

**Lady ‘A’ishah’s age at
the time of the
consummation
of her marriage to the
Holy Prophet
Muhammad (*sas*)**

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The last moments of the Holy Prophet's life with Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*)

It was the last moments of Holy Prophet's life. Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*) was sitting beside him. He was leaning towards her bosom. At that moment, Hazrat Abdur Rahman (*ra*), Hazrat Ayesha's brother, entered the room and he had a *miswaak* in his hand. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) looked towards it. Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*) rightly guessed that he wanted to brush his teeth. She took the *miswaak* from her brother and chewed it to soften it and gave it to the Holy Prophet (*sas*). He brushed his teeth with it properly like a healthy person. Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*) used to relate with pride that of all the Holy Prophet's wives she had the unique honour of being the one whose chewed substance was touched by the lips of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) before he breathed his last.

All this time Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*) was intensely praying for the health of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). The latter's hands were in the hands of Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*). Suddenly, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) uttered: "O Most Exalted Companion on High!" This startled Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*) because when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was healthy he used to say that at the time of a prophet's death he is given the choice of selecting the life of this world or the life hereafter. When she heard these words, she recalled the words of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and realised that he was now leaving this world. At that very moment the Holy Prophet (*sas*) also withdrew his hands. Until then she had tried to remain calm and composed. But, suddenly, she felt the weight of the Holy Prophet's body getting heavy on her. When she looked at his eyes, they were petrified. She then realised that he had expired, and so slowly moved his head onto a pillow. This was a moment of intense grief and sorrow and she started to cry.

The golden part of Hazrat Ayesha's "excellences and virtues" is that it was her apartment which was selected to be the last

resting place of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). His body was buried in it. *“From Allah we are and to Him is our eventual return.”*

Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*), during the life of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), saw in a dream that three moons had fallen onto her apartment. She narrated this dream to his father, Hazrat Abu Bakr (*ra*). When the Holy Prophet (*sas*) died and was buried in her apartment, Hazrat Abu Bakr (*ra*) told her that that was one of the moons, and certainly it was the best of them. Subsequent events proved the veracity of the dream. The other two moons which were buried in her apartment were Hazrat Abu Bakr (*ra*) and Hazrat ‘Umar (*ra*).

Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*) passed forty years of her life as a widow. During that time she regularly looked after the grave of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). She even used to sleep beside the grave. But once she saw the Holy Prophet (*sas*) in her dream and since then she stopped sleeping there. (Syed Sulaiman Nadvi, *Seerat-i Ayesha*, pp. 111,112)

Publisher's Note

The present booklet, *Lady 'A'ishah's age at the time of marriage to the Holy Prophet*, is an English translation of a concise and well-researched Urdu booklet, *Rukhsati ke Waqt Ummul Mu'mineen Sayeda 'Aishah' Siddiqa ki 'Umar* by a well-known writer of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Muslim M.A.

Muslim and non-Muslim biographers, historians, and even some of the well-known commentators of the Holy Qur'an hold that the marriage of Hazrat 'A'ishah (*ra*) with the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was solemnised at the age of seven and consummated at nine. This wrong and rather over-exaggerated love for the Holy Prophet (*sas*) to show 'strange qualities' in his holiness has led Western critics to revile and malign his unblemished character. It is most probably on this score that some Western critics have even charged the Holy Prophet (God forbid!) with child abuse. If, for the sake of argument, it is accepted that marriage was solemnised when Hazrat 'A'ishah (*ra*) was quite young, even then the consummation took place, according to the ancient Arab custom, when she became a major. This is the line of argument taken even by a contemporary Christian writer, Karen Armstrong, in her book *Muhammad – A Prophet for our Time*. She says:

“There was no impropriety in Muhammad's betrothal to 'A'isha. Marriages conducted *in absentia* to seal an alliance were often contracted at this time between adults and minors who were even younger than 'A'isha. This

practice continued in Europe well into the early modern period. There was no question of consummating the marriage until ‘A’isha reached puberty, when she would have been married off like any other girl” (p. 105).

Unfortunately, the majority of Muslim historians and biographers have written that Hazrat ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was solemnly married at the age of seven and consummation took place at nine. This is historically wrong and utterly incorrect.

The present booklet, being published by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Literary Trust, Trinidad and Tobago, brings to light solid historical facts that the most outstanding wife of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), Hazrat ‘A’ishah (*ra*), was married when she was 19 or 20 years of age. As far as we are aware, the first person to raise a voice against the misconstrued view of Hazrat ‘A’ishah’s marriage was Maulana Muhammad Ali of the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement.

This humble contribution is an attempt to clear our Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) of an alleged act ascribed to ‘the most successful religious Reformer’. It was first rendered into English by Masud Akhtar and was published in *The Islamic Review* (USA) in December 1980. It was recently reproduced by the Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha‘at-i Islam (Lahore), Suva, Fiji in its monthly *Paigham-i Haqq*. Ours is a fresh translation by Kalamazad Mohammed in which we have included some additional references and material and have also added an Appendix from Dr Zahid Aziz’s contribution on this subject, “Western critics and the Bible on the marriage of young girls” (available at ahmadiyya.org).

Enayat Mohammed

Chairman

Ahmadiyya Muslim Literary Trust, Trinidad and Tobago

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Lady ‘A’ishah’s age at the time of the consummation of her marriage to the Holy Prophet Muhammad

The books of tradition have all strongly emphasised the point that when Lady A’ishah (*ra*) entered the household of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) as a bride, she was nine years of age and that her marriage (*nikah*) had already taken place in the tenth year of the *Hijrah* when she was six years old. Now, if this tradition is truly authentic, how can any Muslim object to its validity or to its wisdom?

However, if we should consider the matter in the light of several traditions, a different picture emerges, and the truth comes to the fore that when Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) entered the Holy Prophet’s home as a wife, she was not less than nineteen or twenty years of age.

Before refuting the wrong belief that she was six years old when she got married, we would like to familiarise ourselves with the views of two distinguished modern-day biographers so that two sides of the argument can be presented. These two are Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi and Sayyed Abul A’la Maududi, whose profundity of knowledge is universally accepted without contradiction.

1. Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi, in his scholarly book *The Life of ‘A’ishah (ra)*, writes thus:

“Books of history and biography are silent about the date of birth of Hazrat Ayesha (*ra*). The historian Ibn Sa’d has written, and several famous scholars have followed him in saying, that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was born in the beginning of the fourth year of the Call and that she got married in the tenth year of the Call when she was six years old. However, this can in no way be true, for if we accept that she was born in the beginning of the fourth year of the Call, then in the tenth year of the Call she would have been seven years of age and not six. The truth is that regarding Lady ‘A’ishah’s age, there are some cogent unanimously accepted facts, namely that three years before the *Hijrah* in the sixth year of her life she got married; then in the month of Shawwal in the first year of *Hijrah*, when she was nine years of age, her marriage was consummated (*rukhsati*), and when she was eighteen years old, that is, in Rabi’ ul-Awwal of the eleventh year of *Hijrah*, she became a widow.

Accordingly, the real date of her birth would have been in the last part of the fifth year of the Call, or, in other words, in the month of Shawwal in the ninth year before the *Hijrah*, which is the year 614 according to the Christian calendar.

In order to understand future historical events, we ought to know that of the twenty-three years of the Call, approximately thirteen years were spent in Makkah and the remaining ten in Madinah. When Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was born, four years of the Call had already passed and the fifth year was coming to a close.”

2. Maulana Maududi has written the following under the heading “The date of Lady ‘A’ishah’s marriage (*nikah*)” in the monthly *Tarjumanul Qur’an* (Sept. 1974, p. 20):

“From Imam Ahmad Tibrani and Ibn Jarir Tabari and from an exhaustive tradition of Baihaqi, it is not only clear that Lady ‘A’ishah’s marriage took place before Lady Sauda’s, but it is also plainly evident that it was three years before the *Hijrah* in the tenth year of the Call in the month of Shawwal when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) performed the marriage rites with Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*). At that time, she was six years old. Here, a question arises that if Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was six years of age in the month of Shawwal in the tenth year of the Call, then her age at the time of the *Hijrah* ought to be nine years. And according to many reliable traditions, when she became a bride in the Prophet’s household in Shawwal of the second year of the *Hijrah*, she ought to have been eleven years old – in spite of the fact that all traditions are unanimous on this point that her marriage (*nikah*) took place when she was six years old and the consummation (*rukhsati*) occurred when she was nine years of age.

In answer to this seeming incongruity, many learned scholars have affirmed the view that the consummation of Lady ‘A’ishah’s wedding took place seven months after the *Hijrah*, and Hafiz ibn Hajar is also of this opinion. However, Imam Nawawi, in his book *Tehzeebul Asma wal Lughaat* and Hafiz ibn Kathir in *Al-Badayah*, and Allamah Qastalani in *Muwaahib al-Laduniyya*, have categorically stated that the consummation of Lady ‘A’ishah’s marriage occurred in the second year of the *Hijrah*. Hafiz Badr-ud-Din Aini, in *Umdatul Qari*, has written that the consummation took place in the second year of the *Hijrah* after the Holy Prophet (*sas*) had returned from the Battle of Badr.

Imam Nawawi and Allamah ‘Aini have both claimed that this assertion that the consummation of the marriage took place seven months after the Holy Prophet’s Flight (*Hijrah*) as weak and unreliable.

From this, a second question logically comes to mind, and that is, if the consummation of the marriage took place in the second year of the *Hijrah*, what about the authenticity of the marriage date that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was six years old when she got married and nine years of age when the marriage was consummated? We can find an answer to this query in a hadith of *Sahih al-Bukhari*, which related on the authority of ‘Urwah bin ibn Zubair that three years before the *Hijrah* Lady Khadijah (*ra*) died, and after an interval of two years or so the Holy Prophet (*sas*) performed the marriage ceremony with Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*). Then when she was nine years old the marriage was consummated. From this, it can be seen that the computation is very correct in that the marriage took place in the sixth year of her life, approximately one year before the *Hijrah*, and the consummation occurred in the second year of the *Hijrah*.”

These two eminent scholars are unanimous on one point, and that is, that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was six years old when she got married. Although, according to Sayyed Sulaiman, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was born in the fifth year of the Call and that the marriage took place in the tenth year of the Call, whilst the consummation occurred in Shawwal of the first year of *Hijrah*. And according to Sayyed Maududi’s reckoning, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was born in the sixth year of the Call and her marriage was carried out in the twelfth year and the consummation took place in Shawwal of the second year of the *Hijrah*.

So far as I am aware, the first person to raise his voice in objecting to the tradition that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was married at six years of age was Maulana Muhammad Ali of Lahore, when he wrote in his English publication *Muhammad the Prophet* (1924) an account of Lady ‘A’ishah’s marriage. Under the heading “‘A’ishah’s Age” he expressed his view thus:

‘A’ishah’s age

The popular misconception as to ‘A’ishah’s age may be removed here. That she had not attained majority is clear enough, but that she was not as young as six years of age is also true. In the first place, it is clear that she had reached an age when betrothal could have taken place in the ordinary course and must therefore have been approaching the age of majority.

Again, Isaabah, speaking of the Holy Prophet’s daughter Fatimah, says that she was about five years older than ‘A’ishah.

It is a well-established fact that Fatimah was born when the Ka’bah was being rebuilt, that is, five years before the Call. ‘A’ishah was therefore born in the year of the Call or a little before it, and she could not have been less than ten years at the time of her marriage with the Holy Prophet in the tenth year of the Call.

This conclusion is borne out by the testimony of ‘A’ishah herself, who is reported to have related that when the chapter entitled *The Moon* (the 54th chapter) was revealed, she was a girl playing about, and that she remembered certain verses then revealed. Now, the fifty-fourth chapter could not have been revealed later than the fifth year of the Call; therefore the report which states her to have been six years old in the tenth year of the Call when her marriage ceremony was gone through cannot be correct, because this would show her to have been born about the time of the revelation of the 54th chapter.

All these considerations show her to have been not less than ten years old at the time of her marriage. And as the period between her marriage and its consummation was not less than five years, because the consummation took place

in the second year of the Flight, it follows that she could not have been less than fifteen at that time.

The popular account that she was six years at marriage and nine years at the time of consummation is decidedly not correct because it supposes the period between the marriage and its consummation to be only three years, and this is historically wrong” (pp. 183-184).

The *Maulana* also expressed similar views about Hazrat Ayesha’s age in his booklet *Prophet of Islam*, his Urdu translation of the Holy Qur’an – *Bayanul Qur’an*, his Urdu translation and commentary of *Sahih al-Bukhari – Fazlul Bari*, and his well-known English book, *Living Thoughts of Prophet Muhammad*.

In his criticism of Maulana Muhammad Ali’s opinion, Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi, in his *Life of ‘A’ishah* (3rd edition), wrote as follows:

“Some unscrupulous people in whose opinion Lady ‘A’ishah’s childhood marriage seems improper have attempted to establish the point that she was not six years of age but sixteen. However, all these attempts are baseless and their claims are without substance. In no book of *Hadith* or of history can there be found the least support for their theory.”

Search for the truth

In the light of the writings of these three learned scholars, we reach the conclusion that no one knows the history of Lady ‘A’ishah’s birth. Even regarding the year of her birth, differences exist, and there is no consensus in respect to the year of her marriage, and there is also doubt as to the year when her marriage was consummated. As a result, there is room for examining the explanation of these three scholars and for removing the veil that hides the truth.

Historical evidence

First of all, it is important to bear in mind what Sayyed Nadvi wrote about why the Holy Prophet (*sas*) felt the need for marrying Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*). He writes in *Life of ‘A’ishah* (p. 24):

“After the death of his dear companion Hazrat Khadijah (*ra*) and consoler of his heart, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was experiencing a period of depression. In fact, the pain of this deep loneliness made life very difficult for him and his devoted companions were very solicitous over him. Hazrat Uthman bin Maz‘un was a well-known companion of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) in the second year of *Hijrah*. His wife, Khawlah bint Hakim, approached the Holy Prophet Muhammad (*sas*) and requested him to get married again. He replied: ‘To whom?’ Khawlah explained that there were widows as well as young virgins that were available and it was up to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) to choose from among them. He questioned: Who are they? Khawlah replied that there was Saudah bint Zam‘ah and the young maiden, ‘A’ishah, daughter of Hazrat Abu Bakr. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) said: ‘It is better that you negotiate about her.’”

According to Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi, the compelling reasons for the Holy Prophet’s marriage were the agony of loneliness and the separation from his beloved companion and comforter, Lady Khadijah (*ra*). However, there are two other reasons: firstly, the increase in the burden of household duties had created an obstacle in his mission of messengership. In addition, there were at home two young girls, Sayyidah Fatimah and Sayyidah Umm Kulthum, for whose care and supervision a lady of the household was needed. These conditions called for an intelligent, mature and wise housewife, adept at domestic affairs as a lifelong companion and not marriage to a young six-year-old child who would not be able to fulfil the demands of a full household. A six-year-old girl

could not be a comforter to his heart nor could she manage the affairs of the home and look after the young girls. Instead, because of her youth and immaturity, she could be a cause of additional burden. In these circumstances, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) could not have contemplated marriage to Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*), neither could an experienced, cultured and wise lady like Lady Khawlah offer such advice of marriage to the Holy Prophet (*sas*). We must also bear in mind that when Lady Khawlah proposed to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) a union with Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) there is no mention in any tradition that the Holy Prophet (*sas*) rejected the suggestion on the grounds that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was too young and so could not fulfil the responsibilities of his household. Instead, he accepted the proposal without any hesitation. From this we can infer that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) had already reached maturity of age and so possessed, in the opinion of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), the capability to manage his household affairs. Similarly, when Lady Khawlah sought Hazrat Abu Bakr’s permission for Lady ‘A’ishah’s marriage to the Holy Prophet (*sas*), he never made the excuse that Lady A’ishah (*ra*) was still too young and immature to manage the onerous household duties of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). On the contrary, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was of such an age that before this proposal of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) she had already been engaged to the son of Jabir bin Mut‘am, and after receiving this message from the Holy Prophet (*sas*) Hazrat Abu Bakr broke off the engagement and married Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) to the Noble Messenger. Now, was it possible that all these transactions could have taken place over a six-year-old girl who was still playing with dolls, or was Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) not a mature and intelligent young lady at this time?

In the following pages we are going to present relevant and authenticated traditions from two sides to shed light on Lady ‘A’ishah’s time of birth, marriage (*nikah*), and consummation (*rukhsati*) of marriage, and it is our hope that readers will not be overawed by the aforesaid venerable names and their

claims, but instead, in the light of truth, they will form a sound judgement and not look at history through the mirror of traditionally received views.

1. Ibn Jarir Tabari

A famous historian of the early period of Islam has written the following in his book *Tarikh al-Umami wal muluk*:

“In the Age of Ignorance, Hazrat Abu Bakr had married two ladies, the first of whom was Fatilah ibn Abdul Uzza and he had two children from her – Abdullah and Asma. He then married Umm Ruman, who gave birth to Abdur Rahman and ‘A’ishah. All these four were born before the advent of Islam as he writes: ‘Amongst Abu Bakr’s children, four were born in the Age of Ignorance from these two wives whom we have mentioned’ ” (Vol. 4, p. 50).

Hazrat Abu Bakr (*ra*) was twenty-eight years old when he got married to Umm Ruman. The Holy Prophet (*sas*) was two years older than him. If Hazrat Abu Bakr’s two children (Abdur Rahman and ‘A’ishah) were born from Umm Ruman one after the other in the first four or five years of the marriage, then Abdur Rahman’s younger sister was certainly born five or six years before the Call when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was approximately thirty-four to thirty-five years old. It is also a historical fact that Abdur Rahman, son of Abu Bakr (*ra*), fought against the Muslims in the Battle of Badr. If at that time he was twenty-one or twenty-two years of age, then his birth date was nine or ten years before the Call. And if Lady A’ishah (*ra*) was three or four years younger than he, then she, too, was born five or six years before the Call. Now, if according to all narrations she was born in the fifth year of the Call, then in our opinion we are forced to confess that there is no evidence to prove that she was fourteen or fifteen years younger than her brother Abdur Rahman.

2. Allamah Ibn Kathir

The eminent historian and research scholar, Ibn Kathir, has written the following about Lady Asma' in his book, *Al-Badayah wal Nihayah*:

“Lady Asma died in the year 73 after *Hijrah* when she was one hundred years old. She was ten years older than her sister, ‘A’ishah” (Vol. 8, p. 346).

Now, if Lady Asma' was one hundred years old in the year 73 after the *Hijrah*, then at the commencement of the *Hijrah* she was twenty-seven or twenty-eight years of age. From this evidence, her younger sister, ‘A’ishah (*ra*), who was ten years younger than she, would have been seventeen or eighteen years old. If you subtract the thirteen years of the Call in Makkah, then at the time of the Call she was four or five years of age when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was thirty-four or thirty-five years old and thus in the second year of the *Hijrah* she was eighteen or nineteen years old when she entered the Holy Prophet's home as a bride.

3. Sahih Mishkat's account

Shaikh Wali al-Din, the compiler of the famous book of *Hadith*, *Mishkat-ul-Masabih*, has written in his book *Akmal fi Asmaa'ir Rijaal* that at the time of the consummation of her marriage Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was no less than eighteen or nineteen years of age, and in this connection he is in consonance with Allamah Ibn Kathir.

4. The view of Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi

It is a pleasant surprise that according to his observation in his book, *Life of 'A'ishah*, Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi has inadvertently emphasised our opinion when he writes:

- i. “The last portion of Amir Mu‘awiyah's caliphate coincided with the last part of Lady ‘A’ishah's life at which time she was sixty-seven years of age” (p. 153).

- ii. “Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was a widow and in this state she passed forty years of her life” (p. 111).

Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi is a strict and literal follower of traditions, but the facts have caused truth to flow from his tongue. If he had concentrated fully on these two traditions, then his view would have been in harmony with ours. He wrote that at the time of her death Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was sixty-seven years old. Most probably, he had before him the narration of Ibn Kathir and that of the compiler of the *Mishkat*. Now, let us subtract forty years of widowhood from sixty-seven and we arrive at the fact that when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) passed away, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was twenty-seven years of age. The Holy Prophet’s term of prophethood lasted twenty-three years. If we take away twenty-three years from twenty-seven, we will discover that at the time of the Call, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was four years old, and so she was born in the same year in which the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was thirty-six years old. In addition, from the fact that she was married before Lady Fatimah (*ra*), it becomes plainly evident that she was older than her, and in relation to Lady Fatimah (*ra*), it has already been written that she was born when the renovation of the Ka‘bah was completed, at which time the Holy Prophet’s age was at the most thirty-five years.

Ponder carefully, and in the light of these pieces of evidence ask yourself to what extent you can repose faith and credibility on the claims of Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi and Sayyed Abul ‘Ala Maududi. Furthermore, if the world of Islam should accept that at the time of the consummation of her marriage Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was nine years old instead of eighteen or nineteen, then consider what a great objection would be raised against the religion of Islam, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and the life of Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*).

Testimony of the Traditions

Readers have before them the testimony of history. Let us now concentrate on Lady ‘A’ishah’s sayings, the high status of her knowledge and the events of her life, but before doing so, let us read the following extract from the late Sulaiman Nadvi. He writes:

“Generally speaking, in every age children are like those of today in that seven- or eight-year-old children do not have much awareness of social affairs and cannot probe the depth of any affair. Nevertheless, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) recalled every word from her childhood days and would relate them and even more, would derive laws and principles from them. She used to narrate the deeper reasons for various isolated incidents of her childhood so that if even while she was playing as a child if she should chance to hear any verse of the Holy Qur’an being read she would remember that also. Proof of this is that she said that when the following verse of the Holy Qur’an, that is, 54:46, was revealed in Makkah, she was playing. At the time of the *Hijrah*, she was seven or eight years old, yet despite her young and tender age, her consciousness and powers of retention were such that she remembered not only all the events of the *Hijrah*, but every single detail of it. But more than this, no companion ever retained such a detailed and sequential description of the events surrounding the *Hijrah*” (p. 23).

There is no doubt that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was extremely intelligent, sagacious and had a deep sense of understanding, but in keeping with the laws of natural life, up to seven or eight years she was just like other young children. In fact, having made the tender age of Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) the basis and pivotal point of his investigation, Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi has drawn certain conclusions although it is plainly evident from the events of Lady ‘A’ishah’s life that she was not a minor but just like contemporary children. Just as in every age there is a

difference in the intellectual level of children of the same age, so, too, there was a distinction between Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) and other young children of the same age. Nevertheless, it is not true to say that a young child of four or five can have the same understanding of a matter that a child of nine or ten can have.

Chapter 54, *The Moon*, and Lady ‘A’ishah’s age

According to the statement of Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi, there is a narration from Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) recorded in *Sahih al-Bukhari* in the chapter *Kitabut Tafsir* which states: “I was a girl when the following verse of Chapter 54, *The Moon*, was revealed to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) in Makkah. (*The hour drew nigh and the moon was rent asunder – 54:1.*)

First of all, in the *Hadith*, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) referred to herself as a girl when the verse was revealed, and by saying she was a girl it does not mean that she was necessarily a child. In addition, all the commentators of the Holy Qur’an agree on this point that the revelation of the Chapter *Al-Qamar* (The Moon) took place five years after the Call. In those days, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was still playing with other girls. She knew also that at that time that these verses were sent down to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) by Allah, Most High. And just as Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi has written, “Up to the age of seven or eight, children do not have full consciousness of any matter,” so we have to accept also that at that time Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was nine or ten years old and that she was born four or five years before the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was bestowed the mantle of prophethood.

If Sayyed Sahib should accept as a fact that Lady ‘A’ishah’s birth took place in the last part of the fifth year of the Call (p. 21) or should he believe that when Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was born at the end of the fourth year of the Call and the fifth year was in progress (p. 21), then together with this, it would have to be admitted that when Chapter 54, *The Moon*, was revealed in the fifth year of the Call, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was at the most

a few months old. As a result, either the tradition in *Bukhari* relating to the revelation of *The Moon* is wrong or Lady ‘A’ishah’s birth occurred some four or five years before the Call.

Finally, how can we reconcile the views of Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi, Sayyed Abul A’la Maududi and those of the same school of thought with these two traditions of *Bukhari*?

1. When in the fifth year of the *Hijrah*, Chapter 54, *The Moon*, was revealed, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was playing with other girls and the verse, “*The hour drew nigh and the moon was rent asunder,*” was revealed (*Bukhari: Kitabut-Tafsir, Suratul Qamar*).
2. Lady Khadijah (*ra*) died in the month of Ramadan in the tenth year of the Call and this was three years before the *Hijrah* to Madinah and one month after this (i.e. the *Hijrah*) in the month of Shawwal the Holy Prophet (*sas*) got married to Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) (*Bukhari*, related by ‘Urwah).

So, at the time of marriage Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was six years old, and from the point of view of Maulana Abul A’la Maududi’s research she was not yet even born. Instead, she (according to him) was born one year after the revelation of the chapter, *The Moon*.

In the light of these two traditions, whenever *Sahih al-Bukhari* mentions the marriage of Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) at the age of six in the tenth year of the Call and assures us that Lady ‘A’ishah’s birth took place in the fifth year of the Call, he also mentions to us there that *she was born* in the same year she was playing in Makkah with other girls and was reciting the verses of Chapter 54, *The Moon*. How can this be possible?

Inferential evidence from certain events

It is universally accepted that whatever details of conditions that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) furnished in relation to life in Makkah and circumstances surrounding the *Mi‘raj* as well as the *Hijrah* have not been found in the traditions of any other companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), and to expect any girl who was seven or eight years old at the time of the *Hijrah* to retain and provide such details is absurd. It is clear, therefore, from this matter, that at the time of the *Hijrah* she was a seventeen- or eighteen-year young lady who was adept in her command of language, and her intelligence and powers of observation and retention and her deep perception of events had already become mature.

Care of Hazrat Abu Bakr during his illness

When Hazrat Abu Bakr (*ra*) reached Madinah, he fell seriously ill, and despite the fact that her respected mother and her elder sister were present, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was still entrusted with the responsibility of looking after her father during his illness. She narrated that whenever she inquired after the health of her noble father he would read verses of poetry to her like the following:

Good morning wishes for everyone in the family
But death is even nearer than the laces of one’s shoes.

If, in the first year of the *Hijrah* Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was eight years old and nine when her marriage was consummated in the following year, then why was she given the duty of looking after her ill father even though there were elders around, and why would Hazrat Abu Bakr (*ra*) read poetic verses to such a young child? The truth is that Lady ‘A’ishah was seventeen or eighteen years old at the time and she had a full command of the intricacies of poetic language.

We have already mentioned *Asaaba*’s tradition which stated that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was born at the time of the rebuilding

of the Ka‘bah when the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was at the most thirty-five years old and Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was four or five years younger than Lady Fatimah (*ra*). However, from history, we learn that Lady ‘A’ishah’s marriage to the Holy Prophet (*sas*) took place in the tenth year of the Call and prior to this, Lady ‘A’ishah’s betrothal to Jubair bin Mut‘am’s son was already called off when Lady Fatimah’s marriage to Hazrat Ali (*ra*) had occurred five years after Lady ‘A’ishah’s wedding in the second year of the *Hijrah* in Madinah. It is also reported that on that occasion Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) embellished Lady Fatimah’s new home and in the words of Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi, “she plastered the house with mud, made up the bed, and with her own hands she crushed the bark of the date palm to make pillows, presented guests with dried dates and raisins, set up wooden water lines to hang clothes and water skins on them” (*Life of ‘A’ishah*). Is it not clear from all this that Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was somewhat older than Lady Fatimah (*ra*) or at least of the same age and that both of them were born around the same time when the Ka ‘bah was rebuilt?

The battle of Uhud and serving of water to the Muslim soldiers

In this battle, many ladies in the service of Islam bore water skins on their shoulders. These included Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) who was at that time ten years old as is reported in the Traditions. They filled water in Madinah and carried it three miles away to the foothills of Mount Uhud in order to quench the thirst of the holy soldiers (*Bukhari, Kitabul Jihad wal Siyar*). Could this task be accomplished by a nine- or ten-year-old girl? The only argument those who hold the belief that she got married (*nikah*) at six years of age is that at nine years she could fulfil the functions of a wife. The onerous nature of those duties and responsibilities were disregarded – duties which, as a member of the Holy Prophet’s family, would devolve on her. Is participation in the battle of Uhud a demonstration of the strength of a young girl who was still playing with dolls? Does this event not prove that she had become so grown up that she

could perform the task of giving water to the Muslim soldiers in the battlefield without fear of danger and that her age was without doubt twenty or twenty-one years?

Knowledge of genealogy and understanding of poetic language

Everyone is unanimous on the following facts: that in her knowledge of genealogy, poetry, literature, literary criticism and command of language, commentary of the Qur'an, jurisprudence, sayings of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), and medical knowledge, Lady 'A'ishah (*ra*) was without match. Even up to the present time she commands a unique rank among women, as Sayyed Abul A'la Maududi admits:

“The Holy Prophet (*sas*) was the Messenger of Allah, Most High, and he was entrusted with the task of bringing about an all-encompassing revolution in the lives of people and preparing the society for that revolution.

Lady 'A'ishah (*ra*), too, was an extraordinary example of a girl who, because of her intellectual genius, had to perform in conjunction with the Holy Prophet (*sas*) a mighty task in building this society – a feat that no other woman of the time could accomplish, including all the righteous wives of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). Indeed, it can be said without exaggeration that no wife of any spiritual guide in the world ever provided her husband with such stupendous assistance as the herculean help that Lady 'A'ishah (*ra*) gave to the Holy Prophet (*sas*)” (*Tarjumanul Qur'an*, Sept. 1976, p. 21).

Without doubt, Lady 'A'ishah (*ra*) learnt Qur'anic commentary, jurisprudence, *Hadith*, and acquired education in religious sciences from the blessed companionship of the 'Chief of the world', and even medical knowledge was obtained in his household also. However, there is no evidence to substantiate the view that Lady 'A'ishah (*ra*) received

knowledge of genealogy and a taste for poetry and literature from the Chief of the Universe because the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was neither a genealogist nor a poet, neither did he enjoy leisure time from his duties as the Messenger of Allah, Most High, to provide Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) with this kind of knowledge. History also does not testify that she gained this proficiency in Madinah from some other source. On the other hand, we are well-acquainted with the fact that her noble father, Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq, was an expert in the field of genealogy and possessed a sublime taste for poetry and literature, as Sayyed Sulaiman Nadvi testifies in the following extract:

“Hazrat Abu Bakr Siddiq was an expert amongst the Quraish in the knowledge of genealogy and the taste for poetry. When the best of the Islamic poets replied to the poets of the Quraish, the unbelievers were never sure that this could have been done without the correction and guidance of Hazrat Abu Bakr (*ra*). Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) had received training in the lap of this father. As a result, her proficiency in the knowledge of genealogy and aptitude for poetry was a family inheritance” (*Life of ‘A’ishah*, p. 34).

Thus perfection in genealogy, poetry, literature, and facility of language were all acquired by Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) in Makkah from her noble father, Hazrat Abu Bakr (*ra*). If we should accept for a moment that she was seven or eight years old when the *Hijrah* took place, then this would be an untenable position, for it would then have been impossible for her to justly acquire this knowledge in Makkah when she was just six or seven years old, for facility in poetry and historical knowledge call for nurturing of the intellect and maturity of the mind and for this to happen one must be of a mature age and must possess a great command of language. Consequently, there is no way out but to accept that she was not six years old when she was married (*nikah*), and thus consummation of her marriage (*rukhsati*) at nine is beyond understanding. It clearly proves

that she acquired all these sciences in Makkah and then she entered the household of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) at the age of eighteen after she had obtained mastery in those fields of knowledge.

The event of slander of Lady ‘A’ishah

The event of the slander of Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was said to have taken place in the fifth year of the *Hijrah* when, according to all traditions, she was about twelve years of age. It is left to be discussed whether in this sad episode the conduct of Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was that of a twelve-year-old girl, or whether it reflected the personality of a person who was learned in the teachings of the Holy Qur’an or had deep knowledge of the niceties of language, or was of a patient and enduring disposition, or who possessed a pure and chaste character and was a dignified young lady. She bore this calumny like an honourable, modest, intelligent, self-respecting lady and when testimony of her innocence and chastity came from Heaven and her worthy father asked her to give thanks to the Holy Prophet (*sas*), involuntarily from her tongue came a correct and well-measured reply: “Why should I not be grateful to Allah, Most High, Who testified to the purity of my character?” In these extremely worrisome and testing circumstances, to make such a statement so full of sagacity and truth relating to the status of the Oneness of God is not the style nor is it within the capacity of a twelve-year-old girl.

The event of the Temporary Separation

According to all traditions, when the verses relating to the demands of the Holy Prophet’s wives for more of the luxuries of this world’s life were revealed, Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) was already sixteen years of age when the Holy Prophet’s wives found the living conditions changed for the better and they sought more of the comforts of this life from the Holy Prophet (*sas*). The Holy Prophet (*sas*) was not pleased with the demand and elected to separate himself from his wives for a month. Allah, Most High, responded to the restlessness of the holy

wives by revealing the following verses to the Holy Prophet (*sas*):

“O Prophet, why dost thou forbid (thyself) that which Allah has made lawful for thee? Seekest thou to please thy wives? And Allah is Forgiving, Merciful” (66:1).

When the Holy Prophet (*sas*) received this revelation, his mercy was aroused and his pain and agony evaporated. When the period of separation came to an end, the Holy Prophet (*sas*) went straight to the chamber of Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*), who jestingly remarked to him: “You have come to me a day earlier.” He smiled and responded that the month sometimes has twenty-nine days also. After the separation, the following verses relating to the demand for more luxuries was revealed to the Holy Prophet (*sas*):

“O Prophet, say to thy wives: If you desire this world’s life and its adornment, come, I will give you a provision and allow you to depart a goodly departing. And if you desire Allah and His Messenger and the abode of the Hereafter, then surely Allah has prepared for the doers of good among you a mighty reward” (33:28-29).

The grandeur of Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*), her devotion to Islam, her maturity of intellect, her intelligence and alertness can be gauged from this fact that the first person to whom the Holy Prophet (*sas*) posed this faith-testing question was the young Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*). He advised her not to be quick to answer but to consult her parents first and then to reply whether she preferred the luxuries of this world’s life or if, on the contrary, she desired Allah, Most High, the Holy Prophet (*sas*), and the blessings of the Hereafter. As soon as she heard this, Lady ‘A’ishah’s face lit up because of her intense enthusiasm for the faith and without hesitation she responded thus: “O Messenger of Allah, why should I consult my parents on this matter? As

opposed to all the blessings in the world, my greatest love and desire are for Allah, Most High, and His Messenger.”

Readers can judge for themselves whether this faith-inspiring reply would issue from the tongue of a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old girl or whether it would come from a conscientious, intelligent, high-ranking lady of mature age – one who had traversed all stages of the spiritual journey and had reached the ultimate station of divine gnosis, wisdom, asceticism, righteousness and love for God and His apostle.

Love for the Holy Prophet – A faith-enhancing episode

The late Qazi Muhammad Sulaimani has written in his book *Rahmatul lil ‘Alamin*, volume II:

“According to a narration from Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*), the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was repairing his shoe and she was spinning when she saw that on the Holy Prophet’s blessed forehead there was perspiration and from the middle of which a light was emanating and was increasing in brightness. This was such an extraordinary sight that she was struck with total amazement. The Holy Prophet’s holy eyes fell on her and he asked her the reason for such astonishment on her part. She replied: ‘O Messenger of Allah, I saw perspiration on your forehead and in the midst of the perspiration there was a brilliantly resplendent light and so I was totally absorbed in this exotic spiritual scene. By God! If Hazrat Abu Bakr Hazli had had the pleasure of seeing you (the Holy Prophet), then he would have known that the true subject of his verses was indeed the Messenger of Allah.’ ”

When the Holy Prophet (*sas*) inquired of her what these verses were, she quoted the following couplets:

He was exempt from the impurities of birth and suckling.
And cast your eyes on his luminous countenance and you
will discover a brilliantly lustrous light emanating from it.

The Holy Prophet (*sas*) placed on the floor whatever was in his hand, kissed Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) on the forehead, and said to her: “By looking at me you may not have enjoyed the intense pleasure I received when I heard those couplets you recited to me.”

The look on his luminous countenance, the ardour, the love, the choice of Abu Bakr Hazli’s verses, and their comparison with the Holy Prophet’s dazzling visage are a standing inspiration to discerning people to use their imagination. In connection with this matter, kindly ponder over the power of observation of Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*), her perspicacity, her facility and eloquence of language, her breadth of knowledge and her deep insight and pray tell whether this magnificence was the expression of a seventeen- or eighteen-year young lady or that of a nine-year-old girl who had just become a wife in the household of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), or was it the reflection of the intelligence and facility of a lady who already possessed naturally solid and extensive knowledgeable capabilities with which she joined the family of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and who benefitted deeply from the blessings of his companionship?

Completing of the Divine mission

After the passing away of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) performed incomparable services to Islam in circulating commentaries of the Holy Qur’an, jurisprudence and sayings of the Holy Prophet (*sas*). From this, it is quite obvious when she entered into wedlock with the Messenger of Allah, Most High, that she already was endowed with expertise in fluency and eloquence of language, education in literature and poetry, knowledge of genealogy, in addition to which in the companionship of the Holy Prophet (*sas*), she further acquired a perfect share of the knowledge and wisdom of the

Holy Qur'an. Also, as she had no children, it was extremely easy for her to obtain the details of religious sciences. Furthermore, the ladies of Madinah used her as an intermediary in seeking answers from the Holy Prophet (*sas*) concerning feminine affairs. Again, as she was living close to the mosque in Madinah, she had ample opportunity to hear the beautiful exhortations of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) as well as odes and speeches from others. And indeed the heavenly mission of the wives of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) was: “*And remember that which is recited in your houses of the messages of Allah and the Wisdom*” (33:34).

History also eloquently testifies to the fact that the duty Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) performed in the propagation of the Holy Qur’an and wisdom is unique in itself. And if this task was not accomplished through her agency, then the holy wives of the Messenger of Allah, Most High, would have failed to perform the Divine command in the proper way. In this connection, let us consider the view of Sayyed Abul A’la Maududi:

“Whoever has sought knowledge concerning the sayings of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) also knows very well how much knowledge has come down to Muslims through the medium of Lady A’ishah (*ra*) and how much information on Islamic jurisprudence has been acquired. As compared to this, there are very few women, not to mention men, in the period of the Holy Prophet’s prophethood, whose educational services can be mentioned. If Lady A’ishah (*ra*) had not been married to the Holy Prophet (*sas*), and if she did not have the opportunity to be educated and trained by him, we can never be able to estimate what a tremendous portion of Islamic knowledge would have been lost to the Muslim *ummah*. Two thousand, two hundred and ten sayings of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) have been reported by her. However, she was not just a reporter of *hadith*, but she was also a commentator of the Holy Qur’an, a jurist, a religious supervisor, and a pronouncer of

religious verdicts (*mufti*). It has been accepted on all sides that among Muslim women she was considered the greatest jurist of all.

The leading companions of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) consulted her in religious questions so much so that Hazrat ‘Umar (*ra*) and Hazrat Uthman (*ra*) also turned to her for advice on many religious problems. In Madinah, she was counted among those few learned ones (*‘ulama*) on whose pronouncements people could rely” (*Tarjumanul Qur’an*, Sept. 1976).

Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) achieved such a unique position among the wives of the Holy Prophet (*sas*) and the ladies of Islam only because she was already adorned and bedecked by natural intellectual capabilities before she entered the Holy Prophet’s household at a mature age, and then filled her mind with Qur’anic knowledge and wisdom to such an extent that no other companion could be compared with her. And this pedestal could not have been occupied, according to the belief of many, by a mere nine-year-old girl who was still playing with dolls at the time she entered the home of the noble Messenger of Allah, Most High. Lady ‘A’ishah (*ra*) could only have attained this grandeur and exaltation of occupying the elevated and sublime rank of the best of all women in the world and mother of the faithful only because of the intellectual maturity she obtained from Hazrat Abu Bakr’s care and diligence, after which in the eighteenth or nineteenth year of life she was joined in wedlock to the Holy Prophet (*sas*).

Appendix I

Christian Critics and Bible on marriage of young girls

by Dr. Zahid Aziz

As it is Christian evangelists and other believers in the Bible who have been bitterly reviling the Holy Prophet Muhammad on account of his marriage with Aisha, we put to them the practices of the great patriarchs and prophets that are recorded in the Bible itself in this connection. The main accusations regarding the marriage of Aisha are that she was too young in age while the Holy Prophet was a much older man, being fifty years of age, and that consent to marriage was either not obtained from her or she was not capable of giving it.

Abraham

In the book of Genesis in the Bible it is recorded about Abraham:

“Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; so she said to Abram, ‘The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her.’ Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived. ... So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. Abram was **eighty-six years old** when Hagar bore him Ishmael.” (Genesis, chapter 16, verses 1–4, and 15–16, New International Version. Bolding is mine.)

Firstly, it is evident that as Abraham (who then had the name Abram) was 86 years old, Hagar must have been some fifty years younger than him, and probably even younger, to bear a child. Secondly, the Bible speaks of Sarai *giving* her maidservant Hagar to Abraham. So Hagar's consent was not obtained but rather she was commanded by Sarai to go and become Abraham's wife.

David

The first book of Kings in the Bible begins as follows:

“When King David was old and well advanced in years, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him. So his servants said to him, ‘Let us look for a **young virgin** to attend the king and take care of him. **She can lie beside him** so that our lord the king may keep warm.’ Then they searched throughout Israel for a beautiful girl and found Abishag, a Shunammite, and brought her to the king. The girl was very beautiful; she took care of the king and waited on him, but the king had no intimate relations with her.” (1 Kings, chapter 1, verses 1–4, New International Version.(*Catholic Encyclopaedia* on line) Bolding is mine.)

So there seems nothing wrong, according to the Bible, in procuring *a young virgin*, again apparently without her consent, whose duties include lying with the elderly king in bed. The intention was certainly for sexual enjoyment, otherwise there was no necessity of looking for a young, beautiful virgin. A much older woman, perhaps a widow, could have performed all these duties, including lying with the king to keep him warm.

Mary and Joseph

The most famous marriage in Christianity is no doubt that of Mary, Jesus' mother, with Joseph. While the following details

are not in the canonical Gospels in the Bible, it appears from other early Christian writings (known as apocryphal writings) that Mary was *twelve years old* when the temple elders decided to find a husband for her. They selected the husband by drawing lots, and Joseph whom they chose was an elderly man, being according to some accounts *ninety years old*. The husband was selected and Mary was handed over to him, and she played no part in his selection.

These accounts are summed up in the Catholic Encyclopedia, 1913 edition, which is available online, as follows (bolding below is mine):

1. “It will not be without interest to recall here, unreliable though they are, the lengthy stories concerning St. Joseph’s marriage contained in the apocryphal writings. When forty years of age, Joseph married a woman called Melcha or Escha by some, Salome by others; they lived forty-nine years together and had six children ... A year after his wife’s death, as the priests announced through Judea that they wished to find in the tribe of Juda a respectable man to espouse **Mary, then twelve to fourteen years of age, Joseph, who was at the time ninety years old**, went up to Jerusalem among the candidates; a miracle manifested the choice God had made of Joseph ...” (In article *St. Joseph*, under letter *J*. Link: www.newadvent.org/cathen/08504a.htm).

Although these apocryphal accounts are not now accepted by many Christians, and the *Catholic Encyclopedia* says that they “are void of authority”, yet it also speaks of their influence as follows:

“they nevertheless acquired in the course of ages some popularity; in them some ecclesiastical writers sought the answer to the well-known

difficulty arising from the mention in the Gospel of the Lord's brothers; from them also popular credulity has, contrary to all probability, as well as to the tradition witnessed by old works of art, retained the belief that St. Joseph was an old man at the time of marriage with the Mother of God."

However, these accounts are accepted by the Eastern churches. The Ukrainian Orthodoxy speaks of Joseph as follows:

"Early sources, which include apocryphal writings as well as those of early Christian fathers, say he was a widower with four sons as well as daughters when he undertook to be betrothed to the young orphan maid Mary,...Joseph did so with a great deal of misgiving because of his age..."

(See this link: www.ukrainian-orthodoxy.org/saints/beauty/stjoseph.html)

We give below, as **Appendix**, a quotation from one of these apocryphal books, *The Infancy Gospel of James*, describing how Mary's husband was selected.

While the Western Christian churches may not accept these accounts as authentic, the Eastern churches in Europe do accept that Mary was 12 years old and Joseph a widower 90 years old when they married. Moreover, there is nothing in the Gospels of the New Testament to contradict these accounts, and the Gospel stories are not at all inconsistent with these ages for Mary and Joseph.

Appendix II

The Infancy Gospel of James

(Chapter 8 verse 2 to Chapter 9 verse 11)

“When she [Mary] turned twelve, a group of priests took counsel together, saying, ‘Look, Mary has been in the temple of the Lord twelve years. What should we do about her now, so that she does not defile the sanctuary of the Lord our God?’ And they said to the high priest, ‘You have stood at the altar of the Lord. Go in and pray about her. And if the Lord God reveals anything to you, we will do it.’ And the priest went in taking the vestment with twelve bells into the holy of holies and prayed about her. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord stood before him, saying, ‘Zachariah, Zachariah, depart from here and gather the widowers of the people and let each one carry a staff. And the one whom the Lord God points out with a sign, she will be his wife.’ So the heralds went out to the whole surrounding area of Judea and the trumpet of the Lord rang out and all the men rushed in.

Throwing down his axe, Joseph went out to meet them. And after they had gathered together with their rods, they went to the high priest. After receiving everyone’s rod, the high priest went into the temple and prayed. When he was finished with the prayer, he took the rods and went out and gave them to each man, but there was no sign among them. Finally, Joseph took his rod. Suddenly, a dove came out of the rod and stood on Joseph’s head. And the high priest said, ‘Joseph! Joseph! You have been chosen by lot to take the virgin into your own keeping.’ And Joseph replied, saying, ‘I have sons and am old, while she is young. I will not be

ridiculed among the children of Israel.’ And the high priest said, ‘Joseph, fear the Lord your God and remember what God did to Dathan and Abiron and Kore, how the earth split open and swallowed them because of their rebellion. Now fear God, Joseph, so that these things do not happen in your house.’ Fearing God, Joseph took her into his own possession.”

— Translation by Shelly Matthews. For further information and other translations of this gospel, see the link: www.earlychristianwritings.com/infancyjames.html