

The Mothers of the Believers (part 2 of 2): Altruism & Alliances

Description: A brief biography of the other wives of Prophet Muhammad.

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Objectives

- To learn and understand something about the remaining Mothers of the Believers.

Arabic Terms

- *Hadith* - (plural " *ahadith* ") is a piece of information or a story. In Islam it is a narrative record of the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad and his companions.
- *Du'a* - supplication, prayer, asking Allah for something.
- *Mahr* - dowry, bridal gift, given from a man to his wife.

The Mothers of the Believers continued from lesson 1.

· Zaynab bint Khuzaymah (b.595 " d.624)

Zaynab was the first of Prophet Muhammad's wives that did not come from the tribe of *Quraish*^[1]. She died less than one year after her marriage and as a consequence very little is known about her. Before this marriage she had earned the title of Mother of the Poor due to her work with the poor and her generosity to them. There is some dispute about how many times Zaynab was widowed before her marriage to Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him. However her last husband died in battle and her marriage to Prophet Muhammad set a precedent for others to follow. Muslim men no longer feared that their deaths in battle would mean starvation and neglect for their families. It became honourable to marry the widows of the deceased.



· Umm Salamah bint Abu Umayyah (b.596 " d.680 CE)

Umm Salamah married Prophet Muhammad at the age of twenty nine, after her first husband died from the wounds he received while fighting in the battle of Uhud. Umm Salamah and her husband were part of the migration to Abyssinia. Her life was filled with examples of patience in the face of trials and tribulations. She and her husband were among the first to leave Mecca bound for Medina when she was forced to endure separation from her husband and the abduction of her son. At the death of her husband she made *du'a* to Allah, *oeO Lord, reward me for my affliction and give me something better than it in return, which only You, the Exalted and Mighty, can give.*" Marriage to the Prophet of Allah answered that *du'a*. Umm Salamah narrated more than 300 *ahadith*, many of them concerning women. She accompanied the Prophet on many of his expeditions and was married to him for seven years until his death. Umm Salamah outlived all the other wives and died at the age of eighty four.

· Juwayriyah bint al-Haarith (b.608 " d.673 CE)

Juwayriyah came to the Prophet's attention when she was captured in the battle against the tribe Banu Mustaliq. She was the 20 years old daughter of the chief of Banu Mustaliq and her marriage brought about an alignment between her tribe and the Muslims. When Prophet Muhammad married Juwayriyah it allowed the tribe to enter Islam with honour by removing the humiliation of their defeat. As soon as the marriage was announced, all the war booty that had been taken from Banu Mustaliq was returned, and all the captives were set free. Juwayriyah was married to the Prophet for six years, and lived for another thirty-nine years after his death. She died at the age of sixty-five.

· Zaynab bint Jahsh (b.590 " d.641 CE)

Zaynab, a young girl from the noble line of *Quraish* was once married to Prophet Muhammad's freed slave and adopted son Zayd, a man who was very close to the Prophet. Like all young girls brought up in relative luxury she had very high expectations for marriage and Zayd did not fit the description of the man she had in mind. However to please the Prophet her family allowed the marriage to take place. Their marriage was short lived and stormy and to please both of them, Prophet Muhammad allowed them to divorce. This caused a dilemma because divorce was frowned upon and left a woman in a difficult situation; as a way to please all parties including Zaynab's family she was married to Prophet Muhammad. Verses in the Quran were revealed to deal with this matter and by marrying Zaynab, Prophet Muhammad demonstrated that in Islam an adopted son is not the same as a natural son. Zaynab joined the growing family of Muhammad and was known for her generosity and charitable works. She died at the age of fifty.

· Umm Habeebah bint Abu Sufyan (b.589 " d.666 CE)

Ramlah, also known as Umm Habeebah was the daughter of Abu Sufyan a leader of the *Quraish* and at that stage an enemy of Islam. She declared her faith without fear of the consequences to herself and she held fast to her faith when she was severely tested. After converting to Islam and suffering persistent oppression, Umm Habeebah and her husband joined the migration to Abyssinia. Her husband died thereafter. She was alone in a strange country with a young daughter and no visible means of support. When the Prophet heard of her predicament he offered to marry her. She accepted. The king of Abyssinia, who had secretly converted to Islam and was a good friend to the fledgling Muslim community, provided her *mahr* and witnessed the marriage contract. It was some years before she was able to join her husband in Medina. She was married to Prophet Muhammad for four years until he passed away.

· Safiyyah bint Huyayy ibn Akhtab (b.610 " d.670 CE)

Safiyyah was born in Medina to Huyayy ibn Akhtab, the chief of the Jewish tribe Banu Nadir. Banu Nadir had been expelled from Medina and settled at Khaybar. In 629 CE, the Muslims were victorious at the Battle of Khaybar and Safiyyah was taken captive. Muhammad suggested that Safiyyah convert to Islam, she agreed, and become Muhammad's wife.

Despite her conversion, Muhammad's other wives teased Safiyyah about her Jewish origin. Prophet Muhammad once said to his wife, "If they discriminate you again, tell them that your husband is Muhammad, your father was Prophet Aaron and your uncle was Prophet Musa. So what is there in that to be scornful about?" Safiyyah was twenty-one years old when the Prophet died. She lived for another 39 years, passing away in Medina at the age of 60.

· Maymunah bint al-Haarith (b.594 " d.674 CE)

Maymunah, or Barra as she was then called, yearned to marry the Prophet and offered herself to him in marriage. He accepted. Maymunah lived with the Prophet for just over three years, until his death. She was very good natured and her nephew, Ibn Abbas, who later became the greatest scholar of the Quran, learned much from her knowledge.

Endnotes:

[1] Quraish is the name of the most powerful tribe in Mecca at the advent of Islam and the tribe to which Prophet Muhammad belonged. It is also the name of a chapter of the Quran.

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