

[Home](#) > [A New Analysis of Wahhabi Doctrines](#) > [The Life Account of Shaykh Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Sa'ud](#) > Ibn Sa'ud

The Life Account of Shaykh Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Sa'ud

[A cursory glance at the life account of Shaykh Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab](#)

In this section, we deemed it fitting to take a survey of the life of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab, known as the Shaykh, and Muhammad Sa'ud.

The sons and grandsons of the Shaykh are still living in the Arabia, some of whom are known by the family name, "Al ash-Shaykh". The children of Muhammad Al as-Sa'ud some of whom are holding the reins of government in Arabia are known as "al Sa'ud". The country had been known before as "Hijaz", but it was changed into the "Kingdom of Saudi Arabia" {*al-Mamlakah al-'Arabiyyah Sa'udiyyah*} during the reign of King 'Abd al-'Aziz.

Shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab came from the region of Najd who was born in 1114 AH in one of the cities of Najd named as "Ayniyyah". His father, Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhab, was a scholar {*'alim*} and the judge {*qadi*} of that region. As such, the creed of Shaykh Muhammad had been ascribed to his father. After learning the basics of religion from his father, Shaykh Muhammad went to Medina and learned from the '*ulama*' of that region.

Due to his personal interpretations of some issues regarding belief and his opposition to the '*ulama*' of Medina, he was expelled from the city. He then went to Iraq where he stayed in Basrah. In that city he got acquainted with a person named Shaykh Muhammad Majmu'i and adopted his ideas. Finally, the two believed in a certain creed.

The other '*ulama*' of Basrah and the believers of the region that were mainly of Iranian origin, had opposed him and ousted him from Basrah.

When Shaykh Muhammad was driven out of Basrah, he proceeded to Damascus, which had a pleasant climate, but because of his unusual belief and difficulties in life he was unable to remain there. Since he could not return to Medina or Mecca, he went back to the Najd of his father, Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhab, who was then still the 'alim of the region.

The Shaykh had a brother named Shaykh Sulayman ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab who was at loggerheads with him in terms of belief. His brother was the first person to write a book refuting his doctrines. His father also opposed him and sided with Shaykh Sulayman. In addition to the opposition of his father and brother, he also faced the opposition of 'ulama', and this dispute continued until the death of his father.

Shaykh Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab after the death of his father

After the death of his father, Shaykh Muhammad enjoyed great freedom in propagating his doctrines and views. As such, he went to other places and become acquainted with 'Uthman ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad, who was then the emir of 'Ayniyyah, and married his daughter Jawharah. Although it is said that the people there accepted some of his beliefs, because he went to extremes in opposing their customs, they expelled him from the region. For instance, he had ordered the destruction of a dome belonging to Zayd ibn al-Khattab, brother of 'Umar. He had also issued a decree for an old tree, which was venerated by the people of the region, to be uprooted.

In sum, on account of his peculiar doctrines, among which was his disregard for the leaders of the Ahl as-Sunnah, the Shaykh lost his esteem in the people's sight and earned their wrath. From there he went to the region of Dar'iyyah.

Nowadays, pilgrims—Iranian and non-Iranian—can still see the relics related to the rule of 'Uthman in Arabia such as the holy shrine of the Holy Prophet (s) and the graves surrounding it, the lanterns of Masjid an-Nabi, and the inscriptions on that sacred mosque.

The children and students of Shaykh Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab

Shaykh Muhammad had a number of sons and daughters and married one of his daughters to Muhammad ibn Sa'ud, the tribal chief. His sons, Husayn, 'Abd Allah and Ibrahim, became judges after their father. Even now, his sons, one after another, hold religious positions in Saudi Arabia. During his lifetime, apart from training students, the Shaykh wrote some books which nowadays have caught the attention of 'ulama' and students of the region. These books are as follows:

1. *Kitab at-Tawhid*; a collection of his doctrines;
2. *Kitab Kashf ash-Shubahat*, which is written in defense of his doctrines vis-à-vis Sunni 'ulama';
3. The merits and issues of some stories in the Qur'an;

4. *Kitab al-Kaba'ir*, which has been written about the major sins;
5. *Masa'il al-Jahiliyyah*, in which he compares the pre-Islamic period of ignorance of Arabia with his own time;
6. *Fawa'id as-Sirah an-Nabawiyyah*, which is well-known as *Sirat ar-Rasul*. This book examines the entire course of the lives of some Companions of the Prophet (s), his battles and the prevalent beliefs during that time;
7. *Ikhtisar ash-Sharh al-Kabir*; and
8. *Adab al-Mashyi ila's-Salah* (These two books have been written about issues related to jurisprudence and the branches of religion).

These books are still available at the present.

The Death of Shaykh Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab

After engaging in religious and political debates, successive travels to a number of cities in the Muslim world, and enduring the wrath and anger of the '*ulama'*', Shaykh Muhammad was able to find his own supporters and votaries, who are nowadays known as the Wahhabis.

According to historical sources which have been written in his praise and appreciation and negating the deviant nature of his doctrines, the Shaykh passed away in 1206 AH at the age of 92 in Dar'iyyah after traveling to Basrah, Najaf, Karbala', and probably, Isfahan and Shiraz.

In short, after the death of the Shaykh, his beliefs and views were promoted and propagated with the support and blessing of external and domestic political brokers in such a manner that at the present, most of the current rulers of Arabia and a number of religious scholars and judges there follow him and other Muslim countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and boarder communities in Iran have come under the influence of these doctrines. The Wahhabis are spreading this creed in the various countries in Europe, America and Asia by building mosques and libraries, printing copies of the Holy Qur'an, dispatching religious missionaries, and the like.

This creed is called Wahhabism derived from the name of the Shaykh's father. Although the Shaykh seemed to be a follower of the Hanbali school of thought, the truth of the matter is that he was not so, and he was distinctively different from the other '*ulama'*'. In fact, he regarded himself as free to think, choose and formulate his own beliefs pertaining to religion. Since he considered himself an initiator of a new set of beliefs, he expressed his beliefs in the following points:

1. He treated all Muslims as infidels or polytheists while thinking of himself as the true Muslim;
2. He declared visiting the graves and constructing domes and courtyards around the cemetery of the

Companions of the Prophet (s) and his descendants as unlawful *{haram}*;

3. He regarded making vows, requests and offering sacrificial animals beside the shrine of saints *{awliya'}* as unlawful;

4. He used to reckon as *haram* entreating *{istighathah}* and resorting to the inter mediation *{tawassul}* of the saints of God;

5. He considered it obligatory to wage *jihad* against those who opposed his creed, saying: “Wage war against the infidels and polytheists until there is no more sedition *{fitnah}* and the religion is solely for God:

﴿وَقَاتِلُوهُمْ حَتَّى لَا تَكُونَ فِتْنَةٌ﴾

Fight them until faithlessness is no more. [1](#)

What is meant by the Shaykh in this verse is *jihad* against Muslims and for him the pure religion is referred to his creed.

This is the summary of the life account and beliefs of Shaykh Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab as taken from *Kitab At-Tawhid bi'l-Lughati al-Farisiyyah*. [2](#) Of course, other points shall also be mentioned in other discussions.

To whom was Shaykh Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab indebted

During the period of his stay in Mecca and Medina, Shaykh Muhammad came across books that had a role in the formation of his thought. Among them are the books of Ahmad ibn Hanbal, his *Musnad* in particular; the books of Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah; and the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah. Contrary to other '*ulama'*' of the Ahl as-Sunnah, they expressed new beliefs and opinions which can be extracted from their books on jurisprudence and history. Of course, the Shaykh was largely influenced by the views of Ibn Taymiyyah.

Ibn Taymiyyah lived during the 8th century AH. In terms of belief, he was follower of Ahmad ibn Hanbal who lived in the 3rd century AH. Ibn Taymiyyah believed in a sort of anthropomorphism concerning God maintaining that God has a hand, foot, eye, tongue and mouth, and occupies a space! In order to prove his case, he resorted to the literal text of Qur'anic verses, maintaining that God is sitting on a throne in heaven.

Ibn Taymiyyah is the epithet and title of Abu'l-'Abbas Taqi ad-Din Ahmad ibn 'Abd al-Halim. He was born in the territory of Harran in present-day Turkey. He then migrated with his father to Damascus, Syria, and there he acquired learning in religion and jurisprudence. In many ideological and intellectual

issues, he held extreme and radical views.

In addition to his anthropomorphic beliefs concerning God, he prohibited visitation of the graves and seeking the intermediation {*tawassul*} of the Prophet (s) while deeming it permissible to abuse Imam 'Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a). On issues in jurisprudence, he opposed the predecessors of the four Sunni schools. From the above points, it can be understood that the Shaykh was not the first person to have expressed such beliefs, for individuals such as Ibn Taymiyyah had advanced similar ideas prior to him.

Like Shaykh Muhammad, Ibn Taymiyyah earned the wrath and stern criticism of the '*ulama*' of his time and for a time he was exiled to Egypt. But through the help of the government of the time, he returned to Damascus. During the last period of his life, he was imprisoned for his opposition to the '*ulama*' of Damascus and finally expired in the castle of Damascus and was buried there.^{[3](#)}

Ibn Sa'ud

In the territory of Dar'iyyah in the region of Hijaz, which is a mountainous territory with a pleasant climate, a person named Muhammad ibn Sa'ud assumed the chieftainship of his tribe. The Shaykh became acquainted with Ibn Sa'ud and relayed to him his new doctrines, and Ibn Sa'ud in turn accepted them. They agreed together to set up a government encompassing the entire region where religious and judicial affairs, issues concerning propagation, and the leadership of the Friday prayers would be assumed by the Shaykh while the political, social, military, and security affairs would be under Ibn Sa'ud.

The government in Hijaz at that time was tribal and ethnic, and like many Muslim countries, was under Ottoman rule whose capital was present-day Turkey. With Al Sa'ud's ascension to power, Hijaz seceded from Ottoman rule and in the course of time, it fell under the control of Britain. On course, the British role in this change of the government should not be overlooked.

^{[1](#)}. Surat al-Baqarah 2: 193.

^{[2](#)}. Kitab at-Tawhid bi'l-Lughah al-Farisiyyah, no. 27, pp. 16-34.

^{[3](#)}. 'Ali Dawani, Firqeh-ye Wahhabi, chap. 1.