

4. Did Abu Bakr Lead The Prophet?

As if the crisis is not bad enough yet, ‘Aishah threw in one more unnerving contradiction into the mess.

Exhibit G

Imam Ibn Hibban (d. 354 H) records about it:

أخبرنا محمد بن إسحاق بن خزيمة قال حدثنا محمد بن بشار قال حدثنا بدل بن المحبر قال حدثنا شعبة عن موسى بن أبي عائشة عن عبيد الله بن عبد الله عن عائشة أن أبا بكر صلى بالناس ورسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في الصف خلفه

Muhammad b. Ishaq b. Khuzaymah – Muhammad b. Bashar – Badal b. al-Muhabbar – Shu’bah – Musa b. Abi ‘Aishah – ‘Ubayd Allah b. ‘Abd Allah – ‘Aishah:

Abu Bakr led the people in *salat* **while the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, was in the congregational row BEHIND him.**1

‘Allamah al-Albani (d. 1420 H) comments:

صحيح

Sahih²

And, Shaykh al-Arnaut concurs:

إسناده صحيح على شرط البخاري

Its chain is *sahih* upon the standard of al-Bukhari.3

Imam al-Tirmidhi (d. 279 H) also documents:

حدثنا محمود بن غيلان حدثنا شبابة [بن سوار] عن شعبة عن نعيم بن أبي هند عن أبي وائل عن مسروق عن عائشة قال صلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم خلف أبي بكر في مرضه الذي مات فيه قاعدا

Mahmud b. Ghilan – Shubabah b. Sawar – Shu’bah – Na’im b. Abi Hind – Abu Wail – Masruq – ‘Aishah:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, performed *salat* in a sitting posture **BEHIND Abu Bakr** during his fatal illness.[4](#)

Al-Tirmidhi says:

حديث عائشة حديث حسن صحيح غريب

The *hadith* of ‘Aishah is *hasan sahih gharib*.[5](#)

‘Allamah al-Albani comments too:

صحيح

Sahih[6](#)

When did this take place? At the best, one may only attempt to fix it either in the ‘*Isha* prayer of Thursday or in the *Zuhr* of Monday, the Prophet’s last day. By the narration of Anas, the Messenger of Allah did not step into the mosque at all on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday preceding his death. So, we are left with only the evening of Thursday, when he first stopped leading the *salat* and the Monday of his demise. According to one report of ‘Aishah, the Messenger of Allah took over the ‘*Isha* on Thursday, shortly after giving the order to Abu Bakr to lead it. But, in another narration by her, the Prophet actually never intervened in that ‘*Isha* at all, and Abu Bakr led it and all subsequent *salats* till the *Zuhr* of the following Monday. Yet, even on that Monday, Abu Bakr only prayed *beside* him as a surrogate Imam. As such, there really is nowhere to place this new claim of ‘Aishah – that her father was our Prophet’s Imam – within the possible timeframe.

However, Anas b. Malik made a frantic attempt to save her! Imam Ibn Hibban documents:

أخبرنا عمر بن محمد الهمداني قال حدثنا إسحاق بن إبراهيم بن سويد الرملي قال حدثنا أيوب بن سليمان قال حدثني أبو بكر بن أبي أويس عن سليمان بن بلال عن حميد الطويل عن ثابت البناني عن أنس بن مالك قال آخر صلاة صلاها رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم مع القوم في ثوب واحد متوشحا به برد قاعدا خلف أبي بكر

‘Umar b. Muhammad al-Hamdani – Ishaq b. Ibrahim b. Suwayd al-Ramli – Ayub b. Sulayman – Abu Bakr b. Abi Uways – Sulayman b. Bilal – Humayd al-Tawil – Thabit al-Banani – Anas b. Malik:

The last *salat* performed by the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, with the people was done in a single garment wrapped around him **in a sitting posture BEHIND Abu Bakr.**[7](#)

‘Allamah al–Albani comments:

صحيح

Sahih[8](#)

Shaykh al–Arnaut agrees:

إسناده صحيح

Its chain is *sahih*[9](#)

Imam al–Tirmidhi also records:

حدثنا عبد الله بن أبي زياد شبابه بن سوار حدثنا محمد بن طلحة عن حميد عن ثابت عن أنس قال صلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم في مرضه خلف أبي بكر قاعدا في ثوب متوشحا به

‘Abd Allah b. Abi Ziyad – Shubabah b. Sawar – Muhammad b. Talhah – Humayd – Thabit – Anas:

He (the Prophet), peace be upon him, during his illness, performed *salat* in a sitting posture **BEHIND Abu Bakr**, wrapped in a garment.[10](#)

Al–Tirmidhi comments:

هذا حديث حسن صحيح

This *hadith* is *hasan sahih*[11](#)

‘Allamah al–Albani agrees:

صحيح الإسناد

Its chain is *sahih*[12](#)

So, it was the *last* congregational *salat* of the Prophet, after all. But, even Anas’ intervention rescues nothing! We still do not know when that last *salat* was. Anas himself narrated that the final

congregational *salat* of the Messenger of Allah – and it was led by him, obviously before the *'Isha* prayer – was on Thursday, followed by three days when he never stepped into the mosque at all. On the Monday of his departure, he came into the mosque, but did not join the congregational *salat*. He retreated into his room, and that was the very last time his Sahabah saw him alive. He apparently died shortly after his appearance. Basically, it is practically impossible to fix his alleged *salat* behind Abu Bakr anywhere within his lifetime!

There is another similarly unfixable *riwayah* by this same 'Aishah, concerning the same period. Imam al-Nasai (d. 303 H) records:

أخبرنا محمود بن غيلان قال حدثني أبو داود قال أنبأنا شعبة عن موسى بن أبي عائشة قال سمعت عبيد الله بن عبد الله يحدث عن عائشة رضي الله عنها أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم أمر أبا بكر أن يصلي بالناس قالت وكان النبي صلى الله عليه و سلم بين يدي أبي بكر فصلى قاعدا وأبو بكر يصلي بالناس والناس خلف أبي بكر

Mahmud b. Ghilan – Abu Dawud – Shu'bah – Musa b. Abi 'Aishah – 'Ubayd Allah b. 'Abd Allah – 'Aishah, may Allah be pleased with her:

“The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, ordered Abu Bakr to lead the people in *Salat*.”

She said: “**The Prophet, peace be upon him, was IN FRONT of Abu Bakr**, and he performed the *salat* in a sitting posture while **Abu Bakr led the people in *salat*** and the people were behind Abu Bakr.[13](#)”

'Allamah al-Albani declares about it:

صحيح

[Sahih14](#)

Where does this belong? Was it the *'Isha* prayer of the Messenger's last Thursday? Well, 'Aishah herself had also narrated that he led that *salat*, sitting *beside* her father! Of course, Anas denied completely the Prophet's participation in that *Isha* prayer or any other, from that period, till his death! 'Aishah also claimed in another report that the Prophet did not join the *'Isha* prayer on that Thursday! But, what about the *salat* on the Monday of his death? Still, the problem adamantly persists. 'Aishah had narrated that her blessed husband led that *salat* beside Abu Bakr! He neither stayed in front of her father, nor behind him. Therefore, it is once more impossible to fix another *riwayah* of Umm al-Muminin 'Aishah within the lifetime of her master and prophet, *sallallahu 'alaihi wa alihi*.

Understandably, the *'ulama* of the Ahl al-Sunnah are very disturbed by these grave, irreconcilable inconsistencies in 'Aishah's, and of course Anas', reports. Al-Hafiz (d. 852 H) himself is unable to hide this fact:

ورواه مسلم بن إبراهيم عن شعبة بلفظ أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم صلى خلف أبي بكر أخرجه بن المنذر وهذا عكس رواية أبي موسى وهو اختلاف شديد ووقع في رواية مسروق عنها أيضا اختلاف فأخرجه ابن حبان من رواية عاصم عن شقيق عنه بلفظ كان أبو بكر يصلي بصلاته والناس يصلون بصلاة أبي بكر

Muslim b. Ibrahim narrated from Shu'bah with the wording, "The Prophet, peace be upon him, performed *salat* behind Abu Bakr". Al-Mundhir recorded it. **This is in contrast to the narration of Abu Musa, AND IT IS A SEVERE CONTRADICTION. Moreover, there is A FURTHER CONTRADICTION in the report of Masruq.** It is recorded by Ibn Hibban in the report of 'Asim, from Shaqiq from him (i.e. Masruq) with the wording, "Abu Bakr was following his *salat* (i.e. that of the Prophet), and the people were following the *salat* of Abu Bakr."¹⁵

So, what answer do the Sunni *'ulama* have to these contradictions? They, of course, attempted to devise a way out, as 'Allamah al-Albani explains, after quoting the contradictory stories:

ففي هذه الرواية أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم كان إماما بخلاف الأولى؛ ففيها أنه كان مقتديا، وقد اختلف العلماء في التوفيق بين الروايات على وجوه ذكرها الحافظ في "الفتح"؛ وألاها أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم صلى صلاتين في المسجد؛ كان في إحداها مأموما، وفي الأخرى إماما. وإليه ذهب ابن حزم في "المحلى" (3/47)، والبيهقي، وقبله ابن حبان

In this report, it is stated that the Prophet, peace be upon him, was the Imam (in the *salat*), in contradiction to the first one which states that he was a follower (in the *salat*). **The *'ulama* are in disagreement over the methods to harmonize the two reports.** Al-Hafiz mentioned them (i.e. those methods) in *al-Fath*. The first of them is that the Prophet, peace be upon him, performed two *salats* in the mosque. In one of them, he was a follower (of Abu Bakr), and in the other, he was the Imam (of Abu Bakr). This was the opinion of Ibn Hazm in *al-Muhalla* (3/47) and al-Bayhaqi, and before him, Ibn Hibban.¹⁶

The 'Allamah does not cite any other of those methods. This suggests that he most probably considers the two-*salat* "solution" as the strongest possibility. But, does it *really* help the Sunni case? Apparently, it does not. Even if we ignore Anas' claim that the Messenger of Allah never participated in congregational *salat* in his mosque since the last Thursday of his fatal illness, it is still impossible to fix his alleged *salat* behind Abu Bakr anywhere within his lifetime! No matter where it stays, it clashes with some other "sahih" *ahadith* of the Ahl al-Sunnah and creates a new commotion. Besides, even finding a comfortable seat for that *riwayah* (about Abu Bakr's leadership of the Prophet) does not in any way resolve the innumerable, severe contradictions in the various reports about the Messenger of Allah's last congregational prayers and his alleged order(s) to Abu Bakr to lead in *salat*.

1. Abu Hatim Muhammad b. Hibban b. Ahmad b. Hibban b. Mu'adh b. Ma'bad al-Tamimi al-Darimi al-Busti, Sahih Ibn Hibban bi Tartib Ibn Balban (Beirut: Muasassat al-Risalah; 2nd edition, 1414 H) [annotators: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani and Shu'ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 5, p. 483, # 2117

- [2.](#) Ibid
- [3.](#) Ibid
- [4.](#) Abu 'Isa Muhammad b. 'Isa al-Sulami al-Tirmidhi, al-Jami' al-Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi) [annotator: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani], vol. 2, p. 196, # 362
- [5.](#) Ibid
- [6.](#) Ibid
- [7.](#) Abu Hatim Muhammad b. Hibban b. Ahmad b. Hibban b. Mu'adh b. Ma'bad al-Tamimi al-Darimi al-Busti, Sahih Ibn Hibban bi Tartib Ibn Balban (Beirut: Muassasat al-Risalah; 2nd edition, 1414 H) [annotators: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani and Shu'ayb al-Arnaut], vol. 5, p. 496, # 2125
- [8.](#) Ibid
- [9.](#) Ibid
- [10.](#) Abu 'Isa Muhammad b. 'Isa al-Sulami al-Tirmidhi, al-Jami' al-Sahih Sunan al-Tirmidhi (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-'Arabi) [annotator: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani], vol. 2, p. 197, # 363
- [11.](#) Ibid
- [12.](#) Ibid
- [13.](#) Abu 'Abd al-Rahman Ahmad b. Shu'ayb al-Nasai, al-Mujtaba min al-Sunan (Halab: Maktab al-Matbu'at al-Islamiyyah; 2nd edition, 1406 H) [annotator: Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani], vol. 2, p. 83, # 797
- [14.](#) Ibid
- [15.](#) Shihab al-Din Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah li al-Taba'ah wa al-Nashr; 2nd edition), vol. 2, p. 130
- [16.](#) Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, Asl Sifat Salat al-Nabi (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'arif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi'; 1st edition, 1427 H), vol. 1, p. 84

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