

The Life of the Commander of the Faithful Ali Ibn Abi Talib (as)

This part gives an account of the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, the first of the Imams of the believers, of the rulers (wulat) of the Muslims and of God's appointed successors in religion after the Apostle of God, the truthful one and the trusted one, Muhammad Ibn Abd Allah, the seal of the Prophets, blessings on him and his pure family.

He was the brother of the Apostle of God and his paternal cousin, and his helper (wazir) in his affair, his son-in-law, being married to his daughter, Fatima the chaste, mistress of the women of the universe. The full name of the Commander of the faithful is 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib Ibn Abd al Muttalib Ibn Hashim Ibn Abd Manaf. He was the Lord of the testamentary trustees of authority (wasiyyin), the best of blessing and peace be on him. His kunya was Abu al-Hasan.

He was born in the Sacred House (i.e. the Kaba) in Mecca on Friday, the thirteenth day of the month of Rajab, thirty years after the Year of the Elephant (c.570). Nobody before or after him has ever been born in the House of God, the Most High. It was a mark of him being honored by God, the Most High, may His name be exalted, and of his position being dignified in its greatness.

His mother was Fatima, daughter of Asad Ibn Hashim Ibn Abd Manaf, may God be pleased with her. She was like a mother to the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, and he (the Apostle) was brought up under her care.

He was grateful for her kindness and she was among the first to believe in him and she emigrated with him in the group of the emigrants.

The Commander of the faithful, 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, peace be upon him, and his brothers were among the leading members of the second generation of descendants of Hashim. In this way he gained two marks of nobility, through his growing up under the care and education of the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family.

He was the first of the family of the House and of the Companions to believe in God and His Apostle. He was the first male whom the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, summoned to Islam and who answered. He never ceased to support the religion and to strive against the polytheists. He constantly defended the faith and fought against those who supported deviation from the truth and despotism. He spread the teachings of the sunnah (the practice of the Prophet) and the Qur'an, judged with justice and enjoined people to do good.

He was with the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, twenty-three years after the coming of the prophetic mission. Of these, thirteen years were in Mecca before the migration when he shared with him all the persecutions and bore most of his hardships. Then there were ten years in Medina after the emigration when he defended him against the polytheists and strove with him against the unbelievers. He protected him with his own life from the enemies of religion until the time God, the Exalted, took the Prophet to His heaven, raised him to the highest place in heaven and bestowed His blessings and peace on him and his family. On that day the Commander of the faithful, peace be upon him, was thirty-three years of age.

On the day of the death of the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, the community differed over his Imamate. His Shia who were all the Banu Hashim, Salman, Ammar, Abu Dharr, al-Miqdad, Khuzayma Ibn Thabit - the man who is known as the possessor of two testimonies - Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, Jabir Ibn Abd Allah al-Ansari Abu Said al-Khudri and people like them among the important emigrants and Ansar, (all these) maintained that he was the successor (khalifa) after the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, and the Imam.

They did this because of his outstanding merit above all mankind, through the fact that there were gathered in him the qualities of outstanding merit, judgment and perfection, such as him being the first of the community to enter the faith, his superiority over them in knowledge of the laws, his precedence over them in fighting (jihad) and the distinction which set him apart from them in the extent of his piety, asceticism and righteousness.

Furthermore he had been specially singled out by the Prophet from among all his relations because of the qualities which no other relation, apart from him, shared with the Prophet and because of the nomination (nass) of his authority (wilaya) by God, may God be magnified and exalted, in the Qur'an where He, may His name be exalted, says:

﴿ إِنَّمَا وَلِيُّكُمُ اللَّهُ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ يُصَلُّونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوْنَ الزَّكَاةَ وَهُمْ رَاكِعُونَ ﴾ [المائدة: ٥٥]

“Your authority (wali) is God and His Apostle and those believers who perform the prayer and pay alms (zakat) while they are bowing in prayer.....” [5:55]

It is known that no one except him paid alms while bowing in prayer.

It has been established in language that wali means “the most appropriate for authority”, without there being any opposition to this definition. If the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, was, by the stipulation of the Qur'an, more appropriate for authority among the people than themselves because of his being their wali according to the textual nomination (nass) in the Clear Explanation (i.e. the Qur'an, tibyan), it was obviously necessary for all of them to obey him, just as obedience to God, the Most High, and obedience to His Apostle, peace be upon him and his family, was required because of the information about their authority (wilaya) over creatures which is given in this verse with clear proof.

Another reason for their support for the Commander of the faithful was because of what the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, said on the day of the assembly at his house. He had especially gathered the Banu Abd al-Muttalib there in order to make the following solemn pledge:

Whoever helps me in this matter will be my brother, my testamentary trustee (wasi) my helper (wazir), my heir and my successor after me.

Then the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, stood up before him among all the gathering of them, and on that day he was the youngest of them, and he said:

O Apostle of God, I will help you.

Then the Prophet, may God bless him and his family, said:

Sit down, you are my brother, my trustee, my helper, my inheritor and successor after me.

This is a clear statement about the succession after the Prophet.

In addition, there is also what the Prophet, peace be upon him and his family, said on the day of Ghadir Khumm. The community had gathered to listen to the sermon in which he asked:

Am I not more appropriate for authority (awla) over you than yourselves?

Yes, they answered.

Then he spoke to them in an ordered manner without any interruption in his speech:

“Whomsoever I am the authority over (mawla), ‘Ali is also the authority over”.

Thus he (the Prophet) required for him (‘Ali), through laying down obedience to him and his authority (over them), the same authority as he had over them, and which he made them acknowledge and which they did not deny. This is clear evidence of the nomination (nass) of him for the Imamate and for succession to his position.

Furthermore there is the Prophet's, peace be upon him and his family, statement to him at the time of setting out to Tabuk:

You are in the same position with respect to me as Aaron (Harun) was to Moses (Musa) except that there is no prophet after me.

This confirms his succession by the precise statement of revelation. Therefore when the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, gave all the ranks which Aaron had from Moses to the Commander of the faithful, peace be upon him, in the same extent, except for prophecy, all such things were required of him as helping the Apostle, giving him support, outstanding merit and love, because these qualities were definitely required by that.

Then by the clear statement there is his deputizing for him during his life and “after the prophethood” which gives evidence of his succession by specification of the exception, (of Prophethood) when he excludes him from it by mentioning “after”.

The Imamate of the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him, was for thirty years after the Prophet, may God bless him and his family. For twenty-four years and six months of these he was prevented from administering the laws of the office and had to exercise precautionary dissimulation (taqiyya) and withdrawal.

For five years and six months of these, he was troubled by wars against the hypocrites, those who broke their pledges, the unjust and those who deviated from the religion and he was plagued by the seditions of those who had gone astray. In the same way the Apostle of God, may God bless him and his family, had been prevented from administering the laws of his office through fear and through being spied upon, and through being a fugitive and through being exiled, so that he had no power to fight the unbelievers and no means of defending the believers.

Then he emigrated and for ten years after the emigration he remained making war on the unbelievers and being troubled by the hypocrites until the time that God, may His name be exalted, took him unto Himself and made him dwell in the gardens of Paradise.

The death of the Commander of the faithful, peace be on him occurred before dawn of Friday, the twenty-first of the month of Ramadan, in the year 40 A.H. He was a victim of the sword. Ibn Muljam al-Muradi, may God curse him, killed him at the mosque of Kufa, which he had come out to in order to wake the people for the dawn prayer on the night of the nineteenth of the month of Ramadan. He had been lying in wait for him from the beginning of the night.

When he (the Commander of the faithful) passed by him while the latter was hiding his design by feigning sleep amid a group of people who were asleep, he (Ibn Muljam) sprang out and struck him on the top of his head with his sword which was poisoned. He lingered through the day of the nineteenth and the night and day of the twentieth and the first third of the night of the twenty-first. Then he, peace be on him, died as a martyr and met his Lord, Most High, as one who has been wronged.

He, peace be on him, knew of that before its time and he told the people of it before its time. His two sons, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, peace be on them, performed the tasks of washing him and shrouding him according to his bequest. Then they carried him to al-Ghari at Najaf in Kufa and they buried him there. They removed the traces of the place of his burial according to his bequest because of what he, peace be upon him, knew about the regime of the Umayyads which would come after him, and their hostile attitude towards him.

For he knew the evil action and abuse to which they would be led by their wicked intentions if they had been able to know that place. His grave, peace be on him, remained hidden until al-Sadiq Jafar Ibn Muhammad, peace be on them, pointed it out during the Abbasid regime. For he visited it when he came to visit Abu Ja'far al-Mansur while the latter was in al-Hira. Then the Shi'a knew of it and they began from that time to make visitation to his grave, peace be upon him and his pure offspring. On the day of his death he was 63 years of age.