

LESSON 2: The Story of Umar ibn Al-Khattab

Early Life

Umar ibn Al-Khattab, also known as Umar the Great, was one of the most influential and powerful caliphs in Islamic history. He served as the second caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate from 634 to 644 CE. Umar was born around 584 CE in Mecca, into the respected Quraysh tribe. Before embracing Islam, he was known for his physical strength, fiery temper, and strong opposition to the new faith introduced by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Conversion to Islam

Umar's conversion to Islam is a well-known story. Initially a fierce opponent of Islam, he decided to confront Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and end his mission. On his way, he learned that his sister and brother-in-law had converted to Islam. When he went to their house, he found them reading the Quran. After a heated exchange, he asked to read the Quran himself. The verses he read touched his heart deeply, leading to his immediate conversion to Islam.

Contributions as Caliph

When Umar became caliph after the death of Abu Bakr As-Siddiq, he implemented numerous reforms and expanded the Islamic state significantly. Here are some of his key contributions:

1. **Justice and Governance:** Umar was known for his sense of justice. He established an efficient system of administration and governance. He appointed judges to ensure justice was served and was known to personally oversee cases to ensure fairness.
2. **Expansion of the Islamic State:** Under Umar's leadership, the Islamic state expanded rapidly. His conquests included the Persian Empire and significant parts of the Byzantine Empire, including Syria, Egypt, and Jerusalem.
3. **Public Welfare:** Umar introduced several public welfare programs. He established the Bayt al-Mal (public treasury) to ensure that wealth was distributed fairly. He also initiated the construction of roads, canals, and rest houses for travelers.
4. **Religious Freedom:** Umar ensured that non-Muslims living in Islamic territories were treated fairly and allowed to practice their religions freely. This policy of tolerance helped maintain peace and stability within the expanding empire.
5. **Military Organization:** He reorganized the military, setting up a disciplined and efficient system. He ensured that soldiers were well-paid and provided for, which boosted their morale and effectiveness.

Personal Traits

Umar was known for his simplicity, humility, and deep piety. Despite his powerful position, he led a modest life and was always accessible to the people. His rule is often cited as an example of just and compassionate governance in Islamic history.

Death

Umar was assassinated in 644 CE by a Persian slave named Abu Lu'lu'ah. His death marked the end of an era of significant expansion and consolidation for the Islamic state. Before his death, Umar appointed a council to choose his successor, which led to the selection of Uthman ibn Affan as the next caliph.

Legacy

Umar ibn Al-Khattab's legacy is profound. He is remembered as a model of justice, leadership, and piety. His reforms and policies laid the foundation for the administration and governance of the Islamic state, influencing future generations. His life and contributions continue to inspire Muslims around the world.

Lessons for Kids

1. **Justice:** Upholding justice in all aspects of life.
2. **Courage:** Standing up for what is right, even in the face of adversity.
3. **Humility:** Leading with humility and serving others selflessly.
4. **Faith:** Maintaining a strong connection to faith and practicing it with sincerity.