

The Rightly Guided Caliphs: Abu Bakr

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." 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 Quraysh, 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. 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. 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."

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.



The two friends Abu Bakr and Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him, saw each other every day and every day their friendship grew. Abu Bakr felt it was his duty to protect Prophet Muhammad. One day whilst praying in the *Kabah*, Prophet Muhammad was attacked. An altercation that started as taunting quickly escalated into a physical abuse. When Abu Bakr was informed he ran to the *Kabah* and pushed himself into the

middle of the fight shouting, **“Would you kill a man for saying that Allah is his Lord”**. The Meccans were momentarily stunned but then fell upon Abu Bakr beating him so badly that the blood flowed freely and matted his hair. Although beaten until he lost consciousness the *Sunnah* informs us that Abu Bakr's first words when waking were to inquire urgently about the condition of Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of Allah be upon him.

On another occasion when Prophet Muhammad was praying at the *Kabah* one of the Meccan leaders threw a piece of cloth around his neck and began strangling him. There were many people watching but none were brave enough to stop the harassment except Abu Bakr, who rushed over and fought off the person attacking his beloved friend.

Abu Bakr migrates.

· One day in the heat of the noonday sun, Prophet Muhammad visited the home of Abu Bakr. He revealed to his friend that Allah had given him permission to leave Mecca. Aisha narrates that her father wept when he heard that he was to be Prophet Muhammad's companion on the journey. He wept not from fear but from joy. Abu Bakr was overcome with emotion that he would be the one to accompany and protect the Messenger of Allah.

That very night Prophet and Abu Bakr walked out into the desert nightscape, and Allah protected them both with a web of deceit. Abu Bakr and Prophet Muhammad were heading for Yathrib (later named Medina) but knew the Meccans would be furious and looking for them everywhere, thus they hid for three nights in a cave south of Mecca. The search party came so close that Abu Bakr could see the tops of their shoes. They stood outside the cave but did not enter because Allah blinded them from seeing the entrance.

Abu Bakr the warrior.

· The first battle the new Muslim nation engaged in was the Battle of Badr; the men refused to let Prophet Muhammad be in the front lines and built him a shelter at the rear of the troops. It was Abu Bakr that volunteered to guard his Prophet. No one else was willing to do that, possibly because they wanted to be in the thick of battle; however, Abu Bakr understood that the life of

Prophet Muhammad was of the utmost importance. While Prophet Muhammad was in the shelter Abu Bakr could be seen walking back and forth, his sword unsheathed, ready to defend his companion. Later in the battle, Prophet Muhammad led the center battalion and Abu Bakr the right flank.

· In 630 CE Prophet Muhammad decided to lead an expedition to [Tabuk](#) on the [Syrian](#) border. A great deal of livestock and equipment were needed for the expedition so Prophet Muhammad invited contributions and donations from his followers. It is said in the *sunnah* that Abu Bakr gave all his wealth to finance this battle. When Prophet Muhammad asked him how much he had donated Abu Bakr said, "I have brought all that I had. I have left Allah and His Prophet for myself and my family".

Abu Bakr the Caliph.

· Abu Bakr led the Muslims during the most intense and difficult time that had faced the *Ummah*. Prophet Muhammad had passed away and a number of tribes rebelled by refusing to pay the *zakah*. At the same time there were impostors who claimed prophethood and began to revolt. Under these circumstances, many advised Abu Bakr to make concessions but he disagreed insisting that there was no distinction between any of the pillars of Islam especially comparing the *zakah* to prayer. He insisted that any compromise would erode the foundations of Islam. The rebelling tribes attacked, however the Muslims were prepared and their defense was led successfully by Abu Bakr, the Caliph himself. Abu Bakr also forced the false claimants to prophethood to retract their claims and most of them submitted to the will of Allah by re-joining the *Ummah*.

Abu Bakr died in August 634 at the age of sixty-three. He was buried by the side of his dear friend and leader, Prophet Muhammad. In his brief caliphate of twenty-seven months he had strengthened the Muslim *Ummah* from perils that threatened its existence.

Abu Bakr's love and devotion to Prophet Muhammad were remembered fondly even after his death. The fourth Rightly Guided Caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib spoke at Abu Bakr's funeral and thrilled the mourners with stories of his bravery. "You supported him (Prophet Muhammad) when others had deserted him, and you remained firm in helping him in misfortunes when others had withdrawn their support. You had the lowest voice but the highest distinction. Your conversation was most exemplary and your reasoning most just; your silence was longest in duration, and your speech was the most eloquent. Bravest among men, and well-informed about matters, your action was dignified."

Take the quiz

1) Select a true statement with regards to Abu Bakr.

- A. *He married the Prophet's youngest daughter Fatima.*
- B. *He worshiped idols before his conversion to Islam.*
- C. *He was the first adult male to embrace Islam.*
- D. *He belonged to the same clan of Quraish as Prophet Muhammad.*

2) Which of the following companions of the Prophet Muhammad have the honor of being from amongst the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs'?

- A. *Umar ibn Al-Khattab.*
- B. *Uthman ibn Affan.*
- C. *Ali ibn Abi Talib.*
- D. *All of the above.*

3) Abu Bakr belonged to a clan from amongst the Arab tribe of:

- A. *Aws.*
- B. *Khazraj.*
- C. *Quraish.*
- D. *None of the above.*

4) Abu Bakr's full name was Abdullah ibn Abi Quhafa but he came to be called Abu Bakr due to:

- A. *his great love of raising camels.*
- B. *his great love of raising cats.*
- C. *his great love of raising horses.*
- D. *None of the above.*

5) Abu Bakr was an expert in the field of:

- A. *genealogy.*
- B. *astrology.*
- C. *fortune telling.*
- D. *None of the above.*

6) Who was the first of the Rightly Guided Caliphs after the death of Prophet Muhammad?

- A. *Umar ibn Al-Khattab.*
- B. *Uthman ibn Affan.*
- C. *Abu Bakr.*
- D. *Ali ibn Abi Talib.*

7) Which of the following are regarded as the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs' or the 'Al-Khulafa' Ar- Rashidun'?

- A. *The first three leaders of the Islamic nation who came after the death of Prophet Muhammad.*
- B. *The first four leaders of the Islamic nation who came after the death of Prophet Muhammad.*
- C. *The first seven leaders of the Islamic nation who came after the death of Prophet Muhammad.*
- D. *The first ten leaders of the Islamic nation who came after the death of Prophet Muhammad.*

8) Identify the similar characteristics shared by Prophet Muhammad and Abu Bakr.

- A. *They were traders.*
- B. *They were from the tribe of Quraish.*
- C. *They were known for their honesty and integrity.*
- D. *All of the above.*

9) Abu Bakr was by profession a successful:

- A. *merchant.*
- B. *carpenter.*
- C. *blacksmith.*
- D. *tailor.*

10) **Abu Bakr had the honor of:**

- A. *accompanying Prophet Muhammad on his perilous journey to Medina as his companion and protector.*
- B. *marrying the beloved daughter of Prophet Muhammad.*
- C. *being nominated by the Prophet Muhammad as his successor in prophethood.*
- D. *All of the above.*

11) **Abu Bakr died at the age of:**

- A. *forty three.*
- B. *fifty seven.*
- C. *sixty three.*
- D. *seventy three.*

12) **As a caliph Abu Bakr was well known for:**

- A. *suppressing the revolts of the impostors who falsely claimed prophethood.*
- B. *suppressing the revolts of those who refused to pray and perform the hajj.*
- C. *suppressing the revolts of the false claimants to the caliphate.*
- D. *All of the above.*

13) **Abu Bakr was buried:**

- A. *by the side of Prophet Muhammad's grave.*
- B. *in the same graveyard as the martyrs of Uhad.*
- C. *in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia.*
- D. *in the city of Jerusalem.*

14) **Which was the first battle that the new Muslim nation engaged in at the time of Prophet Muhammad?**

- A. *The battle of Uhad.*
- B. *The battle of Khaibar.*
- C. *The battle of Tabuk.*
- D. *The battle of Badr.*