

330016 - A brief biography of the scholar of the ummah and interpreter of the Quran, 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him)

the question

I heard a shaykh say that 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas used to behave from an early age as if he were a wise man. Can you explain in detail how this description could have been reflected in the way he spoke, the way he walked, and how he lived his daily life?

Detailed answer

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Firstly:

The Sahabi 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him)

'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib ibn Haashim, Abu'l-'Abbas, the paternal cousin of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).

His mother was Lubabah bint al-Harith ibn Hazan ibn Bajjiyyah ibn al-Hazam ibn Rubiyyah ibn 'Abdillah ibn Hilal ibn 'Amir ibn Sa'sa'ah al-Hilali.

He was called the scholar (*al-habr*) and the ocean (*al-bahr*), because of his abundant knowledge and his deep understanding of subtle issues. He was the scholar and faqih of the ummah, the spokesman of the tribe, a brilliant reflection of prophethood, the one for whom the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) prayed that he would have deep understanding of the faith and of the Quran, thus he was known as the interpreter of the Quran.

He was born when Banu Hashim were in the gully, three years before the Hijrah; it was also said that it was five years before that, but the former view is more sound, and it is closer to what is narrated from him in *as-Sahihayn*: I was going about some errands, riding a female donkey – and at that time I had just reached the age of puberty – and the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was praying in Mina, not facing towards any wall. I passed in front of part of the row, then I let the donkey loose so that it could graze, and I joined the row, and he did not object to me doing that. Narrated by al-Bukhari (76) and Muslim (504).

In *Sahih al-Bukhari* (6299) it is narrated that Sa'id ibn Jubayr said: Ibn 'Abbas was asked: What age were you when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died? He said: At that time I was circumcised. He (the narrator) said: They used not to circumcise a boy until he reached puberty.

In *Musnad Ahmad* (3125) it is narrated from Sa'id ibn Jubayr, from Ibn 'Abbas, that he said: I learned al-Muhkam [surahs in which nothing is abrogated] at the time of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died, I was ten years old. He (the narrator) said: I said to him: What is al-Muhkam? He said: al-Mufassal [i.e., the surahs from al-Hujurat to the end of the Quran].

Al-Arnaut said: Its isnad is sahih according to the conditions of al-Bukhari and Muslim.

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) prayed for him, asking Allah to grant him deep understanding of religion and to teach him the interpretation of the Quran (tafsir). He said: "O Allah, grant him deep understanding of the faith and teach him the interpretation of the Quran." Narrated by al-Bukhari (143), Muslim (2477), and Ahmad (2397).

He also asked Allah to teach him wisdom. It was narrated from 'Ikrimah that Ibn 'Abbas said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) embraced me and said: "O Allah, teach him wisdom." Narrated by al-Bukhari (3756).

'Umar ibn al-Khattab would bring him close to him and ask him questions, and he would let him attend gatherings with the elders of the people of Badr, to show them his knowledge and understanding. He would always have a ready answer and a radiant, handsome face. He had long hair dyed with henna; he was fair skinned and tall, with a yellowish complexion and a big build. His knowledge was abundant and many reports were narrated from him. An ignorant person would learn knowledge and wisdom from him, and a hungry person would have his fill of food and bread from him.

He (may Allah be pleased with him) died in at-Taif in 68 AH. The scholars differed concerning his age; it was said that he was seventy-one years old, or seventy-two, or seventy-four. The first is the strongest view.

For more information on his virtues, please see: *Fadail as-Sahabah* by Imam Ahmad (2/949); *Ma'rifat as-Sahabah* by Abu Nu'aym (3/1699); and *al-Isabah* by Ibn Hajar (4/122).

Secondly:

The impact of the Prophet's supplication for 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas

Undoubtedly the supplication of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) for 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), asking Allah to teach him wisdom, understanding of the faith and the interpretation of the Quran, had a great impact on Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) in forming his character, in terms of faith, knowledge and ethics, and his keenness to seek knowledge and develop good understanding of the knowledge he acquired.

Ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) did not rely only on the supplication of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) for him; rather he strove hard to accumulate and attain knowledge and to understand the religion of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, with all that he had of strength, energy, patience and resolve.

He began by staying close to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) from a very early age, until the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)

died.

When the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died, he turned to his senior Companions (may Allah be pleased with them), to the extent that he would fold his rida into a pillow and lie at the door of one of them, so as to have the opportunity to learn hadith from him.

It was narrated from 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him): When the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) died, I said to one of the Ansar: Let us go and ask the Companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) about the sayings of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), for they are many [and this is an opportunity to learn].

The man said: I am astonished at you, O Ibn 'Abbas. Do you think that people will need you, when there are still on earth what you see of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah?

So he did not like the idea, but I devoted myself to acquiring knowledge and seeking out the Companions of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), one after another, in order to learn from them. Sometimes I would hear that a man had heard some saying from the Messenger of Allah, so I would go to his house to ask him, but he would be having a siesta. So I would turn my rida (upper garment) into a pillow and rest at his door, with the wind blowing in my face, until he came out.

He would say: What brings you here, O cousin of the Messenger of Allah?

I would say: I have heard that you narrate something from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and I wanted to hear it from you.

He would say: Why did you not send for me so that I could come to you? And I would say: It is more appropriate for me to come to you.

That [Ansari] man would pass by me later on, and would see the people asking me questions, and he would say: You were wiser than me.

Narrated by Imam Ahmad in *Fadail as-Sahabah* (2/976) (1925); ad-Darimi (590); and by al-Hakim in *al-Mustadrak* (363) – he said: It is sahih according to the conditions of al-Bukhari, and this report is usually quoted in the context of seeking hadiths and showing respect to the muhaddith. And adh-Dhahabi agreed with him.

Hence if Ibn ‘Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) was asked: How did you acquire this knowledge? He said: By asking questions and understanding the answers.

Narrated by Imam Ahmad in *Fadail as-Sahabah* (2/970 (1903); al-Bayhaqi in *al-Madkhal ila as-Sunan al-Kubra* (427).

Hence the supplication of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) for Ibn ‘Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) was fulfilled. Allah granted him wisdom, which means that he was able to do the right thing and be precise, and to put things in their appropriate places.

Allah granted him deep understanding of the faith, and He taught him the interpretation of the Quran, to the extent that he was known as the interpreter of the Quran and the scholar of the ummah.

Undoubtedly when someone is given knowledge, understanding and wisdom, that will have an impact on his entire life, his faith, his worship, his piety, his attitudes and manners, his bearing, his smartness, his wisdom, his integrity and his sound views.

Hence ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) would let Ibn ‘Abbas attend his gatherings with the elders of the people of Badr; he would consult him and ask him questions in front of them, to show them his knowledge, wisdom and understanding of the faith.

It was narrated by Sa‘id ibn Jubayr that Ibn ‘Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: ‘Umar would let me attend his gatherings with the elders of Badr. One of them said: Why do you let this young man join us, when we have sons like him? He said: He is one of those whom you know.

[Ibn ‘Abbas] said: One day, [‘Umar] called them, and he called me with them, and I thought that he only called me on that day to show them how much knowledge I had. He said: What do you say about the verse *{When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest ...}* [an-Nasr 110:1] until the end of the surah? Some of them said: It is commanding us to praise Allah and seek His forgiveness because He granted us victory and conquest. And some of them said: We do not know, and some of them did not say anything. He said to me: O Ibn ‘Abbas, do you agree?

I said: No. He said: Then what do you say? I said: This refers to the approaching death of the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), of which Allah informed him (in this surah). Allah told him: When the victory of Allah has come and the conquest – the conquest of Makkah – that is a sign of your approaching death, so glorify and praise your Lord and seek His forgiveness, for He is ever accepting of repentance. ‘Umar said: I do not know anything about its meaning except what you know.

Narrated by al-Bukhari (4294).

It was narrated that Tawus said: By Allah, I never saw anyone who respected the sacred limits of Allah more than Ibn ‘Abbas. By Allah, if I wanted to weep every time I mention him, I could do so.

Narrated by Imam Ahmad in *Fadail as-Sahabah* (2/950).

This is a brief glimpse of this great scholar. But his virtues are many, as are his stories with the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and his Companions. We do not have room here to mention them all.

And Allah knows best.