

The Companions of Prophet Muhammad: Salman Al-Farsi

Description: A short biography of one of Prophet Muhammad's greatest companions, Salman Al-Farsi.

By Aisha Stacey (© 2014 IslamReligion.com)

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Category: Lessons > [Prophet Muhammad](#) > [His Companions](#)

Objectives

- To learn about the life of Salman Al-Farsi and his struggle to seek the truth and embrace it.

Arabic Terms

- *Sahabah* - the plural form of "Sahabi," which translates to Companions. A *sahabi*, as the word is commonly used today, is someone who saw Prophet Muhammad, believed in him and died as a Muslim.
- *Du'a* - supplication, prayer, asking Allah for something.

Salman Al-Farsi is one of the *sahabah*. He is also referred to as Salman the Persian. The country of Fars became known as Persia. He is believed to have been born into a very wealthy and influential family. Salman became a Christian, left his father's house, and began a long religious quest. He travelled to Syria and then to central Arabia, seeking the prophet who, he was told, would revive the religion of Prophet Abraham. On the way he was sold into slavery. Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, was influential in securing Salman's freedom and he went on to become one of the Prophet's closest companions, an innovative warrior and a great scholar of Islam.



Salman, whose name at birth was Rouzeba was born around 565 CE in the village of Jayyan in Isfahan, Persia. His father was the chief of the village and was a rich and influential man. He owned a big home on a fertile estate and was also the local Zoroastrian priest. Salman was bought up in the Zoroastrian faith in which fire plays a symbolic but central role. At a young age Salman was so knowledgeable about his own faith that he was appointed as 'Custodian of the Fire'. Salman's father was very devoted to him and liked to keep him close to home never letting him stray far from the estate or the temple. Salman however acquired an insatiable thirst for knowledge and looked for it wherever he could.

One day Salman's father was very busy and sent his son to the far reaches of the estate to oversee some business; Salman never made it that far. On the way he overheard the melodious sound of Christians praying. Salman was drawn to the Christian religion but upon returning home was prevented from finding out more or joining their congregation. His father forcibly restrained Salman but he broke free and joined a Christian caravan travelling across Syria. Thus he left his country on what could be described as a spiritual journey of enlightenment.

Salman converted to Christianity under the tutelage of a monk with whom he travelled for several years. He resumed his quest for knowledge and travelled towards the Arabian Peninsula. He came in contact with many Christians, monks, preachers and priests but none were more capable than his previous teacher. One day he met a very old and ill priest who told Salman about the coming of the last prophet in Yathrib^[1] and informed him that this prophet's characteristics were mentioned and detailed in the Bible.

Salman left for the city of Yathrib in the company of an Arab caravan. Not long into the journey the Arabs broke their arrangement with Salman and took him captive. Some days later Salman was sold to a man belonging to a Jewish tribe from Yathrib. Thus Salman arrived in Yathrib quite a few years before Prophet Muhammad and for all those years he was harassed, tormented and abused.

Even before Salman had met and spoken with Prophet Muhammad his search for the truth is impressive and not unlike the search undertaken by many people today. It is not uncommon to hear new Muslims talk about moving from one religion to another searching for the light of truth and for the spark that only their soul recognizes. So far Salman has spent many years acquiring knowledge and knowing that something is missing. He has endured heart ache and abuse and his patience in the face of adversity is about to bear a delectable fruit.

When Salman first heard about the arrival in Yathrib of a man calling himself a prophet, he was eager to meet him and devised a way to escape the eyes of his brutal master and meet that man. Salman found a way to confirm the signs of prophethood the old priest had told him about and when he was convinced of those signs, he threw himself at Prophet Muhammad weeping and kissing his hands and feet. Prophet Muhammad drew him upright and said, "O Salman, reveal your story"^[2]. The *sahabah* listened in awe possibly in much the same way that born Muslims today listen to the stories of those who convert to Islam often giving up everything to do so.

Let us hear what Salman himself has to say about what happened next. He begins... "When I had finished, the Prophet said, 'O Salman! Make a deal with your owner to free you.' My master did agree to free me in exchange for the following: 'Three hundred date trees, as well as one thousand, six hundred silver coins.' Hence, the *sahabah* helped by providing around twenty to thirty date plants each.... The Prophet said to me, 'Dig a hole for each date-plant. When you are finished, let me know so that I can personally set all the date-plants into place with my own hands.' Thus, with the help of my friends, I dug holes wherever the date-plants were to be put.

Later on, the Prophet came. We stood by his side holding the plants as he set them into the ground... not a single plant died out... I still had the silver to pay. A man came with gold which was roughly the size of a pigeon's egg. The Prophet said, 'O Salman! Take this and pay off whatever you have to. Allah will surely make it sufficient for your debt.' It outweighed the one thousand, six hundred coins. I not only paid off my dues, but what I had left with me was equivalent to what I had given them."

Again Salman's story is not dissimilar to the stories we hear from new Muslims today. Many will talk about the blessings of Allah raining down upon them, or their *du'a* being answered almost immediately. Allah takes special care of the new Muslims and knows the hardships they faced and the struggles that are to come. Salman is a great example of how a convert to Islam is able to embrace his new religion and way of life. He demonstrates that a search for enlightenment will eventually lead one to the truth. Salman was the first person from Faris to convert to Islam and the first person known to translate parts of the Quran into a language other than Arabic. He is known in Islamic history for his innovative methods of warfare and his closeness to Prophet Muhammad. Salman Al-Farsi left his unique mark on the history of Islam and is believed to have died around 655 CE.

Endnotes:

[1] Yathrib is the city that Prophet Muhammad and his followers migrated to from Mecca. It then became known as Medina. Medina is also the Arabic word for city.

[2] *Imam Ahmad.*

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