

ZAYNAB رَضِيَ عَنْهَا

The Blessed Daughter of Rasūlullāh ﷺ

The Eldest Daughter of Rasūlullāh ﷺ

Zaynab bint Rasūlullāh ﷺ occupies a position of profound honour as the eldest daughter of Rasūlullāh ﷺ and his first wife, the Mother of the Believers, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid ﷺ. Her life, defined by an unwavering devotion to her father and an extraordinary capacity for patience (ṣabr) amidst tragedy, serves as a cornerstone of early Islamic history. She was born roughly five years after the blessed marriage of her parents, a time when Rasūlullāh ﷺ was approximately thirty years old. From her infancy, Rasūlullāh ﷺ displayed a special love and natural attachment toward her, a bond that only intensified as she witnessed the dawn of the final revelation.

Steadfastness and Service in the Initial Stages of Nubuwwah

Zaynab ﷺ remained a diligent supporter of her father during the most arduous initial stages of his mission. As the Quraysh belied and harassed Rasūlullāh ﷺ in the streets of Makkah, a young Zaynab ﷺ rushed to him with a large bowl of water and a cloth to wipe his face. In this moment of intense persecution, Rasūlullāh ﷺ consoled his young daughter, advising her to place her scarf over her chest and reassuring her, “Do not fear destruction for your father in these circumstances,” for Allah was his protector and helper. [Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id]

A Marriage Defined by Loyalty and Dignity

Zaynab’s ﷺ marriage to Abū al-‘Āṣ ibn al-Rabī‘, the nephew of Khadijah ﷺ, took place before the proclamation of Prophethood. Abū al-‘Āṣ was a man of immense integrity and a successful merchant, yet he did not initially embrace Islam. Despite the religious divide, he remained a loyal and dignified son-in-law. When the Quraysh intensified their opposition, they attempted to weaponise this marriage by pressuring Abū al-‘Āṣ to divorce Zaynab ﷺ to cause Rasūlullāh ﷺ further grief. They offered him any woman of the Quraysh he desired in exchange, but he flatly refused, declaring, “No, by Allah! I will not divorce my wife.” [Al-Bidāyah wa al-Nihāyah]

Rasūlullāh ﷺ later publicly expressed his appreciation for this loyalty, noting that Abū al-‘Āṣ had fulfilled the rights of kinship beautifully. Even during the boycott in the Shi‘b (Gorge) of Abū Ṭālib, Abū al-‘Āṣ surreptitiously delivered camel-loads of wheat and dates to the ostracised Muslims, an act of mercy for which Rasūlullāh ﷺ personally praised him.

The Battle of Badr and the Ransom of the Blessed Necklace

The Battle of Badr in 2 AH brought a severe test to Zaynab’s ﷺ household. Abū al-‘Āṣ, who had been coerced by the polytheists into joining the battle, was captured by the Muslims. To ransom her husband, Zaynab ﷺ sent a necklace that had been a wedding gift from her mother, Khadijah ﷺ. The sight of the necklace profoundly affected Rasūlullāh ﷺ reviving memories of his late wife and bringing him to tears. He turned to his Ṣaḥābah and asked, “If you feel it appropriate to free her captive and return her item to her, then do so”. The Ṣaḥābah immediately acceded to his wish. However, Rasūlullāh ﷺ took a pledge from Abū al-‘Āṣ to allow Zaynab ﷺ to emigrate to Madīnah, a promise that Abū al-‘Āṣ honoured upon his return to Makkah. [Musnad Aḥmad]

The Sacrifice of Hijrah and the Pursuit of Faith

The journey of Hijrah (emigration) proved to be the most physically and emotionally taxing period of Zaynab’s ﷺ life. As she set out for Madīnah, the Quraysh pursued her to prevent her departure. A man named Habbār ibn al-Aswad assaulted her, plunging his spear into her camel. Zaynab ﷺ, who was pregnant, fell from the camel onto a rock, suffering severe injuries and a miscarriage. Though she was forced to return to Makkah briefly, she eventually escaped under the cover of night and reached Madīnah with Zayd ibn al-Ḥārithah ﷺ. This sacrifice led Rasūlullāh ﷺ to

declare her high status, “She is the best of my daughters who suffered the most because of me.” [Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id]

A Sanctuary in Madīnah: The Protection of Abū al-‘Āṣ

In 6 AH, a reunion took place after Abū al-‘Āṣ was intercepted by a Muslim contingent while leading a trade caravan of the Quraysh. He fled to Madīnah and sought protection from Zaynab ﷺ. After the Fajr prayer, Zaynab announced her protection of him to the entire congregation. Rasūlullāh ﷺ affirmed her right to do so, stating, “The protection of even the lowest-ranking Muslim is accepted and upheld.” After returning all of Abū al-‘Āṣ’s wealth to him, he settled his debts in Makkah before publicly embracing Islam and returning to Madīnah to rejoin Zaynab ﷺ in their primary marriage. [Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’]

Legacy and Affection: The Grandchildren of the Messenger ﷺ

Rasūlullāh’s ﷺ devotion to Zaynab ﷺ extended to her children, ‘Alī and Umāmah ﷺ. ‘Alī passed away young, but Umāmah ﷺ survived her mother and was a source of great joy for Rasūlullāh ﷺ. It is recorded in the Ḥadīth that Rasūlullāh ﷺ would carry Umāmah on his shoulders even during Ṣalāh, picking her up when he stood and placing her down for rukū‘. [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī] He once received an expensive necklace and, in front of all his wives, placed it on Umāmah ﷺ, referring to her as “my most beloved family member”. [Usd al-Ghābah] Later, Fāṭimah ﷺ would bequeath that ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ marry Umāmah after her death, a testament to the close bond between the sisters. [Usd al-Ghābah]

The Transition to the Hereafter: Ghusl and Paternal Blessings

Zaynab’s ﷺ life came to a close in 8 AH, largely due to complications from the injuries she sustained during her Hijrah. Her passing was a moment of immense grief for Rasūlullāh ﷺ, who supervised her funeral arrangements with meticulous care. He instructed the women, including Sawdah, Umm Salamah, Umm Ayman, and Umm ‘Atiyyah ﷺ, to wash her with water and lotus leaves and to apply camphor to her body. In a final act of fatherly blessing, he gave his own lower garment to be included in her kafn (shroud), so it would remain close to her body. [Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī]

The Intercession in the Grave and the Status of Shahīdah

Rasūlullāh ﷺ personally participated in her burial, and an emotional account details his descent into her grave. He sat by the grave looking deeply distressed, explaining to his Companions that he was troubled by the “narrowness and terror” of the grave and was concerned for Zaynab’s ﷺ feebleness. After a period of intense supplication, he emerged with a radiant face, announcing that Allah had accepted his intercession and made the stage of the grave easy for her. [Usd al-Ghābah] Because she passed away from the injuries sustained during her Hijrah, the Muslim Ummah historically regards her as a shahīdah (martyr). Her life remains a profound example of spiritual and familial devotion, demonstrating the great burdens the family of Rasūlullāh ﷺ had to bear for the sake of Islam.

