

A Short Biography of the "Mothers of the Faithful' (part 2 of 2)

Description: A brief biography of the "Mothers of the Believers," or "the wives of Prophet Muhammad."

By IslamReligion.com

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Umm Habeebah

Umm Habeebah was the Muslim daughter of Islam's archenemy, Abu Sufyan. Umm Habeebah was one of the early converts to Islam in Mecca. She had migrated with her husband to Abyssinia who converted to Christianity over there. On his death, the Prophet sent a proposal to her while she was still in Abyssinia. She returned to Medina three years before the death of the Prophet. She passed away thirty four years after the Prophet.

Zainab, the Divorced Wife of Zaid

Zainab was the cousin of the Prophet, who was married to Zaid, an orphan slave whom the Prophet liberated and then adopted. The Prophet proposed the marriage of Zainab with Zaid to her brother, but he refused to let his sister, a noble girl of Hashimite and Quraishite ancestry and the first cousin of the Prophet, become the wife of a former slave. Such a union was regarded by the Arabs as a thing of great shame. For the daughters of the aristocracy to marry their slaves, even freed slaves, was unthinkable. The Prophet sought to wipe out racial and class distinctions between men. He was to educate the world that no Arab is superior to any non-Arab unless it be in virtue and piety, as God had said,

"...Indeed, the most honorable among you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing..." (Quran 49:13)

The Prophet did not choose to force this principle on a woman outside his own tribe. It was his cousin Zainab who, in complying with the Prophet's wishes for Zaid, willingly opposed the Arabian custom. And Zaid, a freed slave, was the person of too low a lineage for marriage into Meccan aristocracy in her family's eyes. Thus, the Prophet encouraged Zainab to agree to marry Zaid, and, when Zainab agreed, insisted that her brother accept the adopted orphan as a brother-in-law.

However, after the marriage, Zaid found it hard to live with her. Zaid consulted the Prophet who advised him not to divorce her. Never-the less, once all attempts to work out the marriage had failed, divorce was the only alternative left. After the divorce, she and her relatives insisted that the Prophet marry her. Feeling bound to meet their wishes after a failed marriage that he had arranged, the Prophet was hesitant. The pagan

custom allowed marrying step-mothers and mothers-in-law, but looked upon the marriage of the divorced wife of an adopted son as unacceptable. To undo the custom and to set an example, God commanded the hesitant Prophet to marry Zainab. Their marriage took place in 5 A.H. She died ten years after the Prophet.

Juwairiyah

In the same year, a large number of prisoners fell into the hands of Muslims at the Battle of Bani Mustaliq. Among them was Juwairiyah, the daughter of an Arab chief, who approached the Prophet with a ransom for herself to which her captor readily agreed. The Prophet then proposed marrying her, and she, in turn, accepted. As soon as the Muslims heard the news of the marriage, they released their prisoners from the tribe of Banu Mustaliq. They felt they could not keep a tribe honored by the Prophet in captivity, so some one hundred families from the tribe of Banu Mustaliq were freed as a blessing of her marriage with the Prophet. Juwairiyah was one devoted to worship. Once, the Prophet passed by her after the dawn prayer and found her busy in worship in her place of prayer. The Prophet passed by her again during late morning and found her still in her place, whereupon he commented,

"You are still in your state (of worship)?"

She responded, "Yes."

"Should I not teach you some words greater in reward! Say, 'How perfect is God, I praise Him by the number of His creation and His pleasure, and by the weight of His Throne, and the ink of His Words.'" [\[1\]](#)

She died some forty years after the Prophet.

Safiyyah

Safiyyah, daughter of a Jewish chief of Banu Nadheer, was taken as a prisoner in the Battle of Khaibar in the year 7 A.H. The Prophet liberated and then married her. Upon marriage, the Prophet found marks of abuse on her cheek about which he was curious.

She explained, "I saw a dream in which the full moon rose over Medina and fell in my lap. I told the dream to my cousin who slapped me and said, 'You want to marry the king of Medina!' This mark is from his slap."

When the Prophet was on his deathbed, she wept and said, 'I wish I could be in your place, O Messenger of God,' to which he replied, **"By God, she is telling the truth."**

Maimoonah

Maimoomah, another widow, requested marriage to Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, in Mecca in 7 A.H. She was from his tribe and was already over fifty. Prophet Muhammad married her in order to support her, a poor relative of his. Her nephew, Ibn Abbas, who later became the greatest scholar of the

Quran, learned much from her knowledge.

Endnotes:

[1] *Musnad, Abu Daud*

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