

Did the Prophet Order the First Caliph to Lead the Prayers ?Before his Death

<"xml encoding="UTF-8?">

As mentioned earlier, the Prophet before his death ordered the majority of his companions to leave Madina and to join the battalion of Usama, in order to defend the Muslims against the Roman aggression. However, some of the companions refused his commands and stayed in Madina, while Usama camped in an area called Jurf.

Nonetheless, two people namely Lady 'A'ishah, the daughter of the first caliph and the wife of the Prophet and Anas ibn Malik, narrate that the first caliph led the prayers with the consent of the Prophet during his sickness, Lady 'A'ishah narrates, "The Prophet went to the masjid to lead the prayers while he was too weak to walk, and Abu Bakr was leading the prayers. The

Prophet came and sat next to Abu Bakr who was leading the prayers."^[1]

However, this narration does not imply that the Prophet commanded the first caliph to lead the prayers since - despite his illness - he still went outside to lead the prayers. The other narrator, Anas ibn Malik is not considered as a unbiased source, according to the Shi'a school of thought.

Those historians who do relate that the first caliph was present in Madina during the time of the death of the Prophet, indicate that on the day the Prophet was destined to pass away at noon, Lady 'A'ishah ordered Bilal to tell her father that the Prophet wanted him to lead the morning prayers. Once the Prophet learned of this, he went out to lead the prayers himself, even though he was severely sick, leaning on Imam 'Ali and al-Fadl Ibn al-'Abbas. After removing the first caliph and leading the prayers, the Prophet then went back to his room in the

masjid and said to Lady 'A'ishah, "You are as companions of Yusuf (Joseph)."^[2]

This story has been narrated in various words by nine narrators: Lady 'A'ishah, 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud, 'Abdullah Ibn al-'Abbas, 'Abdullah ibn 'Umar, 'Abdullah ibn Zam'a, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, Buraydah al-Aslami, Anas ibn Malik, and Salim ibn Ubayd. However, an examination of these sources show that all the narrations go back to Lady 'A'ishah. In addition, there are also some unreliable individuals in the chains of narrators.

Furthermore, even if the Prophet had appointed Abu Bakr to lead those prayers, this appointment would not imply an appointment to succeed the Prophet in all aspects of life, since during the Prophet's lifetime, he had permitted many people to perform the prayers, and of course, they are not considered as the caliphs, such as Ibn Umm Maktum who was blind.^[3]

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah acknowledges that being a successor for certain tasks in life does not stretch to include succession after death. He adds that the Prophet had appointed many people, such as ibn Umm Maktum, Bashir ibn 'Abd al-Mundhir, and others for certain tasks, such as leading the congregational prayers. Nevertheless, most of these people were not suitable for succession to the Prophet.[4]

In another slightly contrasting hadith, the famous historian and transmitter of hadith, al-Tabari[5] narrated that the first caliph, Abu Bakr was not in Madina at the time of the death of the Prophet, and when the Prophet was in extreme pain and could not go to the masjid to perform the prayers, Bilal, the mu'adhdhin (the caller to prayer) asked, "O Messenger of Allah! May my mother and father be your ransom, who will lead the prayers?"[6] The Prophet called upon Imam 'Ali.

Then his wife, Lady 'A'ishah said to him, "We will call for you Abu Bakr," and his wife Lady Hafsa said, "We will call for you 'Umar." Thus, the Prophet's call did not reach Imam 'Ali, and the rest of the people came. Once they gathered around the Prophet, he said to them, "Go away. If I need you I will send for you." Then these companions left.[7]

References

1. Ibn Kathir, al-Bidayah wal-Nihayah, Vol. 5, 253
2. Tarikh al-Tabari, Vol. 2, 439; Sirat ibn Hisham, Vol. 4, 303
3. Sunan Abi Dawud, Vol.1, 98
4. Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, Minhaj al-Sunna, Vol. 4, 91
5. Tarikh al-Tabari, Vol. 2, 439
6. Musnad Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Vol. 3, 202
7. Tarikh al-Tabari, Vol. 2, 439