

Islam's Perfect Man

Koran Chapter 33:21 states that Muhammad is the perfect man for Muslims to imitate if they want to meet Allah in paradise:

Indeed in the Messenger of Allah (Muhammad) you have a good example to follow for him who hopes for (the Meeting with) Allah and the Last Day, and remembers Allah much.

Rapist

As we saw in the section dealing with slavery, Muhammad engaged in the slave trade and possessed slaves of his own. And after a Muslim victory, Muhammad was involved in distributing the captured non-Muslim women among his Muslim warriors, and taking some for himself. Islamic Doctrine is based on the Koran and the teachings of Muhammad. What did this Doctrine allow to happen to these non-Muslim women?

Captured non-Muslim women then, and still today, fall under the category of those "whom your right hands possess." Such a woman becomes a slave to her Muslim captor and it becomes "legal" for him to have intercourse with her. This is authorized by 4:24 of the Koran,¹ which begins by stating

Also (forbidden are) women already married, except those (slaves) whom your right hands possess. Thus has Allah ordained for you...

Ibn Kathir explained the meaning of this verse:

The Ayah [verse] means, you are prohibited from marrying women who are already married, (except those whom your right hands possess) except those whom you acquire through war, for you are allowed such women after making sure they are not pregnant. Imam Ahmad recorded that Abu Sa'id Al-Khudri said, "We captured some women from the area of Awtas who were already married, and we disliked having sexual relations with them because they already had husbands. So, we asked the Prophet about this matter, and this Ayah was revealed...Consequently we had sexual relations with these women."²

This was also reported in *Sahih Muslim* in a chapter titled:

It Is Permissible To Have Sexual Intercourse With A Captive Woman After She Is Purified (Of Menses Or Delivery) In Case She Has A Husband, Her Marriage Is Abrogated After She Becomes Captive³

In the *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, the phrase *slaves whom your right hands possess* is stated as *those you have taken in war as slaves*. And this *tafsir* explained that,

*You may have relations with them if they have husbands in the Abode of War after istibra' (the waiting period to ascertain whether they are pregnant).*⁴

The modern *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan* explained 4:24 this way:

*The historical background of the verse is that when pagan women were captured by Muslims in battles, they disliked having intercourse with them because they had husbands. The Companions asked the Messenger of Allah about it. Thereupon, this verse was revealed. The verse allowed the Muslims to have intercourse with pagan women if they were captured in battles even if they had husbands, providing their wombs have been cleansed, that is, after one menses or, in case they are pregnant, after the delivery of the child.*⁵

Another modern Koran commentary had this to say about 4:24:

Other than those whom your right hands possess, due to slavery. If an already married woman is taken captive during a war, she would become permissible for a Muslim male after completing one menstrual period.⁶

So when his warriors asked him about raping female captives, instead of prohibiting it, Muhammad responded with this approving "revelation" from Allah.

And, although a Muslim was limited to no more than four wives, there were no limitations on the number of slave girls a Muslim could possess.⁷

Women Captives and Sharia Law (Islamic Sacred Law)

The founders of the four major Sunni schools of *Sharia* Law agreed that

*when a married woman becomes a prisoner of war without her husband, her contract of marriage with her husband ends, and her new master has the right to have sexual relations with her after the birth of a child if she is pregnant, or after waiting a while to confirm the status of her womb if she is not apparently pregnant.*⁸

The Hanafi school, the largest of these four schools, stated it this way in an explanatory footnote while discussing what 4:24 said about married women taken in war:

*Although the ayah literally says, "Those whom your right hands own," it refers here to slaves taken in war, since a man may not have sexual relations with one of his slave women who is in a legitimate marriage. Wives of combatants captured in war are automatically divorced and are thus not under this restriction.*⁹

The Shafi'i school, the next largest of these four, stated:

*When a child or a woman is taken captive, they become slaves by the fact of capture, and the woman's previous marriage is immediately annulled.*¹⁰

Women Captives and Muhammad

Muhammad's favorite wife Aisha said that when it came to taking pledges from women, Muhammad's hand

*did not touch any woman's hand except the hand of the woman that his right hand possessed (i.e. his captives or his lady-slaves).*¹¹

Muhammad advised Muslim men to completely cover their 'Awrah (the area between their navels and their knees) in front of everyone except their wives and "those whom your right hand possesses."¹²

Muhammad himself was quite involved in distributing women captives and allowing them to be raped. As we saw, for example, in the section titled "Slave owner and dealer", after the defeat of the Jewish Bani Qurayzah tribe, Muhammad divided up that tribe's "property, wives, and children" among the Muslims.¹³ And after the defeat of the Jews at Khaybar, Muhammad had the women of Khaybar "distributed among the Muslims."¹⁴

Although on another occasion Muhammad did place some restrictions on his warriors:

*Ruwaifi' bin Thabit Al-Ansari narrated: "A person stood up among us to deliver a sermon, and said: 'I only say to you what I heard the Messenger of Allah say on the Day of Hunain. He said: "It is not permissible for a man who believes in Allah and the Last Day that he discharges his water to a field that belongs to another" - meaning pregnant women, "and it is not permissible for a man who believes in Allah and the Last Day that he uses a slave woman (sexually) until he confirms that she is free (of pregnancy)..."'*¹⁵

So Muhammad said that a Muslim warrior had to wait to rape his "slave woman" until after she had the child, if already pregnant, or until after it was confirmed she was not pregnant.

Muhammad's attitude about how captured women could be treated was further shown in the glaring example of how Muhammad condoned the rape of female captives from the Mustaliq tribe. We can see that the only problem to be resolved in the *hadith* below was whether or not the ransom the Muslims were expecting for these particular female captives would be affected if the captives were returned pregnant. In response to the question about whether the Muslim warriors should therefore engage in *coitus interruptus* with their rape victims, Muhammad, instead of prohibiting the rapes, merely said that *coitus interruptus* would not matter because every soul that was destined to be born would be born:

Abu Sirma said to Abu Sa'id Al Khudri (Allah he pleased with him): O Abu Sa'id, did you hear Allah's Messenger (SAW) mentioning al-'azl [coitus interruptus]? He said: Yes, and added: We went out with Allah's Messenger (SAW) on the expedition to the Bi'l-Mustaliq. We took captive some excellent Arab women. We desired them, for we were suffering from the absence of our wives, (but at the same time) we also desired ransom for them. So we decided to have sexual intercourse with them but by observing 'azl...But we said: We are doing an act whereas Allah's Messenger is amongst us; why not ask him? So we asked Allah's Messenger (SAW), and he said: It does not matter if you do not do it, for every soul that is to be born up to the Day of Resurrection will be born.¹⁶

So according to Muhammad, there was no question about whether or not a woman captive could be raped by her Muslim captor; it was just a matter of when it would happen. And, as pointed out earlier, the only determining factor with regard to the timing was whether or not she was pregnant.

Muhammad even approved of 'Ali bin Abi Talib, his cousin and son-in-law, and the subsequent fourth caliph, raping a slave girl who had been captured during a battle; and Muhammad said that 'Ali deserved even more than that:

Narrated Buraida: The Prophet sent 'Ali to Khalid to bring the Khumus (of the booty) and I hated 'Ali, and 'Ali had taken a bath (after a sexual act with a slave-girl from the Khumus). I said to Khalid, "Don't you see this (i.e., 'Ali)?" When we reached the Prophet I mentioned that to him. He said, "O Buraida! Do you hate 'Ali?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Don't hate him, for he deserves more than that from the Khumus."¹⁷

It is interesting to note how Muhammad reacted when four Muslims complained to him about 'Ali doing this on another occasion:

'Imran bin Husain narrated that the Messenger of Allah dispatched an army and he put 'Ali bin Abi Talib in charge of it. He left on the expedition and he entered upon a female slave. So four of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah scolded him, and they made a pact saying: "[If] we meet the Messenger of Allah we will inform him of what 'Ali did."¹⁸

When the army returned, the four Muslims took turns complaining to Muhammad about 'Ali's conduct. Muhammad became angry and said to them:

"What do you want from 'Ali?! Indeed 'Ali is from me, and I am from him, and he is the ally of every believer after me."¹⁹

The modern commentary for this *hadith* explained that the phrase *'Ali is from me and I am from him* meant not only the family connection, but it was "also to emphasize" that 'Ali's "conduct and character resembles" that of Muhammad [my emphasis].²⁰

And, in case there had been any question about the matter, the Koran specifically made slave girls legal for Muhammad:

Chapter 33, Verse 50

O Prophet (Muhammad)! Verily, We have made lawful to you your wives, to whom you have paid their Mahr (bridal-money given by the husband to his wife at the time of marriage), and those (slaves) whom your right hand possesses - whom Allah has given to you...

As Ibn Kathir explained this verse,

those (slaves) whom your right hand possesses whom Allah has given to you, means, 'the slave-girls whom you took from the war booty are also permitted to you.' He [Muhammad] owned Safiyyah and Juwayriyah, then he manumitted them and married them, and he owned Rayhanah bint Sham'un An-Nadariyyah and Mariyah Al-Qibtiyyah, the mother of his son Ibrahim, upon him be peace; they were both among the prisoners, may Allah be pleased with them.²¹

The *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn* presented the first part of the verse in this manner:

O Prophet, We have made lawful for you: your wives to whom you have given dowries and any slavegirls you own from the booty Allah has allotted you - from among those unbelievers you have captured, such as Safiyya and Juwayriyya...²²

The *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan* explained about the slaves:

The reference is to his slave girls who were four in number: Safiyah, Juwairiyah, Raihanah and Mariya Al-Qibtiyyah (the Copt). As for the first two (Safiyah and Juwairiyah), he set them free and later married them. Raihanah and Mariyah remained with him as slave-girls.²³

There is another verse of the Koran that specifically addressed the issue of slave girls for Muhammad:

Chapter 33, Verse 52

It is not lawful for you (to marry other) women after this, nor to change them for other wives even though their beauty attracts you, except those (slaves) whom your right hand possesses. And Allah is Ever a Watcher over all things.

Here we have a second verse saying that Muhammad could have as many slave girls as he liked, and do with them as he wished.²⁴

Additional

The attitude that slave girls were sex objects continued after Muhammad's death. In the following report we find that 'Umar, the second Caliph after Muhammad's death, was attracted by a slave girl that walked past him, so he "cohabitated" with her. However this happened on a day in which he was fasting. So 'Umar wondered if the cohabitation had been legal, and he asked some companions, including 'Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law, and subsequently the fourth Caliph:

One day 'Umar Ibn al-Khattab came to his companions, and said: Give fatwa [legal opinion] on my action which I did today. They asked: What is that O Amir al-Muminin [Commander of the Faithful]? He replied: A slave-girl passed by me, who attracted me and I cohabitated with her while I was fasting. He (Ibn al-Musayyib) said: The people declared it to be a misfortune, but 'Ali kept quiet. Then he ('Umar) said to him: What do you say O Ibn Abi Talib ['Ali]? He replied: Your action was lawful; (fast) for one day in place of today. Thereupon he said: Thou art the best of them in giving fatwa.²⁵

So 'Umar saw a slave-girl that he liked, raped her, and then wondered if there was a problem with this because he happened to be fasting that day. 'Ali responded that it was "lawful" for 'Umar to have raped the slave girl, but 'Umar had broken his fast by doing so; consequently, the only thing 'Umar needed to do was fast "for one day in place of today."

'Umar and 'Ali were two of the four "Rightly Guided" Caliphs; these were the first four caliphs after Muhammad's death, and they were so named because they are believed to have held the most firmly to the teachings and example of Muhammad.

¹ The use of the phrase "whom your right hands possess" in reference to captured women and/or slave girls is found in other verses of the Koran (e.g. 4:3, 4:25, 23:6, 24:31, 33:50, 33:52, and 70:30).

² *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 2, p. 422. This situation regarding what to do with the captured women from Awtas, with the same conclusion, was also reported in *Al-Wahidi's Asbab al-Nuzul*, p. 71; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 2, No. 2155, pp. 555-556; *Jami' At-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 2, No. 1132, pp. 502-503; and Vol. 5, Nos. 3016-3017, pp. 331-332; and *Sunan An-Nasa'i*, Vol. 4, No. 3335, p. 155.

A modern commentary pointed out that this became a *permanent principle*:

For a solution and as a permanent principle regarding war captives, particularly those who are given a female captive as their share from the spoils of war, even though her non-believer and polytheist husband is alive; the recipient was allowed to have sexual intercourse with her after finding out the condition of her womb...

Jami' At-Tirmidhi, Vol. 5, Comments to *Hadith* No. 3016, p. 331.

³ *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 4, Nos. 1456-1456R4, pp. 386-387. The translator pointed out that the phrase *those whom your right hands possess* "denotes slave girls, i.e. women who were captured in the holy war." He goes on to note that there is supposed to be a procedural delay to the raping of those captured women:

The Muslims are not permitted to have sexual intercourse indiscriminately after they are captured. They can do it only after they are properly delivered to their charge by the head of the Islamic State or someone else on his behalf.

Ibid., n. 1, p. 387.

This was reiterated by Ibn Salih Al-Uthaymin, a 20th century Muslim scholar:

But if the dividing (of the Ghanimah) [spoils of war] takes place, and the woman from them ends up as a slave woman, then she becomes property of the right hand. The person can have intercourse with her as a right hand possession, which is permissible and there is nothing wrong with this.

The Clarification Regarding Intentionally Targetting Women and Children, p. 73.

So instead of the Muslim warriors "indiscriminately" raping captured women, the warriors are allowed to rape only those specific women who have been "properly delivered" to them as part of the spoils of war.

⁴ *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, p. 185. This explanation was also mentioned in the *Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas*, p. 103.

⁵ *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan*, Vol. 1, pp. 441-442.

⁶ *Tafsir As-Sa'di*, Vol. 1, p. 353.

⁷ From the commentaries on 33:50 of the Koran: *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 7, p. 724; *Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas*, p. 551; *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan*, Vol. 4, p. 402; and *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, p. 907. The lack of limits on the number of slave girls is also noted by the Hanafi School, which states that "one may collect as many slave women as one wishes," without "reckoning the number even if it exceeds a thousand." See *The Kitab al-Athar of Imam Abu Hanifah*, 134.457 and n. 1347, p. 263.

⁸ *Jami' At-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 2, Comments to *Hadith* No. 1132, p. 503.

⁹ *The Kitab al-Athar of Imam Abu Hanifah*, 114.390, n. 1217, p. 225.

¹⁰ *Reliance of the Traveller*, o9.13. Although this is a Shafi'i book of Sharia Law, the introduction to *Reliance of the Traveller* pointed out that in 1990, Dr. Taha Jabir al-Alwani, then-President of the Fiqh [Islamic Jurisprudence] Council of North America, and then-President of the International Institute of Islamic Thought located in Northern Virginia, said of this English translation (p. xviii):

There is no doubt that this translation is a valuable and important work, whether as a textbook for teaching Islamic jurisprudence to English-speakers, or as a legal reference for use by scholars, educated laymen, and students in this language...its aim is to imbue the consciousness of the non-Arabic-speaking Muslim with a sound understanding of Sacred Law...

In 1991 this English translation was certified by the Islamic Research Academy of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, to correspond "to the Arabic original," and it "conforms to the practice and faith of the orthodox Sunni Community" [my emphasis]. (p. xx)

¹¹ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 9, Book 93, No. 7214, p. 203.

¹² *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 4, No. 4017, p. 381. For similar narrations by Muhammad see *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Vol. 3, No. 1920, p. 101; and *Jami' At-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 5, No. 2769, p. 141. Muhammad also talked about punishing “those whom your right hands possess (i.e. slave women)” - see *Musnad Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal*, Vol. 1, No. 736, p. 377.

¹³ *The Life of Muhammad (Sirat Rasul Allah)*, p. 466.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

¹⁵ *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 2, No. 2158, pp. 556-557.

¹⁶ *Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 4, No. 1438, p. 373. For similar *hadiths* about the captured Bani al-Mustaliq women, see *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 3, Book 49, No. 2542, pp. 413-414; Vol. 5, Book 64, No. 4138, pp. 278-279; and Vol. 9, Book 97, No. 7409, pp. 303-304; *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 2, No. 2172, pp. 564-565; *Al Muwatta of Imam Malik Ibn Anas*, 29.34.95.

Although it was also reported that *coitus interruptus* was one of the ten "characteristics" that Muhammad disliked - see *Sunan Abu Dawud*, Vol. 4, No. 4222, p. 474.

¹⁷ *Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Vol. 5, Book 64, No. 4350, p. 387. The *Khumus* is the one-fifth of the war booty given in Allah's Cause, a portion of which went to Muhammad.

¹⁸ *Jami' At-Tirmidhi*, Vol. 6, No. 3712, p. 386.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 386-387.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

²¹ *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 7, p. 720.

²² *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, p. 907.

²³ *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan*, Vol. 4, p. 402.

²⁴ *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 8, p. 22 (*He was forbidden to marry more women...except for those whom his right hand possessed (slave women).*); *Tafsir Ahsanul-Bayan*, Vol. 4, p. 405 (*This ban did not apply to keeping slave-girls.*); and *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, p. 908 (*...any you own as slaves - who are still lawful for you*).

²⁵ *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p. 438.