

The Rightly Guided Caliphs: Abu Bakr (part 1 of 2)

Description: A short biography of Prophet Muhammad's companion, friend and father-in-law, Abu Bakr.

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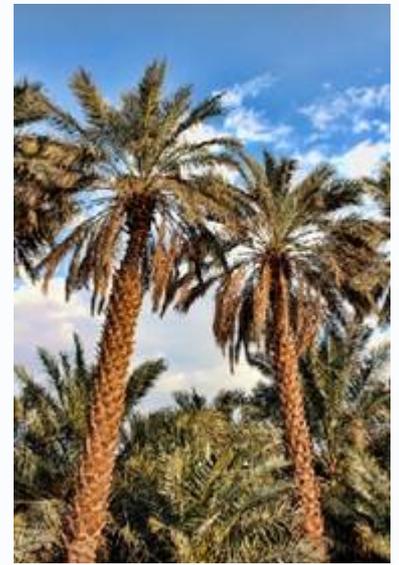
Objectives

- To learn about the life of Abu Bakr and understand his importance in the history of Islam.
- To appreciate his closeness to Prophet Muhammad and acknowledge his understanding of Islam.

Arabic Terms

- *Khalifah* (plural: *Khulafa'*) " Caliph. Sometimes spelled Khalif. He is the chief Muslim religious and civil ruler, regarded as the successor of Prophet Muhammad. A Caliph is not a monarch.
- *Rashidun* " Those who are rightly guided. More specifically, a collective term to refer to the first four Caliphs.
- *Sunnah* - The word *Sunnah* has several meanings depending on the area of study however the meaning is generally accepted to be, whatever was reported that the Prophet said, did, or approved.
- *Kabah* - The cube-shaped structure located in the city of Mecca. It serves as a focal point towards which all Muslims face when praying.
- *Ummah* - Refers to the whole Muslim community, irrespective of color, race, language or nationality.

Before his death, Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, asked his companions to, "Hold firmly to my example (*sunnah*) and that of the Rightly Guided Caliphs."^[1] Those known as the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*Al-Khulafa' Ar-Rashidun*) or the *Rashidun* are the first four leaders, after the death of Prophet Muhammad, of the Islamic nation. Their names are probably familiar to you because they were close companions and relatives of Prophet Muhammad. They are Abu Bakr, Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Uthman ibn Affan and Ali ibn Abi Talib. These men are known for their righteousness, their fierce love and devotion to Islam.



Abu Bakr

The first Rightly Guided Caliph was Abu Bakr. He ruled over the Caliphate from 632-634 of the Common Era (CE), approximately 27 months.

Abu Bakr's full name was Abdullah ibn Abi Quhafa but he came to be called Abu Bakr due to his great love of raising camels. He was born into what we would call a well-off middle class family and by adulthood had easily established himself as a successful merchant/trader. He was a likeable communicative man with a large social network. At that time the Arabs were very concerned with genealogy and Abu Bakr was an expert in this. His knowledge coupled with his pleasant personality allowed him to mix easily across the breadth of Meccan society.

From the history of Islam and the *Sunnah* we learn that Abu Bakr was approximately 2 years younger than Prophet Muhammad and that both men were born into the tribe of Quraish, although into different clans. They must have been aware of each other throughout their lives but their lifelong friendship was established when Prophet Muhammad married his first wife Khadijah and they became neighbors. They shared many of the same characteristics. Both men were traders, who conducted all their affairs with honesty and integrity. Abu Bakr was known as As-Siddiq, the truthful. It was Prophet Muhammad himself who gave him this title. These were two men of upstanding character and their ties were made even stronger when Prophet Muhammad married Abu Bakr's daughter Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her.

Aisha herself tells us a lot about her father's character. One of the stories she recounted about her father was that he never prostrated to an idol. In other narrations Abu Bakr himself tells us that when he was a child his father took him to the place where idols were kept and left him there alone. He assessed these idols and wondered what benefit they actually held. He asked them and of course they were unable to respond. Abu Bakr instinctively knew that statues and idols were not worthy of worship. This made it easy for him to believe and embrace the new religion presented to him by his close friend Muhammad.

Abu Bakr the first.

- He was the first adult male to embrace Islam. Upon hearing Prophet Muhammad say that there was nothing worthy of worship but Allah and that he (Muhammad) was the Messenger of Allah, Abu Bakr accepted Islam immediately.
- He was the first public speaker for Islam. When there were less than 40 Muslims, Abu Bakr wanted to proclaim the message in public. Prophet Muhammad refused, thinking the numbers too small to risk exposure but Abu Bakr insisted. Prophet Muhammad was eventually ordered by Allah to make the message public and he and Abu Bakr made their way to the *Kabah* where Abu Bakr proclaimed, "There is none worthy of worship but Allah, and Muhammad is His slave and Messenger"
- He was the first among the Muslims to perform any good deeds. Meaning that he did not hesitate but took every opportunity to act righteously. Prophet Muhammad's nephew, Ali ibn Abi Talib, praised Abu Bakr as the first person to perform any good deeds.^[2] In Islam, competing with one another to do good deeds is encouraged.
- He was the first *Caliph*. After the death of Prophet Muhammad the Muslims were grieving and in disarray however during this great crisis they chose Abu Bakr as their leader.
- He will be the first person of this *Ummah* to enter Paradise. We learn this about Abu Bakr from the *Sunnah* of the Prophet.^[3] Prophet Muhammad said, "The angel Jibreel (Gabriel) came to me and took my hand and showed me the gate through which my *Ummah* will enter Paradise". Abu Bakr then said "I wish I had been with you to see that gate", to which Prophet Muhammad replied "Abu Bakr, you should know that you will be the first of my *Ummah* to enter Paradise." ^[4]

Abu Bakr the protector.

- At the advent of Islam the Meccan leaders waged a campaign of brutality that made life very difficult for the new Muslims, particularly the weak and vulnerable including many slaves. The persecution and abuse was designed to break the new religion and might well have done so if it hadn't been for the strength and courage of men like Abu Bakr. He was at this stage a rich and influential merchant able to ease the suffering of many slaves by buying them from their masters and setting them free. One of the slaves he set free was Bilal, the man who became the first man to call the faithful to prayer.

To be continued in Part 2

Endnotes:

^[1] *IbnMajah, Abu Dawood.*

^[2] Ali ibn Abi Talib at Abu Bakr's funeral

[3] *Abu Dawood*

[4] *Ibid.*

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