

## **The Third Caliph, 'Uthman (644 - 656CE)**

*"Every Prophet has an assistant, and my assistant will be 'Uthman."* [Hadith]

### **'Uthman's Election**

When 'Umar fell under the assassin's dagger, before he died the people asked him to nominate his successor. 'Umar appointed a committee consisting of six of the ten companions of the Prophet (*peace be on him*) about whom the Prophet had said, *"They are the people of Heaven"* - 'Ali, 'Uthman, 'Abdur-Rahman, Sa'ad, Az-Zubayr and Talhah - to select the next Caliph from among themselves. He also outlined the procedure to be followed if any differences of opinion should arise. 'Abdur-Rahman withdrew his name. He was then authorized by the committee to nominate the Caliph. After two days of discussion among the candidates and after the opinions of the Muslims in Madinah had been ascertained, the choice was finally limited to 'Uthman and 'Ali. 'Abdur-Rahman came to the mosque together with other Muslims, and after a brief speech and questioning of the two men, swore allegiance to 'Uthman. All those present did the same, and 'Uthman became the third Caliph of Islam in the month of Muharram, 24H.

### **'Uthman's Life**

'Uthman ibn Affan was born seven years after the Holy Prophet (*peace be on him*). He belonged to the *Umayyad* branch of the *Quraysh* tribe. He learned to read and write at an early age, and as a young man became a successful merchant. Even before Islam 'Uthman had been noted for his truthfulness and integrity. He and Abu Bakr

were close friends, and it was Abu Bakr who brought him to Islam when he was thirty-four years of age. Some years later he married the Prophet's second daughter, Ruqayyah. In spite of his wealth and position, his relatives subjected him to torture because he had embraced Islam, and he was forced to emigrate to Abyssinia. Sometime later, he returned to Makkah but soon migrated to Madinah with the other Muslims. In Madinah his business again began to flourish and he regained his former prosperity. 'Uthman's generosity had no limits. On various occasions he spent a great portion of his wealth for the welfare of the Muslims, for charity and for equipping the Muslim armies. That is why he came to be known as '*Ghani*' meaning '*Generous*'.

'Uthman's wife, Ruqayyah was seriously ill just before the Battle of Badr and he was excused by the Prophet (*peace be on him*) from participating in the battle. The illness Ruqayyah proved fatal, leaving 'Uthman deeply grieved. The Prophet was moved and offered 'Uthman the hand of another of his daughters, Kulthum. Because he had the high privilege of having two daughters of the Prophet as wives 'Uthman was known as '*The Possessor of the Two Lights*'.

'Uthman participated in the Battles of 'Uhud and the Trench. After the encounter of the Trench, the Prophet (*Peace be on him*) determined to perform *Hajj* and sent 'Uthman as his emissary to the *Quraysh* in Makkah, who detained him. The episode ended in a treaty with the Makkans known as the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah.

The portrait we have of 'Uthman is of an unassuming, honest, mild, generous and very kindly man, noted especially for his modesty and his piety. He often spent part of the night in prayer, fasted every second or third day, performed hajj every year, and looked after the needy of the whole community. In spite of his wealth, he lived very simply and slept on bare sand in the courtyard of the Prophet's mosque. 'Uthman knew the *Qur'an* from memory and had an intimate knowledge of the context and circumstances relating to each verse.

## 'Uthman's Caliphate

During 'Uthman's rule the characteristics of Abu Bakr's and Umar's Caliphates - impartial justice for all, mild and humane policies, striving in the path of God, and the expansion of Islam - continued. 'Uthman's realm extended in the west to Morocco, in the east to Afghanistan, and in the north to Armenia and Azerbaijan. During his Caliphate a navy was organized, administrative divisions of the state were revised, and many public projects were expanded and completed. 'Uthman sent prominent Companions of the Prophet (*peace be on him*) as his personal deputies to various provinces to scrutinize the conduct of officials and the condition of the people.

'Uthman's most notable contribution to the religion of God was the compilation of a complete and authoritative text of the *Qur'an*. A large number of copies of this text were made and distributed all over the Muslim world.

'Uthman ruled for twelve years. The first six years were marked by internal peace and tranquility, but during the second half of his Caliphate a rebellion arose. The Jews and the Magians, taking advantage of dissatisfaction among the people, began conspiring against 'Uthman, and by publicly airing their complaints and grievances, gained so much sympathy that it became difficult to distinguish friend from foe.

It may seem surprising that a ruler of such vast territories, whose armies were matchless, was unable to deal with these rebels. If 'Uthman had wished, the rebellion could have been crushed at the very moment it began. But he was reluctant to be the first to shed the blood of Muslims, however rebellious they might be. He preferred to reason with them, to persuade them with kindness and generosity. He well

remembered hearing the Prophet (*peace be on him*) say, "*Once the sword is unsheathed among my followers, it will not be sheathed until the Last Day.*"

The rebels demanded that he abdicate and some of the Companions advised him to do so. He would gladly have followed this course of action, but again he was bound by a solemn pledge he had given to the Prophet. "*Perhaps God will clothe you with a shirt, 'Uthman,*" the Prophet had told him once, "*and if the people want you to take it off, do not take it off for them.*" 'Uthman said to a well-wisher on a day when his house was surrounded by the rebels, "God's Messenger made a covenant with me and I shall show endurance in adhering to it."

After a long siege, the rebels broke into 'Uthman's house and murdered him. When the first assassin's sword struck 'Uthman, he was reciting the verse:

**"Verily, God sufficeth thee; He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing."** [*Al-Qur'an* 2:137]

'Uthman breathed his last on the afternoon of Friday, 17 *Dhul-Hijjah*, 35H (June 656CE). He was eighty-four years old. The power of the rebels was so great that 'Uthman's body lay unburied until Saturday night when he was buried in his blood-stained clothes, the shroud which befits all martyrs in the cause of God.

**Source:**

<https://sunnahonline.com/library/history-of-islam/352-rightly-guided-caliphs-the#h4-the-third-caliph-uthman-644-656ce>