

Sources: This is based using the earliest and most reliable Islamic sources: the Qur'an (Q.), the *Sira* (biography) written by Ibn Ishaq and edited by Ibn Hisham, and commentaries written by Ibn Kathir, Ibn Abbas and Jalalayn. The quotes from the Qur'an and Hadith can be found in: www.searchtruth.com
 A free copy of the *Sira* can be downloaded on <http://www.archive.org/details/TbnIshaq-SiratRasulAllah-translatorA.Guillaume>.
 The commentaries can be found on : www.qtafsir.com (Ibn Kathir), and www.altafsir.com (the rest)

Many Muslims claim that Muhammad was sinless: Nasr refers to Muhammad as 'the perfect man' *al-insan al-kamil*.¹ Hume notes that, among some modern Muslims, "the sinlessness of Muhammad is proclaimed."²

But what do the Qur'an and renowned Islamic commentators say about this?

In the Qur'an, Muhammad is told five times by Allah to ask forgiveness for his sins: He is commanded:

(a) "And ask the Forgiveness of Allah (*wa'staghfir Allah*), certainly, Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Q.4:106)

(b) "Ask forgiveness for your sin" *wa'staghfir li dhanbik*^a (Q.40:55)

(c) "Ask forgiveness for your sin *wa'staghfir li dhanbik*^a, and also for believing men and believing women. (Q.47:19)

¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr *Islamic Spirituality* (London: SCM, 1985) p.xxii

² Robert E Hume., *The World's Living Religions* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), p.229

(d) "Allah may forgive you your sin of the past and the future (Q.48:2)

(e) "Celebrate the Praises of thy Lord and ask for His Forgiveness (*wa'staghfir*)." (Q.110:3)
Note: the same command "ask forgiveness of your sin" *wa'staghfiri li dhanbik*ⁱ is given to Aziz's (Potiphar's) wife for trying to seduce Yusuf (Joseph) (Q.12:29).

Examples of Muhammad's shortcomings and sins are given in the Qur'an:

Q.94:1-3 : O Prophet! Have We [Allah]not expanded your breast for you and relieved you from the burden which weighed down your back?" Twice Muhammad's chest was opened and his heart cleansed from sin. He said that, as a child, "two men in white raiment ... seized me and opened up my belly, extracted my heart and split it; then they extracted a black drop from it and threw it away; then they washed my heart and my belly with that snow until they had thoroughly cleaned them."³ Before Muhammad's night-journey to heaven. "Gabriel cut open (the part of his body) between his throat and the middle of his chest (heart) and took all the material out of his chest and abdomen and then washed it with Zam-Zam water with his own hands till he cleansed the inside of his body."⁴ Ibn Kathir and Jalalayn state that Q.94:1-3 means that Muhammad's previous and future sins would be forgiven (Q.48:2).⁵ Ibn Abbas says: "We [Allah] lifted your sins from you."⁶

³ *Sirat Rasul Allah* by Ibn Ishaq p.72

⁴ Sahih al-Bukhari 9:608

⁵ See <http://www.qtafsir.com> on Q.94:1-3

Q.80:1-12: "The Prophet frowned and turned away" This was Muhammad's reaction to the blind man Abdullah (or 'Amr) Ibn Um Maktuum, who came to him seeking spiritual guidance, But Muhammad was pre-occupied with some wealthy Qurayshi leaders hoping they would accept Islam. Allah rebuked Muhammad for this act of discrimination. Ibn Kathir reports that "[a]fterwards, whenever Ibn Um Maktuum came to him, the Prophet would say to him, 'Greetings to him on whose account God reproached me!', and would lay down his cloak for him."⁷

Q.66:1 - "O Prophet! Why do you make something unlawful, which Allah has made lawful to you in seeking to please your wives?" Muhammad had nine wives. He slept with a different wife each day, but he had permission from Allah to change their turns (Q.33:51). Allah also gave Muhammad permission to have sex with his slave-girls (Q.33:52). On this day, it was Hafsa's turn to sleep with Muhammad, but she was absent, so Muhammad slept with his beautiful Coptic slave Maria in Hafsa's bed. Hafsa was very upset. According to al-Wahidi, Muhammad "said to her: 'Do not mention this to 'A'ishah; she is forbidden for me [i.e. Mariyah] if I ever touch her'... He swore to her that he will not touch her and then said: 'Do not mention this incident to anyone'. But she went ahead and informed 'A'ishah."⁸ (See Q.66:3) Jalalayn comment on this verse as follows:

⁶ See <http://www.altafsir.com> on Q.94:1-3

⁷ See <http://www.qtafsir.com> on Q.80:2

⁸ See <http://www.altafsir.com> on Q.66:1-4

“O Prophet! Why do you prohibit what God has made lawful for you, in terms of your Coptic handmaiden Māriya — when he lay with her in the house of Hafsa, who had been away, but who upon returning [and finding out] became upset by the fact that this had taken place in her own house and on her own bed — by saying, ‘She is unlawful for me!’, seeking, by making her unlawful [for you], to please your wives?”⁹ Al-Bukhari notes that “Allah admonished him [Muhammad] (for his oath that he would not approach Maria).”¹⁰ Ibn Abbas agreed with this view.¹¹

Q.9:43 – *“Allah forgives you! But why did you (O Muhammad) give them leave to stay behind? (You yourself should have not given them leave) so that it would have become clear which of them spoke the truth and which of them invented false excuses.”* After the Tabuk campaign, eighty Medinan hypocrites came to Muhammad and gave him false excuses for not accompanying him. Allah had warned Muhammad that this would happen (Q.9:95,96). But Muhammad accepted their excuses and prayed for their forgiveness. As a result, Allah had to forgive Muhammad for granting them exemption from fighting. The commentators Jalalayn called this “a reprimand” to Muhammad from Allah “for exercising his personal judgement”.¹² Qatadah said that “Allah criticised him.”¹³

Q.33:37 – *“You sought to hide in your heart what Allah intended to reveal; you were afraid of the people whereas it would have been more appropriate to fear Allah.”* This was regarding Muhammad’s adopted son Zaid bin Haritha divorcing Zainab bint Jahsh so Muhammad could marry her.¹⁴

Q.8:67,68 - *“It is not for a Prophet that he should have prisoners of war (and free them with ransom) until he had made a great slaughter (among his enemies) in the land. You desire the good of this world (i.e. the money of ransom for freeing the captives), but Allah desires for you the hereafter... Were it not for a previous ordainment from Allah, a severe torment would have touched you for what you took.”* After the battle of Badr, Muhammad ransomed his prisoners of war for money instead of executing them. Tariq Ramadhan comments that this revelation “was to reproach the Prophet for this choice, which indeed was mainly motivated by the desire to acquire wealth.”¹⁵

CONCLUSION: It is clear from these verses in the Qur’an and the Muslim commentaries on those verses that Muhammad never was and never claimed to be sinless. He needed God’s forgiveness for his sins, just like you and I do.

According to the Qur’an, only Isa al-Masih (Jesus Christ) is sinless (see Q.19:19) and He alone can save you from your sin. You can learn more about Jesus from www.mylanguage.com

¹⁴ Al-Bukhari 6:310; 9:516

¹⁵ Tariq Ramadhan, *The Messenger: The Meanings of the Life of Muhammad* (London: Penguin, 2007), 106

Was Muhammad^(pbuh) Sinless?

What the Qur’an and Islamic commentators say

Allah commanded Muhammad:
“Ask forgiveness for your sins, and also for believing men and believing women.”
(The Qur’an: Sura Muhammad 47:19)

وَأَسْتَغْفِرْ لِدُنُوبِكَ
وَاللِّمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ

⁹ See <http://www.altafsir.com> on Q.66:1-4

¹⁰ Al-Bukhari 3:648

¹¹ See <http://www.altafsir.com> on Q.66:1-4

¹² See <http://www.altafsir.com> on Q.9:43

¹³ See <http://www.qtafsir.com> on Q.9:43