

The Companions of Prophet Muhammad: Zayd ibn Thabit

Description: A brief look at the life and achievements of a man dedicated to the Quran.

By Aisha Stacey (© 2014 IslamReligion.com)

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Objectives:

- To learn about the life of Zayd ibn Thabit and his ability to take advantage of what he could do in his given circumstances.

Arabic Terms:

- *Ansar* - helpers. The people of Medina who opened their homes, lives and city to Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Mecca.
- *Surah* " chapter of the Quran.
- *Hijrah* - the act of migration from one place to another. In Islam, the *Hijrah* refers to the Muslims migrating from Mecca to Medina and also marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.
- *Mushaf* " this is the book in which the Quran is contained.
- *Du'a* - supplication, prayer, asking Allah for something.
- *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.

Zayd ibn Thabit is believed to have been about twelve or thirteen when Prophet Muhammad made *Hijrah* to Medina. He was a smart boy, well-educated and supported by his family but was devastated when he was not allowed to participate in battle. His response was to study the Quran^[1] and thus prove his worth to his Prophet. His Islamic and secular education held him in good stead and did indeed lead to a position within the inner circle of the men around the Prophet. Each time we hold the Quran in our hands we have cause to remember Zayd ibn Thabit for he was the man who oversaw the collection of all the verses and chapters of Quran and was responsible for



putting them into one book; the *Mushaf*.

Zayd ibn Thabit first came to the Prophet's notice about a year after the Muslim community had migrated to Medina. Zayd was a young teenager and a member of the *Ansar*. When the Muslims were preparing for the Battle of Badr, Zayd presented himself for duty. He was carrying a sword that was nearly as tall as he was and he was not as well built as some of the boys already training with the army. The Prophet recognised his zeal and treated him with great respect but denied him the opportunity to join the army. Zayd felt sad, angry and dejected. Instead of wallowing in grief, Zayd decided to do something that was sure to please the Prophet. He began to study and learn the Quran, the words of Allah.

When next it came time for the Muslims to face their greatest enemy at the Battle of Uhud, Zayd's attempt to join the army was once again rejected due to his young age. This time even his family felt his pain and decided to approach Prophet Muhammad and inform him of Zayd's study of the Quran. Some of the men of the *Ansar* approached Prophet Muhammad and mentioned Zayd's exceptional qualities such as his dedication to the Quran and his ability to read and write. They respectfully asked Prophet Muhammad to listen to Zayd recite.

The Prophet listened, liked what he heard, and was impressed with Zayd's literacy which was a rare skill at that time; Prophet Muhammad himself was an unlettered man. Prophet Muhammad also recognised Zayd's gift for languages and instructed him to learn Hebrew and Syriac. When he had become proficient he assisted Prophet Muhammad with his correspondence including letters to heads of state inviting them to the way of Islam.

Prophet Muhammad had many scribes however it was Zayd who rose quickly to prominence. As the words of Allah were revealed Prophet Muhammad would call for a scribe to write down the words as they flowed from his lips. Many *sahabah* reported that they often heard him call for Zayd saying "let him bring the board, the ink pot and the scapula bone".^[2]

It was not until the Battle of the Trench, five years after the *Hijra* that Zayd was able to fulfill his desire to participate in a military campaign. The boy was now more mature, more experienced and well versed in the revelation that was being revealed to Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him. Zayd had plans to be a fighter in the cause of Islam but Allah had other plans. What we want is not always what is good for us or the best thing. This is true today as much as it was then. When a person converts to Islam they might have great plans, to do this, or that but often their plans are thwarted at every turn.

oe...But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. And Allah Knows, while you know not." (Quran 2:216)

Zayd's plans were not fulfilled in the way he wanted but he was patient and tried to do what he thought would please Prophet Muhammad and Allah Almighty. He memorised the Quran, he studied Islam, he worked diligently as an interpreter and scribe for Prophet

Muhammad and in just a few years he was able to participate in battle. However Zayd's greatest work for Islam was yet to come. Each day when you hold the *Mushaf* in your hands perhaps you might spare a thought or a *du'a* for Zayd ibn Thabit, for it was he who was appointed to collect the Quran into one manuscript.

At the time of Prophet Muhammad's death, pieces of the Quran were held in trust by many Muslims. Some had only a few pages from which they were learning to recite, others had several chapters and still others had pieces of bark or animal skin containing only one verse.

The leader of the Muslims after Prophet Muhammad, Abu Bakr, was afraid that the Quran would be lost, so he consulted some of the *sahabah* about compiling the Quran into a single book. He asked Zayd ibn Thabit, to oversee this task. At first, Zayd felt uneasy about doing something with the Quran that Prophet Muhammad did not specifically authorize. However after realizing the necessity of the task he agreed to collect pieces of the Quran, both written and memorized and compile a book " the *Mushaf*.

Zayd knew all Quran by heart and it would have been possible for him to have written the whole Quran from his own memory. However, he did not use this method alone. He was very careful and methodical and would not write down any verses unless they had been confirmed by at least two of the *sahabah*. Because Zayd had been prevented from joining the army he took refuge in the Book of Allah and thus became one of the preservers of the Quran.

oeVerily it is We who has sent down the Quran and surely We will preserve it" (Quran 15: 9)

Zayd was a man of knowledge immersed in the words of Allah and a close companion to Prophet Muhammad; a role model for both then and now. Zayd was well respected and well-remembered. It is said that Umar ibn Al-Khattab once addressed the Muslims saying, oeO people, whoever wants to ask about the Quran, let him go to Zayd ibn Thabit." Seekers of knowledge from among the *sahabah* and the generation who succeeded them came from far and wide to benefit from Zayd's knowledge. When Zayd died, between 660 and 665 CE, the *sahabi* Abu Hurayrah is believed to have said, oeToday, the scholar of this *Ummah* has died."

Endnotes:

[1] Quran is the words of Allah as revealed to Prophet Muhammad by the archangel Jibreel.

[2] Saheeh Bukhari

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