadith and actually studying them.
- One person said: I attended the sessions of Imam Ahmad for 12 years and I never wrote down one hadith. I would only attend these sessions to learn from his manners.
- He would have large public sessions in the masjid for everyone to attend but he would also have small private sessions in his house to teach his close friends and family.

The Great Trial

- Allah SWT tested him with a great trial which occurred during his time: The trial of the createdness of the Quran.
 - Imam Ahmad was not interested in theology and philosophy.
 - People began to debate whether the Quran had always existed or if it was created.
 - The Mu'tazilah's, an islamic rationalist sect, believed that if the Quran is God's word, then logically God must have preceded His own speech, and therefore the Quran is created.
 - The traditionalists believed that the Quran was co-eternal with God, therefore it was not created.
- Al-Ma'moon was the Caliph at the time and he was a Mu'tazilah.

- He called upon all of the scholars and told them that they must accept the Mu'tazilah beliefs and publicly declare it to everyone.
- He was a student to one of the Mu'tazilah scholars which is why he grew up loving them.
- The Mu'tazilah had some beliefs which were somewhat contradictory to Islamic beliefs.
 - It is problematic to believe that the Quran was created.
- Al-Ma'moon told the mayor to go and ask each scholar what they believed about the Quran. If the scholars did not say that the Quran was created, Al-Ma'moon said that he would not appoint them to any government position because they can not be trusted. Those who refused to agree with him would be punished in different ways.
 - He would stop paying them, make them look untrustworthy, put them in jail, and eventually he would threaten to kill them.
- A lot of the scholars and judges submitted to him and believed in what he wanted.
- Only 4 scholars remained strong in their beliefs and one of them was Imam Ahmad.
 - They were put in jail and continuously asked about their beliefs.
 - One of them eventually backed down and agreed, so three people remained.

- The mayor sent a threat to these three people and he specifically singled out Imam Ahmad because he knew how strong his belief was.
- He began to publicly humiliate these scholars by moving them to different jails in handcuffs in front of everyone.
- One of the scholars submitted to them eventually and later on another scholar passed away.
- The only scholar left was Imam Ahmad.
- Imam Ahmad was sent to Al-Ma'moon and on his way to him, Al-Ma'moon passed away.
- The brother of Al-Ma'moon, Al-Mu'tasim, was next in line to be the Caliph and he was much tougher.
 - Before he passed away, Al-Ma'moon wrote in his will that he recommends that his brother remain on the beliefs of the Mu'tazilah, so he did.
- Al-Mu'tasim began to severely torture Imam Ahmad.
 - He was tortured for 2 years and 4 months until they allowed him to go home because they realized that he would not change his mind.
 - He spent a long time in his house because he was unable to move due to his injuries from the torture.
 - When he felt better, he would go to the masjid and hold small sessions with a few people.
- Then, Al-Mu'tasim died and Al-Wathiq became the next Caliph.
 - He was from the same family and was a Mu'tazilah.

- He did not want to physically abuse Imam Ahmad because the more he was tortured, the more people began to believe him.
 - He prevented him from meeting with anyone so that his ideologies would not be spread.
- Imam Ahmad did not teach for 5 years.
- Later on, Al-Wathiq changed his mind.
 - People were angry with him because he was preventing Imam Ahmad from teaching.
 - People began to ask him why he was calling people to something that none of the companions called people to.
 - This made him realize that he was wrong.
- Imam Ahmad did not have a full time job for most of his life.
 - He would work various small jobs which provided him very little money just so he could live.
 - He would be offered several jobs from kings and officials but he would refuse them.

Key Characteristics of Imam Ahmad

- He had a very strong memory.
 - Not only would he memorize the ahadith, but he would understand the rulings of the sahabah.
 - One scholar said: When Imam Ahmad speaks it is as if Allah has gifted him with all of the knowledge.
- He was an extremely patient man.
 - He endured all of the trials and torture of that time.

- He was detached from the adornments of this life.
 - One of the scholars visited Imam Ahmad and asked, “how can I soften my heart?” Imam Ahmad said, “Oh son, just have halal provisions.”
- He was very careful about showing off.
 - He would say: If you show your pen and ink in the street, it can be a form of showing off.
 - This is because when people saw a pen and ink they knew that this person was a student of knowledge.
- Every time he mentioned or thought about death he would cry.
 - He told his students: Fear has prevented me from even food and drink. When I think about death, this whole life means nothing to me.
 - He said: I am tested with being famous. I wish no one knew me.
- One of his famous books was Al-Musnad which is a technical book of several ahadith.
 - He categorized this book based off of the names of the different companions.
 - Each chapter has all of the narrations that the companion narrated.
 - He started compiling this book when he was 16.
 - The 10 companions that he began with are the 10 companions who were guaranteed Jennah by the Prophet SAW.

His Madhhab

- Very few Muslim communities follow the madhhab of Imam Ahmad today.
 - The number of followers of a madhhab does not correlate with the strength or authenticity of a madhhab.
 - The amount of followers has a lot to do with politics and social factors.
- It was the last of the four madhaahib.
 - When he came, the other three madhaahib were well established and spread around the world.
 - This is one reason that it was less popular.
- His methodology was against the government while the other Imams, specifically Al-Shafi'i and Abu Hanifa, established the judiciary systems based on their schools of thought.
 - This is another reason it was less popular.
 - Those who wanted a job within the judiciary systems would adopt the methodologies of Al-Shafi'i or Abu Hanifa.
 - Imam Ahmad and his students did not try to enforce their methodology on the judiciary systems.
- Imam Ahmad got the title of the Imam of Ahul Ul-Sunnah because he faced a big trial and he defended the creed and purity of the Quran with his own life.