

# The Young Marriage of 'Aishah

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## Introduction

The marriage of the Prophet Muḥammad (P) to 'Aishah bint Abu Bakr when she was at quite a young age has been the focus of quite a bit of criticism in the West. Unfortunately, in this Neo-Colonialist Age of smart bombs, MTV, CNN and the Big Mac, some of those who profess to be Muslims have themselves become critics. Many Muslims, faced with the juggernaut of allegedly "universal" Western liberal values that have permeated almost everyone around them, sheepishly avoid discussion of such "embarrassing" Islamic issues. It is a keenly true observation that even though the European powers have pulled their colonial armies out of Muslim lands and granted them "*independence*", an even worse plague continues. This curse is "*Colonialism of the Mind*" and it is more dangerous since it is much more subtle. *Insha'llah*, this article will be a contribution to making both Muslims and non-Muslims aware of not only the objective facts regarding the Prophet's (P) marriage to 'Aishah, but how to understand it in light of Islam and life in the "modern" world.

Regrettably, for those of us trying to spread the truth of Islam in the West, we often have to agree with the Orientalist W. Montgomery Watt when he wrote: "*Of all the world's great men none has been so much maligned as Muhammad.*"<sup>1</sup> But here, for a change, we are dealing with something that is an authentic part of Islamic history, not an apocryphal or fabricated event that Westerners have been duped into believing is authentic, such as the so-called "*Satanic Verses*" incident. That a man in his fifties would marry such a young girl—especially a man who is supposed to be a living example of piety—is not only difficult for many "modern" Westerners to come to terms with, but it has even gone so far as to stir up disgusting "sexual misconduct" charges amongst them. In the face of such criticism, Muslims have not always reacted well. In the past century, when so many Muslims were so "Westoxicated" and ready to monkey Europeans in almost anything, the usual reaction was to deny the sources that reported the alleged "embarrassing problem". To Muslim "modernists", who argued that ONLY a legal ruling found in the Qur'an was Islamically valid, brushing aside this aspect of the Prophet's life was rather easy. They simply denied that it had occurred and attacked the sources which reported it. Fortunately for Muslims, the apologetics of these "*Uncle Toms of Islam*" has faded into the periphery to a large extent. However, there are still many Muslims out there who try to get around what they see as a problem by ignoring authentic Islamic sources while claiming to be followers of the *Ahl as-Sunnah*. (which basically means "orthodox Sunni" Muslims, for those unfamiliar Islamic terminology). Many other Muslims possibly wonder whether the story is authentic and how to understand it if it is.

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## The Islamic Evidence of 'Aishah's Age

Due to the apparent ignorance of many Muslims, possibly due to reading "modernist" apologetic literature like that mentioned above, a look at what the authentic sources of Islam say about the age at which 'Aishah married the Prophet (P) is in order. This way, before we move on to an analysis of the facts, we will first establish what the authentic Islamic facts are. At this point, it should be mentioned that it is absolutely pointless from an Islamic standpoint to say that the age of 'Aishah is "*not found in the Qur'an*", since the textual sources of Islam are made up of **BOTH** the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* - and the Qur'an tells us that. Now in regards to what the authentic Islamic sources actually say, it may come as a disappointment to some "modern" and "cultured" Muslims that there are four *ahadith* in *Saḥeeḥ al-Bukḥari* and three *ahadith* in *Saḥeeḥ Muslim* which clearly state that 'Aishah was "*nine years old*" at the time that her marriage was consummated with the Prophet (P). These *ahadith*, with only slight variation, read as follows:

'Aishah, may God be pleased with her, narrated that the Prophet (P) was betrothed (*zawaj*) to her when she was six years old and he consummated (*nikah*) his marriage when she was nine years old, and then she remained with him for nine years. (*Saḥeeḥ al-Bukḥari*, Volume 7, Book 62, Number 64)

Of the four *ahadith* in *Saḥeeḥ al-Bukḥari*, two were narrated from 'Aishah (7:64 and 7:65), one from Abu Hisham (5:236) and one via 'Ursa (7:88). All three of the *ahadith* in *Saḥeeḥ Muslim* have 'Aishah as a narrator. Additionally, all of the *ahadith* in both books agree that the marriage betrothal contract took place when 'Aishah was "*six years old*", but was not consummated until she was "*nine years old*". Additionally, a *hadeeth* with basically the same text (*matn*) is reported in *Sunan Abu Dawood*. Needless to say, this evidence is—Islamically speaking—overwhelmingly strong and Muslims who deny it do so only by sacrificing their intellectual honesty, pure faith or both.

This evidence having been established, there doesn't seem much room for debate about 'Aishah's age amongst believing Muslims. Until someone proves that in the Arabic language "*nine years old*" means something other than "*nine years old*", then we should all be firm in our belief that she was "*nine years old*" (as if there's a reason or need to believe otherwise!?!). In spite of these facts, there are still some Muslim authors that have somehow (?) managed to push 'Aishah's age out to as far as "*fourteen or fifteen years old*" at the time of her marriage to the Prophet (P). It should come as no surprise, however, that none of them ever offer any proof, evidence or references for their opinions. This can be said with the utmost confidence, since certainly none of them can produce sources more authentic than the *hadeeth* collections of Imams al-Bukhari and Muslim! Based on the research that I've done, I feel that there is a common source for those who claim that 'Aishah's age was "*fourteen or fifteen years old*" at the time of the marriage. This source is "*The Biographies of Prominent Muslims*" which is published in book form, on CD-ROM and is posted in several places on the Internet. Just another example of why going to the sources is important . . .

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## The Prophet's (P) Marriage In Perspective

To put all of this in perspective—hopefully without undue apologetics—the first thing that one should be aware of is that 'Aishah was the third wife of the Prophet (P), not the first. Prior to this, the Prophet's (P) first and only wife for **twenty-four years** was Khadijah bint al-Khuwaylid, who was about nineteen years older than him. He married Khadijah when she was forty and he was twenty-one—which might be called the years of a male's "*sexual prime*"—and stayed married ONLY to her until her death. Just after Khadijah's death, when he was round forty-six years old, the Prophet (P) married his second wife Sawdah bint Zam'ah. It was after this second marriage that the Prophet (P) became betrothed to 'Aishah, may God be pleased with her. She was the daughter of Abu Bakr, one of the Prophet's closest friends and devoted followers. Abu Bakr, may God be pleased with him, was one of the earliest converts to Islam and hoped to solidify the deep love that existed between himself and the Prophet (P) by uniting their families in marriage. The betrothal of Abu Bakr's daughter 'Aishah to Muhammad (P), took place in the eleventh year of Muhammad's prophethood, which was about a year after he had married Sawdah bint Zam'ah and before he made his *hijra* (migration) to *al-Madinah* (Yathrib). As mentioned above, the marriage with 'Aishah bint Abu Bakr was consummated in *Shawwal*, which came seven months after the Prophet's *hijra* from Makkah to al-Madinah. At the time of his marriage to 'Aishah, the Prophet (P) was over fifty years old.

It should be noted that the Prophet's (P) marriage to 'Aishah was an exceedingly happy one for both parties, as the *hadeeth* literature attests. 'Aishah, may God be pleased with her, was his favourite wife and the only virgin that he ever married. After emigrating to al-Madinah, Muhammad (P) married numerous other wives, eventually totalling fifteen in his lifetime. Even though we do not have time to go into the details of each one of them here, each of these marriages was done either for political reasons, to strengthen the ties of kinship or to help a woman in need. Quite a few of the wives were widows, older women or had been abandoned and thus were in need of a home. Additionally, it should be mentioned that the same collection of Muslim *hadeeth* literature that tells us that

'Aishah was only nine years old at the time of the marriage tells us that the marriage was Divinely ordained:

Narrated 'Aishah, may God be pleased with her: The Messenger of God (P) said (to me): "You have been shown to me twice in (my) dreams. A man was carrying you in a silken cloth and said to me, 'This is your wife.' I uncovered it; and behold, it was you. I said to myself, 'If this dream is from God, He will cause it to come true.'" (Saheeh Bukhari, Volume 7, Book 62, Number 15)

Thus like everything that the Prophet (P) did, there was wisdom behind it and lessons to be learned from it. The wisdom behind such incidents provides us guidance on the basis of human morality, exposes the double standards of misguided hypocrites from other religions that criticize Islam and much more. But more on that subject below. . .

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### Criticism Addressed And Entertained

Myself and many other Muslims should no longer be surprised by the double standards that Christians display when they criticize the conduct of Prophet Muhammad (P), since we've heard it for so long. To have an atheist, agnostic—or anyone else who does not believe in a Divinely revealed basis for morality—criticize something that is "*politically incorrect*" by today's moral standards comes as no surprise. Such people will always find something to criticize, since they simply have a bone to pick with "religion" in general. All of this "absolute morality" talk gets in the way of them having a good time, so they want to mock it, discredit it and do away with it. The criticism of Christians, however, is another matter. While it is true that Christians speak out against the "moral relativity" which is spreading amongst the increasingly secular society today, they too are unconscious victims of it. The values of most Christians today come from the humanist values of Western Europe (or, at a minimum, are heavily influenced by them). Their values DO NOT come straight out of the Bible—in theory or in practice—regardless of what they may claim. That Christians today try to take credit for the so-called "Freedom", "Human Rights", "Democracy" and "Women's Rights" in Europe and America is nothing short of a joke. It may impress uneducated people in so-called Third World countries, but anyone who has studied history knows that these things came about in spite of the Church, not because of it. The way in which many Christians uncritically mix non-Christian values with (allegedly) Biblical values has always fascinated me. One interesting example of this is how nationalism and patriotism are supported amongst the majority of Evangelical Protestant (and even other) Christians in the United States. In America, good Christians are flag wavers. Few, if any, of these fiercely patriotic minds ever seem to realize that narrow-minded patriotism is, at its core, both selfish and non-universal. That patriotism and Christianity go hand-in-hand in the minds of many people is just an example of how we can be blindly sucked into "moral relativism" without even realizing it.

According to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, right and wrong are ordained by Almighty God. As such, morality does not change over time based on our whims, desires or cultural sensitivities. In cultures where there is no Divinely revealed ruling on an issue, what is right and what is wrong is determined by cultural norms. In such cases, a person would only be considered "immoral" if they violated the accepted norms of their society. As we will demonstrate, the Prophet Muhammad's (P) marriage to 'Aishah, viewed both in the light of Absolute Morality and the cultural norms of his time, was not an immoral act, but was an act containing valuable lessons for generations to come. Additionally, this marriage followed the norms for all Semitic peoples, including those of Biblical times. Based on this, and other information that we will provide below, it is grossly hypocritical for Christians to criticise the Prophet's (P) marriage to 'Aishah at such a young age. In case Christian readers are under the false impression that their values today are timeless and somehow reflect those of Biblical times, please consider the following points which are directly related to the question of at what age a person is properly ready to be married:

- Keeping in mind the ideas of "political correctness" and "absolute morality", in Biblical times the age at which a girl could marry was **puberty**. However, during the Middle Ages it was usually twelve years old. Now in most "Christian" countries it is between fourteen and sixteen years old. I live in country where some states allow partners of the same sex to legally marry, but consider an eighteen year old boy who sleeps with a sixteen year old girl a "*statutory rapist*". So even though Christians might disagree with much of what is becoming all too prevalent in Western society today—whether it be drug abuse, gay marriages or abortion—they too have been swallowed up (possibly unknowingly) by the ugly monster of "moral relativism". Certainly, they might be giving in less quickly than people who do not believe in a Divine basis for morality, but they're giving in nonetheless.
- Historically, the age at which a girl was considered ready to be married has been **puberty**. This was the case in Biblical times, as we will discuss below, and is still used to determine the age of marriage in what the culturally arrogant West calls "primitive societies" throughout the world. As the *ahadith* about 'Aishah's age show, her betrothal took place at least three years before the consummation of the marriage. The reason for this was that they were waiting for her to come

of age (i.e. to have her first menstrual period). Puberty is a biological sign which shows that a woman is capable of bearing children. Can anyone logically deny this? Part of the wisdom behind the Prophet's Muḥammad's (P) marriage to 'Aishah just after she reached puberty is to firmly establish this as a point of Islamic Law, even though it was already cultural norm in all Semitic societies (including the one Jesus (P) grew up in). The large majority of Islamic jurists say that the earliest time which a marriage can be consummated is at the onset of sexual maturity (*bulugh*), meaning puberty. Since this was the norm of all Semitic cultures and it still is the norm of many cultures today—it is certainly not something that Islam invented. However, widespread opposition to such a Divinely revealed and accepted historical norm is certainly something that is relatively new!

- The criticism of Muhammad's (P) marriage to 'Aishah is something relatively new in that it grew up out of the values of "Post Enlightenment" Europe. This was a Europe that had abandoned (or at least modified) its religious morality for a new set of humanist values where people used their own opinions to determine what was right and wrong. It is interesting to note that Christians from a very early time criticized (again hypocritically) the Prophet's practice (P) of polygamy, but **not** the marriage to 'Aishah. Certainly, those from a Middle Eastern Semitic background would not have found anything to criticize, since nothing abnormal or immoral took place. It was European Christians who began to criticize Muhammad on this point, not ones who were in touch with their Semitic roots.
- It is upon reaching the age of puberty that a person, man or woman, becomes legally responsible under Islamic Law. At this point, they are allowed to make their own decisions and are held accountable for their actions. It should also be mentioned that in Islam, it is unlawful to force someone to marry someone that they do not want to marry. The evidence shows that 'Aishah's marriage to the Prophet Muhammad (P) was one which both parties and their families agreed upon. Based on the culture at that time, no one saw anything wrong with it. On the contrary, they were all happy about it.
- None of the Muslim sources report that anyone from the society at that time criticized this marriage due to 'Aishah's young age. On the contrary, the marriage of 'Aishah to the Prophet (P) was encouraged by 'Aishah's father, Abu Bakr, and was welcomed by the community at large. It is reported that women who wanted to help the Prophet (P), such as Khawlah bint al-Hakeem, encouraged him to marry the young 'Aishah. Due to the Semitic culture in which they lived, they certainly saw nothing wrong with such a marriage.
- Society's ideas of love, family and marriage are much different in the so-called "modern" and "civilized" West of today than they were in Biblical or Qur'anic times. Unfortunately, many of us carry the baggage of "romantic love" and ideas about sex that have managed to poison our minds since the Europeans (and their ideas) came to dominate the globe. These ideas have not only penetrated into the minds of Muslims, but actually permeate many of them. The European colonial powers have pulled out of almost all Muslim lands, but the colonization of the minds continues! As we mentioned above, the sad part is that most people do not even realize that they are under such un-Godly influences. Just to reference the way things have changed, a statement in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica* makes it clear that values regarding the proper age of marriage have been changing over the years: ". . . in the United States and parts of Europe the association of adult status with **sexual maturity** as expressed in the term **puberty rites** has been **unwelcome**".<sup>2</sup>
- The significance that sex and sexuality are thought to play in human psychology has its roots in Freudian thought. Even though many of Freud's ideas are being heavily challenged today, many of his ideas still play a role in the thinking of many people. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) taught that humans are basically "sexual beings" whose childhood sexual urges are the key to understanding their behaviour. He developed the methodology of psychoanalysis and his ideas on sex, repressed guilt and sexuality, the subconscious sex drive, the Oedipus complex and other ideas have come to almost haunt the Western view of sexuality (almost as much as the repressive views of the Roman Catholic Church). Needless to say, Freud's ideas have been criticized by believing Jews, Christians and Muslims since they basically deny human moral responsibility. In Freud's view of things, human beings are prisoners to the effects of unconscious forces and their sex drive. Such ideas are always welcomed by "liberals", "humanists" and others like them. The point of all this in regards to young marriage, however, might be less clear. What needs to be pointed out is the contradictory "modern" Western view of sexuality. They are taken aback by the thought of marriage at the age of puberty, even though it's an age old custom. However, they have junior high schools where sex education is taught and a society where sexually promiscuous "dating" is considered the norm. Sometime sex is simply a natural pleasure to be enjoyed, but at other times it is a psychological demon of far reaching consequences. In short, everything from their private lives to their court systems, have fallen victim to the moral relativity of the psychiatrists and psychologists. The attitude that any experience in life can be seen as some sort of "trauma" is very widespread. Many people go through life constantly obsessed about what sort of "complex" they may be suffering from due to experiences they've had in their relatively normal life. The morality which is produced by such attitudes all but does away with human responsibility. People who are guilty of serious

crimes, instead of being held responsible for their actions, are themselves considered "victims", since they are only doing what their psychological makeup causes them to do.

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### Puberty = Maturity = Marriage

The above points having been presented, some additional details on a few of them is worthwhile. An interesting article on the age at which people married in Biblical times is *Ancient Israelite Marriage Customs*, by Jim West, ThD—a Baptist minister. This article states that:

"The wife was to be taken from within the larger family circle (usually at the **outset of puberty** or around the age of 13) in order to maintain the purity of the family line;"

This is just one reference to the fact that the onset of puberty was considered the age at which young people could marry. That people in Biblical times married at an early age is widely endorsed. While discussing the meaning of the word '*almah*', which is the Hebrew word for "*young woman*" or "*adolescent female*", Gerald Segal says:

"It should be noted, however, that in biblical times females married at an early age".<sup>3</sup>

In spite of its somewhat arrogant Western talk of "*primitive cultures*", *An Overview of the World's Religions* makes it clear that puberty is an age old symbol of adulthood:

"Almost all primitive cultures pay attention to **puberty** and marriage rituals, although there is a general tendency to pay more attention to the puberty rites of males than of females. Because puberty and marriage symbolize the fact that children are **acquiring adult roles**, most primitive cultures consider the rituals surrounding these events very important. Puberty rituals are often accompanied with ceremonial circumcision or some other operation on the male genitals. Female circumcision is less common, although it occurs in several cultures. Female puberty rites are more often related to the commencement of the menstrual cycle in young girls."

Some female authors agree:

"Puberty is defined as the age or period at which a person is first capable of sexual reproduction, in other eras of history, a rite or celebration of this landmark event was a part of the culture." (*Rites of Passage: Puberty*, by Sue Curewitz Arthen)

"Getting your period" marks a rite of passage for young girls entering womanhood (From the *Women's Resource Center*)

Another contemporary reference relating marriage age to puberty is an article on Central Africa, which says: ". . . **women marry soon after puberty**".<sup>4</sup> The previous quotations, and plenty of others which were not used, should prove to any intelligent person what anthropologists and historians already know: **in centuries past, people were considered ready for marriage when they reached puberty.**

It should be mentioned that from an Islamic point of view, many problems in society today can be traced back to the abandonment of early marriage. Due to the way that Almighty God has created man and woman, i.e. with strong sexual desires, people should marry young. In the past, this was even more true since life expectancy was very low (i.e. you were considered "old" if you made it to 40!). Not only does marriage provide a legal outlet for people with strong sexual desires, but it usually produces more children. One of the main purposes of marriage is to produce children—"be fruitful and multiply" as the Bible says (Genesis 8:17). This was especially important in the past, when people did not live for as long as they do now and the infant mortality rate was much higher.

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### The Age Of Puberty

Even though we have established that puberty has been the historical, cultural and religious norm for indicating readiness for marriage, some may wonder at which age puberty normally takes place. This is somewhat meaningless in regards to our specific discussion of Muhammad (P) and 'Aishah, since the *hadith* literature makes it clear that she had reached puberty. However, in regards to puberty and at what age most girls have their first menstrual cycle, 'Abdul-Hamid Siddiqi says:

Islam has laid down no age limit for puberty for it varies with countries and races due to the climate, hereditary, physical and social conditions. Those who live in cold regions attain puberty at a much later age as compared

with those living in hot regions where both male and female attain it at a quite early age. "The average temperature of the country or province," say the well-known authors of the book *Woman*, "is considered the chief factor here, not only with regard to menstruation but as regards the whole of sexual development at puberty."<sup>6</sup> Raciborski, Jaubert, Routh and many others have collected and collated statistics on the subject to which readers are referred. Marie Espino has summarised some of these data as follows: (a) The limit of age for the first appearance of menstruation is **between nine and twenty-four** in the temperate-zone; (b) The average age varies widely and it may be accepted as established that the nearer the Equator, the earlier the average age for menstruation.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, an article entitled *Puberty in Girls* by an Australian government Public Health organization, says:

"The first sign of puberty is usually a surge of growth: you become taller; your breasts develop; hair begins to grow in the pubic area and under the arms. This may start from **10 years to 14 years - even earlier for some and later for others.**"

An article *Physical Changes in Girls During Puberty* has this to say:

"During puberty, a girl's body changes, inside and out, **into the body of a woman**. The changes don't come all at once, and they don't happen at the same time for everybody. Most girls start showing physical changes around age 11, but everyone has her own internal schedule for development. **It's normal for changes to start as early as 8 or 9 years of age**, or not until 13 or 14. Even if nothing looks or feels different yet, the changes may have already begun inside your body."

Many will readily agree with the information above, but still may harbour reservations about whether a marriage to an older man could be happy for such a young girl. Putting aside the modern Western notions of "happiness" for a moment, the marriage of 'Aishah and the Prophet (P) was a mutually happy and loving one as is expressed in numerous *hadeeth* and *seerah* books. That happy marriages occur between people with a fairly large difference in ages is known among psychologists:

"When the differences (in ages) is great, e.g. exceeds fifteen to twenty years, the results may be happier. The marriage of an elderly (senescent) not, of course, an old (senile) man to a quite young girl, is often very successful and harmonious. The bride is immediately introduced and accustomed to moderate sexual intercourse"<sup>7</sup>

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### More Wisdom Behind It

In his comments on the *ahadith* in *Sahih Muslim* which mention 'Aishah's young marriage to the Prophet (P), 'Abdul-Hamid Siddiqi shows points three other reasons for this marriage:

- 'Aishah's marriage to the Prophet Muhammad (P) at an early age allowed her to be an eye witness to the personal details of his life and carry them on to the succeeding generations. By being both spiritually and physically near to the Prophet (P), the marriage prepared 'Aishah to be an example to all Muslims, especially women, for all times. She developed into a spiritual, teacher and scholar, since she was remarkably intelligent and wise. Her qualities helped support the Prophet's work and further the cause of Islam. 'Aishah, the Mother of the Believers, was not only a model for wives and mothers, but she was also a commentator on the Qur'an, an authority on *hadeeth* and knowledgeable in Islamic Law. She narrated at least 2,210 *ahadith* that give Muslims valuable insights into the Final Prophet's daily life and behaviour, thus preserving the *Sunnah* of Muhammad (P).
- At that time, this marriage refuted the notion that a man could not marry the daughter of a man who he had declared to be his "brother" (even in the religious sense). Since the Prophet (P) and Abu Bakr had declared each other to be "brothers", this notion was done away with. This is demonstrated in the following *hadeeth*:

Narrated 'Urso: The Prophet (P) asked Abu Bakr for 'Aishah's hand in marriage. Abu Bakr said, "But I am your brother." The Prophet (P) said, "**You are my brother in God's religion and His Book, but she ('Aishah) is lawful for me to marry.**" (*Saheeh al-Bukhari*, Volume 7, Book 62, Number 18)

- The marriage did away with the pagan Arab superstition that it was a bad omen to be married in

the month of *Shawwal*. They thought that the month carried this omen since the word *Shawwal* was derived from *Shaala*, which itself was believed to carry a bad omen. The authentic *ahadith* indicate that the Prophet (P) and 'Aishah were married in this lunar month.

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### Not Much Ado Back Then

Above, we established that fact that getting married at puberty was an accepted practice amongst not only today's "primitive cultures", but specifically amongst the Semitic (i.e. Hebrew, Arab, Syriac, etc.) peoples of the Middle East. In order to provide additional proof that Muhammad's (P) marriage to 'Aishah did not raise any eyebrows at that time, I here submit quotations from two Western female scholars who have studied Islam in detail:

"It is not clear just when the marriage actually took place. According to some versions, it was in the month of Shawwal of the Year 1, that is, some seven or eight months after the arrival at Medina; but, according to others, it was not until after the Battle of Badr, that is, in Shawwal of the second year of the *Hijrah*. **In no version is there any comment made on the disparity of the ages between Mohammed and Aishah or on the tender age of the bride who, at the most, could not have been over ten years old and who was still much enamoured with her play.**"<sup>8</sup>

In the above quotation, the sources which are given for the latter date are "*Nawawi*" and "*Tabari*". Both Imams al-Nawawi and al-Tabari were great Muslim scholars, but their works contain material that is less than authentic by Islamic standards, which is probably the reason over her questioning which date is authentic. This is all beside the point, since we've already shown that authentic Islamic sources state that 'Aishah, may God be pleased with her, was "*nine years old*". The main point to note is that in "**no version**" was any comment made on their age difference or on 'Aishah's young age. Why? Such an early marriage was normal in all Semitic societies - such as the ones that Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad grew up in!

Another author, Karen Armstrong, has this to add: "*Tabari says that she was so young that she stayed in her parents' home and the marriage was consummated there later when she had reached puberty*".<sup>9</sup> This further establishes that the marriage took place at puberty and that, as such, no eyebrows were raised. "*Tabari*", it should be mentioned, refers to Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Jareer al-Tabari (225-310 AH / 839-923 CE), who was a great Muslim scholar who is well known in the West for his Qur'anic commentary and history of the world.

It is no surprise that both of the above authors agree on the fact that the marriage of 'Aishah and Muhammad (P) took place when the former had reached puberty and that this was normal at the time. This is no surprise, since anyone who studies the Muslim sources and Semitic culture would be forced to come to the same conclusion, since it is simply a historical fact. It should be pointed out that both of the above quoted female authors do not hesitate to misrepresent Islam (intentionally or unintentionally) in their other writings. Suffice it to say that if there was some other "damaging" information available, they would not hesitate to bring it to light. Nabia Abbott, who has done some useful research on Islam in some areas, was basically an "Orientalist" in the classic sense. Her book which was quoted above, *Aishah-The Beloved of Mohammed*, is actually nothing but a disgusting second-guessing of 'Aishah's life. If a book with a similar mix of speculation and inauthentic sources were written about someone of significance in the West, it certainly would **not** be sitting on scholarly bookshelves. It's has long been established that Orientalists with a bone to pick with Islam liked to decide on the authenticity of a story based on their pre-conceived notions. If an inauthentic story seemed to belittle the Prophet of Islam, it became oft quoted. However, any authentic material that contradicted their theories was simply ignored. It's analogous to writing a historical biography of Jesus and using quotations from apocryphal gospels to override the Canonical ones whenever whimsically deemed appropriate. This is how Orientalists and Christian missionaries have been treating Muhammad (P) for centuries.

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### So What's The Verdict?

Overcoming cultural bias or admitting your own double standards is not always easy. For some people, it takes years for them to admit that they've been hypocritical. Hopefully, the thoughts presented here will plant the seed of reflection in some people so that they may reflect on the truth. Admitting that there's a problem is often half the battle, so before the reader heads off to make a final personal judgement on where they stand on this issue, I want to provide some more food for thought. Montgomery Watt, a long time scholar of Islam, had some choice words on how the West should judge Muhammad (P). I have never agreed with many of Watt's conclusions about Islam, but I have always viewed him as one of the more open-minded and open-hearted Orientalist scholars. Possibly, this is because he was more of a promoter of understanding than a narrow-minded Christian missionary. Years of studying Islam brought Watt to this conclusion:

"The other main allegations of moral defect in Muhammad are that he was treacherous and lustful . . . Sufficient

has been said above about the interpretation of these events to show that the case against Muhammad is much weaker than is sometimes thought. The discussions of these allegations, however, raises a fundamental question. How are we to judge Muhammad ? By the standards of his own time and country ? Or by those of the most enlightened opinion in the West today? When the sources are closely scrutinized, it is clear that those of Muhammad's actions which are disapproved by the modern West were **not the object of the moral criticism of his contemporaries**. They criticized some of his acts, but their motives were superstitious prejudice or fear of the consequences. If they criticized the events at Nakhlah, it was because they feared some punishment from the offended pagan gods or the worldly vengeance of the Meccans. If they were amazed at the mass execution of the Jews of the clan of Qurayzah, it was at the number and danger of the blood-feuds incurred. The marriage with Zaynab seemed incestuous, but this conception of incest was bound up with old practices belonging to a lower, communalistic level of familial institutions where a child's paternity was not definitely known; and this lower level was in process being eliminated by Islam . . . **From the standpoint of Muhammad's time, then, the allegations of treachery and sensuality cannot be maintained. His contemporaries did not find him morally defective in any way. On the contrary, some of the acts criticized by the modern Westerner show that Muhammad's standards were higher than those of his time.** In his day and generation he was a social reformer, even a reformer in the sphere of morals. He created a new system of social security and a new family structure, both of which were a vast improvement on what went before. By taking what was best in the morality of the nomad and adapting it for settled communities, he established a religious and social framework for the life of many races of men. That is not the work of a traitor or 'an old lecher'.<sup>10</sup>

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### From Abraham (P)To "Pick-And-Choose/Feel Good Religion"

Everything that we have discussed above logically frees Muhammad (P) from the unjust criticism that he has received (at least amongst those who can be intellectually honest and fair-minded). One point, however, still needs to be made a bit more clear. Even though we've mentioned it in passing, the hypocrisy and double standards of Christians who criticize Muhammad (P) for his morality needs to be more thoroughly analysed and exposed.

Before moving on to an analysis of Biblical morality, I would like to offer some advice and encouraging words to my fellow Muslims. My main piece of advice is to not be discouraged by slanderous attacks on Islam or how it is distorted in the media. Certainly, we all hate to see such things occur, but in the "Information Age" which was brought about by a culture that (allegedly) places a supreme value on freedom of speech, there is not much that we can do to stop it. The flip side to this coin is the fact that the Truth of Islam is still out there and people are finding it. Yes, **Islam is spreading** in spite of these hypocritical methods that Christians and others are using to stop it. From the "moon god" lies of **Robert** Morey to the almost daily distortions in the media, Islam is still spreading in the West. Actually, the fact that those who make a career out of attacking Islam, such as Christian missionaries, have to resort to lies and distortions when they discuss Islam is a good sign. Certainly, if they discussed Islam as it was meant to be understood, they would only be hurting their own cause. When Islam is presented by non-Muslims in the West, usually matters of peripheral importance are addressed and criticised. The core beliefs of Islam, if discussed at all, are presented in a distorted manner. If Islam was just some ridiculous "Third World" religion with no appeal, they would not have to treat it this way. As a matter of fact, a great deal of the anti-Islamic literature that fills Christian bookstores (and the Internet) is not designed to convert Muslims, but to turn Westerners off to Islam. The people who write these lies are just trying to poison the minds of people so that they won't be receptive to the message of Islam when they hear it.

Their methods, however, are failing. In Europe especially, the Christian religion is in a severe state of stagnation and people are looking for truth elsewhere. Christians have always been embarrassed by their almost complete inability to convert a notable Muslim to Christianity. Certainly, they have their converts that they hold up as examples, however all of them seem to have been only nominal Muslims (at best) when they converted. However, many notable Westerners have embraced Islam, recently as well as in the past. One of the most interesting things about this is many (if not all) of these people could be called "Searchers for the Truth". By this I mean that they were the type of people who were spiritual, open-minded and read books on many subjects. They were not brainwashed simpletons who simply wanted to join an easy religion and the dominating culture of the time. They were people who knew a lot not only about religion, but about history, philosophy and other disciplines. Suffice it to say that the truth of Islam is out there, in spite of all the negative press that it gets today. The following is just one testimony that Islam is spreading in the West:

"Unprecedented numbers of British people, nearly all of them women, are converting to Islam at a time of deep divisions within the Anglican and Catholic churches. The rate of conversions has prompted predictions that Islam will rapidly become an important religious force in this country . . . Within the next 20 years the number of British converts will equal or overtake the immigrant Muslim community that brought the faith here", says Rose Kendrick, a religious education teacher at a Hull comprehensive and the author of a textbook guide to the Koran. She says: "Islam is as much a world faith as is Roman Catholicism. No one nationality claims it as its own". Islam is also spreading fast on the continent and in America. (*The Times*, London, Tuesday, November 9th, 1993, Home-News page)



Thanks be to God that many of us who are former "pew warmers" finally decided to go out and investigate what they try to spoon feed us from the pulpit and TV. Why does Islam succeed in attracting Christians and others? Because it's the Clear Way of Abraham. No other religion today can honestly claim this! Islam isn't just a "feel good" religion where they just tell you what you want to hear and read selected verses from the Bible. Most Christians today approach religion like they do Sunday brunch: they take what they like and leave what they don't like. They have this attitude in spite of the fact that Abraham is held up in their Bible as a towering example of faith. Abraham (P), who was going to sacrifice his own son because Almighty God commanded it, certainly knew the basis of morality. It is clear in both the Bible and the Qur'an that Abraham knew that whatever God commands is the right thing to do. However, how many Christians today can say that they honestly believe that on all issues? How many of them have reflected on the moral ramifications of what is contained in their Bible? Seemingly, not even their learned apologists who attack Islam have reflected on it too deeply!

The question "*What is our basis for morality?*" is an easy one for those who follow the faith of Abraham (P)—and that's what Islam is. Islam is submission to the Will of Almighty God - "*We hear and we obey*"- the faith of our father Abraham. If it was good enough for Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, then it's good enough for me! It is this truth and this attitude that attracts people to Islam. The entire basis of Islam, which produces this attitude, is Unity—the Unity of Almighty God and the unity of mankind. To be sure, the message of Islam appeals to the very nature of man. No wonder it is spreading! A Christian theologian, relatively recently, observed:

"It is probable that early in the twenty-first century Islam will have become numerically the largest of the world religions" <sup>11</sup>

Quite possibly, if you count only Sunni Muslims (which are at least 85% of Muslims), we are already the largest religion in the world when compared not to "Christians" as a whole, but to either the Orthodox, Roman Catholics or Protestants each separately.

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### A Case Study In Biblic Morality

Now that we've taken an detailed look at an alleged moral difficulty in the life of Muhammad (P), for the sake of balance, let's take a look at a moral difficulty in the Bible. We've already made statements above concerning the nature of Biblical morality, but many readers may be unaware of some of its "*difficulties*". For better or for worse, in Sunday school they generally skip the verses which we are going to deal with below. However, these verses certainly are useful tools in putting intellectually honest Christians in the same "moral dilemna" that they think Muslims should be in due to Muhammad's (P) young marriage to 'Aishah, may God be pleased with her. It should be kept in mind that the purpose of this discussion is the basis for morality, not the inspiration of the Bible (or lack thereof). For the purposes of this discussion, we accept the Bible "*as is*". However, this should not be interpreted to mean that we are endorsing it as the "Word of God" *in toto*. On the other hand, it should not be interpreted to mean that we are attacking the "Word of God", since we are discussing it simply because **Christians** consider it to be the "Word of God" (whatever their particular definition might be).

The portion of the Bible that we want to look at begins with the Book of Numbers, Chapter 31, verses 17 and 18. Here, Moses, following the **Lord's command**, orders the Israelites to kill all the Midianite male children. The order continues with the following:

". . . **kill every woman who has known man by lying with him, but all the female children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves.**"

One can only guess how the Israelites determined who the virgins were. Most probably, they did it based on age and maturity, assuming that all of the female "*children*" who had not reached puberty were virgins. Keep in mind that this was done, according to the Bible, on God's command to "*Avenge the Israelites on the Midianites*". Later, God gives Moses instructions on how to divide up the booty, "*whether persons, oxen, donkeys, sheeps or goats*". Based on this command, "*thirty-two thousand persons in all, women who had not known a man by lying with him*" were divided up. This was done so that the Israelite soldiers could have these young girls "*for themselves*". I do not suspect that anyone reading this is either so naive or ignorant of King James English to not know what this means!

Moving along to another great example of Biblical morality, . . . in Deuteronomy 21:10-14 the Biblical "*God of Love*" gives the following command:

"*When thou goest forth to war against thine enemies, and the Lord thy God hath delivered them into thine hands and thoust has taken them captive, and seest among the captives a beautiful woman, and have a desire unto*

**her, that though would have her to be thy wife, then though shalt bring her home to thine house . . . and after that you may go into her and be her husband, and she shall be your wife. But if though have no delight in her, then thou shalt let her go".**

This should serve as sufficient proof that the morality that is taught in the Bible often is not what Christians make it out to be. In spite of what they teach in Sunday school, the above mentioned verses demonstrate the following:

Almighty God, at least according to the Bible:

- \* Ordered innocent babies to be killed; and
- \* He allowed young women to be forced into sex against their will.

Before moving on, it should be noted that killing women and children in war is **never** permitted under Islamic Law (the actions of some ignorant Muslims around the world notwithstanding). Some Christians may take issue with the words "*innocent babies*" above, since they believe that even babies are tainted with "Original Sin". However, this is not the topic of the discussion at hand. Suffice it to say that Biblical support for the Doctrine of Original Sin is contradictory at best. There are some verses that seem to support it, but there are others that seem to clearly deny it. One strike against "Original Sin", besides the fact that it's simply unjust, is the fact that the Jews—who read the Old Testament—never believed in it the way Christians do. But anyway . . . when faced with the problematic parts of the Old Testament, Christians react in various ways. Many offer up the ill thoughtout "*Well-That's-in-the-Old-Testament*" defense. In spite of the fact that they usually don't brush the Old Testament aside so quickly when they are being shown alleged prophecies which match Jesus, a few other thoughts can be presented. Some of the things that make brushing aside the Old Testament a bit more difficult (at least for Christians who want to remain intellectually honest) are: 1) the same God that "inspired" the Old Testament "inspired" the New Testament; 2) this same God is "unchanging" according to the Bible; 3) Jesus in the New Testament endorses the "Law and the prophets" (i.e. the Old Testament) in several places; and 4) without the Old Testament there is no basis for Christianity.

When put in this predicament, Christians, have one of two choices: **1)** stop thinking about it and fall back on a liberal "pick-and-choose" religion that just makes them "feel good" but does not answer any of life's more difficult questions; or **2)** accept the (allegedly) Divinely Revealed morality of the Bible "*as is*" and *en toto*.

There are Christians out there who claim to accept the Divinely Revealed morality of the Bible. They understand what's at stake and the issues at hand. If people are allowed to whimsically decide what is right and what is wrong, there would be chaos. Just as importantly, if people decide what is "God's Word" and what is not His word based on their preconceived notions and "modern" sensibilities, nothing would be left of the Bible. As such, there are Christians who, in principle, say that killing babies is "moral" as long as God clearly commands it. For someone who understands the nature of Divinely Revealed morality, we would have to agree in principle but with certain reservations. As mentioned above, Almighty God—according to Islam—never commands the killing of innocent children. That is one "*difficulty*" that I am glad that Muslims don't have to explain their way out of! Killing babies is okay as long as God commands it?! So much for having Christians as baby-sitters!

The bottom line is that morality comes from Almighty God and from Him alone. However, if ones studies the Bible, it is plain to see that it is not a foundation for morality. The examples above are just a few that can be provided from both the Old **and** the New Testament. The people who promote "*Biblical morality*" pick and choose from the text as they please. Only in Islam can one with good conscience accept "*the whole package*" without ignorantly or hypocritically denying things that they don't like. This is how true internal peace and balance are achieved. If one belongs to a religions without accepting everything in its scripture (real or alleged) one is not only bearing false witness against themselves but against God Himself. With all the false ideas in the modern age, it's easy to be lead astray. The liberal Western morality that has now touched all corners of the globe is, culturally speaking, something like an eight-hundred pound gorilla. It's very hard to stand in its way or speak out against it. However, being encouraged by others to follow "*vain desires*" has been an eternal problem for mankind, as Almighty God makes clear in the Qur'an:

"Say: 'I will not follow your vain desires:  
if I did I would stray from the path  
and be not of the company of those who receive guidance.'  
Qur'an - Surah al-An'aam - 6:56

## Guideposts To Be Thankful For

The Prophet Muhammad (P) was a great example for all of humanity and peoples of different cultures (from "modern" Europeans to the aborigines of Australia). Not only was he a great Prophet and Messenger, but he was also a statesman, military leader, ruler, teacher, neighbour and friend. Family life was one of the most important areas where he was a great example, since he was both a husband and a father. Due to God's wisdom, His last and final prophet experienced a wide array of marriages and family situations. Due to this, he is an example for people who are monogamous, for those who are polygamous, for those wishing to marry those older than themselves and for those wondering how early someone can rightfully marry. Muhammad (P) re-established the Religion of Abraham so that it would continue to the Last Day.

As Muslims, we should be thankful for these guideposts in our moral journey through life. Reflecting on them aids us in avoiding being led astray into "*moral relativism*". This is a very dangerous thing, since it can lead to the worst of all sins—associating others with Almighty God in worship, belief and/or Lordship. By knowing the Prophet's (P) life we can see how to stay within the boundaries laid by Almighty God and stay on the Natural Religion of Islam which was made to suit the natural disposition (*fitrah*) of mankind. I pray that we, as Muslims, make Almighty God's limits our limits, and that we are not influenced by other societies and cultures. **If it was good enough for Abraham and Moses, then it's good enough for me . . .**

That's the way I see it, but God knows best . . .

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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina*, Oxford University Press, 1956.
- <sup>2</sup> "Rites and Ceremonies", *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition (1987), Volume 26, page 850.
- <sup>3</sup> Gerald Sigal, *The Jew and the Christian Missionary*, Ktav Publishing House, 1981, page 28.
- <sup>4</sup> "Central Africa", *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition (1987), Volume 15, page 646. See also "Aboriginal Australia", *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th Edition (1987), Volume 14, page 425. For additional references to the marriage customs in Biblical times, see *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, by Johannes Pedersen, Volume 1, page 60ff.
- <sup>5</sup> Herman H. Ploss, Max Bartels and Paul Bartels, *Woman*, Volume I, Lord & Bransby, 1988, page 563.
- <sup>6</sup> English-translation of *Sahih Muslim*, Volume 2, International Islamic Publishing House, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, page 715.
- <sup>7</sup> Theodor H. Vandeveld, *Ideal Marriage : Its Physiology and Technique*, Greenwood Publishing Group, 1980, p. 243.
- <sup>8</sup> Nabia Abbott, *Aishah-The Beloved of Mohammed*, Al-Saqi Books, London, 1985, page 7.
- <sup>9</sup> Karen Armstrong, *Muhammad: A Biography of the Prophet*, Harper San Francisco, 1992, page 157.
- <sup>10</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, Oxford University Press, 1961, page 229.
- <sup>11</sup> John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993, page 87.