

11093 - What to do at times of fitnah and division

the question

Are these the times which are referred to in the hadeeth of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), according to which when one of the Sahaabah asked him, “What should I do when there is too much fitnah and division?”, he replied, “Keep away from the people, and sit in your house”? In al-Saheeh, in Kitaab al-Fitan, Baab Kayf al-Haal idha lam yakun khaleefah, there is a hadeeth which says that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) told them to withdraw from people when calamities strike, and he said, “... even if you have to bite onto the root of a tree.” Please explain this hadeeth and tell us what the scholars said about it.

Detailed answer

In al-Saheehayn and elsewhere – and this version was narrated by al-Bukhaari – it is reported from Abu Idrees al-Khawlaani that he heard Hudhayfah ibn al-Yamaan say: “The people used to ask the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) about good things, but I used to ask him about bad things, fearing that I would live to see such things. I said, ‘O Messenger of Allaah, we were in a state of ignorance (jaahiliyyah) and evil, then Allaah sent us this good (i.e., Islam). Will there be any evil after this good?’ He said, ‘Yes.’ I said, ‘Will there be any good after that evil?’ He said, ‘Yes, but it will be tainted.’ I said, ‘How will it be tainted?’ He said, ‘(There will be) some people who will guide others in a way that is not according to my guidance. You will approve of some of their deeds and disapprove of others.’ I said, ‘Will there be any evil after that good?’ He said, ‘Yes, there will be people calling at the gates of Hell, and whoever responds to their call, they will throw them into it (the Fire).’ I said, ‘O Messenger of Allaah, describe them to us.’ He said, ‘They will be from among our people, speaking our language.’ I said, ‘What do you command me to do if I live to see such a thing?’ He said, ‘Adhere to the jamaa’ah (group, community) of the Muslims and their imaam (leader).’ I asked, ‘What if there is no jamaa’ah and no leader?’ He said, ‘Then keep away from all those groups, even if you have to bite (eat) the roots of a tree until death overtakes you whilst you are in that state.’”

The time does not refer to this particular period we are living in; it is a general idea which may refer to any time and place, from the time of the fitnah and rebellion against ‘Uthmaan (may Allaah be pleased with him) at the time of the Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them all), onwards.

What is meant by keeping away or withdrawing from people at the time of division is what was mentioned by al-Haafiz ibn Hajar (may Allaah have mercy on him) in al-Fath, narrating from al-Tabari, who said: when the people do not have an imaam (leader) and they split into sects and parties, do not follow any of these groups; keep away from all of them if possible, lest one fall into evil. When there is a jamaa’ah that is truly following the Straight Path, then you have to join them and help to increase their numbers, and cooperate with them in truth, because in that case this group constitutes the jamaa’ah of the Muslims for that man in that place.

And Allaah is the source of strength. May Allaah bless our Prophet Muhammad and his family and companions and grant them them peace.