

**'ARĀ'IS AL-MAJĀLIS FĪ QIṢAṢ AL-ANBIYĀ'**  
**OR "LIVES OF THE PROPHETS"**

AS RECOUNTED BY  
ABU IṢHĀQ AḤMAD IBN MUḤAMMAD IBN IBRĀHĪM AL-ṬHA'LABĪ

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED

BY

WILLIAM M. BRINNER



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OR "LIVES OF THE PROPHETS"

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With gratitude for welcome assistance from

Prof. Marc S. Bernstein

Prof. Ariel A. Bloch

Dr. Josef W. Meri

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## PREFACE

This work of translation was begun many years ago, inspired to a great extent by several important figures in my academic life; first of all, Professor William Popper who introduced me to Arabic language and literature; and later, Sir Hamilton A.R. Gibb, with whom I studied during a stay at Harvard. But there were several other professors who, although not my teachers, have been sources of inspiration and learning over the years, most specifically Professors Franz Rosenthal, Bernard Lewis, M.J. Kister, and the late Gustave E. Von Grunebaum, David Ayalon, and Moshe Perlmann, to all of whom I owe deep gratitude. Several others, closer to my own generation, have also been very helpful with suggestions and ideas. This project was interrupted by several other translations that I had been asked to undertake: Nissim ibn Shahin's "*An Elegant Composition Regarding Relief After Adversity*"; volumes two and three of the "*The History of al-Ṭabarī*"; a section of the translation of al-Jabartī's "*History of Egypt*," as well as the editing of several other books.

It is because of the delays in continuing the work on this project, that I must express my gratitude to a number of other individuals—some of them students, some of them colleagues, some of them members of my family, all of whom assisted greatly in various ways in completing the project. Having begun the process in the days of the typewriter, and not having learned to use the computer for a number of years, I must express my gratitude to all of them for their assistance. My thanks go to Allen B. Bennett for typing the first portions of the translation from handwritten pages sent to him from England while I was on sabbatical some twenty years ago, and much later to former students Jeffrey Deboo, Amy Forga and Geoffrey Graham for their early transfer of the material to the computer. Once I became computerized, I must express my deepest thanks for the assistance and patience of my sons, Professor Benjamin Brinner and Rafael Brinner, and to my daughter, Leyla Brinner Sulema, for helping me deal with computer and other problems that developed at times.

I have mentioned my thanks to three important figures on the title page: one colleague of many years, Professor Ariel Bloch, and

two former students, Professor Marc Bernstein and Dr. Josef W. Meri, for having read the translation in whole or part and making many important suggestions for changes. But above all, I wish to express my love and gratitude to my wife, Lisa, not only for help in many ways, but also for having given up a number of opportunities for visiting friends, seeing plays and films, and especially for travel to exotic and not-so-exotic sites, because of my having been tied to the library and my computer.

William M. Brinner

## INTRODUCTION

The sacred text of Islam, the Qur'ān, with divine revelations found in beautiful passages and in laws laid down by Allah, is also filled with stories of the lives of prophets. This present work represents one type of commentary on those Qur'ānic sections, expanding the often brief and at times somewhat enigmatic aspects of those stories. Rather than a commentary, it is a collection of traditions to form a narrative whole. Its title, *Qisṣ al-anbiyā'*, is the usual name of the Islamic literary genre that it represents, usually translated as tales, stories or legends of the prophets. The English title for this book, *Lives of the Prophets*, was chosen primarily in order to distinguish it from other works of the same genre, but also to indicate that to many Muslims these are not mere tales or legends but actual historical accounts, relating what is known about the lives of the prophets. Whatever its name, this is one of the most important works in Arabic in this genre. Yet in reading through this relatively long text one is struck by its varied aspects, gravitating between classical, medieval and popular Islam, undoubtedly meant for the enjoyment of the many, while simultaneously giving religious instruction with scholarly commentary on the Qur'ān as a background. In some portions it uses folk literature and language that is almost playful and certainly amusing—as in some of the many tales about King Solomon, for example. But the book also indicates aspects of shared folk-religious beliefs of Muslims, Christians and Jews, filled as it is with many references to the Hebrew Scriptures as well as containing rather brief, some times rather strange tales of early Christianity. The combination of scripture and commentary of the type contained in this work presents us with a broader and more sustained account of the lives of the prophets than does scripture alone.

Enjoying a revival in the Muslim world today, texts of the genre as a whole, but especially the work being presented here, have been or are now being published not only in Arabic, but also in some of the other languages of Islam as well.<sup>1</sup> Some have been translated

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<sup>1</sup> For example, a Farsi version relying heavily on Shi'ite sources, was published

into various European languages, such as German, Italian and French, but until now only very few have been translated into English, although many references have been made to one or another of these texts and some important short sections as well as an entire book have been translated over the years.<sup>2</sup> This raises the questions of what is meant by the term *q̣iṣṣa*, and who the prophets referred to in works of this genre may be. As early Islam developed and spread, it gave rise to various types of history which dealt with precisely those matters mentioned here.

These special Arabic literary works have been considered by some Muslims as historical and by some other scholars, of both Muslim and other backgrounds, as made up of purely anecdotal tales which may be pleasant reading, but are otherwise of no great significance. In addition to two of the major genres, labeled as *ta'riḫ* "history" or *akḥbār* "story, anecdote," (here the latter term is not pejorative) two other early genres, often using much the same material, sources, and authorities, which in varying degrees are still important bases for the Islamic view of past history must be included. One of these is *tafsīr* or exegesis of the Qur'ān, that became and remains an important body of work from the early periods of its appearance in Islam down to the present and throughout many different Muslim communities. These books do, at times, include the same tales as are found in the other literary genre with which we are now concerned, namely *q̣iṣṣa al-anbiyā'*, with some overlapping between the two genres.

The term *q̣iṣṣa* itself, has gone through many changes in usage from its earliest days down to the present. Derived from the Qur'ānic *qaṣṣa*, meaning "to tell a story," in later times the term *q̣iṣṣa* came to mean simply "tale" or "story," eventually evolving into a contemporary usage as "a novel." But the term *qaṣṣa*, the telling of religious stories was done for several centuries by itinerant preachers and "story-tellers," *quṣṣāṣ*, which in this case means tellers of stories of a religious nature, who aroused the piety of the masses and taught morality to them, but who all too often fell into disrepute when unscrupulous *quṣṣāṣ* misused those tales, even creating vulgar or erotic

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in Tehran in 1996 by Sayyid Rasūlī Maḥalātī, under the title *Q̣iṣṣa-i Qur'ān ya Ta'riḫ-i Anbiyā'* "Stories of the Qur'ān or History of the Prophets."

<sup>2</sup> A fine example is the translation of a selection from this genre, and in part specifically of this work, by Prof. Jacob Lassner in his book, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba* (1993), pp. 187–202. See also on a different level, the translation by W. Thackston, *Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisā'ī*.

versions which were condemned by the religious leaders.<sup>3</sup> Although these story-tellers are rarely found in the Muslim world today, condemnation of the stories themselves as a genre have been carried on down to the present precisely because of the behavior of some of the *quṣṣās*.<sup>4</sup> At best, some very revised versions of the most acceptable of the tales have been published during the past few decades, as will be mentioned below.

The question of the sources of the tales about the lives of the prophets has been and continues to be an issue in Islamic thought. Written works similar to this one have continued to be read, but as mentioned above, still remain largely in the province of popular culture. Whether accepted as they were or revised for various reasons, the stories of the lives of the prophets were of interest to many of those exposed to these tales. While clearly based at times on biblical stories, one wonders often about the sources used for writing this material and where they originated.

### *Prophets and Prophecy*

Western scholars have often stated that the pre-history of Islam is connected with the history of ancient Israel and of early Christianity through the influence of the sacred texts of both of these earlier religions. Pre-Islamic Arabia had its own polytheistic religious traditions centered annually in what was already the sacred site of the Ka'bah in Mecca. But there were also important Jewish and Christian communities that were quite well known to the tribal Bedouins and settled peoples of Arabia as well. Some contemporary scholars maintain that at least one third of the text of the Qur'ān, the sacred book of Islam, is directed by Allah towards the *Banū Isrā'īl*, the Children of Israel. For example, the important early traditionist Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal cited the Prophet of Islam, "The Prophet said: 'Transmit on my authority, be it even one verse (from the Qur'ān), narrate (traditions) concerning the Children of Israel and there is nothing objectionable.'<sup>5</sup> There is little doubt that this was cited in the early days of

<sup>3</sup> See the lengthy discussion of the matter by Merlin S. Swartz in his *"Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb al-Quṣṣāṣ wa'l-Mudhakkirīn."*

<sup>4</sup> See the chapter called "The Ḥadīth as a Means of Edification" in Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*. Vol. Two, Chapter 5, for an excellent study of the *quṣṣās*.

<sup>5</sup> See the article based on this saying by M.J. Kister, "Ḥaddithū 'an banī isrā'īla wa-lā ḥaraja: A Study of an early tradition." *Israel Oriental Studies*, II, pp. 215-39.

Islam to bolster the argument of those Muslims who claimed that one could utilize Jewish and Christian sources to interpret the Qurʾān and to explain Muslim practices and beliefs which may have been taken from their predecessors. Indeed, Sūrah (chapter) 3: (verses) 3–4 of the Qurʾān speaks of Allah: *He has revealed to you this Book with the Truth and confirming the Books revealed before, as indeed He has already revealed the Torah and the Gospel for the guidance of men, and the distinction between right and wrong.*

In those early days of Islam then, the texts spoke of the prophets of a much earlier Israel, whose tasks were seen as not limited to foretelling the future, but who, in speaking to their people through divine inspiration, warned them in the name of God about their misdeeds, warnings that were also used by the leaders of the new religion. Early Muslim scholars wrote that the Books of the Jews and Christians include information about the life and actions of the prophets of the period before Islam, but also about their Prophet Muḥammad and the fate of his community, but they would not reveal that. Several of the biblical prophets, both Jewish and Christian, are mentioned at length in the Qurʾān, and those divine warnings are reported there and in later Islamic writing, as having been ignored by the Jews, whose divine punishment should therefore serve as examples and warnings to Muslims. Some of those biblical prophets appear in the Qurʾān in somewhat altered form, along with other biblical figures such as Noah, Ishmael, Samson, Samuel, David and Solomon, who are not considered to be prophets in Jewish tradition. Much less often, the Qurʾān also mentions Arabian prophets like Hūd and Šālīḥ, who were treated by the members of their tribes just as the Jews had behaved towards their prophets, and found that they were similarly rejected by their own people. Each of the prophets is noted for his particular role, as examples, Joseph for his beauty, his wisdom and his love for his father; Moses for his closeness to God and his short temper; Jesus for his magic in raising the dead and feeding large numbers of the hungry.

A prophet received direct inspiration by means of an angel, as in the case of Muḥammad and the angel Gabriel; by the inspiration of the heart, or has seen the working of God in a dream. From the beginning of the mission of the prophet Muḥammad, the concepts of prophet and prophecy became important issues in Islam. An example of that, and a possible reason for its significance, may have been the appearance of several “false prophets” in Arabia during the life-

time of Muhammad as well as almost immediately after his death. The possibility, therefore, of the rise of further prophets who might bring with them new and presumably false revelations, was a serious question to the earliest Muslims. The intellectual leaders of the new faith could eliminate these possibilities, however, through the very important statement in the Qur'ān: *Muhammad is not the father of any man among you. He is the Messenger of God, and the Seal of the Prophets.* (Sūrah 33, verse 40) Thus the title "Seal of the Prophets" was given to the Prophet Muhammad by none other than Allah, to be seen as the last in a long line of divinely inspired humans to whom alone Allah would speak directly. To these prophets Allah would be imparting commands and warnings, words of commiseration and hope, which they were to further transmit to their people. Since then, the title of "Seal of the Prophets" given to Muhammad has been taken to mean that after his death there would not be, indeed there surely could not be, any more prophets. While that concept has remained fixed in Muslim thought, certain *sūrahs* (chapters) in the Qur'ān tell of a number of earlier prophets: Jewish, Christian, and Arabian, all predecessors of Muḥammad. But he, portraying himself as closely connected to a succession of those prophets, in particular through a very important one of them, namely Abraham, gives rise to this interesting body of literature. Because of the desire and need of Muslims to understand the life of their Prophet and his place in history, reading about the lives of earlier prophets and filling out the rather sketchy and sometimes enigmatic Qur'ānic accounts of those lives, became a task of major importance and are especially significant down to the present.

To many of the earliest adherents to the new religion of Islam, much of the Qur'ānic text dealing with prophets must have seemed somewhat strange at times, too brief, and even enigmatic in places, to be clearly understood by people who did not have knowledge of or even access to the Hebrew or Christian scriptures from which the tales of the prophets had reached them. It becomes clear that when we read Muslim texts about the prophets, whether seeming to be influenced by biblical or other sources, we are not only dealing with an important aspect of early Islamic religion, but also with its relationship to the other monotheistic religions of the Middle East. Beginning in the earliest decades after the death of Muhammad, members of his new community desired more detailed information about the lives and missions of these special figures. For this, Muslims



newly converted to their new religion, turned to men who were looked upon as authorities on the subject; most often to Jews who had accepted Islam or to some Christians who had done the same, but usually to men of their own background who were close to the Prophet and were often members of his own tribe. Some of the latter knew a number of tales that had been passed down through many generations; about the creation of the world, about the great Arabian figures of the past, but in general, about a variety of other, well-known stories that had little to do with prophets or prophecy.

All of this material had been transmitted by certain early scholars, and further enlarged by later ones who organized it into the collections which eventually created the genre of which we have spoken, the "tales of the prophets." In part, therefore, this literature developed and spread because of the need to portray the long line of predecessors of Muḥammad to which he belonged and in which he served as a perfect final example. But it also created a new and important genre of Islamic literature, preserved and translated into various languages of the Islamic world, used in religious preaching, art and other cultural aspects down through the ages. While the stories can be and are read and appreciated for their literary content, occasionally for amusement as well as for their Islamic religious aspect, it should be borne in mind that they also provide an early source for the study of comparative religion for those scholars so interested. This shows the interaction of the three monotheistic religions, but questions arise as to the purpose of these literary works as well as the backgrounds of the authors and the sources they used.

Twenty-eight prophets are said to be mentioned by name in the Qur'ān, and even more are listed and discussed in the *qīṣaṣ* literature. A majority of these tales seem to be based on the accounts of the lives of those prophets in the Hebrew Scriptures, others in Christian hagiography; some come from tales of ancient tribes of the Arabian peninsula, and a very few more seem to be based on other cultures of the Mediterranean and Far Eastern worlds, but in general to speak of divine revelations and to serve as religious models and inspiration to the masses. All of these prophets are divided by Muslim scholars into two, often overlapping, categories. One such category was that of *nabī* (pl. *anbiyā'*) (see the Hebrew *navi'*—"prophet") who, as noted previously, are men chosen and directly inspired by God, and number about one hundred and twenty-four thousand according to some Muslim scholars. The other category was that of

the *rasūl* (pl. *rusul*) “messenger,” or “apostle,” as in the *shahādah*, the Islamic profession of faith: “*There is no god but Allah, and Muḥammad is the Messenger (or Apostle) of Allah.*” There were said to have been some three hundred and fifteen such messengers or apostles sent by God to be spiritual guides of their community, usually bringing divine revelations, some of which survive in texts, having received a book through the angel Gabriel. Muḥammad could and did fit into both of these categories, as *nabī* and as *rasūl*, and therefore may be spoken of with both titles in the Islamic texts.

Some Muslim scholars have questioned whether certain individuals mentioned in a number of *qīṣaṣ* collections, such as Alexander the Great (Arabic: al-Iskandar, also known in Islamic tradition as Dhū l-Qarnayn, “the two-horned one”), and Luqmān, a figure closely resembling Aesop, belonged in these works, and should thus actually be considered as prophets, messengers, or simply as divinely-inspired men. In some *qīṣaṣ* works, there are figures, of which Bulūqiyā is an example, whose tale is to be found in the *Thousand and One Nights*, which may go back to a much earlier period.<sup>6</sup> Certain aspects of the “Story of the Phoenix” in this volume may also be related to the same ancient epic as well. Another example is the tale of Jirjīs, often identified with St. George, whose story is set in a group of highly imaginative tales that have little or nothing to do with the Christian saint by that name.

As a primary source of such accounts and as the immutable word of Allah, the Qur’ān cannot be challenged. Meanwhile, the reliability of the other major source, the *Hadīth*, often translated as “Tradition,” is based to a great extent on the authority, reputation and degree of reliability attributed to the collectors of those traditions and their sources. These collections consisted of the accounts of the divinely-revealed words, deeds, and silent affirmations of the Prophet himself, based on what was recorded by his companions as having been heard or seen by them. As time passed from one such collector to another, the veracity of those traditions depends to a great degree on the *isnāds* or “chains of authority” of those who collected and recorded the traditions for, as we shall see in this work, not all of

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<sup>6</sup> See the interesting idea held by a number of scholars, of the connection of the story of Bulūqiyā to that of Gilgamesh. For example, in *Myths from Mesopotamia*, by Stephanie Dalley, p. 48, and her article “Gilgamesh in the Arabian Nights” in *JRAS*, 3rd Series, vol. 1, 1991, pp. 1–18. See below, p. xix.

the participants were considered equally acceptable by later Muslim scholars and their lives had to be carefully studied along with their sources.

These works vary greatly in length, in style and approach, as well as in the occasional inclusion of tales with little or no connection at all with the concept of prophecy. Indeed it has been said that this work, in particular, is a combination of both serious and playful tales, several of the latter occurring here prominently. The tales of the lives of the prophets vary greatly from one text to another from among those found in the *qiṣaṣ* genre, and the numbers of prophets also change from one work to another. Stylistically, some rely heavily on the insertion of the varying and often clashing ideas by well-known Muslim religious authorities of earlier times, while others reduce their numbers or omit certain prophets. This literature was also needed in order to fill out the brief and sometimes enigmatic references to the Jewish, Christian, and Arabian prophets in the sacred book of Islam.

As indicated above, in early Islamic literature the central texts of the two earlier monotheistic religions are said to be the Torah of Moses and the Psalms of David among the Jews, and the Gospel of Jesus for the Christians. Based on certain references in the Qur'ān, and on the words of the Prophet in the *Ḥadīth* collections, Muslim authorities have tended to speak of the biblical texts of Judaism and Christianity as having been altered or deleted by the followers of those religions, hence not to be considered by Muslims as true versions of divine revelation in their present forms. The writings of a number of biblical prophets, for example, are rarely found in Islamic works, and the New Testament is not a source of prophetic material except for some stories about Jesus, Mary and John the Baptist. It is therefore especially interesting to see in Tha'labī's writing, impressive portions of the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, in some instances actual renditions of the biblical text though rather differing in others.

#### *Early Authors of Tales of the Prophets*

Among the earliest known writers in this genre, only portions of whose complete works seem to be extant, are Wahb b. Munabbih (d. ca. 110 A.H./728/732? C.E.); Abū Khudhaifa Ishāq b. Bishr (d. 206/821); and the much-less well-known Abū Rifā'a al-Fārisī 'Umāra

b. Wathīma (d. 289/902); only the first two of whom are frequently cited by later writers. Wahb is said to have been born in Yemen of an Iranian father and Himyarite mother, although some Muslim and other scholars claim that he was of Jewish origin.<sup>7</sup> His *Kitāb al-Mubtada' wa-Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, also known as *Qiṣaṣ al-akhbār*, is found in a greatly revised version.<sup>8</sup> Not much is known of 'Umāra b. Wathīma, except that he lived in Egypt and wrote *Bad' al-Khalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* which was translated in 1978.<sup>9</sup>

Ishāq b. Bishr, born in Balkh in present-day Afghanistan, lived in Bukhara in present-day Uzbekistan until his death. He is cited very often in texts such as this present work. His text *Kitāb Mubtada' al-dunyā wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, re-worked by Ismā'īl ibn 'Isā of Baghdad, contained two chapters of tales of the prophets.<sup>10</sup> The first volume of the work contains twenty-eight sections, the first of which is about Paradise and Hell, followed by the "Matter of the Creation of the Earth" and the "Creation of Adam." After the stories of Adam and Eve come the stories of Idrīs, then of Hārūt and Mārūt, followed by Noah, and the death of Adam. Then further stories about the tribe of 'Ād and the prophet Hūd, the tribe of Thamūd and the prophet Ṣāliḥ, the tale of Nimrod, and the "Matter of Abraham" and his tale. This is broken into by the story of "Dhū l-Qarnayn al-Iskandar (Alexander the Great)" and back to the story of Abraham with a section about his receiving the tidings of the birth of Isaac. The story of Lot follows, then the building of the Ka'bah and the pilgrimage to it, the divine message received by Abraham that he must sacrifice his son, ending with his encounter with the Angel of Death, Abraham's death, and a list of his descendants. These sections do not follow the usual order in later texts of this genre but Ibn Bishr is cited in all of those.

One of the most important of all of the early Muslim authors is Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224–310 A.H./839–923

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the works *Wahb ibn Munabbih* by R.G. Khouri, 2 vols. Wiesbaden, 1972; and the article by H.Z. Hirschberg, *EJ*, vol. 16, pp. 241–42.

<sup>8</sup> See Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Band I (1967), p. 306. Also Ziriklī, IX, p. 150. Rauf Khouri's study *Wahb ibn Munabbih* (1972), is very important on this subject.

<sup>9</sup> See Sezgin, I, 322(29); Ziriklī, V, 194. R. Khouri published *Les légendes prophétiques dans l'Islam depuis le Ier jusqu'au III<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'Hégire. Bad' al-halq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* . . . in 1978.

<sup>10</sup> See Sezgin, *Geschichte*, Band I, 294, also Ziriklī, I, p. 286. I am grateful to Prof. M. Kister for supplying me with an Arabic text of this work.

C.E.), a native of Tabaristan in northern Iran. He is highly considered both as a historian and a Qurʾān exegete, as well as an early author of *qiṣaṣ* literature, though he did not give it that title. His works are still read and studied today and his monumental universal history *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wal-mulūk*, “The History of Messengers and Kings” (“messengers” as another term for prophets) spans the ages from Creation to his own time, and is translated into English as *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, published in forty volumes—only four of which belong to the *qiṣaṣ* genre.<sup>11</sup> This portion of Ṭabarī’s vast work includes much history of Jewish origin, but because of his Iranian origins and knowledge of its traditions, he attempts to coordinate the history of ancient Iran and the lives of certain of its rulers, many of them clearly legendary figures, with the biblical figures in the *qiṣaṣ*.

Ṭabarī begins his work with a discussion in which he asks “What is time?” and then a section on “The Proofs for the Origination of Momentary and Extended Time and Night and Day,” going on for many pages dealing with other aspects of time completely different from any of the other texts of the genre. Next comes the story of Iblīs, followed by a long section on Adam—on his life with Eve, his death and the rule of his son Seth. There is then an example of what becomes typical of Ṭabarī, a tale of Persian kings followed by the story of Enoch (namely Idrīs), then the story of Noah, and again a story of Persian kings.

This approach by Ṭabarī was not, however, a usual occurrence in this body of writing. What seems to have been much more common, as we shall see in our present work, is the adaptation by the early Muslim writers of material based on Jewish scriptures and midrashic literature, as well as on Christian tradition, early Arab tales, and other sources. The first of these sources seems to have been transmitted by Jewish residents of Arabia, several of whom converted to Islam and were often portrayed by Muslims as experts in Jewish lore. From the nature of these tales, modern scholars have concluded that they are largely based on oral tradition rather than on written sources.

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<sup>11</sup> Vol. 1, trans. by Franz Rosenthal: *General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood* (1989). I have translated two volumes: Vol. 2: *Prophets and Patriarchs* (1987)—from Noah to Joseph; and Vol. 3: *The Children of Israel* (1991)—from Moses to Solomon; Vol. 4 by Moshe Perlmann: *The Ancient Kingdoms* (1987)—from Kaykhusraw and Solomon to Jirjīs (St. George).

Another very different *q̣iṣaṣ* work of some importance is by Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-*Kisā’ī*, an author about whose actual name and life nothing definite is known, but who has been thought by some scholars to have been a 10th-century jurist.<sup>12</sup> The Arabic edition of this work was published in 1923 by a German scholar, Dr. I. Eisenberg, under the title *Vita Prophetarum*, and was translated into English in 1973 by Prof. W. Thackston as *Tales of the Prophets*. Unlike some other authors of this genre except for Ṭabarī and the present work by Tha‘labī, Kisā’ī begins from Creation and includes some rather strange aspects of the tales that several of the other versions do not contain. To some scholars Kisā’ī’s work seems rather to reflect Arabic folk literature of the 12th and 13th centuries, lacking many of the types of material one finds in other known *q̣iṣaṣ* works. Kisā’ī’s collection is divided into anecdotal segments with little reference to the text of the Qur’ān, even lacking the usual chains of authority that are seen as vital elements in verifying the sources and veracity of the texts, or the usual references to the *ḥadīth* literature.

There are fifty-six, mostly very brief tales, beginning with “The Tablet and Pen,” then “Creation,” but in the midst of the story of Adam and the creation of Eve, there is a section on “The Peacock and Iblīs” followed by a segment about Adam and another about Eve, then by one on “The Expulsion of the Peacock” and another on “The Expulsion of the Serpent,” and after several other segments there is one on “The Eagle and Fish” and “The Description of the Locust.” None of these are in the “standard” tales. Strangely enough, once the stories of Adam and Eve are concluded, the text not only follows the more usual tales but also expands the chains of authority previously confined to three early authorities: Ibn ‘Abbās, Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, and Wahb b. Munabbih, with very infrequent mentions of Abdallāh b. Salām and the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’isha. Once the more usual tales begin to appear, the number of names of the usual authorities and citations from the Qur’ān appear as well.

A relatively early known *q̣iṣaṣ* work, this one by an Andalusian writer Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muṭarrif al-Kinānī *al-Ṭarafī* (997–1062),<sup>13</sup> has been studied and translated into Italian

<sup>12</sup> But see the comments of T. Nagel in *EP*, V, p. 176, who considers this to be a much later medieval work. See also the doctoral work of Aviva Schussman, *Stories of the Prophets in Muslim Tradition*, 1981; in Hebrew with English introduction.

<sup>13</sup> See Brockelmann, *S1*, p. 593.

and published by Dr. R. Tottoli as *Storie dei profeti* (1997), containing the tales of prophets from Adam to Jesus and ends with a combination of several other prophets and tales. Ṭarafī's work contains the rather brief tales of the twenty-four prophets whose lives it describes, although his introduction states that there were actually thirty-one prophets. Tottoli utilized the works of Wahn, Ibn Bishr, and Kisā'ī, as well as Tha'labī, in discussion of the genre of *qisās* both in his earlier doctoral dissertation, in an important separate work,<sup>14</sup> as well as in later articles and other writings in which he discusses all of the above-mentioned writers of *qisās* literature. This text by Ṭarafī is rather brief compared with some of the works by other authors—only eighteen sections in all—but they cover all of the major tales from Adam to Jesus. After that, however, the last section brings together rather briefly a great variety of figures not mentioned earlier: Ezekiel, Samuel, Jeremiah and al-Khiḍr, though Ṭarafī seems to confuse Jeremiah and Ezra as well as Jeremiah with al-Khiḍr—the latter not unusual—and ends with very brief references to the rather mysterious “People of al-Rass” and the “People of the Pit,” both of whom we will meet in the last part of Tha'labī's work.

A still later writer of what was essentially the same genre of *qisās al-anbiyā*, although not given that title, is the historian and traditionalist Abū l-Fidā' 'Imād al-dīn Ismā'īl b. 'Umar *Ibn Kathīr* al-Qurashī al-Boṣra'wī (1300–1373) who included in his work of history, *Al-Bidāya wal-Nihāya*, an account beginning from Creation to the life of Muḥammad, continuing through the caliphates, and down to the history of Damascus of his own period, a very lengthy though not very original work. What was rather different about his beginning sections of the very long work, is that this was essentially a version of *qisās al-anbiyā*<sup>15</sup> in which he attempted to omit what might be considered to be *isrā'īliyyāt*, based on his adherence to the views of the earlier examples of Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Taymīya,<sup>16</sup> thus distancing himself from what he considered to be heresy.

The first of the two volumes of his stories begins, as it does in

<sup>14</sup> Namely *I profeti biblici nella tradizione islamica* (1999).

<sup>15</sup> There is also his work called *Qisās al-anbiyā*.

<sup>16</sup> This will be discussed below. This *qisās* section is in a relatively recent version of the *Bidāya*, published in Beirut and Riyad in 1966, Vols. 1 and 2 include 343 and 359 pages respectively.

some of the earlier *q̄iṣāṣ* texts, with cosmology but with a considerably longer and quite different approach than those other works, if only because of his referring to many more and often later authorities. In many more of the stories than in the usual *q̄iṣāṣ* works, Ibn Kathīr relies on *ḥadīth* that refer to the words of Muḥammad himself. After the cosmogony we have the usual list of figures: the story of Adam, his expulsion from Paradise, the death of Adam and his choice of Seth as successor, then Idrīs, Noah, Hūd and Šālīḥ, followed by Abraham and so on. This first volume ends with a story of Elijah that is unusual in that it relates that “he was sent by Allah to the people of Baalbekk east of Damascus,” where he converted tens of thousands. The beginning of the second volume contains stories found in some of the other *q̄iṣāṣ* works such as “The People of the Cave,” “The People who Violated the Sabbath,” “Luqmān.” with the insertion of other, less well-known tales, and then moves into areas that are at the very end of the pre-Islamic events eventually entering into at least a part of the story of the life of Muḥammad.

A much later author, a Morisco from Aragon, Muḥammad Rabadán, wrote in 1603 a Spanish *q̄iṣāṣ* version in a long poem starting with Adam and including all the Jewish prophets down to and including Jesus, and likewise from Ishmael and his Arab descendants down to Muḥammad. Rabadán’s work in Spanish is titled *Discurso de la luz de Muhamad*.<sup>17</sup> Canto I is dedicated to Allah, Creator of everything, followed by a canto about Adam, followed by Iblīs, then on to Noah who hands on leadership to Abraham. Unlike the other texts mentioned in this Introduction, it goes rather quickly to tales of the forebears of the Prophet, then a section called “The History of our Prophet Muḥammad” in five cantos. The fifth of these cantos deals, of course, with the death of the Prophet who, on his death-bed recites the same words that marked the beginning of the revelation of Islam, namely the ninety-sixth Sūrah “The Clot” beginning with: “*Recite: In the name of the Lord who created, created man from a clot of blood . . .*” At the very end, there is a list of the 99 names of Allah with a Spanish explanation of each. It is especially interesting to see

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<sup>17</sup> Published as “The Poetry of Mohamed Rabadán, of Arragon” ed. by H.E.J. Stanley in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (New Series). I am grateful to Prof. James Monroe for calling this to my attention, giving me a copy of the text and various articles about Rabadán and his work. Prof. Monroe, who has written on the subject, considers it to be *the* Spanish epic of Islam, written in the meter of the Ibero-Romance ballad.



how these Spanish Muslims, quite cut off from the Muslim world at that very late date, used more-or-less the pronunciation of Arabic words as in the heyday of Islam in Spain, some of these are scattered throughout the text and written, of course, in Latin script. Two examples are Arabic *wuḍūʿ*, meaning "purification," becomes *guado*; and Arabic *al-zabūr*, meaning "psalm," becomes *el-azabor*. This is not unusual, given the Spanish readings of many Arabic words during the days of Arab and Berber rule in Spain.

As we shall see later, this work from the seventeenth century, was not the end of the writing of tales of the prophets. Those of the twentieth century differ greatly from those mentioned here, especially because of the views of many modern Muslims about the Jewish elements of some of the tales and a desire to cleanse the *qīṣaṣ* of those elements, as we shall see in the sections named "The Issue of Isrāʿīliyāt" and "The 'New' Qīṣaṣ" below.

*Al-Thaʿlabī: The Author of this Work*

Except for the work of Ṭabarī, this is the longest and most diverse collection of tales of the lives of the prophets, also containing a number of extraneous tales having little or nothing to do with prophets, for the first time in complete English translation. Written by Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī al-Nisābūrī al-Shāfiʿī (d. 1036), the last two parts of his name indicating that he was born in Nishapur in Iran—although it is known that he spent much of his life in Baghdad—and that he followed the Shāfiʿīte school of Islamic law. This work is the richest extant text of its genre, but al-Thaʿlabī also wrote a much less well-known work *Tafsīr*,<sup>18</sup> or Qurʾān exegesis, which seems to contain *qīṣaṣ* material, but any additional writings by him are not otherwise known. The full title of our *qīṣaṣ* work is *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (*The Brides of Sessions about the Tales of the Prophets*)—the word *ʿArāʾis* "(Brides)" may have been used here to vaunt the beauty of the text, and *majālis* "(Sessions)" is used as the name given to the major divisions of the prophetic tales in this work.<sup>19</sup> As noted, it has been translated into many lan-

<sup>18</sup> This *Tafsīr* is being studied and translated as this is being written.

<sup>19</sup> The term "sessions" is an attempt to translate the term *majlis* (pl. *majālis*) that can mean, among other possibilities, "seat, room, gathering" as well as "session."

guages of the Islamic world and has been and is now being translated into several other European languages as well.

Beginning his account with a long and rather elaborate discussion on the creation of the heaven and earth and all that is in them, it goes on to include tales of the lives of many individuals who are prophets in Islam, beginning with Adam and Eve and Idrīs, who is possibly biblical Enoch. The forty-three separate sections of the stories (*majālis*) include Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and Solomon, among several others from Hebrew Scriptures; John the Baptist, Mary, and Jesus from Christian ones; as well as Hūd and Šāliḥ, from Arabian sources, and the somewhat mysterious Dhū l-Kifl, who may figure in this group or be connected with some otherwise-named individual from the other mentioned sources. In addition there are stories other than those having to do with the prophets, for example the "Tale of Iram of the Pillars," which occurs in several forms in many other literary texts. There is, also, the "Tale of the Phoenix," strangely connected here with a story about the wisdom of King Solomon and used to verify the Islamic belief in Divine predestination, although it also seems to be similar to tales of Greek origin as well.<sup>20</sup>

Another tale noted above is that of Bulūqiyā, a Jewish youth who leaves home and wanders through the world seeking the Prophet Muhammad, about whom he has learned in a secret text hidden by his father long before the coming of Islam, an account which is seen as one of the tales in the *Thousand and One Nights*, and possibly too of the Gilgamesh epic. There is also the Christian tale of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, called in Islam "The People of the Cave," greatly embellished here and ending in an effort either to turn it into a Muslim story or divide it between Muslims and Christians. The rather mythical stories of Jirjīs, a name that seems to be the Arabic version of St. George, are filled with the horrors carried out on him and his converts by pagan rulers. These horrors are then followed by some pre-Islamic tales of Arabia, including those of the Christians of Najrān and their treatment by Dhū Nuwās, the Jewish ruler of Ḥimyār, in southern Arabia. These tales are followed by the Abyssinian attempt to invade Mecca and the story of the elephant involved in that failed effort, which is connected with the date of the birth of the prophet, "The Year of the Elephant." These tales

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<sup>20</sup> Several of these may be found in Gustave E. von Grunebaum, *Medieval Islam*, Chapter Nine: Creative Borrowing: Greece in the *Arabian Nights*.

are based on the *Sīra* literature, the story of the life of the Prophet, that goes back to his early ancestry as well.

The tales of Bulūqiyā and of the Seven Sleepers as told here, serve as good examples of frequently found Islamic *topoi* of Jews and Christians who, several centuries before the coming of the Prophet, have read about him in their Scriptures or in secret texts hidden from most of the people, and are intent on going out in search of him. The many tales about Alexander the Great, known as Dhū l-Qarnayn in Islam, contain some that must have come from the *Alexanderroman* or other non-Muslim sources, but present Alexander as a righteous historical figure who venerated God. Unlike Ṭabarī, who emphasized Persian historical concurrence with certain biblical prophets who figure in the *qīṣaṣ* literature, Thaʿlabī uses a very great deal of detailed biblical material found in few other *qīṣaṣ* works. Examples of this are versions of the words of biblical prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but strangely, some of his tales of this genre often confuse events having to do with certain well-known figures, such as Nebuchadnezzar with Belshazzar, and Ezekiel with Ezra; or with matters of dating, as in the cases of Jonah, Samson, and others, as mentioned in the text.

### *The Issue of Isrāʿīliyyāt*

While looked upon as necessary supplements to the rather sparse historical material found in the sacred books of early Islam, there eventually arose a strong opposition to this borrowed lore. A great deal of what we find in this literature seems clearly to be based on material brought into Islamic culture by early Jewish converts to the new religion. We already find this in a much earlier period, if we can consider as historically authentic a conflict recorded in this work and elsewhere between an early Muslim authority related to the family of the Prophet, ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās (d. 65/686), and an equally important figure, Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. 32/652), a Jewish convert to Islam.<sup>21</sup> In his many disagreements with Kaʿb, Ibn ʿAbbās states that the Torah is no longer valid. It seems that the term *isrāʿīliyyāt* may have first appeared in the work *Murūj al-dhahab*, by al-Masʿūdī (d. 345/956) who stated that his work relied on *funūn al-akhbār min akhbār*

<sup>21</sup> See pp. 29ff. of this volume regarding an argument between these two figures.

*banī Isrāʾīl wa-ghayri-hā* (the types of stories from among the tales of the Israelites and others). It was the great Islamist, Ignatz Goldziher who, earlier in the last century, had noted the first use of the term as being older than Masʿūdī.<sup>22</sup> Ṭabarī himself had included in his work some material found in *qīṣaṣ* collections which was denounced by others as “*isrāʾīliyyāt*”, i.e., “Israelitisms,” at times defined as “Jewish falsehoods,” and thus decried by some devout, learned Muslim leaders as a foreign and untrustworthy element. But in addition to the problem faced by Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, it may go back to an often cited, but as yet undiscovered work by the aforementioned Wahb b. Munabbih, possibly called *Kitāb al-Isrāʾīliyyāt*, or “Book of Israelite Lore.” Notwithstanding, Kaʿb is cited frequently in the *qīṣaṣ* literature and elsewhere, as a major and authentic source of traditions about ancient Israel, its cosmogony, rituals, and tales of the lives of its prophets.

A rather unusual aspect of Thaʿlabī’s presentation of some of the Jewish prophets are the often very lengthy quotations of what he deems to be their words. A prime example are Isaiah and Jeremiah, who are “quoted” at great length, as is Ezekiel, even when he is confused with another figure in the biblical text. Even more so, the story of Job and his discussions with his companions are given considerable coverage by Thaʿlabī, though in this instance it is clear that Job is not considered a prophet in Jewish tradition. Those who are acquainted with the Hebrew scriptures may be able to recognize the sources of these discussions, but at the same time may be puzzled by some of the odd twists in Thaʿlabī’s versions, such as the end of the story of Job and the manner in which his wife meets him. One wonders where Thaʿlabī found these strangely altered versions of well-known biblical texts. We do not find these stories in the generally shorter and much less detailed earlier *qīṣaṣ* works, if they cover these prophets at all. It has been assumed by some that Thaʿlabī used some non-traditional Jewish informants, as is often said by modern scholars about those who wrote in the early days of Islam. What Jewish scholars see as somewhat strange perversions of biblical and other Jewish sources are often attributed to the Jews

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<sup>22</sup> See his *Muslim Studies*, vol. 2, chap. 5, “The Hadīth as a Means of Edification and Entertainment.” The study by Roberto Tottoli, “Origins and use of the term *isrāʾīliyyāt* in Muslim literature” in the journal *Arabica* covers the history of this matter quite fully.

of the Arabian peninsula who, in some areas, were isolated from centers of Jewish learning. But one wonders about Tha‘labī’s sources in the early 11th century, in the rather sophisticated, multi-cultural centers of Islamic learning—who were his informants? or was it written material that served as his source?

Three centuries later, the very strong opposition of the Ḥanbalite leader Ibn Taymīya (d. 728/1328) and his later follower Ibn Kathīr mentioned above, led to further condemnation of these tales, especially to their use by the *quṣṣāṣ*, who recited them to the uneducated. But other reasons given for this opposition were their Jewish origins, charging that the Jews, including those who had converted to Islam, used the tales to undermine the truth of the message of the Prophet, the divine revelation of the Qur’ān, and what was handed down in the body of *Ḥadīth*. There was much less criticism of the far fewer Christian tales, either mainly because of the often mentioned claim that “the Jews killed their prophets,” or of the generally stronger antipathy towards the Jews than to Christians in certain periods. All of this might have led to the virtual end of the further collection and use of the *qiṣaṣ* by some Muslim scholars. In some important areas, however, the tales continued to have a great impact, especially among the common people, and especially of Ṣūfī poetry in the literary area, using the lives of certain prophets as related in the *qiṣaṣ* works, giving them pious mystical interpretations, whether they were of Jewish origin or not. Thus the tales did not wholly die out.

This animosity becomes quite apparent much later, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when we note a new attack on this genre as a whole, renewed by religious reformers such as Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905), and his disciple Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1940). The latter did so especially in his monumental exegetical work on the Qur’ān, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, in which he made it clear that in his view the material he labeled as *isrā’īlyāt* was fabricated by the Jews with the purpose of undermining Islam by the introduction of Jewish lore. Some modern Muslim scholars, on the other hand, criticized his stand because they could not accept his rejection of so many traditions, but also because it implied the inability of early Muslim scholars to sort out the Jewish from the true Muslim material. And yet, to a great extent, during the same periods and since then, the tales have maintained an important popular position among a large part of the public as well as a number of scholars in the Muslim world.

*The "New" Qisas*

The renewed interest in this literary genre in the West, is mirrored both by the active reprinting of these works in several of the languages of the Islamic world, as well as by the writing of new versions due, in part, to what seems to be a resurgence of Islamic religiosity. During the past few decades one may read at least two major widely-used modern Arabic renderings of these tales, especially among students in *madrasas*, which carefully omit every trace of *Isrā'īliyyāt*. These works have been published by religious teachers, one of whom was 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Najjār (1860–1941) an Egyptian scholar and teacher at the Dār al-'ulūm, the religious section of al-Azhar University in Cairo. The words *Qisas al-anbiyā'*, at the top of the page, are followed on the title-page by the phrase "*Laqad kāna fī qisāṣihim 'ibra li-ūlā l-albāb*" ("In their tales there is an example for those who possess understanding"). In this work of 534 pages, he omits the usual cosmogony of the older works and begins with the life of Adam, ending with that of Jesus, including altogether nineteen other prophets, roughly half the number in our present work. Unlike the much earlier writers of this genre, he said in his long introduction that he deliberately ended with the study of Jesus and omitted the Prophet of Islam because he felt that Muḥammad was too important to be placed with the other prophets who preceded him.

His aim was to explain any problems the modern reader might have with certain aspects of the tales. In the introduction he outlines twelve principles of his approach to the genre, beginning by stating that reason is the first basis of faith; if an account contradicts reason it is necessary to interpret the story in ways that will eliminate this contradiction; also, "as for the Old and New Testaments, what is in them that agrees with the Qur'ān is true, and what denies it is false." Others among these twelve principles with which he begins his study, include the obligation to believe in all the prophets, their infallibility, their miracles, and their being exemplars for humankind. Among the other principles are "miracles are not proven by single instances . . . because single accounts have no certainty," and "there is no objection to contradicting the *isrā'īliyyāt* nor in denying them in their entirety."

A younger scholar, who acknowledges the work of al-Najjār, takes a more didactic approach. He is 'Afif 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Ṭabbārah, who has written many other publications about the Qur'ān and on the

Jews. He calls this work of his *Ma' al-anbiyā' fīl-Qur'ān al-karīm* ("With the prophets in the glorious Qur'ān") with the subtitle *Qisāṣ wa-durūs wa-ʿibar min ḥayātihim* ("Tales, lessons, and precepts from their lives").<sup>23</sup> In his introduction to the stories of the prophets a section bears the heading "The distinction between the Torah and the Qur'ān in the tales of the prophets," and begins this section as follows: "The Qur'ān did not follow the path of the Torah and did not relate the stories of the prophets and messengers as it did. Rather, it chose to relate (some) of their tales, and passed over the others. Allah the Exalted said, addressing His messenger Muḥammad, 'There are messengers We have already told you about before, and Messengers We have not told you about.'" (Qur'ān 4:164) Unlike al-Najjār, he ends this book with over 120 pages about Muḥammad. As an example of his didactic approach, after the section about Adam and one on Adam and Iblīs, he devotes a long section called "Lessons and precepts" which is found at the end of each prophetic portion, to the way for students to better understand the prophets. This one begins with "The status of humans; Punishment for pride; A call to spiritual aspiration; Adam was not the first to inhabit the Earth" and likewise for each following prophet. Then each section is followed by a series of *masā'il*, i.e., questions or problems, which he answers, such as: Where is the Garden of Eden located? Who are the angels and who are the *jinn*?

Considerable space has been devoted to these two modern works on tales of the prophets because they portray rather clearly the efforts of two very unlike contemporary figures of different generations, to bring a certain sense of modernity to this important but difficult genre of Islamic religious literature. They have applied their didactic approaches to this material aiming primarily at the younger generation of their community who will eventually become the teachers of the next generation.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Description of the Book*

As mentioned above, possibly as a result of the resurgence of Muslim interest in earlier Islamic thought and writings, this literary genre is enjoying a revival today, and has been re-worked and translated into

<sup>23</sup> Beirut, 8th printing, 1980. He includes 24 prophets in addition to Muḥammad.

<sup>24</sup> An example is the book by Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, professor of Qur'anic Studies in al-Azhar in Cairo, *Al-Isnā'īlyāt fīl Tafsīr wal-Hadīth*, 1986.

many of the languages of the Muslim world. It has been studied by a number of non-Muslim scholars in the last two centuries but is being increasingly studied today by Muslim scholars as well. Among other uses of these texts, some of these "tales" had become standard elements of Sufi mystical poetry over the centuries. But they have also served as subjects for the work of Muslim artists who created the well-known miniature paintings of Iranian and Indian art. Although, as noted previously, small portions of this work have been translated into English, but this is the first full translation of this rather long text.

One should, however, realize that although these are religious works in essence, there is a certain amount of humor in sections of this text, especially true in the case of King Solomon where one need only read the sections including some tales already noted: the Tale of the Phoenix; the Story of the Ants; Solomon's Ring; and even certain portions of the story of The Queen of Sheba. This is clearly an important work; not only a collection of tales reflecting the religious and cultural interests of both early, and of some present-day Muslims, but in this translation into English it offers Western readers a picture of an ancient civilization, as well as an excellent source for the study of comparative religion.

In its present English translation this work is somewhat long, almost double the length of the 440-odd pages of the Arabic original. Because of its length and necessary preparation to make the work available to a wider readership, only printed versions of the text have been used, compared, and their differences noted. Beginning with a rather detailed story of the process of divine creation, very different from both the biblical and the generally brief Qur'ānic accounts, it is clearly based on a number of ancient Near Eastern cultural traditions. Except for the presence of a few "secular" tales mentioned above, that are not based on any religious tradition, we enter the realm of prophecy, ending with tales of Arabia in the period just before the birth of the prophet Muḥammad in 570 C.E. and the beginning of revelation from Allah received by him in 610 C.E. There are some very obvious temporal confusions in the tales of certain biblical figures, for example, after the rather imaginative stories of the lives of Jesus and Mary, there follows the life of Jonah, who lived during the Assyrian period according to the Hebrew Scriptures, which would place him ca. 8th century B.C.E., many centuries before Jesus. After this come the stories of the People of the Cave (the



Muslim name for the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus) and of Jirjīs (St. George), from several centuries after the time of Jesus. These tales are then followed by the life of Samson who, according to biblical tradition, must have lived from the period of about 1000 B.C.E., which is followed immediately by the stories of events in Arabia as noted previously, leading to the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad—though his story is not told in this work. In addition to these problems, the very character of several of the prophetic figures has been greatly altered through particular emphases in later times. For example, in the stories about the life of Jesus he is almost primarily presented as a magician who brought the dead to life and who had many problems with his Apostles.

### *Notes on Style*

In light of the deviations from the ancient and generally well-known textual versions of the tales, I have referred the readers to those early sources in the footnotes. Although the style of the work clearly presents a medieval text, an effort has generally been made to have the translation sound more modern. This has been done especially in choosing English translations of the many citations from the Qurʾān; using a variety of sources rather than the text of only one translator. This was done primarily because not all of the English translations fit the ideas expressed in the surrounding text.

For another example of deviation from the usual, the practice of naming the entire *isnād*, “chain of authorities,” namely the line of scholars whose handed-on traditions form the basis of most of the tales in the book, is revised without including the words such as “so-and-so heard from so-and-so, who received from . . .” etc., which occasionally goes on for an entire paragraph; instead, in most cases, a long line—is inserted between one name and the next. The usual pious statements of praise and blessing occurring after the names of the Prophet Muḥammad, his relatives, and other prophets, such as *sallā Allah ʿalayhī wa-sallam* “God bless him and grant him salvation,” are generally omitted together with the similar special words used after any of the names of God are mentioned. The names of biblical figures, whether from the Hebrew Scriptures or the Christian Bible, are generally given in their English form, e.g., Abraham for Ibrāhīm, with the Arabic in a footnote or in parentheses in the text

itself, at times the Hebrew original is also given in a footnote. This is also the case for place names and the like.

As noted, the term *majlis* is translated throughout as "Session" and heads the major division as given by Tha'labī, but then the major subdivisions will be noted as Chapters. The ubiquitous parts of every Arabic name as necessary signs of a person's parentage, "son of . . ." and "daughter of . . ." "ibn" and "bint," are abbreviated to "b." and "bt." In a number of places the text has been adjusted in style for the sake of the English reader—in others, the flavor of the Arabic has been retained. At the beginning of most of the chapters there are the first lines of a Qur'ānic quotation leading either into the story of a prophet or of a particular event, ending in the Arabic equivalent of "and so forth." In order to help the readers who do not know the Qur'ān by heart, the continuation of the omitted portions of the sentences in order to complete what the author intended, has been printed between brackets [ ]. Some stories do not begin with Qur'ānic citations because they are folk-tales or the like, in which case they will simply be giving the heading as in the *qisās* text. Although the chapters and other divisions which seem to have been determined by the author have been retained, this translation also divides the book according to the major events or figures in each tale. E.g., Creation, Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, Abraham, etc.—in all thirty-two chapter divisions. The names of these divisions have been determined by the translator and are placed at the top of the page next to the over-all title of the work, for example: *Lives of the Prophets—Iram of the Pillars*. The names of two books of translation by the present author from Ṭabarī's *History*, are shortened in the footnotes. Please note: *PP* stands for Vol. II: *Prophets and Patriarchs*, while *CI* stands for Vol. III: *The Children of Israel*.

The number of footnotes has been curtailed because of the great length of the text as a whole. Many of them refer to the *qisās* works of other authors, especially Ṭabarī, al-Kisā'ī and Ṭarafī, while others refer to Jewish *midrash* or to later European or Muslim scholars. It is hoped that even with the relatively sparse footnotes, the reader will be able to follow and enjoy this work.

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LIVES OF THE PROPHETS

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## CREATION

### INTRODUCTION

*“We relate to you the histories of these Messengers to put courage into your heart.”* (11:120)

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful, may God be praised the full measure of His praise. May God bless Muḥammad and his family.

The Master, Abū Ishāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Tha‘labī,<sup>1</sup> said: “This book includes tales of the prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān, along with commentary.” God is the One whose help is sought, and on Him do we rely.

#### A CHAPTER WITH SOME INSIGHT FROM TALES TOLD BY GOD TO THE MASTER OF MESSENGERS ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE PASSED ON

God said: *“We relate to you the histories of these Messengers to put courage into your heart”* (*ibid.*). The sages have said: “Indeed God related to the Chosen One<sup>2</sup> the tales of those prophets who had passed on and of departed nations because of five reasons or insights.”

The first of these [insights] was that it was a manifestation of his prophethood and a sign of his mission. The Prophet was illiterate<sup>3</sup> and had no recourse to any tutor or teacher. He did not leave his birthplace long enough to permit him to attach himself to any scholar from whom he could acquire the knowledge of tales, nor is it known of him that he sought after any field of knowledge. [That was so] until something happened to him, and Gabriel appeared to him and

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<sup>1</sup> Date of birth of the author of this book is unknown; he died 427 A.H./1035 C.E., see Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 12:40. See also Introduction. When the title “The Master” occurs, it usually refers to the author, al-Tha‘labī, or at times, his teacher.

<sup>2</sup> Arabic: *Al-Muṣṭafā*—another name given to the Prophet Muḥammad.

<sup>3</sup> A traditional understanding of *nabī ummī*, possibly actually meaning “gentile prophet,” a prophet to all peoples. Note also p. 556, n. 12 below.

instructed him about all of that, so that he began to tell people tales of past centuries and of the lives of previous prophets and former kings. Whoever was intelligent and suitable among his folk believed in what God had revealed to him, that He had related it to him, and believed in him and considered him truthful. That was a miracle for him and a proof of the truth of his prophethood. Whoever was an enemy and an opponent envied him, contradicted him, and denied what he had brought, saying (as God has related): *“And they say: ‘Fables of the ancients he has had written down: they are dictated to him morning and evening.’”* (25:5) God—giving the lie to them and verifying the Prophet—has said: *“Say: It is revealed by Him who knows the secrets of Heaven and Earth.”* (25:6)

The second insight was that God told him about the noble characters of the preceding messengers and prophets, the saints and pious men, and praised them, so that these men would serve him as a model and example, so that his people might avoid the transgression of those commandments for which the nations of the prophets were punished and for which they deserved punishments and chastisements. Thereby God perfected in him the noblest qualities, and when he obeyed the order of God and followed the conduct of the prophets, God praised him and said: *“Surely yours is a sublime nature.”* (68:4) Because of that, ‘Ā’ishah<sup>4</sup> when asked about the nature of the Messenger of Allah said: *“His nature was the Qur’ān.”*

The third insight was that He told him these tales to confirm him and to make known his nobility and his people’s nobility and high worth. That is so because when he contemplated the tales of peoples before him, he learned that he and his people were spared many of the trials which God had visited upon the prophets and saints, and that He had eased their laws, and relieved them of the burdens and shackles that had weighed on previous peoples, as some of the commentators have said in interpreting His word: *“And He has lavished on you both His visible and unseen favors.”* (31:20) The “visible favor” is the lightening of the laws, while the “unseen” one is the decrease of [required] acts. God has said: *“God desires your well-being, and not your hardship.”* (2:185) And He has said: *“He has laid on you no burdens*

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<sup>4</sup> ‘Ā’ishah bt. Abū Bakr, ca. 614–78. The third and favorite, very young wife of the Prophet. She outlived him by many years, becoming a major source for the words and deeds of the Prophet.

*in the observance of your faith.*" (22:78) And He has said: *"God wishes to lighten your burdens, for man was created weak."* (4:28)

When God related these tales to His Prophet he became aware of his own excellence and that of his people, and he knew that God had set him and his people apart with special regard which he had not vouchsafed to any of the prophets or peoples. He joined his night (prayers) to his day (prayers), and his fasting to his praying, not abating his worship of his Lord, rendering his thanks until his feet were swollen. They said: "Messenger of Allah, has not God forgiven you your early transgression as well as the late ones?" He said: "Should I not be *'a thankful servant?'*" (17:3) Then he boasted and said: "I was sent with the true and tolerant (religion)."

The fourth insight is that He told him the stories as instruction and guidance for his people, because in them He mentioned the prophets and their reward, the foes and their punishment. In more than one place He also mentioned that He warned His people against the deeds of the enemies, and urged them to follow the deeds of the saints. For He has said: *"In Joseph and his brothers there are signs for those who inquire,"* (12:7) and: *"Surely in their stories there is a lesson for men of understanding,"* (12:111) and: *"a guidance and warning for those who are godfearing,"* (5:46) and similar verses. Al-Shiblī used to say about these verses: "The masses only tell these tales, while the elite learn the lesson from them."

The fifth insight is that He told him the stories of the preceding prophets and saints to keep their memory and legacy alive, so that those who do well in keeping the saints' memories alive assure themselves thereby a speedy reward in this world, in order that the saints' good renown and legacy may remain forever, just as Abraham, the Friend of God, desired the preservation of his good reputation and said: *"And let me have a good report with posterity."* (26:84) For men are tales—it is said that "no man dies but mention of him revives him." And (the narrator) said: "Kings and wealthy men spend their wealth on edifices, fortresses, and palaces only to preserve a memory (of themselves)."

Nāṣir b. Muḥammad al-Marwazī reported that al-Duraydī recited:

*Man is only a report that is left behind; therefore be a good report to him who understands.*



A SESSION ON THE DESCRIPTION OF THE  
CREATION OF THE EARTH

God has said: "*He Who has made the Earth a bed for you, and the sky a canopy.*" (2:22) There are many verses similar to this in the Qur'ān. Know that the discourse about the creation of the Earth consists of seven chapters.

*Chapter 1 The Beginning of the Creation<sup>5</sup> of the Earth and its Properties*

The narrators have told—in varying ways, but agreeing in conception—that when God desired to create the heavens and the Earth, He created a green jewel many times the (size of the) layers of the heavens and the Earth. Then He looked at it with a look full of dread and it became water. Then He looked at the water and it boiled, and foam, smoke and steam arose from it. It trembled with fear of God, and from that day on it trembles until the Day of Resurrection. And from that smoke God created the heavens, for that is what He has said: "*Then He turned to the heavens and it was smoke.*" (41:11) That is, He undertook the creation of the heavens which were smoke. And from that foam, He created the Earth.

The first part of the Earth to appear on the face of the water was Mecca, and God spread out the Earth below it. Therefore it was called Umm al-Qurā, namely the "model (*lit.*, mother) of all towns." It is what God (meant) saying: "*And afterwards He spread out the Earth.*" (79:30)

When God created the Earth, it consisted of one layer, so He split it and it became seven, which is what He meant by saying: "*Are these unbelievers unaware that the heavens and the Earth were one solid mass which We tore asunder?*" (21:30) Then God sent an angel from beneath the Throne, who descended to Earth until he entered beneath the seven earths and placed them on his shoulder. One of his hands was in the East and the other in the West—spread out, clutching the foundation of the seven earths until he had a firm grip on them. His feet still did not find a resting-place. So God sent down from the heights of Paradise an ox with seventy thousand horns and forty

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<sup>5</sup> See also Ṭabarī, pp. 8–78, Rosenthal, pp. 172–249, and Kisā'ī, pp. 6–22 in Arabic; English translation Thackston, pp. 5–23, as well as the Jewish legends about Creation in Ginzberg, *Legends*, I:1–46; V:3–62.

thousand legs, and made a resting-place for the angel's feet on its hump. His feet were still not yet firmly stabilized, so God sent down a green gem from the highest level of Paradise. Its thickness was (the extent of) a journey of five hundred years, and He placed it between the hump and ear of the ox, and the angel's feet rested upon it. The horns of that ox protruded from all regions of the Earth and were like a prickly hedge under the Throne. The nose of the ox was in the sea, and it breathed once a day. When it exhaled, the sea would rise, and when it inhaled, it would ebb. Now there was no resting place for the feet of the ox, so God created a green rock, the thickness of which was equivalent to that of seven heavens and seven Earths, and the feet of the ox rested on it. This was the rock about which Luqmān<sup>6</sup> said to his son: "*O my son! Be they as small as one grain of mustard-seed, be they hidden in a rock, or in heaven, or the earth, God will bring all things to light. [Gracious is God and All-knowing].*" (31:16) It is related that when He said these words to Luqmān, his gall bladder burst because of his fear; and he died, this having been his last admonition.

Now there was no resting-place for this rock, so God created a fish, and this was the great whale the name of which was Lūtiyah,<sup>7</sup> its nickname Balhūt, and its by-name Bahamūt.<sup>8</sup> He placed the rock on its back, leaving the rest of its body free. (The narrator) said) that the whale was on the sea, the sea on the back of the wind, and the wind rested on (God's) might. The weight of the world and what is on it was as two letters from the book of God. The Almighty said to it: "Be!"<sup>9</sup> and it was. And this is His word: "*The only words We say to a thing, when We desire it, is that We say to it: 'Be!' (kun) and it is.*" (16:40)

Therefore one of the scholarly poets said:

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<sup>6</sup> A legendary hero and sage in pre-Islamic lore; in Qur'ān a monotheist and wise father; in later Islam, a creator of fables similar to Aesop, see the story of Luqmān, p. 586 below, also Luqmān in *ET*<sup>2</sup>, V:811–13.

<sup>7</sup> Undoubtedly related to the Biblical *leviathan*; in Hebrew consonants *leytn*. For many Jewish tales on the mythical sea-creature Leviathan see Ginzberg, *Legends*, vols. I and V.

<sup>8</sup> Probably the Biblical *behemoth*, the terrestrial equivalent of *leviathan*. See Job 40:15. Some modern scholars possibly refer it to a hippopotamus. See *EJ*, 4: 394–95. See p. 601 below.

<sup>9</sup> The word *kun* is the Arabic imperative "be". In Arabic the names of the two consonants in this word are *kāf* for *k* and *nūn* for *n*, which together make up the command of Creation, "be."

*Do not submit to any created being because of greed,  
 For that is a lack of religion on your part.  
 Seek sustenance from God from what is in His stores,  
 For your sustenance is between the Kāf and the Nūn,<sup>10</sup>  
 Dispense with the world of kings, relying on God alone, just  
 As kings dispense with religion, relying on (things of) their world.*

Ka'b al-Aḥbār<sup>11</sup> said: "Iblīs<sup>12</sup> hurried to the whale on whose back the Earth rests and whispered to it, saying: 'Do you know, O Lūtiyah, what nations, animals, trees, mountains and the like you bear on your back? If you were to shake them and throw them altogether off your back, it would be much easier for you.' Lūtiyah intended to do that, but God sent a creature that entered his nose and reached his brain. The whale cried out to God for help because of that, and God permitted (the creature) to go out and it did. By Him who holds my soul in His hand, he looked at it and it looked at him as if (God) had not intended anything of the sort, and it returned to its previous state." This is the whale by which God swore, saying: "Nūn.<sup>13</sup> *By the pen and what they write therewith.*" (68:1)

It is also said that the Earth is balanced on the water as a ship balances on the water, for God has anchored it on the mountains, which is what He said: "*And He set firm the mountains.*" (79:32) And He said: "*And raised the mountains like supporting poles.*" (78:7) He also said: "*And He cast on the earth firm mountains, lest it shake with you,*" (16:15) meaning, that it should not move with you.

ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said: "As soon as God created the Earth, it cried out: 'O Lord! You will place mankind upon me, who will commit sins upon me and perform abominations on me,' and it started shak-

<sup>10</sup> See previous note.

<sup>11</sup> Ka'b (b. Matī) al-Aḥbār, d. in Homs, ca. 653. A Jewish scholar of Himyarite background, learned in Hebrew Scripture and South Arabian tradition, hence the title al-Aḥbār, "of the scholars." Converted to Islam at the time of Caliph ʿUmar (634–44) and ʿUthmān (644–56) and became close to them. Muslim historians were not always congenial to him but he appears often in *qisās* material. See *EI*<sup>2</sup> IV: 216–17; *EJ* 10:487; Ziriklī, 6:55.

<sup>12</sup> Arabic name of the angel who rebelled against God by refusing to bow down to Adam, assumed to be derived from Greek *diabolos*, "devil", thus he is often also called *al-shaytān*, "Satan". His punishment being deferred until the Day of Judgment, he was given the power to lead astray all who are not faithful servants of God. *EI*<sup>2</sup>, IV:668–69; Ṭabarī, 78–86; Rosenthal, 249–257.

<sup>13</sup> One of the "mysterious letters" at the head of certain *sūrahs* (chapters) of the Qur'ān. The word *nūn*, is both the name of the letter *n* and an Arabic word for "fish."

ing. So God fastened it to the mountains and made it stable.” God created a huge mountain from a green chrysolith from which the greenness of the heavens came. This (mountain) was called Jabal Qāf, and He surrounded (the chrysolith) all around with mountains. That is by what God swore when He said: ‘Qāf.<sup>14</sup> *By the glorious Qurʾān.*’ (50:1)

Wahb said that Dhū l-Qarnayn<sup>15</sup> came to Jabal Qāf and saw small mountains around it, so he said to it: ‘Who are you?’ And it said: ‘I am Qāf.’ He said: ‘Then tell me what these mountains around you are.’ It said: ‘They are my veins. When God wants to shake a land, He commands me, and I move one of my veins and the land attached to it shakes.’ And Dhū l-Qarnayn said: ‘Qāf, tell me something of the greatness of God.’ It said: ‘Indeed the nature of our Lord is great; so all attributes fall short of Him, imagination is lacking regarding Him.’ He said: ‘Then tell me of the least of what is described of it.’ It said: ‘Behind me is a land some five hundred years’ journey (distant), consisting of mountains of ice which crash against one another, and beyond these there are similar mountains of hail. Were it not for that ice and hail, the whole world would burn up from the heat of hellfire.’ He said: ‘Tell me more.’ It said: ‘Gabriel stands before God, his entire body trembling with fear. From each tremor God created one hundred thousand angels who stand arrayed before God, their heads bowed, not permitted to speak until the Day of Resurrection. When God permits them to speak, they say that there is no god but God. For this is what He has said: *‘On the day when the angels and the Spirit stand up in their ranks, they shall not speak, save him who shall receive the sanction of the Merciful and declares what is right.’* (78:38) That is to say, that there is no god but God.

Yazīd b. Hārūn quoted al-ʿAwwām b. Ḥawshab—Sulaymān b. Abī Sulaymān—Anas b. Mālik, who said: “When God created the Earth it began to shake, so God created the mountains and placed

<sup>14</sup> Another of the “mysterious letters” in the previous note. This is the name of the Arabic letter *q*, the first letter of the word Qurʾān, as well as of the name of this mountain.

<sup>15</sup> *Lit.*, “The two-horned”, an often-used name for al-Iskandar/Alexander the Great, in Islamic literature. Accepted as a believer by some, because, after being given power on Earth, he spoke to the people of the West about God’s punishment and reward. Muslim scholars have disputed as to whether he was a prophet. See *EP*<sup>2</sup>, IV:127, *s.v.* Iskandar; also Brannon Wheeler, “Moses or Alexander . . .,” pp. 191–215.

it upon them, and it became steady. The angels were amazed at the strength of the mountains and said: 'O Lord, is there anything in Your created world stronger than the mountains?' And He said: 'Yes, iron.' And they said: 'Lord, is there anything stronger than iron in Your created world?' He said: 'Yes, fire.' Then they said: 'Lord, is there anything in what You created stronger than fire?' He said: 'Yes, water.' So they said: 'Lord, is anything stronger than water in Your created world?' He said: 'Yes, wind.' Then they said: 'Is anything of Your created world stronger than wind?' He said: 'Yes, man. He gives alms with his right hand and conceals it from his left.'"<sup>16</sup>

*Chapter II About the Limits of the Earth, its Levels, Regions,  
and Inhabitants*

'Abdallāh b. 'Umar received from the Messenger of Allah: "From each earth to the one which adjoins them is a distance of five hundred years journey, and these earths have seven levels: The first earth is this one, with its inhabitants. The second earth is the dwelling place of the wind, and from it come forth the various winds as He has said: *'the turning-about of the winds.'*" (2:164; 45:5) In the third earth are creatures whose faces are like those of human beings but whose mouths are like those of dogs; their hands are like human hands, but their feet are like cows' feet; their ears are like those of goats, but their hair is like sheep's wool. Not for a moment do they disobey God. They have no clothes. Our night is their day and their day is our night. In the fourth earth there are rocks of sulfur which God prepared for the people of the Fire, with which Hell is heated up." The Prophet said: "By Him in whose hand is my soul, there are rivers of sulfur there; if the lofty mountains were set free there, they would melt."

Wahb b. Munabbih said: "It is like red sulfur, one stone of which is like a great mountain. It is what God meant when He said: *'whose fuel is men and stones.'*" (2:24; 66:6)

<sup>16</sup> See Qur'ān 2:271: "To be charitable in public is good, but giving alms to the poor in private is better and will atone for some of your sins." Abū Hurayrah said that Muḥammad commended "him who gives alms only in secret so that his left hand does not know what his right hand does." Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, pt. 2, p. 105. In Judaism the same concept was developed in rabbinic writings.

‘Alī b. al-Husayn said, “I heard from Abū Bakr b. ‘Abdūs b. al-Mazanī—Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Marqarī—Muḥammad b. Manṣūr—Aḥmad b. al-Layth—Abū Ḥafṣ al-Qushayrī, that Manṣūr b. ‘Ammār said: ‘When setting out on pilgrimage, I was led to al-Kūfah one night. It was an intensely dark night and I became separated from my companions. Then I came near in an alleyway to the door of a house. I heard the weeping of a man who was saying while crying out: ‘My God, by Your power and Your glory, when I was rebellious I did not intend to disobey You, but I rebelled against You and did so in my ignorance. I disobeyed You and did so because of my distress. Now who can deliver me from Your punishment? And whose help can I seek if Your help is taken from me? O sins! O rescue! O God!’ He made me weep, by God, and I placed my mouth on a crack in the door and I said: *‘I seek refuge in God from the accursed Satan.’* (16:98) *‘Verily God hears all, knows all.’* (5:75; 6:13; 6:115, etc.) In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful, *O you who believe! Guard yourselves and guard your families against a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, [in charge of fierce and mighty angels who never disobey God’s command and who promptly do His bidding]* (66:6). Thereupon I heard a great commotion, then the voice died down. I placed a stone at the door so that I would recognize the place.

When morning came, I rose up early to go to him, and behold, shrouds were being prepared and an old woman entered the house and came out weeping. I said to her: ‘You there! What is your connection with the dead man?’ She said: ‘Be off, worshipper of God, do not add to my sorrows.’ I said: ‘I want to know, for the sake of God. Perhaps you will entrust me with a prayer, for I am Manṣūr b. ‘Ammār, the preacher of the people of Baghdad.’ She said: ‘Manṣūr, this is my son.’ I said: ‘What was he like?’ She said: ‘He was one of the family of the Messenger of Allah. He earned whatever he earned and divided it into thirds; one third for me, one third for the poor, and one third with which he would break his fast, for he fasted by day and stayed awake at night until this last night, when he took to weeping and supplication. On this night a man passed by and recited a verse from the book of God, and my dear one remained in a state of agitation until it was morning when he departed this world, may God have mercy on him.’

Manṣūr b. ‘Ammār: “One day I entered a ruin and found a youth praying the prayer of those who fear (*i.e.*, had a premonition of

death),<sup>17</sup> and I said to myself: 'This must be a young man of some importance; perhaps he is one of the saints of God.' I waited until he finished his prayer, and when he was through praying I greeted him and he returned my greeting. I said to him: 'Do you not know that in Hell there is a river called *Laḏā* (the fire of hell). *Eager to roast, calling him who drew back and turned away, who amassed and hoarded (wealth).?*' (70:15-18) He sobbed and fell down in a faint. When he recovered his senses, he said: 'Tell me more.' So I said: '*Believers, guard yourselves and your families against a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, and over which are harsh, terrible angels who never disobey God's command and who promptly do His bidding*' (66:6) and he fell down dead. When I removed his clothing from his chest I saw written on it by the Pen of (Divine) Omnipotence: '*He has a blissful state in a lofty Garden, with clusters of fruit within reach.*' (69:23) When the next night came I slept and saw him in a dream sitting on a throne with a wreath on his head. I said to him: 'What has God done to you?' He said: 'He has given me the reward of the fighters of Badr<sup>18</sup> and more.' I asked him: 'Why?' He said: 'Because they were killed by the sword of the infidels, while I was killed by the sword of the Almighty King.'"

The fifth earth contains the scorpions of those doomed to hellfire, the size of mules with tails like lances, each tail with three hundred and sixty vertebrae, in each of which are three hundred and sixty pitchers of poison. If you were to place only one pitcher of that poison in the midst of the Earth, all the people of the world would perish from its stench, and everything would be spoiled by it. It also contains the serpents, long as rivers, reserved for the people of hellfire. Each of those serpents has eighteen thousand fangs, each fang of which is like a tall date palm; at the base of each fang are eighteen thousand pitchers of poison. If God were to command one of those serpents to strike the highest mountain on Earth with one of its fangs, it would raze it and it would become (a heap of) decayed things. It meets the unbeliever, poisons him, and breaks his limbs.

<sup>17</sup> *Ṣalāt al-khaef*, see Qur'ān 4:101-102; also al-Bukhārī, *Ṣahīh*, II, xiv, pp. 30-35; Maslim, *Ṣahīh*, pt. 2, pp. 212ff.

<sup>18</sup> The site of the important battle in March, 9 A.H./624 C.E., between the early followers of Islam in Medina against the Meccans—since used as a metaphor for extreme bravery, the battle of the few against many, as the Medinans numbered about one-third the number of the Meccans.

The sixth earth contains the records of the people of hellfire and their abominable deeds and spirits, and its name is "Sijjīn."<sup>19</sup> God has said: "*Indeed; the record of the sinners is in (the lowest depth) Sijjīn.*" (83:7)

God has made the seventh earth a dwelling-place for Iblīs and his hosts. In it is his nest, on one side of which is the hot wind and on the other side vehement cold. He is surrounded by his hosts of evil spirits and the fiercest of the *jinn*<sup>20</sup> and from there he disperses his troops and his hosts. Those to whom he accords the highest station with him are those who cause the greatest temptation to humans.

Salamah b. Kuhayl—Abū l-Zarqā', quoting 'Abdallāh: "Today Paradise is in the seventh Heaven, whereas tomorrow God may place it wherever He wishes, and Hell today is in the lowest Earth, but tomorrow He may place it wherever He wishes. As for what is beyond the bottom of the Earth, satisfy yourself with the story of Korah<sup>21</sup> when God caused the Earth to swallow him up with his house and possessions. In the accounts (it is said) that He causes him to sink down in it a man's height deeper each day, but he will not reach bottom until the Day of Resurrection. And the Prophet said: 'While a man may strut around proudly in his garments, admire himself, and be pleased with himself, God will cause the earth to swallow him up and he will sink into it until the Day of Resurrection.'" "

### *Chapter III An Account of the Days During Which God Created the Earth*

God Most High said: "*Say: Do you indeed disbelieve in Him Who created the earth in two days?*"<sup>22</sup> [*And do you make other gods His equals? The Lord of the Universe is He*]."<sup>23</sup> (41:9) Abū Hurayrah—Abū Ishāq—Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qaṭṭān—Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Shādhān—Ibrāhīm b. Yahyā—Ṣafwān b. Salīm—Ayyūb b. Khālid

<sup>19</sup> A common explanation of this unusual word. See further, Lane, 2899.

<sup>20</sup> Pl. of *jinnī*, in English also "geni, geniū," intelligent bodies, imperceptible to our senses, composed of vapor or flame, unlike humans; able to appear under different forms and to carry out difficult tasks. Muḥammad was sent to them as well as to mankind. They play various roles in folklore. See *EP*<sup>2</sup>, II:546-50, s.v. *ḍjinnī*.

<sup>21</sup> Arabic: *Qārūn*, whose story, based on Qur'ān 8:76; 29:39; 40:23-25, is found in the story of Moses, see pp. 353ff. below.

<sup>22</sup> Namely, days 3 and 6 of Gen. 1 which mention the creation of the Earth.

<sup>23</sup> But see Qur'ān 11:7, "*who created heaven and earth in six days.*"



al-Anṣārī—‘Abdallāh b. Abī Rāfi‘—Abū l-Qāsim Muḥammad, who said that God created the Earth on Saturday, the mountains on Sunday, the trees on Monday, the darkness on Tuesday, the light on Wednesday, the animals on Thursday, and Adam on Friday.

*Chapter IV About the Earth's Names and By-Names*

Wahb b. Munabbih related that the first level of the Earth was called Adīm (skin, hide), the second Basīṭ (simple), the third Thaḳīl (heavy), the fourth Baṭīḥ (flat), the fifth Mutathāqilah (sluggish), the sixth Māsikah (clutcher), and the seventh Tharā (moist). As for its names which are mentioned in the Qur’ān, they are also seven: God called it Firāsh (a couch, carpet), for He said: “*He Who has appointed the earth a carpet for you.*” (2:22) He called it Qarār (a fixed abode), for He said: “*Is not He (best) Who made the earth a fixed abode?*” (27:61) He named it Rataq (one piece), for He said: “*Have not those who disbelieve known that the heavens and the earth were of one piece?*” (21:30) He named it Bisāt (wide expanse), for He said: “*And God has made the earth a wide expanse for you.*” (71:19) He named it Mihād (expanse), for He said: “*Have We not made the earth an expanse?*” (78:6) He named it Dhāt al-Ṣad‘a (the split one), for He said: “*And the earth which splits*” (86:12)—meaning with plants. And he named it Kifāt (receptacle), for He said: “*Have we not made the earth a receptacle?*” (77:25)

Khālid b. Sa‘īd said: “I was walking in the upper part of al-Kūfah with al-Sha‘bī, and he looked down at the houses of al-Kūfah and said: ‘These are the receptacles of the living.’ Then he looked at the graves and said: ‘These are the receptacles of the dead.’”

It is told that when ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir came to Nishāpūr,<sup>24</sup> among the Majūs<sup>25</sup> who accompanied him was a man who practiced medicine who was called Taḥqīq al-Kalīm (*lit.*, Verifier of the Interlocutor), and he set forth the question of burning bodies in fire. He claimed that the body is coarse, stinking while alive, and that when it dies there is no wisdom in burying it, causing it to increase its stench; and that (therefore) it was necessary to burn it and scatter its ashes.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Also Arabic: *Naysābūr*, an important city of medieval Khurasan. See LeStrange, *Lands*, pp. 382–87.

<sup>25</sup> Sg. *Majūsī*, English magi, magians, namely Zoroastrian(s).

<sup>26</sup> A misunderstanding of the Zoroastrian attitude towards fire that must be kept pure, hence may not be used for cremating the dead. The usual procedure was the exposure of corpses to vultures.

One of the jurists was told that people were tempted by the words of this Majūsī, so the jurist wrote to ‘Abdallāh b. Ṭāhir, “Bring us together with this Majūsī so that we might hear from him.” So they gathered unto ‘Abdallāh, and when the Majūsī made his statement, the jurist said to him: “Tell us about a baby who is claimed by his mother and by his wet-nurse; which one has a greater right to him?” He said: “The mother.” So (the jurist) said: “This Earth is the mother from which mankind was created, so she has a greater right that her children return to her.” Thus he silenced the Majūsī, and he recited on this topic (verses) by Umayyah b. Abī l-Ṣalt:<sup>27</sup>

*The earth is our refuge and it was our mother,  
In it are our graves, and in it were we born.*

Yaḥyā b. Mu‘ādh al-Rāzī was asked: “If man knows that this world is not a lasting abode, why does he trust it?” He said: “Because from it he was created and it is his mother, in it he was reared and it is his nest, from it he is sustained and it is his livelihood. So to it he will return, for it is his receptacle, being the passageway of the righteous to Paradise.”

#### *Chapter v An Account of with What God Adorned the Earth*

They are seven things: (firstly) the seasons. He adorned the seasons with four months. God said: “*The number of the months, with God, is twelve in the Book of God, the day that He created the heavens and the earth; four of them are sacred.*” (9:36) Of the four sacred months, three are consecutive and one stands alone. The three consecutive ones are Dhū l-Qa‘dah, Dhū l-Hijjah, and al-Muḥarram, while the single one is Rajab.

(Secondly) places, He adorned them (by singling out) four things: Mecca, Medina, Bayt al-Maqdis<sup>28</sup> (Jerusalem), and the Mosque of al-‘Ashā‘ir.<sup>29</sup>

He adorned it, too, with the prophets, of whom there were four: Abraham, the Friend (*al-Khalīl*), Moses, the Interlocutor (*al-Kalīm*), Jesus, the Most Worthy (*al-Wajīh*), and Muḥammad, the Beloved

<sup>27</sup> 5 A.H./626 C.E. A poet at the beginning of Islam who did not accept Islam.

<sup>28</sup> Arabic for Hebrew *Beit ha-Miqdash*, lit., House of the Sanctuary, i.e., the Temple in Jerusalem.

<sup>29</sup> Place not identified, lit., “The Mosque of the Clans.”

(*al-Ḥabīb*). They are the people of the Holy Scriptures, masters of the (Divine) law codes, who possess strong determination.

He adorned it, too, with the family of Muḥammad, and adorned them specifically with four: ‘Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. Yazīd al-Raqqāshī quoted Anas b. Mālik: “The Messenger of Allah guided us in the dawn prayer, and when he turned away from prayer he approached us with his noble visage and said: ‘O assembly of Muslims, whoever misses the Sun, let him take hold of the Moon; whoever misses the Moon, let him take hold of Venus; and whoever misses Venus, let him take hold of the two pole stars.’ Someone said: ‘Messenger of Allah, what is the Sun, and what is the Moon, and what is Venus, and what are the two pole stars?’ He said: ‘I am the Sun and ‘Alī is the Moon, Fāṭimah is Venus, and al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn are the two pole stars in the book of God, who will not separate until they are brought to the Basin.’<sup>30</sup>

He also adorned it with the Companions and adorned them with four: Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī, for they are the rightly-guided Caliphs and the approved Imāms!”

Anas b. Mālik quoted the Messenger of Allah: “The love for all these four exists only in the heart of a believer.” Anas said: “Love for all of them exists in my heart, praise be to God.”

He adorned it, too, with the believers, whom He adorned with these four: the scholars (*‘ulamā’*), the Qur’ān-reciters (*qur’ā’*), the champions of the faith (*ghūzāh*), and the pious worshippers (*‘ubbād*).

He adorned it, too, with a variety of animals, plants, and minerals.

#### Chapter VI About its End, Termination, and Final State

Know that God has promised (the Earth) seven things: One is change, as He said: “*On the day when the earth will be changed into other than the earth.*” (14:48) In the *Hadīth*<sup>31</sup> (it says that) a white Earth of silver will be brought about, like the bread of pure white flour, on which God has not been disobeyed for a moment. There is neither a blem-

<sup>30</sup> *Hawd*—the basin at which Muḥammad would meet his community on the day of resurrection. See *EI*<sup>2</sup>, III:286.

<sup>31</sup> Basically “narrative, tale.” With the definite article, as here, it means “The tradition”: accounts of what the Prophet said, did, or tacitly approved something done in his presence. To be considered *sound*, a *ḥadīth* requires both a reliable *isnād* (chain of transmission) and *matn*, (text). Here capital Ḥ stands for the body of tradition, while small ḥ stands for a single tradition.

ish on it, nor a break; it is as smooth as a sharpened whetstone.

The second is the earthquake. God said: "*When the earth is shaken with her (final) earthquake [and earth brings forth its burdens, and man asks, 'What has come over it?']*." (99:1) The Messenger of Allah said: "No sooner will the hour of Resurrection come than the banner will be seized, there will be many earthquakes, there will be unrest, and disorder will abound." It was said: "What is disorder, O Messenger of Allah?" He said: "Slaying. And if my people take usury, then there will be the earthquake; if they act wrongly in judgment, then the enemy will venture against them. If there will be adultery, there will be the plague and death. If they withhold alms, they will be afflicted with drought, and were it not for the livestock, they would not receive rain at all."

In the *Hadīth* one finds that during the time of 'Umar, the Earth quaked, so 'Umar took hold of the two posts of the pulpit of the Messenger of Allah and said: "People of Medina, you tremble and the trembling is caused by the abundance of usury and fornication, and the lack of profit is caused by the paucity of charity. You have caused evil things, even impelling others to do (them). So will you desist or will 'Umar have to flee from among you?"

The third is (the property) of emerging, as God has said: "*And you will see the earth emerging*" (18:48)—meaning, for the rendering of final judgment.

The fourth is the rocking, as God has said: "*When the earth is strongly rocked*." (56:4) The commentators have said: "As a child rocks in the cradle, until everything upon (the Earth) is shattered, in terror of its Master."

The fifth is the quaking, as He has said: "*On the day when the earth and the hills shall quake*." (73:14) The sixth is the spreading out, so that it empties and casts out what is in its interior, as He has said: "*And when the earth is spread out and has cast out all that was in it, and is empty*." (84:3-4)

The seventh is the grinding, as He has said: "*When the earth is ground to powder, grinding, grinding*," (89:21) and He has said: "*And the mountains will be crushed with a single blow*." (69:14)

It has been related about al-Rabīʿ b. Kathīr that when he read this verse he would grab the skin of his arms and say: "O flesh, O blood, where are you?"

Chapter VII *Regions of the Earth Mentioned in the Qur'an*

They are seven, and the first among them in special (qualities) is Mecca, as God has said in *The Thunder* (Sūrah 13) and *The Prophets* (Sūrah 21): “Do they not see how We visit the land, diminishing it in its outlying parts?” (13:41; 21:44) meaning the land of Mecca.

The second region is the land of Medina, as God has said: “Was not God’s earth spacious that you could have migrated therein?” (4:97) meaning the region of Medina. He said: “My Earth is spacious” (29:56). He said: “And they indeed wished to scare you from the land, that they might drive you forth thence.” (17:26)

The third is the land of Syria,<sup>32</sup> and that is His saying: “Go into the Holy Land [which God has prescribed for you, and turn not back in your traces, or you shall suffer]” (5:21) meaning the land of Syria. And He has said: “And we rescued him and Lot (and brought them) to the land which We have blessed for (all) peoples.” (21:71)

The fourth region is the land of Egypt. He has said: “Thus we established Joseph in the land” (12:21)—that is, in the land of Egypt. And He has said: “Set me over the storehouses of the land. I am a skilled custodian,” (12:55) and: “Therefore I shall not go forth from this land” (12:80)—that is, the land of Egypt; and: “Pharaoh exalted himself in the earth.” (28:4) And: “And make you viceroys in the land” (7:129) that is, the land of Egypt.

The fifth is the land of the East, for that is His saying: “Gog and Magog<sup>33</sup> are spoiling the land.” (18:95)

The sixth is all of the lands, for He said: “And there is not a beast on the earth but its sustenance depends on God,” (11:16) and: “There is not an animal in the earth, nor a flying creature on two wings, but they are people like you” (6:38)—meaning the nations in the portrayals are your examples in subjugation. He has said: “And if all the trees on the earth were pens,” (31:27) and: “Who has appointed the earth a resting-place for you.” (2:22)

<sup>32</sup> Arabic: *al-Shām*, refers to the greater Syrian area, but is commonly used in early texts to refer to Palestine, as it generally does in this work.

<sup>33</sup> Arabic: *Yājūj* and *Mājūj*, (sometimes *Ya’jūj* and *Ma’jūj*) similar in vowel pattern to other Qur’ānic names, some based on biblical ones. See *Tālūt*, *Jālūt*, *Hārūt*, *Mārūt*, below. Cf., *EI*<sup>2</sup>, III:286, often found in both Jewish and Islamic eschatological works. Found in the Bible in Gen. 10:2; Ezek. 38, 39. Islamic traditions are based primarily on Qur’an 21:96. Supposedly two nations found in the North-east of the ancient world. See *Shorter EI*, 637.

The seventh is the land of the Garden, for that is His saying: *“And verily We have written in the Psalms, after the Remembrance: My righteous worshippers will inherit the earth,”* (21:105) and: *“And has made us inherit the land, for us to make our dwelling wheresoever we will in Paradise! How bounteous is the wage of workers!”* (39:74)

#### A SESSION ON THE CREATION OF THE HEAVENS, AND ALL THAT PERTAINS TO THEM

The arrangement of the discussion in this Session is also in seven chapters, in accordance with the words of Wahb b. Munabbih: *“Almost everything is in sevens: the heavens are seven, the earths are seven, the mountains are seven, the seas are seven, the age of the world is seven thousand, the days are seven, the stars are seven, namely the planets, the circumambulation of the House<sup>34</sup> is seven rounds, the running (sa‘y) between al-Şafā and al-Marwah<sup>35</sup> is seven, the throwing of the stones is seven,<sup>36</sup> the gates of Hell are seven, its downward steps are seven, the trials of Joseph lasted seven years. He has said: *And Joseph remained in prison for several years,* (12:42) and his being given to rule over Egypt (lasted) seven years. And the king said: *“I saw in a dream seven fat kine.”* (ibid.) The gracious acts of God towards the Chosen One were seven. He has said: *“We have given you seven of the oft-repeated (verses) and the majestic Qur’an,”*<sup>37</sup> (15:87) which makes seven sevens. A human being is composed of seven members, and He created him of seven substances. God has said: *“We created Man from an essence of clay; [then We set him, a drop, in a receptacle secure, then We created of the drop a clot, then We created of the clot a tissue, then We created of the tissue bones, then We clothed the bones in flesh; thereafter We produced him as another creature.] So blessed be God, the noblest of creators.”* (23:14) And Man’s sustenance and food are of seven sub-*

<sup>34</sup> Namely, the Ka‘bah in Mecca. For the Hajj see *EP* III:33–37, *s.v.* *Hadjġ*.

<sup>35</sup> Two hills in Mecca traversed by pilgrims during the Hajj, commemorating Hagar’s running between these hills, seeking water for her thirsty son, *cf.*, *EP*, VIII:756, *s.v.* *al-Şafā*.

<sup>36</sup> The last three items are all parts of the ceremonials of the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

<sup>37</sup> These verses are often said to be examples from sacred history dealing with the peoples of Noah, ‘Ad, Thamūd, Abraham, Lot, Midian, and Pharaoh. Sūrah 20 (*The Poets*) and 29 (*The Spider*) deal with all seven, but other sūrahs contain other numbers of these examples.

stances. God has said: *“Let Man consider his food: [how We poured down the rain in torrents and cleave the earth asunder; how We bring forth the grains, the vines and vegetation, and olives, and the palm, and dense gardens, and fruit-trees, and the green pastures.] Provision for you and your cattle.”* (80:24–32) And he ordered (our) prostration on seven members.

### *Chapter I On the Beginning of the Creation of the Heavens*

It is related in the well-known transmitted accounts that when God wished to create the heavens and the Earth, he created a jewel like the seven heavens and the seven earths; then He looked at it with a frightful glance and it became water. He looked at the water and it boiled and rose up, and was covered with foam and smoke. From the foam He created the Earth, and from the smoke Heaven. As He says: *“Then He turned (istawā) to the heaven when it was smoke”* (41:11)—namely, *qaṣada*. That is to say, He broke it to pieces, it having originally been a single surface and made it into seven heavens. God has said: *“Have not those who disbelieve known that the heavens and the earth were of one piece, then We parted them?”* (21:30)

### *Chapter II About the Substances of the Heavens and their Varieties*

Rabīʿ b. Anas said: “The lowest heaven is an overflowing wave, the second one is of stone, the third of iron, the fourth of brass, the fifth of silver, the sixth of gold, and the seventh of white pearl.”

### *Chapter III About their Shapes and Boundaries*

God has said: *“And We have created above you seven paths.”* (23:17) Ibn ‘Abbās said: “God created the heavens like vaults. The sections of the lowest heaven are attached to the second, and the second to the third, and so on until the seventh, and the seventh is connected to the Throne. For thus He has said, *“[He has raised up the heavens] without pillars that you can see. And its pillar is above it.”* (31:10)

It is related on the authority of Abū Hurayrah, who said: “The Messenger of Allah went forth to his companions as they were thinking, so he asked: ‘About what are you thinking?’ They said: ‘We are thinking about the Creator.’ And he said to them: ‘Think about the creation and not the Creator, for thought cannot encompass Him. Think that God created the heavens as seven (and) the Earth

as seven, (that) beneath each Earth there are five hundred years (distance) and between each Heaven and Earth five hundred years, and beneath each Heaven five hundred years, and between each two heavens are five hundred years (distance), and in the seventh Heaven is an ocean, the depth of which is equal to all of that taken together, and in it is an angel standing, and the water does not even reach to his ankle."

*Chapter iv About their Names and By-Names*

Wahb b. Munabbih said: "The first of them is the Heaven of this world, *Dīnāh*; the second, *Dīqā*; the third, *Raqī*;<sup>6</sup> the fourth, *Fīlūn*; the fifth, *Tiflāf*; the sixth, *Simsāq*; and the seventh, *Ishāqā'il* (also *Ishāfā'il*). As for their names as mentioned in the Qur'ān, they are seven, the first of which is the "canopy;" God has said: *'And the sky a canopy'* (2:22; 40:64) And the "roof;" God has said: *'And we have made the sky a roof withheld (from them).'* (21:32) And the "paths;" God has said: *'And We have created above you seven paths.'* (23:17) And the "layers;" God has said: *'Who has created seven heavens in layer upon layer.'* (67:3) And the "strong ones;" God has said: *'And We have built above you seven strong (heavens).'* (78:12) And "one piece and the parting;" God has said: *'(The heavens and the earth) were of one piece and We parted them.'* (21:30) And "smoke;" God has said: *'Then He turned to the heaven when it was smoke.'*" (41:11)

It is related that the angels said: "O Lord! If the Heaven and Earth rebelled against You when You gave them a command, what would You do to them?" He said: "I would order one of My beasts and it would swallow them up." They said: "And where is that beast?" He said: "In one of My meadows." They said: "And where is that meadow?" He said: "Within one of the many branches of My knowledge." They said: "Praised be the Possessor of the open hand, the Strong One."

From al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. al-Muzāḥim al-Hilālī there has come down a strange but reliable account that sums up the preceding chapters, regarding the description of the Heavens, their boundaries, shapes, and what is in them, their people and dwellers, their names and appellations; namely that Abū 'Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-'Adl—Muḥammad b. Ja'far, who related to us, saying: al-Ḥasan b. 'Alawiyah—Ismā'il b. 'Īsā—Ishāq b. Bishr—Juwaybir—al-Ḍaḥḥāk and Muqātil who both said: "God created the



lowest Heaven and adorned it while it was water and smoke. Its thickness is a five-hundred-year journey, and between it and the Earth was a five-hundred-year journey. Its color is that of polished iron, and its name is *Barqī'a*. Between it and the second Heaven is a five-hundred-year journey; in the latter are angels created from fire and wind, over whom is an angel called the Thunder. He is the angel responsible for the clouds and rain, and he says: 'Praised be the Possessor of dominion and kingship.' He created the second Heaven in the color of brass, and its width is a journey of five hundred years, and between it and the third Heaven there is a journey of five hundred years. In that second Heaven there are angels of various colors (standing) in ranks, (so close) that if one were to measure between their shoulders, a hair's breadth could not be measured; they raise their voices saying: 'Praised be the Possessor of power and might,' and its name is *Qaydūm*. In it God created an angel called Ḥabīb, half of whom is fire and half of whom is ice. The two (halves) are mended together, yet the fire does not melt the ice, nor does the ice extinguish the fire. (Ḥabīb) says: '(You) Who have brought together ice and fire, bring the hearts of Your worshippers!'

From it to the third Heaven is a journey of five hundred years. The color of the third Heaven is like the color of alum; its width is a journey of five hundred years, and its name is *al-Mā'ūn*. There are angels in it with two, four, and six wings, and with various faces, and they raise their voices in praise, saying: 'Praised be the Ever-Living, Who never dies.' (They stand) in upright ranks as though they were a compact building. If one measured a hair's breadth between their shoulders, it could not be measured; not one of them knows the color of his neighbor for fear of God.

"God created the fourth Heaven; between it and the third Heaven lies a journey of five hundred years, and its width is a journey of five hundred years. Its color is that of white silver, and its name is *Filūn*. In it are angels double the number (of those) in the third Heaven, and likewise the inhabitants of each heaven are twice as numerous as those of the heaven below it. In the fourth Heaven are angels whose number only God can count, and they increase every day, for thus is His saying: '*None knows the hosts of thy Lord save Him.*' (74:31) (Al-Ḍaḥḥāk) said: "They are standing, kneeling, and prostrating themselves in various modes of worship. God sends an angel from among them on one of His affairs, the angel rushes and departs

with the companion at his side not being aware, so intense is (his) worship. They say: 'Praised and sanctified be our Lord the Merciful, there is no other god than He!'"

(Al-Ḍaḥḥāk) said: "God created the fifth Heaven, whose width is a journey of five hundred years and its color is that of gold. Its name is *al-Lāḥuqūn*. Between it and the sixth Heaven lies a journey of five hundred years and it has twice as many angels as the (first) four heavens combined. They kneel and prostrate themselves, and do not raise their glances, nor will they raise them until the Day of Resurrection. When that day comes, they will say: 'O Lord, we have not worshipped You as is Your due.'"

"God created the sixth Heaven, whose width is a journey of five hundred years, and from it to the seventh Heaven is a journey of five hundred years. There is God's greatest and most powerful army, the Cherubim,<sup>38</sup> whose number only God can count. In charge of them is an angel whose army consists of seventy thousand angels, each of whom has troops of seventy thousand angels. They are the ones whom God sends on His affairs to the people of this world. They raise their voices in praise and exaltation. Its name is *ʿĀrūs*, and it is (made) of red sapphire.

"Then God created the seventh Heaven, whose width is a journey of five hundred years; in it are the hosts of the angels of God. In charge of them is an angel who commands seven hundred thousand angels each of whom has troops like the celestial zone of Heaven, and the dust of the Earth and its valleys, and the sands of the sea, and the number of all the pebbles and leaves and the number of all creatures in the seven heavens and the seven earths. God creates each day as He wishes. [This Heaven's] name is *al-Raqī*<sup>39</sup> and it consists of white pearl.

From the seventh Heaven to a place called *Marḥūthā* is a journey of five hundred years, and there are hosts of God's angels there, who are the chiefs of the angels and the most powerful of them except for the Angel Gabriel and the bearers of the Throne. Each angel has various faces, and various wings and various lights on his body so that no one of them resembles the other. They raise their

<sup>38</sup> Arabic: *karūbiyūn*, sg. *karūb*, *karūbī*. Biblical *cherub*, angelic creature (Mod. Hebrew: *keruv*, *keruvin*), Gen. 3:24 and elsewhere.

<sup>39</sup> Hebrew *raqīʿa*, similar in form, means "firmament," "the heavens."

voices in exaltation, looking at the Throne, never blinking their eyes. If even one among them were to spread his wing, he would cover the world with a single feather of his wing. And God alone knows their number.

Above that is white cloud whose width is the width of the seven heavens and the seven earths, and from the seventh heaven to it (*i.e.*, the white cloud) there is a distance as between the seven heavens and the seven earths. And the Throne is above it in the loftiest heights, and none but God knows its utmost limit.”

#### *Chapter v The Days During which God Created Things*

The narrators relate that God began the creation of things on Sunday (and went on) until Thursday. On Thursday He created three things: the heavens, the angels, and Paradise, until three hours before sunset on Friday. In the first of these three hours He created the seasons and terms (of life);<sup>40</sup> in the second, the means of subsistence; in the third, Adam, as He said: “*So He determined them as seven heavens in two days, and revealed its commandment in every heaven.*” (41:12)

#### *Chapter vi With What God Adorned the Heavens*

[He has done so with] ten things: (firstly) the Sun. God said: “*And made the sun a lamp,*” (71:15) and He said: “*And We appointed a blazing lamp.*” (78:13)

The Moon. God said: “*And set the moon therein for a light.*” (71:15)

The stars. God said: “*We have adorned the lower heaven with the adornment of the stars.*” (37:6) Stars are of two sorts, the suspended ones like the lamps suspended in a mosque, and those set in place like a stone mounted in a signet-ring. Despite their multitude they vary in form. Indeed, God has not created among the stars a single one in the likeness of another. As some accounts have it: “There is no animal on Earth, nor any beast that moves beneath the Throne, that does not have its likeness in the universe of the stars.”

The Throne. And He has said: “*Exalter of ranks is He, Possessor of*

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<sup>40</sup> *I.e.*, the Islamic belief that one’s life span and the time of death are determined before one’s birth. See Qur’an 6:2: “*It is He Who created you from clay. He decreed a term (of life) for you in this world and another in the next.*”

*the Throne.*" (40:15) Ja'far b. Muḥammad related from his father who received from his grandfather: "In the Throne there is a likeness of everything that God has created on land and in the sea." And he said that this was the interpretation of His words: "*Naught is there, but its treasures are with Us.*" (15:21) (The distance) between any one of the posts of the Throne and the next is like the fluttering of a swift bird for eighty thousand years. The Throne is covered each day with seventy thousand colors of light, and none of God's creatures can get a glimpse of it. Everything in the Throne is like a ring cast down in the desert. God has an angel named Ḥazqiyā'il who has eighteen thousand wings, and the distance between each wing is a journey of five hundred years. The thought occurred to him whether he would be able to look at the Throne. God added to him a like number of wings, so now he had thirty-six thousand wings, the distance between each of which was a five-hundred-year journey. God sent an inspiration to him: "O angel, fly!" So he flew for a period of twenty thousand years but was unable to reach any one of the posts of the Throne. Whereupon God doubled the number of the wings, (doubling) his strength, and commanded him to fly. So he flew for a period of thirty thousand years and did not reach the tip of any post of the Throne. Then God sent another inspiration to him: "O angel, even if you were to fly until *'the trumpet is blown,'*" (20:102; 27:87; 78:18) despite all your wings and your strength, you would not reach even one post of my throne." The angel said: "Praised be my Lord Most High!" for God revealed: "*Praise the name of thy Lord, the Most High.*" (87:1) The Prophet said: "Say that when prostrating yourselves."

Ka'b al-Aḥbār said: "When God created His Throne it said: 'God has not created anything greater than me.' Whereupon it shook, and God twisted a snake around it with seventy thousand wings, each wing with seventy thousand feathers, each feather with seventy thousand faces, each face with seventy thousand mouths, in each mouth in each face, seventy thousand tongues. There came forth each day from these mouths a number of praises to equal the drops of rain, or the leaves of trees, or the number of pebbles or (particles) of earth, and the number of the days of this world and of the angels altogether. The snake coiled itself around the Throne in such a way that the Throne reached the middle of the snake as it was twisted around it."

The Seat. God has said: "*His Seat encompasses the Heavens and the*

*Earth.*" (2:255) 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib quoted the Messenger of Allah: "The Seat is a pearl whose size is such that even the savants do not know [it]. God has set the Verse of the Seat<sup>41</sup> as protection for the people of faith against Satan's evil."

Ismā'il b. Muslim—Abū Mutawakkil al-Bāji—Abū Hurayrah who had the key of the house of charity in which there were dates. One day he went there and opened the door, and behold, a handful of them had been taken. He went there on another day and again the same amount had been taken. Again he went there another day and a similar amount had been taken. Abū Hurayrah mentioned this to the Prophet, who said to him: "Would it make you happy to seize him?" He said: "Yes." He said: "When you open the door, say: 'Praised be He who subjected you to Muḥammad.'" So he went and opened the door and said this, and behold, [the thief] stood before him. He said to him: "Enemy of God, are you the perpetrator of this deed?" He said: "Yes," then said: "I shall not come back [i.e., do it again]. What I have taken is only for a family of poor *jinn*." So [Abū Hurayrah] let him go. He went back and mentioned this to the Prophet, who said: "Will it make you happy to seize him?" He said: "Yes. [The Prophet] said: "When you open the door, say the same thing again." He opened the door and said: "Praised be He who subjected you to Muḥammad." And behold, [the thief] was again standing before him, so he said to him: "Enemy of God, did you not promise me that you would not come back again?" He said: "Let me go just this time and I shall not return." So he let him go. Then he returned and seized him a third time and said: "Did you not promise me that you would not come back? I shall not let you go today before I bring you to the Prophet." He said: "Do not do that! If you let me go, I shall teach you a phrase which, when you say it, will (let) no *jinnī* come near you, neither small nor large, neither male nor female." He said: "Will you really do that if I let you go?" He said: "Yes. He said:" "Then what is it?" He said: "*Allah, there is no god but He, the Living, the Eternal One . . .*" (2:255) until he completed the verse, then he let him go. [The thief] went away and did not return thereafter. Abū Hurayrah mentioned this to the Prophet, who said: "Did you not learn this, Abū Hurayrah, such is the truthfulness of evil ones?"

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<sup>41</sup> Also called the "Throne Verse." The word *kursī* in this verse is variously translated as both "seat" and "throne."

*The Tablet and the Pen*

God has said: “*We keep an account of all things in a clear register.*” (36:12) And He has said: “*Nūn. By the Pen and that with which they write.*” (68:1) Ibn ‘Abbās said: “Among God’s creations is a Preserved Tablet which is a white pearl, its covers are of red sapphire, its writing of light, and the Pen [to write on it] of light; its breadth is like the distance between Heaven and Earth. God looks at it three hundred and sixty times each day and according to it He creates and sustains, causes to live and to die, and does as He desires, for this is what He has said: “*Every day He is upon some labor.*” (55:29)

It is related that the first thing that God created was the Pen. It looked at Him in terror. It had been as long as [the distance] from Heaven to Earth, but it split in two. He said: “Write!” and it replied: “What shall I write?” He said: “Write: *In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.*”<sup>42</sup> Then He said to it: “Carry out whatever will be until the Day of Resurrection.”

It is told that Ibn al-Zayyāt entered upon a certain Caliph and found him grieving. (The Caliph) said to him: “Make me feel better, O Ibn al-Zayyāt!” So he composed a verse saying:

*Worry is superfluous, because destiny has the upper hand,  
What is inscribed on the Tablet is what will happen.  
Therefore look for the spirit and what is related to it,  
Too much have you despaired of the spirit.*

*The Inhabited House*<sup>43</sup> (52:4)

Al-Zuhrī—Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab—Abū Hurayrah: “The Messenger of Allah said: ‘In the Lowest Heaven there is a house opposite the Ka‘bah called the Inhabited House, and in the seventh heaven there is a sea of light called al-Ḥayawān, which Gabriel enters every morning. He immerses himself once, then goes out and shakes himself once. Seventy thousand drops of light emanate from him, and from each droplet God creates an angel. The angels are commanded to go to the Inhabited House and pray there. They go there, enter it and pray, then go forth, and will not return to it until the Day of Resurrection.’”

<sup>42</sup> An invocation opening every sūrah except Sūrah 9. In Qur’ān 27:30 it begins a letter from Solomon to the Queen of Sheba.

<sup>43</sup> Arabic: *al-Bayt al-Ma‘mūr*, also called The Frequented House.

*The Lote-Tree of the farthest boundary*<sup>44</sup>

God has said: “*By the Lote-Tree of the farthest boundary, nigh unto which is the Garden of the Refuge.*” (53:14–15) Ka‘b and others have said, their accounts being intertwined with one another: “It is a tree in the Seventh Heaven, adjacent to the Garden; its root is firmly fixed in the Garden, its (branch) roots are beneath the Seat, and its branches are below the Throne. It is the utmost limit in the knowledge of created things, each of its leaves sheltering one of the nations, and angels cover it as though they were a carpet of gold. Upon it are angels whose number only God knows, and Gabriel’s Abode is in the midst of it, but God is All-knowing.”

*The Garden*

‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb said: “The Messenger of Allah was asked about the Garden: ‘What is it like?’ He said: ‘Whoever enters the Garden will live forever and not die, leading an easy life, never despairing. His garments will not wear out, nor his youthfulness end.’ Someone said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, how is it constructed?’ He replied: ‘Of a brick of gold and a brick of silver; its mortar made of excellent musk, and its gravel consists of pearls and diamonds, and its soil is saffron.’” Mujāhid—Masrūq from Abū Dharr—the Messenger of Allah said: “The Heaven groans, and has good reason to groan, for there is not a place in it four fingers wide without an angel prostrating himself or kneeling or standing or sitting and mentioning God’s name. If you knew what I know, you would laugh little and weep much, or you would go out into the desert entreating God.”

*Chapter VII About the End and Final State of the Heavens*

Know that God threatened Heaven with seven things, the first being that it would be overcome by spinning. God said: “*Upon the day when heaven spins dizzily,*” (52:9) meaning it would spin like a millstone in terror of the Day of Resurrection. The second: He related that it would become like molten copper, as He said: “*Upon the day when heaven shall be as molten copper,*” (70:8) meaning like dregs of oil. The

<sup>44</sup> *Sidr*, varying species of a tree found in the Middle East and North Africa of the genus *Ziziphus*, bearing fruits used for food and medicinal purposes. *Sidrat al-muntahā*, as here, is in Sufism a symbol of the point to which knowledge can take the mystic, beyond which true experience lies. See *ET*<sup>2</sup>, 9:549–50, *s.v.* *sidr*, *sidrat al-muntahā*.

third: That it would become crimson like red leather, as He said: *“And when heaven splits asunder and turns crimson like red leather.”* (55:37) The fourth: splitting. God has said: *“When the heaven is split asunder.”* (84:1) The fifth: cleaving. God has said: *“When the heaven is cleft asunder,”* (82:1) and *“The heaven being then cleft asunder.”* (78:18) Cleaving is more than splitting. The sixth is sundering. God has said: *“When heaven is riven asunder.”* (77:9) The seventh is stripping off, as God has said: *“When heaven is stripped off,”* (81:11)—that is to say, is stripped from its place and folded up. God has said: *“On the day when We shall roll up heaven as a scroll is rolled.”* (21:104) The poet spoke well when he said:

*When it is said: “Who is Lord of heaven  
than Whom there is no other?” [Heaven] is in turmoil.  
But if one were named “Lord” other than our Lord,  
all worshippers would say, “This is a lie”.*

A SESSION ON THE CREATION OF THE SUN AND THE MOON,  
A DESCRIPTION OF THEIR PATHS, THEIR BEGINNING  
AND THEIR DESTRUCTION

It deals with what Abū Sa‘īd Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥamdūn, the trustworthy and reliable authority, related to us when I was reciting the Qur’ān to him in Ṣafar of the year 333 A.H.<sup>45</sup> He said, citing Abū Ḥāmid Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Sharqī al-Ḥāfiẓ—Abū l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Salamī—Abū ‘Ismah Yaḥyā b. Abī Maryam al-Khurasānī—Muqātil—‘Ikrimah—Ibn ‘Abbās: While Ibn ‘Abbās was sitting one day, a man came to him and said: “Ibn ‘Abbās, I have heard a wondrous thing from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār about the Sun and the Moon.”<sup>46</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās had been reclining, but he prepared (to listen) and said: “And what is it that he said?” He said: “Ka‘b al-Aḥbār claimed that the Sun and the Moon would be brought to Him on the Day of Resurrection as though they were two hocked oxen, and they would be thrown into the Fire.” ‘Ikrimah continued: “Then a splinter flew from Ibn ‘Abbās, and another fell to the ground because of his anger.”

<sup>45</sup> Probably September, 944 C.E.

<sup>46</sup> The following story is studied in “Two Castrated Bulls . . .” by D. Halperin and G. Newby, in *JAOS*, 102 (1982): pp. 631–38.



Then he said: "Ka'b al-Aḥbār lied!" He said that three times. "Nay, this is Jewish lore which he wants to bring into Islam,<sup>47</sup> but God is too noble and too exalted to punish those obedient to Him. Have you not regarded His word: "And He subjected to you the Sun and Moon, constant in their courses" (14:33)—meaning their constancy in obeying Him. How could He punish two servants whom He had praised for being constant in their devotion to Him. May God fight this Jewish scholar and denounce his narrative. How insolent he is against God and how strong his slander against those two obedient servants of God! Then he repeated several times: "We belong to God [and to Him do we return.]" (2:156)<sup>48</sup> then took a stick from the ground and began scratching the ground with it, continuing thus for a while. Then he raised his head and threw the stick away, saying: 'Shall I not tell you what I heard from the Messenger of Allah about the Sun and the Moon, the beginning of their creation, and the course of their existence?' We said: 'Yes, may God bless you!'

He continued: 'The Messenger of Allah was asked about that and said: "When God had perfected what He had created, and only Adam remained (to be created), He created two suns from the light of His Throne. As for the one which in His prior knowledge God foresaw to leave as the Sun, He created it like this world, together with its places of rising and of its setting. As to the other one that God foresaw in His prior knowledge He would destroy and transform into a moon, He created it to be less than the Sun in strength. But one only sees it as small because of the great height of heaven and its distance from Earth. If God had left the second sun as it was in the beginning, one would not know night from day, nor day from night. The hired man would not know when to work, or when to take his pay. The one who fasts would not know until when to fast and when to break the fast, nor would a woman know how to count the *'iddah*.<sup>49</sup> Muslims would not know the times of their prayers,

<sup>47</sup> 'Abdallāh b. al-'Abbās, (619–686/88 C.E.) a relative of the Prophet, called "*ḥabir al-'Arab*", "the Arabian 'rabbi,' or teacher" (from Hebrew *ḥaver*) for his knowledge of Jewish and other ancient lore, also *bahr*, "sea (of knowledge)". *EP*, I:40–41. Ka'b al-Aḥbār, a Jewish convert to Islam, and an early source on Jewish matters. See p. 8, n. 11 above.

<sup>48</sup> Qur'ān 2:156: "*innā li-llāh wa'innā ilayhi rāji'ūn*", a common statement used by Muslims in various circumstances to stress their acceptance of God's decree.

<sup>49</sup> A requisite period counted after menstruation, childbirth, and other "defiling" circumstances, until a woman becomes "clean" or "purified" and available to her husband. It is also the period of abstention from sexual relations of a widow,

or the time of their pilgrimage. Creditors would not know when to claim their debts, nor would people know when to till the soil, nor when to rest to comfort their bodies. God was All-caring and All-merciful to His worshippers and sent Gabriel, and ordered his wing to cover the face of the Moon three times, which at that time was as strong as the Sun, thus dimming its radiance; but the light remained in it. This is what He said: “*We have appointed the night and the day as two signs; then We have blotted out the sign of the night, and made the sign of the day to see.*” (17:12) The blackness in the interior of the Moon, like lines in it, is nothing but the trace of that erasing. Then God created the Sun from the brilliance of His light. God then created for the Sun a wheel in which there were three hundred and sixty spokes, and from among the angels of the lowest Heaven, placed three hundred and sixty angels in charge of the Sun and its wheel, each one of whom was suspended from one of those spokes.

“God created places of sunrise and sunset in the regions of the Earth and the two sides of Heaven as one hundred and eighty springs in the East, consisting of black clay, and one hundred and eighty springs in the West, likewise of black clay. The boiling of the latter wells up like a pot when it boils strongly, for that is what He said: ‘*He found it (the Sun) setting in a muddy spring*’ (18:87)—and the meaning of *hami’ah* (muddy) is “black with clay”. Each day and night it has a new rising-time and a new setting-time; the time between the earliest rising and the earliest setting occurs when the day is longest in the summer, whereas the latest rising and setting times mark the shortest day in winter. For thus did He say: ‘*Lord of the two Easts, and Lord of the two Wests*’ (55:17)—meaning its last is here and its first is there. He left the rising and setting times that were between those (two points); thereafter He put them all together and said: ‘*Lord of the sunrises and the sunsets,*’ (70:40) and this equals the number of all those springs.

“Then God created a sea three *parasangs*<sup>50</sup> beneath the Lowest Heaven; it is the hemmed-in wave free-standing in the air, God making this possible. Not a drop falls from it. All the stars dwell in that sea. It streams with the speed of an arrow, and with its force. It

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divorced woman, or one whose marriage has been annulled, before she may remarry. See *’iddah*, *EI*<sup>2</sup>, III:1010–13; also p. 55, n. 13 below.

<sup>50</sup> Arabic *farsakh*, originally an Iranian measure of distance that spread throughout the Islamic world; equivalent to 6 km. Cf. Huart/Sadan, *farsakh*, in *EI*<sup>2</sup>, II:812.

extends evenly in the air like an extended mountain between the East and the West. The Sun, Moon, and planets rush in that sea with the speed of the turning of a millstone because of the terrors of the Day of Resurrection and its shaking. For that is as He said: *'Each swimming in an orbit.'* (21:34; 36:39) The orbit of the wheel lies in the depths of the water mass of that sea. By Him in Whose hand is the soul of Muḥammad, if the Sun were to appear without that sea it would burn up everything on the face of the Earth, even boulders and rocks. If the Moon were to appear without that sea, the people of the Earth would be infatuated with it so that they would worship it instead of God, except for those of His saints and obedient adherents whom God would wish to safeguard."

"Ibn 'Abbās said that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said: 'By my father and mother, Messenger of Allah, you mentioned the movement of the planets with the Sun and the Moon; and God swore by the planets in the Qur'ān just as you mentioned today. What are the planets?' Muḥammad said: "Alī, they are the five stars: Jupiter, which is *al-Mushṭaṭī*, Saturn, Mercury, Mars, and Venus. These are the five stars that rise and move with the Sun and the Moon in orbit. As for the rest of the stars, all of them are suspended in the sky as lamps that hang in the mosque. They rotate with the Heaven in praise, sanctification, and prayer to God.' Then the Prophet said: 'If you would like to perceive this, observe the rotation of the orbit, once from here and once from elsewhere. And if you can not perceive the orbit, then (observe) the galaxy and its whiteness, once from here and once from elsewhere. For this is the rotation of the Sun and the Moon and the rotation of the stars all together, except for the five whose rotation today is as you see, for that is their prayer. But their rotation on the Day of Resurrection will be at the speed of the turning of the millstone, because of the terrors of the Day of Resurrection. For that is His statement: *"Upon the day when heaven spins dizzily"* (52:9)—meaning it will rotate a full turn—*"and the mountains are in motion."* (ibid.) When the Sun rises it does so from some of those springs, (riding) on its wheel, having three hundred and sixty angels with it who spread their wings, and pull it in orbit while praising and sanctifying God in accordance with the hours in the day. The Moon too, is different in accordance with the hours of the night, which vary between length and shortness, whether in winter or summer, autumn and spring.'

'If God wishes to test the Moon and the Sun and show Mankind

a miracle in order to induce them to turn back from disobeying Him and to accept obedience to Him, the Sun moves off the wheel. At one time indeed, the Sun fell down from the wheel so as to sink into the depths of the water of that sea which is the orbit. And if God wishes to make that miracle even greater, so that the fear of mankind grows more intense, the Sun falls off entirely and none of it remains on the wheel. That happens when the day becomes dark and the stars appear—and this is the extreme of its eclipse. But if God wishes to make it somewhat less of a miracle, half of it or a third or two-thirds falls into the water, while the remainder stays on the wheel. This, then is a lesser eclipse than the one by which the Sun and the Moon are tested. It is (still) a terror for Mankind and a reprimand from God. In any of these cases, the angels responsible for the wheel are in two groups: one group approaches the Sun and moves it toward the wheel, while the other group approaches the wheel and moves it toward the Sun, thereby leading it through the orbit in accordance with the hours of the day or the hours of the night, doing so whether it is day or night, so that (the day or night) should not exceed its respective length. God inspired them with that knowledge and gave them this power.<sup>51</sup>

‘What you see after an eclipse, the Sun’s or Moon’s slow appearance out of the darkness which covered it, that is the emergence from the depths of the water of that sea. If the angels bring forth the (Sun), all of them gather together and carry it and place it on the wheel. That is so when it is revealed to the world, (the angels) praise God for empowering them to perform this task. They hang on to the spokes of the wheel so as to pull it, by God’s permission, in the flood of the sea. And when they bring it to the place of its setting they make it enter through one of those springs, and it falls from the horizon of the sky into the spring.’

Then Muḥammad said: ‘I marvel at God’s creation, but the omnipotence He has revealed with what has not been created is even more wondrous. On this matter, Gabriel said to Sarah: “*What! Do you wonder at God’s command?*” (11:73)<sup>51</sup> A related matter is that God created two cities, one in the East and the other in the West. Each of the two cities had ten thousand gates with a distance of a *parasang* from one gate to another. The inhabitants of the city in the

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<sup>51</sup> That refers to Sarah’s response when told by the angels that she would give birth at her late age. See Gen. 18:12.

East are remnants of 'Ād, descendants of those of their believers who put their faith in Hūd.<sup>52</sup> Its name in Syriac is Barqīshā and in Hebrew Jābaliq. The name of the city in the west is Barjīša in Syriac, and in Hebrew it is Jāyir Sāniyūt.<sup>53</sup> Every day ten thousand men stand on guard at each gate of these two cities with weapons and horses, to alternate with each other in guarding from that day until the "day when the trumpet shall sound." (20:102) By Him Who holds the soul of Muḥammad in His hand, were it not for the multitude of these people and the clamor of their voices, the inhabitants of this world would hear the impact of the Sun when it rises and when it sets.'

'Beyond them are three nations whose number only God knows; they are Minshak, Tāris, and Nāwīl. Beyond them are Gog and Magog,<sup>54</sup> and Gabriel set out bringing them to me on the night he ascended with me to the heavens.<sup>55</sup> I invited Gog and Magog unto God and His religion and His worship, but they refused to respond to me, so now they are in the Fire together with those sons of Adam and of Iblīs who have disobeyed God. Then he set forth with me for those two cities, and I invited them unto God and His religion and His worship, and they responded and turned in repentance. So they are our brothers in the Faith. He among them who does good is among those righteous, while he who does evil is among the idolaters. Then he set out with me for the three nations and I called them to the religion of God and His worship, but they refused me and denied God and rejected His messengers, so they are in the Fire with Gog and Magog and the rest of those who rebelled against God.'

'When the Sun sets He raises it up to the Seventh Heaven with the speed of the flight of angels. It is confined beneath the Throne and seeks permission from whence it should be commanded to rise, from its setting-place or its rising-place, it is covered with brilliance—

<sup>52</sup> 'Ād, a mythical tribe of pre-Islamic Arabia, to whom God sent the Arabian prophet Hūd. See Qur'ān 11 (Sūrah of *Hūd*), p. 105 below.

<sup>53</sup> According to Ṭabarī, p. 68, Rosenthal, p. 237: "The name of the city in the east is Marqisiya in Syriac and Jabalq in Arabic . . . in the west is Barjisiya in Syriac and Jabars in Arabic."

<sup>54</sup> See n. 33 above.

<sup>55</sup> Referring to the *Isrā'*, or *Mīrāj*, the Night Journey of Muḥammad from Mecca to Jerusalem to Heaven, ostensibly referred to in Qur'ān 17: 1, a major theme in Islamic exegesis and in popular and mystical tradition. See *ET*<sup>2</sup>, VII:97-105, *s.v.*, *mīrāj*.

the Moon, by contrast, is covered with light<sup>56</sup>—each in accordance with the number of hours of the night and the day. Then He brings the Sun to (the space) between the Seventh Heaven and the lowest levels of the Garden, with the speed of angels' flight. It goes down opposite the East from heaven to heaven, and when it reaches this Heaven, that is when dawn breaks in the morning. When it descends from those springs, that is when the morning becomes bright, and when it reaches this side of the Heaven, that is when the day shines. Those are its rising- and setting-places from its first to last Spring of rising and setting. Thus six months are completed; then, when it returns from Spring to Spring, rising and setting until it reaches its last Spring, the year is complete. Its days and nights number three hundred and sixty.<sup>57</sup>

'God created a curtain of darkness in the East and placed it on the Seventh Sea in the amount sufficient for the number of nights from the time God created the world to the time it will end. When the Sun sets, one of the angels responsible for the night approaches and takes a handful of darkness from that curtain, and moves towards the West. (While he is doing this) that darkness flows continuously from between his fingers little by little, as he controls the twilight. As the twilight disappears he releases the darkness completely. Then he spreads his two wings that they reach the four quarters of the Earth and the two sides of the sky and even extend beyond—as God wills—out into the air. He carries along the darkness of the night with his two wings while praising and sanctifying (God), until he reaches the West in accordance corresponding with the hours of night. When he reaches the West, morning shines from the East. He folds up his wings and gathers the darkness—all of it—bit by bit, taking it in his two hands, then gathers it all in one hand (so that it is) like the handful that he took from the curtain in the East. Then he places it in the West in the Seventh Sea. From there comes the darkness of the night whenever that curtain is moved to the East and to the West.'

'When "*the trumpet is blown*," (20:102) the days of this world will come to an end, as well as the light of day (coming) from the brilliance

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<sup>56</sup> For the sun *ḍawʿ*, "light", is here translated "brilliance"; for the moon, *nūr* "light".

<sup>57</sup> This number is based on the Islamic calendar in which each month has thirty or twenty-nine days.

of the Sun, and the darkness of night from that curtain. The Sun and Moon will continue thus from their rising-place to their setting-place until they ascend to the Seventh Heaven to their place of confinement beneath the Throne, until the time which God has set for the repentance of Mankind. Rebelliousness will increase on Earth and goodness will disappear with no one to command it, whereas reprehensible deeds will spread with no one to forbid them.<sup>58</sup> When the people act thus, the Sun will remain confined beneath the Throne for the length of a night, and when it will bow down and ask leave of its Lord as to whence it should rise; it will not be given leave, nor will it be given any reply. Then the Moon will come to the Throne and bow down with (the Sun) asking leave as to whence it should rise. But no leave and no reply will be given to the two of them until they will both be confined, the Sun for the span of three nights and the Moon for two nights.'

'Only those who keep vigil in prayer on Earth will be aware of the length of that night, and at that time they will be but a small band on Earth. They will be despised among the people in each land of the Muslims and insignificant in their own eyes. On that night, each one of them will sleep as long as he did on previous nights. Then he will arise, perform his ablutions, enter his place of prayer, and pray his private devotions; but it will not become morning at the time when it became morning every previous night. He will find that strange, and will go outside and look at the sky, and behold, night will be in its place and the stars will have made their rotation in the sky, and will have moved to their places from the beginning of the night. He will not find that strange, but will have his suspicion about it and say: "Have I recited less (than usual), or cut my prayer short, or did I arise before my time?" Then he will arise and return to his place of prayer and pray (again) in like manner, then look out and still not see the dawn. Again he will go out, and lo! night will still be in its place, and that will increase his ominous feeling and fear will overcome him, and he will suspect a calamity. Then he will say to himself: "Perhaps I cut short my prayer, or recited less than usual, or got up at the beginning of the night." Then he will return in apprehension and fear, anxious about what

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<sup>58</sup> Referring to the Qur'anic dictum of *al-amr bil-ma'rūf wa'l-nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding good and prohibiting evil), see Qur'an 3:114; 7:157; 31:17, and variants. See p. 427, n. 18 below.

terror to expect that night. Then he will arise and pray again, like his private devotion each previous night, as he had done before that. He will look, and not see the dawn, and will go forth a third time to look at the sky, and lo! He will find that the stars will have rotated with the sky, and come to their positions at the beginning of the night. Thereupon he will become anxious with the anxiety of a believer who knows about what he was being warned. Fear will overtake him as well as regret. Then they will call one another, for they had been acquainted with each other and in connection with each other previously. In each town those who keep vigil will gather that night in one of their mosques, supplicating God with weeping and clamor for the remainder of that night.'

'When three nights have passed, God will send Gabriel to the Sun and the Moon, and he will say to them: "Your Lord commands you to return to your setting-place and that you rise from there, for here We have no light for either one of you." Thereupon the two will weep in dread of God and fear of the Day of Resurrection, and their weeping will be heard by the dwellers of the Seven Heavens and those below, as well as by the dwellers in the pavilions of the Throne and those above them. And all of them will weep because of the weeping of these two, in the fear of death which will befall them, and the fear of the Day of Resurrection.'

'Then the Sun and the Moon will return to their setting-place and rise from there. While those who keep vigil are weeping and imploring God, and the heedless ones will still be unmindful, a voice will call out: "Lo! The Sun and the Moon have risen from their setting-place!" People will look up, and behold, they will see the two of them black, with no light in the Sun nor the Moon, just as they were in their eclipses in earlier times. For that is God's word: "*And the Sun and the Moon are brought together,*" (75:9) and His saying: "*When the Sun shall be darkened.*" (81:1) The two will arise thus like two opposing camels, each one struggling to get ahead of the other, while the inhabitants of the Earth will cry for help to each other; and mothers will neglect their children, lovers will neglect the beloved fruit of their hearts, and every soul will busy itself with what it has wrought. As for the righteous and innocent, their weeping will be of help to them on that day and will be recorded for them as an act of worship on their part. It will be of no avail for the wicked and dissolute, rather it will be foreordained to them as their affliction. When the Sun and the Moon reach the navel of the sky, which is its midpoint,



Gabriel will come to them and take hold of their rays and return them to the West. He will not let them set at their setting-places in those springs, but will make them set at the Gate of Repentance.”

‘Umar said: “By my father and mother, Messenger of Allah! What is the Gate of Repentance?” And he said: “‘Umar, God created a gate for repentance in the rear of the West, which has two panels of gold, crowned with pearls and jewels. It is forty years (distance) from one panel to the other for a fast rider, and that gate has been open from the time God created (the world) until the dawn of that night when the Sun and the Moon will arise from their setting-places. The repentance of any worshipper of God who has repented sincerely, from the creation of the world until that day, entered by that gate and then ascended to God.”

Mu‘ādh b. Jabal said: “By my father and mother, Messenger of Allah, what is (meant by) sincere repentance?” He said: “That a person should be sorry for the sin he perpetrated, and ask pardon of God, and not return to (doing) it, just as milk does not return to the udder.”

He continued: “Gabriel will make the Sun and the Moon set by that gate, then shut the door panels so tightly that it will seem as if there had been no crack between them at all. Once the Gate of Repentance is locked, no repentance will be accepted from any person thereafter. Nor will any good deed performed by a person thereafter in Islam be of help to him, except for one who had performed good deeds before. For he will be inflicted with what he was to be inflicted before that day, as He said: *“On the day that one of the signs of your Lord comes, it shall not profit a soul to believe that never believed before, or earned some good in his belief.”* (6:159)

Ubayy b. Ka‘b said: “By my father and mother, Messenger of Allah, what will happen to the Sun and the Moon after that, and what about mankind and the Earth?” He said: “After that, Ubayy, the Sun and the Moon will once again be covered with their light, and they will rise and set as they did before. As for mankind, despite the horror and awe of the supernatural events they witnessed, they will solicit the Earth, the rivers will flow there, and they will plant trees and erect buildings. As for the Earth, if a man’s mare foaled a colt, he would not be able to ride it until the hour came from the time of the rising of the Sun from its setting-place until *‘the trumpet is sounded.’*” (20:102; 27:87; 69:13)

Ḥadhīqah said: “May God make me your ransom, O Messenger

of Allah! What will it be like for mankind when *'the trumpet is sounded?'*" (ibid.) He said: "O Ḥadhīqah, by Him who holds my soul in His hand, verily the trumpet will be blown and the Hour will arrive and a man will have plastered his water-trough and the water will not enter it. The Hour will arrive and a man will have just taken milk from his camel and will not have drunk it. The Hour will arrive, and a piece of cloth will lie between two men and they will not have time to spread it, nor fold it, nor sell it. The Hour will arrive and a man will raise a morsel to his mouth but not eat it." Then he recited this verse: *'But it shall come upon them suddenly when they are not aware.'* (29:53) When the Hour arrives God will pass judgment between the inhabitants of any two houses, and two groups of people—those of the Garden and those of the Fire. Before they enter (either of) them, God will call on the Sun and the Moon and they will be brought before Him, darkened, with no light, left grieving, having experienced the quakes and the other calamities; their entire bodies trembling because of the terror of the Day of Resurrection, and the terror of the present day—and for fear of the Merciful One. When both of them are in front of the Throne, they will sink to the ground bowing to God, saying: "Our God, You know how obedient we are to You, and how we persevere therein, and how much we hurry to carry out Your command (during all) the days of this world. So do not punish us because of the idolaters' worship of us. For You know that we did not call them to worship us, and we did not neglect worshipping You." And God will say: "You are right. I have decreed for Myself to create and create again. I shall return the two of you to the state in which I created you. So return to that of which I created you." And they will say: "O our Lord, from what did you create us?" And He will say: "I created you from the light of My Throne, so return to it." Then a lightning bolt will flash from each of them that will almost snatch away the eyesight with its light, and they will become mingled with the light of the Throne. For that is as He said: *'Surely it is He Who creates, then creates again.'*" (85:13)

ʿIkrimah said (continuing): "Then I set out, together with the people who had told what they had heard from Kaʿb regarding the matter of the Sun and the Moon, until we came to him and told him of the anger of Ibn ʿAbbās and his reaction to his *ḥadīth* and what had been related to us from the Messenger of Allah regarding the story of the Sun and the Moon from their creation to their

origin. Ka'b al-Aḥbār said: 'I related (the story) on the authority of an abrogated, old book,<sup>59</sup> which has been passed from hand to hand, while Ibn 'Abbās related from a book newly revealed by the Merciful, which abrogates other books, and stems from the Master of the Prophets and Messengers, the Best of Mankind.'<sup>60</sup> Then (Ka'b) arose and went to Ibn 'Abbās and said: 'I have been told how angry you were at my *ḥadīth* and what you have related from the book of God and the tradition of the Messenger of Allah. Indeed I ask God's pardon for that, although I did not fabricate this of my own accord, but took it from an old book, and I do not see that there is anything in it about distinctions between infidels and Jews. Even if I had related what I did from a book newly revealed by the Merciful, which abrogates other books, and stems from the Master of Messengers, I should like you to relate to me what you related to your companions about the *ḥadīth* of the Sun and the Moon. I will memorize the *ḥadīth* from you, and if I ever relate anything about the Sun and the Moon hereafter, it will be the *ḥadīth* which you relate to me instead of my earlier *ḥadīth*.'"

'Ikrimah said (in conclusion): "By God! Ibn 'Abbās repeated the *ḥadīth* again and again for him, and I studied it in my heart, chapter by chapter, and he neither added anything nor subtracted, and he made nothing precede nor follow (its previous order). This increased my liking for Ibn 'Abbās and aided my memorization of *Ḥadīth*. And God is All-knowing!"

<sup>59</sup> Meaning by this the Hebrew Bible.

<sup>60</sup> Here, of course, meaning the Qur'ān.

## ADAM AND EVE

### A SESSION ON THE STORY OF ADAM, CONSISTING OF MANY CHAPTERS

#### *Chapter 1 About the Creation of Adam<sup>1</sup>*

The sages have said that God brought creation into being in order to manifest His existence, for if he had not done so, it would not be known that He exists. It was also to show the perfection of His knowledge and His omnipotence by the manifestation of His perfect and masterful works, because they would not have been feasible except for a powerful, wise master. Also in order to be worshipped, for He loves the devotion of those who worship. He rewards humankind for it by virtue of His grace, not by virtue of their deeds; yet He had no need of the devotion of those He has created. Indeed, the obedience of those who obey does not increase His dominion, nor does the rebellion of the disobedient diminish it. God said: *"I have not created the jinn and humankind except to serve Me."* (51:56) Also to show his kindness, for He is kind, and he brought humankind into being to be kind and gracious to them, and to treat some with justice and others with grace. He created believers especially for mercy, as He has said: *"He is All-compassionate to the believers."* (33:43) And He said: *"But they continue in their differences, excepting those on whom thy Lord has mercy. To that end He created them."* (11:118-19) Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq and al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim said: "That is to say, for mercy He created them and (so) that they might praise him, for He loves praise."

It is related that when God created Adam and presented his descendants to him, he found among them the healthy and the ill, the beautiful and the ugly, the black and the white. So he said: "O

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the version of the story of Adam in Ṭabarī, pp. 86-167; Rosenthal, pp. 157-337; Kisā'ī, pp. 23-44; Thackston, pp. 23-76. See also J.P. Monferrer Sala, *Historia de Adan y Eva*, and J. Knappert, *Islamic Legends*, I, pp. 35-41; Tottoli, *Storie*, pp. 28-51.

Lord, would you not want to make them equal?" And God replied: "I love to be thanked."

Abū l-Ḥasan al-Fattāl said: "God created the angels (to show His) omnipotence, created things as lessons to be learned, and He created you as trials. He said: *'(God is) He Who created you, then provided for you, then He shall make you die, then He shall give life to you.'*" (30:40)

The sages have said: "He has created you to show His omnipotence, then provided for you to show His magnanimity, then He will cause you to die to show His power and authority, then He will revive you to show His justice and favor, reward and punishment."

One of them said that God created all creatures for the sake of Muḥammad. Qatādah—Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab—Ibn 'Abbās: "God manifested to Jesus: 'Jesus, believe in Muḥammad and command your nation to believe in him. For if not for Muḥammad I would not have created Adam, nor the Garden, nor the Fire. I created the Throne on water and it surged, so I wrote on it: "There is no god but Allah and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah," and it became calm.'"

It is said that He created Mankind for an important purpose that He has hidden from them and will not reveal to them until that for which He created them befalls them. As God said: *"What, did you think that We had created you only for sport, and that you would not be returned to Us?"* (23:115) 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said: "O people, fear God, for no man has been created for no purpose so he should dally, nor has been forsaken to no purpose so that he should talk nonsense."

Al-Awzā'ī said: "It has reached me that there is an angel in Heaven who calls out every day: 'Would that Mankind had not been created! Or would that they, once created, know for what they have been created!'"

Someone said: "When they died and then are recreated, they know for what they were created; then they sit and remind each other what they have come to know."

Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān the ascetic used to say in his prayer dialogues: "My God, you have hidden from me my term of life and have charged my actions against me, and I do not know which of the two abodes is my final destination; you have detained me in the posture of grief-stricken without end for as long as you let me live."

Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥakīm said: "God placed the son of Adam between affliction and decay. As long as the soul dwells in the body; he is in affliction; when the soul leaves his body, he is in decay; and

then (at last) happiness comes to him, so he is between affliction and decay.”

One of the sages said: “Son of Adam, look at the gravity of your position in this world. Your Lord took an oath, saying: *‘I shall assuredly fill Hell with jinn and mankind all together,’* (11:119) while Iblīs swore, saying: *‘Now, by Your Glory, I shall pervert them all together, excepting those of your servants among them that are sincere.’* (38:83–4) And you, miserable one, are between God and Iblīs, downtrodden yet carefree at ease, and God knows.”

*Chapter II On the Creation of Adam, of what He is Made, and his Distinguishing Features*

The commentators have said in different words but similar meanings: “When God desired to create Adam, He manifested to the Earth: ‘From you I shall create humans, some of them will obey Me and others will disobey Me. Those who obey Me I shall allow to enter the Garden, and those who disobey I shall make to enter the Fire.’ Then he sent Gabriel to the Earth in order that he bring Him a handful of its soil. When Gabriel approached to take the soil, the Earth said to him: ‘I take refuge in the power of God Who sent you, that you not take any thing from me which will have a share in the Fire tomorrow.’ So Gabriel returned to his Lord without taking anything from the Earth, and said: ‘Lord, the Earth took refuge in You and I did not want to approach it.’

Then God ordered Michael, and he came to the Earth and it likewise sought refuge in God refusing to let him take anything from it, so he returned to his Lord without taking anything. Then God sent the Angel of Death and he came to the Earth, but it again refused that he take anything from it. However, he said: ‘God forbid that I disobey any of His command.’ So he took a handful from its four corners, from its upper surface, and from its swamps, from its clay and its red, black, and white (soils), from its smooth and its rough ground. Likewise there are among the offspring of Adam the good and the evil, the pious and the vicious, the beautiful and the ugly. Therefore their forms and colors differ. God said: *‘And of His signs is the creation of the Heavens and the Earth and the varieties of your tongues and hues.’* (30:22)

The Angel of Death ascended with the soil to God, Who commanded him to form all of the soil into clay, and let it ferment. So

he kneaded it in bitter water and in sweet and salty (water) until he formed it into clay, and leavened it. Therefore human natures vary. Then he commanded Gabriel to bring him a handful of the white (soil) which is the heart of the Earth, its splendor and its light, to create Muḥammad from it. So Gabriel descended with the favorite angels of Paradise, the Cherubim, and the angels of the highest plane, and took a handful (of soil) from the place of the Prophet's tomb, which, at that time, was white and pure. It was kneaded in the Blessed Water of Paradise, and was so fresh that it became like a white pearl. Then it was immersed in all the rivers of the Garden. When it came forth from the rivers, God looked at this pure pearl and it trembled for fear of God, whereupon one hundred and twenty-four thousand drops fell from it, and from each drop God created a prophet, and all the prophets—may the blessings of God be upon our Prophet and upon them—were created from his light. Then the pearl was shown round the Heavens and the Earth, so the angels came to know Muḥammad at that time, before they knew Adam. Then He kneaded it with the clay of Adam and left it for forty years until it became sticky, pliable clay. Then He left it for another forty years until it became 'sounding clay', like pottery. It is the dry clay that rings when you strike it with your hand, that is, it makes a noise to make it known that its characteristic is craftsmanship and omnipotence, not by its innate nature or (human) cleverness. Dry clay does not yield, nor is it easy to mold it. Then He shaped it into a body which He cast down for forty years on the path of the angels who descend to Heaven and ascend from it, for that is His word: *'Has there come on man any period of time [when he was a thing unremembered?]*'" (76:1) Ibn 'Abbās said: "The man was Adam, and the period was forty years during which Adam was a body cast down at the gate of the Garden."

The following report is found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Tirmidhī<sup>2</sup> with a chain of authorities going back to the Messenger of Allah. It is a commentary on the beginning of the Sūrah of the Cow (Sūrah 2): "God created Adam with His hand from a handful (of soil) which he took from all the earth, from the plains and the mountains, the black, white, and red soil; so his descendants became of the colors

<sup>2</sup> One of the six canonical collections of the *Ḥadīth*, this one by Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad al-Tirmidhī, d. between 883–893 C.E.

of the Earth.” ‘Abdallāh b. Salām asked the Messenger of Allah: “How did God create Adam?” He replied: “He created Adam’s head and forehead from the soil of the Ka‘bah; his chest and back from Jerusalem; his thighs from the earth of the Yemen; his legs from the earth of Egypt; his feet from the earth of the Hejaz, his right hand from the earth of the East, and his left hand from the earth of the West. Then He laid him down at the gate of the Garden, and whenever a host of angels passed by him, they marveled at the beauty of his shape and his tall stature. Never before had they seen any shape similar to his. Iblīs passed by him, saw him and said: “For what purpose were you created?” Then he struck him with his hand, and behold! he was hollow. He entered into his mouth and came out of his rear. So he said to his companions among the angels who were with him: “This is a hollow creature; it is not firm, nor does it hold together.” Then he said to them: “Do tell me, if He prefers this one over you, what will you do?” They said: “We will obey our Lord.” So Iblīs said to himself: “By God, if He prefers this one over me I shall rebel against Him, but if I am preferred over him I shall destroy him.” For so He said: “*I know what things you reveal, and what you are hiding*” (2:33)—meaning the obedience which the angels displayed and the disobedience which Iblīs concealed—He continued, “*Save Iblīs; he refused and waxed proud, and so became one of the unbelievers.*” (2:34)

The account says that the body of Adam was laid down for forty years during which time rains of sadness fell upon it, then the rain of happiness fell upon it for one year; therefore afflictions abound among his descendants, but at the end there will be joy and comfort. Abū ‘Awānah al-Mahrjānī recited for us on this theme:

*They say that a life span consists of two days altogether:  
one day of beloved things, and one day of detested.  
But they err, for a life span is one day of beloved things  
and days of detested ones, with many beginnings*

Ibn al-A‘rābī recited for me saying:

*The trials of Time are many and never end,  
while its joys come to you as blunders of fate.*

Abū Bakr al-Šūlī recited for me this verse by Ibn al-Mu‘tazz:

*What can be more remarkable than this,  
if you think about the adversities of Time:*



*The occurrences of happiness are simply weighed  
Whereas misfortunes must be measured by volume.<sup>3</sup>*

*Chapter III Description of the Soul Being Breathed into Adam*

Scholars have said: "When God wished to breathe his soul into Adam, He commanded it to enter his mouth, but the soul said: '(It is) a corridor with a deep bottom, (leading to) a dark entrance.' So He told the soul a second time and it repeated the same thing, and likewise a third time, until, on the fourth time, He said: 'Enter unwillingly and depart unwillingly.' When God commanded it thus, it entered his mouth. As soon as He breathed the soul into Adam, it entered his brain and wandered about in there for a period of two hundred years, then settled in his eyes. The wisdom of this was that God wished to show Adam the beginning of his creation and his origin, so that when tokens of God's respect for him would be bestowed on his successors, pride would not enter him, nor self-love. Then the soul settled in his nose and he sneezed. When he finished sneezing, the soul settled in his mouth and his tongue and God taught him to say: '*Praise be to God, the Lord of all Being.*' (1:2; 6:45; 10:10; 37:182; 39:79) This was the first thing that his tongue uttered, and his Lord answered him, saying: 'Your Lord will have mercy upon you, Adam, because I created you for mercy.' He said: 'My mercy surpasses My anger.'<sup>4</sup> Then the soul descended to his chest and his rib cage and he began trying to stand upon his feet, but did not succeed, for that is His word: '*Man is ever hasty,*' (17:11) and His word: '*Man was created of haste.*' (21:37) When the soul reached the belly, it desired food, and this was the first desire that entered the belly of Adam.

According to one account, when his Lord said to Adam: "Your Lord will have mercy on you, Adam," he stretched forth his hand and put it on his skull, saying: "Woe is me!" And God said: "What ails you, Adam?" And he answered: "I have sinned." (God) asked: "How have you come to learn that?" And he said: "Because mercy is for those who sin." And that has become a habit among his descen-

<sup>3</sup> There may be a play on words here: *qafazah* "jumps," or *qufzah* "a volume measure of grain."

<sup>4</sup> Not found in the Qur'ān.

dants: if misfortune or tribulation strikes one of them, he places his hand on his head and moans: "Woe is me!"

The soul spread out through his body and became flesh and blood and bones and veins and nerves. Then God covered him with a garment of translucent skin,<sup>5</sup> and he began to increase in beauty every day. When, however, he yielded to sin, it was exchanged for the (present) skin, but a remnant of it has been left in his fingertips to remind him of his original condition.

‘Abdallāh b. al-Ḥārith said: "The animals used to be able to speak before God created Adam; the eagle would come to the fish in the sea and tell it what was on land, and the fish would relate what was in the sea. When God created Adam, the eagle came to the fish and said: 'Today God has created a creature, and I have seen something today that will bring me down from my aerie and will take you out of the sea.' When God finished the creation of Adam and breathed the soul into him, He cut him into small bits, and split him, and shaped him; He completed him and gave him speech, clothed him in the garments of the Garden and adorned him with various decorations, so that from within him a light emanated like the rays of the sun, and a light like that of our Prophet Muḥammad emanated from his forehead like the moon on the night of a full moon.

Then God lifted him onto a throne and had it carried on the shoulders of angels and said to them: 'Take him about My Heavens to see its wonders and all that is in it, so that he will increase in unwavering belief.' The angels said: 'At Your service, our Lord, we hear and obey!' And the angels carried him on their shoulders and circled about the Heavens with him for a period of one hundred years, until he was aware of all its miracles and wonders. Then God created a steed of the excellent musk that was called al-Maymūn, and it had two wings of pearls and jewels. Adam mounted it and Gabriel took its reins while Michael was on his right and Isrāfil was on his left, and they showed him around all the Heavens while he was saying: 'Peace be with you, angels of God!' And they replied: 'And to you, peace of God's mercy and blessing!' And God said: 'Adam, this will be your greeting and the mutual greeting of believers among your descendants until the Day of Resurrection.'

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<sup>5</sup> Arabic *zifī*, as contrasted with the usual word for skin, *jild*.

“Then God taught him all the names. Now, the scholars differ about these names. Rabīʿ b. Anas said: ‘(They were) the names of all the angels.’ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd b. Aslam said: ‘(They were) the names of his descendants.’ Ibn ‘Abbās and most of the people said: ‘He taught him the name of every thing, even to the large and small burrows of a mole.’

“Then God commanded the angels to prostrate themselves to him, as God has said: *‘When I have shaped him, and breathed My spirit into him, fall you down, bowing before him.’* (15:29) Most of the scholars are of the opinion that the command of prostration to Adam was directed exclusively to the angels who were with Iblīs, and not to the other angels. This was a prostration of honor and greeting, not one of prayer and worship. When He commanded them to bow themselves down, *“they bowed themselves, save Iblīs; he refused and waxed proud, and so he became one of the unbelievers.”* (38:73–74)

#### *Chapter IV Description of the Creation of Eve*

The commentators have said: “When God let Adam dwell in the Garden, he was walking around lonely; there was no one to keep him company or befriend him. So God cast sleep upon him, and he slept. God took one of his ribs from his left side, which is called al-Qaṣīrī, and formed Eve from it, without Adam feeling it nor finding any pain therein. For if Adam had felt pain therefrom, no man would be fond of a woman. Then He clothed her in the garments of the Garden, adorned her with all kinds of decorations, and placed her at his head. When Adam awoke from his sleep he saw her sitting at his head. The angels said to Adam, testing his knowledge: ‘What is this, Adam?’ He answered: ‘A woman.’ They asked: ‘And what is her name?’ He replied: ‘Eve (*Hawwā*).’ They said: ‘You are right, but why was Eve given that name?’ He said: ‘Because she was formed from something alive (*ḥayy*).’ They asked: ‘Why did God create her?’ Adam answered: ‘So that she would find rest with me and I with her,’ for that is as God said: *‘It is He who created you out of one living soul, and made of him his spouse that he might rest in her.’*” (7:189)

The Prophet said: “Woman was formed from a crooked rib; if you straightened (corrected) her, you will break her, and if you leave her as she is, you will relish her despite her crookedness.”

It has been said that there is a good reason that men become

more handsome and good-looking with the passage of days and years for they were created from earth and clay, which increases in beauty and uniqueness every day. But women become increasingly ungainly as the days pass because they were created from flesh, and flesh becomes more spoiled as the days pass.

One account has it that when Adam saw Eve, he stretched out his hand to her and the angels said: "What are you doing, Adam?" And he said: "And why (not), when God created her for me?" So the angels said: "Not until you pay her dowry." He asked: "What is her dowry?" They answered: "That you bless Muḥammad three times." He asked: "Who is Muḥammad?" They said: "The last of the prophets from your progeny. If not for Muḥammad, you would not have been created."

Sa'īd b. Jubayr—'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās—the Messenger of Allah: "When God wishes to create a girl, He sends to her two pale-skinned angels crowned with pearls and diamonds. One of them places his hand on her head and the other places his hand on her foot, and the two of them say: 'In the name of our Lord and yours, God, you were created weak from one who has but weak support, who is burdened by toil until the Day of Resurrection.'"

#### *Chapter v How God Put Adam to the Test and How He Fared*

The historians have said: When God let Adam and Eve dwell in the Garden, He permitted them the delights of the entire Garden, except for one tree, for that is what He said: "*And We said: Adam, Dwell you and your wife in the Garden, [and eat thereof easefully where you desire; but draw not nigh this tree,] lest you be evildoers.*" (2:35) (Historians) have differed about the identity of that tree which was the tree of testing. 'Alī said it was a camphor tree, while Qatādah said that it was the tree of knowledge in which there was an indication about everything; whereas Muḥammad b. Ka'b and Muqātil said that it was the ear of grain. It is also said that it was wheat, or that it was a grapevine.

Now Satan instilled evil in the two of them until he made the tree seem desirable to them, so they ate of its fruit which their Lord had forbidden them to eat. He made it attractive to them to disobey God in this matter, so they ate it. According to those who relate those accounts, the approach of God's enemy Iblīs to them and his temptations about this (matter) to them were (as follows):

that Iblīs wished to enter the Garden in order to instill evil in Adam and Eve, but the treasure-keepers (of the Garden) prevented him from doing that. So he went to the serpent, who was one of the most beautiful beasts created by God. She had four legs like the legs of a camel. Now, she was one of the treasure-keepers of the Garden and was a friend of Iblīs, so he asked her to take him into the Garden in her mouth. She put him into her mouth and passed by the keepers with him while they were unaware, and took him into the Garden. He had entered the Garden at the same time as Adam, and when (Adam) entered the Garden and saw the pleasures and bliss therein, he said: "I wish that this were eternal!" Then Satan snatched this opportunity from him for he had come to him before eternal life (had been determined).

Elsewhere it is said that when Iblīs heard of Adam's entering the Garden, he envied him and said: "Woe to me! I have been serving God for so many and so many thousands of years and He has not let me into the Garden, whereas this is a creature which God has created just now and has permitted into the Garden." So he plotted the expulsion of Adam from the Garden. He placed himself at the gate of the Garden and worshipped there for three hundred years until he became renowned for worship, and everyone there knew him for this activity. All that while he was waiting for someone to come out of the Garden so that he might obtain access to Adam through him. So he remained at the gate of the Garden for three hundred years, during which time God did not permit any creature to leave it. While he was doing this, behold, the peacock—who was the master of the birds of the Garden—came out to him. When Iblīs saw him, he said to him: "O noble creature, who are you? And what is your name? I have not seen any creature of God's more beautiful than you." The peacock said: "I am one of the birds of the Garden, and my name is Peacock." Then Iblīs wept and the peacock said to him: "Who are you and why are you crying?" Iblīs replied to him: "I am one of the Cherubim angels, and I weep in sadness because you will lose your beauty and the comeliness of your form. The peacock said to him: "Will I lose what I have?" He replied: "Yes, for you will perish and pass away, and all creatures will pass away, except for those who eat of the fruit of the tree of eternal life—for they (alone) are the immortals of all the creatures." The peacock said: "And where is that tree?" Iblīs replied: "It is in the Garden." And the peacock said: "Who will show us its place?"

Iblīs said: "I will show it to you, if you take me into the Garden." The peacock replied: "How can I take you into the Garden? This is impossible because of the standing-place of Riḍwān, for no one either enters the Garden nor leaves it except with his permission. I will, however, lead you to one of God's creatures that will take you into it: if anyone is able to accomplish this, it is one (creature) and no one else because the creature is a servant of God's deputy, Adam." He said: "Who is it?" The peacock replied: "The serpent." Iblīs said to him: "Set out for her at once, for there lies everlasting bliss for us—if only she will be able to accomplish it."

The peacock went to the serpent and informed her where Iblīs was and what he had heard from him, saying: "I have seen one of the Cherubim angels at the gate of the Garden, whose features are thus-and-so. Can you take him into the Garden, so that he may lead us to the tree of immortal life?" The serpent hurried towards Iblīs, and when she reached him, he repeated to her what he had told the peacock. She said: "How can I take you into the Garden? For if Riḍwān sees you, he will not allow you to enter it." He said to her: "I will turn myself into a wind, and you will place me between your fangs." She replied: "Yes, I will." So Iblīs transformed himself into a wind and entered the mouth of the snake, and she took him into the Garden.

When Iblīs entered the Garden, he showed the snake the tree that God had forbidden to Adam. He went and stood in front of Adam and Eve, but they did not know that he was Iblīs. Then he lamented over them, which made them sad, and they wept. He was the first (ever) to lament, and the two of them said to him: "What has made you weep?" He replied: "I weep for the two of you, for you must die and leave the delight and bliss in which you are now." This weighed down their souls and they were grieved. Iblīs wept and went away.

Then Iblīs came to them later, his words had affected them, and he said: "Adam, shall I lead you to the tree of eternal life and of a never-ending dominion?" He replied: "Yes." He said: "Eat from this tree, the tree of wheat." But (Adam) said: "My Lord has forbidden it to me." So Iblīs replied: "Your Lord forbade this tree to you only so that you would not become angels, or become immortal." But he refused to accept this from him, so (Iblīs) swore to them by God that he was a sincere advisor to them. They were deceived by that, for they did not think that anyone would swear an oath by

God falsely. Thereupon Eve quickly started to eat from the tree; then she extolled (it) to Adam so that he ate (from) it too.

Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq—Yazīd b. ‘Abdallāh b. Qasīṭ—al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn—his father—his grandfather: “I heard Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab swear an absolute oath by God, that Adam did not eat of the tree consciously. Rather, Eve gave him wine to drink until he became drunk, then she led him to the tree and he ate. Therefore did the Messenger of Allah say: ‘Wine is the summation of all abominations, and the source of sins.’”

“It is said that when God told Adam and Eve not to approach this tree, they both said: ‘Indeed, we shall not approach it nor eat of it.’ But they did not make an exception in their words, by adding ‘if this is the will of God.’ For God made them responsible for themselves and they ate of what was forbidden to them. The narrator said that Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn—Ibrāhīm b. al-Ash‘ath—Ibrāhīm b. al-Adham: “This single act of eating has bequeathed us a long-lasting sorrow.” Al-Shiblī said: “The first portion of wine-jug (leaves) sediment. Look here, our father Adam sold his Lord for a handful of wheat, and when he ate of the forbidden tree, God afflicted him with ten things. The first was that He reproved them for this transgression by saying: ‘Did I not forbid you that tree and tell you: “Iblīs is an open enemy to you?”’<sup>6</sup> The second was shame, for when they committed the sin their disgraceful acts became evident (or, their pudenda became visible) and the garments which they wore in the Garden fell off of them. Adam was embarrassed and began to run about the Garden. The jujube-tree took hold of him and seized him by the forelock. His Lord called out to him: ‘Are you fleeing from Me, Adam?’ He said: ‘Yes, O Lord, but out of shame before You.’ Therefore it is said: ‘The careless will have enough shame on the Day of Resurrection.’”

It is related that when Adam’s evil became apparent and his nakedness appeared, he went about among the trees of the Garden asking them for a leaf with which to cover his pudenda. The trees of the Garden rebuffed him until the fig tree had pity on him and gave him a leaf. The two of them—meaning Adam and Eve—began at once sewing (clothes) for themselves from the leaves of the Garden. God rewarded the fig by making its outside and inside equally sweet

<sup>6</sup> See Qur’ān 7:22: “*Satan is for you an evident foe.*”

and useful, and every year God gave him the fruit of the fig tree. The third (affliction) was that He weakened his skin so that it became dark, after his skin had been like brightness all over. He left on him a small amount of that on his fingertips, so that he might remember thereby his original state.<sup>7</sup>

The fourth is that He removed him from His vicinity. It was proclaimed that “no one may dwell near Me who disobeys Me”, for thus He said: *‘Get you down, each of you an enemy to each. In the Earth a sojourn will be yours, and enjoyment for a time’* (7:24)—meaning Adam, Eve, Iblīs, the serpent, and the peacock. Adam alighted in Sarandīb<sup>8</sup> in the land of India—some say on a mountain in the land of India which is called Nūd,<sup>9</sup> some say Wāsim. Eve (alighted) in Jiddah,<sup>10</sup> a town in the land of the Hejaz. Iblīs (alighted) in al-Ubullah in the land of Iraq, which is near Basra—some say Mashān. The serpent alighted in Isfahan (here: Iṣbahān) and the peacock in the land of Bābil (Babylon).<sup>11</sup>

It is said that the wisdom of expelling Adam from the Garden was that among his offspring there were those who did not deserve closeness with God, nor were they suited for the sacred enclosure (of Paradise). But if He were to oust them from among his offspring, God will return him to it to be in it eternally. It is said that God expelled Adam from the Garden before He brought him into it, for that is what He says: *“I am about to place a viceroy on the Earth,”* (2:30) and He did not say: “in the Garden.”

Nāfil b. Azfar b. Aḥmad—‘Uthmān b. ‘Aliyah—al-Waḍīn b. ‘Aṭā’: “Adam said: ‘We were among the progeny of the Garden, but because of (our) sin Iblīs led us in captivity to the Earth. There can be no joy for us in this world, only sadness and weeping as long as we are in the house of captivity, until we return to the house from which we were taken captive.’” The poet has said:

*O watcher gazing with the eyes of a sleeper,  
but the spectacles of fate are not mere spectacles:  
Your soul has raised hopes in you for a connection  
and you have allowed it paths of hope, yet they are not smooth.*

<sup>7</sup> See the similar account, p. 47 below.

<sup>8</sup> *I.e.*, Ceylon, present-day Sri Lanka.

<sup>9</sup> See Rosenthal’s discussion of this name in Ṭabarī, p. 120 (there Nūdhi). Rosenthal, p. 291, n. 788.

<sup>10</sup> *Cf.* “*Djudda*,” *EP*, II:571–73.

<sup>11</sup> See Rosenthal, pp. 291–92, for another account.



*You heap sins on top of sins, hoping thereby  
to reach the stairs of Paradise, the triumph of a worshipper:  
You have forgotten that God expelled Adam  
from there to this world for only one sin.*

The fifth (affliction) is separation. He separated him from Eve for one hundred years, he being in India, she in Jiddah. Each of them set out seeking the other until they drew near to one another and advanced closer, so (the place) was named al-Muzdalifah (place of coming near). They were joined together and that place was named Jam'ah (gathering); and they recognized each other by questioning on a day of questioning. So the place was named 'Arafât (questions) and the day, 'Irfah.<sup>12</sup>

The sixth affliction was enmity. He sowed enmity and hatred among them, as He said: *"Each of you an enemy to each."* (2:36; 7:24; 20:123) Man is an enemy of the serpent, smashing her head whenever he sees her. The peacock is his enemy and the serpent is his enemy, biting him whenever she can. And Iblis is the enemy of all of them. Therein lies a warning signal that when friends come together and together act in disobedience, their disobedience causes enmity, as God has said: *"Friends on that day shall be foes to one another, except the Godfearing."* (43:67)

The seventh was that it was publicly proclaimed regarding their disobedience, for God has said: *"And Adam disobeyed his Lord and so he erred."* (20:121) It is related that one night Abraham was thinking about the story of Adam and said: "O Lord, You created Adam with Your hand, and breathed into him from Your spirit; You made Your angels prostrate themselves before him, and had him dwell in Your Garden without toil. Then, for one mistake, You proclaimed his disobedience and expelled him from Your vicinity in the Garden." God inspired him as follows: "Do you not know, Abraham, that the disagreement of one lover with another is a serious matter?"

The eighth was that the enemy was given power over his children, for He said: *"And startle whomsoever of them you can with your voice, and rally against them your horsemen and your foot, and share with them [in their wealth and their children, and promise them!]"* (17:64)

The ninth was to make this world a prison for him and his chil-

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Tabarî, p. 120, Rosenthal, p. 291. See below, p. 150 in the story of Abraham, for a somewhat different account of the origin of these place-names, all connected with the annual Pilgrimage.

dren, afflicting him with the air of this world and the hardship of cold and heat in it. They did not have any acquaintance with those discomforts because of their being used to the air of the Garden, for it is as He said: "*Therein they shall see neither Sun nor bitter cold.*" (76:13) The Messenger of Allah said: "The Garden is temperate; there is neither heat nor cold in it."

The tenth is fatigue and toil, for that is His word: "*Surely this is an enemy to you and your wife. So let him not expel you both out of the Garden so that you are unprosperous.*" (20:117) He was the first creature whose forehead sweated from fatigue and exertion. Eve and her daughters were afflicted with these traits, and with fifteen other traits besides.

The first is menstruation. It is related that when she ate (from) the tree it bled. God said: "I will surely make you bleed, you and your daughters, once each month, as you have made this tree bleed."<sup>13</sup> The Messenger of Allah said about menstruation: "This is a matter which God has decreed concerning the daughters of Adam." The second is the burden of pregnancy.

The third is the labor pains and the agony of delivery. God has said: "*His mother bore him painfully, and painfully she gave birth to him.*" (46:15) And (it says) in the *Hadīth*: "Were it not for the lapse which was committed by Eve, women would not menstruate, yet would still be sexually mature. They would bear in secrecy and give birth secretly."

The fourth is woman's deficient religion, and the fifth is her lack of intellect. On the authority of Abū Sa'īd, in a *hadīth* which he mentioned, the Messenger of Allah said: "I have not encountered creatures more deficient in intellect and religion which are destructive to the mind of a prudent man, than one of you (women)." So they said to him: "What is our deficiency of intellect and religion, Messenger of Allah?" He replied: "Is not the testimony of a woman worth half the testimony of a man? That is her deficiency of intellect. Is it not so that when a woman menstruates she neither prays nor fasts?" They answered: "Indeed." He said: "That is her deficiency of religion."

The sixth is that her inheritance is half that of a man. God has said: "*To the male the like of the portion of two females.*" (4:11) The seventh is that only they are subject to the *'iddah*.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Not found in the Qur'ān, but see Ṭabarī, p. 107. Rosenthal, p. 278.

<sup>14</sup> See above, p. 31, n. 49.

The eighth is His placing them under men's control, as He has said: "*Men are in charge of women.*" (4:34) Whereas Muḥammad has said: "Deal kindly and well with women, for they have that which is deficient among you." The ninth is that they have nothing in the way of initiating divorce; they do not possess that (right), for it belongs to men.

The tenth is exclusion from *Jihād*. The eleventh is that no prophet arose from their midst. The twelfth is that there is no ruler or judge from among them. The thirteenth is that none of them may travel without an interdicted (male) relative.<sup>15</sup>

The fourteenth is that Friday (prayers) are not convened by them. The fifteenth is that one does not greet them.

He punished Iblīs the accursed with ten things. The first of these was his removal from rule, for he had possessed control over the Earth and over the Lowest Heaven as well as being keeper of the treasure of the Garden. The second was being removed from His vicinity and being cast down to the Earth.

The third was that God transformed his shape, making him into Satan after he had been an angel. The fourth was that He changed his name, for it had been 'Azāzīl,<sup>16</sup> and He named him Iblīs because he despaired (*ablasa*)<sup>17</sup> of the mercy of God. The fifth was that He made him leader of the scoundrels.

The sixth was that God cursed him. The seventh was that He deprived him of knowledge. The eighth was that He locked the Gate of Repentance to him. The ninth was that He made him a rebel, that is to say, empty of goodness and mercy. The tenth was that He made him the spokesman of the people of the Fire.

He punished the serpent with five things:

He cut off her legs and made her move on her abdomen; He disfigured her shape after she had been the most beautiful of animals; He made the dust her food; He made her die every year in

<sup>15</sup> That is a male family member who falls into the category of one whom she is forbidden to marry, hence considered to be a "safe" companion.

<sup>16</sup> See Lev. 16 where the ceremonies in the Jewish temple on the Day of Atonement included the sending of a goat "*ta-'Azazel*" (to 'Azazel)—the meaning of the name or word is not certain (*cf.* *EJ* 3:999–1002)—into the wilderness as a bearer of the sins of the people. Hence the popular connection of the word with evil and the devil. See also *EP*, III:811.

<sup>17</sup> This is an effort to give the name an Arabic root source, but see p. 8, n. 12 above.

winter; He made her an enemy of Mankind, and made Mankind her enemies: whenever they see her they kill her. The Messenger of Allah made it permissible to kill her during prayer or the state of ritual consecration (*iḥrām*).

Abū Hurayrah heard from the Messenger of Allah: "We have not been at peace with snakes since we have waged war against them. Whoever lets go of any serpents out of fear, he is not one of mine."

‘Abdallāh b. Yūnus—Dā’ūd—Muḥammad—Abū l-A‘yan al-Mab‘adī—Abū l-Aḥwaṣ al-Ḥasanī: While Ibn Mas‘ūd was preaching one day, behold, a serpent was going along the wall, so he stopped his sermon and struck it with a staff until he killed it. He said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah say: 'Whoever kills a serpent, is as though he had killed an idolatrous man whose blood it was permissible (to shed).'"

## CAIN AND ABEL

### *Chapter 17 The State of Adam after His Descent to the Earth, and How He Fared*

Ibn 'Abbās said: "When Adam was cast down to Earth onto the mountain of Sarandīb—and it should be noted that its top was nearer to Heaven than all the Earth's mountain peaks—Adam's foot came to rest on the mountain while his head was in Heaven, so that he would listen to the prayers of the angels and their praise of God. Adam became used to this, so that the angels grew fearful of him and complained to their Lord, whereupon Adam's height was reduced to sixty cubits. Before that his head had touched the clouds, which brought about his baldness, a trait inherited by his descendants. When his height was thus diminished, he said: 'My Lord, I was under Your protection in Your dwelling. I have no lord but You, nor guardian save You. There I ate in comfort and could go wherever I wished, but You have cast me down to this mountain. I used to hear the voices of the angels and see them as they surrounded Your throne. I would experience the smell of the Garden and its perfume.<sup>1</sup> Then You cast me down to the Earth and diminished my height to sixty cubits so that I have been cut off from its sound and sight, and the aroma of the Garden has departed from me.' And God answered him: 'Due to your disobedience, Adam.' Then Adam said: 'That was for Your sake. O Lord.'"

Wahb b. Munabbih said: "When God cast Adam down from the Garden and he landed, seated on the ground, he sneezed and blood flowed from his nose. He had never seen blood before then, so what he saw frightened him. The Earth did not soak up the blood, which turned black on its surface like ashes. Adam was seized by great fear and remembered the Garden and the good life there, and he fell down in a swoon and wept for forty years. God sent an angel to him who stroked his back and belly and placed his hand on Adam's heart so that his sadness and swooning left him, and he had relief from the sadness which had overcome him."

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<sup>1</sup> Probably referring to Paradise in Heaven.

Shahr b. Ḥawshab said: "I have been told that when Adam was cast down to Earth, he did not raise his head for three hundred years out of shame before God."

Ibn 'Abbās said: "Adam and Eve wept for two hundred years over the loss of the pleasure of the Garden. They did not eat or drink for forty years, nor did Adam draw near to Eve for one hundred years. When God wanted to be merciful to His servant Adam, He taught him words which caused his repentance to be accepted, as He has said: "*Then Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He turned towards Him; [truly He turns, and is All-compassionate].*" (2:37)

There is a difference of opinion about what those "*certain words*" were. Ibn 'Abbās said: "It was that Adam said: 'Lord, did You not create me with your hand?' He replied: 'Yes.' He said: 'Did You not breathe some of Your spirit into me?' God replied: 'Indeed.' Adam said: 'Did You not make Your mercy come to me before Your anger?' He replied: 'Yes.' 'Did You not let me dwell in the Garden?' He replied: 'Yes.' He asked: 'So why did You expel me from the Garden?' God replied: 'Because of your unfortunate disobedience.' He said: 'Lord, tell me, if I repented and made amends, would You return me to the Garden?' These then are the '*certain words*.'"

'Abdallāh b. 'Umar said: "Adam said: 'Lord, tell me: Is what I committed something which I devised of my own accord, or something that You predestined for me before creating me with Your hand?'<sup>2</sup> He replied: 'It is something which I predestined for you before I created you.' So he said: 'Lord, as You predestined it for me, so forgive me!'"

Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Quraḏī said: "These words are: 'There is no god but You, praise and glory be to You, O God. I did evil and brought harm upon myself, so relent toward me, for You are the Forgiver, the All-merciful. There is no god but You, praise and glory be upon You, my God. I did evil and caused harm to myself, so forgive me, for You are forgiving, the All-merciful. There is no god but You, my God. Praise and glory be to You, Lord, I did evil and brought harm upon myself, so have mercy on me, for You are the best of those who show mercy.'"

<sup>2</sup> An example of the Islamic doctrine of predeterminism; in Arabic, "*al-qaḏā' wa'l-qaḏar*," lit., "the decree and determination." See *ET*, IV:364-67, s.v. *al-Ḳaḏā' wa'l-Ḳadar*.

Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, al-Ḥasan, Mujāhid, and ‘Ikrimah said: “These words are His saying: *Lord, we have wronged ourselves, [and if You do not forgive us, and have mercy upon us, we shall surely be among the lost].*” (7:23)

Then God sent down one of the sapphires of the Garden, and set it down at the place of the House in the size of the Ka‘bah, which had two gates, an eastern gate and a western gate, and in it were lamps of light. Then God inspired Adam: “I have a Sanctuary<sup>3</sup> located directly under My Throne; so go to it and circumambulate it, as (the angels) circumambulate My Throne, and pray there, as they pray at My Throne, for there I shall answer your prayer.”

So Adam left the land of India for the land of Mecca to visit the House, and God designated an angel to guide him; and as a result of this guidance every place he set foot on became inhabited, while whatever he passed over became deserts and wastelands. When he reached ‘Arafāt, Eve had come there from Jidda seeking him in order to meet him. The two of them met at ‘Arafāt on the day of questioning (*‘Irafah*) so that is why that place was named ‘Arafāt. When they left for Minā, Adam was told: “Wish for something.” And he said: “I wish (*atamannā*) for forgiveness and mercy.” So that place was named Minā,<sup>4</sup> and He pardoned their sin and accepted their repentance. Then they left for the land of India.

Mujāhid said: “Ibn ‘Abbās related to me that Adam performed forty pilgrimages on foot from the land of India.” Someone said to him: “Abū l-Ḥajjāj,<sup>5</sup> surely he must have ridden.” He replied: “What would have been able to carry him? By God, his gait measured a three-day journey.”

Ibn ‘Umar said that when Adam made the pilgrimage and performed all the rites, the angels met him to congratulate him on the pilgrimage and on the acceptance of his repentance, saying: “Your pilgrimage was valid, Adam.” A feeling of pride came over him because of that. When the angels saw this in him, they said: “Adam, we have made pilgrimage to this House two thousand years before you.” And Adam’s spirit shrank because of that.

Abū l-‘Āliyah said: “Adam left the Garden with a branch from a

<sup>3</sup> The House and The Sanctuary are alternative names for the Ka‘bah.

<sup>4</sup> Arabic for “wish.” ‘Arafāt and Minā are two stations of the Pilgrimage to Mecca. These are folk etymologies of their names as in p. 54 above. Cf. Ṭabarī, p. 120; Rosenthal, p. 291.

<sup>5</sup> This is the *laqab*, nickname or by-name, of Mujāhid.

tree of the Garden. On his head was a wreath made from the trees of the Garden. But when he came to Earth, that wreath dried up and its leaves scattered. All kinds of aromatic plants sprouted from it then, and for that reason India is the source of all perfume."

Ibn 'Abbās said: "Adam came down from the Garden with some perfume. Then he planted trees originally from the Garden in the valleys of India, and so everything in those valleys was filled with perfume. Therefore perfume is brought from (the trees of) India. Its origin was from the smell of Adam, and his smell was that of the Garden. With him God sent down the Black Stone,<sup>6</sup> which was then whiter than snow, and the staff of Moses,<sup>7</sup> which was made of myrtle from the Garden, and was ten cubits long, in accordance with the height of Moses. Some say it was of the ben-tree."<sup>8</sup>

Sufyān—Maṣūir b. Mu'ammār—Rabī' b. Kharrāsh—Hudhayfah who said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah say: 'When Adam was sent down from the Garden to the land of India, he wore as a garment leaves from the Garden. But they dried up and scattered about the land of India; because of these leaves aloe-trees, sandalwood, musk, ambergris, and camphor trees became fragrant.' They said: 'Messenger of Allah, does not musk come from animals or is it from plants?' He replied: 'It comes from an animal resembling a gazelle, which feeds on those bushes, and God makes musk in its navel. When it feeds during the spring, God forms what it ate into musk and it drops off and human beings make use of it.' They said: 'Messenger of Allah, where does the musk drop off?' He answered: 'Gabriel told me (that it drops) in three districts, it is not nowhere on Earth other than the lands of India, Sa'dā,<sup>9</sup> and Tibet.' They said: 'Messenger of Allah, is not ambergris (originally) from an animal in the sea?' 'Of course,' he said, 'this animal was originally in the land of India and grazed on the land, but God sent Gabriel to her who drove her and her companions and pushed them into the sea. She is the largest animal there is, her girth being one thousand

<sup>6</sup> The story of the Black Stone embedded in a corner of the Ka'bah, is found in the chapters on Adam and the building of the Ka'bah by Abraham, see below 148ff.

<sup>7</sup> For the story of the staff of Moses, see below 292ff.

<sup>8</sup> Or *bān*, often mentioned in Arabic poetry because of its long, straight, tender branches, likened in poetry to tall, slender, tender young women or boys. See Lane, 278.

<sup>9</sup> A town and province of Yemen, north of its capital Ṣāna'a'.



cubits. She drops her dung into the sea as cows drop their dung, and sometimes a portion of ambergris comes from her stomach weighing one thousand five hundred *ratls*<sup>10</sup> or thereabouts.”

“Then Adam felt an aching in his head and body and complained of it to God, who sent Gabriel down to him with the olive-tree and commanded him to take its fruit and press it. He said: ‘This tree holds a cure for every malady except poisoning.’ Then Gabriel led him to the myrobalan tree<sup>11</sup> with white, black, and yellow fruit, and said to Adam: ‘Your Lord greets you, and tells you to eat of this; neither you nor your offspring will ever be cured with any remedy superior to this one, for it is a cure for every ailment. If it remains in your stomach do not fear it; if it is excreted it will take out the illness entirely and will cure it.’ So Adam ate it and was cured.”

The traditionists say that when Adam descended to Earth, and the noxiousness of the (unaccustomed) air struck his body so that he felt it, he complained of a strange feeling in his body, for he had become used to the air of the Garden. He complained about it to Gabriel, who said: “You are complaining of your nakedness.”

“Then God sent down to him the eight animals forming the pairs mentioned in the Sūrah of the Cattle<sup>12</sup> (6:144–45): two sheep, two goats, two camels, and two cows. He ordered him to slaughter one of the sheep; he slaughtered it, then took its wool and Eve spun it. Then Adam wove it and made of it a *jubbah*<sup>13</sup> for himself, and a chemise and veil for Eve. They wore this wool and wept over the garments of the Garden that they had to give up.

Eve was the first to spin and Adam was the first to weave and wear wool. Ibn Jurayj—‘Atā’—Ibn ‘Abbās who said: “A man came to the Prophet, saying: ‘Messenger of Allah, what do you say about my trade?’ And the Messenger of Allah asked: ‘What is your trade?’ He replied: ‘I am a weaver.’ He said: ‘Your trade is that of our father Adam. The first man to weave was Adam. Gabriel taught

<sup>10</sup> A measure of varying weights in different periods and lands of the Islamic world. Originally introduced into Arabia from Mesopotamia. See *EP*, VI:118, *s.v. makāyil*; also Lane, 1102.

<sup>11</sup> In Arabic *ihlīlaj*, a tropical tree of the genus *Terminalia*, the dried plum-like fruit of which, in several colors, was used in dyeing, tanning, and making ink. See Lane, 2899.

<sup>12</sup> *Al-An‘ām*, the 6th Sūrah of the Qur’ān.

<sup>13</sup> A term used for a variety of garments in different periods and areas of Islam. Generally, a coat-like outer garment worn by both men and women. See *EP*, V:741, *s.v. libās*, also Plate XLII there.

him, and Adam was his pupil for three days. God loves your trade; for both the living and the dead have need of it. If anyone among you speaks evil about you, our father Adam will oppose him. If anyone scorns you, then he scorns Adam. Whoever curses you curses Adam, and whoever harms you harms Adam.<sup>14</sup> (God) is their adversary on the Day of Resurrection, so do not fear; and receive good tidings, for your trade is a blessed one and Adam will be your leader into the Garden.” On the authority of Abū Umāmah al-Bāhili, the Messenger of Allah said: “You must wear wool, for then will you experience the insignificance of food. You must wear wool, for then you will be recognized in the Hereafter.<sup>15</sup> Contemplation upon wool invests one with a thoughtful heart, thinking brings wisdom, and wisdom flows in the body as blood, so the more one thinks, the less one craves; whereas the less one thinks, the more one craves, the larger his body grows and the harder his heart. And a hard heart is far from God, far from the Garden, near the Fire.”

It was said that then, after covering his nakedness, Adam complained once again. So Gabriel asked: “What ails you?” And he replied: “I feel agitation and restlessness in my heart because of which I cannot find a path to worship. I feel a creeping like the creeping of an ant between my flesh and my skin.” Gabriel said to him: “It is called hunger.” He asked: “How does one get rid of it?” He answered: “I shall lead you to that,” and he disappeared. Then he brought him two red oxen and an instrument called *‘alāh*, meaning an anvil, and a hammer, bellows, and tongs. Then he brought him sparks from Hell and they fell into Adam’s hand; but a single one of those sparks flew off and fell into the sea. Gabriel went into the sea after it, brought it back and handed it to Adam, and it flew off again and again until he had done this seven times. For that is the word of the Prophet: “This fire of yours is just one part of seventy parts of the fire of Hell after it has been washed in water seven times.” When he brought it the eighth time, the fire spoke and said: “Adam, I shall not obey you, but I shall punish the disobedience of your descendants on the Day of Resurrection.” So Gabriel said:

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<sup>14</sup> These statements may reflect a long-held generally negative view of weavers and their trade.

<sup>15</sup> This emphasis on wearing wool (*sūf* in Arabic) is reflected in the term Sufi, used for Muslim mystics, who wore wool in keeping with the views of Muḥammad as cited here.

“Adam, it will not obey you, but I shall imprison it for you and your descendants so that there may be usefulness in it for you and your descendants.” So he imprisoned it in stone and in iron, for that is His saying: “*Have you considered the fire you kindle? Is it you [that create its wood, or did We?]*” (56:71–72).

It is related that when Adam took the fire, it burned his hand and he drew back from it. Then he said to Gabriel: “Why did it burn my hand and not your hand?” He replied: “Because you disobeyed God, whereas I have not disobeyed Him.” Then Gabriel ordered him to make the plow, so he was the first one to work with iron. Then he brought him a packet of wheat with three grains of wheat in it, and said: “Adam, two grains are for you and one grain for Eve,” thus (the *sūrah* says) “*to the male the equivalent of the portion of two-females.*” (4:11) The weight of one grain was one hundred and eighty thousand *dirhams*,<sup>16</sup> and Adam said: “What shall I do with all of this?” And (Gabriel) said: “Adam, take it, for it is the means to satisfy your hunger. Because of it you were sent out of the Garden, with it you will be able to live in this world. Because of it you and your descendants will experience strife until the Hour draws nigh.”

Then he ordered him to tie fast the oxen, to break some wood and put it on them, and he did that. He began to plow the Earth with them, and he was the first to plow the Earth. The oxen wept because of the comforts of the Garden which were lost to them, and their tears dropped onto the Earth, and from these sprouted millet. Then they urinated, and from that sprouted chickpeas, and they dropped dung, and from that sprouted lentils. Gabriel then broke up those heads (of grain) so as to increase their number; then he sowed them, and they sprouted immediately. Then Adam said: “Now I shall eat.” But Gabriel said: “No, be patient until (the grains) mature.” When they formed ears and began to ripen he said: “Now I shall eat!” Gabriel said: “No,” and taught him to reap. And when he had reaped, he said: “Now I shall eat!” Gabriel said: “No,” and taught him to thresh. When he had threshed, he said: “Now I shall eat!” But Gabriel said: “No,” and taught him to winnow. When he had winnowed it, he said: “Now I shall eat!” Gabriel said: “No,”

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<sup>16</sup> As a weight, the *dirham* varied over the centuries and in different areas. The weight of the standard Egyptian *dirham*, for example, has been set since 1924 at 3.12 grams. See W. Hinz: *dirham EI<sup>2</sup>*, II:319. Also the name given to certain coins. See below, p. 67.

and brought him two stones and taught him to grind. When he had ground it, he said: "Now I shall eat!" Gabriel said: "No," and taught him to knead (dough). (It is said that when Adam had sifted his flour, Gabriel ordered him to scatter the bran in the prepared soil, and barley sprouted there.) When he had kneaded the dough, he said: "Now I shall eat!" Gabriel said: "No," and commanded him to (first) dig a pit, place firewood in it, and light fire in it. He did that, then placed his dough on it and baked it until he made bread baked on embers. He was the first to bake. When he brought it out he said: "Now I shall eat!" Gabriel said: "Not until it cools." When it had cooled he ate it, and when he did, tears came to Adam's eyes and he said: "Why this toil and drudgery?" Gabriel said to him: "This is the promise God made to you, for this is what He said: *'This is an enemy to you and your wife. So let him not expel you both from the Garden, so that you come to toil.'* (20:117) Similarly the time has come for you to eat from the toil of your hand and the sweat of your brow, you and your descendants."<sup>17</sup>

When Adam had eaten his fill of the food his stomach ached, and he did not know what it was, so he complained of that to Gabriel who said: "That is thirst." So he asked: "How can I quiet it?" He disappeared from his view, then returned with a mattock and told him: "Dig the soil!" He dug for a long time until the hole was knee-deep, and fresh water, colder than the snow and sweeter than honey, welled up from beneath his legs. Gabriel said: "Adam, drink your fill from it!" He drank of it and was satisfied. Afterwards he felt a pain worse than the first and second ones, and he said to Gabriel: "What is it that I feel?" He said: "I do not know." So God sent an angel to him and he slit openings in his front and in his back, before that there had been no way out for the food. When what had hurt him came out and he became aware of its smell, he wept about that for seventy years.

They say that when God bestowed iron on Adam, he examined a bar of iron that originated on a mountain and said: "This is of the same kind as that."<sup>18</sup> And he began breaking up trees that were old and dry, and heated the iron on that until it melted. The first thing he beat out from it was a knife with which he worked. Then

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. the somewhat similar story in an ancient Ugaritic poem about Baal and Anath in Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, 114. See p. 91, n. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *I.e.*, as the iron used in making the anvil and the plow in pp. 63 and 64 above.

he beat out an oven, the one that Noah inherited and which boiled with punishment<sup>19</sup> in India.

They say that when God sent Adam down, he took a piece of gold with him out of the Garden. For that reason gold remains unchanged, not deteriorating in wet earth and not rusting in moisture. The soil does not impair it nor does fire consume it because it was brought from the Garden.

It is said that when God sent Adam down to the Earth, He supplied him with thirty types of fruit; ten of them with rind or shell, ten with stones or pits, and ten with neither rind nor pit. Those with rinds or shell were of the first type: the walnut, the almond, the pistachio, the hazelnut, the poppy, the acorn, the chestnut, the bitter orange, the pomegranate, and the banana. Those with stones or pits were the prune, the apricot, the jujube, the peach, fresh dates, the sorb or service-apple, the lotus-fruit, the medlar, and the wild palm-fruit. Those with neither shells nor stones were the apple, the quince, the pear, the grape, the mulberry, the fig, the citron, the carob, the cucumber, and the melon.

Ibn Jurayj said: "God sent Adam down with vessels in which were the seeds for a vine of arbor grapes and of sweet basil, and Adam planted the vine arbor. When everything grew, Iblīs came along and stole the fruit. Adam said to him: 'Woe to you, you caused me to leave the Garden, yet do you not want to grant me a livelihood?' He replied to him: 'I have a rightful share in it.' Adam asked: 'What is your share?' Iblīs answered: 'The intoxicating force; you humans may have the rest of it.'"<sup>20</sup>

Ibn 'Abbās said: "Adam came down from the Garden with three things: the myrtle, which is the queen of all the aromatic plants on the Earth; ears of grain, for that is the queen of foods of the people of this world; and pressed dates, which are the queen of all the fruits of the Earth."

Ibn 'Abbās, 'Ā'ishah, and Abū Ḥurayrah all quoted the Prophet: "Pressed dates come from the plants of the Garden. They contain medicine, and are an immediate antidote. Get yourself the *barnī*"<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The sign of the coming of the great Flood was "and water gushed forth (or, boiled) from the oven." (11:40) See below, p. 95, n. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Possibly a reference to the ambivalent prohibition of drinking alcoholic beverages in Qur'ān 2:219; 4:43; 16:67.

<sup>21</sup> A type of date held to be one of the best varieties, see Lane, 196.

dates and eat them, for they glorify their tree and intercede on behalf of whoever eats them.”

Ibn ‘Abbās said: “When Adam came down to the Earth, the first fruit he ate was the fig.” Ka’b said: “The first to mint the *dinār* and the *dirham*<sup>22</sup> was Adam, for he said: ‘Only with them will commerce be honest.’”

Wahb b. Munabbih said: “When Adam was sent down to the Earth and saw its expanse, and saw no one in it but himself, he said: ‘O Lord, does not this Earth of yours have an inhabitant who can glorify You and exalt You and sanctify You besides me?’ God replied: ‘I will place in it descendants of yours who will glorify, exalt, and sanctify Me. I shall place on it houses which will exalt My name, in which My creation will be praised and My name mentioned. I shall create among Your progeny, Adam, some who will serve Me as is My due. From among those houses I will set one apart especially with My favor, and honor it with My name, and call it My House. I shall make it speak with My majesty, and on it I shall place My glory. I shall make that house a safe sanctuary, whose sanctity will render inviolable everything that surrounds it, is above it, or is below it. He who sanctifies it with My sacredness merits My favor thereby, but He who threatens its adherents therein forfeits the protection (*dhimma*)<sup>23</sup> of My covenant, offends My sacredness, and merits thereby My chastisement and punishment. I shall make this house the First House established for the people in the hollow of Mecca,<sup>24</sup> a holy place to which they will come, disheveled, dusty, *‘and upon every lean beast; they shall come from every deep ravine,’* (22:27) shaking intensely with their words “We are at Your service!”<sup>25</sup> weeping in a loud voice, roaring with cries of “God is great.”<sup>26</sup> Whoever visits it on pilgrimage will desire nothing else, for he has come to visit Me and has sought My hospitality, because it is incumbent on a benefactor to be generous to the delegation visiting him and to his guests, and to grant all of them their needs. Adam, visit it on

<sup>22</sup> The major coins in use in many Islamic societies down to the present.

<sup>23</sup> The term *dhimmi* (i.e., protected one) is used for non-Muslims living under Muslim control.

<sup>24</sup> The city lies in a natural depression.

<sup>25</sup> *Talbiya*, lit., “response, obeying,” uttering the formula *labbayka*, “Here I am!” “At Your service.”

<sup>26</sup> *Takbīr*, lit., “exaltation,” saying *Allāhu akbar*, “God is great.”

pilgrimage as long as you live. After you nations and prophets and centuries of your progeny will visit it, nation after nation, generation after generation.’”

“Then God stroked Adam’s back with His hand, withdrawing from it every living creature He was about to create until the Day of Resurrection, like sprinkling of blood from ‘Arafah, a village near Mecca. Then He took a promise from them and spoke to them, saying: *‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said: ‘Yes, we testify that you are’—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection: ‘As for us, We had no knowledge of that.’*” (7:172)

When asked about this verse ‘Umar b. al-Khattāb said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah say: ‘God created Adam and stroked his back from which He withdrew his offspring, saying: “I created these for the Garden, and they will perform the deeds of those deserving the Garden.” Then He stroked his back and withdrew offspring, saying: “I created these for the Fire and they will perform the deeds of those deserving the Fire.”’ A man said: ‘Messenger of God, how (should one) therefore act?’ And he replied: ‘If God creates a person for the Garden, He will make him perform the deeds of those deserving the Garden, and he will enter the Garden. If God creates a person for the Fire, He will make him perform the deeds of those deserving the Fire, until he dies performing those deeds and is one of the people of the Fire.’”<sup>27</sup>

Wahb b. Munabbih said: “God inspired Adam after He relented toward him, (saying): ‘Adam, I shall combine for you all knowledge in four words: one pertains to Me, one to you, one to be divided between Me and you, and one to what lies between you and humankind. As for the one that is Mine, (it is) that you worship Me and do not associate anything with Me. As for the one that is yours, (it is) what I shall reward you for your deeds to the utmost extent of your need. As to what pertains to Me and you, from you comes prayer and from Me the response. As for what is between you and the people, (it is) that you wish for them what you wish for yourself.’ Adam said: ‘Lord, due to my preoccupation with seeking a livelihood and sustenance instead of glorifying (God) and worship, I do not know the hours of glorification according to earthly days.’ So God sent down a rooster to him, letting him hear the voices of

<sup>27</sup> One of the important formulae of predestination, see p. 59, n. 2 above.

the angels glorifying (God). And it was the first domesticated animal which Adam used among all created beings. Whenever the rooster heard God being glorified in Heaven, it glorified (God) on Earth, and so Adam glorified God whenever the rooster did."

It is related that God sent inspiration to Adam when He wanted to send him down to the Earth, (saying): "Adam, I am making you and your offspring dwell in an abode built on four foundations. The first is that I shall separate what you (humans) join; the second is that I shall disperse what you gather; the third is that I shall destroy what you build; the fourth is that I shall cause to die whatever you beget." Therefore it has been said:

*Beget for death and build for destruction,  
For all of you are proceeding towards a departure.*

*Chapter VII The Descent of Iblīs the Accursed to Earth, and How He Fared after the Curse*

God has said: "*Get you all down, each of you an enemy of each; [and in the earth a sojourn shall be yours, and enjoyment for a time].*" (2:36)

Al-Sha'bī said: "Iblīs was sent down from Heaven wearing a turban which did not descend below his chin,<sup>28</sup> he was one-eyed, and wore a sandal on one of his feet."

Ibn al-Mubārak—Khālīd—Ḥamīd b. Hilāl, who said that he himself disliked putting his hands on his flanks during prayer,<sup>29</sup> because Iblīs descended with his hands on his flanks.

Ḥammād—Thābit and Ḥamīd—'Abdallāh b. 'Ubayd b. 'Umayr that Iblīs said: "Lord, You sent me forth from the Garden because of Adam, but I cannot make him obey me except by Your authority." God said: "You are indeed given power over him." He replied: "Lord, give me more!" (God) said: "For every child born to him, two will be born to you." He said: "Lord, give me more!" (God) said: "Their bosoms are dwelling-places for you, and you will make blood flow from them." He said: "Lord, give me more!" (God) said: "*And rally against them your horsemen and your foot-soldiers, and share with them in their wealth and their children, and promise them. But Satan promises only to deceive.*" (17:64)

<sup>28</sup> The ends of certain turbans would hang down and be tied under the chin.

<sup>29</sup> The usual posture before kneeling and prostration in prayer.



Adam said: "Lord, You have given him dominion over me, but I cannot ward him off except through You." (God) said: "For every child born to you, I shall appoint someone responsible for guarding him from the accomplices of evil." He said: "Lord, give me more!" (God) said: "Goodness has tenfold like it, and I shall increase it, while evil has only one in its likeness, and I shall erase it." He said: "Lord, give me more!" (God) said: "Say, 'O My people who have acted against your own interests, do not despair of God's mercy, [surely God forgives sins altogether; surely He is the All-forgiving, the All-compassionate].'" (39:53) Adam said: "Lord, give me more!" (God) said: "Repentance. I shall not take it away from your children as long as breath remains in them." He said: "Lord, give me more!" (God) said: "I forgive and do not take account of it." Adam said: "That suffices me."

It is related that Iblīs said: "O Lord, You have cursed me and sent me forth from the Garden, and made me a damned Satan, ostracized and reviled; whereas to mankind You sent messengers and revealed books. What are my messengers?" God replied: "Soothsayers." He said: "And what are my books?" "Tattoo marks."<sup>30</sup> "And what is my conversation?" God replied: "Your conversation is lying." He said: "And what is my recitation?" God replied: "Poetry."<sup>31</sup> He said: "And what is my caller?" God replied: "Your muezzin is the reed-pipe."<sup>32</sup> He said: "And what is my mosque?" God replied: "Your mosque is the marketplace." He asked: "And what is my dwelling?" God replied: "Your dwelling is the bathhouse." He asked: "And what is my food?" God replied: "Your food is any thing over which My name is not mentioned." He asked: "What is my drink?" God replied: "Every intoxicating thing." He asked: "What are my snares?" God replied: "Your snares are women."<sup>33</sup>

Muqātil and Juwaybir—al-Ḍaḥḥāk—Ibn 'Abbās: "When Iblīs left the Garden, God cast passion and lust upon him. So he cohabited with himself and laid four eggs from which (came) his offspring."

Ishāq b. Bishr—Muḥammad b. Ishāq: "I have heard that after he had been expelled from the Garden, Iblīs married the serpent

<sup>30</sup> The Hebrew Bible forbids tattooing, see Lev. 19:28.

<sup>31</sup> Reflecting Muḥammad's reputed dislike of poetry and poets. See below, p. 78, n. 49.

<sup>32</sup> The muezzin calls the faithful to prayer, while the reed-pipe in the early days of Islam was considered anathema because most players were women of questionable behavior. Cf. *EP*, VII:207, s.v. *mizmār*.

<sup>33</sup> All of these questioned items are disliked or forbidden in Islam.

into whose mouth he had entered when he spoke to Adam, and from her came his offspring.”

*Chapter VIII The Stories Related about Those to Whom Iblīs Appeared, and who Saw Him with Their Own Eyes and Spoke to Him with their Own Mouths*

It is told that Adam met Iblīs in an open, waterless land and blamed him for his deeds, saying: “Cursed one! What have you caused to happen to me? You beguiled me and caused my expulsion from the Garden and acted as you did towards me.” As he spoke, Iblīs wept and said: “Adam, I did indeed act towards you as you say, and lowered you down to this rank. But who brought *me* to this predicament, and lowered *me* to this rank?”

It is related that Iblīs appeared in human form to Pharaoh in Egypt while he was bathing, and Pharaoh did not recognize him. Iblīs said to him: “Woe to you, do you not know me?” He replied: “No.” He said: “How can that be when you created me? Are you not the one who said: *I am your supreme Lord?*” (see 79:24)

It is also related that Solomon asked Iblīs: “What deeds are the most beloved by you and the most hated by God?” He replied: “Were it not for your rank with God, I would not tell you. I know nothing more beloved to me and more hated by God than a man being content with another man and a woman being content with another woman.”<sup>34</sup>

It is told that the Prophet said: “There is no human being who has neither committed a sin nor intended to do so, except for John, son of Zachariah,<sup>35</sup> who had neither committed a sin nor intended to do so. He once said: ‘Lord, show me Iblīs as he is, and urge him not to conceal from me anything that I ask him.’ So God inspired Iblīs: ‘Go to My servant John, son of Zachariah, just as you descended to Earth beforehand, and do not conceal from him anything he asks you.’ Thereupon he went to him and said: ‘John, I am Iblīs. My Lord commanded me to come to you, just as I descended beforehand to Earth.’ John looked at him and saw swallows flying above

<sup>34</sup> Homosexual behavior is condemned in several places in Qur’ān 4:16; 7:80–1; 26:166–7; 27:54–5; 29:28–9.

<sup>35</sup> Arabic: *Yahyā b. Zakariyā*, namely, John the Baptist. See his story beginning 622 below.

his head, while his loins were surrounded by nests<sup>36</sup>—one nest here, the other there—and on his feet were silver anklets. John asked: ‘What are these swallows that fly about your head?’ He answered: ‘With them I snatch the minds of men.’ ‘And what are these anklets which are on your feet?’ He replied: ‘I move them for man until he sings or someone sings for him.’ He asked: ‘At what hour do you have the most power over men?’ He replied: ‘When he is filled to satiety with food and drink.’ He said: ‘Have you found anything (objectionable) in my soul?’ He replied: ‘No.’ ‘Not on any occasion?’ He said: ‘Yes, in fact your food was served to you one night after you had fasted, and I made you desire it so much that you ate more than usual and did not bother about your private devotion and usual practice.’ John said: ‘Of a certainty I shall never again eat my fill.’ Then Iblīs said: ‘Of a certainty I will never be sincere to a human being again.’”

It is said that when the Messenger of Allah died, they began to prepare him (for burial). Then the people left and the place was empty. Ibn ‘Abbās quoted ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib: “When I had placed him on the washing-board, suddenly a voice was heard sounding from the corner of the house: “‘Alī, do not wash Muḥammad, for he is already pure and clean.’ Something occurred to me because of that and I said: ‘Woe to you, who are you? For verily the Prophet commanded us to do this, and this is his Sunna.’”<sup>37</sup> Then another voice rang out more loudly, (saying): ‘Wash him, ‘Alī, for the first voice was Satan, who was envious that Muḥammad might enter his grave washed.’ I (‘Alī) said: ‘May God reward you with good, for you have informed me that that was Iblīs. But who are you?’ He said: ‘I am al-Khiḍr.<sup>38</sup> I have come to the funeral of Muḥammad.’”

It is related that Iblīs appeared to a group of the Children of Israel and they said to him: “Stand in the same manner in which

<sup>36</sup> *khaṭāʾif* can be “swallows” or “iron hooks,” *akwār* can be either “nests” or “furnaces.”

<sup>37</sup> Namely, the “way,” or “tradition” of the Prophet.

<sup>38</sup> Also written al-Khaḍir, *lit.*, “the green (man),” a mysterious figure of folklore. A story involving him with Moses is found in Qur’ān 18:59–81, and has been traced to the Gilgamesh epic (see below p. 593, n. 4), the Alexander romance, and the Jewish story of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi and Elijah. See *EP*, IV:902–905 for these and other associations of al-Khaḍir; the Babylonian Noah, Atra-hasis or Utnapishtim, S. Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, pp. 2–3; J.W. Meri, “Re-appropriating Sacred Space,” in *Medieval Encounters*, 5,3:2–28; Brinner, *An Elegant Composition*, 13–16; B. Wheeler, “Moses or Alexander,” *JNES*, 57, pp. 191–215.

you used to stand in the presence of God, before you rebelled against your Lord.” He said: “You will be unable to bear the sight of that.” They begged him, so he took up a way of standing, and when they looked at him and saw his humility and submissiveness they fell dead, every one of them.

It is related that a man used to curse Iblīs a thousand times a day. One day, while he was sleeping, a person came to him and woke him up, saying: “Arise, for that wall is about to fall.” He said to him: “Who are you to be concerned with me in this way?” He said: “I am Iblīs.” The man said: “How so, when I curse you a thousand times every day?” He replied: “It is because I know the (high rank) God accords to martyrs, and I was afraid you would be granted with them what they are awarded.”

#### Chapter IX *The Story of Cain and Abel*

God has said: “*But recite to them the story of the two sons of Adam truthfully, when they offered a sacrifice [and it was accepted of one of them, and not accepted of the other. ‘I will surely slay you,’ said one. ‘God accepts only of the godfearing,’ said the other. ‘Yet if you stretch out your hand to slay me, I will not stretch out my hand to slay you; I fear God, the Lord of All-being.]*” (5:27–28) Persons with expert knowledge about the stories of the prophets and accounts of those departed have said that Eve at each birth bore twins for Adam, a boy and a girl, except in the case of Seth who was born alone. The total number of those whom Eve bore was forty—male and female—in twenty births. The first pair were Cain and his twin sister Iqlīmā,<sup>39</sup> and the last of them was ‘Abd al-Mughīth and his twin sister Amat al-Mughīth. God then increased the progeny of Adam as He has said: “*Mankind, fear your Lord, Who created you of a single soul [and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women].*” (4:1)

Ibn ‘Abbās said: “Adam did not die before seeing forty thousand of his children and his children’s children. Adam also saw among them fornication, the drinking of wine, and corruption. Scholars differ over the time of the births of Cain and Abel. Some of them said: ‘Adam cohabited with Eve one hundred years after their descent

<sup>39</sup> Or Aqlīmā. Also appears as Qalīmā. See Ṭabarī, p. 144; Rosenthal, p. 314, n. 893.

to the Earth and she bore him Cain and his twin sister Iqlīmā in one birth, then Abel and his twin Labūdā in one birth.’”

Muḥammad b. Ishāq, (basing himself on an expert scholar) said in the *Mubtada*<sup>40</sup> that Adam slept with Eve in the Garden before she descended to the Earth, and she became pregnant by him with Cain and his twin sister. She did not feel any craving for special foods, nor fatigue, nor labor pains on their account when she gave birth to them, nor did she notice any blood with them because of the purity of his milk.<sup>41</sup> When the two of them descended to Earth and came to feel at ease on it, Adam slept with her, and she became pregnant with Abel and his twin sister Labūdā. With them she felt a craving for special foods, and experienced fatigue, labor pains, and blood. When his children grew older, he would marry off a boy of one birth to a girl of the other birth. At that time, a man might marry any of his sisters that he wished except for his own twin sister that was born with him, for she was not lawful to him. All this was necessary because in those days there were no women who were not the men’s sisters and who did not have Eve as their common mother.

When Cain and his twin sister Aqlīmā<sup>42</sup> were born in one birth and Abel and his twin sister Labūdā in one birth, there were two years between them according to the statement of al-Kalbī. They understood God’s command to Adam that he should marry off Labūdā, the sister of Abel, to Cain, and that he marry Abel to Aqlīmā, the sister of Cain. (Now the sister of Cain was one of the most beautiful and the finest of character among women.) When Adam mentioned this to his son Abel he was content, but Cain was resentful and said: “She is my sister, born with me in the same birth, and she is more beautiful than Abel’s sister. I have more right to her, for we are children of the Garden, while they are children of the Earth.<sup>43</sup> So I have more right to my sister.” Then his father said to him: “She is not permitted to you,” but he refused to acquiesce. He claimed that this had been God’s command to him, even though it was only his (own) idea. So Adam said to the two of them: “Offer

<sup>40</sup> Possibly meant for Ishāq b. Bishr, author of *al-Mubtada’* or Wabb, see p. 174.

<sup>41</sup> “*min ṭaharat labanīhi*,” i.e., the milk Cain was given by his mother’s nursing.

<sup>42</sup> Tottoli, *Storie*, p. 48, Affimiyā.

<sup>43</sup> Note that Cain was born in the Garden, whereas Abel was born on Earth.

each a sacrifice, and he whose sacrifice is accepted has more right to her.”

Mu‘āwiyah b. ‘Ammār: “I asked Ja‘far al-Şādiq: ‘Did Adam marry his daughter to his son?’ He answered: ‘God forbid! If Adam had done so, the Messenger of Allah would have detested him and Adam’s religion would not have been the same as the religion of our Prophet Muḥammad. God sent Adam and Eve down to Earth and joined them together, and a daughter was born to him whom he named ‘Anāq, and she committed fornication. She was the first one to commit fornication on Earth, and God gave mastery over her to someone who killed her.’”

After her, Cain was born to Adam, followed by Abel. When Cain matured, God produced a female *jinnī*,<sup>44</sup> named ‘Amālah, in the form of a human female. God created a womb in her, and inspired Adam: “Marry her to Cain,” and he did. When Abel matured, God sent down to Adam a *hourī*<sup>45</sup> in the form of a human female and created a womb in her. Her name was Tarakah. When Abel stared at her, God inspired Adam: “Marry her to Abel,” and he did. Cain said: “Father, am I not older than my brother, and have I not more right to what you have done for my brother than he has?” (Adam) replied: “My son, favor is in God’s hand; He bestows it upon whom He wishes.” (Cain) said: “On the contrary, you preferred him to me in your affection.” (Adam) said: “If you desire to know about that matter, let the two of you make offerings. The one whose offering is accepted, he is more worthy of (the *hourī*) than the other.” (The scholars) say that at that time, if offerings were accepted, fire would descend from Heaven and consume them, and if they were not accepted, fire would not descend to consume them; instead, beasts of prey would eat them.

“The two of them<sup>46</sup> went out to bring offerings. Now Cain was an owner of crops and he offered a great amount of food from the worst of his crops, harboring this thought in his heart: ‘I do not care whether He will accept (my offering) or not; he will never marry my sister.’ Abel was a shepherd, possessing flocks, and he offered a

<sup>44</sup> See p. 13, n. 20, as a *jinnī*, she did not have a womb for a human child, nor did the *hourī*.

<sup>45</sup> A virgin of Paradise as mentioned in Qur’ān 44:54; 52:20; 55:72; 56:72, hence preferable to a *jinnī*.

<sup>46</sup> This seems to pick up the account of Ibn Ishāq above.

fat lamb from the choicest of his beasts, as well as milk and butter; and in his heart he accepted God and submitted to His command.”

Ismā‘īl b. Rāfi‘ said that a lamb was born in Abel’s flocks, and when it grew up there was no possession dearer to him than it; he would carry it on his back. However, when he was commanded to make an offering, he sacrificed it.

(Ibn Ishāq) said: “They both placed their offerings on the mountain; fire came down from Heaven and consumed the lamb and the butter and milk, but it consumed not one grain of Cain’s offering because he was not pure of heart, whereas the offering of Abel was accepted because he was pure of heart. That lamb kept grazing in the Garden until it was sacrificed as a ransom for the son of Abraham, for that is what He said: *‘It was accepted of one of them and not accepted of the other; [“I will surely slay you,” said one. “God accepts only from the righteous,” said the other].’* (5:27) They went down from the mountain and parted ways, but Cain was angry because God had declined his offering. Envy and covetousness arose in him which he had harbored in his heart even before that. Then Adam went to Mecca to visit the House. When he wished to go to Mecca, he said to Heaven: ‘Accept trusteeship for my son.’ But it refused, so he said the same to the Earth and the mountains, but they refused. Then he said the same to Cain, who replied: ‘Yes, you will return and see him as will make you happy.’ But Adam returned and Cain had slain Abel, for that is His word: *‘We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely he is sinful and very foolish’* (33:72)—referring to Cain when he was charged by his father with the trusteeship (for his brother) and then betrayed him.”

They said: “When Adam was absent, Cain came to Abel while he was among his flocks and said: *‘I shall surely slay you.’* (5:28) And he said: ‘But why?’ He replied: ‘Because God accepted your offering and did not accept mine, so you will marry my beautiful sister and I shall marry your ugly one, and people will be saying that you are better than I and more virtuous, and your son will boast of being superior to mine.’ So Abel said: *“What is my sin? ‘God accepts only of the godfearing. Yet if you stretch out your hand against me to kill me, I will not stretch out my hand against you; I fear God, Lord of all Being.’”* (5:28)

‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar said that the slain one was the stronger son, but that restraint prevented him from stretching forth his hand against his brother. God has said: *“Then his soul prompted him to slay his brother,*

and he slew him [and became one of the losers].” (5:30) That is to say, he submitted to him, and assisted him, but then he slew him.

Al-Suddī said that when Cain set out to slay Abel he was wandering among the mountain peaks. Then he came upon him one day when he was sleeping. He lifted up a rock and crushed his head with it, and he died.

Ibn Jurayj said: “Cain did not know how to kill his brother, so Iblīs appeared to him and took a bird, placed its head on a stone, and then crushed it with another stone.” On the day of his slaying, Abel was twenty years old.

There are different opinions about his death and the place of his slaying. Ibn ‘Abbās says (it happened) on Mount Nūd,<sup>47</sup> while another says (it was) in the Pass of Ḥirā’. Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī said, quoting Ja‘far al-Šādiq: “In Basra, in the place (where) the Great Mosque is.”

After Cain had killed Abel, he left him, for he did not know what to do with him, as his was the first dead body among men on the face of the Earth. When wild beasts came for the dead body, he carried it in a sack on his back for a year so that they would go away. But the birds and the wild beasts kept after him, watching where he would throw it down so that they could devour it. Then God sent two ravens, and they fought each other, and one of them killed his companion, then he dug with his beak and claws until he had made a place for the other in the ground, threw him into that hole, and buried him while Cain was watching him. He said: “*Woe is me! Am I unable to do as this raven has done and so conceal my brother’s naked body?*” And he repented” (5:31)—that is, for having carried him, not for having killed him.

Al-Awzā‘ī—al-Muṭṭalib b. ‘Abdallāh al-Makhzūmī: “When the son of Adam killed his brother, the Earth and all that is on it shook for seven days, then the Earth drank his blood as it would drink water. Then God called to him: ‘Where is your brother Abel?’ He replied: ‘I do not know. Am I his keeper?’ Then God said: ‘Verily the blood of your brother calls out to me from the Earth.’<sup>48</sup> Why did you slay your brother?’ He said: ‘So where is his blood if I have slain him?’

<sup>47</sup> Cf. the earlier account of Adam’s expulsion from Paradise, and other references to this mountain in India, see p. 53.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Gen. 4:10.



Therefore from that day on, God forbade the Earth ever to drink blood afterwards.”

Al-Ḍaḥḥāk—Ibn ‘Abbās: “When Cain slew Abel while Adam was in Mecca, the trees became thorny, foods changed their tastes, fruits went sour, the water became bitter, and the Earth became covered with dust. Adam said: ‘Something evil has happened on Earth.’ So he went (back) to India, and lo! Cain had slain Abel. So he began making verses—and this was the first poem ever composed—saying:

*The lands and all the people upon them have become altered;  
the face of the Earth is dusty, ugly.  
Changed is every taste and color;  
Rare is now the smile upon the handsome face.*

It is related that Ibn ‘Abbās said: “Whoever says that Adam composed poetry has lied against God and His Messenger and has accused Adam of a sin, for Muḥammad and all of the prophets have equally forbidden the composition of poetry. As He has said: ‘*We have not taught him poetry, it is not seemly for him.*’ (36:69) But when Cain slew Abel, Adam lamented him. Now Adam was a Syrian, and only one who speaks Arabic may compose poetry.<sup>49</sup> After Adam composed his lamentation for his son Abel, who was the first martyr on the face of the Earth, Adam said to Seth: ‘I wish, O my son, for you be my heir, so remember these words that people may pass them on as a heritage.’ They were continuously transmitted until they reached Ya‘rab b. Qaḥṭān b. Hūd, who spoke both Syriac and Arabic. He was the first to ride a horse, to speak Arabic, and to compose poetry. He examined the lament and saw that it was in rhymed prose (*saj‘*), so he said: ‘This will be a poem.’ He changed the order of the lines, putting early ones later and some later ones earlier, and gave it the meter of a poem, but he neither added nor subtracted a word, and he said:

*The lands and all the people upon them have become altered;  
the face of the Earth is dusty, ugly.  
Changed is every taste and color;  
rare is now the smile on the handsome face.*

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<sup>49</sup> Note the distinction between poetry and lamentation. Here suggesting that one who did not come from Arabia and did not speak Arabic, could not attain the heights of Arabic poetry. Strange praise in light of the Prophet’s reputed dislike of poetry and the words of the Qur’ān cited here.

*Cain made Abel taste death.*

*O sadness! The handsome one has been lost,  
How can I not shed lavish tears when Abel  
is embraced by his grave.*

*They (the tears) came burning like a flame; and with them  
a wailing loudly ringing out for their Abel and Cain.*

*The prophet's son has been slain for no wrongdoing,  
and my heart is wounded at his slaying.*

*We live near a never-ending spring;  
an enemy who will not die so that we may have rest*

And Eve said:

*Leave off complaining, for they have both died,  
a death which is not a valuable compensation (for Paradise).*

*What does weeping benefit the mourners  
when man is carried away to the grave?*

*But I mourn for the soul and give up its longing,  
for you will live forever after this killing.*

*And the accursed Iblīs replied to both of them, gloating over them:  
Move away from this land and its people,*

*for the wide expanse of the gardens was too strait for you.*

*You dwelled there with your mate, prosperous,  
sparing yourself the pain of this world.*

*My intrigues and deceptions did not cease  
until you lost the valuable payment.*

*If not for the mercy of the Omnipotent there would be  
in your grasp nothing but a whiff of paradise.*

Sālim b. al-Ju'd said: "After Cain killed Abel, Adam did not laugh for one hundred years. Then someone came to him and said: 'God granted you a long life, and made you to laugh and not cry.' When one hundred and thirty years of Adam's life had passed—that was five years after Cain had slain Abel, Seth was born to him, whose name means 'gift of God'<sup>50</sup>—indicating that God had substituted him for Abel. And God taught him the hours of the night and the day and how to worship creation during each of their hours. God revealed fifty pages to him, and he was Adam's heir and successor. As for Cain, he was told: 'Leave!' So he left, banished, a fugitive, frightened and terrified, not being safe from anyone who saw him. He took his sister Iqlīmā by the hand and went with her to Aden in

<sup>50</sup> Arabic: *Shūth*. Gen. 4:25: "... (Eve) named him Seth, meaning, 'God has provided me with another offspring. . .'" The Hebrew root *sh-th*, *shath* or *Sheth*, anglicized as Seth, may mean "reestablished for me" as well.

the land of the Yemen. Then Iblīs came to him and said: 'The fire consumed your brother's offering only because he served the fire and worshipped it. So you too set up a fire that will be for yourself and your progeny.' He built a fire-temple, and he was the first to build a fire and worship it.

"He could not pass by any one of his children who would not shoot at him. Now Cain had a blind son who had a son who walked with him. The son of the blind one said to his father: 'Here is your father Cain.' So the blind one shot at his father Cain and killed him. The blind man's son said: 'He was your father.' Whereupon (the blind one) raised his hand and struck him, and he died. Then the blind man said: 'Woe is me! I have killed my father by my shot and my son by my blow.'"<sup>51</sup>

Mujāhid said: "One of Cain's hands dangled by his thigh and leg, and it hung there from that day until the Day of Resurrection, turning toward the sun whenever it moves. He is surrounded in the summer by an enclosure of fire, and in winter by an enclosure of ice."

They say that the children of Cain invented instruments of entertainment, such as varieties of drums and pipes and stringed instruments,<sup>52</sup> and were engrossed in pleasure and drinking wine, in fornication and fire-worship and idol-worship and abominations, until God drowned them in the Flood at the time of Noah; while the descendants of Seth survived—and God is All-knowing.

### *Chapter x Adam's Death*

The historians and traditionists mention that Adam became ill eleven days before his death, and appointed his son Seth as his heir. He wrote his testament and handed it to Seth, commanding Seth to conceal it from the children of Cain; for Cain had slain Abel out of envy of him when Adam had assigned him to marry Cain's sister Iqlīmā. He feared for Seth too, that Cain might slay him because Adam had bestowed knowledge on him. So Seth and his children hid the testament in their possession, and neither Cain nor his children had any knowledge that would be of use to them.

Abū Hurayrah—the Messenger of Allah: "When God brought

<sup>51</sup> See the Biblical story of Lamech in Gen. 4:19–24.

<sup>52</sup> *I.e.*, Jubal, son of Lamech, in Gen. 4:21, "the ancestor of all who play the lyre and the pipe." Note the negative view of music and any entertainment.

forth the progeny of Adam from his back, He began to array them before Adam. There was one group who radiated light, so Adam said: 'Lord, who are these who radiate light?' He replied: 'These are the prophets and messengers.' Behold, there was a man among them who was radiant, and whose light was the brightest. He asked: 'Lord, who is this?' And He said: 'This is David.' Adam said: 'Lord, how long will he live?' God replied: 'Sixty years.' He said: 'Add years to his life, Lord!' He said: 'No, not unless you take them from your own life-span, for the Pen which inscribes the life-spans of Mankind has dried up.'<sup>53</sup> Adam's life-span was to have been one thousand years, but he gave David forty years from his own life, so God wrote a contract on that matter and had the angels witness it. When nine hundred and sixty years of his life had passed, the Angel of Death came to him to take him, but Adam said: 'You have come to me too early, Angel of Death!' He replied: 'I have not, because you have completed your term.' Adam said: 'There are forty years left of my term.' He said: 'But you have given them to your son David.' He said: 'I have not given him anything.' So God sent down the contract and called on the angels as witnesses. Nevertheless, God completed one thousand years for Adam and one hundred years for David." The Messenger of Allah said: "Adam forgot (the contract) and his progeny forgot. He denied it and his progeny denied it too. Therefore God commanded that from that day on contracts be written and witnesses be called."

Ibn Ishāq and others have said: "Then Adam died, and the angels gathered round him because he was the one chosen by the Merciful One. The angels buried him and Seth and his brothers, to the east of Paradise, near a place which would become the first town on Earth. The Sun and the Moon went into eclipse for six days and nights. When the angels gathered round Adam, God sent to him embalming-herbs and a shroud from the Garden, and the angels took charge of washing him and burying him. They washed him with lote-tree (*sidr*) and then water, and buried him in three garments.<sup>54</sup> Then they dug a grave for him and interred him and said: 'This will be the practice of the descendants of Adam hereafter.'"

<sup>53</sup> An element of predestination: see p. 247, n. 40 above.

<sup>54</sup> *Sidr* is said to be crushed lotus leaves mixed with water (but see *sidr*, p. 28, n. 44). This is an abbreviated version of Muslim ritual preparation of the corpse for burial. See Rosenthal, p. 333, n. 969; also *EP*, II:441f., s.v. *djanāza*.

Ibn ‘Abbās said that when Adam died, Seth said to Gabriel: “Pray for Adam.” And Gabriel said to him: “You go first and pray for your father.” So he prayed for him and uttered thirty times: “God is great”—five of them being (regular) prayer and twenty-five of them being out of esteem for Adam.

There have been differences of opinion about his burial place. Ibn Ishāq said (it was) to the east of Paradise.<sup>55</sup> Others have said that he was buried in Mecca, and it has been said (that it was) in the cave of Abū Qubays; this is a cave called the Great Cave.

Abū Šāliḥ—Ibn ‘Abbās: “Adam died on Mount Nūd in India.” Ibn ‘Abbās said: “When the days of the Flood came, Noah carried the coffin of Adam in the ark. When he came out of the ark, he buried Adam in Jerusalem.” Adam’s death was on a Friday. Eve outlived him by one year, and then she died and was buried with Adam. God is All-knowing.

#### A CHAPTER ABOUT THE ATTRIBUTES WITH WHICH GOD DISTINGUISHED ADAM

The Master has said: “God created Adam with His hand and breathed into him of His spirit, and made him in the most beautiful form, the culmination of his creation, and the most glorious Speaker swore by him saying: *‘By the fig and the olive and the Mount Sinai and this land made secure, We indeed created Man in the fairest stature.’* (95:1ff.) He taught him to say: ‘Glory be to God’ when he sneezed, then He said to him: ‘Your Lord will have mercy on you,’ for His mercy preceded His anger. After He finished His work of creation, He let him dwell in the Garden without toil. He permitted the entire Garden to him except for one tree. He taught him all the names, and He commanded the angels to bow down to him, and commanded them to instruct (him). He made him the father of all flesh, and His deputy on Earth, and informed the angels of his precedence over them. For his sake He cursed Iblīs, in spite of Iblīs’ abundant worship, and He scolded the angels because of him. Adam was the first to extol (God), the first penitent, the first elected one, the first chosen one,

<sup>55</sup> Here *findaves*. Ṭabarī, p. 144; Rosenthal, p. 314 has Cain flee to Aden in Yemen, and in n. 894, links Aden with Biblical Eden, to the east of which Cain fled and settled in the land of Nod, *cf.* Gen. 4:16.

and the first vicar of God on earth. He was the one who distinguished between the evil and good spirits. He is the one who will delegate on the Day of Resurrection, delegating the Fire away from his descendants. These are twenty-three of his distinguishing attributes. He is honored and revered. And God is All-knowing.

### *The Prophet Idrīs*

God has said: “*And mention in the Book Idrīs; he was righteous, a Prophet.*” (19:56) Those who know the stories of past generations and tales of the prophets have said: “He was Idrīs b. Barid (some say Bārīd) b. Mahalalel (Mahalā’īl) b. Kenan (Qaynān), b. Enosh b. Seth son of Adam. His real name was Enoch (Ukhnūkh), but he was called Idrīs because of his constant study (*dars*) of the books and book-leaves of Adam and Seth.<sup>56</sup> His mother was Ashūt (Ashwat). Idrīs was the first to write with a pen, the first to sew clothing and wear sewn clothes, the first to study the science of the stars and of calculation. God sent him to the children of Cain, and then raised him up to Heaven.”<sup>57</sup>

The reason for his being raised to Heaven, according to Ibn ‘Abbās and most of the people, was that he set out one day and suffered from the glare of the Sun. He said: “Lord, I walked in the Sun for one day and suffered. How much more suffering there would be for one who bears the sun for five hundred years in a single day!<sup>58</sup> God, lighten its burden for him and relieve him of its heat.” In the morning, the angel felt a lightness of the Sun and of its heat unknown to him, and he said: “Lord, the heat of the Sun has been lightened for me. What is the position of the one on whose behalf You have made this decree?” (God) answered: “My servant Idrīs asked Me to lighten its burden and its heat for you, and I agreed to that.” He said: “Lord, bring me together with Idrīs and create friendship between him and me.” God granted this to him.

Idrīs would ask him questions, and among what he asked him

<sup>56</sup> An imaginative etymology. Scholarly opinion has suggested Esdras (Greek: Ezra), and St. Andrew, usually seen today as that of Andreas, the cook of Alexander the Great who, according to the *Alexander Romance*, became immortal. See B. Wheeler, “Moses and Alexander.” Mentioned twice in Qur’ān 19:57; 21:85, Idrīs, often connected with Enoch, also with Elijah and al-Khidr, and received revelations. This story of Idrīs is not included in Ṭabarī; Tottoli, *Storie*, pp. 52–58. See *EP*, III:1030–31.

<sup>57</sup> See the text of Gen. 6:24—“*Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, for God took him.*”

<sup>58</sup> Namely, an angel who had this task.

was: "I have been told that you are the noblest of the angels in the eyes of the Angel of Death and the most influential of them with him, so intercede with him on my behalf to extend my term of life so that I may increase my thanksgiving and worship." The angel replied: "God will not delay a soul when its turn comes." He said: "I know that, but perhaps he<sup>59</sup> will be beneficent to my soul." (The angel) said: "I shall speak to him for you, and what he is unable to do for any of humankind, he will do for you." Then the angel carried him on his wing until he raised him up to Heaven and put him at the place of the Sun's rising. Then he came to the Angel of Death and said to him: "I have a request of you." He said: "I shall do for you whatever I am able." He said: "I have a human friend who has asked me to intercede with you to extend his term." He said: "That is not up to me, but if you like, I may inform him of his term and when he will die, so that he may come forward by himself." He replied: "Yes." So the Angel of Death looked into his ledger, the angel informed him of his name, and the Angel of Death said: "You have spoken to me of a man whom I do not see dying ever." He said: "How is that?" He said: "I find that he will die at the place of the Sun's rising." He said: "When I came to you, I left him there." The Angel of Death said: "Go! and I believe that you will find him dead, for by God, nothing is left of Idrīs's term." The angel returned and found him dead.

Wahb said: "Each day there would rise up from him as much worship as would rise up from all the people of the Earth in his time. The angels marvelled at him, and the Angel of Death craved him and asked God for permission to visit him. He permitted him to do so, whereupon the Angel of Death came to him in human form. Idrīs had been fasting for a while, and then the time came to break the fast. He called the Angel of Death to his feast, but he refused to eat. He did that for three nights and he refused him. He said to him on the third night: 'I want to know who you are.' He said: 'I am the Angel of Death. I asked my Lord for permission to visit you and be in your company, and He gave me leave to do that.' Idrīs said to him: 'I have a request of you.' He said: 'What is it?' He said: 'Take my spirit.' Then God inspired him to take his spirit and he took it, then God returned it to him after an hour.

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<sup>59</sup> *I.e.*, the Angel of Death.

The Angel of Death asked him: 'What was the sense of your asking that your spirit be taken?' He said: 'So that I might experience the torment and grief of death, in order that I might be better prepared.'

Then he said: 'I have another request of you.' He said: 'What is it?' 'That you raise me up to Heaven that I may see it and the Garden.' He granted him that, and when they came near the Fire he said to him: 'I have a request of you.' He said: 'What do you wish?' He said: 'Ask Mālik<sup>60</sup> to open the gates of the Fire for me, so that I may ward it off.' He did that, and then he said: 'Just as you have shown me the Fire, now show me the Garden.' So he took him to the Garden and asked that it be opened, and its gates were opened for him. He entered it and the Angel of Death said to him: 'Come out so that you may return to your place.' But he seized hold of a tree and said: 'I shall not leave it.' God sent an angel to arbitrate between them. The angel said to him: 'What is the matter with you that you do not depart?' He said: '*Because God has said: "Every soul shall taste of death,"* (3:185) and I have tasted it. And He has said: "*Not one of you there is but he shall go down to it (the Fire),*" (19:71) and I have gone down to it. And He has said: "*Nor shall they ever be driven forth from there (the Garden),*" (15:48) and I shall not be driven forth.' So God said to the Angel of Death: 'Leave him, for by My leave he entered the Garden and by My command he shall not leave it.' So he lives there, at times serving God in the Fourth Heaven and at times enjoying the Garden. God is All-knowing."

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<sup>60</sup> The guardian of (Hell) Fire, see Qur'ān 43:77. The name is strangely similar to Molech, a Canaanite god.



## HĀRŪT AND MĀRŪT

### THE TALE OF HĀRŪT AND MĀRŪT<sup>1</sup>

God has said: “*And they follow what the Satans recited over Solomon’s kingdom. [Solomon disbelieved not, but the Satans disbelieved, teaching the people sorcery, and that which was sent down upon Babylon’s two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt.]*” (2:102) Commentators have said that the demons have written charms and incantations from the mouth of Āṣaf during the period of the decline of the reign of Solomon. That is what Āṣaf son of Barkhiyā<sup>2</sup> taught Solomon the king, then the demons buried (the writings) under his praying-place while Solomon was unaware of it. When Solomon died they took them out from under his prayer-place, and they said to the people: “Solomon was able to rule over you only through this.”

According to al-Suddī the story was that a demon assumed the form of a human being and came to a group of the Children of Israel and said: “Shall I lead you to a treasure which will never be depleted?” They said: “Yes.” He said: “Then dig under the throne of Solomon.” He took them and showed them the place but remained standing at a distance. They said to him: “Come near!” But he said: “No, I shall remain here, but if you do not find it, then kill me.” He said this because no one among the demons might approach the throne, for he would be burned. They dug and found the writings, and when they took them out the demon said: “Solomon ruled over the *jinn*, humans, demons, and birds by means of these”, and the demon flew off and left. As for the scholars of the Children of Israel and their pious men, they said: “God forbid that this be the wisdom of Solomon, for if this were his wisdom, then Solomon would have been destroyed.” However, the ignorant and lowly people began to study all this while abandoning the books of their prophets.

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<sup>1</sup> These names are in the Arabic pattern *fā’ūl* (e.g., Ṭālūt = Saul) but are probably based on the names of two Zoroastrian archangels: Haurvatāt and Ameretāt, possibly moderated by way of Aramaic. See *EQ*, vol. II: 404–405.

<sup>2</sup> Biblical Asaph son of Berechiah, in I Chron. 6:24; 15:17 with this patronymic, but mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible without it.

Therefore God revealed this verse as a declaration of absolution of Solomon and an explanation of his innocence. This, then, is the (background) tale of the verse.

### THE TALE OF HĀRŪT AND MĀRŪT

Commentators have said that when the angels saw the ugly deeds and the many sins of the children of Adam that rose up to Heaven during the time of Idrīs the prophet, they condemned their deeds and reproached them saying: "Those whom You placed as successors on Earth and whom You chose have disobeyed you." God said: "If I had sent you down to Earth and instilled in you what I have instilled in them, you would have acted as they have." They said: "Glory to You, our Lord, it is not proper that we disobey You." God said: "Choose two of your best angels and I shall send them down to Earth." So they chose Hārūt and Mārūt, who were among the most pious and worshipful of the angels.

According to al-Kalbī: "God said: "Choose three among you," and they chose 'Azā, who is Hārūt, and 'Azābiyā, who is Mārūt, and 'Azriyā'īl—but He had changed the names of two of them when they sinned, just as God had changed the name of Iblīs, whose name had been 'Azāzil.<sup>3</sup> God instilled in them the passion which He had instilled in the sons of Adam and sent them down to Earth, commanding them to judge the people justly, and to forbidding them idolatry, killing without just cause, fornication, and the drinking of wine. As for 'Azriyā'īl, when passion lodged in his heart, he asked his Lord to release him and asked Him to raise him up to Heaven, and He released him and raised him up. He prostrated himself for forty years, then raised his head, but afterwards continued bowing his head out of shame before God. As for the other two, they held out firmly in that, judging among the people by day, while when it became evening they would mention the mighty name of God and rose up to Heaven."

Qatādah said that not a month had passed before the two were tempted one day by al-Zuharah, a very beautiful woman, with whom they had got into an argument. 'Alī said that she was of the people

<sup>3</sup> Biblical Azazel. See Lev. 16:8,10,26. above p. 56, n. 16.

of Persia and a queen in their land. When the two of them saw her, she captivated their hearts and they attempted to seduce her, but she refused and left. She returned, however, on the following day, and they acted in a like manner, and she said: "No, not unless you are willing to worship what I worship, to pray to this idol, to commit murder, and to drink wine." So the two said: "There is no way to do these things, for God has forbidden them to us." Again she left and returned the next day carrying a goblet of wine, harboring a desire for them in her heart. So they attempted again to seduce her; she refused but proposed to them what she had said the previous day, and they replied: "Prayer to someone other than God is a great sin, and so is killing a person, but the least of the three is drinking wine." So they drank the wine and became drunk, then happened upon the woman and fornicated with her. A man saw them, and they killed him."

According to al-Rabī' b. Anas, the two then bowed down to the idol, whereupon God transformed al-Zuharah into a star. But according to a different tradition from 'Alī, al-Suddī, and al-Kalbī she said: "You will not have me until you teach me the means by which you ascend to Heaven." They said: "We ascend by the most powerful Name of God." So she said: "You will not have me until you teach it to me." One of them said to his companion: "Teach her." But he said: "I fear God." And the other said: "But what about God's mercy?" So they taught her the Name, and she uttered it and ascended to Heaven, and God transformed her into a star.

The Master said that these (authorities) see in her *al-Zuharah* (Venus) herself, while others say, she is rather the red star whose name in Persian is *Nāhīd* and in Coptic *Bādakht*. Proving the truth of this (i.e., the first opinion) is what Yaḥyā b. Ismā'īl told us with a chain of authority going back to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who said that the Prophet, upon seeing *Suhayl* (Canopus), would utter these words: "May God curse *Suhayl*, for he was a tax-collector in the Yemen, and may God curse *al-Zuharah*, for she seduced two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt."

Al-Mujāhid said: "I was with Ibn 'Umar one night who said to me; 'Observe the star (namely, *al-Zuharah*), and when it rises, waken me.' When it rose I wakened him, and when he saw it he reviled it greatly, and I said: 'May God have mercy upon you! You revile a star that is hearing and obedient?' But he said: 'This one was a whore, and she caused the downfall of two angels.'" Ibn 'Abbās said

likewise. But others have rejected this story saying that al-Zuharah is one of the seven moving planets which God placed as firm (signs) for mankind, by which He swore: “*Oh, but I call to witness the planets, the stars which rise and set.*” (81:15) Whereas the one who seduced Hārūt and Mārūt was merely a woman who was named Zuharah because of her beauty, and when she fornicated, God changed her into a meteor. When the Messenger of God saw *al-Zuharah*, he remembered the woman with the corresponding name and cursed her. Likewise, *Suhayl* the tax-collector was a man, and when the Messenger of God saw the star whose name corresponds to that of this man, he cursed him.

Confirming this is that which Qays b. ‘Abbād relates from Ibn ‘Abbās about this story saying: “She (Zuharah) was a woman superior to other women in comeliness and beauty just as (the star) *al-Zuharah* is superior to all other stars. When in the evening Hārūt and Mārūt, after having committed the sin, intended to ascend to Heaven, their wings did not let them. Then they knew that the punishment had come over them. They set out for Idrīs and told him of their affair, and asked him to intercede for them with God. They said to him: ‘We see that as much worship ascends from you as from all the people of the Earth, so intercede for us with God.’ Idrīs did that, and God let them choose between the punishment of this world and the punishment of the Hereafter. They chose the punishment of this world because it comes to an end. They are now in Babylon suffering punishment.”

Scholars differ about the kind of punishment they are undergoing. Ibn Mas‘ūd said that they are hanging by their hair until the Hour comes. Muqātil said that they are chained from their feet to the base of their thighs. Mujāhid said: “A pit was filled with fire and they were placed in it,” while ‘Amr b. Sa‘d said that they are hanging upside down in chains, being beaten with iron whips.

It is related that a man set out to learn witchcraft from Hārūt and Mārūt and found them hanging by their feet, their eyes turned blue, their faces black, with less than four fingers distance between their tongues and water so that they were being tortured by thirst. When he saw that, their state terrified him, and he said: “There is no god but Allah.” When they heard that they said: “There is no god but Allah. Who are you?” He answered: “A man from the (common) people.” They said: “From which nation are you?” He answered: “From the nation of Muḥammad.” One of them said:

“Has Muḥammad been sent?” he answered: “Yes.” So they glorified God and expressed delight. The man said: “Why do you rejoice?” They said: “He is the Prophet of the Hour (of Judgment), so the end of our punishment is near.”

Hishām relates on the authority of ‘Ā’ishah who said that a woman came to her from Dūmat al-Jandal<sup>1</sup> seeking the Messenger of Allah, after he had died, to ask for his advice concerning a matter of witchcraft in which she had been involved and what she should do about it. ‘Ā’ishah said to ‘Urwah: “O son of my sister, I saw her weep when she did not find the Messenger of Allah. She wept so much that I took pity on her. Then she said: ‘I am not afraid if I shall have to perish.’ And she said: ‘I had a husband who had been estranged from me, so I went to an old woman and complained to her of that, and she said: “If you will do whatever I command, I will make him come to you.” When night fell she came to me with two black dogs. I mounted one of them and she mounted the other, and before long we were standing in Babylon. And behold, there were two men hanging by their feet, and they said: “For what did you come?” I replied: “To learn witchcraft.” They said: “We are tempters, do not become an infidel. Return to whence you came.” I said: “No.” They said: “Then go to that baking-oven and urinate in it.” I went to urinate, but I was frightened and did not do it. I returned and they said: “Did you do it?” I said: “Yes.” One said: “Did you see anything?” I said: “I did not see anything.” They said: “Then you did not do anything. Return to your land and do not be an infidel.” But I refused, so they said: “Go to that oven and urinate in it.” I went, and my flesh shivered and I was afraid. Then I returned to them and told them that I had done it. They said: “What did you see?” I answered: “I saw nothing.” They said: “You lie. You did nothing. Go back to your land and don’t be an infidel, for you are at the beginning of your matter.” I refused, so they said: “Go to that oven and urinate in it.” Again I went to it and urinated in it and saw a horseman in an iron mask going away from me until he reached Heaven, then disappeared and I could not see him. I came to them and said: “I have done it.” They asked: “What did you see?” I said: “I saw a horseman in an iron mask going away from me and ascending to Heaven until I did not see him any-

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<sup>1</sup> Also Duma, Dumaitha, Djauf—a town on the edge of the northern Arabian desert, inland from Aqaba.

more.” They said: “You are right. That was your faith coming out of you. Now go!” Then I said to the woman: “I don’t know anything and they have not said anything to me.” They said: “Whatever you want, will be. Take this flour and sow it.” I sowed it and said to it: “Come out!” It came out and I said to it: “Be harvested,” and it was harvested. I said to it: “Be husked,” and it was husked. Then I said: “Be ground,” and it was ground. Then I said: “Be baked,” and it was baked. When I understood that if I wanted something, it came into being, I stood aghast and I returned and repented. By God, mother of the Believers, I did nothing (wrong) at all and I shall do nothing (evil) ever.”<sup>5</sup>

According to Al-Awzā’ī, Gabriel came to the Prophet who said: “Gabriel, describe the Fire for me!” He said: “God commanded that it burn for a thousand years until it turned red, and then it burned for a thousand years until it turned black, for it is black, dark; its embers are never extinguished, its flame never subsides. By Him Who sent you in truth, if one of the garments of those who people the Fire appeared to the dwellers of the Earth, they would all die, and if a bucket of Hell’s water were poured into the water of all the Earth, whoever tasted it would be killed. If one link of the chain which God has mentioned<sup>6</sup> were placed on all the mountains of the Earth, they would melt, and (the link) could not be lifted off. If a man were to enter the Fire and come out, the people of the Earth would die from the stench of his odor and the sight of the mutilation of his body and bones.” Then the Prophet wept, and Gabriel wept because of his weeping, and he said: “Why do you cry, Muḥammad, when God has pardoned all of your sins, both past and future?” He replied: “Should I not be a grateful worshipper?” And Gabriel wept, and Muḥammad said: “Gabriel, you weep, yet you are the faithful spirit, the agent of God entrusted with His inspiration?” He replied: “I fear that I shall be tried as Hārūt and Mārūt were tried, and that is what has prevented me from relying on my position with my Lord so I would be safe from a calamity.” They continued weeping until a call came from Heaven: “Gabriel and Muḥammad, God makes you able to bear His anger, for He will not punish you, and the superiority of Muḥammad over the other prophets is like the superiority of Gabriel over the other angels.”

<sup>5</sup> Another version of the ancient “Wheat to Bread” story, *cf.*, 65, n. 17 above.

<sup>6</sup> See Qur’ān 69:32.

## NOAH

### THE STORY OF NOAH

God has said to His prophet: “Recite to them the story of Noah, when he said to his people: [*My people, if my standing here is grievous to you and my reminding you of the signs of God, in God have I put my trust, so decide on your course of action, with your associates.*] (10:71) He was Noah son of Lamech son of Methuselah son of Enoch son of Mahalael son of Kenan son of Enosh son of Seth,<sup>1</sup> and his mother was Qaynūsh daughter of Rākīl—some say daughter of Kābīl b. Makhū’īl son of Enoch, whom God sent to the sons of Cain and the sons of Seth who came after them.

Ibn ‘Abbās said that there were two clans of the sons of Adam, one of which lived in the plain while the other inhabited the mountain. While the men of the mountain were handsome and their wives ugly, the women of the plain were beautiful but their husbands were ugly. So Iblīs came to one of the men of the plain in the form of a young lad, and hired himself out to him and served him. Iblīs took something like the pipe that shepherds play, and made it play a sound unlike anything that had ever been heard. This (sound) reached those round about them, and they came to hear him. They made this into a festival on which they would gather (each) year, when the women would display their charms to the men and the men to the women. One of the men from the mountain came upon them while they were celebrating their festival, and saw the beauty of the women. He returned to his companions, telling them of this, whereupon they moved down to dwell with them. They began to engage in immoral deeds, as He has said: “*Display not your finery, as did the pagans of old.*” (33:33)

According to Ibn ‘Abbās, Adam had ordered the children of Seth not to intermarry with the children of Cain. The children of Seth placed Adam in a cave and posted watchmen over him, so that none of the children of Cain might come near him. Whoever came to

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<sup>1</sup> See Gen. 5 for the Biblical list of Noah’s ancestry.

him, the children of Seth would apologize to them (for not letting them in).

One hundred of the handsome sons of Seth said: "Let us see what our cousins (meaning the children of Cain) have done!" So the hundred went down to the women of the plain among the children of Cain, who were comely of countenance, and (these) women detained the men, so they stayed there as long as God willed. Then another hundred said that they would like to see what their brothers had done. So they descended to them from the mountain, joined them, and the women detained them (too). Then all the children of Seth came down, and sin established itself. They intermarried and intermingled until the children of Cain increased so much that they filled the Earth and spread corruption. Therefore God sent them their prophet Noah, who was (then) fifty years old. He stayed with them for one thousand years less fifty,<sup>2</sup> calling them to God, making them fear His power, warning them of His might. As God has related, saying: *"My Lord! I have called my people by night and by day, but my calling has only increased them in flight."* (71:5) And He has said: *"And the folk of Noah aforetime, they were more unjust and more rebellious."* (53:52) And He has said: *"And the folk of Noah aforetime, they were licentious folk."* (51:46)

Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said, according to Ibn 'Abbās, that Noah would be beaten, then wrapped in felt and thrown into his house, and they thought that he had died. But then he would come out and call to them, until he despaired of his people (ever) believing. After that there came a man leaning on a staff accompanied by his son. He said: "My son, see that old man; beware lest he deceive you." And (the boy) replied: "My father, place the staff in my hand." He gave him the staff, and (the boy) said: "Lay me on the ground." And he put him there. Then (the son) went up to Noah and beat him with the staff. Noah said: "O Lord, You can see what Your servants do to me. If You have any concern for Your servants, then guide them, but if it be otherwise, then give me endurance until You judge between them and me, for You are the best of judges."

Then God revealed to him, (saying): *"None of your people shall believe but he who has already believed, so be not distressed by what they may be doing."* (11:36) He made him despair of his people believing, and

<sup>2</sup> See Ṭabarī, p. 198, Rosenthal, p. 368; also Tottoli, *Stories*, 59.



informed him that there is not a believer left in the loins of men or the wombs of women. At that, (Noah) called out against them and said: *“My Lord, they have rebelled against me [and followed him whose wealth and children increase him only in loss. And they devised a mighty plot. Do not leave your gods,] Do not leave Wadd, Suwā’, Yaghūth, neither Ya’ūq nor Nasr. For they have led many astray.”* (71:21–24) Those are the names of their idols which they worshipped to the exclusion of God. He said: *“My Lord! Do not leave the unbelievers on the earth. If you leave them, they will lead Your servants astray, and will beget none but unbelieving libertines.”* (71:26–27) And He has said: *“And do not increase the evil-doers save in ruin,”* (71:28) meaning destruction and ruin. And God answered his prayer and commanded him to build the ark, as He has said: *“Make the ark under Our eyes and by Our inspiration; [and address me not concerning those who have done evil; they shall be drowned.]”* (11:37) Noah said: *“Lord, what is the ark?”* He replied: *“A house of wood which will float on the surface of the water until I drown the rebellious folk and rid the Earth of them.”* Noah said: *“Lord, where is the water?”* He said: *“Noah, I am able to do whatever I desire.”* Noah continued: *“Lord, and where is the wood?”* God said: *“Plant trees.”* And he planted teak. Forty years then passed, during which Noah ceased calling them unto God, and God made the wombs of their women barren and no children were born to them. When the trees had matured, his Lord commanded him to cut them down, so he cut them down and dried them. Then he said, *“Lord, how shall I make this house?”* He said: *“Make it curved, in three (parts); its head like the head of a cock; its middle like the belly of a bird; and its tail inclining like the tail of a bird. Make it symmetrical and place doors in both its sides. Make it three stories (tall), and make its length eighty cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits<sup>3</sup>—the cubit meaning (from the hand) to the shoulder.<sup>3</sup> That is what the People of the Book say.*

Then God sent Gabriel to teach Noah how to build the ark. Noah was cutting wood, driving nails, and preparing the equipment of the ark, such as pitch and the like; and his folk were passing by him while he was at work, and they scoffed at him, saying: *“Noah, you have become a carpenter after having been a prophet!”* Then they would say: *“Look at this madman making a house with which to*

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<sup>3</sup> Compare Gen. 6:15–16.

travel on water!" And they laughed at him, and this was as He has said: "So he was building the ark, and whenever a council of his people passed by him, they scoffed at him." (And Noah) said: "If you scoff at us, we shall surely scoff at you, as you scoff, and you shall know to whom will come a chastisement degrading him, and upon whom there shall alight a lasting chastisement." (11:38) And God inspired Noah: "Hasten the building of the ark, for My anger is growing against those who defy Me." Noah hired laborers to work with him, and his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth were building the ark with him. "He made the ark six hundred and sixty cubits in length, three hundred and thirty cubits in width, and thirty-three cubits high."<sup>4</sup> These are the words of Ibn 'Abbās as narrated by al-Ḍaḥḥāk.

(Noah) coated it with pitch from within and without, and strengthened it with dowels, namely nails of iron. That is according to His word: "And We bore him on a vessel of planks and nails." (11:40) God opened up for him a boiling spring of pitch next to the ark so that he might coat it with the pitch. When he completed the building of the ark, God inspired him: "Embark in it two of every kind of animal, so that their posterity would not be cut off. God made them assemble from land and sea, from mountain and plain, and made the gushing forth<sup>5</sup> of the oven a sign between himself and Noah, and God enjoined him, saying: "When you see the oven gushing forth, then embark with those who are with you on the ark, and carry in it two of every kind, a pair", as God said: "When Our command was issued and the oven gushed forth water (that is to say, Our punishment, namely the Flood), We said: 'Take into (the ark) a pair of every species, [and members of your family other than those against whom the sentence has been passed already, and those who come to believe.]" (11:40)

Scholars have differed regarding His words: "The oven gushed forth." 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (said) that it means that the dawn arose and filled the morning with light. Ibn 'Abbās said: "Water gushed forth from the surface of the Earth, and the Arabs call the surface of the Earth *tannūr* (an oven)." Qatādah said: "The *tannūr* is the noblest place on the Earth, and its highest spot."<sup>6</sup> Al-Ḥasan said: "By *tannūr* He meant

<sup>4</sup> Note the different measurements in the two accounts, here and p. 100.

<sup>5</sup> Pickthall and Ahmed Ali have this translation, while Arberry has "boiling", Dawood has "welled out." Note the different story of the source of the Flood in Gen. 7:11-12.

<sup>6</sup> Similar in form and meaning to Hebrew *tannūr* "oven," but compare with Hebrew *ṭabbūr*, meaning "highest point, navel", cf., Mt. Tabor.

that in which one bakes, and it was an oven (*tannūr*) of stone which belonged to Adam and then passed on to Noah. It was said to him: 'When you see water gushing forth from the oven, then embark, you and your companions.' Water bubbled out of the oven, and (Noah's) wife noticed it and informed him."

The scholars differed about the location (of the oven). Mujāhid said that it was in the vicinity of al-Kūfah.

Al-Suddī related from al-Shaʿbī that he would swear by God that the "oven gushed forth" nowhere else but in the vicinity of al-Kūfah, for he said: "Noah made the ark within the mosque of Kūfah, and the oven was on the right of the entrance, next to the Kindah Gate. The gushing water was a sign to Noah and an indication of the destruction of his people."

Muqātil said: "That was the oven of Adam, only it was in the land of Syria in a place called 'Ayn Ward."

Ibn ʿAbbās said that the oven was in India, and the gushing forth was a boiling over; when Noah saw it gushing, he was convinced that the punishment was about to come down, and he took a male and a female of every kind of animal as God had commanded him. Ibn ʿAbbās said: "God sent the rain for forty days and nights. Wild beasts, birds, and cattle came to Noah when the rain pelted them, and they were made subservient to him and he took two of every kind. The first among the cattle that Noah took into the ark was the milk-cow, and the last was the donkey. When the donkey came through with his front part, Iblīs clung to its tail and its legs did not move. So Noah said: 'Enter.' The donkey got ready (to move), but was unable to. Then Noah said: 'Enter, even if the devil is with you'—a phrase which was a slip of the tongue, for when he uttered it, the devil entered (the donkey) which entered (the ark) bringing the devil with it. Noah said to him: 'I shall not let you in, enemy of God.' But he said: 'Did you not say: "Enter, even if the devil is with you"?' (Noah) said: 'Get out, enemy of God!' He replied: 'I shall not get out. Which means that you will have to take me with you.' And he was—as they claim—on the deck of the ark."

Mālik b. Sulaymān al-Harawī said: "The serpent and the scorpion came to Noah, saying: 'Take us on board.' He said: 'You are the cause of harm and trouble, so I will not take you on board.' They said: 'Take us, and we guarantee you that we will not harm anyone who mentions you.'" Indeed, as fearing harm from them someone recited, "Peace be upon Noah among all beings," so we

shall likewise reward the doers of good, for he is one of Our believing worshippers, whom they did not harm.

Wahb b. Munabbih: "When God commanded Noah to take with him a male and female of each kind, (Noah) asked: 'What shall I do with the lion and the cattle? What shall I do with the she-goat and the wolf? With the dove and the cat?' God said to him: 'Who set enmity between them?' He answered: 'You, O Lord.' He said: 'So shall I reconcile them so that they will not cause harm to one another.' So Noah loaded the wild beasts and domesticated animals on the first level, and God cast a fever on the lion and caused him to be busied with himself rather than (with) the domesticated animals and cattle, and it has been said about this:

*The dog does not get fever, even though his life be long;  
by your life, no one is continually feverish save the lion.*

He also placed wild beasts on the second level, while he and the humans with him were on the third level, and he placed the parrot with him on the upper level out of solicitude, lest anything evil kill it.<sup>7</sup>

There have been debates over (who were) the people on the ark of whom God spoke in His words, saying: "*And members of your family other than those against whom the sentence has been passed already.*" (See 11:40 above) Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that when Noah wanted the ark to anchor, he would say: 'In the name of God,' and it would anchor. When he wanted it to sail, he would say: 'In the name of God', and it would sail on the water, for that is His saying: "*In the name of God be its course and mooring.*" (11:41)

"... *And those who come to believe. But only a few believed in him.*" (11:40 above) Who were they and how many were they? Qatādah said: "There were in the ark only Noah, his wife and three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and their wives—all in all eight persons. "Ham had intercourse with his wife on the ark, and Noah prayed to his Lord," Qatādah said, "and Ham's sperm became altered, and he brought forth black (offspring)."

Al-Kalbī said: "Noah ordered that no male should approach a female as long as they were in the ark, but a dog mounted a bitch and Noah cursed him, saying: 'O God, bring him unto distress.'"

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<sup>7</sup> Not clear why the parrot is singled out.

Al-A‘mash said: “There were seven: Noah, three sons, and three daughters-in-law.” Ibn Ishāq said: “There were ten aside from their wives. They were Noah, his sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and six women of those who believed with him—along with the men’s wives.”

Muqātil said: “They were seventy, over and above Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives—altogether seventy-eight people, half of them women and half of them men.” Ibn ‘Abbās said: “They were eighty people, and Noah carried with him the body of Adam and placed it on display as a barrier between the men and the women.”

They said that when Noah boarded the ark and brought in everyone who believed, it was the month of Āb in the Byzantine (calendar),<sup>8</sup> and when he entered and loaded those he took, the springs of the Earth stirred, as well as the great deep, and the Heaven rained like the spouts of water-skins, as He has said: “*And We opened the flood gates of the sky with water pouring down in torrents. And We opened up the springs of the earth; and the waters met for a decreed end,*” (54:11–12) that is to say, the water of Heaven and the water of Earth met, and the water began coming down from Heaven and welled up from the Earth until it increased and grew stronger, so that from the time He let loose the water until the water raised the ark, forty days and nights passed.<sup>9</sup> Then the water raised the ark, but Canaan, son of Noah<sup>10</sup> stayed behind.

Qatādah said: “He would not board the ark, though Noah called to him. *And he (Canaan) was separated from him. ‘Embark with us, my son, and be not one of those who do not believe!’ He said: ‘I shall go up a mountain which will keep me from the water.’ (Noah) said: ‘There is no getting away from the decree of God today, except for those upon whom be His mercy.’* (11:42–43) Canaan was accustomed to the mountains being a safe-guard against the rain, and he believed that this time would be the same. But (Noah) said: *‘There is no getting away from the decree of God today, except for those on whom be His mercy. And a wave came between them, and he was among those who were drowned.’* (11:43) The water increased and rose above the mountains.” Ibn ‘Abbās said: “It rose fifteen cubits above the highest mountain on earth.”

<sup>8</sup> *I.e.*, August in the Roman calendar.

<sup>9</sup> This version of the Flood, rather than the earlier one of “*the oven gushing forth*”, is in line with the Biblical story in Gen. 7.

<sup>10</sup> In the Bible, a son of Ham, hence a grandson of Noah. See Gen. 10:6.

‘Ā’ishah quoted the Messenger of Allah: “If God had pitied anyone of the people of Noah, He would have pitied the woman, the mother of the lad (Canaan), who feared that the waters would reach him, for she loved him greatly. She went with him to the mountain until she reached its peak, and when the water reached her she went out and stood erect on the mountain and carried the boy. When it reached her neck she raised the boy in her hands until the water carried them both away. If God had pitied any one of them, He would have pitied this (woman).”

They have said that then the ark, with its people on board, circled the entire world in six months. It did not stop anywhere until it reached the Holy Sanctuary. It did not enter it, but went around the Sanctuary for a week. God had raised up the House, to which Adam had made pilgrimage to protect it from being covered by water,—it is the Frequented House<sup>11</sup>—and Gabriel concealed the Black Stone in the mountain of Abū Qabays. After the ark had circled the Sanctuary it sailed the Earth, bearing its passengers until it came to al-Jūdī,<sup>12</sup> which is an inaccessible mountain in the land of Mosul, and it landed on it.”

Mujāhid said: “The mountains lifted themselves up and stretched so that the water would not reach them, but the water rose fifteen cubits above them. Al-Jūdī humbled itself to the commandment of its Lord and therefore was not covered, and the ark berthed on it, for that is His word: *‘And it came to rest upon al-Jūdī.’* (11:44)

Ibn ‘Abbās said that the ark came to rest on al-Jūdī, while everything on the face of the Earth had perished; the unbelievers, and everything endowed with the breath of life and the trees. And no living creatures remained except for Noah and those with him in the ark, and except for Og son of ‘Anaq,<sup>13</sup> for that is His word: *“And it was said: Away with the people of evildoers”* (ibid.)—that is to say, let there be destruction (unto them). Ibn ‘Abbās said (further) that Og would seize the clouds for himself, and drink from them, because of his height. He would take the whale from the depths of the sea and fry it in the eye of the Sun. He would lift it up to the

<sup>11</sup> *al-Bayt al-Má‘mūr*, also called the Inhabited House. Qur’ān 52:4. See p. 26, n. 41 above.

<sup>12</sup> Located in present-day southeastern Turkey, known as Aghri Dagh, to the south of Ararat. See *EP*<sup>2</sup>, II: 573–74, s.v. *Djūdī*; Yāqūt, *Muṣjam*, II: 144. See also *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 146–147.

<sup>13</sup> See the story of Og son of ‘Anaq, p. 435 below.

Sun, then eat it. He said to Noah: "Take me with you." But Noah replied: "Out with you, enemy of God, I have not been ordered to take you with me." God spread water on the face of the Earth and the mountains, but it did not even reach the knees of Og son of 'Anaq. Then when the ark came to rest on al-Jūdī, it was said: "*O earth, swallow back your water (or dry up), and O Heaven, abate (restrain your water)! And the water was made to subside.*" (ibid.) What had come down from Heaven became the seas that are (now) on the Earth, because they are the last of what remained on Earth of the waters of the Flood. It remained on the Earth for forty years, then abated.

It has been related (according to) 'Alī b. Zayd b. Jad'ān—Yūsuf b. Mihrān—Ibn 'Abbās who said: "The apostles said to Jesus son of Mary: 'Would that you send us a man who witnessed the ark to talk to us about it.' So he went off with them until he brought them to a mound of earth. He took a handful of that earth and said: 'Do you know what this is?' They said: 'God and His Messenger know best.' He said: 'This is the heel of Shem son of Noah.' Then he smote the mound with his staff and said to it: 'Rise, with God's leave.' And behold, Shem stood up shaking the dirt from his head, and he was white-haired.

Jesus said to him: 'Was it thus that you perished?' He said: 'No, for I died when I was young. But I thought that the Hour had come, whereupon I turned white.' He said to him: 'Tell us about the ark of Noah.' He said: 'Its length was one thousand two hundred cubits and its width six hundred cubits.<sup>14</sup> It had three levels: a level with wild beasts and cattle, a level with humans, and a level with birds. When the dung of the cattle became too much, God inspired Noah: "Touch the tail of the elephant"; he touched it, and a male and female pig fell from the elephant and proceeded to eat the dung. When mice increased on the ark and began to gnaw its ropes—that was because they propagated on the ark—God inspired Noah: "Strike the lion between its eyes"; he did so, and male and female cats came out of its nostrils and proceeded to eat the mice.' Jesus said to him: 'How did Noah know that the land had dried up?' He said: 'Noah sent a raven to bring him a report, but it found a corpse and fell upon it and was too busy to return.'<sup>15</sup> So Noah

<sup>14</sup> Compare with the two previous sets of dimensions, p. 95.

<sup>15</sup> This reason for its delay in returning is not found in the Biblical story.

invoked fear upon it, and for that reason it is not fond of human habitation. Then he sent a dove, and it brought back an olive leaf in its beak and mud in its claws, so he knew that the land had dried up. So (Noah) gave the dove its green (collar) that encircles its neck and blessed it to feel at home and safe in houses.' They said: "Messenger of God,<sup>16</sup> shall we not take him to our people so that he may sit with us and report to us?" He said: 'How can someone who has no sustenance follow you?' Then he said to him: 'Return, by God's leave.' And (Shem) returned to dust."

Historians have said: "God sent the Flood when thirteen days had elapsed of Āb, six hundred years of Noah's life had passed, and at the completion of two thousand one hundred and fifty-six years since Adam was sent down to Earth.<sup>17</sup> Noah and those with him entered the ark until ten days had elapsed of Rajab, and they left it on the tenth of Muḥarram—therefore (that day) was called Yawm 'Ashūrā'.<sup>18</sup> They had stayed in the ark for six months. When Noah and those with him descended safely from the ark, Noah fasted and commanded all the humans, wild beasts, cattle, and birds who were with him to fast, and they did so, thanks to God. It is said that the eyes of Noah and his people had clouded over in the ark from continually watching the water, so they were commanded to color their eyelids with antimony (kohl) on the day of 'Ashūrā' on which they went out of the ark."

According to Ibn 'Abbās, the Messenger of Allah said: "Whoever smears his eyelids with antimony on the day of 'Ashūrā', his eyelids will never be sore." When Noah and those with him went out of the ark, he settled in a place in the vicinity of Jazīrah<sup>19</sup> and built a town there which they called Sūq Thamānīn (The Market of Eighty),<sup>20</sup> because he built it for the believers who were with him, and they

<sup>16</sup> Here probably referring to Jesus.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Gen. 8:13.

<sup>18</sup> From Arabic *'ashara*, "ten", or Hebrew *'asor* with an Aramaic ending. A day of fasting set by Muḥammad equivalent to the Jewish Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*, on the 10th of Tishre, until the break with the Jews of Medina took place; it became a voluntary fast day on the 10th of Muḥarram. But like Jewish fasts, lasted from sunset to sunset. See *EI*<sup>2</sup>, I: 705.

<sup>19</sup> Jazīrah is the name of the area between the Tigris and Euphrates in northern Mesopotamia.

<sup>20</sup> Also *Qaryat al-Thamānīn*. See Yāqūt, *Mu'jam*, I: 934–935; LeStrange, *Lands*, p. 94.



numbered eighty.<sup>21</sup> Today it is still called Sūq Thamānīn. God inspired Noah that the Flood would never return to the Earth. Noah lived after that for three hundred and fifty years, and his whole life numbered nine hundred and fifty years. Then God took him to Himself. This is what most scholars say, and thus, too, is it related in the Torah.

‘Awn b. Abī Shaddād said: “Noah lived for nine hundred and fifty years after the Flood, and for three hundred and fifty years before it.” According to this statement, Noah lived for a total of thirteen hundred years. It is related that when Noah died he was asked: “How did you find the world?” He said: “Like a house with two doors. I entered by one and left by the other.” When death came near, he summoned his son Shem and made him his heir. Shem had been born to him seventy-eight years before the Flood. It is said that when death came near he called his son Shem, who was his first-born, and said: “My son, I urge two things upon you and forbid you two things. The latter two are idolatry and haughtiness, for no one will enter the Garden who has in his heart the weight of one grain of idolatry or haughtiness. As for the two things that I urge upon you, I have seen them bring men closer to God. They are the statements: ‘There is no god but Allah’ and ‘Glory be to Allah.’ As for the statement: ‘There is no god but Allah,’ the ark would traverse the Seven Heavens and the Seven Earths, even if they were combined, until it reached their Lord. ‘There is no god but Allah’, if put in the balance of a scale, would outweigh the Seven Heavens and the Seven Earths and all therein. I urge upon you to say ‘Glory be to Allah,’ for it is the prayer of (all) created beings whereby they are sustained.”

#### THE SPECIAL ATTRIBUTES OF NOAH

They are fifteen attributes: None of the prophets was called by his name, and (Noah) was named this because of his great lamenting over himself.<sup>22</sup> He was the first of the prophets of the Divine Law

<sup>21</sup> Numbers range from seven without Noah’s wife, to eight with her, and eighty, supposedly including the pious children of Seth.

<sup>22</sup> The meaning of his name varies in Muslim and Jewish sources. According to

and the first summoner sent from God; he was the first one to warn against idolatry and the first to be tormented by his folk when they rejected his call, and all the people of the Earth were destroyed because of his invocation. It is said that God inspired him after the Flood: "I created mankind and commanded them to obey me, but they embarked on the road of rebellion against Me. Therefore My anger grew so much that, for the sins of those who disobeyed, I punished even those who did not disobey. And I punished My entire creation for the sins of Mankind. But now I swear by My Own Name, that I shall never again punish any of human being in this manner, neither shall I make the fortunes of this world alternate among My worshippers; then I shall repay them for their deeds when they gather unto Me."

(Noah) lived the longest among the prophets, and he was called "the greatest of the prophets and the elder of the Messengers"; and the miracle he performed was that of himself, for he lived for one thousand years and lacked neither tooth nor strength. None of the other Messengers did as much in their mission as he did, for he preached to his people day and night—openly and in secret—and no prophet suffered from his nation the blows, insults, and types of injury and roughness that he received. Therefore God said: "*(So We had destroyed) the people of Noah before them. They were surely a sinful people*" (51:46) And he was made second to the Chosen One (Muhammad) regarding covenant and inspiration. God said: "*When We made the covenant with the prophets and with you, as with Noah . . .*" (33:7) And He said: "*We have sent revelation to you as we sent revelations to Noah and the prophets (who came) after him.*" (4:163) And in resurrection—for he will be the first for whom the Earth will open up on the Day of Resurrection, after Muḥammad. God gave him the ark and taught him how to make it and He saved him with everything therein. He made it sail upon the water and named him "the grateful one", as God has said: "*(O you) the offspring of those We bore (in the ark) with Noah, he was indeed a grateful worshipper.*" (17:3) He favored him with peace and blessing, for He has said: "*Noah, disembark with peace and safety from Us and blessings upon you and the people with you. [As for some (of them) We shall bestow advantages for a time, then send a grievous punishment on them.]*" (11:48)

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Kisā'ī it means "he wailed" from *nāḥ*, while Jewish tradition derives it from Hebrew *niham*, meaning "he gave comfort".

According to Muḥammad b. Ka‘b al-Qurazī, every male and female believer enters into that peace until the Day of Resurrection and “*He made his progeny survive.*” (37:77) For he was the first of humankind and the source of all offspring.<sup>23</sup>

It is related according to al-Ḥasan—Samrah b. Jandab that the Messenger of Allah said: “Three were born to Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Shem is the father of the Arabs, Persians, and Byzantines; Ham is the father of the blacks; and Japheth is the father of the Turks and of Gog and Magog.” ‘Atā’ said that Noah cursed Ham that the hair of his progeny would not go beyond their ears, and (that) wherever his children might be, they would be slaves to the children of Shem and Japheth.

When Noah and his offspring left the ark, he divided the Earth among his sons into three parts. He gave Shem the middle of the Earth, which includes Jerusalem, the Nile, the Euphrates, the Tigris, Sayḥūn, and Jayḥūn—that is, the area that lies between Qaysūn and east of the Nile, and what is between the southern and northern watercourses.<sup>24</sup> He gave to Ham his portion west of the Nile and what lies between the course of the south wind and beyond to Sayḥūn, to the course of the west wind. He made Japheth’s portion the area from Qaysūn and what lies beyond, up to the course of the east wind, for that is His word: “*And made his progeny survive, and left (his name) for posterity (the salutation): ‘Peace upon Noah among all men. That is how We reward those who do good. Surely he was one of Our faithful worshippers.’*” (37:77–80)

<sup>23</sup> Meaning that through his three sons he was responsible for the rebirth of humanity after the destruction of the Flood.

<sup>24</sup> Possibly the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea.

## HŪD

### THE TALE OF HŪD

God said: “*And We sent Hūd, their brother, to the people of ‘Ād. [He said: “O you people, worship God, for you have no other god but He. Will you not take heed for yourselves?” (7:65) He<sup>1</sup> was ‘Ād b. ‘Awṣ b. Iram son of Shem son of Noah, and (the tribe) was the ancient ‘Ād. The tribe of ‘Ād settled in the Yemen, and their dwellings were in the narrow valleys and sand-hills, as God said: “And remember [Hūd] the brother of ‘Ād, when he warned his people in Aḥqāf (the wind-curved sand-hills)—though many a warner had come [and gone before and after him: “Do not worship any one but God, for I fear the punishment of an awful day for you.]” (46:21) These sands are called “piled up sands” (raml ‘ālīj), and they are found between Oman and Ḥaḍramawt.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, (the people of ‘Ād) spread out in the land and became numerous and subdued its inhabitants because of the superiority of their strength with which God endowed them. For God had endowed them with strength and stature that He had not given to any others, as God has said: “Remember, He made you successors after the people of Noah, and gave you greater increase in your stature.” (7:69)—namely grandeur, height, strength, and power.*

Abū Ḥamzah al-Yamanī said: “The height of every man among them was seventy cubits.” Ibn ‘Abbās said: “Eighty cubits,” while al-Kalbī said: “The tallest of them was one hundred cubits while the shortest was sixty cubits.”

Wahb said: “The head of each of them was like a great dome, and each one’s eye would hatch wild beasts, and their nostrils likewise. They possessed idols that they worshipped instead of God. One of these idols was called Ṣudā, another Harad, and another Habā. God sent Hūd to them as a prophet, and while he was one of mediocre genealogy, he was their superior in esteem. He is Hūd son of ‘Abdallāh b. Ribāḥ b. al-Khalūd b. ‘Ād b. ‘Awṣ b. Iram son of Shem son of Noah.

<sup>1</sup> Namely, the founder of the people of ‘Ād and its patriarch.

<sup>2</sup> This may refer to al-Rub‘ al-Khālī, the Empty Quarter, in Arabia.

Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār said: "And Hūd was the son of Eber son of Shelah son of Arpachshad son of Shem son of Noah.<sup>3</sup> Eber was born to Shelah after thirty years of his life had passed. Hūd commanded them to profess belief in God's unity and to put no other god with Him, and to desist from wronging people. He did not command them to do more than that, according to tradition, but they rejected everything, called him a liar, and said: 'Who is stronger than we?' They built strongholds and attacked in them with the force of tyrants, as God has said: *"You build on every hill monuments in vain. And erect palaces, that you may live forever, and when you apply force become tyrannical."* (26:128-130)

When they behaved thus, God withheld the rain from them for three years until it harmed them greatly. In those days, when misfortune and hardship beset people, they used to seek relief from God, and this petitioning of God would take place at His Sacred House in Mecca, with both Muslims and unbelievers participating. A large crowd of different people of different religions would gather in Mecca, all of them honoring Mecca and recognizing its sanctity and its outstanding position in the eyes of God. The people of Mecca at that time were the Amalekites. They were called Amalek because their forebear was 'Amlāq son of Shem son of Noah. The lord of Amalek in Mecca at that time was a man called Mu'āwiyah b. Bakr. His mother's name was Nāhdah, the daughter of al-Khubayrī, a man of 'Ād.

When the rain dried up, the people of 'Ād suffered greatly and said to each other: 'Let us prepare a delegation from among us to go to Mecca and pray for rain for you.' They sent Qayl b. 'Anz, and Luqaym b. Huzāl b. Huzayl, and 'Utayl b. Ḍadd b. 'Ād the Elder, and Murthid b. Sa'd b. 'Ufayr, who was a Muslim but hid his conversion, and Jalhamah b. al-Khubayrī, the maternal uncle of Mu'āwiyah b. Bakr. They also sent Luqmān b. 'Ād b. Ḍadd b. 'Ād the Elder. Each one in this group set out with a band of men from his people, so that the number of persons in their delegation reached seventy men. When they came to Mecca they stayed with Mu'āwiyah b. Bakr, who dwelt on the outskirts of Mecca, outside the Sanctuary. He gave them lodging and hospitality, for they were his uncles and

<sup>3</sup> All of the names here but Hūd are in the Biblical list of names.

in-laws. They stayed with him for a month drinking wine, and being entertained by the 'two locusts,' two female singers of Mu'āwiyah b. Bakr's. Their journey had lasted a month and their stay lasted a month. So when Mu'āwiyah saw how long they were staying—their people having sent them to seek help because of the disaster that had struck them—he felt troubled and said: 'My uncles and in-laws are dying while these are staying with me as my guests. By God, I do not know what to do with them. I am embarrassed to order them to go back to the place from whence they were sent, for they would think that I had acted out of weariness over their staying with me. However, their people at home are perishing of distress and thirst.' He revealed his grievance to his 'two locusts,' and they said to him: 'Compose a poem which we will sing (to the visitors) without their knowing who composed it, perhaps this will convince them to move on.' So Mu'āwiyah b. Bakr said:

*Woe unto you, O Qayl, arise and murmur a prayer:  
 Perhaps God will bestow clouds on us  
 So the land of Ād will be watered  
 Indeed Ād do not utter words clearly  
 Because of the great thirst; we can beseech with these words  
 neither the old shaykh nor the young boy.  
 Their women lived in comfort;  
 but now they are lacking milk,  
 And the wild beasts approach them openly,  
 not fearing an arrow from any member of Ād.  
 While you are here, enjoying in full measure what you desire  
 all day and all night long.  
 How much more disgraceful is your visit than that of any other!  
 May you never again be met with greeting and salutation.*

When the 'two locusts' sang this to them, they said to each other: 'O men! Your people sent you to seek assistance for them because of this distress which has descended upon them, but you have kept them waiting. Enter this Sanctuary and pray for rain for your people!' Murthid b. Sa'd, who had secretly become a believer in Hūd in secret, then said: 'Your prayer for rain will not be answered, but if you obey your prophet and repent to your Lord, you will be given rain.' With that he made public that he had become a Muslim. When Jalhamah b. al-Khubayrī, the maternal uncle of Mu'āwiyah, heard these words and realized that Murthid followed the religion of Hūd, he said:

*Abū Sa'd, you are from a tribe of men of honor and nobility;  
 And your mother is of Thamūd.  
 We will not obey you as long as we live,  
 nor will we do that which you would.  
 Do you command us to abandon the religion of Rafīd,  
 and of Raml, the family of Dadd, and al-'Ubūd,  
 To abandon the religion of noble forefathers,  
 men of judgment, who follow the religion of Hūd?*

Then he said to Mu'āwiyah b. Bakr and to his father Bakr, who was a venerable shaykh: 'Hold back Murthid b. Sa'd so that he does not proceed to Mecca with us, for he follows the religion of Hūd and has abandoned our faith.' When they entered Mecca to pray that the 'Ād be given rain, Murthid b. Sa'd set out from Mu'āwiyah's dwelling and overtook them there before they had prayed to God. He began praying to God, just when the delegates of 'Ād did. He said: "God, grant my request for my own sake, and do not link me in any way with the prayer of the delegates of the 'Ād."

Qayl b. 'Anz, the chief of the 'Ād delegates, had commanded the others to make him their representative, and so the delegates of the 'Ād said: "God, grant unto Qayl what he asks of You, and place our request with his." Then Luqmān b. 'Ād stayed behind and did not join the delegates of the 'Ād in their prayer. He said: "God, I have come to you alone in my need, grant my request."

When Qayl b. 'Anz prayed, asking for rain, he said: "God, I did not come for a sick man whom I would be able to treat, nor a prisoner whom I could ransom. God, give rain to the 'Ād, as much as You used to! Our God, if Hūd is a true prophet, give us rain, for we perish." Then God created three clouds, one white, one red, and one black. Then a herald called to him from the cloud: "Qayl, choose one of these three clouds." Qayl said: 'I choose the black cloud because it has the most water.' The herald called out, saying: "Qayl, you have chosen ashes, only much of it. It will not leave alive anyone of the people of the 'Ād, it will spare neither a son nor a father, but turn them all into rotten bones and stiff corpses, except for the Banū al-Luwaydah,<sup>4</sup> the well-aided." The Banū al-Luwaydah were a group of the Huzāl b. Huzayl b. Bakr; they lived in Mecca with their maternal uncles and had not been with the 'Ād in their land. They are the last surviving 'Ād.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ṭabarī, p. 235; Brinner, *PP*, p. 35, have al-Lawdhiyyah.

<sup>5</sup> In contrast to *al-'Ād al-'Ulā*, "'Ād the Ancient." *Cf.*, Qur'ān 53:50.

God dispatched the black cloud which Qayl had chosen, containing the punishment against 'Ād, and it came upon them emerging from a *wādī* of theirs which is called al-Mughīth.<sup>6</sup> When they saw it they took it as a good omen and said: 'This is just a passing cloud that will bring us rain.' But God said: '*No, it is what you were trying to hasten, the wind which carries the grievous punishment. It will destroy every thing at the bidding of its Lord*' (46:24-25)—or everything over which it passed.

A woman of the 'Ād called Muhaddid was the first to see it and to realize that it was a destructive wind. When she recognized the punishment it carried she cried out, then swooned. After she recovered, people asked her what she saw. She replied: "I saw a wind in which there was something like flames of fire with men in front guiding them."

Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn—Muḥammad b. Ja'far—al-Ḥasan b. 'Alwah—Ismā'īl b. 'Īsā from Ishāq b. Bishr—al-Muthannā b. al-Ṣabāḥ—'Amr b. Shu'ayb—his father—his grandfather, that God inspired the lethal wind<sup>7</sup> to go forth against the people of 'Ād and take revenge from them for Him. So the wind went forth without limitation or boundary,<sup>8</sup> as if emanating from the nostrils of a bull, whereupon the Earth trembled from east to west. The angels said: "Lord, they will not be able to endure the wind as it is, it will destroy all that is between the easternmost and westernmost parts of the Earth." God inspired it to return and go forth like the hole of a seal, which is a ring. *God imposed it against them for seven nights and eight successive days*, (69:7) that is to say, steadily, consecutively. It spared no one of 'Ād but was destroyed. Hūd and those with him were separate in an enclosure, and all that befell them of the wind only soothed their skins and gave pleasure to the spirit. But it pierced the people of 'Ād, then carried them between Heaven and Earth, damaging their brains with stones until they perished.

Muḥammad b. Ishāq and al-Suddī said: "God sent the lethal wind against the 'Ād, and when it came near them they saw camels and people being blown about by the wind between Heaven and Earth, so they rushed into their houses. But when they entered, the wind came in after them and drove them out, and they perished. After God had destroyed them, He sent scavenger birds, and He cast (the

<sup>6</sup> Namely, "the well-watered," ground with abundant rain.

<sup>7</sup> *al-riḥ al-aqīm*, a wind causing barrenness, or sterility.

<sup>8</sup> *lit.*, "without weight or measure."



‘Ād) into the sea.” Ibn Bashshār said that when the wind came out of the *wāḍī* against the ‘Ād, a group of nine of them, among them was al-Khuljān, their chief and elder in those days, who said: “Come, let us stand at the head of the *wāḍī* and resist the wind.” But the wind would go under each one of them and lift him up, then throw him down and break his neck. The wind would pick up large trees with their roots, and tear down their houses on top of them. It would pick them up and leave them, as God has said: *‘As though they were uprooted trunks of palm-trees,’* (69:7) until only al-Khuljān was left of them. He made for the mountain and seized one side of it; the mountain shook him, and it continued shaking in his hand when he composed his poem:

*There remains only al-Khuljān himself.  
O dreadful day and dreadful yesterday that befell me;  
You have tightened your grip with great strength.  
Had it not come to me, I would have gone to it and staved it off.*

Hūd said to him: “Woe to you, Khuljān, accept Islam and be safe.” He replied to him: “What will I have from your Lord if I accept Islam?” He said: “The Garden.” He asked: “And who are those whom I see in the clouds as though they bring good luck?” Hūd said: “Those are the angels.” He said: “If I accept Islam, would your Lord assign some of them to me for my people?” Hūd replied: “Woe to you! Have you ever seen a king assigning away some of his troops?” He said: “If he acted in such a manner, I would not be pleased.” Then the wind came, joined him with the others and killed him. God made ‘Ād perish except for those of its people who remained in Mecca and its environs.

Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Dīnawārī, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq al-Sunnī, Abū Ya‘lā al-Mawṣilī, Iṣḥāq b. Abī Isrā‘īl and ‘Ubaydallāh b. ‘Umar al-Qawārīrī, Ja‘far b. Sulaymān al-Ḍabay‘ī, Farqad al-Sabakhī—‘Āṣim—‘Amr al-Bajalī—Abū Umāmah al-Bāhilī—that the Messenger of Allah said: “Some people of this nation spend the night with food, drink, and entertainment, and wake up as apes and pigs, and ignominy and calumny befalls them. Then people say: ‘Tonight (the Earth) has swallowed up the Banū so-and-so.’ He will send against them the lethal wind which destroyed the ‘Ād for their drinking wine and taking usury, making use of singing-girls, wearing silk, and violating the rules of kinship.”

It has been said: “Then the delegates of ‘Ād left Mecca until they

passed by Mu'āwiyah b. Bakr and alighted there. While they were with him a man came on a camel during a moonlit night from the cities of the 'Ād, and related to them the destruction of the 'Ād, and they asked: 'Where did you part from Hūd and his companions?' He replied: 'I parted from them on the shore of the sea,' and they seemed to doubt what he had related to them." But Harmalah bt. Bakr said: 'He is right, by the Lord of the Ka'bah, and Munawwar b. Ya'far, the son of my brother Mu'āwiyah b. Bakr, is with them.' It was said to Murthīd b. Sa'd, Luqmān b. 'Ād, and Qayl b. 'Anz when they prayed in Mecca: "You have been granted your request, so choose for yourselves." Murthīd said: "God, grant me piety and truthfulness." And he was given that. Qayl said: "I choose that there should befall me what befell my people." And he was told that means destruction. So he replied: "I do not care. There is no sense that I survive my people." Then he received the punishment that befell the 'Ād, and he perished.

Luqmān said: "Lord, give me long life," and was told: "Choose for yourself to last as long as seven brown dung droppings of dusty gazelles which rain-drops never touched, or the life span of seven vultures: when one vulture would die, you would turn into another vulture.' He thought little of the permanence of dung droppings and chose the vulture; and so he was given the life span of seven vultures. Each time, he would take the fledglings when they hatched from their eggs, choose a male from among them for its strength, and raise it until, when it died, he would take another. He continued doing this until he reached the seventh vulture (each vulture would live eighty years) and when only the seventh remained, a nephew said to Luqmān: "Uncle, only this vulture remains of your life span." Luqmān said: "Nephew, this one is Lubad." (And 'Lubad' in their language means 'time'.) When Lubad's life span came to an end, the vultures flew off in the early morning from the top of a mountain, but Lubad did not fly away with them. (Luqmān's vultures were never kept out of his sight.) When he saw that Lubad did not fly off with the (other) vultures, he went up the mountain to see what Lubad had done, and sensed a weakness in himself, which he had never felt before. When he reached the mountain he found his vulture Lubad standing among the vultures and called to him: "Fly off, Lubad!" He was about to fly, but was unable, and he fell down and Luqmān died with him. It is about him that the proverb was coined:

*Eternity (abad) has overtaken Lubad.*

And al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī said:

*It (the land) became desert and its people were carried off;  
that which destroyed Lubad destroyed them.*

Muḥammad b. Ishāq said: Murthid b. Sa'd, composed this poem when he heard the rider telling about the destruction of the 'Ād:

*'Ād disobeyed their messenger and became thirsty;  
but Heaven did not moisten them.  
Their delegates were sent for a month seeking rain;  
but they added more hardship to the thirst.  
Because they openly blasphemed their Lord,  
ruin followed them back in their footsteps.  
Indeed, God stripped the 'Ād of their reason,  
so now their hearts are a windswept wasteland.  
Who is their guardian now that they defied Him?  
and what use is friendly admonition for their affliction?  
O could I but sacrifice my own soul, my two daughters and my sons' mother,  
for the soul of our prophet Hūd as ransom.  
He came to us while our hearts were blinded  
to injustice—light had disappeared.  
We had an idol who was called Sumūd;  
who faces both thirst and health (with equanimity),  
Whereas those who turned to Him in repentance were able to perceive Him,  
those who disowned Him were overtaken by misery.  
As for me, I shall join the people of Hūd  
and his brothers when night falls.*

Then he joined Hūd and those with him who had become believers. Hūd lived as (long as) God willed and then he died, his lifespan being one hundred and fifty years. Abū l-Ṭufayl 'Āmir b. Wāthilah said: "I heard 'Alī say to a man of the people of Ḥaḍramawt: 'Have you seen a red sand-hill with red clots of earth in it and many thorn-bushes and lote-trees in such-and-such a district in Ḥaḍramawt?' He said: 'Yes, Prince of the Believers, you have described it to me like a man who has seen it.' ('Alī) said: 'No, but I have been told about it.' The Ḥaḍramawtī said: 'What is its significance, Prince of the Believers?' He replied: 'The grave of the prophet Hūd is in it.'" Abū 'Umar and Aḥmad b. Abī l-'Arabī related to us from al-Mughīrah b. 'Amr al-Walīd: "(The grave is) in Mecca in the Inviolable Mosque between the Corner (of the Black Stone) and the Standing Place of Abraham."

Al-Faḍl b. Yahyā al-Jundī informed us, as did Yūnus b. Muḥammad and Yazīd b. Abī Hakīm—Sufyān al-Thawrī —‘Aṭā—al-Sā’ib—‘Abd al-Rahmān b. Sābiṭ: “Between the Corner and the Place of Abraham and Zamzam are the graves of ninety-nine prophets, and the graves of Hūd and Ṣāliḥ, of Shu‘ayb and Ismā‘īl, are in that place.”<sup>9</sup>

According to other accounts, any prophet whose people were destroyed while he and the pious with him were saved, would come to Mecca with his companions to worship God until they died. And God is All- knowing.

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<sup>9</sup> All of these are seen as Arabian (*i.e.*, non-Israelite) prophets.

## ŞĀLIḤ

### THE TALE OF ŞĀLIḤ

God has said: "*And to Thamūd (We sent) their brother Şāliḥ.*" (7:73) He was Thamūd b. 'Āmir<sup>1</sup> b. Iram son of Shem son of Noah and he was a brother of Jadīs, but God meant the tribe (of Thamud) here. Abū 'Amr al-'Alā' said: "It was called Thamūd because of its scarcity of water," *thamūd* being 'a source that dries up in winter.' The dwelling places of Thamūd were in al-Ḥijr, between the Hejaz and Syria.

According to what Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār, al-Suddī, al-Kalbī, Wahb b. Munabbih, Ka'b and other writers, (all of whose reports overlap) said that after God destroyed the (tribe of) the ancient 'Ād, and finished their affair, the Thamūd began to flourish and were appointed their successors in the land, and settled there. They multiplied and prospered and one of them began to build a house of stone and clay, but it collapsed while he remained alive. When they saw this, they used stones from the mountains for making houses. They smoothed them, bored holes in them, hollowed them out, and were living in comfort as God has said: "*And remember when He appointed you successors after 'Ād and lodged you in the land, taking to yourselves castles of its plains, and hewing its mountains into houses. So remember the bounties of God and do not do mischief on the Earth.*" (7:74) But they violated God's commandment and served others besides Him, acting corruptly on the Earth, so God sent to them Şāliḥ as a prophet. He was Şāliḥ son of 'Ubayd b. Āsif b. Māsiḥ b. Ḥādhir, son of Thamūd, all these were Arab peoples. Şāliḥ was of mediocre genealogy among them, but of highest esteem. God sent him to them as a messenger and he called them to God and His worship, but only a *few, persecuted*' (cf., 8:26) followed him.

When Şāliḥ urged them with his pleas and messages, and constantly alerted them and warned them, they asked him to show them a miracle which would confirm what he was saying. He said: "O God, show them a miracle so that they may be taught a lesson."

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<sup>1</sup> Zirikī, 2:56-7, has b. 'Ābir.

Then he said to them: "What miracle do you want?" They replied: "Come with us to our festival"—they had a festival at which they would go forth with their idols on a certain day of the year—"and pray to your god and we will pray to ours. If your prayer is answered, we will follow you, but if ours is answered, you will follow us," and ŞāliḤ said: "Yes."

So they took their idols out to that festival of theirs and ŞāliḤ went forth with them. They prayed to their idols and asked them that ŞāliḤ not be granted anything for which he prayed. Then said Jundu' b. 'Amr b. Jawwās, who was at that time the chief of Thamūd: "ŞāliḤ, bring forth for us from this rock"—meaning the rock that stood apart from the mountain in the vicinity of al-Ḥijr, called al-Kāthibah—"a she-camel of the kind known as al-Muḥtarīja; big-bellied, covered with hair, in the tenth month (of gestation)"—a Muḥtarīja is similar to the Bactrian camel—"If you do that, we will believe you and follow your creed." ŞāliḤ took their pledge that if he did that they would believe him and follow him. Then ŞāliḤ prayed and called to God, and the rock began to labor as if it were at the point of delivering her offspring. Then the mountain shook and cracked to reveal a camel, in her tenth month, big-bellied, hairy, as they had asked him—only God knew how huge was what she carried inside. All the while, they were watching and she brought forth a young one, like her in size. Thereupon Jundu' b. 'Amr and a group of his people expressed their belief in him, and wanted the nobles of Thamūd also to believe in ŞāliḤ and follow his creed. But Dhu'āb b. 'Amr b. Labīd and al-Khubāb, the two guardians of their idols, and Riyāb b. Şam'ar, who were among the nobles of Thamūd, forbade it. Jundu' b. 'Amr had a cousin called Shihāb b. Khalīfah who wanted to accept Islam, but this group of people forbade him and he obeyed them. A man of Thamūd said:

*A group of the family of 'Amr, called Shihāb to the faith of the prophet.  
The noblemen of Thamūd, all of them, thought that he would consent.  
Had he consented, ŞāliḤ would have become mighty among us,  
and they would not have thought of their companion Dhu'āb on the same level  
as (ŞāliḤ)  
But the misguided of the people of Ḥijr,  
after being on the right path, followed one another into evil.*

When the camel came forth, ŞāliḤ said: "Here is this she-camel. *She shall have her share of water as you have yours, each on an appointed day.*"

(26:155) The camel remained with her young one in the land of Thamūd, grazing on the trees and drinking water. She would come to the water one day, and they on another day. When her day came, she would put her head in a well in the land of al-Ḥijr called "The Well of the She-camel" and the water would rise up for her. She would lift up her head only when she had drunk everything in it and had not left a drop, she would crouch down, then return to them. They would milk her as much as they wanted, and drink and store some and fill their vessels. But she would come out through a different passageway than the one through which she had entered, for she was unable to go forth from whence she had entered because it was now too narrow for her. Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī went to the land of Thamūd and measured the passageway where the camel would have come out, and found it to be sixty cubits wide.

On the morning of their day, they would drink of the water which God had brought out of the well for them, and they would store as much as they wanted, an amount sufficient for them on the camel's day. For that reason, they would live in prosperity and calm. When it was hot in the summer, the camel would climb to the upper part of the *wādī*, and their sheep, cows, and camels would flee from her; then she would go down to the bottom of the *wādī* with its intense heat. The livestock would run away from her when they saw her. In winter, the camel would go first to the bottom of the *wādī* so their cattle would flee to the top of the *wādī* with its bitter cold, which harmed their cattle to the point of decrepitude and to be weeded out, for their grazing-places were in the mountains. This became intolerable to them so they endeavored to hamstring the camel and plotted ways to do so.

There was a woman of Thamūd called 'Unayzah daughter of Ghanam b. Mukhallid, nicknamed Umm Ghanam, and she was of the Banū 'Ubayd b. al-Mahil, and the wife of Dhu'āb b. 'Amr. She was an old woman with beautiful daughters and much wealth in camels, cows, and sheep. There was another woman named Ṣadūq bt. al-Muḥayyā b. Mihr. She was wealthy and beautiful, with much livestock. These two women were among the strongest enemies of Ṣāliḥ, and they were plotting to hamstring the camel because of their rejection of Ṣāliḥ and because of her harming their livestock. Ṣadūq was with a maternal cousin of hers named Ṣanīm b. Harāwah b. Sa'd b. al-Ghaṭrīf b. Hilāl, who had accepted Islam in a proper conversion. Ṣadūq had entrusted her wealth to him but he had dis-

bursed it to those among Şālih's companions who had accepted Islam together with him until the wealth had run out. Şadūq was informed of his conversion and reproved him for that, but he expounded his religion to her and called her to God. But she rejected him and took her children, hiding them among the children of her paternal cousins who held the same views. Her husband asked her to return his children to him. And when he persevered, she responded: "(Not) until I bring you to trial before *my* paternal cousins." This she said because the paternal cousins of her husband were Muslims and therefore she refused to bring him to trial before them. But her paternal cousins said to her: "By God! You give him his children willingly or not!" When she saw that, she gave him his children.

Then Şadūq and 'Unayzah plotted to hamstring the camel in accordance with the suffering that was preordained for the two of them. Şadūq called upon a man of Thamūd called al-Khubāb and commanded him to hamstring the camel, offering herself to him if he would do that, but he rejected her. So she called upon a paternal cousin of hers called Muşda' b. Mahraj and offered herself to him if he would hamstring the camel. She was one of the most beautiful, wealthy, and mature of the people, and he agreed to this. 'Unayzah called upon Qaddār b. Sālif of the people of Qadaḥ, whose mother's name was Qadīrah. He was fair-haired, blue-eyed, and short-statured, and people claimed that he was born out of wedlock to a man named Şafwān and not to Sālif, though he was born in the latter's bed. She said to him: "Qaddār, I will give you whichever of my daughters you desire if you will hamstring the camel." Qaddār was respected among his people and the Messenger of God mentioned him when he was sent: "When the most villainous then will be delegated a nobleman among his people like Abū Zam'ah."<sup>2</sup> Qaddār and Muşda' went off and sought the help of certain people of Thamūd; seven persons followed them, and they were nine altogether, as God said: "*Now there were in the city nine persons who did corruption in the land, and did not put things right.*" (27:48) And Hidayāt b. Mablagh, the maternal uncle of Qaddār, who was distinguished among the people of al-Ḥijr, joined them, as well as Dhu'ar b. Ghanam b. Dā'irah, the brother of Muşda', and five others whose

<sup>2</sup> Possibly referring to Zama'a b. al-Aswad, a foe of the Prophet, see Guillaume, pp. 172, 181.



names were not mentioned, and they agreed to hamstring the camel.

Al-Suddī and others said that God inspired Ṣāliḥ, saying: "Your people will hock the camel." And he told this to them, but they said: "We will never do that." And he said to them: "During this month a lad will be born who will hamstring her, and your destruction will be at his hands." They said: "Then we shall surely slay every boy born this month." During that month nine sons were born to nine of them, and they slew them. But then a son was born to a tenth man, and he refused to slay him because he was his first-born; not one child had been born to him previously. The son of the tenth man had blue eyes and fair skin, and he grew quickly. When this man passed by the nine and they saw him, they regretted having killed their children and said: 'If our sons were alive they would be like this one.' So the nine became angry with Ṣāliḥ, because he was the reason for their having killed their sons,<sup>3</sup> and they swore to each other an oath by God: "We shall attack him and his people at night." They said: "Let us go out and make the people think that we have left on a journey, then let us go to the cave and hide in it until, when night falls and Ṣāliḥ goes to his mosque, we will ambush him and kill him. We shall return to the cave and hide in it, then go back to our camels and continue on our journey and say: *'We were not witnesses of the destruction of his family; and assuredly we are truthful men.'* (27:49) They will believe us and think that we had gone on a journey."

"Ṣāliḥ used not to sleep at night in the town with them, but sought out the mosque called the 'Mosque of Ṣāliḥ' to spend the night there. When morning came he would come to them, exhort them, and speak to them, and in the evenings he would return to the mosque and spend the night there. When they entered the cave, thinking that they would ambush him that night and kill him, a boulder from the cave fell upon them and killed them. Some men who learned of the event rushed to the cave, and lo! they were smashed. They returned, crying out in the town: "Servants of God, it was not enough for Ṣāliḥ that he commanded them to kill their children, so he killed them too." Then the people of the village gathered to hamstring the camel.

Ibn Ishāq said that the oath sworn by the nine to attack Ṣāliḥ at

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<sup>3</sup> *I.e.*, because of his prediction that a son born during that month would cause their destruction.

night came after they had hamstrung the camel, and Şāliḥ had announced to them that they would be punished. It was as follows, the nine who hamstrung the camel said: "Come, let us kill Şāliḥ. If he speaks the truth (that we will be punished), we will speed up slaying him, and if he is lying, we will unite him with his camel." At night they came to attack him and his people, but the angels cast stones at them, and when they kept their companions waiting, the latter came to Şāliḥ's dwelling and found them crushed, smashed with stones. They said to Şāliḥ: "You have killed them," and they intended to kill him, but his kinfolk shielded him, took weapons and said to them: "You will never kill him, for he has warned you that punishment will descend upon you in three nights. If he told the truth, you will only increase your Lord's anger at you. If he lied, then you have beyond what you desire." So they went away from them that very night.

Al-Suddī and others said that when the son of the tenth man was born—that is to say, Qaddār—he matured each day as much as anyone else did in a week, and in a week as much as anyone else in a month, and in a month as much as anyone else in a year.<sup>4</sup> When he grew up, he sat with people having strong drink, and they wanted some water to mix with their drink. That was the day of the camel's turn to drink, and they found that the camel had drunk all of the water. They found that unbearable, and said: "What can we do with the milk? If we used the water which this camel drinks to water our herds and our fields it would be better for us." When the son of the tenth man said: "Do you want me to hamstring her?" they agreed.

Ka'b said that they hamstrung the camel because of a woman called Malikā who had ruled over Thamūd. When the people turned to Şāliḥ and he assumed the leadership, she envied him and spoke to a woman called Quṭṭām who was the beloved of Qaddār b. Sālif and to another woman called Qubbāl who was the beloved of Muşda' b. Mahraj. Qaddār and Muşda' would meet them every night to drink wine. Malikā said to the two women: "When Qaddār and Muşda' come to you tonight do not let them sleep with you, but say to them: 'The queen is aggrieved because of Şāliḥ and his camel, and we will not submit to you until you hamstring the camel, but

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the story of the birth of Abraham below.

if you hamstring her we will submit to you.' When the two men came, they spoke these words to them and they replied: "We will hamstring her."

Ibn Ishāq and others have said that Qaddār, Muṣḍa', and their seven companions went out and lay in wait for the camel until she would come away from the water. Qaddār had hidden himself from her in the trunk of a tree that lay in her path, while Muṣḍa' had hidden himself in another tree trunk. The camel passed by Muṣḍa', who shot an arrow at her with which he penetrated her leg muscles. Umm Ghanam 'Unayzah went out and ordered her daughter, who was a most beautiful woman, to show herself to Qaddār and uncover her face for him, which she did, and she also incited him to hamstring the camel. He attacked the camel with his sword and laid bare her hamstring; he felled her and slit her throat, thus killing her. The people of the village went out, divided her up, and ate her flesh. When he had hamstrung her she foamed at the mouth, and when her foal saw all this, he rushed away to an inaccessible mountain called Ḍaw'—some call it Qārah.

The following is transmitted on the authority of the Messenger of Allah in the narrative of Shahr b. Ḥawshab from 'Umar b. Khārijah. Ṣāliḥ was told: "Look at your camel! It has been hamstrung." Ṣāliḥ approached and they went out to meet him and they apologized to him, saying: "O prophet of God, so-and-so hamstrung her; we are without fault." Ṣāliḥ said to them: "See whether you can get hold of her young one. For if you get hold of it, perhaps your punishment will be removed from you." So they went forth in search of it, and when they saw it on the top of the mountain they went to seize it, but God inspired the mountain and it raised itself up to Heaven until not even the birds could reach it. Then Ṣāliḥ came, and when the young camel saw him it wept so that its tears flowed; then it foamed three times and the rock split and it entered it. Then Ṣāliḥ said: "Every nation has its term. *Take your joy in your habitation for three days*, (11:65) then the punishment will come to you. That is not a false threat." Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār said that four of the nine persons who had hamstrung the camel followed her young one, among them Muṣḍa' and his brother Dhu'āb, the son of Mahraj. Muṣḍa' shot an arrow at it and it penetrated its heart, then he pulled its leg and took it down, throwing its meat together with its mother's meat. Ṣāliḥ said to them: "You have desecrated something sacrosanct to God, so rejoice in God's punishment and His vengeance."

But they responded, mocking him: "And when will that be, Şāliḥ? And what will be the sign of that?"

They used to give the days names; Sunday was al-Awwal, Monday was Ahwan, Tuesday was Dibār, Wednesday was Jabbār, Thursday was Mu'nis, Friday was al- 'Arūbah, and Saturday was Shibār. The poet said about this:

*I hope that I shall live, but that the day of my death  
might be on Awwal or Ahwan or Jabbār  
Or the destroyer Dibār. But even if I elude it,  
there still is Mu'nis or 'Arūbah or Shibār.*

It is related that the camel was hamstringed on a Wednesday, and Şāliḥ was asked about the time of the punishment and its sign, he said, "Verily you will awaken early on Mu'nis and your faces will be yellow; you will awaken on 'Arūbah with your faces red; and on Shibār with your faces black. Then the punishment will come to you on Awwal." Indeed, young and old, male and female, awoke on Thursday and their faces were yellow, as though they had been painted with saffron. Now they were convinced of Şāliḥ's words and knew that he had told them the truth, so they sought to kill him. Şāliḥ fled from them and reached a clan of Thamūd called Banū Ghanam. He stayed with their leader, a man from among them called Nufayl, nicknamed Abū Hadab, who was an idolator. But he hid him from them and they were unable to reach him. In the morning they went to Şāliḥ's companions, and forced them to lead them to him. One of Şāliḥ's companions named Mubdi' b. Haram asked: "Prophet of Allah, they are forcing us to lead them to you, shall we consent?" He said: "Yes", and Mubdi' showed them the way. They came to Abū Hadab and questioned him. He said: 'Yes, he is with me, but you have no way to reach him." They turned away and left him, so deeply were they concerned with God's punishment, for they spoke among themselves about what they saw on each other's faces. When evening came they cried out all together: "Alas, one day of our term has passed!"

When they awoke on the second day, behold, their faces had turned red as though dyed with blood, and they cried out and clamored and wept, for they knew that the punishment was befalling them. When evening came they cried out all together: "Alas, two days of our term have passed and the punishment is upon us!" When they awoke on the third day their faces had turned black as though

painted with pitch, and they all cried out: "Alas, the punishment is upon us!" When the eve of Sunday came, Šālīḥ went out from amongst them, and those who believed in him left with him and came to Syria and settled in Ramlah in Palestine. When the remaining people awoke, they wrapped themselves in shrouds, and put embalming aromatics on themselves, using aloes and myrrh, and their shrouds were mats of leather.<sup>5</sup> They then threw themselves on the ground, turning their glances, now toward Heaven, and now toward the Earth, not knowing whence the punishment would come. When the sun stood high on Sunday, a roar came down from Heaven with the sound of the mightiest thunderbolt and the loudest roar rose from on earth. Their hearts in their chests failed them, there was left no one, young or old, that did not perish. He said: "*They lay overturned in their homes in the morning, as though they had never lived there at all. Beware! The people of Thamūd turned away from their Lord. Beware! Accursed are the people of Thamūd.*" (11:67-68) Only a crippled girl from among them escaped, named Dhari'ah bt. Shāf; she was an infidel full of enmity towards Šālīḥ. God cured her foot after she had witnessed all the punishment, and she went forth as fast as possible until she came to Qarḥ, which is the Wādī l-Qurā, a barrier of sorts between the Hejaz and Syria, and she told them of the punishment she had witnessed and what had befallen Thamūd. She asked for water, and when it was given to her and she drank, she died.

Abū Zubayr—Jābir b. 'Abdallāh said that when the Prophet passed by al-Ḥijr during the raid on Tabūk, he said to his companions: "Let no one of you enter this town nor drink of its water. Do not enter among these punished ones except weeping, lest there befall you what happened to them." Then he said: "Now then, you must not ask your Messenger for signs. Look at the people of Šālīḥ who asked their Messenger for a sign; whereupon God sent them the she-camel. She would come to the water from this passageway and go out from that one, and she would drink their water on the appointed day." The Messenger of Allah also showed them the place where the young camel climbed up into the cave. But they rejected the commandment of their Lord and hamstrung her, and God destroyed

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<sup>5</sup> Leather mats were placed under people to be executed by decapitation and the like. Their bodies were then wrapped in the mats and taken away for burial.

them from beneath the face of Heaven, whoever of them was in the easternmost or westernmost part of the Earth, except for one man named Abū Raghāl, who was Abū Thaqīf. He was in the Sanctuary of God, and God's Sanctuary prevented him from being punished by God; but when he left (the Sanctuary) whatever befell his people befell him as well. A golden branch was buried with him, and the Messenger of Allah showed the people the grave of Abū Raghāl. The people went down and hastened to it with their swords and dug for it, and took out that golden branch. Then the Messenger of Allah veiled himself with his garment and hastened his journey until he crossed the *wādī*.

Scholars say that ŞāliḤ died in Mecca when he was fifty-eight years old. That was because he moved from Syria to Mecca after God destroyed his people, and he worshipped God there until he died; he had lived among his people for twenty years. Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Ḥamdūn—'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan—'Abdallāh b. Hāshim—Wakī' b. al-Jarrāḥ—Qutaybah Abū 'Uthmān—his father—al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāhim said: "The Messenger of Allah said: 'Alī, do you know who is the greatest villain among the ancients?' He answered: 'God and His Messenger know best.' He said: 'The one who hamstrung the camel.' He said: 'Alī, do you know who is the greatest villain of the later generation?' He replied: 'I have already said that God and His Messenger know best.' He said: 'The one who will kill you.'" And God is All-knowing.

## ABRAHAM

### A SESSION ON THE STORY OF ABRAHAM AND NIMROD

He is Abraham son of Terah son of Nahor son of Serug son of Reu son of Peleg son of Eber son of Shelah son of Kenan son of Arpachshad son of Shem son of Noah.<sup>1</sup> The name of Abraham's father given him by his father (Nahor) was Terah, but when, at the time of Nimrod, he became guardian over the treasures of his gods, he was called Āzar.<sup>2</sup> Mujāhid said that Āzar was not the name of his father, but was the name of an idol. Ibn Ishāq said that it was not the name of an idol but a nick-name, meaning "crooked", by which he was put to shame. It is said that in Nabatean it means "decrepit old man." Terah was born to Nahor after twenty-seven years of his life had passed. This portion consists of several chapters—and God is All-knowing.

#### *Chapter 1 The Birth of Abraham*

The sages differ over the place in which Abraham was born. Some say that his birthplace was in Susa in the district of al-Ahwāz, while some say that it was in Babylon, in the district of al-Sawād in the region called Kūthā. Still others say that it was in al-Warkā, a district within the borders of Kaskar, but that his father then moved him to the place where Nimrod lived, in the region of Kūthā. Others say his birthplace was Ḥarrān, but his father moved him to the land of Babylon. But in general, scholars of old say that Abraham was born at the time of Nimrod son of Canaan, and that between the Flood and Abraham's birth one thousand two hundred and sixty-three years passed—that was three thousand and thirty-seven years

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic: *Ibrāhīm b. Tārīkh b. Nākhūr b. Sārūgh b. Arghū b. Shālīkh b. Faynūn b. Arfakhshadh b. Sām b. Nūh.*

<sup>2</sup> Based on Qur'ān 6:74, interpreted by some to be simply an abusive epithet or name of an idol. Possibly a misuse of the Hebrew name of Abraham's servant Eliczer, in Gen. 15:2.

after the creation of Adam. Nimrod, during whose reign Abraham was born, was Nimrod son of Canaan son of Sanjārib son of Kūrush<sup>3</sup> son of Ham son of Noah. The *Ḥadīth* says: “Four men have ruled the (whole) world: two believers and two infidels. The two believers were Solomon son of David and Dhū l-Qarnayn; the two infidels, Nimrod and Nebuchadnezzar.”<sup>4</sup> Nimrod was the first to place a crown on his own head. He acted haughtily in the land and called on the people to worship him. He had diviners and astrologers who told him: “There will be born in your land in this year a boy who will change the religion of the people of the land, and your destruction and the end of your rule will be at his hands.” It is said that they found that in the books of the prophets.

Al-Suddī said that Nimrod seemed to see in his dream a star rising which took away the brilliance of the Sun and the Moon until no brilliance was left to them. He was greatly frightened by that and called the magicians, diviners and prognosticators—they were the ones who drew lines on the ground—and asked them about it. They said: ‘He is a child who will be born in your region this year, and your ruin and the ruin of your family will be at his hands.’ And Nimrod ordered the slaying of every boy born in that region that year, and ordered that men be kept apart from women. Over every ten men he placed a trustworthy overseer, and when a woman menstruated he would leave the couple alone with each other, since he was sure that there would be no intercourse; when she was pure again, he would separate the man from her. Āzar the father of Abraham returned and found his wife purified from menstruation, so he had intercourse with her during her purity and she became pregnant with Abraham.”

Muḥammad b. Ishāq said: “Nimrod sent for every pregnant woman in his city and withheld her from her husband, except that he did not know of the pregnancy of the mother of Abraham. That was

<sup>3</sup> Possibly for Sennacherib son of Cyrus. Nimrod in Arabic is Namrūd, Namrūdih, Nimrūd. Not in Qurʾān. Tabarī, p. 205; Brinner, *PP*, p. 4, associates him with Ḍaḥḥāk, elsewhere called Ruler of the East or of the whole Earth. See Tabarī, pp. 254ff.; Brinner, *PP*, pp. 50ff.; Kisāʾī, pp. 121ff.; Thackston, pp. 138ff.; Tottoli, *Storie*, pp. 72ff. *EI*<sup>2</sup>, VII:952–53.

<sup>4</sup> In Arabic Bukhtnaṣ(ṣ)ar, see *EI*<sup>2</sup>, I:1297–98. Bakhtanaṣsar in *al-Munjid li-ʿĀlām*, p. 66. Bukht Naṣir in Rosenthal, p. 352, n. 1058. Not mentioned in Qurʾān. See also below p. 553, n. 7.



because she was a young girl, never before pregnant, and it was not noticed on her belly.”

Al-Suddī said: “Nimrod took the men out to the troops, thus separating them from women out of fear that births would result. He continued thus, God knows how long, then he thought of some task in the city, but he had confidence in no one of his people to take care of it except Āzar. He called him and said to him: ‘I have a task for you and would like to entrust you with it. I shall send you only because of my trust in you, and I ask you to swear that you will not draw near your wife, nor have intercourse with her.’ Āzar said: ‘I am too zealous for my religion to do that.’ So he entrusted him with this task and sent him off. He came to the city and completed his task and said to himself: ‘If only I might visit my family and see them!’ When he looked at the mother of Abraham, he could not restrain himself, so he had intercourse with her and she became pregnant with Abraham.”

Ibn ‘Abbās said: “When the mother of Abraham became pregnant, the diviners said to Nimrod: ‘The mother of the boy of whom we told you has become pregnant with him tonight.’ So Nimrod ordered that boys be slain, and when the mother of Abraham was about to give birth and was seized with labor pains, she fled, for fear that Nimrod would overtake her and kill her child. She gave birth to him in a dry riverbed, wrapped him in a rag, and placed him among rushes.<sup>5</sup> She returned and told her husband about her son, that she had given birth and that the boy was in such-and-such a place. His father went out and took him from that place, dug an underground tunnel for him at a river, and concealed it and blocked its entrance with a stone, for fear of wild beasts. His mother came to him frequently and nursed him.”

Al-Suddī said: “When the belly of Abraham’s mother had grown large, Āzar became afraid that she would be slain, so he took her to a place between al-Kūfah and al-Baṣrah called Warkā and made her live in an underground tunnel, and placed things with her that would be useful to her. He began to take care of her, but hid that from his friends. She gave birth to Abraham in that tunnel, and he grew so fast that at the age of one year, he was as big as a three-year-old. Soon he looked like an adolescent, which made the child-

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<sup>5</sup> Arabic: *ḥalfāʾ*, alfa, or esparto; a type of grass or rush.

slayers give up the will to kill him. Then Āzar mentioned to his friends that he had a big son, and took him to them.”

Ibn Ishāq said: “When the mother of Abraham felt labor pains, she went out one night to a nearby cave and there gave birth to Abraham. She provided him with what is necessary for a newborn child, sealed him in the cave and returned to her house. Later she looked for him in the cave and found him alive, sucking his thumb.” Abū Zurayq said that whenever the mother of Abraham came to see him, she would find him sucking his thumb. One day she thought: “Let me look at his fingers.” She found him sucking water from one finger, milk from another, honey from another, and clarified butter from another.

Ibn Ishāq said that Āzar asked his wife what her pregnancy had produced. She said: “I gave birth to a boy, but he died.” He believed her and asked no more. Now Abraham’s growth in one day was like a month and a month like a year, so Abraham had been in the cave only fifteen days<sup>6</sup> when he came to his father Āzar and informed him that he was his son. And his wife told him what she had done for him. So Āzar rejoiced over that and was very happy.

*Chapter II Abraham Leaves the Underground Hiding-place and  
Returns to his People, Disputes with Them in Matters of Religion,  
and is Cast into the Fire*

Scholars of the biographies of the ancients have said that when Abraham grew up while in the underground hiding-place, he said to his mother: “Who is master over me?” She said: “I am.” He said: “Who is your master?” and she replied: “Your father.” He asked: “Then who is my father’s master?” She said: “Nimrod.” He asked: “But who is Nimrod’s master?” She said: “Be quiet,” and he was silent. Then she returned to her husband and said: “Look at that boy who says that he would change the religion of the people on Earth, he is your son.” Then she related to him what he had said to her, so his father Āzar went to him and Abraham said to him: “Father, who is my master?” He said: “Your mother.” “And who is my mother’s master?” He answered: “I am.” “And who is your master?” He replied: “Nimrod.” “And who is Nimrod’s master?” He

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<sup>6</sup> *I.e.*, he was fifteen years old.

slapped him and said, "Be quiet!" For that is as He said: "*We bestowed guidance on Abraham for We knew him well.*" (21:51)

Then he said to his parents: "Take me out of here." And the two of them took him out of the hiding-place and went off with him until the sun set. At that time Abraham saw camels, cows, sheep, and horses being led to their night shelter, and he asked his father: "What are these?" He replied: "Camels and horses and cows and sheep." So he said: "These must have a master who created them." Then he observed and thought about the creation of the Heavens and the Earth and said: "Verily He Who created and sustained me, fed me and gave me drink, is my Master. I have no god beside Him."

Then he looked, and behold, Jupiter (*al-Mushtarī*) had risen, and some say it was Venus (*al-Zuharah*). That night was the end of the month and he saw that star before he saw the moon, and he said: "This is my Lord", for that is His word: *When the night came with its covering of darkness he saw a star, and he said: "This is my Lord." But when the star set, he said: "I love not those that wane." When he saw the moon rise all aglow, he exclaimed: "This is my Lord." But even as the moon set, he said: "If my Lord had not shown me the way, I would surely have gone astray." When he saw the Sun rise all resplendent, he cried: "My Lord is surely this, and the greatest of them all!" But it also set and he exclaimed: "O my people! I am through with those you associate (with Him). I have truly turned my face towards Him Who created the heavens and the earth: I have chosen one way, and am not an idolater.*" (6:76-79)

They relate that his father made idols, and when he brought Abraham to be with him, he would make idols and give them to Abraham to sell. Abraham would take them along and cry out: "Who will buy what does harm and is of no use?" So no one would buy from him. Since they were not profitable for him he would take them to a river and strike off their heads, saying to them: "Drink your fill. You are useless!" mocking his people for their departure from the right path and their folly. When it became known among his people and in his city how he had disgraced and derided their idols, his people argued, and he said: "*Do you argue with me about God? He has guided me [already, and I fear not what you associate with Him, unless my Lord wills, for held within the knowledge of my Lord is every thing. Will you not reflect? And why should I fear those you associate with Him when you fear not associating others with God for which he has sent down no sanction? Tell me, whose way is the way of peace, if you have the knowledge? They alone*

*have peace who believe and do not intermix belief with denial, and are guided on the right path.] This is the argument We gave to Abraham against his people. We exalt whosoever We please in rank by degrees. Your Lord is Wise and All-knowing.” (6:80–83)*

He debated them until he defeated them and overcame them in the dispute. Then Abraham invited his father Āzar to his religion, saying: “*My father, why do you worship that which can neither hear nor see, nor even profit you the least?*” (19:42) But his father refused to heed his call. Then Abraham publicly declared to his people that he disavowed all that they worshipped, and declared his creed openly, saying: “*Have you considered what you have been worshipping, you and your fathers? Yet they are my enemies, except the Lord of all the Worlds.*” (26:75–77) They said: “Then whom do you worship?” He replied: “The Lord of the Universe.” They said: “You mean Nimrod?” He said: “No, *He Who created me and He showed me [the way, Who gives me food and drink, and heals me when I am sick, Who will make me die, then give me life again, and Who, I hope, will condone my faults on the Day of Judgement.]*” (26:78)

All this became known among the people and reached Nimrod the tyrant,<sup>7</sup> who summoned him and said to him: “Abraham, who is this God of yours who sent you, to whose worship you call people, of whose omnipotence you speak, magnifying him above all others?” Abraham said: “My Lord is the giver of life and death.” (Nimrod) replied: “I am the giver of life and death.” Abraham said: “How do you give life and death?” He replied: “I take two men both of whom deserve to die, in my judgment. I kill one of them, so I will have caused him to die, and then I pardon the other and let him go, thus I will have given him life.” But then Abraham said to him: “God makes the Sun rise from the East; so you make it rise from the West.” Nimrod became speechless and did not answer at all, because the argument convinced him, for that is God’s word: “*And dumbfounded was the infidel [God does not guide those who are unjust].*” (2:258) Then Abraham wanted to show his people the weakness and impotence of the idols that they worshipped instead of God, so as to force them to accept the evidence against the idols. He looked for an opportunity to outsmart them, until one of their festivals came.

Al-Suddī said: “Each year they had a festival on which they would

<sup>7</sup> For the Jewish version of Abraham’s meeting with Nimrod, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, I:194.

assemble. Upon returning from their celebration they would visit the idols and bow down to them, and return to their dwellings. When that festival came Abraham's father said: 'Abraham, if you would go to our festival with us our religion would appeal to you.' So Abraham went with them, and when they were on the way, he threw himself down and said: '*I am sick, I have a pain in my foot.*' *But they turned their backs on him* (37:89-90) while he was on the ground, and when they had passed, he called out to the last of them, (for the weaker people had stayed behind): '*I swear by God I will do something to your idols when you have turned your backs and gone.*' (21:57) And they heard that from him."

Mujāhid and Qatādah said that Abraham said this in such a way that his people should not hear, but one man from among them heard him, and he was the one who divulged these words. They continued: "Then Abraham returned from the road to the temple of the gods. There was a stream in the temple and facing the entrance to the stream stood a huge idol, with smaller idols closer to the entrance to the stream. They had prepared food and placed it in front of the gods, saying: 'At the time of our return the gods will have blessed our food, and we shall eat.' When Abraham looked at the gods and the food placed in front of them, he said to them mockingly: '*Will you not eat?*' And when the gods did not respond he said: '*What is wrong with you that you do not speak?*' *Then he started striking them down with his right hand,* (37:91-93) and began to break them with an axe in his hand until only the largest idol remained. He hung the axe on its neck and left, as is His word: '*So he smashed them up to pieces, with the exception of the biggest of them, so that they may turn to it.*' (21:58) When the people came back from the festival to the temple of their gods and saw them in that condition, they said: 'Who has done this to our gods? He is surely a mischief-monger.' They said: '*We heard a youth talk about them. He is called Abraham.* (21:59-60) He is the one who we think did this.' This reached Nimrod the tyrant and the nobles of his people, so *they said 'bring him before the people that they may bear witness'* (21:61) that he was the one who had done that, for they did not want to arrest him without proof."<sup>8</sup>

This is what Qatādah and al-Suddī as well as al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: "That they may bear witness, that is, testify to what we shall do with him and how we shall punish him. When they brought him,

<sup>8</sup> See Ginzberg, *Legends*, I:195-98; 209-217, for the *midrash* on this theme.

they asked: *'Did you do this to our gods, Abraham?'* *'No,'* he said, *'it was done by that chief of theirs.* He is angry that you worship these little idols alongside him, although he is greater than they, so he broke them. *Ask him, in case they can speak.'*" (21:62–63)

The Prophet said that Abraham told only three lies, all of them for the sake of God: His saying: *"I am sick,"* (37:89) his saying: *"No, it was done by that chief of theirs,"* (21:63) and his words to the king who concerned himself with Sarah: *"She is my sister."*<sup>9</sup>

(Al-Ḍaḥḥāk) continues: "When Abraham said to them (that it was their chief) they gathered apart and said: *'Surely you are yourselves unjust,* (21:64) (to this man, by asking him). Look, your gods are right here to whom he did what was done to them; so ask them.' For this is Abraham's statement: *'Ask them, in case they can speak.'* (21:63) His people said: *'We think it is just as he has said.'* It was said: *'Surely you are the ones who have done wrong,* (21:64) that is, by your serving the minor idols together with this large one.' Then they were crestfallen, (confounded by Abraham, for they knew that they could neither speak nor strike). So they said: *'Truly, as you know, they cannot speak.'* (21:65) Challenging them in dispute, Abraham said to them: *"Then why do you worship something apart from God that cannot profit you at all, or do you harm? Shame on you and those you worship besides God! Will you not understand? When they were convinced by the argument and unable to respond, they said: 'Burn him, and save your gods, if you are men of action.'"* (21:66–68)

ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar said that the one who recommended to them to burn Abraham in fire was a Kurdish man. Shuʿayb al-Jubbī said: "His name was Haynān, and God made the Earth swallow him up, and he will be tossed around in it until the Day of Resurrection."

He continued: "When Nimrod and his people agreed to burn Abraham, they imprisoned him in a house and built a structure for him like a cattle-pen, for that is His word: *"They said: 'Build a pyre for him and throw him into the raging fire.'"* (37:97) Then they gathered the hardest firewood and all kinds of lumber for him. When a woman became ill she would say: *'If God makes me well I shall gather firewood to burn Abraham.'* A woman would vow concerning what she desired, that if she attained what she wanted, she would pick up firewood and place it in the fire in which Abraham would be

<sup>9</sup> Not in Qurʾān, but may refer back to the Biblical version: Gen. 12:13,19; 20:2,5,12; 26:7,9.

burned, as a pious deed performed in the hope of reward in the Hereafter."<sup>10</sup>

According to Ibn Ishāq, they collected firewood for a month, and when they had gathered as much of it as they wanted, they lit a fire at all corners of the woodpile. The fire was so hot that if birds flew over it they would burn because of the great heat of the blaze. They took Abraham and carried him up to the top of the pyre and tied him up. Then, at the advice of the cursed Iblīs, they made use of a catapult because the heat of the fire was so great they were not able to throw him into it. They put him in the catapult, bound and shackled. The Heavens and Earth, the mountains and all the angels therein, and all creation but for humans and *jinn* roared in unison: "Our Lord, no one on Your Earth other than Abraham worships You and he is being burned in fire. Allow us to aid him!" God said to them: "If he seeks help from any of you or calls anyone, let that person save him, I grant that to you. But if he does not call on anyone but Me, for I am the most familiar with him, being his Friend, then let Me alone help him."

When they wanted to throw him into the fire, the angel of waters came to Abraham and said: "If you desire, I shall douse the fire, for the stores of water and rain are in my hand." And the treasurer of the wind came and said: "If you wish, I shall make the fire fly off into the air." But Abraham said: "I have no need of you." Then he raised his head to Heaven and said: "O God, You are the only One in Heaven and on Earth. No one on Earth worships You except Me."

Mu'tamar—Ubayy b. Ka'b—Arqam related that when they tied Abraham up in order to cast him into the fire, he said: "There is no god but You, glory be to You, Lord of all being; to You alone belongs praise, to You belongs dominion, You have no associate in creation!" Then they cast him with the catapult into the fire which was a great distance away, and Gabriel met him and said: "Abraham, do you need anything?" He replied: "From you, no." Gabriel said: "Then ask your Lord." Abraham said: "I need not ask Him for anything, for He knows my predicament. God is sufficient for me! Most excellent is He in Whom I trust."

The traditional narrative relates that Abraham was saved from

<sup>10</sup> For the *midrash* on Abraham and the fire see Ginzberg, *Legends*, I:198–203.

the fire only because he spoke the words: "God is sufficient for me! Most excellent is He in Whom I trust." God said: "*Turn cold, O fire, and give safety to Abraham.*" (21:69)

Al-Suddī said: "Gabriel was the one who called out these words by God's command." 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and Ibn 'Abbās said: "Had He not said: '*and give safety*', Abraham would surely have died from the cold. There remained not a single fire on earth that did not die down, thinking that it was being addressed." Ka'b al-Aḥbār, Qatādah and al-Zuhrī said that no one on Earth benefited from fire on that day, and fire burned nothing on that day except Abraham's bonds. On that day every beast extinguished the fire to protect him except the gecko, and therefore the Prophet commanded that it be killed and named it 'little evil-doer'. Al-Suddī said: "The angels took Abraham by his upper arms and sat him down on the ground, and there was a spring of water, red roses, and narcissus." They said that Abraham remained within the fire seven days. Al-Minhāl b. 'Umar said that Abraham, the Friend of God, said: "I have never experienced more pleasant days than the days I was in the fire."

Ibn Ishāq and others have said that God sent the angel of the shadow in the form of Abraham and he sat within the fire by his side, keeping him company. Gabriel brought him a silken shirt and said to him: "Abraham, now you know that fire cannot harm those I love," and he put the shirt on him. Then Nimrod looked down from a lofty palace of his and also caught sight of Abraham, having had no doubt that he had perished. But now he saw him sitting in a meadow with the angel sitting at his side, while all around him was the fire burning the wood that they had gathered. Nimrod called out to him: "Abraham, great is your god whose power extended to being able to shield you from the fire so that it did not harm you. Abraham, now will you be able to come out of the fire?" He said: "Yes." He asked: "Did you fear that it would harm you if you remained in it?" He replied: "No." He said: "Then arise and come out." So Abraham arose, walked through the fire, and came out to him. He said: "Abraham, who was the man I saw with you, with an appearance like yours, sitting at your side?" He said: "The angel of the shadow whom my Lord sent to keep me company in the fire." Nimrod said: "Abraham, I shall offer a sacrifice to your God because of His power and resolution in what He did for you because you refused to worship anything but Him and declare His unity. I shall slaughter four thousand cows for Him." Abraham said to him:



“God will accept nothing from you as long as you follow this religion of yours rather than abandon it for my religion.” Nimrod said: “Abraham! I cannot abandon my rule, but I shall slaughter those cattle for Him.” So he slaughtered them and presented them as an offering and forbade that any pain be inflicted on Abraham. Then he said to Abraham: “How excellent is the Lord, your Lord, Abraham!”

Al-Sha‘bī said: “Abraham was thrown into the fire when he was sixteen years old, and he sacrificed Isaac<sup>11</sup> when Isaac was seven years old. Sarah had given birth to him when she was ninety years old. The place of his sacrifice was two miles from Jerusalem. When Sarah became aware of what he wanted to do to Isaac she lived only two days and died on the third.”

Ibn Ishāq said: “Some men among Abraham’s people followed his call when they saw what God did for him, making the fire turn cold and giving safety to him against the threat of Nimrod and of their elders. Lot (*Lūṭ*) believed in Abraham, and he was the son of his brother, namely Lot son of Haran (*Hārān*), son of Terah. Haran was the brother of Abraham, and they had a third brother called Nahor, son of Terah. Now Haran was the father of Lot while Nahor was the father of Tanwīl.<sup>12</sup> Tanwīl was the father of Laban (*Lābān*) and Rebecca (*Rifqā*). The daughter of Tanwīl was the wife of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the mother of Jacob (*Ya‘qūb*), while Leah (*Liyā*) and Rachel (*Rāhīl*), the two wives of Jacob, were the daughters of Laban. Sarah, too, believed in him. She was the daughter of his paternal uncle. She was Sarah, daughter of Haran the elder, paternal uncle of Abraham.

Al-Suddī said that Sarah was the daughter of the king of Ḥarrān.<sup>13</sup> Abraham and Lot set out in the direction of Syria, and this is how Abraham met Sarah, who was the daughter of the king of Ḥarrān. She had already offended her people in matters of their religion, and Abraham married her on the condition that (the king) would not harm her.

Ibn Ishāq said that Abraham departed from Kūthā in the land of Iraq, taking refuge in his Lord, and Lot and Sarah went with

<sup>11</sup> Arabic: *Ishāq*. The later Muslim decision is that it was Ishmael who was to be sacrificed. See the discussion from pp. 154ff.

<sup>12</sup> A misreading of the Hebrew characters *b-th-w-l*, i.e., Biblical Bethuel.

<sup>13</sup> Note the probable confusion between *Hārān*, the person, and Ḥarrān, the place.

him, as God has said: *Then Lot believed in him, and (Abraham) said: I will separate myself and take refuge in my Lord.* (29:26) He reached Ḥarrān and stayed there for as long as God wished him to stay. He continued his journey there until he came to Egypt, then left for Syria and settled in Beersheba in Palestine, which is the desert of Syria, while Lot settled in the City of the Plain (al-Mu'tafikah), which is a journey of one day and one night from Beersheba. God sent him on his mission as a prophet, for that is His word: "So We delivered him and Lot and brought them to the land We had blessed for (all) the peoples" (21:71), meaning Syria, whose blessing is that He sent most of the prophets on missions from there. It is the Holy Land, the land of the gathering (for the Day of Judgment) and of Resurrection. In it Jesus, son of Mary, will descend, and therein God will destroy the Antichrist<sup>14</sup> at the gate of Lydda. It is a fertile land of many trees, rivers, and fruits, and life is good therein for both rich and poor. Ubayy b. Ka'b said: "There is no sweet water in the world that does not issue from beneath the Rock which is in Jerusalem and then disperses throughout the Earth." And God is All-knowing.

*Chapter III The Birth of Ishmael and Isaac, Ishmael and His Mother  
Hagar Settling in the Meccan Sanctuary, and the Story of the  
Well of Zamzam*

Scholars of the lives of past generations say that when God saved His Friend Abraham, those who believed in him followed him by parting from their people and manifesting their disavowal of them, saying: "We disassociate ourselves from you and the gods you worship instead of Allah. We do not believe in you, idols who are worshipped instead of Allah. There will be open enmity and hatred between us and you, idol-worshippers, until you believe in Allah alone!" Then Abraham went forth, taking refuge in his Lord, and Lot went with him. Abraham married Sarah, the daughter of his paternal uncle, and went with her, seeking to escape with his religion and seeking protection for his worship of his Lord, until he settled in Ḥarrān. He remained there for as long as God willed and

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Masīh al-Dajjāl*. Probably based on the Syriac *daggālā* ("the false" or "deceiver") in Matt. 24:24. Will come before the end of time for 40 days or years. Will let impurity rule the world, after which there will be a universal conversion to Islam. See *EI*<sup>2</sup> II:76-77 s.v. *al-Dajjāl*.

went from there, migrating to Egypt, where one of the first Pharaohs ruled. Sarah was a very beautiful and comely women and she never disobeyed Abraham in anything, for which God bestowed honor on her.

Then someone told the tyrant: "There is a man here accompanied by the most beautiful of women," and he described her beauty and comeliness. The tyrant sent for Abraham, who appeared before him, and he said to him: "What is this woman to you?" He replied: "She is my sister," fearing that if he had said "She is my wife" he would kill him. He said to him: "Adorn her and send her to me so that I may lay eyes on her." Abraham returned to Sarah and said to her: "This tyrant asked me about you and I told him that you were my sister, so do not make a liar out of me with him. For you are indeed my sister in the book of God, and in this land there is no other Muslim beside me and you." Then Sarah approached the tyrant while Abraham rose to pray. When she came to him and he saw her, he stretched out his hand to take her but his hand stuck to his chest, paralyzed. When the tyrant saw this he showed her great esteem and said: "Ask your Lord to release my hand and I shall not harm you, by god!" Sarah said: "God, if he is telling the truth, free his hand!" And God released his hand.

According to certain authoritative accounts this repeated itself three times; he wanting to take hold of Sarah, and his hand being struck with paralysis (each time). When he saw that, he returned her to Abraham and gave her Hagar (*Hājar*), who was a Coptic<sup>15</sup> slave-girl. She came to Abraham, and when he became aware of her he turned away from his prayers, saying: "What is the matter?" She replied: "May God avert from (me) the cunning of the adulterer (who covets what he sees), and may He take Hagar away from me as a servant." Muḥammad b. Sīrīn said: "When Abū Hurayrah used to transmit this account from the Messenger of Allah he would say: 'This is your mother, children of the water of Heaven (*i.e.*, Arabs)!"

Certain accounts tell us that God removed the veil separating Abraham and Sarah so that he could observe her from the time she would go out until she would come back to him, as a sign of regard for her and to reassure Abraham. They said that Hagar was a respectful slave-girl, and that Sarah gave her to Abraham, saying:

<sup>15</sup> *I.e.*, Egyptian. Often used by Tha'labī instead of *miṣrī*.

“I consider her to be a pure woman, so take her. Perhaps God will grant you a son from her.” For Sarah had been unable to give birth until she had become old. Then Abraham had intercourse with Hagar and she bore him Ishmael.

Muḥammad b. Ishāq—‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ka‘b b. Mālik al-Anṣārī—the Messenger of Allah said: “When you conquer Egypt, be kind to its people, for they have the covenant of protection and are your kinfolk.” Ibn Ishāq said: “I asked al-Zuhrī: ‘What is the kinship to which the Messenger of Allah referred?’ And he replied: ‘Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, was one of them.’”

They said: Then Abraham left Egypt for Syria, but fearing the king that was there and guarding against his enmity, he settled in Beersheba in the land of Palestine. He dug a well there and built a mosque. The water of that well (would rise and) become a spring flowing on the surface of the Earth, and his flocks would come to water there. Abraham remained in Beersheba for a while, but then the people there caused him some grievance, so he left and settled in a region of Palestine between al-Ramlah and Jerusalem<sup>16</sup> in a village called Qa‘ah. After he had left the people of Beersheba, the water of that well seeped into the Earth and was gone. They regretted what they had done, and said: “We drove out a pious man from our midst.” So they followed his trail and overtook him, asking him to return. He replied: “I shall not return to a place from which I was driven out.” They said: “The water which you used to drink and we would drink with you has seeped into the ground and is gone.” He gave them seven goats from his flock and said: “Take them with you, and when you bring them to the well to water them, the water will rise and flow on the surface and become a spring as it was before. Then drink of it, but let no menstruating woman approach it.” So they left with the goats. He continued: “When they stood at the well the water rose and they were all drinking from it. This continued for some time until, one day a menstruating woman came there and scooped some with her hands. Then the water stopped flowing until now.”

Abraham remained in his town and would give hospitality to all those who came by. God had made him rich, with a plenitude of wealth and servants. When God wished to destroy the people of Lot,

<sup>16</sup> Here *Īlīyā*, the Roman name for Jerusalem, Aelia Capitolina. One of the Arabic names for the city. Used in several places in this work, see p. 738 below.

He sent His messengers to command him to depart from their midst. But He ordered them to go first to Abraham and to announce to him and Sarah the birth of Isaac, and after Isaac, of Jacob. When they visited him he had been deprived of guests for fifteen days which had aggrieved him, for he would only eat with a guest whenever possible. When he saw the Messengers in the form of men, he rejoiced in them, for he saw in them guests of such excellence and comeliness as he had never seen before. He said: "None beside me shall greet these people," and went outside. Then he brought meat of a fat calf which is roasted on stones, and he presented it to them, but they withheld their hands from it and he said to them: "Will you not eat?" *When they did not stretch their hands towards it, he became suspicious and afraid of them, (11:70)* since they would not eat of his food. They said: "Abraham, we eat food only for a price." He said: "This does indeed have a price." They asked: "What is the price?" He replied: "You must mention the name of God at the beginning of the meal and praise Him at the end." Gabriel looked at Michael and said: "This man truly deserves that God take him as a friend." Then they said to him: "*Do not be afraid! We have been sent to the people of Lot.*" (ibid.) Now Sarah, his wife, was standing there serving them while Abraham was sitting with them, and when they told him why they had been sent and brought him the good news of Isaac and Jacob, Sarah laughed.

Scholars have disagreed about what caused her laughter. Al-Suddī said: "Sarah laughed when they did not partake of their food, saying: 'How strange these guests of ours are! We serve them with our own hands, to honor them, and they do not eat our food!'" Qatādah said: "She laughed about the heedlessness of the people of Lot and their approaching punishment." Muqātil and al-Kalbī said: "She laughed at Abraham's fear of the three men, considering that they were surrounded by his servants and his retinue." Ibn 'Abbās said: "She laughed because she was amazed that she should have a child at her and her husband's advanced age, for she was ninety years old and her husband was one hundred and twenty."

Al-Suddī said: "Sarah said to Gabriel when he gave news of the child to her at her age: 'What is God's sign?' He took a dry piece of wood in his hand and twisted it between his fingers; it stirred and became verdant. Then Abraham said: 'He will therefore be a sacrifice to God.'" Muḡāhid and 'Ikrimah said: "*And she laughed*", (11:71) that is, "she menstruated immediately." The Arabs say: "The rabbit laughs when it menstruates."

According to al-Suddī, Ibn Yasār, and others who transmit accounts, Sarah became pregnant with Isaac after Hagar was already pregnant with Ishmael, and they gave birth at the same time and the two boys grew up together. One day while they were competing with each other in archery, and Abraham was the judge determining the winner, Ishmael won and Abraham seated him on his lap, and seated Isaac at his side, while Sarah was watching. She became angry and said: "You have turned to the son of the servant-girl and have seated him in your bosom, whereas you have turned to my son and seated him at your side, while you had vowed that you would not injure me or do any evil to me." The jealousy that overcomes women overcame her and she swore to cut off a piece of Hagar's flesh and deface her appearance. Then she regained her senses, while still wavering in the matter. Abraham said to her: "Lower her status and pierce her ears." She did that, and it became a customary practice among women.

Then one day Isaac and Ishmael fought as boys do, and Sarah became angry at Hagar and said: "You will not live in the same town as I." She commanded Abraham to send her away, and God inspired Abraham that he should take Hagar and her son to Mecca.<sup>17</sup> So he took them and arrived in Mecca, which was at that time a place of thorny shrubs, acacia, and thistles. All around, outside Mecca, lived a people called Amalek. And in the place of the Ka'bah in those days there was a red hill. Abraham said to Gabriel: "I was commanded to place the two of them in this location." He said: "Indeed." Then (Abraham) took the two to the place of the Stone and made them settle there, and had Hagar make a trellis. Then he said: "*Lord, I have settled some of my children in a barren valley near Your sacred House. So that, our Lord, they may be constant in devotion. So put in hearts of men some kindness for them, and provide fruits for them so that they may give thanks.*" (14:37) Then he left, but Hagar followed him, asking: "To whom have you entrusted us?" And he would not answer her. Then she said: "Did God command you to do this?" He replied: "Yes." And she said: "Then He will not let us perish." Thereupon he left, returning to Syria.

Hagar carried with her an old skin with water in it, but it was

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<sup>17</sup> Note the shift in location from Palestine to Mecca and vicinity, necessary for linking the later story of the Ka'bah and the Pilgrimage to the lives of Abraham and Ishmael.

all used up and she and the boy thirsted for water. She looked around to see which was the lowest mountain, and she climbed al-Şafā and listened whether she could hear a voice or see a human, but she neither heard anything nor saw anyone. Then she heard the sound of wild beasts of the valley coming from the direction of Ishmael, and she went to him quickly to be with him. She heard a sound coming from al-Marwah and ran, taking pains not to run like an exhausted person. She was the first to run between al-Şafā and al-Marwah (as is the custom of the Ḥajj). Then she climbed al-Marwah and heard a voice, as if disbelieving her hearing, then she knew for certain, and began to call out: "Ishmael!" by which she meant: "God, You have made me hear Your voice, so help me, for I and he who is with me will perish." Suddenly Gabriel stood before her, asking "Who are you?" "Abraham's concubine" she answered, "He left me here with my son." He said: "To whom did he entrust you?" She said: "He entrusted us to God." He said: "Then he has entrusted you to One, Generous and Sufficient." Their food and drink had run out and he brought them to the place of Zamzam, where he thrust his foot into the ground and a spring burst forth. Therefore Zamzam is called "The Foot Thrust of Gabriel." When the water flowed, Hagar began scooping it with the old water skin she had so as to store it away. Gabriel said to her: "It is a spring with copious water," but Ishmael's mother began to scoop it up. The Messenger of Allah said: "Had she not hurried so, Zamzam would have been a spring on the surface of the ground (and not a well)." Gabriel said to her: "Do not fear thirst for the people of this land, for this is a spring from which the guests of God will drink." And he said to her: "The father of this boy will come and the two of them will build a House for God whose place is here."

They said that a band of Jurhum was passing by on their way to Syria and saw birds hovering over the mountain, and said, "These birds must be hovering over water." So they looked out and saw the water and said to Hagar: "If you wish, we will stay with you and keep you company. The water is yours." She agreed and they settled down with her and became the first inhabitants of Mecca. Therefore the Arab pilgrims used to say in the *talbiyah*<sup>18</sup> upon entering Mecca:

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<sup>18</sup> See p. 67, n. 25 above.

*Do not be distressed that Jurhum are among Your worshippers;  
These people may be newly gained, but they are your time-honored possession,  
For since olden times they have inhabited Your land.*

They stayed there, and when Ishmael grew up and Hagar died, he married a woman of Jurhum, adopted their language and became assimilated to them. His descendants are the "assimilated Arabs."

Then, one day Abraham asked Sarah for permission to visit Hagar and her son, and she granted it to him on condition that he not settle there. Abraham came to Mecca when Hagar had already died. Some say he arrived riding al-Burāq.<sup>19</sup> Upon arriving in Mecca, he went to Ishmael's house and asked his wife: "Where is your master?" She replied: "He is not here. He has gone hunting." Ishmael would often leave the sanctuary to hunt and then return home. He was passionately fond of hunting and trapping, horsemanship, archery, and wrestling. Abraham said to her: "Are you able to entertain a guest? Do you have any food or drink?" She said: "I have nothing and no one has come (to visit)." Abraham said to her: "When your husband comes home, extend my greetings to him and tell him to change the threshold of his door" Abraham went away and Ishmael entered, sensed the smell of his father and said to the wife: "Did anyone visit you?" She said: "An old man, of such and such traits, visited me", as if making light of him. When he asked her what he had said, she replied: "He said, 'Extend greetings to your husband and tell him to change the threshold of his door,'" whereupon he divorced her and married another.<sup>20</sup>

Some time had passed when Abraham again asked Sarah's permission to visit Ishmael, which she granted on condition that he not settle there. When Abraham arrived at Ishmael's door and said to his wife: "Where is your master?" she answered, "He has gone hunting but will return soon, God willing. Come, stay, may God have mercy on you." He said to her: "Do you have any food or drink to accomodate a guest?" "Yes," she replied, and brought him milk and meat, and he asked for God's blessing over them. Had she

<sup>19</sup> The strange creature which Muḥammad rode when he went on the "Night Journey." See *EF*, I:1310-11, s.v. *al-Burāk*.

<sup>20</sup> See Ṭabarī, pp. 283-285; Brinner, *PP*, pp. 77-78. Compare this story with the Jewish version in Ginzberg, *Legends*, I:266-69. Cf. the truncated story in Kisā'i, p. 142; Thackston, p. 153.



brought bread or wheat or barley or dates on that day, Mecca would have been the richest place on God's earth in wheat and barley and dates. Then she said: "Stay that I may wash your disheveled hair." But he would not stay, so she brought him the Station (*Maqām*) and set it down on his right side, putting his foot on it so that the print of his foot remained on the stone. She washed the right side of his head, then she placed the stone on his left side and washed the left half of his head. He said to her: "When your husband comes home, extend greetings to him and tell him that now the threshold of your door has become sound." When Ishmael came home he sensed the smell of his father and said to his wife: "Did anybody visit you?" She said: "Yes, there came to me an old man, with a handsome face and a wonderful smell, who told me this and that and I told him this-and-that. I washed his head, and this is his footprint on the stone." And he said: "That was Abraham."

Anas b. Mālīk said: "I saw the imprint of Abraham's toes, heels, and soles, but it was all effaced because of people's rubbing it."

Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. 'Abdūn—Muḥammad b. Ḥamdūn b. Khālīd—Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm—Hadiyyah b. Khālīd—Abū Yaḥyā b. Jābir b. Masaḥ al-Qurashī—Musāfir b. Shaybah—'Abdallāh b. 'Umar said: I bear witness that on three occasions I heard the Messenger of Allah say: "The Corner and the Station are two of the Sapphires of the Garden whose light God has wiped out. Had God not obliterated their light, they would have illuminated the world."

#### *Chapter iv The Rest of the Story of Zamzam*<sup>21</sup>

The narrator 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said that 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hāshim<sup>22</sup> said: "While I was sleeping in the sacred space someone came and said to me: 'Dig up *ṭayibah* (goodness).' And I said: 'What is *ṭayibah*?' But he left without answering me. On the second night he came again and said: 'Dig up *durrah* (the pearl).' I asked: 'What is *durrah*?' But again he left without answering me. On the third night he came again and said: 'Dig up *al-maṣūnah* (the protected, *i.e.*, chaste [woman]).'

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Guillaume, pp. 62–64.

<sup>22</sup> The grandfather of Muḥammad. Quraysh was the tribe to which the family of the Prophet belonged. See *EP*, I:80, and also p. 774 below.

I said: 'What is *al-maṣūnah*?' But he left. On the morrow I returned to my bed and fell asleep and he came yet another time and said: 'Dig up Zamzam!' I asked him, 'What is Zamzam?' for its water had dried up since the days of Ishmael (and no trace of it remained). He said: 'It is a well from which the pilgrims will draw water, located near the place of the Qurayshī's sacrifices, next to where the raven is pecking, near the town of al-Naml.'

When this became evident to 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, he arose, and pointed to the location of Zamzam, realizing that the man had spoken the truth. Next morning he arose, took his pickaxe, and went out with al-Ḥārith b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, (for he had no other son at that time). When the Quraysh learned of this event they came to him saying: "'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, that well is one of the things we inherited from our forefather Ishmael, we certainly have a right to it, let us have our share.'" He said: "I shall not do that. This is something that I alone was singled out to be given as an inheritance." They said to him: "Let us have what is due to us, for we shall not let you go until we have argued our case against you." He replied: "Name whomever you wish to be our judge, and I shall contend with you before him." They said: "The woman diviner of the Banū Sa'd b. Hudhayl," and he agreed. This woman lived at the far end of Syria, and 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib rode there together with a group of men from the Banū 'Abd Manāf, and each tribe of the Quraysh also sent out a group of riders. The narrator continued: "In those days the land was nothing but desert, in the midst of one of those deserts, the water which 'Abd al-Manāf and his companions had brought along gave out, so that they were certain that they would perish. They asked the tribes of the Quraysh who were with them for water, but they refused, saying: "We are in a desert and we fear that what happened to you might happen to us." When 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib saw the reaction of these people he said to his companions: "What do you think?" They said: "We will act according to what your think, so tell us what to do." He said: "Each of you should dig a hole for himself with whatever strength he can muster; then, whenever one of us dies, a companion will bury him in that hole." They dug the holes and sat down awaiting their death. Then 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib said: "Why don't we continue our travel? God may sustain us with water." So they set out on their way while the Qurayshīs who accompanied them watched what they were doing. Then 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib walked to his camel, mounted her, and as

soon as she had set out on her way with him, water burst forth from beneath her hooves. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib praised God, and his companions did likewise. He dismounted and drank of the water together with his companions until they were sated and had filled their water-skins. Then he called out to the tribes of Quraysh, "Come to the water, for God has given us and you to drink." They drank and watered their beasts and said: "By God! the Lord has pronounced judgment in your favor and against us, 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. By God! We will never dispute your right over Zamzam. He Who gave you this water to drink in the wilderness is the One Who gives you Zamzam, so return now." Then they returned to Mecca with him and they gave him authority over Zamzam. At night 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib saw in his dream a man saying to him,

*O you night-wanderer, dig up Zamzam,  
for if you do, you will not regret it.  
It is a heritage from your great ancestor;  
it will water the pilgrims; a rich river that has never held back.*

"When 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib heard the man, he said: "But where is Zamzam?" He was told: "At the town of al-Naml, where the white-footed raven is pecking." In the morning 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib set out with his son al-Ḥārith, found the town of al-Naml, and found the raven pecking next to the two idols Asāf and Nā'ilah, whom the Quraysh used to worship, and they offered sacrifices nearby. He brought his pickaxe and began to dig as he was commanded, when Quraysh approached him, saying: "By God, we will not let you dig for Zamzam, because our idols and place of sacrifice are at that spot." Quraysh envied him for this because they had been informed that when Jurhum had inhabited Mecca they had deposited great riches and weapons in Zamzam intended for the Chosen One (i.e., Muḥammad), because they were told that God was about to send a prophet to this town whose characteristics were such-and-such, but the Quraysh did not know where this treasure was. When 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib was informed of the location of the treasure, they contended with him over this, but then said to one another: "Let him dig; most likely he will miss the place." But he had not dug far when various signs became evident. He praised God, and they knew that he had not missed. He went on digging until he reached two statues of gold. These were the two gazelles which the Jurhum had buried, and he found there swords and armor. Then the Quraysh

said to him: "Abd al-Muṭṭalib, we have rightful share in this find together with you." He said: "No, but let us draw arrows in order to apportion each party's share." They said: "How should we proceed?" He replied: "Assign two arrows to the Ka'bah, two arrows to me, and two to you, each party whose are drawn wins a portion of the find; but the party whose arrows remain in the bag has nothing." They said: "You have acted justly." So he assigned two yellow arrows to the Ka'bah, two black arrows to 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and two white arrows to the Quraysh. Then they gave out the arrows with which they used to draw lots in front of Hubal, while 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib rose to pray. The outcome was that the two yellow arrows apportioned the two gazelles to the Ka'bah, the black ones apportioned the swords and the armor to 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, while the two arrows of the Quraysh remained in the bag.

'Abd al-Muṭṭalib hung up the swords and the armor at the entrance of the Ka'bah and fastened the two golden gazelles onto the door of the Ka'bah; this was the first gold with which the Ka'bah was adorned. Thus, the position of leadership and supremacy had fallen to 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib already before he dug up Zamzam. Once he retrieved those objects, his importance and honor grew even more among the Quraysh. The pilgrims loathed the waters of Mecca and its environs, so they came to Zamzam because of the sweetness of its water, this being so because Zamzam was a heritage of Ishmael. For this reason the Banū 'Abd Manāf would boast and feel superior to the Quraysh and the other Arabs. But God is All-knowing.

*Chapter v The Building of the Ka'bah, and its History from the Beginning until our Own Time*<sup>23</sup>

Abū 'Amr and Abū Aḥmad al-Furātī—al-Ḥasan b. al-Mughīrah b. 'Umar b. al-Walīd al-Maghribī in Mecca—Abū Sa'īd al-Mufaḍḍal b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. al-Mufaḍḍal—'Abdallāh b. Abī Ghassān al-Yamānī—Abū Hammām—Muḥammad b. Ziyād—Maymūn b. Mihrān—Ibn 'Abbās, who said that the Messenger of Allah said: "Before Adam descended to Earth, the Ka'bah was one of the jewels of Paradise, and the Frequented House in Heaven (visited each day by seventy thousand angels who will not return there until the

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ṭabarī, pp. 274–277; Brinner, *PP*, pp. 69–72.

Day of Resurrection) faced the place on Earth where the sacred Ka'bah was (to be built). When God cast Adam down to the place of the Ka'bah, and he was shaking like a (rocking) boat, He sent down to him the Black Stone, which shone like a white pearl. Adam embraced it to seek comfort in it. Then God made a covenant with the children of Adam and placed the document in the Black Stone. Then God sent down the staff to Adam and said: 'Adam, take a step'; he took one step, and behold, he was in India. He remained there for a while, but then he felt a longing for the Sacred Ka'bah and he was told: 'Go on the pilgrimage, Adam.' He started again to walk ahead. Now wherever his foot had come to rest there arose a new village, and the places in between remained desert. When he reached Mecca the angels came out to greet him, saying: 'May your pilgrimage be a blessing, Adam. We have been making the pilgrimage to the House for two thousand years before you.' He said: 'What did you used to say while going around it?' They said: 'We would say: "Praise be to God" and "Glory be to God" and "There is no god but Allah" and "God is most great."' When Adam went around the House, he would therefore say these words. Adam would go around the House for seven weeks, five weeks by night and two weeks by day."

"Adam said: 'Lord, let me have builders among my offspring who will make this House prosper.' Then God sent him inspiration, saying: 'I shall make it flourish through a prophet from your offspring whose name is Abraham. I shall make him my Friend; with his help I shall ensure the prosperity of the House. I shall entrust him with providing water to the pilgrims. I shall pass down to him what is lawful and forbidden in the sanctuary, what the pilgrimage stations are; I shall point out to him its ritual sites and its places of sacrifice.' When Abraham finished building it, he proclaimed: 'O people, God has built a House, so make pilgrimage to it.' He let it be known to all Mankind between East and West, and so people came to the House on pilgrimage saying: 'Here I am. Here I am.'"

The Prophet said that Adam spoke to his Lord, saying: "Lord, I ask You to allow anyone of my offspring who dies in this Sanctuary and has never worshipped any god but You to be united with me in Paradise." And God replied: "Adam, whoever dies in the Sanctuary without having worshipped any god but Me alone, I shall surely resurrect on the Day of Final Resurrection."

According to the narrators of various traditions, when Adam was

sent down to Earth his feet were on the ground while his head reached Heaven, and he would listen to the inhabitants of Heaven, while they were speaking and praying and praising God and took a liking to them. But the angels feared him and when they complained to God, God reduced his size to sixty cubits in the cubits of Mankind. When Adam was deprived of the voices of the angels and their songs of praise, he missed it and complained of it to God, so God sent down to him one of the jewels of Paradise, and it came to rest in the place where the Ka'bah is now. Then He said: "Adam, I have sent down to you a House which you should go around it as My Throne is now being circled; you should pray there as you used to pray in front of My Throne." So Adam turned towards Mecca and saw the Sacred House and circumambulated it.

Abū Šālih—Ibn 'Abbās, saying: God revealed to Adam: "I have a sacred place opposite My Throne, so go forth and build Me a house therein, then go around it as you have seen the angels circle My Throne. For there I shall answer your prayers and those of your children who will be obedient to Me." Adam said: "My Lord, how shall I do that? I am not equal to the task, nor can I find the way to it." So God attached an angel to him and he set forth for Mecca. Whenever Adam would pass by a meadow or any place that pleased him, he would say to the angel: "Let me stay here", and the angel would say to him: "Stay." Every place where he alighted became inhabited, and every place he passed by became desert and wasteland. Then he reached Mecca and built the House. When he finished the work on it, the angel took him out to 'Arafāt and showed him all the ceremonies (of the pilgrimage) which people perform today. Then he brought him back to Mecca and Adam circled the House for a week. He then returned to the land of India and died on Mount Nūd. Abū Yaḥyā the fodder-seller—Mujāhid—'Abdallāh b. 'Abbās said: "Adam settled down when he arrived in India, but he made the pilgrimage from that land forty times on foot." So Abū Yaḥyā asked Mujāhid: "Abū l-Ḥajjāj, didn't he ride?" He answered: "What sort of animal could carry him, when, by God, any footstep of his measured a three-day journey?"

Wahb b. Munabbih said that when Adam was sent down to Earth and saw its expanse and saw no one in it except himself, he said: "Lord, does not this land have any inhabitant who will praise Your glory and sanctify You besides me?" God said: "I shall place in it those of your descendants who will praise My glory and sanctify Me.

I shall place therein houses which will be raised up with mention of Me and in which My creation will praise and mention My Name. I shall place one of these houses which I will set aside with My regard and choose it by means of My Name, call it My House, gird it with My power and place upon it My glory. Then I shall establish that House as a safe sanctuary which, by its inviolability, will make inviolable whoever is around it, above it, or below it. He who declares it sacred by its sacredness is worthy of My regard, while he who frightens its people loses My religion, violates My covenant, and abandons My protection. I shall make it the first House appointed for people to come to it disheveled, dusty, and “*riding along distant roads on lean and slender beasts,*” (22:27) raising a clamor with (cries of) *labbayka*, burning with bitter tears, crying out: “God is great” in a roar, for whoever chooses it will desire none other. For he has come to Me, has visited Me and has become My guest, and it is incumbent upon Me, the Generous One, that his delegation and his visitors be treated generously, and that he be made comfortable, and honored, and helped not as though he were in need. You will build it, Adam, as long as you live; then the peoples, the generations, and the prophets, people after people, generation after generation.”

Thus was the beginning of the Ka’bah, (may God guard it) and its condition remained unchanged until the days of the Flood, and when the days of the Flood came, God raised the Ka’bah up to the Fourth Heaven, and sent Gabriel in who hid the Black Stone in the mountain of Abū Qubays, to preserve it from the Flood. Therefore the site of the Ka’bah remained empty until the time of Abraham. After Ishmael and Isaac were born to Abraham, God commanded him to build a house for Him in which He would be worshipped and His name be mentioned. But Abraham did not know where he should build the House, so he asked God about it. Now scholars differ as to how Abraham was shown the way. One group said (that) God sent the *Sakīnah*<sup>24</sup> to him to lead him to the site of the House, as was told by Simāk b. Ḥarb from Khālid b. ‘Ar‘arah, that a man approached ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib saying: “Please tell me about the House, whether it was the first house set up for Mankind?” He said: “No,

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<sup>24</sup> From Hebrew *shekhinah*, *lit.*, “dwelling, resting,” also “Divine presence,” variously understood in Jewish tradition: the immanence of God in this world; sometimes refers to God Himself. Homiletic license has made it seem to be a separate aspect of God. See *Ej*, 14:1348–1354. See also p. 469, n. 34 below.

but it is the first House to be built wherein God's blessing resides, and the site called the Station of Abraham was placed there, and whoever enters the House finds safety. If you wish, I shall inform you how it was built. God inspired Abraham that (he should) "Build Me a House on the Earth," but Abraham was unable to accomplish that. So God sent the *Sakīnah*, which is a wind, a gale, and it had two heads, one of which followed the other until they reached Mecca, where the wind circled like a whirlpool in a water basin. God commanded Abraham to build where the *Sakīnah* came to rest, and he built a house there."

Others said that God sent him a cloud in the form of the Ka'bah, which traveled with him until he came to Mecca, and it settled at the site of the House. Then there came a call: "Abraham, build on the shadow of the cloud, do not make it larger or smaller." Some say that it was none other than Gabriel, who went with Abraham from Syria to show him the place of the House, for that is His word: "*When We chose the site of the House for Abraham [We said: Associate no one with Me and clean My House for those who will circumambulate, stand (in reverence), and bow in homage].*" (22:26)

It is said that when Abraham began to build the House, Ishmael would hand him the stones. While Abraham was a Hebrew, Ishmael was an Arab, but God instilled in each of them the language of the other. Abraham would say: "Give me a *kayn*," meaning: "Give me a stone," and Ishmael would say: "Here, take it." The two of them built the Ka'bah from five mountains: Mount Sinai, the Mount of Olives, Mount Lebanon, and al-Jūdī, while its foundations were built of Mount Hīrā'. When at last only one stone was needed, Ishmael went to look for it. When he came back, he saw that Abraham had already set the stone in its place, "Father," he said: "who brought you this stone?" He said to him: "Someone brought it to me who did not want me to depend on you." Then Abraham said to Ishmael: "Bring me a beautiful stone which I may place in the corner so that it will be a sign to Mankind." But Mount Abū Qubays called out to him: "Abraham, I have something for you that has been entrusted to me for safekeeping; here it is, take it." So Abraham took the Black Stone from Mount Abū Qubays and set it in its place.

When Abraham and Ishmael finished building the House and completed it to perfection, they prayed to their Lord, for that is His word: "*When Abraham was raising the plinth of the House with Ishmael, (he prayed): 'Accept this from us, Lord, for You hear and know every thing; [and*



*make us submit, Lord, to Your will, and our progeny a people submissive to you.] Teach us the way of worship and forgive our trespasses, for You, are compassionate and merciful.'"* (2:127–28)

And God answered their prayer and sent Gabriel to them to teach them the ceremonies of the Pilgrimage. He went to Minā with them on the day of *Tarwiyah* (deliberation),<sup>25</sup> and prayed with them the noon, afternoon, evening, and night prayers. He spent the night with them until dawn, when he prayed the early morning prayer with them. Then he went with them to 'Arafāt in the morning, and stayed there with them until, when the Sun was inclining to set, he joined the noon and afternoon prayers together. Then he took them to the staying-place at Arafāt, then stood with them on the very spot where people stand today. When the sun had set he urged them on to al-Muzdalifah and there joined the evening and night prayers together. He again spent the night with them and when dawn broke, he prayed the morning prayer with them. Then he stood with them on Quzah, and when the morning was shining brightly, he moved on with them to Minā, and showed them how to throw stones at the *Jamras*.<sup>26</sup> Thereupon he commanded them to sacrifice, showing them the slaughtering-place at Minā, and commanded them to shave their heads. Then he took them to the House. God revealed to our Prophet Muḥammad: . . . *follow the way of Abraham the upright (ḥanīf),*<sup>27</sup> *who was not of the idolaters.* (3:95) Then God commanded Abraham that he call the people to the Pilgrimage. He said: "Lord, my voice will not reach." He answered: "Yours is the call, Mine is the reaching." So he ascended Mount Thabīr and proclaimed: "Worshippers of God, your Lord has built a House, so make pilgrimage to it and respond to God's caller." Everything between Heaven and Earth and between the seas heard him, as did whoever was in the loins of men and the wombs of women. Everyone among the believers in God, whom God knew to be predestined to make the Pilgrimage until the Day

<sup>25</sup> Lit. "pouring;" possibly from the act of watering animals who will carry the pilgrims from Mecca to Minā and on to 'Arafāt to spend the night. This is the 8th day of Dhū l-Hijjah before going to Minā. See *EF*<sup>2</sup>, X:312.

<sup>26</sup> Namely the ritual act of throwing pebbles at pillars representing Satan at three stops on return from 'Arafāt during the Ḥajj. See *EF*<sup>2</sup>, II:438 *s.v.* *Djama*.

<sup>27</sup> First used in Qur'ān II:135 about Abraham, the upright (neither Jew nor Christian) who was not an idolater. Often used to speak of Muslims as contrasted with idolaters, and also of People of the Book. See *EF*<sup>2</sup>, III:165–66.

of Resurrection, answered him: "We are here (*labbayka*), O God, we are here!"

‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr said to ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr: Abraham faced the South, the East, the West, and the North, calling to the pilgrimage, and was answered: "We are here, O God, we are here!" And that is His word: "*Announce the Pilgrimage to the people. They will come to you on foot and riding along distant roads on lean and slender beasts, in order to reach the place of advantage for them, [and to pronounce the name of God on appointed days over cattle He has given them for food; then eat of the meat and feed the needy and the poor.]*" (22:27–28)

The House remained unchanged as Abraham had built it until the year thirty-five of the birth of our Prophet Muḥammad, which was five years before he was called to prophecy. The Quraysh demolished the Ka‘bah and then rebuilt it. The reason for that was mentioned by Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq and other narrators, that the Ka‘bah was a building of layered stones just above a man’s height, and the Quraysh wanted to increase its height and roof it. The sea had cast a ship on shore at Jiddah, belonging to a Greek merchant; it was shattered, and they took the planks and used them for the roof. There was in Mecca a Coptic carpenter, and he prepared for them some of what was needed to repair.

A snake would come out of the well of the Ka‘bah and it would watch whatever they brought for it each day, and it would watch the wall of the Ka‘bah. They were afraid of the snake because it would open its mouth and bare its fangs when anyone came close. One day, as it was lying on the wall of the Ka‘bah, as was its wont, God sent a bird and it plucked the snake up and carried it away. The Quraysh said: "We hope that God has been pleased with our intention to re-build His House, and pleased that now we have a companion worker and wood, for He has protected us from the snake." This took place fifteen years after the war of the Fijjār. When they made a joint decision to tear down the Ka‘bah and rebuild it, Abū Wahb b. ‘Amr b. ‘Umayr b. ‘Āmir b. ‘Amr b. Makhzūm took a stone from the Ka‘bah, but it jumped out of his hand and returned to its place. He said: "Assembly of Quraysh, when you build the Ka‘bah, do not bring with you any of your money except what you have earned lawfully, no wages of a whore, no proceeds from a usurious sale, or that come from the unjust treatment of anyone of the people." So the people became afraid of tearing it down, but al-Walīd b. al-Mughīrah said: "I shall begin tearing it down for you."

He took a pickaxe and began to work. "God! We desire only good," he said, and tore down part of the side of the two corners (facing him). The people watched him that night saying: "Let us observe him. If anything happens to him, we will not tear down any of it, but will restore it to its previous condition. But if nothing happens to him, then God is pleased with what we have done."

The next day al-Walīd awoke early, and resumed his work of demolition. He tore (it) down with the people until he reached the foundation and they came upon some stones of green color, that looked like the humps of camels, stuck to each other. One Qurayshī inserted a crowbar between two of the stones to dislodge one of them, but when the stone moved, all of Mecca moved, along with its clans. Then they realized that they had indeed reached the foundation. It is told that when the tribes gathered to rebuild the Ka'bah, each tribe resolved to stay apart from the others, and then they began to build. When in the course of construction they reached the site of the Corner they quarreled, each tribe insisting to position it according to its wish, none other. So they clashed, then formed alliances, and set a time for war. Then the Banū 'Abd al-Dār brought in a bowl filled with blood, and they and the Banū 'Adīy b. Ka'b swore a covenant unto death, placing their hands in that blood. (They were called "lickers of blood" for that reason). They continued deliberating among themselves for four nights or five, then they gathered in the mosque asking counsel and establishing their rights. Some narrators claim that Abū Umayyah b. al-Mughīrah, the oldest man of the Quraysh, said to them: "Men of the Quraysh, agree among yourselves to let the first man who enters through the door of this mosque be the judge of your dispute." They were pleased with this advice and agreed to accept it. The first one to enter to them was Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allah, and when they saw him they said: "This is Muḥammad the faithful, we accept him." When he came to them and they told him the story, he said: "Bring me a cloth," and they did. He took the Stone and placed it on the cloth with his hand and said: "Let each tribe take hold of one side of the cloth, and lift it up together," and they did. When they reached the site of the Stone, he set it down with his hand. The building was then erected on top of this stone. They say that the Ka'bah remained just as the Quraysh had built it, until the year sixty-four (A.H.) when al-Ḥuṣayn b. Numayr al-Sakūnī besieged 'Abdallāh b.

al-Zubayr and they hurled stones at the House from catapults, and people composed this *rajaz*-verse saying:

*Stones like a foaming stallion being hurled at the wood of this mosque.*

Another of them said:

*What is your opinion of the deed of Umm Farwah  
as it takes them (the stones) from al-Şafā and al-Marwah?*

Umm Farwah was an epithet of that catapult. The walls of the Ka‘bah leaned because of the stones that were fired at it from that catapult. Afterwards, the Ka‘bah was destroyed by fire. That was because they were lighting fires around it, and a spark, blown by the wind, flew and burned the door of the Ka‘bah, and set fire to the wood of the House.

Al-Wāqidī said: ‘Abdallāh b. Zayd related to me saying: ‘Urwah b. Udhaynah related to me: “I came to Mecca with my father on the day the Ka‘bah burned down, and the fire had already reached it. I saw the Corner blackened, and it was split in three places, so I said: ‘What has happened to the Ka‘bah?’ They pointed to a man who was a companion of Ibn al-Zubayr, saying: ‘It burned down because of him. He took a live coal on the tip of his spear, and the wind carried it and struck the curtain of the Ka‘bah between the Southern Corner and the Black Stone.’”

According to a different source the reason for it was that a woman was burning incense in the House when a spark flew from the fire, burning the House down. This was the day that people spoke of destiny for the first time, some saying that it was from God’s will, while others were saying that it was not from God’s will.

It is told that ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr demolished the Ka‘bah, levelling it to the ground. People continued to circumambulate around its foundation and come close to its site. He kept the Black Stone in a chest of his, wrapped in a cloth of silk, and whatever ornaments there were in the House and all cloths and perfumes he found there he gave to the doorkeepers for safekeeping in the treasury of the House. Then he proceeded to rebuild the House. He said that his mother, Asmā’ bt. Abī Bakr, related to him the words of the Messenger of Allah to ‘Ā’ishah: “Were it not for the [fact that] your people’s infidelity is still so fresh in memory, I would have restored the Ka‘bah on the foundations of Abraham and would have included

the Ḥijr in the Ka‘bah. But because the Quraysh had lacked the means of maintenance, they separated the Ḥijr from the House, and I would have made two doors for it, an Eastern Door and a Western one.” Ibn al-Zubayr ordered the ground to be dug up and they found heaps of rocks shaped like camels. When they moved one of the rocks it emitted flashes like lightning, so he said: “Set up the Ka‘bah on its foundations.” So Ibn al-Zubayr rebuilt it and included the Ḥijr in the building, and installed two doors, one for entering and one for leaving.

The Ka‘bah remained as Ibn al-Zubayr had rebuilt it until the year seventy-four (A.H.) when al-Ḥajjāj b. Yūsuf al-Thaqafī killed ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr and became ruler of the Hejaz for ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. Then al-Ḥajjāj, by order of ‘Abd al-Malik, interfered with the structure of the Ka‘bah that Ibn al-Zubayr had erected, restoring it to its earlier form while several of the elders of Quraysh were watching. The Ka‘bah today is as al-Ḥajjāj built it, except that al-Qarmaṭī, the ruler of Bahrain (may God curse him) was the one who removed the Black Stone in the year he attacked the pilgrims in Mecca, and took it away to Bahrain, together with the pilgrims he captured. However, it was taken from him and returned to its place by our master Abū Ishāq b. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Barmakī al-Nīsābūrī (may God’s blessing be upon him).

#### *Chapter 17 God Commands His Friend to Sacrifice his Son*

God has said: *And when (his son) was old enough to walk with him, (Abraham) said: “My son, I dreamt that I was sacrificing you. Consider, what do you think?” He replied: “Father, do as you are commanded. If God pleases, you will find me steadfast.”* (37:102)

Preceding generations of Muslims have disagreed about which of his two sons Abraham was commanded to sacrifice, even though there had been earlier consensus among People of the Holy Writ that it was Isaac. Some among the Muslims have said it was Isaac, namely among the Companions ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb and ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and among the Successors and those who came after them, Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, al-Qāsīm b. Abī Birrah, Masrūq b. al-Ajda‘, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abī Sābiṭ, Abū al-Huzayl, al-Zuhrī, and al-Suddī. Sha‘bah—Abū Ishāq—Abū l-Aḥwās, a man was boasting to ‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd, saying that he was so-and-so, son of so-and-so, son of the “noble elders.” ‘Abdallāh explained that

the man was saying in effect: "I am a descendant of Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, the *Dhabīh*<sup>28</sup> to God, son of Abraham, the Friend of God."

Sufyān—Zayd b. Aslam—‘Ubaydallāh b. ‘Ubayd b. ‘Umayr—his father—his grandfather that Moses asked the Lord why people say: "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob," and God replied: "Abraham considered nothing to be My equal but chose Me over all else, and Isaac freely offered himself to Me as a sacrifice, and even without this willingness he would be beyond reproach; and as for Jacob, the more I afflicted him, the more he showed his goodwill towards Me."

According to Ḥamzah b. al-Zayyāt—Abū Ishāq—Abū Maysarah, Joseph said to the king of Egypt: "Do you want to eat with me? For, by God, I am Joseph son of Jacob the prophet of God, son of Isaac the *Dhabīh* of God, son of Abraham, the Friend of God!"

Others, namely ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar, Abū l-Ṭufayl, ‘Āmir b. Wā’ilah, Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab, al-Sha‘bī, Yūsuf b. Mihrān, and Mujāhid say that it was Ishmael. In fact al-Sha‘bī used to say: "I saw the horns of the ram suspended in the Ka‘bah."

According to ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī had no doubt that the one of the two sons of Abraham who was commanded to be sacrificed was Ishmael. This also corresponds to the narrative of ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Ribāḥ and ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās, both of whom said that the ransomed one was Ishmael, though the Jews claim it was Isaac; but the Jews lie.

Muḥammad b. Ishāq—Muḥammad b. Ka‘b al-Quraṣī: The one of his two sons whom God commanded Abraham to sacrifice was Ishmael. We find evidence of this in the book of God, where He tells the truth about Abraham and how He commanded him to sacrifice his son, namely Ishmael. That is because God says at the end of the story of the one of Abraham’s sons who was to be sacrificed: "*So We gave him the good news of Isaac, an apostle, who is among the righteous.*" (37:112) *And He said, "We gave her the news of Isaac and after Isaac, of Jacob."* (11:71) He speaks of a son and the son of a son. Now, He would not have commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac having given him that promise from God (concerning Isaac’s progeny). Therefore Ishmael was the one He commanded him to sacrifice."

<sup>28</sup> *I.e.*, "The sacrificial offering," although the sacrifice was not carried out.

Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Qurazī said that he mentioned that to 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, when 'Umar was caliph, and they were together in Syria, and that 'Umar said to him: "I have not looked into this question, but I think it is as you have said." He said that 'Umar sent him to a man who was with him in Syria, a Jew who had become a Muslim and was a good Muslim, and was considered to be one of the sages of the Jews. He said that 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz asked the man, in Muḥammad b. al-Qurazī's presence: "Which of the two sons of Abraham was he commanded to sacrifice?" He replied: "Ishmael." Then the man said: "By God, Commander of the Faithful, the Jews know this fact, but they envy you Arabs, that it was your forefather whose sacrifice God commanded, he being the son with the superior ability to endure what God had ordered for him. But they deny all this, claiming it was Isaac, because Isaac is their forefather."

Both statements have been attributed to the authority of the Messenger of Allah, and if there had been consensus that either one of these had been sound, Abū 'Abdallāh would not have ascribed this view over another. As for the narrators who quote the Prophet that Isaac was the *Dhabīḥ*, Abū 'Abdallāh has related to me from al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib that the Messenger of Allah said: "The one whom Abraham wanted to sacrifice was Isaac." And Muḥammad is also quoted as saying: "The one whom God ransomed for a great sacrifice was Isaac."

Abū 'Abdallāh—Aḥmad b. Ja'far b. Ḥamdān—Yūsuf b. 'Abdallāh b. Māhān—Mūsā b. Ismā'īl—al-Mubārak—al-Ḥasan—al-Aḥnaf b. Qays—al-'Abbās b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib—Anas b. Mālik—the Messenger of Allah said: "Isaac will intercede along with me saying: 'Lord, You have proven Your Prophet to be truthful for I have given myself up willingly for sacrifice, so do not let one who worships You alone enter the Fire.' He said that God will then respond: 'By My glory, I shall cause no one who worships Me alone to enter the Fire.'"

Abū Tāhir Muḥammad b. al-Faḍl b. Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Mazanī related to us something that was read to him in the year three hundred and eighty-three (A.H.) which said that my grandfather Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Khazīmah, the Grand Imam, informed us that 'Alī b. Ḥajar—'Umar b. Ḥaḥṣ—Abān—Abū Hurayrah quoted the Messenger of Allah as saying: "God let me choose between His granting pardon to half my people or giving up my intercession, and I chose the right to intercede, hoping

that this would be of broader benefit to my people. And were it not for one who preceded me to Him in this matter, the righteous servant, I would have pleaded earlier on their behalf. That is because when God relieved Isaac of the torment of being sacrificed, he was told: "Ask for anything, it will be granted to you." And he replied: "By Him Who holds my soul in His hand, I shall hurry to intercede before the Devil's incitement to evil. Lord, forgive anyone who dies having worshipped no god other than You, and let him enter Paradise."

Now for the narrators who quote the Prophet that the one to be sacrificed was Ishmael, according to 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Khaṭābī and his chain of authorities, al-Ṣabāḥī narrated that one day, while he and others were talking in the presence of Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān and they mentioned that the sacrificed one was Ishmael or Isaac, Mu'āwiyah said: "You have happened upon someone who knows. I was with the Messenger of Allah when a man came to him saying: 'Messenger of Allah, tell me once again what God bestowed upon you, you son of the two *Dhabīhs*.' And the Messenger of Allah laughed." It was said, "Commander of the Faithful, 'Who are the two *Dhabīhs*?' He replied: 'When 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib dug Zamzam he vowed that if God made the matter easy for him he would sacrifice one of his sons.' He continued: 'The arrow of the lot fell on 'Abdallāh,<sup>29</sup> but his maternal uncle held him back, demanding that he ransom his son with one hundred camels, which he did. The other case involving a ransom was Ishmael, for this is what is told down in the *ḥadīth* accounts.'"

As for the Qur'ān, it contains proof for each of the two views. The proof that it was Isaac can be found in the story that God related about Abraham when he parted from his people, emigrating to Syria with Sarah and Lot, and he said, "*I am going away to my Lord who will show me the way. O Lord, grant me one righteous*" (37:101) meaning a righteous son.<sup>30</sup> This was before he knew Hagar, that is, before she became the mother of Ishmael. God then tells about the fulfillment of Abraham's wish, the tidings to him of a gentle son, and about Abraham's vision that he was to sacrifice this son that was promised to him, of whom he was given tidings "*when (his son)*

<sup>29</sup> The father of Muḥammad.

<sup>30</sup> The Arabic word *ḥalīm* is usually translated as "gentle", "prudent", or "demonstrating forbearance."



*was old enough to go about with him.*" (37:102) But the Qur'ān speaks of no tidings given to Abraham of the birth of a male child other than Isaac. As for the proof that it was Ishmael, it is given in our earlier account of the two horns. The report is true that the two ram's horns were suspended in the Ka'bah until the House burned and the horns were consumed by the fire in the days of Ibn al-Zubayr and al-Ḥajjāj, and this is the strongest evidence that the *Dhabīḥ* was Ishmael.

*The Story of the Sacrifice, A Description of It, And What Abraham  
Did to His Son*

Al-Suddī said, quoting his chain of authorities, (that) when Abraham, the Friend of God, fled his people and went to Syria, taking his creed with him, as the Lord has said, *And he said, "I am going away to my Lord Who will show me the way,"* (37:99) He prayed to God to give him a pious son from Sarah and he said, *"O Lord, grant me a righteous son."* (37:100) When he was visited by his guests, the angels who were sent as messengers to al-Mu'tafikah, the city to be destroyed, they gave him tidings of a gentle son, and Abraham said, *"He is, therefore, a sacrifice to God."* When the boy was born *"and was old enough to go about with him,"* (37:102) people said to Abraham, *"Now fulfill your vow that you made and offer your sacrifice to the Lord."* This was the reason for God's command to His friend Abraham to sacrifice his son. Thereupon Abraham said to Isaac, *"Come, let us depart and sacrifice to God,"* and he took a knife and a rope, then went with him until he brought him into the mountains. Then the boy said to him, *"Father, where is your sacrifice?"* He replied, *"O my son, I have seen (arā) in a dream that I must sacrifice you"* that is, meaning, *"I saw" (ra'aytu).* He spoke in the future (*arā*) but his meaning was the past. *"Consider, what do you think?"* He said, *"Father, do as you are commanded. If God pleases, you will find me steadfast."* (37:102)

According to Ibn Ishāq, when Abraham visited Hagar and Ishmael he was carried on al-Burāq. He would set out from Syria in the morning, hold the midday rest in Mecca and return from Mecca to spend the night with his family in Syria. When Ishmael *"was old enough to go about with him"* and Abraham became attached to him and had high hopes for him, as one who would worship his Lord and enhance the grandeur of His holy places, he saw in a dream that he was sacrificing him. After he was commanded to do so, he

said, "My dear son, take the rope and the knife, let us go to this trail to gather firewood." When Abraham was alone with his son on the trail of Mount Thabīr, Abraham told him what he was ordered to do and said, "*My dear son, I have seen in a dream that I was sacrificing you. [Consider, what do you think?]*" (37:102)

And his son, whom he was about to sacrifice, said to him, "Father, bind me firmly so that I do not move about, and hold your garments away from me lest my blood splash them (which would lessen my reward), and lest my mother see them and be saddened. Sharpen your blade and pass your knife quickly over my throat so death will be easier for me. For death is harsh. When you come to my mother, give her my greetings, and return my shirt to her, if you think that this may comfort her for me." Abraham said to him, "How excellent is the Helper! My son, you are fulfilling what God has commanded." Abraham did as his son bade him. He bound him up, bent over him and kissed him while he was weeping and the son was weeping so their tears followed each other down his cheeks. Then he placed the knife on his throat, but he did not cut, nor did the knife do anything.

Al-Suddī relates that God cast a flat, thin sheet of copper over his throat, whereupon the boy said, "Father, turn me face down, for if you look into my face you will have mercy on me, and be overcome by compassion that will stand between you and God's commandment." Abraham did as he was asked, for that is His word, *When they submitted to the will of God and Abraham laid him down prostrate upon his brow.* (37:103) Then he placed the knife on his nape, but the knife turned over and a voice called out to him, "*Abraham, you have fulfilled your dream. [Thus do We reward the good.]*" (37:105) Here is what you should sacrifice as a ransom for your son, so sacrifice it instead of him." When Abraham looked up behold, there was Gabriel with a ram: white and black, with horns, the ram glorified (God), as did Abraham and Ishmael, for that is His word, "*So We ransomed him for a great sacrifice.*" (37:107)

Sa'īd b. Jubayr and others have said, on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, that the ram came to Abraham from the Garden, having pastured there for forty autumns. Ibn 'Abbās is also quoted as saying, "The ram that redeemed Abraham's son was the same that Abel, the son of Adam, sacrificed and was accepted from him. Abraham sent away his son to fetch the ram, then took it to the slaughtering-place of Minā and slaughtered it. By Him Who holds

Ibn 'Abbās' soul in his hand, this was in the early days of Islam, but the head of the ram is still hanging by its two horns from the water-spouts of the Ka'bah, and it had dried up.'"

'Amr b. 'Ubayd—al-Ḥasan—his father, who was saying, "It was a female mountain goat by which Ishmael was ransomed: it was sent down to him near Mount Thabīr." This is the narration of Abū Ṣāliḥ—Ibn 'Abbās, who said it was a mountain goat. Abū Hurayrah—Ka'b al-Aḥbār and Ibn Ishāq, quoting some men as saying that when Abraham saw in his dream that he was to sacrifice his son, Satan said, "By God, either I seduce the family of Abraham in this way, or I shall never be able to seduce any of them." So Satan presented himself to them as a man and came to the mother of the boy and said to her, "Do you know where Abraham took your son?" She replied, "He took him to gather firewood on this trail." He told her, "I swear that he took him for no other purpose than to sacrifice him." She said, "Certainly not! He is kinder to him than I, and loves him too much for such a deed." He said to her, "He claims that God commanded him." She said to him, "If this is true, he is right to continue on the path of obedience and submission to his Lord's command."

So Satan left her in a great hurry and caught up with the son, who was walking in his father's footsteps. He said to him, "Lad, do you know where your father is taking you?" He replied, "To gather wood for our family on this trail." He said, "No, by God, he wants to sacrifice you!" He asked, "Why?" He replied, "He claims that God commanded him to do so." He said to him, "Then let him follow God's command, for we must hear and obey the Lord." When the boy turned him down, Satan approached Abraham and said to him, "Where are you going, old man?" He replied, "I have something to do on that trail over there." He said, "By God, I think that Satan has come to you in your dream and commanded you to sacrifice this son of yours." But Abraham recognized him and said to him, "Get away from me, cursed one! In the name of my God, I shall go forth to fulfill the command of my Lord." So Iblīs the cursed left in a great hurry, not having achieved anything that he wanted from Abraham and his family, for they had turned him down with God's help and assistance.

Abū I-Ṭufayl quotes Ibn 'Abbās as saying that when Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son, Iblīs appeared to him at the pilgrimage station of al-Muzdalifah and tried to get ahead of him,

but Abraham left him behind. Then he went to the western heap of stones, but Satan appeared to him there too, and Abraham threw seven stones at him and he went away. Then he appeared to him at the middle stone-heap, and again he threw seven pebbles at him until he left. Thereafter Satan caught up with him at the large stone heap, but Abraham chased him away.<sup>31</sup> Then Abraham set on his way to fulfill God's command, and this is the story of the sacrifice. Umayyah b. Abī Ṣalt composed a poem about this story:

*And to Abraham, who kept the vow, willing to sacrifice,*

*I swear by Him Who praises selfless giving,*

*His own first-born son, he would never endure giving him up,*

*Not even if he had seen him in the troop of enemies.*

*"My son! I have vowed to slaughter you as an offering to the Lord so be steadfast, for I have no other way.*

*Be strong when I must draw the knife, as a prisoner is forced to drag his chains."*

*He had a knife which, as it moves, cuts into the flesh, vying for glory with a lad whose brow was like the new moon.*

*As he was pulling his garments away from his son, his Lord redeemed him with a ram fit for sacrifice.*

*"Fetch this one as a ransom for your son, for I surely do not dislike what the two of you have done."*

*Human souls often grieve at some matter that has a joyous end, As if you are freed from your chains.*

*Chapter VII The Death of Nimrod, the Son of Canaan and the Revenge which God Visited upon Him, and the Story of the Tower*

God said, *"Those who have gone before them had also conspired, then God uprooted their structure from its foundation, the roof fell over them from above, and punishment came upon them from somewhere they did not suspect."* (16:26)

The narrators, using different sources, relate that the first tyrant on Earth was Nimrod, son of Canaan. People would go to him to get their provisions of food from him, and Abraham would go with them for the same purpose. Whenever people passed by him Nimrod would say to them, "Who is your lord?" and they would say, "You are." Then Abraham passed by him and he asked him, "Who is your lord?" and he responded, "My Lord is the giver of life and

<sup>31</sup> This story is the basis for the ritual stoning of the pillars (*jamra*) during the Ḥajj. See above p. 150, n. 26.

death." He answered, "I give life and cause death." Abraham said, "God causes the sun to rise from the East, so you make it rise from the West. *And dumbfounded was the infidel*, (2:258) so he turned Abraham away without food. When Abraham went back to his family he passed by a whitish sand dune and said to himself, "Let me bring some of this to my family, so that it will cheer them up." This he did, and when he came home he put down his bag and went to sleep. Then his wife arose, went to his bag, opened it, and behold, it contained the finest flour she had ever seen. She took it and prepared a meal that she set before him when he woke up. His family had become accustomed that there not being any food, so he asked them, "From where is this?" She replied, "From the food which you brought." So Abraham knew that God had sustained him, and he praised God and thanked Him.

When Nimrod the tyrant argued with Abraham about his Lord, he said to himself, "If what Abraham says is true, I shall not rest until I know who resides in Heaven." So he built a tall tower in Babylon, desiring to climb from it into Heaven in order to look at the god of Abraham, as he imagined.

According to Ibn 'Abbās and Wahb the tower reached five thousand cubits into the sky, while Muqātil and Ka'b said it was two *parasangs* tall. Nimrod then took four eagle fledglings, fed them meat and bread and raised them until they matured and became powerful. Then he sat in a wooden chest, accompanied by a lad who was with him, holding his bow and arrows. He one door in the top of that chest and the other in the bottom. He tied the chest to the legs of the eagles, and attached the meat to a staff on top of the chest. He then sent off the eagles and they flew up, all the time rising higher, in their eagerness for the meat, until they were far off in the sky. Nimrod said to the lad, "Open the upper door and see whether they have reached Heaven." He opened the upper door and looked out, but the sky was as it has always been, so he said, "Open the lower door and see how the Earth appears to you." He opened it and said, "The Earth looks to me like a white beard, and the mountains like smoke." The eagles continued their ascent until the wind prevented them from going on. He said to his lad, "Open both doors." He opened the upper one and the sky was as it has always been, but when he opened the lower door, behold, the Earth was pitch dark. A voice called out, "Insatiable tyrant, where do you want to go?" Thereupon, according to 'Ikrimah, he ordered his lad to

shoot an arrow and the arrow returned to him stained with blood, so he said, "Now I have been spared my preoccupation with the god of Heaven."

There has been disagreement as to how that arrow became stained with blood. 'Ikrimah said it came from a fish in a sea that is suspended between Heaven and Earth who sacrificed itself for God. Someone else said that the arrow struck a bird and was stained with its blood. Then Nimrod ordered his lad to guide the staff so as to pull in the meat, which he did. Thereupon the eagles plunged down pulling the chest with them. When the mountains heard the sound of the falling chest they became frightened, thinking that something had occurred in Heaven and that the Hour had arrived, for that is His word, "*Still they are plotting their plots, but their plots are evident to God (that is, the reward of their plotting), even though they are so adroit as to make the mountains move (tazūl),*" (14:46) or, in the reading of 'Alī and 'Amr ibn Mas'ūd, "*whereby the mountains should become low (tadhull),*" with a *dhāl*.

Then God sent a wind that flung the top of Nimrod's tower into the sea. The rest of the building then collapsed and fell down on them, knocking over their houses. Nimrod was gripped by a shudder when the tower fell and, because of the fear, the tongues of the people became confused and they spoke in seventy-three languages. Therefore the place was named Babel, because the languages became confused (*tabalbala*) therein. That is His word, "*The roof fell down over them from above, and punishment came upon them from somewhere they did not suspect.*" (16:26)

That is because God sent an angel to Nimrod saying, "Become a believer, so that I may let you keep your kingship!" But Nimrod said, "Is there a lord other than myself?" Then the angel came to him a second time and a third, but he turned him away. Then the angel said to him, "Gather all your troops and armies in three days," and Nimrod assembled them in one place. On God's command the angel then opened a door above, thus letting loose hordes of gnats, so many that the soldiers did not see the sun on that day because of the hordes of gnats. God sent them against Nimrod and his people, they ate their flesh and drank their blood, not leaving anything but bones, except for Nimrod, who was not affected by this ordeal. Then God dispatched to him a single gnat, and it entered his nostril and reached his brain. It remained there for four hundred years, and he had people beating his head with mallets. The person most

merciful to him was whoever made fists and beat his head with them. He was a tyrant for four hundred years and God afflicted him for four hundred years, like the length of his rule. Then the gnat ate his brain, and God made him perish, having forsaken him.

*Chapter VIII The Death of Sarah and Hagar. The Death of the Wives  
of Abraham and His Sons*

God has said, “*Why are you surprised at the command of God? God’s mercy and blessings [be upon you, O members of this household,] they said. “Indeed, He is worthy of praise and glory.”*” (11:73)

The men with knowledge of the accounts of past generations have said, “Sarah died in Syria when she was one hundred and twenty-seven years old, in a town of the Jabābirah of the land of Canaan, that is, in Hebron,<sup>32</sup> in a field that Abraham had bought, and she was buried there. Hagar had died in Mecca before Sarah, and was buried in the Hġjr. When Sarah died, Abraham married a Canaanite woman called Keturah daughter of Yaqtān and she bore him six males: Jokshān, Zimrān, Madān, Madd, Ashīq (Ushayq?), and Washūkh.<sup>33</sup> He also married another woman from the Arabs named Hājūn bt. Ahīb, (Uhayb?) and she bore him five sons: Kaysān, Farrūkh, Ahīm (Uhaym?), Luṭān, and Nāfis. Altogether the sons of Abraham, including Isaac and Ishmael, numbered thirteen, and Ishmael was his firstborn male and the eldest of his children. He settled Ishmael in the land of Hejaz and Isaac in the land of Syria, scattering his remaining children in various lands. They said to him, “Our father! You have let Isaac dwell with you and Ishmael near you, but you have commanded us to settle in desolate lands far away from home” He said, “Thus was I commanded.” Then he taught them one of the names of God with which they would pray for rain and ask for assistance.”

*Chapter IX The Death of Abraham*

According to the historians and biographers, when God wished to take Abraham’s breath of life, he sent the Angel of Death to him

<sup>32</sup> In the Arabic text *Jabrūn*—hence the name *Jabābira*, i.e., Hebronites.

<sup>33</sup> See Gen. 25: *Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, Shuah.*

in the guise of an old feeble man. Al-Suddī adds, quoting his chain of authorities, that Abraham used to be very hospitable and to feed people frequently. One day, while he was handing out food to people, an old man appeared, walking on the road. Abraham sent a donkey to the old man and he mounted it. When the donkey brought the old man, Abraham had someone bring him food. The old man, wishing to put food into his mouth, began to take a morsel and wanted to put it into his mouth, but instead he put it now into his eye and now into his ear. But when he put it into his mouth it reached his stomach and it came out of his rear end.

Now Abraham had once asked his Lord to let him die when he himself would ask to die. Seeing the old man's predicament, he said to him, "What is the matter with you old man that you act thus?" And he said, "Abraham, it is old age." Abraham asked him how old he was. When he told him, Abraham made a calculation and found that the man's age exceeded his own by only two years. Abraham said to him, "There are only two years between us, and when I reach your age, shall I be like you?" He said, "Yes." So Abraham said, "God, take me before that!" The old man arose and took Abraham's soul, for the old man was the Angel of Death. Abraham's age was two hundred years, some say one hundred and ninety-five years, and he was buried near Sarah's tomb in the field of Hebron."

#### *Chapter x The Outstanding Attributes of Abraham*

He was Abraham the Friend of the Merciful. God said, "*And God (Himself) chose Abraham as a friend.*" (4:125) And he was the master of the brave.

The *Hadīth* tells that when someone said to the Prophet, "O Master of Mankind," he responded, "That is Abraham." He was the father of guests; he would not eat the morning meal or evening meal without a guest, and would often walk two miles or more to find a guest, and his hospitality lasts until the Day of Resurrection. It is the blessed tree of which God spoke, "*(The lamp is) lit with the oil of a blessed tree [neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil appears to light up even though fire touches it not—light upon light].*" (24:35) It is true that he prayed to God to bestow the power of prophecy among his progeny, and He answered his prayer, granting prophecy to the two nations of Ishmael and Isaac. According to Anas b. Mālik the Messenger of Allah said,



"I was sent to eight thousand prophets, four thousand of them from the Children of Israel."

He was the one whose name was upheld in later generations. There is no other prophet who is acclaimed by all mankind and is set above all others, the only one revered by every nation.<sup>34</sup> And this is because of his prayer, "*And uphold my name in later generations.*" (26:84) He was afflicted with various trials and was acknowledged as remaining faithful. God has said, "*Remember when his Lord tried Abraham why a number of commands which he fulfilled.*" (2:124) And He said, "*And Abraham who fulfilled his trust*" (53:37)—that is, whatever he was commanded. He was "the obedient nation"—God said, "*Lo, Abraham was a nation (umma) obedient to God, and upright, and not one of the idolaters, [grateful to Him for His favors; so He chose him and guided him to the path that is straight, and gave him what is good in this world, and in the Hereafter].*" (16:120–22) The meaning of "nation" (here) is that he was a teacher of charity, who combined many qualities of goodness and virtue, such as is (usually) gathered in a nation, as the poet has said:

*God is not unwilling to gather the whole world in a single human being.*

He is the one who was given guidance before reaching puberty. He is the leader of all those who profess belief in one God and he was given arguments to prove God's unity. With these arguments he appealed to mankind to follow the truth, from his childhood to old age. God said, "*This is the argument We gave to Abraham [against his people].*" (6:83) He is the first one whom God called a *ḥanīf* and a Muslim. He said, "*But he was upright and obedient, [a ḥanīf and a Muslim].*" (3:67) He absolved him from the allegations of the Jews and Christians, and bore witness to his submission and loyal devotion, as He says, "*Neither was Abraham a Jew, nor a Christian [but upright and obedient, and not an idolater].*" (ibid.)

He was the first to be circumcised. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Khamshārī—Abū 'Abbās al-Mu'āqqalī—'Abd al-Ḥakīm—Ibn Wahb—Yaḥyā b. Naṣr said: "Ibn Wahb read before me (that) Ibn Sa'ān—Muḥammad b. al-Munkadar—Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab from Abū Hurayrah who said that Abraham was circumcised with an adze when he was one hundred and twenty years old and then lived for another eighty years.

<sup>34</sup> Meaning, by Jews and Christians as well as by Muslims.

Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Faṭḥawayh—Muḥammad b. Mukhallid b. Ja‘far—al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alawiyyah—Ismā‘īl b. ‘Isā—Ishāq b. Bishr—al-Ḍaḥḥāk—Ibn ‘Abbās: “Abraham was the first to give hospitality, the first to make a bread soup (*tharīd*), the first to wear sandals, the first to divide booty, the first to fight with a sword, and his was the first circumcision. He performed it on himself using a carpenter’s adze, which is an axe, at the beginning of the one hundred and twentieth year of his life, at a place called al-Qudum (the axe). He did this because of a great battle between him and the Amalekites in which a large number of men on both sides had been killed. Abraham could not identify his companions to bury them, so he made circumcision a sign for the people of Islam, using an axe on himself circumcised on that very day.

He was the first to wear trousers. Al-Ḥasan al-Dīnawarī—Aḥmad b. Shaddād b. ‘Umar b. Aḥmad al-Qaṭṭān—Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl b. Ḥassān—Wakī‘—Jarīr b. Ḥāzim—Wāṣil, the freedman of Ibn ‘Uyaynah, who said that God manifested Himself to Abraham (saying), “Abraham, you are the noblest of the inhabitants of the Earth to me, so when you bow down the Earth should not see your pudenda. Therefore wear trousers.” He was the first to become gray-haired. When he noticed this change, he became frightened and said, “Lord, what is this?” He replied, “It is dignity.” So he responded, “Lord, give me more dignity.”

He was the first to perform the rituals, for when he prayed, “*Teach us the way of worship,*” (2:128) his prayer was answered. He was the first to offer a sacrifice, and it was he for whom God prepared the site of the House and showed it to him after it had been effaced, and then he built it, as He says, “*And when We chose the site of the House for Abraham [(We said:) ‘Associate no one with me, and clean My House for those who will circumambulate it, stand (in reverence) and bow (in homage)’]*” (22:26)

He was the first to be cast into the fire for God, and the fire was made cold and peaceful for him. He was the first prophet for whom God revived the dead at his request, when he said, “*O Lord, show me how You raise the dead.*” [He said: “*What! Do you not believe?*” “*I do,*” answered Abraham, “*I only ask for my heart’s assurance.*”] (2:260) He alone was granted this privilege if, while travelling, he desired Sarah and longed for her, God would raise the barrier between them so that he could see her wherever he was. He is the one who will be covered with white vestments on the Day of Resurrection, and a pulpit

will be placed for him to the left of the Throne of the Merciful. The Prophet said, "Mankind will be assembled on the Day of Resurrection—barefoot, naked, uncircumcised, speakers of strange tongues."<sup>35</sup> And Abraham the Friend of God will be the first to be given a garment. He will be the patron of Muslim children and he guides the inhabitants of the Garden.

He was the first to clip his mustache and pare his nails, the first to shave himself, the first to pluck the hair of his armpits, the first to cleanse his teeth with a toothpick, the first to part his hair, the first to rinse his mouth, the first to snuff up water, the first to cleanse himself with water after excretion. And Abraham was the first to leave his land for the sake of God, as God said, "*Then Lot believed in him: and [Abraham] said, 'I will separate myself and take refuge in my Lord!'*" (29:6) And his Station was made a direction of prayer (*qibla*) for Mankind, as God has said, "*Make the spot where Abraham stood the place of worship.*" (2:125) And He made him lead the people in prayer—as God has said, "*I will make you a leader among men.*" (2:124) And He has said, "*You have an excellent model in Abraham.*" (60:4) And He commanded Muḥammad—the best of the prophets—and his nation—the best of the nations—to follow Abraham's creed. For He has said, "*So We commanded you, 'Follow the creed of Abraham the upright (ḥanīf).'*" (16:123) And He said, "*No, we follow the creed of Abraham, the upright.*" (2:135) And He named three of his qualities: "patient, compassionate, penitent", for He has said, "*Abraham was patient, compassionate, penitent.*" (11:75) Patient is a master who controls anger, compassionate is a man who sighs much when sins are mentioned, and penitent is one who turns his heart to his Lord. These are forty-six of the outstanding characteristics with which God favored him.

It is related that God spoke to Abraham, "Abraham, when you gave all you had to your guests; surrendered your son to be sacrificed; committed yourself to the fire, and gave your heart to the Merciful, We have taken you as a friend."

According to Abū Idrīs al-Khawlānī, Abū Dharr al-Ghafārī asked the Messenger of Allah about the number of writings and books revealed by God. He replied, "One hundred separate pages and four books. He revealed ten pages to Adam, fifty pages to Seth, thirty pages to Enoch, and to Abraham ten pages. He revealed the Torah,

<sup>35</sup> Also found, in a slightly shorter form, in Tottoli, *Storie.*, p. 106.

the Gospels, the Psalms, and the Qur'ān." He went on and asked the Messenger of Allah about the pages revealed to Abraham. He replied, "They contained admonitions, (such as); "O ruler, who has been given dominion and is now put to the test: I did not send you to heap up the riches of this world on top of each other, but I sent you to keep away from Me the prayers of the oppressed. For I shall not turn down those pleas even if they come from an infidel." And those pages also contained admonitions such as: "As long as he is in full possession of his faculties, the wise man ought to devote four hours: one hour during which he should confide in his Lord; one hour to contemplate God's wondrous creation; one hour during which to search his heart, as to whether his desires in food and drink and like matters are permitted or forbidden. The wise man ought not go on a journey except for these three reasons: supplying himself with provisions for his Pilgrimage; or provisions for his livelihood; or to find enjoyment that is not forbidden. He must have insight about the events of his time, must devote himself to his affairs, and watch out for his tongue. The man who recognizes that his words cause greater harm than his actions will seldom speak on a matter that does not concern him, and God will help him in all danger."

SESSION ON SOME ACCOUNTS OF ISHMAEL AND ISAAC,  
THE TWO SONS OF ABRAHAM

We have already told that Abraham the Friend journeyed with his son Ishmael and with Hagar to Mecca and settled them there. When Ishmael grew up and reached the age of marriage, he took a woman of the Jurhum for a wife; we have already told earlier how she acted. By his father's command he divorced her and married another woman called al-Sayyidah bt. Maḍāḍ b. 'Amr al-Jurhumī. It was she to whom Abraham said when he came to Mecca, "When your husband comes home, greet him for me and tell him 'now the threshold of your door is established'." Al-Sayyidah bore twelve males to Ishmael: Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedem.<sup>36</sup> From the seed of his

<sup>36</sup> The Arabic forms of these Biblical names (Gen. 12-15) are: *Nābatā*, *Qaydār*, *Adyīl*, *Basām*, *Masma'*, *Dhūmā*, *Masā*, *Harāh*, *Faymāwe*, *Baṭūr*, *Nāfis*, *Qaydmā*. Ṭabari has *Nābit*, *Adabil*, *Mabashā*, *Dūma*, *Mās*, *Adad*, *Waṭūr*, *Nāfis*.

two sons, Nebaioth and Kedar, God brought forth the Arabs. Then God made known His will to Ishmael and sent him to the Amalekites and the tribes of Yemen. When death came to Ishmael, he entrusted his brother Isaac to marry his daughter to Esau, son of Isaac. Ishmael lived one hundred and thirty-seven years, and was buried in the Hġjr near the tomb of his mother Hagar.

‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz was quoted as saying that Ishmael complained to his Lord of the heat of Mecca, whereupon God revealed to him, “I shall open for you one of the gates of the Garden from which its breeze will blow upon you until the Day of Resurrection,” and at that place Ishmael was buried.

This is the narrative about Isaac: he married Rebecca, the daughter of Bethuel, and after he passed the age of sixty she bore him Esau (*‘Aysā*) and Jacob (*Ya‘qūb*). As al-Suddī tells it, there is a strange tale concerning the two of them. Rebecca carried two boys in her womb, and when she wanted to give birth, the two boys fought in her womb. Jacob wanted to come out before Esau, but Esau said, “By God, if you come out before me, I shall lie across my mother’s womb and kill her.” So Jacob stayed back and Esau came out before him. He was called Esau because he “rebelled” (*‘asā*) by coming out before Jacob. The other one was named Jacob because he came out holding on to the “heel” (*‘aqb*) of Esau. Jacob was the larger of the two in the womb, but Esau came out before him.<sup>37</sup>

When the two boys grew up, Esau was the more beloved of his father, while Jacob was more loved by his mother, for Esau was a huntsman. When Isaac grew old and became blind, he said to Esau, “My son, bring me some game to eat and come close to me so that I may give you the blessing my father gave me.” Now Esau was hairy while Jacob was smooth-skinned. Esau went out in search of game, but his mother had heard [Isaac’s] words and she said to Jacob, “My son, go out to the flocks and slaughter a sheep. Roast it, put its skin upon yourself, then set the meat before your father and say to him, ‘I am your son Esau.’” He did that and went in to his father, saying, “Father, eat.” He said, “Who are you?” He replied, “I am Esau.” So Isaac felt him and said, “The feel is that of Esau, but the smell is the smell of Jacob.”<sup>38</sup> His wife said to him,

<sup>37</sup> See Gen. 23–26 for the Biblical account.

<sup>38</sup> Gen. 27:22 has “*The voice is the voice of Jacob, yet the hands are the hands of Esau.*”

"He is indeed your son Esau, so bless him." Isaac said, "Set your food in front of me," and he did. Isaac ate of it, then said, "Come closer to me." He did, and he blessed him that God grant him prophets and kings among his offspring. Then Jacob arose from before him. And Esau came after that and said, "Father, I have brought you the game that you asked for." He said, "My son, your brother Jacob has preceded you." Esau became angry and said, "By God, I will kill him!" But Isaac said, "My son, I have reserved a blessing for you, so come here and I shall give it to you." He went to him and he blessed him saying: "May your descendants be like the dust in number, and may no one else be master over them but they themselves." Then Jacob's mother said to him, "Flee to my brother and stay with him," for she feared that Esau might slay Jacob. So Jacob fled to his uncle, traveling by night and hiding by day. Therefore God named him Israel, for he was the first to "travel by night" (*sarā bil-layl*).<sup>39</sup> And Jacob arrived at his uncle's place.

Isaac had commanded Jacob not to marry a Canaanite woman but one of the daughters of his maternal uncle Laban, son of Nahor. During the time he lived in his uncle's house Jacob asked for his daughter Rachel in marriage. Laban had two daughters: Leah, who was the elder, and Rachel, who was the younger. He asked Jacob, "Do you have anything by which to pay me that I should marry off a daughter to you?" He said, "No, but I will serve you as a hired hand until you will have received in full the value of your daughter's dowry." He said to him, "Very well, her dowry is that you must serve me for seven years." Jacob said, "Marry me to Rachel, for she is the younger one, and for her alone I shall serve you." His uncle said to him, "This shall be the agreement between the two us."

Jacob herded for him for seven years, and after he had fulfilled his obligation, Laban gave him his elder daughter Leah. He brought her to him at night and so when Jacob awoke in the morning, he found a woman other than the one that he had demanded in the agreement. Jacob came to Laban while he was among a group of his folk and said to him, "You have enticed me and cheated me, made me labor for you without pay for seven years, then stealthily

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<sup>39</sup> This closely follows Gen. 27, but Israel's name here is based on a word-play in Arabic, but a Hebrew word-play in Gen. 32 bases it on Jacob's wrestling with an angel, "*sarīta*," "you have striven."

settled me with a woman I did not want for my wife." His uncle said to him, "Son of my sister, in this matter I did not want to bring a disgrace upon myself which, as your uncle and your elder, I should have to bear. When have you seen people marry off the younger daughter before the elder? Come, serve me another seven years so that I may marry the other one to you." In those days people would marry off two sisters to the same man, until Moses was called to prophecy and the Torah was revealed. So Jacob herded for him another seven years and he gave him Rachel. Leah bore him these four tribal ancestors: Reuben who was the eldest, Judah, Simeon, and Levi. Rachel bore him Joseph and Benjamin, who is called Shaddād in Arabic but was named Benjamin because his mother Rachel died in childbirth, and *yāmīn* means "complication" in Arabic.<sup>40</sup>

Laban had given his daughters two maids when he equipped them for Jacob—one was called Zilpah and the other Bilhah. Jacob had intercourse with the two maids and each of them bore him three tribal ancestors. Zilpah bore to Jacob Dan, Naphtali, and Zebulon,<sup>41</sup> and Bilhah bore him Gad, Issachar, and Asher.<sup>42</sup> Altogether Jacob had twelve sons: two from Rachel, four from Leah, three from Zilpah, and three from Bilhah. God named the tribes after these sons, because each of them was the ancestor of a tribe. In the speech of the Arabs *sabat*<sup>43</sup> is a tree with many intertwined branches (and a single root). The tribes (*asbat*) of the Children of Israel are like the nations of foreign peoples and the tribes of the Arabs.

Then Jacob, accompanied by his children and his wives and concubines already mentioned, left from his uncle Laban to the house of his father in Palestine in great fear of his brother Esau. But Esau showed him nothing but kindness, treated him with humility and affection, and even left the land to him. So Esau moved about in Syria and traveled to the coastal plains. Then he crossed over into Byzantium<sup>44</sup> and settled there, and that land became his and, after his death his children's possession.

<sup>40</sup> In Arabic: *Rūbīl*, *Yahūdihā*, *Shamʿūn*, *Lāwī*; *Yūsuf*, *Binyāmīn*. In Hebrew *yāmīn* means "right (hand)" or "south."

<sup>41</sup> Arabic: *Zīlfa*, *Dān*, *Naftālī*, *Rūbālūn*.

<sup>42</sup> Arabic: *Bilhā*, *Jād*, *Yashjār*, *Āshar*.

<sup>43</sup> Hebrew: *shevet*, meaning "rod, stick, sceptre, or tribe."

<sup>44</sup> Arabic: *Rūm*, see n. 46 below.

According to Ibn Ishāq, Esau son of Isaac, married Basemath<sup>45</sup> bint Ishmael son of Abraham, a daughter of his paternal uncle, and she bore him al-Rūm<sup>46</sup> son of Esau, and all pale-skinned people are his descendants. Esau, as has been mentioned, was called Ādum (*Edom*) because of his ruddiness, and therefore his children were called “the pale-skinned ones.”

It is said that Isaac lived one hundred years after Esau and Jacob had been born to him. He died at the age of one hundred and seventy years, and his sons buried him near the tomb of his father Abraham in the field of Hebron. And God is All-knowing.

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<sup>45</sup> Arabic text has here *Nasīmah*.

<sup>46</sup> *Lit.*, “Rome,” the name given to Byzantium (Constantinople) by the Eastern Roman Empire. Esau was thus considered the ancestor of the Romans/Byzantines.



## LOT

### SESSION ON THE TALE OF LOT

He is Lot, son of Haran son of Terah, son of the brother of Abraham. He was called Lot (*Lūt*) because love for him clung (*lāta*) to Abraham's heart—that is to say, it clung there or adhered to it. A similar image is found in the *ḥadīth* of Abū Bakr when he quoted 'Umar, "God, grant forgiveness, this is most beloved (or most adhering) to the human heart." And Abraham loved Lot very much. Those who are versed in the life-stories of the prophets, as well as Wahb, in his *al-Mubtada'*,<sup>1</sup> say that Lot journeyed from the land of Babylon with his paternal uncle Abraham, adopted his creed and emigrated with him to Syria. Sarah, daughter of Nahor, traveled with them from the land of Babylon, and with them journeyed Terah, Abraham's father, but he rejected Abraham's religion about his religion and remained an infidel. They reached Harran and stayed there for a while, then Terah—who was Āzar, the father of Abraham—died in Ḥarrān remaining an infidel to the end.

Then Abraham, Lot, and Sarah journeyed to Syria, then continued to Egypt where they encountered one of the Pharaohs called Sinān b. 'Ārān b. 'Ubayd b. 'Awj b. 'Imlāq<sup>2</sup> b. Lūd b. Shem son of Noah, following which they went back again to Syria. But Abraham settled in Palestine and he let Lot settle in the Jordan (Valley). God then sent Lot to Sodom and its environs—a land whose people were infidels and perpetrators of abominations, as God has related about them, "*Why do you commit this lecherous act which none in the world has committed before? In preference to women you satisfy your lust with men. Indeed you are a people who are guilty of excess*" (7:80–81).

'Amr b. Dīmār said, "One did not see a male on top of a male until the time of Lot." God has said, "*You commit unnatural acts with men and cut off the way,*<sup>3</sup> *and commit obscenities in your gatherings.*" (29:29).

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<sup>1</sup> Wahb b. Munabbih's, *Mubtada'*, see Brockelman, *Geschichte*, Supp. I, 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Awj* and *Imlāq* probably refer to Biblical Og and Amalek.

<sup>3</sup> Understood differently by exegetes and translators. Arberry has "*cut the way*", M.H. Shakir has "*and commit robbery*," Pickthall has "*for travelers*," Ahmad Ali "*of pro-*

“Cutting the ways,” according to the exegetes, means committing abominable acts with whoever arrived in their town. And “committing obscenities in their gatherings,” was understood by them to imply that they would sit together on the road and strike (with a sword) anyone who passed by. They would fart in their assemblies and have intercourse with one another on the road. Muḥāhid said similarly, “They would have intercourse with men when they gathered on the road.”

According to Abū Ṣāliḥ Umm Hāni‘ asked the Messenger of Allah about this verse. He said, “They used to sit on the road and strike those who passed by and deride them. Those were the abominations they committed. Lot tried to hold them back calling them to worship God, warning them not to persist in their ways, commanding them to repent and speaking to them of the horrors of God’s punishment. But his warnings did not deter them, and only increased their stubbornness, arrogance and hostility, thereby hastening God’s punishment. They said to him, “*Bring the punishment of God, if you are truthful!*” (ibid.) Finally Lot asked his Lord to help him against them saying, “*O Lord, help me against the wicked people.*” (29:30) God answered his prayer and sent Gabriel, Michael, and Isrāfil to destroy them. They came in the guise of handsome beardless young men, walking towards him. They accepted his hospitality and gave him tidings of Isaac (that story has already been told above). When they informed Abraham that God had sent them to destroy the folk of Lot, he argued and reasoned with them, as God has said, “*When Abraham’s fear was dispelled, and the good news had come to him, he pleaded for the people of Lot with Us*” (11:74).

Ibn ‘Abbās and others describe how he debated them. They said to him, “We shall destroy the people of that township,” and he asked, “Will you destroy a town in which there are four hundred believers?” They replied, “No.” He said, “Then will you destroy a town in which there are three hundred believers?”—“No.”—“And a town in which there are two hundred believers?”—“No.”—“A town with one hundred believers?”—“No.”—“With forty believers?”—“No.”—“Fourteen believers?” They said, “No.” Abraham had counted fourteen, thereby including the wife of Lot, thereupon he fell silent and became calm.

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*creation,*” Rodwell and the French of Kasimirski exactly the same: “*attack ye them on the highways.*”

According to Sa'īd, Ibn 'Abbās said that the angel said to Abraham, "If there are five among them who pray, the punishment will be lifted off them." When Abraham heard what was awaiting the people around Lot, he said to the messengers, "*Surely Lot is there,*" out of concern for him. But the messengers said, "*We know who is there! We are come to save him and his family, save his wife*" (29:32). Qatādah said, regarding this verse, "We do not consider one a believer unless he protects a believer."

Then the messengers went towards Sodom, and found Lot working on some of his land. According to Qatādah, quoting Hudhayfah, God had told the angels, "Do not destroy them until Lot submits four testimonies against them." They came to him and said, "We should like to be your guests tonight." He went off with them, and when they had walked for an hour he turned to them and said, "Have you heard nothing about this town!?" They asked, "What is its story?" He said, "I bear witness by God that it is the most wicked town on Earth. I know of no people on the face of the Earth more evil!"—repeating this four times. When they entered his house with him. Lot knew that as his guests, he would have to defend them for he feared that his townsfolk might harm them, as He says, "*So when Our angels came unto Lot, he grieved for them and felt powerless to help them, and said: 'This is a day of sorrow'*" (11:77) . . . that is to say, violent.

According to al-Suddī and the sources he uses, the angels left Abraham and by midday they arrived at Sodom, the town of Lot. They came upon a daughter of Lot who was drawing water for her family (he had two daughters, Rayhā, the older, and the younger one, Ghaythā) and said to her, "Maiden, is there a place to lodge here?" She replied, "Yes, but stay where you are. Do not enter the town until I come back to you," for she feared that the townsfolk might harm them. Then she went to her father and said, "Father, go and fetch the two young men at the city gate, lest the townsfolk get hold of them and disgrace you. Faces more beautiful than theirs I have never seen before." Now the townsfolk had forbidden Lot to give hospitality to any men, saying, "Let us, we will give men hospitality," as He said, "*Did we not restrain you,*" they said, "*from entertaining creatures from the outside world?*" (15:70)<sup>4</sup> Lot took them to his

<sup>4</sup> Pickthall has "*They said: Have we not forbidden you from (entertaining) anyone?*"; Arberry has "*They said, 'Have we not forbidden thee all beings?'*"; Rodwell, "They said,

dwelling, without anyone noticing except the people of his household. But his wife went out and told her people about that, saying "there are men in Lot's house, so beautiful as I have never seen before."

Abū Ḥamzah al-Thamālī said that he had heard of a signal<sup>5</sup> between Lot's wife and the townsfolk: whenever guests came to them her messenger was to say, "Bring us salt," inviting them thereby to use Lot's guests for acts of abominations. He had heard also that God transformed her into salt.

It is told that when Lot's wife informed her folk of her husband's guests, "*His people came excited to him*"<sup>6</sup>—which is to say, hurrying, running. When they drew near, Lot said, "*O my people . . . Have fear of God, and do not shame me in before my guests. Is there no man of discernment among you?*" And he said to them, "*These daughters of mine are cleaner (and lawful) for you.*" They said, "*Have we not forbidden you to entertain anyone?*" (11:78)<sup>7</sup>—that you give hospitality to men. They said, "*You know we have no need for your daughters, and you know well what we want.*" (11:79) When they did not accept what he offered them, he said, "*I wish I had the power to resist you or some powerful support*" (11:80). It has been said that God, therefore, sent no prophet after him except one who had an eminent position among his people and the power to stand up to his kinsfolk. When Muḥammad read this verse he said, "God bless my brother Lot, who sought refuge in '*some powerful support*'."

As Ibn 'Abbās and others tell it, "Lot locked the door with the angels inside the house, as he was arguing and imploring the townsfolk from behind the door and they were attempting to scale the building. When the angels saw how distressed and exhausted Lot had become on their account, they said to him, 'Lot, Your support is indeed powerful, and upon them is coming a punishment that cannot be averted. *O Lot, we have verily been sent by your Lord. They will never be able to harm you. So leave late at the night with your family [and none of you should turn back to look; but your wife will suffer (the fate) they are going to suffer].*" (11:81) They said to him, 'Open the door and

"*Have we not forbidden thee to entertain any one whatever?*"; Shakir. "*They said: Have we not forbidden you from (other) people?*"

<sup>5</sup> Taking the word as *alam* "signal, sign," rather than *ilm*, "understanding".

<sup>6</sup> Thus translating *yuhra'ūna*. Pickthall has, "*and his people came unto him, running towards him*" Arberry: "*And his people came to him, running towards him.*"

<sup>7</sup> See n. 4 above.

let us deal with them.' He opened the door and the townspeople entered, Gabriel asked his Lord for permission to punish them, and He granted it to him. Gabriel stood there in his entire figure, spreading his two wings, a pearl-studded sword in his hand, his front teeth sparkling, beautiful to behold, his perfectly-shaped head as if made of pure pearls, white as mother of pearl, and his two feet a shade of brown. With his wings he struck their faces, blotted out their eyes and blinded them, for that is His word, "*They lusted after his guests so We put out their eyes [and said: 'Taste My punishment and my warnings].'*" (54:37)<sup>8</sup> Suddenly they were no longer able to find the way to their houses, and they withdrew, crying out, "Help! Help! The greatest sorcerers on Earth have assembled in Lot's house!" They said to Lot, "You have brought here some sorcerers who have bewitched us. Stay where you are until we come in the morning," thereby threatening him.

When Lot understood that his guests were messengers of his Lord and that they were sent to destroy the people of his town, he said to them, "Destroy them now!" Gabriel said to him, "*Their hour of doom is in the morning. Is not the morning nigh?*" (11:81bis) Then he commanded that Lot travel with his family late at night, and that none of them look back except his wife. At dawn, Lot set out with his household, taking his wife along, as He says, "*. . . except the family of Lot, whom We saved in the early hours of the morning, as a favor from Us. That is how We reward the grateful.*" (54:34-35) When they arose in the morning, Gabriel placed his wing under their land and uprooted the four towns with their people. There were one hundred thousand people in each town and he lifted them up on his wing between Heaven and Earth, so that the inhabitants of the Lowest Heaven heard the crowing of their roosters and the barking of their dogs. Then he overturned the towns, as God said, "*And We turned the habitations upside down.*" (11:82) And he pursued with stones those who ran away, or were travelling, as He said, "*And rained upon them stones of hardened lava in quick succession. Impressed with (the signs) of your Lord. And such (punishment) is not far for the (other) transgressors*" (11:82-83)—that is to say, from those who act as they did.

According to al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Faṭḥawayh, Mukhallid b. Ja'far al-Bāqirī—al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alawiyah—Ismā'īl b. 'Īsā—Ishāq

<sup>8</sup> Ali has "*and my commination.*"

b. Bishr—Juwaybir and Muqātil—al-Ḍahḥāk—Ibn ‘Abbās from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib who reported that the Messenger of Allah said, “Whenever I hear violent storms and rumblings of thunder, I fear they are stones that were prepared for the folk of Lot and whoever acts as they did.”

Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. ‘Uqayl al-Qaṭṭān—Abū l-Faḍl ‘Abdūs b. al-Ḥusayn b. Maṣṣūr—Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī—Abū l-Yamān al-Ḥukm b. Nāfi‘ al-Ḥimsī—Ṣafwān b. ‘Amr reported that he was in the presence of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān when Shu‘ayb, the *qāḍī* of Homs, came by. He was a learned man, and ‘Abd al-Malik asked him about the punishment of a sodomite. He replied that they should be stoned, as were the people among whom Lot lived, for God has said, “*And We rained upon them a shower (of stones). How terrible was the rain (that fell) on those who had been warned.*” (26:73; also 27:58) And He has said, “*And rained upon them stones of hardened lava.*” (11:82; also 15:74) ‘Abd al-Malik agreed with him and accepted this view.” They say that if any man from among them would talk about the town in which he was living, a stone would come and kill him. He also narrated that when Lot’s wife heard the sound of crashing, she turned around, and crying out, ‘O my people,’ was hit by a stone that killed her. This is as He said, “*All except his wife, for she is one of those who will stay behind*” (7:83, also 29:32)—that is, who will be kept back for punishment. God also says, “*She will suffer (the fate) they are going to suffer.*” (11:81)

According to al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn—Mūsā b. Muḥammad b. ‘Alī related—al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alawiyah—Ismā‘īl b. ‘Īsā—al-Musayyab, interpreting Abū Rawq, reported that he had heard “*All except his wife, for she is one of those who will stay behind*” (7:83; also 29:32) as implying that remaining back, she was transformed into stone. Her name was Halsafa<sup>5</sup>, or according to others, her name was Wā‘ilah. It is said that in the time of Lot, there were five towns—Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zoar.<sup>9</sup> Sodom was the largest, with four thousand people. Gabriel carried away these towns on his wing, then turned them over; therefore they were called al-Muṭafikāt, or the overturned ones. The name of the fifth town was Ṣafrah; it escaped punishment because its people believed in Lot.”

<sup>9</sup> Arabic: *Sadūm*, ‘*Āmūrā*, *Dūmā*, *Sā‘ūr*. See Gen. 14:2.

It is narrated that the Prophet said to Gabriel, "God has given you names, He has explained them to me. He called you *full of power, well-established* (in position) *with the Lord and Master of the Throne, obeyed, and worthy there of trust*' (81:19-20) so tell me about your might." He replied, "Muḥammad, with my wing I flung the towns of Lot's people off the face of the Earth and into the air—until the angels of the Lowest Heaven heard their cries and the cries of the roosters. Then I turned these towns inside out." He said, "Now tell me why He called you '(one) to be obeyed?'" He replied, "When I say to Riḍwān, keeper of the Gardens, and Mālik, the keeper of Hellfire, to open the gates of the Garden or Hellfire, they do open them." He said, "Now tell me about 'trustworthy.'" He replied, "God has sent down to His prophets from Heaven one hundred and four heavenly books which He entrusted to no one but me."

‘Abdallāh b. al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Thaqafī—Abū ‘Uthmān b. Aḥmad b. Sam‘ān al-Bazārī—‘Abdallāh b. Qaḥṭabah—Yāsir b. Tawbah—Muḥammad b. Rāmūz—Abū Bakr b. ‘Ayyāsh asked Abū Ja‘far whether God punished the women among Lot's people for the acts of their husbands. He said, "God is too just for such a verdict. Rather, the men find satisfaction with other men, and so did the women with women, therefore the punishment of God was imposed on all of them."

According to Ibn Faṭḥawayh—Mukhallid b. Ja‘far—al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alawiyah—Ismā‘īl b. ‘Īsā—Ishāq ibn Bishr—Muqātil b. Sulaymān told me, "I asked Mujāhid ‘Abū l-Ḥajjāj, did anyone of Lot's people survive?" He said, "No, but one man lived on for forty more days. He was inside the Ḥaram (the Sacred Precinct) in Mecca and a stone came to smite him in the Ḥaram. The angels of the Ḥaram said to the stone, "Return whence you came, for this man is inside God's Sanctuary.' So the stone remained outside the Sanctuary for forty days suspended between Heaven and Earth. But when the man concluded his affairs and left the Ḥaram, the stone hit him and killed him outside the Sanctuary."

According to Muqātil—Abū Naḍarah—Abū Sa‘īd who said that the folk of Lot who engaged in this activity were only thirty and some men, less than forty, but God destroyed all of them. As the Messenger of Allah has said, "You must enjoin the good and forbid the reprehensible, or punishment will encompass all of you."

## JOSEPH

### THE TALE OF JOSEPH SON OF JACOB, AND HIS BROTHERS

Origin and meaning of the Qur'ānic verse: God has said, "*We narrate to you the most beautiful of stories, [of which you were unaware before.]*" (12:3) According to Sa'd b. Abī Waqqāṣ, the Companions said to the Messenger of Allah, "Do recount (*ḥdth*) to us." Whereupon God revealed the verse, *God has sent down the most beautiful of stories (ḥdth), a Scripture consistent [which makes all of those who fear their Lord, shudder.]*<sup>1</sup> (39:23) Then they said, "Messenger of Allah, do narrate (*qṣṣ*) to us." Whereupon God revealed, "*We will narrate (qṣṣ) to you the most beautiful of stories in that We have sent down to you this Qur'ān [of which you were unaware before.]*" (12:3) Thus in this verse God had pointed out to them the most beautiful of stories.

Scholars have disagreed about why God called the tale of Joseph "*the most beautiful of stories.*" Some rhetoricians take the phrase (*āya*) in question to mean simply 'the meaning of the verse is a beautiful narrative'; suggesting the use of the superlative intensifying adjective as a simple adjective, as in, "*It is easy for Him,*"<sup>2</sup> (30:27) or as the poet says,

*He, who raised the Heavens, built for us  
a house whose pillars are strongest and tallest,*

meaning simply only 'strong and tall.' However, others take the phrase literally, to mean that it was the 'most beautiful of stories'.

Opinions also vary as to the intention of the phrase. According to Muqātil, Sa'īd b. Jubayr said that the Companions of the Messenger of Allah gathered around Salmān al-Fārisī and said, "Salmān, tell us what is the best of the Torah." Whereupon God revealed, "*We will narrate to you the most beautiful of stories,*" by which He meant that the stories in the Qur'ān are better than those in the Torah. In a

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<sup>1</sup> The translations vary greatly: Ali, "... as a book conformable [in its juxtaposition, ...]; Arberry, "God has sent down the fairest discourse as a Book, consimilar in its oft-repeated, wherewith shiver the skins of those who fear their Lord."

<sup>2</sup> The Arabic grammatical form usually indicates superlative, hence the different translations. Arberry has "it is very easy for Him;" Dawood: "that is easier for him;" Ali: "This is how His law works inevitably."



different view, God called it the most beautiful, because no other story in the Qurʾān is as rich in good counsel, wisdom, subtleties, and miraculous events, wherefore God said, “*In the story of Joseph and his brothers are lessons for those who inquire,*” (12:7) and “*In their accounts there is a lesson for men of understanding.*” (12:111) Others say God named it the ‘most beautiful story’ because Joseph requited good to his brothers for their evil; he remained steadfast as they did him wrong; refrained, when he met up with them, from mentioning what they had done with him; and because of his generosity in forgiving them when he said, “*There is no blame on you this day! May God forgive you.*” (12:92) Yet others say that it has been so named because it speaks of many things: prophets and pious folk, angels and devils, *jinn* and men, livestock and birds, the lives of kings and slaves, scholars and merchants, wise men and fools, the behavior of men, and of women, with their plots and stratagems. It deals with matters such as chastity, belief in the unity of God, lives of the great, dream interpretation, the proper way to govern and behave towards others, and planning a people’s subsistence. It is the wealth of its hidden meanings about life and creed, about the benefits of this world and the next that make this the most beautiful of stories. Symbolists say that God gave it this name because it speaks of the Lover and the Beloved.

### Chapter 1 Joseph’s Lineage

He is Joseph the righteous, son of Jacob the pure, son of Isaac the one to be sacrificed, son of Abraham the Friend. Therefore the Messenger of Allah called him “noble,” and his forefathers “the nobles.” Abū Hurayrah quoted the Messenger of Allah as saying, “The noble, son of the noble, son of the noble, son of the noble, that is Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham.” There are various views about the meaning of the name Joseph. The majority of scholars have held that it is a Hebrew name and therefore does not follow the rules (of Arabic), others have said that it is an Arabic name. I have heard the learned Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥabībī—his father—about Abū l-Ḥasan al-Aqṭaʿ the wise, when asked about Joseph, he said, “In (our spoken) language *asaf* is sadness, and *asīf* is a slave (or worshipper); now both of those meanings came together in him, and therefore he is called Yūsuf (Joseph).”<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Hebrew *yosef* is explained in two ways in Gen. 30:23: “*God has taken away (asaf) my disgrace*” and “*May the Lord add (yosef) another son for me*”.

*Chapter II A Portrayal of Joseph: His Craftiness,  
His Character, and His Appearance*

God has said, "And when they saw him they exalted him." (12:31)<sup>4</sup> Abū 'Abdallāh al-Thaqafī—'Umar b. Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān—Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān—Muḥammad b. Ḥamid al-Rāzī—Salamah b. al-Faḍl—Muḥammad b. Ishāq—Rawḥ b. al-Qāsim who said, "Amārah—Abū Sa'īd al-Khudarī—the Messenger of Allah said, 'In my Night-journey to Heaven, I passed by Joseph. I asked Gabriel who it was, and he said, "Joseph." People said, "And how did he look, Messenger of Allah?" He replied, "Like the Moon on a night when it is full.'"

According to a report related to me by al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad, Aḥmad b. Ja'far b. Ḥamdān—Ḥāmid b. Sa'dān—Ubayy—Ya'qūb—al-Walīd b. Muslim—Thābit—Anas, who heard the Messenger of Allah saying, "He and his mother were given a portion of beauty." Abū Ishāq b. 'Abdallāh b. Abī Farwah (said), "When Joseph would walk in the alleys of Cairo, the glimmer of his face would reflect from the walls just as the light of the Sun or the Moon." Ka'b al-Aḥbār said, "God made Adam's descendants appear before him in an order of rank, showing him the prophets, one by one. On the sixth level there was Joseph, crowned like a king, clad in splendor, holding the royal scepter in his hand, seventy thousand angels on his right and seventy thousand on his left. Behind him the nations of the prophets, shouting praise to the Lord and sanctifying His name. Before him was the tree of happiness, moving with him wherever he moved.

Seeing him, Adam exclaimed, "My God, who is this illustrious man to whom You have granted such abundant honor, raising him to the highest rank?" God said, "He is your son Adam, who is envied for what I have given him. O Adam! Make a gift to him!" Adam said, "I have already given him two-thirds of the beauty of my progeny." Then Adam clasped Joseph to his bosom and kissed him between his eyes, saying, 'My son, do not be sad (*ta'saf*) for you are Yūsuf (Joseph)," and it was indeed Adam who was the first one to call him Joseph. God allotted to Joseph two-thirds of (all) beauty and divided up the remaining third among humanity. He resembled Adam on the day God created him with His hand and breathed His spirit into him, that is, before he chose insubordination, for God

<sup>4</sup> Ali has, "... the women were so thunderstruck."

had given Adam perfect beauty and splendor on the day He created him. But when he became disobedient He took back all of that and gave it to Joseph. Then when God forgave him, he returned to him the one-third of beauty that He had taken from him. This God did to have humanity know that He has power to do as He wills. Thus He gave Joseph a superior beauty such as He had not given to any other human. Then He endowed him with the knowledge of interpreting dreams: he would be told by what he saw in a dream that such and such would happen before it actually happened. God taught him, as He had taught all the names to Adam.

The beauty of Joseph was like the light of day; his skin was fair, his face comely, his hair curly, eyes large, he stood upright, had strong legs, upper arms, and forearms, a flat belly with a small navel, he was hook-nosed, and had a dark mole on his right cheek which beautified his face; a white birthmark between his eyes resembling the Moon when it is full, and eyelashes like the fore-feathers of eagle wings. His teeth sparkled when he smiled, and light emanated from his mouth between his incisors when he spoke. No human would be able to describe Joseph, no one! It is said that he inherited his beauty from his grandfather Isaac, son of Abraham, who was the most beautiful man, Isaac means 'the one who laughs' in Hebrew, and who, in turn, inherited his beauty from his mother Sarah. God fashioned her in the image of the wide-eyed *houris*, but did not give her the same purity. He gave Joseph an unblemished skin, and so much beauty as He had not given to any other human. When he swallowed, greens and fruits which he ate could be seen in his throat and chest until they reached his stomach. Sarah had inherited her beauty from her foremother Eve."

Wahb said, "Beauty is in ten parts; nine belong to Joseph and one to the rest of mankind." According to 'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd, the Prophet said, "Gabriel descended and said, 'Muḥammad! Verily God says to you, "I have covered Joseph's beauty with the light of My Seat and I have covered your face with the light of My Throne."' A scholar was asked, "Who is more beautiful, Joseph or Muḥammad?" He replied, "Joseph was one of the most beautiful of men, but Muḥammad was the most beautiful." This is indicated in an account of Jābir b. 'Abdallāh, who said, "I saw the Messenger of Allah clad in a red garment, and then looked at the moon when it was full—and he was more beautiful in my eyes than the moon."

DISCUSSION OF THE TALE<sup>5</sup>

In fact, scholars who are knowledgeable in the tales of the prophets and accounts of past (peoples) have said (that) the beginning of the affair of Joseph and Jacob and the start of Jacob's love for him and preferring him over the rest of his children, was that God made a tree grow for Jacob in the courtyard of his house. Each time a son was born to him, God would make a new branch sprout on that tree, and as the boy grew up, that branch would become longer and thicker. When the boy matured, Jacob would cut off the branch and give it to him. Ten sons had been born to Jacob, and for each, God brought forth a branch, but not when Joseph was born. Therefore when Joseph became older, he said to his father, "Prophet of God, each of my brothers has a branch except for me, therefore pray to God to favor me with a branch from the Garden." Jacob raised his hands to Heaven and said, "God, I ask you to give Joseph a branch from the Garden by which he can surpass all of his brothers." Gabriel descended to Earth holding a branch of green chrysolite from the Garden and handed it to Joseph. Joseph used to take that branch wherever he went with his brothers. Then Joseph, who was still a lad at that time, saw his branch in a dream. It was firmly planted in the ground and put forth branches of its own that hung down, laden with fruit of every kind. Then the branches of his brothers were planted around him, but they did not cleave to the ground, nor did they branch out or bear fruit. And behold! Joseph's branch, the smallest of them all, rose towards Heaven, so that it towered above the branches of his brothers. Then a wind blew and tore the branches of his brothers off their roots and cast them into the sea, while his branch continued growing steadily in the ground. Suddenly Joseph awoke, startled and in great fear. His father said to him, "What has befallen you, my son?" He told him his dream, then it reached his brothers, and they said, "Son of Rachel, you have seen a wondrous thing and now you are about to claim that you are our master and we your slaves." His dream troubled them and they became rather jealous of him.

Wahb said that Joseph had the dream about the branch when he was seven years old. When he was twelve, he had the dream which

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<sup>5</sup> For the *midrash* on the story of Joseph, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, II:1-184.

God relates to us in His Book where He says, *“When Joseph said to his father, ‘O my father, I saw in a dream eleven stars [and the sun and the moon bowing before me in homage.]’ (12:4)* This happened one night while Joseph was lying asleep next to his father. (For Jacob used to have him sleep at his side.) It was Friday night, and suddenly Joseph awoke trembling. Jacob held him to his chest, kissing him between his eyes, and said, “O beloved of his father, what ails you?” He replied, “My father, I have seen a dream that frightened me.” He said, “My son, may it be for good what you have seen. But what indeed have you seen?” Joseph said, ‘I saw Heaven opening up and light shining through its gates. Stars flared and lit up the mountains, the seas welled up, their waves rising high, and the fish praised the Lord in a multitude of tongues. I saw myself being clad in a robe so splendid that it made the Earth shine in beauty, and I saw the keys of the treasures of the Earth being cast down in front of me. Then I saw eleven stars descending from the sky, together with them the Sun and Moon, and prostrating themselves before me.” Jacob said, *“My dear son, do not tell your brothers of your dream, [or they will plot against you. Surely Satan is man’s acknowledged foe.]” (12:5)* Then he interpreted his dream saying, *“Thus your Lord will choose you and teach you to interpret events, [and confer His favors on you and the house of Jacob, as He has done in the case of two ancestors of yours, Abraham and Isaac before you. Indeed your Lord is all-knowing, all-wise.]” (12:6)* When Jacob’s wife overheard what Joseph said to his father, Jacob asked her to conceal what she had heard and not to tell it to her sons, and she consented. But when the sons returned from the pasture, she told them the dream that Jacob had commanded her to conceal. Their veins became swollen and their skin shivered from anger at Joseph, and they said, “By the Sun he meant our father, by the Moon none other than you, and by the stars none other than us.” Then they said, “Rachel’s son wants to rule over us, and he will say, ‘I am your master and you are my slaves,’” and they were jealous of him. Therefore the aphorism says: “Never trust what is read from a page; nor put a woman in the trust of a young man; never entrust a secret to a woman.”

Al-Ḥakam b. Zahr—Isma‘īl al-Suddī—‘Abd al-Raḥmān—Jābir b. ‘Abdallāh who said that a Jew called Nistār<sup>6</sup> asked the Messenger of Allah to tell him about the names of the stars that Joseph saw

<sup>6</sup> The name means “hidden” in Hebrew.

bowing down to him. But the Messenger of Allah remained silent and did not answer. Then Gabriel came down and informed him of their names, whereupon he sent for the Jew and said, "If I reveal their names to you, will you become a Muslim?" He said, "Yes", so the Prophet said, "Jaryān, al-Ṭāriq, al-Dhayyāl, Dhū l-Kitfayn, al-Faragh, Waththāb, 'Amūdān, Qābis, al-Muṣbiḥ, al-Falīq, and al-Ḍarūḥ. Joseph saw these stars on the horizon of the sky, bowing down to him. When he told his dream to his father, the father said, 'I see something scattered, but God will gather it up for you.'" The Jew said, "These are their names, by God."

It is said that seven years after Joseph's dream of the branch, he had his dream of the stars. Then to make matters worse for his brothers, he was favored through his father Jacob's special love and closeness, which added to their envy and drove them to devise a plot among themselves to separate Joseph from his father by some ruse, and destroy him in secrecy. As God has narrated, "*Surely Joseph and his brother are dearer to our father than we, many though we be. Our father is surely in the wrong*" . . . thereby meaning that he was clearly mistaken, in his preferring Joseph and his brother to us . . . "*Let us kill Joseph or cast him in some (distant) land, so that we may get our father's exclusive affection; then play the innocent*" . . . that is, repentant, as if saying, "Let us prepare ourselves for penitence before committing the sin." "*One of them said:—Judah, the most virtuous and reasonable of them—If you must do so, then do not kill Joseph,—for killing is a terrible thing—but throw him into the pit.—that is, a closed up well built of stone—Some passing caravan may rescue him.*" (12:8-10)

Someone asked al-Ḥasan, "Does a believer envy?" He replied, "What has made you forget the sons of Jacob?" For that reason there is the saying, "The father is a slave-trader, the brother a plunderer."

So they agreed among themselves to go to Jacob and speak to him about sending Joseph with them to the open plain. But Reuben, who was the oldest son of Jacob, said, "Your father will not trust you with Joseph, so let us all go to Joseph and play in front of him. When he sees us playing in high spirits, he will long to do the same." So they went to Joseph, who was sitting there praying to God, and began to pretend playing together and laughing in front of him. Observing them, Joseph desired to join their play. "Brothers," he said, "do you play like that when you pasture?" They said, "Yes, Joseph. If you saw how we play in our pastures you would long to

be with us." They kindled his desire so much that finally it was he who asked to join (them). He said, "Brothers, go to my father and ask him to send me with you." They went to Jacob and lined up before him (as they were wont to do whenever they requested something of him). When he saw them standing in line in front of him, he asked what it was they sought. They said, "*O father, why don't you trust us with Joseph? We are, in fact, good friends to him? We will guard and protect him until we return him to you. Let him go out with us tomorrow, that he may enjoy himself and play. We shall take good care of him.*" Jacob said to them, "*I am afraid of sending him with you, lest a wolf should devour him while you are unmindful.*" (12:11-13)

According to Ibn 'Abbās and others, what Jacob said is only because in a dream he had seen Joseph on top of a mountain being attacked by ten wolves who were about to devour him, while one wolf among them was protecting him. Then he saw the Earth splitting open; and Joseph entered it and did not come out for three days. It is because of this dream that Jacob said, "*I fear lest the wolf should devour him*" (ibid.).

According to al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Faṭḥawayh, 'Abdallāh b. Shabah—Abū Nu'aym 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Quraysh—Muḥammad b. 'Amr b. al-Ḥakam al-Harawī—Mālik b. Sulaymān al-Qarawī—'Ubaydallāh b. 'Amr al-'Umarī—Nāfi' b. 'Umar reported the Messenger of Allah saying, "Do not give people the idea for an untrue story, for they may use it" This indeed happened in the case of the sons of Jacob: they did not know that wolves eat people until their father suggested it to them, when he said, "*I fear lest the wolf should devour him,*" for then they told him, "The wolf has devoured him."

Then his sons said, "*If a wolf should devour him when we are there, a well-knit band,—that is, ten men—then surely we are losers*" (12:14)—that is, defeated, weak—and they added, "Prophet of Allah, how can a wolf devour him when Simeon the wrathful is among us, whose anger does not subside until he screams, and when he screams, a pregnant woman gives birth to what is in her womb; and among us is Judah who, in his fury, tears lions asunder?"<sup>7</sup> When Jacob heard these words, he became more trusting. Then Joseph said to him, "Father, send me with them."—"Do you really want to go, my

<sup>7</sup> For the source of these characterizations, see Gen. 49.

son?"—"Yes,"—"Tomorrow, then, I will let you go." In the morning, Joseph put on his garments, tied his belt, took his staff and went forth with his brothers. Jacob took the basket in which Abraham had carried provisions for Isaac, and he filled it with provisions for Joseph and went out to see them off. But they said, "Prophet of Allah, go back now." Jacob said, "My sons, I urge you to obey God, as I am entrusting my beloved Joseph to you; and I ask of you, in the name of God, to feed him when he is hungry; and to give him to drink when he is thirsty. Guard him and do not tire him out, and do not desert him. Be friendly and respectful to each other." "Yes, father," they said, "We are all your sons and he is our brother, like any other of us, though he is superior to us because of your love for him." He said, "Indeed, my sons. God will watch you for me, but I fear that I shall lose him." Then he approached Joseph, held on to him, clasped him to his bosom, kissed him between his eyes and said, "I commend you to the protection of God, the Lord of all being." Then he departed and returned home.

This is what al-Suddī and Rajā'—Ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās, and some of the Companions of the Prophet, and from Ishāq b. Bishr b. al-Juwaybir—al-Daḥḥāk—Ibn 'Abbās and Muqātil—Ibn Buḥayrah—Ka'b al-Aḥbār, Sa'īd b. Abī 'Arūbah, al-Ḥasan (all of whose reports have become intertwined with one another): When Jacob sent Joseph and his brothers on their way, at first they showed him respect, but when they brought him out into the wilderness, they displayed their enmity and struck him. He implored them, one by one, but none of them showed mercy. They took the food that Jacob had sent along with him and fed it to the dogs, and went on beating him until they almost killed him. He suffered great thirst and said to them, "Give me a mouthful of water to drink before you kill me," but they would not let him drink. The angels, who saw all this, wept out of pity for Joseph. When Joseph saw that not one of them had compassion for him, he cried out, saying, "O father! O Jacob, if only you knew what the sons of the Patriarchs<sup>8</sup> are doing to your son!" When they were about to kill him, Judah, the son of Joseph's maternal aunt and the only brother with good intentions towards him, said to them, "Have you not made an agreement with me that you would not kill him?"<sup>9</sup> It was then that they agreed to discard

<sup>8</sup> Tabarī has "sons of the servant girls" here.

<sup>9</sup> This is referred to again later but no such agreement was mentioned earlier.



him in the well, as God has said, "*So, when they took him off, they planned to throw him into an unused well*" (12:15). They took him to the well and cast him into it. That well was in the land of Jordan between Midian and Egypt or, according to others, on the highest stretch of the road between Tiberias and Jerusalem, in some nearby wadi, about three *parasangs* from Jacob's dwelling. It was a deserted, dark well, with salty water; its bottom so wide, and its top so narrow, that anyone thrown into it would perish because he would not be able to climb out. It had been dug by Shem, son of Noah, and was called the Well of Sorrows.

They began lowering him into the well, but he held on to the rim of the well. So they tied his hands to his back and tore off his shirt. He said, "Brothers, give me back my shirt so I can hide my nakedness; and let it be my shroud after my death. Untie my hands so I can drive away the vermin in the well." But they said to him, "Call the Sun, the Moon, and the eleven Stars that they may clothe you and keep you company," and they lowered him further with a rope. When he reached the halfway point, they cut off the rope so he would fall and get killed. But God made a rounded stone emerge on the surface of the water and raised it so that Joseph could stand on it. Then Joseph began to weep, and they called to him. He thought that pity had overcome them, so he answered them. But they intended to throw stones at him to kill him. But again Judah stopped them, saying, "You have given me a promise not to kill him."

They said further that when Joseph was thrown into the well, the well became light for him and its water sweet, so he could do without food or drink. Then God sent him an angel who loosened his bonds. When Abraham was stripped of his clothes and thrown into the fire naked, Gabriel brought him a shirt made from the silk of the Garden and clothed him in it. That shirt remained with Abraham, and when he died, Isaac inherited it. When Isaac died, Jacob inherited it from him, and when Joseph grew up, Jacob put that shirt in an amulet and placed it on Joseph's neck to protect him from the evil eye. He never parted from it. When he was thrown into the pit naked, the angel came to him with the amulet. He took out the shirt, dressed Joseph in it, and kept him company by day.

It is related that the angel brought him a quince from the Garden and fed it to him. When evening came and the angel arose to leave, Joseph said to him, "If you depart I shall be terrified." The angel

said to him, "When fear overcomes you, say, 'O Helper of those calling for help! Giver of rain to those who ask for rain! O You Who dispel the grief of the distressed from Whom nothing is hidden, You see my predicament'" When Joseph called out these words, God sent him seventy angels and they surrounded him and kept him company in the well for three days. On the fourth day, Gabriel appeared and said, "O lad, who cast you into this cistern?"—"My paternal brothers."—"And why?"—"They were jealous of me because of my rank with my father." He asked, "Would you like to come forth from this cistern?" He said, "Yes." So he told him, "Say these words, 'Creator of all being! Healer of all that is broken! Who is present at every gathering, and hears all secret talk, Who is ever near, never far away. Companion of every lonely soul, the Victor, Who is never vanquished; the Knower of hidden things; Ever-living, never to die; Reviver of the dead, there is no god but You, glory be to You! I ask You, Who deserves all praise, Creator of Heavens and Earth, Who holds all power and is all splendor and nobility: I ask You (may You bless Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad), to deliver me and bestow Your bounty on me, both the expected and the unexpected.'"

When Joseph said these words, God made for him a way out of the well, released him from his brothers' snare, and God gave him dominion over Egypt, which he did not expect. While he was still in the well, God revealed to him "You will make known to your brothers what they have done, but they will not know that you are Joseph," for these are His words, "*You will tell them of this deed when they know (you) not.*" (12:15)

Mujāhid said, "Joseph left Jacob when he was six years old; he had not yet lost his milk teeth. God brought them together again when he was forty years old."

According to Abū 'Abdallāh al-Dīnawarī, Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Ṣarṣarī—Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī—'Imrān al-Qazzāz—'Abd al-Wārith—Yūnus—al-Ḥasan said that Joseph was cast into the well when he was seventeen. His enslavement and rule lasted altogether for eighty years, and after this period he lived twenty-eight more years, and died when he was one hundred and twenty-five years old.

Let us return to the story of Joseph and his brothers. After they had cast him into the cistern, they took a lamb from the flock, slaughtered it, and smeared Joseph's shirt with its blood; they roasted

it and ate its meat. Then they returned to Jacob who was sitting in the highest place in the road, waiting for them to bring back Joseph. When they drew near, they cried out as one man and raised their voices in weeping. Then Jacob knew that they had been struck by a calamity. They huddled together and came up to him, rent their collars and wept. Jacob, terrified, asked, "What has happened with you, my sons, and where is Joseph?" They said, "*Father, we were racing with one another* (or, "competing in archery", in the reading of 'Abdallāh) *and left Joseph by our things, and a wolf devoured him. But you will not believe us, even though we tell the truth.* (12:17) And here is his shirt smeared with his blood." For that is His word, "*At nightfall they came to their father weeping.*" (12:16) They did so in order that the darkness would enable them to be bolder in making up excuses and embellishing their deceit. As the saying goes, "Do not run after some desire of yours at night, for shame reveals itself in the eyes, and do not try to invent an explanation for your foul deed by daylight, for you will stammer—and will not be able to complete your sentence."

Al-Sha'bī tells that a woman came to Shurayḥ and began to cry. A man said, "Look how this poor woman is crying." Shurayḥ responded by reminding the man of the weeping of the brothers of Joseph, and then recited this poem on this theme:

*Have you been deceived by a tearful old man and his flattery,  
or the white beard, loose for plucking?  
For the sons of Jacob came to their father  
in the evening weeping, lying, and deceitful.*

Shurayḥ continued that when they came saying, "*O our father, we went racing one with another* (or competing with one another) *and left Joseph by our things, and the wolf devoured him, [and you will not believe us though we tell the truth. And they brought his shirt with false blood on it.]* (12:17–18) God said, "with false (*kadhib*) blood"—because it was not Joseph's blood but the blood of a sheep. Instead of "false", 'Ā'ishah read, "with fresh (*kadib*) blood," reading the word with a *d* instead of a *dh*. When they told Jacob about Joseph, he wept greatly and said to them, "Show me the shirt," and they showed it. He said, "By God, I have never before seen [a day] like this, nor a wolf with as little ferocity as this one, devouring my son without leaving the slightest rip in the collar or anywhere else in the shirt." He cried out, then fell down in a faint and awoke only after a long time. At

last he regained his senses and, deeply sobbing, held on to the shirt—smelling it, kissing it—and put it on his face and eyes.

Ibn Faḥawayh—Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm b. Shādhān—‘Ubaydallāh b. Thābit—Abū Sa‘īd al-Ashajj—Usāmah—Zakarīyā informed me from Simāk that al-Sha‘bī mentioned three miraculous events associated with Joseph’s shirt: When they brought it to his father saying, ‘*A wolf has devoured him,*’ (12:17) his father said, ‘If a wolf had devoured him, he would have torn the shirt apart’; and when he *raced to the door and she rent his shirt from behind.* (12:25) and the minister knew; if it had been he who had seduced her, the tear would have been in front; and when the shirt was dropped—on Jacob’s face—*he regained his eyesight.* (12:96)

When Joseph’s brothers arose on the morrow, they returned to their pastures and said to each other, “Now we see what has come of our lying to our father yesterday. If we want him to believe us and remove the blame from us, let us go to the pit, and let us take Joseph and separate his ribs from his flesh then bring him to his father. But Judah said, “Brothers, what about the agreement between us? By God, if you do what you say, I shall tell Jacob what you have done to him. Then I shall be an enemy to you as long as I live.” So they left Joseph alone, and when they returned to their father in the evening, he said to them, “If you are telling the truth that he was devoured by a wolf, then where is that wolf? Bring him to me.” They took their ropes and their staffs and went out to the desert. They caught a wolf, bound him up and put him in fetters, then carried him away and brought him before Jacob. He said, “Loosen his cords,” so they unbound him, and Jacob bade the wolf to come near. The wolf came near, passing through the group until he stood before Jacob bowing his head. Jacob said to him, “O wolf, you devoured my son, the apple of my eye, the beloved of my heart, and have caused me endless sorrow and suffering.” Then the wolf spoke, “Nay, by your white hair, prophet of Allah! I did not devour any of your sons. Your flesh and your blood, O you prophets, is forbidden to us. Verily, I have been wronged and lies have been told about me, for I am a foreign wolf from the land of Egypt.” Jacob said to him, “What brought you to the land of Canaan?” He said, “I have come because of kinship with some wolves whom I visit and with whom I am connected.” Thereupon Jacob said to his sons, “*It is not so; you have made up the story. Yet endurance is best*”—that

is, the course in which there is not grief or complaint—“*I seek the help of God alone for what you impute.*” (12:18)

As Ibn ‘Abbās tells it, the reason for Jacob’s affliction was that he once slaughtered a sheep while he was fasting, and a neighbor of his asked him for food and he did not feed him. So God punished him with the affair of Joseph.

Ibn ‘Abbās further relates that Joseph remained in the well for three days. Then on the fourth day, when he spoke the words Gabriel had taught him, there appeared a caravan (that is, a company of travelers), passing from Midian on their way to Egypt; they had lost their way and wandered off until at last they alighted near the well. That well was in the wasteland, far from any habitation, and was used only by shepherds and wayfarers; its water had been brackish, but became sweet when Joseph was cast into it. When the caravan set up camp they sent out an Arab man of the people of Midian, called Mālik b. Du‘ar,<sup>10</sup> to seek water for them. As God says, “*A caravan happened to pass, and sent their water-drawer to bring water from the well. He let down his bucket*” (12:19). They say that the water-drawer is one who precedes a caravan to a well, and prepares the ropes and the buckets. The water-drawer reached the well and lowered his bucket, that is, he let it down, and Joseph caught on to the rope. When he reached the mouth of the well, Mālik b. Du‘ar saw the most handsome lad there could be. “*What luck!*” he said, “*Here is a boy*” thus announcing to his fellows that he had found a slave, “*And they hid him as merchandise.*” (12:19bis) Which means, according to the commentators, that Mālik b. Du‘ar and his companions concealed the truth about Joseph from the merchants who were with them, by saying to them, “He has been handed to us as merchandise by some people to be taken to Egypt,” fearing that they would want a share in him if they knew his state.

It is also told that Judah would bring food to Joseph every day, in concealment from his brothers. But when he came to the well on that day, he did not find him there. Suddenly he saw Mālik and his companions setting up camp, and Joseph was among them. So Judah returned and brought the news to his brothers. They went to Mālik and said, “This is our slave, he ran away from us.” But Joseph kept the truth to himself, fearing that they would kill him. Then Mālik

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<sup>10</sup> The name means “traitor” in Arabic.

said that he wanted to buy him from them. So they sold him to Mālik, as God says, “*And they sold him as worthless for a few paltry dirhams*” (12:20)—that is, they sold him for a measly sum that was an outrage, an unlawful act, because naming a price for a free man is a sin. He explained the price by saying, “*a few paltry dirhams,*” because in those days, they would not weigh whatever weighed less than an ounce (*ūqīya*), *i.e.* forty *dirhams*, but simply count the *dirhams*. But that which reached an ounce they would weigh, because the smallest of their weights in those days was an ounce, *i.e.* forty *dirhams*.

Scholars have disagreed about the number of *dirhams* for which they sold Joseph. Ibn Mas‘ūd, Ibn ‘Abbās, Qatādah, and al-Suddī maintained that it was twenty coins, which they divided among themselves, two coins to each. Mujāhid said twenty-two *dirhams*, while ‘Ikrimah said forty. They sold him for this amount because they attached no value to him, not knowing the high esteem and lofty rank that God accorded him.

Some say that Joseph was made a slave and was sold by his brothers because when Abraham once returned from his travels to Egypt, the poor of the land and the slaves escorted him, walking barefoot a distance of more than four *parasangs* out of veneration for him but he failed to dismount for them. Therefore God revealed to him, “Because you failed to dismount for my servants who were walking alongside you barefoot, I shall punish you by letting one of your descendants be sold into this land.” When Mālik b. Du‘ar and his friends were about to depart with Joseph, the brothers, walking at their side, warned them: “Beware of him, he is a runaway, a thief, a liar. So by handing him over to you, we have rid ourselves of the disgrace he has brought upon us.”

Mālik sat Joseph on a camel of his and began his journey to Egypt amid his companions. Their route passed by the grave of Joseph’s mother. When Joseph saw it, he could not control himself, but threw himself down from the camel to the grave, saying, “O my mother! O Rachel! Loosen yourself from the bond of perdition, and raise up your head from the ground, and look at your son Joseph and what distress has beset him since you have gone. Mother! If you had seen my weakness and humiliation, you would have pity on me. Mother! If you saw me when they tore my shirt off and bound me and cast me into the pit and slapped me on the cheek, stoned me, and had no pity on me. As one sells a slave they sold me, and as one carries off a prisoner they carried me.”

Then suddenly, as Ka'b al-Aḥbār tells it, Joseph heard a herald behind him, saying, "Be firm. But your firmness is from God alone." At that moment Mālik became aware that Joseph was no longer on the camel on which he had been before, but he could not find him. He shouted to the caravan, "Woe, the lad has returned to his people!" The company went searching for Joseph, and found him. One of the men approached him and said, "Your masters have told us that you were a runaway, a thief, but we did not believe it until we saw you behave in this way." He said, "I swear by God, I did not run away! However, when you passed by my mother's grave, I could not restrain myself and threw myself on the grave." Then Mālik b. Du'ar raised his hand and slapped Joseph in the face, then he dragged him and loaded him onto his camel. Some say he was brought into Egypt in chains.

Mālik said, "Throughout this journey I could not fail to notice what a blessed person Joseph was. I would hear the angels greeting him morning and evening; and I would observe a white cloud shading him, journeying above his head when he journeyed and stopping whenever he stopped." When they reached Egypt, Mālik ibn Du'ar commanded that he wash himself, so did. Then he clothed him in a beautiful garment and displayed him for sale. He was bought by Potiphar<sup>11</sup> b. Raḥīb, who was the ruler of Egypt and its vicinity, in charge of all the grain storehouses of the Great King. The king over Egypt and its vicinity at that time was al-Rayyān b. al-Walīd b. Tharwān b. Arāshah b. Qārān b. 'Amr b. 'Imlāq b. Lāwudh<sup>12</sup> b. Shem, son of Noah. It is related that this king did not die before he believed in Joseph and followed his religion. But he died in Joseph's lifetime, and was followed on the throne by an infidel, Qābūs b. Muṣ'ab b. Mu'āwiyah b. Numayr b. al-Salwās b. Qārān b. 'Amr b. 'Imlāq b. Lāwudh b. Shem, son of Noah. Joseph called him to accept Islam but he refused.

Ibn 'Abbās said, "When they entered Egypt Potiphar met the caravan and bought Joseph from Mālik b. Du'ar for twenty dinars, a pair of sandals, and two white garments."

<sup>11</sup> *Qifir* in the Arabic text. See the article in *Solving Riddles* "Some Problems . . .," p. 23, on the changes Hebrew names have undergone in similar Arabic texts.

<sup>12</sup> These are probably the Biblical Amalek, a grandson of Esau, Gen. 36:12, and Lud, a son of Shem, Gen. 10:20. See the discussion in *Solving Riddles*.

Wahb b. Munabbih said, "The caravan reached Egypt and they brought Joseph to the market to present him for sale. People outbid each other; each offering a higher amount, until his price reached his weight in musk, silver, and silk, and Potiphar bought him for this price from Mālik. Potiphar took him to his house and said to his wife, *"Receive him honorably. He may prove useful to us. We may even adopt him as a son."* (12:21) Her name was Rā'īl bt. Ru'fā'yā'īl, according to Ishāq b. Yasār. On the other hand, Ibn Faṭḥawayh—Ibn Abī Shaybah—Abū Ḥāmid al-Musaylimī—Abū Hāshim al-Ruqā'ī—said that the name of the wife of the ruler was Bakkā bt. Fayūsh.

They said that Potiphar said to her, *"Receive him honorably. He may prove useful to us. We may even adopt him as a son"* (ibid.)—meaning, "take him as our child."

Ibn Ishāq said that Potiphar did not lie with women, and that his wife Ra'īl was beautiful, and lived in comfort and luxury.

Abū Bakr al-Jawzaqī—Abū l-'Abbās al-Da'walī Baṣarḥīn—'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Hilālī—Abū Nu'aym—Zuhayr—Ibn Ishāq—Abū 'Ubayd—'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd who said that the keenest of people were three: the ruler of Egypt when he looked closely at Joseph and said to his wife, *"Receive him honorably"*; the woman who came upon Moses and said to her father, *"O my father! Employ him;"* (28:26) and Abū Bakr when he appointed 'Umar his successor.

God said, *"So we firmly established Joseph in the land"* (12:21), meaning the land of Egypt. The people of the scriptures say that when Joseph had completed thirty years in the land, Pharaoh of Egypt made him a viceroy and placed him over his storehouses, for that is His word, *"Thus We established Joseph in the land, that We might teach him the interpretation of dreams [God dominated in his affairs, though most men do not know.]"* (ibid.)

The ruler brought Joseph to his dwelling and said to his wife, *"Receive him honorably"*, she looked at him attentively and when she saw how very beautiful he was, her heart was filled with passionate love for him. She wished to seduce him, that is, she demanded that he give in to her desires, for that is His word, *"But she, in whose house he resided wished to seduce him and, closing the doors, said, 'Come!'"*—namely, "come here!" inviting him to herself. But Joseph said, *"God be my refuge! He is my master, who has treated me honorably"*—meaning, your husband Potiphar, my master, has indeed treated me honorably—*"Surely those who do wrong never prosper."* (12:23) God has said, *"But the woman desired him, and he would have desired her but for the clear sign that*



he received from his Lord.” (12:24) “Desire” is what a man’s inner feeling tells him to do, but which he had not yet done—as the poet says:

*I desired but did not act, although I almost did; and I wished  
when I was leaving, that ‘Uṭhmān would be mourned by his wives.*

Scholars have different views about Joseph’s desire for the woman and her desire for him. Al-Suddī and Ibn Ishāq say that when the ruler’s wife wished to seduce Joseph, she began to tell him about his charms, and filled him with longing for her. She said, “Joseph, your hair is so beautiful!” And he replied, “It will be the first thing to fall off my body.” She said, “Joseph, your eyes are so beautiful!” He said, “They will be the first part of my body to flow into the Earth.” She said, “Your face is so beautiful!” He said, “The Earth will consume it.” She went on in this manner, now ordering him, now extolling him, and inviting him to pleasure, until finally he was a young man on the threshold of youthful lust, for she was beautiful, so he yielded to her because he saw how much she was in love with him. Now he no longer shied away from her, and when they were alone in some house, he desired her.

Ishāq b. Yasār—Juwaybir, from al-Ḍaḥḥāk and Muqātil together from Ibn ‘Abbās, reporting the conversations between the two. She said, “O your beautiful hair, Joseph!”—“It will be the first thing to decay when I die.”—“Your beautiful face, Joseph!”—“My Lord formed me in the womb.”—“Joseph, you have emaciated my body with the shape of your face!”—“The devil will help you with that.”—“O Joseph, the little garden has caught fire, come and extinguish it.”—“If I extinguish it, I will have to burn for it.”—“The little garden is thirsty, Joseph, arise and water it.”—“The one who holds the key has more right to water it than I.”—“O Joseph, a carpet of silken hair has been spread out for you, arise, and gratify my wish.”—“Then I will lose my share of the Garden.”—“Come with me under the cover, Joseph, and I will hide you.”—“Nothing can conceal me from my Lord if I disobey Him.”—“Joseph! Put your hand on my breast and you will cure me.”—“My master has more right to that than I.”—“Ah well, your master! I shall give him a cup with mercury in it to drink so his flesh will fall off and his bones will disintegrate. Then I shall throw him onto a gold-embroidered silk cloth and drop him in the *qayṭūn*”—which is a small storage room—“and no one will know of it and I shall put you in charge of all his possessions, the small ones and the large.” He said, “But payment will

come on the Day of Repayment.” She said, “Joseph! I have much in pearls, sapphires, and topaz, and I shall give all of that to you so that you may spend it to please your master who is in heaven.” But Joseph refused.

Then, according to Ibn ‘Abbās, the devil rushed into the space between the two and, putting one hand around Joseph and the other around the woman and drew them together. Ibn ‘Abbās said, “Now Joseph’s desire grew so strong that he undid his waistband, and lay down next to her, in the manner of a man about to commit adultery.”

Jābir related from al-Ḍaḥḥāk from Ibn ‘Abbās that she desired that Joseph sleep with her, and he desired her, meaning he desired that she become his wife.

It was the sign received by Joseph that caused him to remain chaste and kept fornication away from him, but views differ as to the details.

Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ṭabarānī—Ḥasan b. ‘Aṭīyah—Isrā’īl b. Abī Ḥusayn—Abū Sa‘īd—Ibn Abbās who, commenting on the Qur’ānic words, “*But for the clear sign from his Lord,*” (12:24) said, “Jacob appeared to him and hit him on the chest with his hand, and Joseph’s desire left through his fingertips.” According to al-Ḥasan, Muḥāhid, ‘Ikrimah, and al-Ḍaḥḥāk, the roof of the house split open for him and he saw Jacob biting his fingers.

Each of the sons of Jacob begot twelve sons except Joseph, who begot only eleven, because of the decrease in his desire when he beheld the image of his father and became ashamed in front of him. Qatādah said, that Joseph saw Jacob’s image and Jacob said to him, “Will you do the deed of fools when you are inscribed in the register of the prophets?”

Al-Suddī said that a voice proclaimed, “Joseph, do not lie with her, for as long as you do not, you will be like a bird in the sky that cannot be mastered, but if you do, you will be like that bird when it dies and falls to earth unable to defend itself. As long as you do not lie with her, you will be like the stubborn ox who cannot be put to work, but if you do, you will be like a dead ox: ants penetrate the roots of his horns and he cannot defend himself.”

‘Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid b. Muḥammad al-Iṣfahānī—Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Sakūnī—Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Khālid b. ‘Umar b. Ḥaṣṣ al-Baṣrī in Baghdad—Khālid b. Yazīd al-Baṣrī—Jarīr—from Layth, from Muḥāhid, from Ibn ‘Abbās about his comment

to the Qur'ānic word, *"The woman would have desired him and he would have desired her"* (12:24) as follows: Joseph had loosened his trousers and lay down with her as a man lies down with a woman, when suddenly there appeared between them a hand without a wrist or arm, on which was inscribed, *"Over you are noble keepers recording, who know what you are doing."* (82:10) Whereupon they arose and fled to escape. When the fear left them, they came back and he lay down with her as a man lies down with his wife. Again that hand with no arm nor wrist appeared between them, this time inscribed: *"Have fear of a day when you go back to God [Then each will be paid back in full his reward, and no one will be wronged.]"* (2:281) So he arose and fled and she arose, but when their fear abated, they came back and did as they had done before. The separating hand appeared again, inscribed, *"Do not go near fornication. It is immoral and an evil way."* (17:32) They fled again and when they returned yet another time to do as they had done before, God said to Gabriel, "Gabriel! Take hold of my servant before he commits a sin." Gabriel went down, biting his fingers (or hand), and said, "Joseph, are you doing what fools do, you whom God destined to be one of the Prophets?" For God has said, *"This was so that We may avert evil and lechery from him for he was one of Our servants."* (12:24)

According to Ya'qūb b. Aḥmad, Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh al-Nu'mānī—'Abdallāh b. Aḥmad b. 'Āmir al-Ṭabaristānī related, "My father informed me saying, 'Alī b. Mūsā al-Riḍā—his father and his grandfather Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq, that his father and grandfather related that this is what 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn said about the verse, *"If it had not been that he saw the clear sign of his Lord,"* (12:24) that the wife of the ruler walked over to the idol and covered it with a cloth. Joseph asked her about this and she replied, 'I was ashamed that he should see us.' Joseph said to her, 'Are you ashamed before one who neither hears, nor sees, nor understands? Should not rather I be ashamed before Him Who created all things and knows all things?'

When Joseph saw the clear sign, he arose running to the door of the house to flee from that which she wanted, but the woman followed him, for that is His word, *"Both of them raced to the door"*—meaning Joseph and Rā'īl—Joseph to escape from committing adultery, and she to beseech him to gratify her desire for which she was seducing him. She caught up with him and held on to his shirt from behind, pulling him towards her to prevent him from leaving. *'And*

*she rent*'—that is, she tore, ripped—'*his shirt from the rear*'—that is, from his back—because Joseph was the one fleeing and the woman the pursuer. When they went out '*they met her master*'—that is, they found her husband Potiphar '*at the door*', sitting with a paternal cousin of Rā'īl. When she saw him, she was afraid of him and said, preceding Joseph in speaking to her husband, '*What shall be his reward, who wishes evil to your folk*' meaning adultery—'*save prison or a painful doom?*' (12:25)—that is, beating with whips. In this connection Ibn 'Abbās quotes the current proverb, "Seize the robber before he seizes you."

Joseph said, '*It was she who wanted to seduce me*' (12:26), but I refused and fled from her, and then she caught up with me and tore my shirt.'" As Nawf al-Shāmī tells it, "Joseph did not want to speak of her at all, but when she said, '*What shall be his reward, who wishes evil to your folk,*' he became angry and said, '*She it was who asked of me an evil act.*'" (ibid.)

*And a witness of her own folk testified* (ibid.). There are different views about the witness mentioned (in the second half of the verse). Sa'īd b. Jubayr and al-Ḍaḥḥāk thought that it was a child in the cradle whom God made speak. Support for this view is found in a *ḥadīth* of Ibn 'Abbās attributing the statement to the Prophet: "Four infants spoke in the cradle: the son of Māshitah, the daughter of Pharaoh; the witness of Joseph; the companion of Jurayj the monk; and Jesus, son of Mary."

However, according to al-Ḥasan, 'Ikrimah, and Qatādah, it was not a child, but a wise, insightful man from among the king's nobles. Al-Suddī said that he was a paternal cousin of Rā'īl who was sitting with her husband at the door and he spoke the verdict as told by God, "*If his shirt is torn from the front, then she speaks the truth and he is a liar. But if his shirt is torn from behind, then she has lied and he speaks the truth. So when he saw his shirt torn from behind*—he recognized his wife's treachery and Joseph's innocence, and he said, "*Surely this is a woman's ruse, and the wiles of women are great*" (12:27–28) and to Joseph he said, '*Joseph, ignore this tale and do not speak about it to anyone.*' Then he said to his wife, '*Ask forgiveness for your sin you were surely errant*—meaning those who do evil. *For you have attempted to seduce a young man and have betrayed your husband; and when he kept himself chaste, you lied about him.*'" (12:29)

According to the aforementioned commentators the story of Joseph and Rā'īl became rumored, and people started talking about it. "*In the city the women gossiped*—they were the wife of the cup-bearer, the

wife of the baker, the wife of the master of the inkwell, the wife of the prison-master, and the wife of the chamberlain; *'The ruler's wife is lusting for her boy*—meaning, her Canaanite slave—he has smitten her to the heart with love—that is, love for him has penetrated deep into her heart, its veil and its cover, that is *'We think she is in plain error'* (12:30)—that is, committing an obvious sin, in attempting to seduce her slave.' When Rā'īl *'heard their slanderings'*—that is, their conversations among themselves (in which, according to Ibn Ishāq, they plotted to trick her into letting them see Joseph, of whose great beauty they had heard so much)—she set up a table and invited forty women, among them those who had reviled her. For this is as He says, *'She sent for them and prepared (a'tadat, meaning the same as hay'at, 'prepared, made ready') a couch,*<sup>13</sup> (12:31) meaning here a place to sit down for a meal, with cushions and pillows to lean on.

In the interpretation of Ibn 'Abbās, Sa'īd b. Jubayr, and Qatādah on the one hand, it means she prepared (i.e., *a'tadat*) food. And indeed, Mujāhid and Qatādah, on the other hand, read *matkan* (instead of the canonical *muttaka'an* without the *hamzah*) which signifies all food which you slice with a knife. In the same vein, Wahb says that she prepared for them citrons, melons, bananas, pomegranates, and roses *'and gave to each of them a knife and said (to Joseph), "Come out unto them!"'* (for she had asked him to sit in a room other than where they were sitting). Then Joseph came to them, *'and when they saw him they admired him; he filled them with awe and they were speechless 'and cut their hands'*<sup>14</sup> (ibid.) with the knives, thinking that they were cutting the citrons and the other fruits.

Qatādah said, "They kept cutting their hands until they made them fall off, but they became aware only of the blood, yet experienced no pain (from cutting off their hands), because their minds were preoccupied with Joseph."

Wahb had been told that seven of the forty women died during that session out of ecstasy of love for Joseph. They exclaimed, *"God preserve us!"*<sup>15</sup> (ibid.)—which means the same as "God save us!" *"This is no mortal, but a gracious angel."* (ibid.) Rā'īl then said to the women, *"This is he on whose account you blamed me"*—that is, for loving him. Then she disclosed to them the passion she felt, saying, *"I sought to*

<sup>13</sup> In most translations given as *'banquet'*, but note this discussion of the terms.

<sup>14</sup> Dawood has *"they were amazed at him;"* Ali has *"the women were so wonderstruck."*

<sup>15</sup> Ali: *"O Lord preserve us."*

*seduce him, but he preserved himself from sin*”—that is, he resisted and did not yield. Then the women said to Joseph, “Obey your mistress.” And Rā’īl said, “*Yet if he will not, he shall be imprisoned, and be one of the humbled.*” (12:32) When the woman repeated her solicitation and threatened prison, Joseph chose to disobey, and said, “*O my Lord, Prison is more dear to me than give in to their advances, but if you do not fend off their wiles from me I shall yield to them—that is, feel desire and follow them—and lapse into folly. His Lord heard his prayer and averted their wiles from him. He hears and knows everything. And yet it seemed good to them—namely to the ruler and his companions—after they had seen the signs—proving Joseph’s innocence, such as the shirt being torn from behind, and his scratched face, and the women’s cutting their hands—to imprison him for a time.*” (12:33–35)

In al-Suddī’s interpretation, this happened because the woman said to her husband, “This Hebrew slave has dishonored me among the people, pretending to them that I tried to seduce him, whereas I have no way of defending myself Therefore either you let me go out so that I can plead my case, or you imprison him as you have imprisoned me.”<sup>16</sup> So he imprisoned him although he knew of his innocence, in order to avert suspicion of his wife. All this came about because God had devised Joseph’s imprisonment so as to cleanse him from his desire and make him atone for his lapse.

According to Ibn ‘Abbās, Joseph stumbled three times: when he desired to lie with her and was imprisoned; when he said, “*Mention me in the presence of your lord*” (12:42) and remained in prison for some years; and when he said to his brothers, “*You are surely thieves!*” they replied, “*If he has stolen, a brother of his has stolen before.*” (12:77)

When Joseph was imprisoned, *two young men entered the prison with him* (12:36) both servants of al-Walīd b. al-Rayyān, the great king of Egypt. One was his baker and the overseer of his food: his name was Mujlib. The other was his cup-bearer and the overseer of his drink: his name was Bayūs. The king, having been told that the baker wanted to poison him and that the cup-bearer concurred, became furious and imprisoned them. All this came about because a band of Egyptians were about to betray the king and assassinate him, so they plotted with these two youths and promised them money to poison the food and drink of the king, and they both agreed to

<sup>16</sup> Or “*secluded me*”, probably referring to being restricted to her house as any upper-class wife.

that. Then the cup-bearer withdrew from the plot, but the baker went ahead to deceive the king: he accepted the bribe and poisoned the food. But when his time came to bring in the meal, the cup-bearer said, "O king, do not eat, for this food is poisoned!" but the baker said, "O king, do not drink, for the drink is poisoned!" The king said to the cup-bearer, "Drink," he drank and it did not harm him. Then he said to the baker, "Eat of your food!" but he refused, then gave the food to one of the animals, and it died. Then the king ordered them both imprisoned.

When Joseph entered the jail, he told the other prisoners that he knew how to interpret dreams. One of the two young men said to the other, "Come, let us try out how much this Hebrew slave really knows by making a pretense to him." Then they asked him without having had any dreams at all, as has been confirmed by 'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd's account, "Joseph's two companions merely feigned dreams in order to test his knowledge." However, others have said, on the contrary, their dreams were true and real when they asked him about them.

Mujāhid tells that when the two young men saw Joseph, they declared their love for him. But Joseph said to them, "I implore you in the Lord's name not to love me, for anyone who has loved me brought me nothing but misfortune. My paternal aunt loved me and brought me distress; my father's love caused me great unhappiness; and the love of my master's wife was a calamity for me. So do not love me, may God bless you both!" Nevertheless they refused to renounce their love for him.

Then they began witnessing the signs of Joseph's discernment and insight and were amazed. Now both had dreams when they entered prison, and they came to Joseph. The cup-bearer said, "Man of knowledge, I dreamed that I was in a garden. Suddenly there stood before me a grapevine with three clusters of grapes that I picked. The king's cup was in my hand, and I pressed them and gave the king a drink." For that is the Qur'ānic verse, "*I dreamed that I was pressing khamr*" (12:36)—the word *khamr* means grapes in the language of Oman, corroborated by Ibn Mas'ūd who reads, "*I was pressing khamr, that is, grapes.*" Then the baker said, "In my dream I was carrying three baskets on my head, in which was *'bread, and the birds were pecking at it'* You tell us the meaning of this. You seem to be a righteous man.'" (ibid.)

According to Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b.

Aḥmad b. ‘Uqayl—‘Ubaydallāh b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm b. Qāluwayh—Muḥammad b. Yazīd al-Sulamī—Abū l-Rabī‘ al-Zaharānī—Khalaf b. Khalīfah—Salīm—al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim said this about the Qur’ānic verse, “*You seem to be a righteous man,*” saying, “Joseph’s goodness was such that when a man became ill in prison, he cared for him, and when dejected, he brought him comfort, whatever a person needed, he gathered for him, or asked it of his Lord.” Qatādah said, “I have been told that his good deeds cured the ill among them and comforted the sad, and that he strove hard for his Lord.” He also said that when Joseph arrived in prison, he found that the people there had lost all hope, after years of languishing in great misery. He said to them, “Be of good cheer; if you bear your suffering patiently, you will be rewarded, and that reward will be your repayment if you bear your suffering patiently.” They said, “O young man, How noble is your face, your bearing, your speech. We have been blessed by your presence. We have no desire to be in any place other than this since we have seen you, because of what you have related to us about reward, atonement, and purification. Who are you, O youth?” He said, “I am Joseph, son of the sincere friend of God Jacob, son of the sacrifice of God Isaac, son of the Friend of God Abraham.” The keeper of the prison said to him, ‘By God young man, I would set you free if I could. But I shall improve your lodgings and treat you better than the others, so choose to dwell in any building you wish.’”

Joseph did not want to make known to them what they had asked him, for he knew how painful the message would be to one of them, so he avoided their questions, preparing to speak of something else (namely his creed). He said, “*Before the food which you are given will come to you I shall tell you its interpretations.*” They said, “This is an act of sorcery and divination.” He said, “I am neither a sorcerer nor a diviner, but *this knowledge is of that which my Lord has taught me.*” Then he explained his religion and belief to them and said, “*I have forsaken the religion of those who do not believe in God and deny the Hereafter. I followed the creed of my fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. [We cannot associate anyone with God. This is among God’s favors to us and to all mankind; but most men are not grateful].*” (12:37–38) Thereby he demonstrated his discernment and wisdom, and he invited them to adopt Islam. Then speaking to those two men, as well as to the other prisoners, who had idols in front of them that they worshipped instead of God, he said, forcing the proof on them, “*O fellow prisoners, are diverse gods*



*better, or God the One, the Almighty? What you worship besides Him [are nothing but names that you and your fathers assigned, for which no sanction has been sent by God. Authority belongs to God alone. He commands that you worship none but Him. This is the right way, but most men are ignorant]*" (12:39–40). Then, because they pressed him, he interpreted their dreams, "*Fellow prisoners! One of you (that is, the cup-bearer) will serve wine to his master (meaning the king) to drink, and he will return to his former station. The three grape-clusters are three days he will remain in prison, then he will be set free. And as for the other, he will be crucified; the baskets that he saw in the dream, are the three days he will remain in prison. Then he will be taken out and crucified and the birds will peck at his head* (12:41)."

As Ibn Mas'ūd tells it, when the two heard Joseph's words, they said, "We did not dream any at all, we were only joking and testing this knowledge you claimed." But Joseph said, "*Thus is the case judged concerning which you inquired*" (ibid.)—meaning that the case about which you asked has been closed." According to 'Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid b. Muḥammad b. al-Wazzān, Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. al-Ṣaffār related to us, Aḥmad b. Mihrān related to us from Abū Razīn al-'Uqaylī who heard the Messenger of Allah say, "A dream is a man's omen as long as it has not been interpreted; but once interpreted it comes true. A dream is one forty-sixth part of prophecy and the noblest part. Tell a dream only to one who has skill and intelligence." He also said, "The dream is the oldest fortune-teller."

Then Joseph said to the man who he knew would be released of the two of them, namely the cup-bearer, "*Mention me in the presence of your lord—meaning the king—and tell him that there is a youth in prison confined unjustly.*" *But Satan caused him to forget to mention him to his master, [so he remained in prison for some years].* (12:42) "Some" is anything between three and ten, but most commentators agree that "some" in this verse was seven years.

Wahb b. Munabbih said, "Job's suffering lasted for seven years, and Nebuchadnezzar was punished by being changed into an animal for seven years, and Joseph was left in prison for seven years."

According to Yūnus—al-Ḥasan said, "The Messenger of Allah said, 'If my brother Joseph, may God bless him, had not said these words, meaning his saying, "*Mention me in the presence of your lord*", he would not have remained in prison as long as he did' and then the Messenger wept." Al-Ḥasan said, "When a misfortune comes upon us, we take refuge among people."

According to Mālik b. Dīnār, when Joseph said to the cup-bearer, "*Mention me in the presence of your lord*" he was told, "Joseph! You have put your trust in someone other than Me. Therefore I shall lengthen your confinement." Joseph wept and said, "O Lord, my many tribulations made my mind forget, therefore I said what I said, woe unto my brothers."

It is narrated that Gabriel entered upon Joseph in prison; Joseph recognized him and said, "O brother of those who warn, why do I see you among those who go astray?" Gabriel said to him, "O purest of the pure, the Lord of all being greets you and asks you, 'Why did you withdraw from Me and turn to humans to intercede for you? By My glory, I shall make you *remain in prison for some years.*'" Joseph said, "O brother Gabriel, will He then be pleased with me?" He answered, "Yes," and Joseph said, "Then I do not mind."

Ka'b al-Aḥbār said that Gabriel said to Joseph, "God asks you, 'Who created you, Joseph?'" Joseph said, "God." Then Gabriel said, "And who endeared you to your father?"—"God."—"And who comforted you in the well and clothed you when you were naked?"—"God."—"And who saved you from the agony of the well?"—"God."—"And who taught you the interpretation of dreams?"—"God." Then Gabriel asked, "If so, how could you turn to a human being like yourself for help?"

When the seven years (of Joseph's imprisonment) had passed, al-Kalbī said that these were besides the five that already passed; that is, because he had already been imprisoned for five years before he asked the cup-bearer to intercede for him, and that is His word, "*to imprison him for some years*"; for when he asked the cup-bearer to intercede, saying, "*Mention me in the presence of your lord*," he remained in prison for seven years.<sup>17</sup>

When his trials ended and his relief drew near, the great king of Egypt, who was al-Rayyān b. al-Walīd, had a wondrous dream which terrified him: he saw seven fat cows coming up from a dry river, and seven lean cows. And the seven lean cows swallowed the fat ones and they entered their bellies so that he saw nothing of them. And he saw seven green ears of corn with thick grains ready to be husked, and seven others that were dry, and had matured long ago.

<sup>17</sup> Note this curious interpretation of "*some years*" as being five plus the usually accepted seven.

Then the dry ones twisted around the green ones until they overpowered them. Then the king gathered the diviners and sorcerers and his dream interpreters and related this dream to them, saying, *"Tell me the meaning of this vision, my nobles, if you can interpret dreams"*, meaning "if you can explain them." They said, *"They are but a medley of dreams,"* that is, confused, of doubtful interpretation, delusive—*"We know nothing of the interpretation of dreams."* Then said the youth who had been released of the two—namely, the cup-bearer—(now) at last remembering,—that is, remembering Joseph's request. (Ibn 'Abbās suggests 'at last' to mean 'after years'.) *"I will give you its interpretation, therefore send me forth"*—namely, to the prison. (12:43-45)

According to Ibn 'Abbās the prison was not in the city. So they sent him on his way and he came to Joseph. He said to him, *"O man of truth (ṣiddīq)—meaning, regarding what you have interpreted about our dreams. A ṣiddīq is one who is very truthful. Expound for us the seven fat cows being devoured by the seven lean cows [and seven green ears of corn and seven dry ones, so that I may go back to the people] that they may know"*—namely, your superiority and your knowledge. Joseph said to him, *"You shall sow seven years as usual, [and after reaping leave the corn in the ears, except the little you need for food. Then there will come seven years of hardship that will consume the grain you had laid up against them, except a little you had stored away. This will be followed by a year of rain] when they will press wine and oil."* (12:46-49) The cup-bearer returned to the king and delivered to him Joseph's interpretation of his dream which was as clear as the day. And the king, knowing that what he had said will come true, said, *"Bring me the one who interpreted this dream of mine."* And when the messenger came to Joseph, he refused to go forth with him until he (the king) made known his innocence and the truth of his claim with regard to the women. He said to the messenger, *"return unto your lord"*—namely, your master the king—*"and ask him how fare the women who had cut their hands. My Lord knows their guile."* (12:50) Ibn 'Abbās surmised that if Joseph had left prison on that day before letting the king know the truth about himself, there would have remained in Potiphar's mind some concern about him, for he would say, *"He is the one who tried to seduce my wife."*

The Messenger of Allah said, *"I marvel at my brother Joseph, at his nobility and patience, God bless him! If I had been in his place when he was asked about the fat and lean cows, I would not have told them until I had laid down a condition that they set me free."*

And if I had remained in prison as long as he did, I would have hurried with my answer and rushed to the door, without first seeking exculpation. By God, he was patient, long-suffering." Then Ibn 'Abbās, continuing his narration, related that when the messenger returned to the king with Joseph's message, the king sent for the women who had cut their hands, as well as the wife of the ruler, and said to them, "*What happened when you tried to seduce Joseph?*" They answered, "*God save us! We know no evil of him.*" Said the wife of the ruler, "*Now the truth is out. It was I who tried to seduce him, and he is indeed a man of virtue.*" When Joseph heard that, he said, "*(I asked for) this, that he may know that I betrayed him not in his absence, and that surely God does not guide the snare of the betrayers.*" (12:52) Gabriel said to him, "And not even when you desired her, Joseph?" Whereupon Joseph replied, "*I do not wish to absolve myself, [for the soul is prone to evil, unless my Lord have mercy. Indeed my Lord is forgiving and kind].*" (12:53)

When Joseph's innocence became evident to the king and he recognized his trustworthiness, skills and insight, his piety and knowledge, he said, "*Bring him unto me that he may serve me alone.*" (12:54) Then the messenger came to Joseph and said, "Now comply with the king's wish," whereupon Joseph left prison. Upon leaving, he spoke a prayer for the prisoners that is known until today, "O God! Fill the hearts of the generous with affection for them, and do not keep information hidden from them," and indeed, they are the most knowledgeable people in every village, until today.

When Joseph left the prison he wrote on its gate, "This is the grave of the living, the abode of the aggrieved, the place where friends are put to the test, the target of the enemies' gloating." Then he washed and cleansed himself of the filth of the prison, put on new clothes, and went to the king.

Wahb said that when he stood at the gate of the king, Joseph said, "My Lord is my only need in this world, I need nothing but Him in all creation. Exalted is the one who seeks His protection, glorious is His praise, there is no god but He!" When he entered to the king, he said, "O God, I ask You for Your goodness rather than his goodness, I seek refuge in You from his evil and the evil of others." When the king looked at him, Joseph greeted him in Arabic. The king asked him, "What is this language?" "The language of my uncle Ishmael", he replied. Then he invoked God's blessing upon him, this time in Hebrew, and the king asked, "What is this language?" "The language of my father Jacob," he said. According

to Wahb the king spoke seventy languages, and whenever he addressed Joseph in a language, Joseph answered him in that language, so the king was filled with admiration for him. Recognizing Joseph's youth and the abundance of his knowledge—Joseph was only thirty years old—the king said to those around him, "Surely this one knew how to interpret my dream, and none of my diviners and sorcerers was able to do so." Then he bade him to sit down and said, "I want to hear my dream from your own mouth." Joseph said, "I will do as the king asks. O king, you saw the river Nile exposing to you, seven gray cows, fat and beautiful, who came up towards you from the shore, their teats overflowing with milk. Suddenly, as you were watching them and marveling at their beauty, the water seeped away and the Nile dried up and its bottom came into view. Out of its mud and mire came forth seven lean cows. Their manes were disheveled and caked with dust, the skin of their bellies was shriveled up and they had no udders or teats. They had the teeth and paws of dogs, and snouts like wild beasts. They mingled with the fat cows and tore them apart in the manner of wild beasts, eating their flesh, ripping the skins, crushing the bones and sucking out the marrow. While you were watching and wondering how they had been able to overpower the fat cows being themselves so emaciated, and how after devouring them, no fat or added growth was visible on their bodies; suddenly there sprouted seven green ears of grain and then, in the very same spot, seven others, black and dry. And you were saying to yourself, 'How is this possible? These are green and bear fruit, but those are black and dry, even though they were growing in the same moist soil and water.' All of a sudden a wind blew that turned the black dry leaves over on the green and succulent ones, setting them ablaze and spread among them and burned them, so that they too became black. This is the end of what you saw in your dream, and you woke up alarmed."

The king said to him, "By God! What is the meaning of this dream? It is surely more wondrous than anything I have heard from you. What do you discern in my dream, O truthful one?" Said Joseph the truthful one, "I advise you my king, to pile up grain and sow an abundance of seed during these fertile years; build pyramids and storehouses and put the grain therein, leaving it in its stalks and spikes (which makes the grain last longer and allows the spikes to be used as fodder for the cattle). Therefore, command the people to remit one-fifth of their crops, and what you will have collected

in this way will suffice the people of Egypt and its surrounding lands. Then people from all regions will come to you and be supplied with provisions by you, under your authority, and treasures will be heaped in front of you such as were acquired by no one before." The king said to him, "Who will do this for me? Who will gather and sell for me and spare me the trouble?" Joseph said to him, "*Appoint me over the granaries of the land, I shall be a skilled custodian*" (12:55) implying a record-keeper, an accountant. But others explained it differently: "watchful" (*ḥafīz*) over that which you have entrusted to me, "knowledgeable" (*ʿālim*) about the years of famine and knowledgeable in the languages of those who will come to me." So the king said, "Who could be more deserving of this task than you?" And he appointed him in charge of the entire undertaking, and said, "*Today you are established in a rank of trust with us.*" (12:54)

According to al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Thaqafī b. Mukhallid b. ʿAlawiyah—Ismāʿīl b. Jaʿfar al-Bāqirī—al-Ḥusayn b. ʿAlawiyah—Ismāʿīl b. ʿĪsā—Ishāq b. Bishr—Juwaybir—al-Ḍaḥḥāk—Ibn ʿAbbās said that the Messenger of Allah said, "My poor brother Joseph, may God bless him, had he not said, "*Appoint me over the granaries of the land*" (12:55), the king would have employed him immediately. But because he asked it of him, the king delayed the matter for a year, and Joseph stayed with the king in his house for an entire year."

According to Sufyān, Abū Sinān ʿAbdallāh b. Abī l-Hūdhalī reported the king saying to Joseph, "I want you to join me in everything I do, except that it would be abhorrent to me if you took your meals with me." Joseph said, "I should have more cause to abhor eating with you, for I am the son of Jacob, named Israel by God; son of Isaac, the sacrificial victim of God; son of Abraham, the Friend of God." Thereupon the king would take his meals with him.

Ibn ʿAbbās related that when a year had passed after Joseph had requested sovereignty, the king called him and set his own crown on his head, girded him with his own sword, and adorned him with his signet-ring. He ordered that a throne of gold be made for him, embellished with crowns made of pearls and amethysts, covered with a cupola of silk brocade. That throne was thirty cubits long and ten cubits wide; it was covered with thirty carpets and sixty cushions. Then on the king's order, he set out with the crown on his head, his whiteness sparkled like snow, his face was as bright as the moon, so much so that the observer would see in his face the purity of the

color of the moon. Sitting on the throne, and so, proceeding through the streets, kings humbled themselves before him. He remained close to the king who entrusted him with the rule over Egypt, discharging Potiphar from his duties and appointing Joseph in his place.

Shortly thereafter Potiphar died and the king married Joseph to Rā'īl, the wife of Potiphar. When he came to her he said, "Is this not more virtuous than what you desired of me?" She said to him, "O truthful one, do not blame me. I was beautiful, living in comfort and luxury, amidst wealth and earthly possessions, but my husband, as you saw, did not approach women, whereas you were as God has made you, with a pleasing shape and good looks, and I could not control myself." When Joseph consummated the marriage he found her to be a virgin, so he took her and she bore him two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh,<sup>18</sup> the two sons of Joseph. Rule over Egypt was now firmly secure in Joseph's hand; he established justice among the people, and men and women loved him, for that is His word, *'Thus We reward those who do good' and 'thus we gave Joseph authority in the land'*—namely the land of Egypt—*so that he had mastery in it wherever he pleased. We bestow Our favors on whomsoever we please. We do not allow the reward of those who do good to go to waste.*" (12:56).

Al-Buḥturī has said about this theme:

*Is there not in God's messenger Joseph an example  
for one like you, imprisoned unfairly and falsely?  
He, graceful in forbearance, remained in prison for a while  
and his graceful forbearance led him to dominion.*

Someone wrote these verses to a friend of his:

*Just beyond the straits of fear lies the expanse of safety,  
and happiness begins when sorrow reaches its utmost.  
Despair not! For God made Joseph ruler  
over his treasures after his release from prison.*

Now Joseph was secure in his rule, the fruitful years had come and gone, the barren years had set in, bringing upon the people a horror the like of which they had not seen before; they were overwhelmed by hunger. At the beginning of the drought, while the king was asleep one night, suddenly he felt hungry, and called out, "Joseph, I am hungry!" Joseph said, "Now the period of drought and famine has arrived."

<sup>18</sup> Arabic: *Afāyīm, Manash'a.*

In the first year of famine, they used up everything they had prepared during the fruitful years; and the people of Egypt began buying grain from Joseph. During this year he sold it to them in exchange for coins of gold and silver, until not a *dirham* or *dinar* remained in Egypt but he seized it. In the second year he sold them grain for jewelry, clothing, and gems, until none of that remained in the possession of the people. During the third year he sold it to them for livestock, until he all cattle and riding animals. During the fourth year he sold the grain in exchange for male and female slaves until no slave, male or female, remained that he did not take. During the fifth year he sold it to them for their farms, lands, and houses, thus he got hold of everything and no one was left with any property. In the sixth year he sold them grain in exchange for their children: a man would buy wheat or barley with his son, so severe was the famine. And no one kept a son or daughter who did not become enslaved.<sup>19</sup> During the seventh year he sold it to them for their own bodies and souls; thus there remained in Egypt no free man nor slave nor slave-woman that did not become Joseph's property. People were amazed at Joseph and said, "By God, we have never seen a more glorious and powerful ruler than this one." Then Joseph asked the king, "What is your advice concerning the power my Lord has conferred on me?" The king said to him, "The decision is yours; we shall follow." But Joseph said, "I swear by God and in your presence that I shall set free all the people of Egypt, and shall return to them their properties, their slaves, and their children."

It is said that Joseph would not eat his fill in those days, and when people said to him, "Will you go hungry when the storehouses of the land are in your hand?" He would reply, "I fear that if I were to satisfy my appetite I would forget the hungry."

It is also related that Joseph commanded the king's cook to prepare just one meal for him for the entire day and night, desiring thereby that the king himself should taste hunger so that he not forget the hungry and do good to those in need. The cooks complied. Since then, kings take their meal at midday.

People set out for Egypt from all directions in search of food. Joseph would let no one have more than the load of one camel—not even the powerful—in order to treat the people equitably and

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<sup>19</sup> Here, *mamlūk*, lit. "owned, possessed", later a technical term for military slaves "Mamluks" who were manumitted.



in order to be generous to all; and people crowded together about him.

Now, the lands of Canaan and Syria were struck as hard by the drought as all the other lands, and Jacob sent his sons to Egypt in search of provisions. But he kept with him Benjamin, Joseph's brother of the same mother. Jacob's sons came to Joseph, ten in number. They were dwelling in the vicinity of the land of Palestine on the frontiers of Syria; they were people of the desert and owned cattle. When they entered to him he knew them, but they did not know him, because God wanted Joseph to attain what He purposed.

According to Ibn 'Abbās, forty years passed from the day they cast him into the pit until the day they entered the land of Egypt. That is why they did not recognize him. According to another explanation he was clad like an Egyptian Pharaoh in garments of silk, sitting on a throne, with a band of gold on his neck and a crown of gold on his head; therefore they did not recognize him because a curtain separated him from them. And in the words of a wise man, "Sinfulness begets disavowal." Therefore God has said, "*The brothers of Joseph came and presented themselves before him. He recognized them, though they did not recognize him.*" (12:58)

When the brothers addressed Joseph in Hebrew, he said to them, "Tell me who you are, and what your purpose here is, because I do not know your intentions." They replied, "We are shepherds from Syria, who have fallen on hard times, and we have come to seek food." He said, "Perhaps you are spies and have come to seek out the weakness of my land." They said, "No, by God, we are not spies, we are brothers, sons of one father, a venerable elder, man, one of God's prophets, a righteous man called Jacob." He said, "How many are you?" They replied, "We were twelve, but one brother went into the wilderness and perished there; our father loved him more than us." Joseph said, "How many are you here?" "Ten." "And where is the other one?" They said, "With our father, for he is the brother of the one who perished—of the same mother—and our father finds consolation in him." Joseph said, "And who knows whether what you speak is the truth?" They said, "O king, no one knows us in this land." Joseph said, "Bring me your brother who is of the same father if you speak the truth. Then I shall be satisfied." They said, "Our father will be reluctant to let him go, but we will try to persuade him." He said, "Leave one of you as a pawn with me until you bring me your brother." So they cast lots among them-

selves and the lot fell on Simeon. He had been the one among them most devoted to Joseph, so they left him behind. For that is His word, “*And when he provided them with their provision, he said, ‘Bring your half-brother with you [Have you not seen that I give full measure and that I am the best of hosts? But if you do not bring him to us, I shall have no measure (of grain) for you, nor shall you come back to me.] They said, ‘We shall request his father,] and will certainly do that.’*” (12:59–60) Joseph then said to his young men, that is, his servants who were measuring out the grain, “*Put back their merchandise (bidā’a)*”<sup>20</sup>—meaning the price of their grain.

According to Ibn ‘Abbās (who interprets the word *bidā’a* as “merchandise”), “Their *bidā’a* was sandals and hides.” Similarly Qatādah said (but with a different interpretation), “It was silver coins in their saddlebags, (here *bidā’a* means the money they paid for their food), so they would recognize it when they came to their people, and would have to return again.”

Scholars differ as to why Joseph acted in this way towards them. Al-Kalbi’s opinion was that Joseph feared that if their father did not have enough silver coins to enable them to visit him, they would not return to him another time. In the view of others, he feared that taking that silver from them would weigh heavily on his father, since it had been a year of famine. It was also thought that he considered it mean-spirited to let his father and brothers pay for the grain, since they had need of the money; therefore he returned the silver without their knowledge, thereby showing nobility and kindness. It was assumed furthermore, that he did this because he knew that their piety and faith would induce them to bring back the money, and they would not appropriate it unlawfully; and that they would return to him for that purpose. Coming back to their father, they said, “Father, we came upon the most charitable of people. He took us in as guests and showed us so much hospitality that even if he had been of the people of Jacob he could not have treated us more kindly.” Jacob said to them, “If you come to the king of Egypt, give him greetings from me, and say to him, ‘Our father blesses you and prays for you for the favor you have bestowed on us.’” Then he asked them where Simeon was. They told him that the king had taken him as a pawn so that they should bring Benjamin to him.

<sup>20</sup> The word *bidā’a* is used in different ways, as we shall see below.

They told him the story and he asked them why they had told him all that. They said to him, "He seized us and said that we were spies when we spoke to him in the Hebrew language." Then they told him the tale, saying, "*Father, a further measure has been withheld from us, so send our brother with us—meaning Benjamin—that he may bring more grain; we will most surely take care of him*" (12:63). But Jacob said, "*Should I trust you with him as I trusted you with his brother before? [But God is the best of guardians, and the most merciful of all].*" (12:64)

According to Ka'b, when Jacob said, "*God is the best of guardians, and the most merciful of all,*" God said, "By My might and My glory, I shall surely return both of them to you after you have put your trust in Me." "*And when they opened their goods*" which they had carried from Egypt, they found their money, that is, the price of their food, returned to them. "*They said, O father, what more can we ask? Look, even our money has been returned. We shall go and buy a camel-load more of grain for our family, and take good care of our brother. That will be an easy measure.*" (12:65) Then Jacob said to them, "*I will never send him with you, until you swear by God that you will bring him back to me, unless all of you are overtaken (by misfortune),*" (12:66) that is, unless you perish, all of you.

Juwaybir reports [in the name of] al-Ḍaḥḥāk that Ibn 'Abbās after discussing the second part of this verse—"that you will bring him back to me, unless all of you are overtaken (by misfortune)"—goes on to comment on its first part, namely, "until you swear by God"—this means that you swear to me by the truth of Muḥammad, the Seal of the Prophets and the Lord of the Messengers, that you will not betray your brother," and they swore. "*And when they had given their promise, he said, "God is witness to our conversation*" (12:66)—namely, He is a witness to the fulfillment. When they wanted to leave him, he said to them, "*Do not all enter (Egypt) by one gate; enter by different gates.*" (12:67) This he said because he feared for them that the evil eye might look upon them, because they were all handsome, and dignified, well-formed and tall, and were all the sons of one man. So he ordered them to separate upon entering the land lest the evil eye cause them harm. Then he said to them, "*If anything should befall you from God, I shall not be able to avert it, for all authority belongs to God. I have placed my trust, in Him, and the trusting should rely on Him alone.*" (12:67) "*When they entered as their father had advised them*"—for Egypt had four gates, and they entered by all of its gates—"nothing could avail them against (the will of) God, yet it confirmed a premonition Jacob had; [for verily he had

*knowledge as We had taught him,] though most men do not know.*" (12:68)

When they came to Joseph for the second time, they said, "O ruler, here is our brother whom you ordered us to bring to you. We have brought him to you." He said to them, "You have done right; and you will be rewarded by me." He gave them lodging and was friendly to them and feasted them. He seated every two of them at a table, but Benjamin remained by himself at his table. He wept and said, "If my brother Joseph were alive, [the ruler] would have seated me with him." Joseph said, "This brother of yours remains alone," and he asked him to sit with him at his table and he dined with him. When night came, Joseph gave instructions that they be treated in a like manner; then he said to them, "Let every two of you sleep on one bed." Then again, when Benjamin remained by himself, Joseph said, "This one will sleep next to me, on my bed." So Benjamin slept next to him. Joseph embraced him and breathed his smell until morning, and Reuben said, "We have never seen anything like this!" When morning came, he said to them, "I think that this man whom you brought along has no brother to keep him company, so if you wish I will take him to myself to dwell with me."

Then Joseph settled them in a house and had food and drink brought to them, but his brother by his mother he had dwell with him, for that is what He said, "*He lodged his brother with himself*" (12:69). And when he was alone with him, he asked for his name, and he said, "Benjamin." He asked him the meaning of Benjamin, and he said, "One who is bereaved." That is because when he was born he lost his mother. He asked about the name of his mother, and he said, "Rachel, daughter of Laban son of Nahor." Then he asked him if he had any children, "Yes," he said. "How many?" "Ten sons." "And what are their names?" He answered, "I derived them from the name of a brother of mine of the same mother who perished, his name was Joseph." Joseph said, "This surely caused you profound grief. What then are their names?" He said, "Bālī'ā, Akhyar, Ashkal, Aḥyā, Khayyir, Nu'mān, Ward, Ra's, Ḥaytham, and 'Aytam." He asked him for the meaning of these names. He said, "Bālī'ā—because my brother was swallowed up (*ibtala'a*) by the Earth; Akhyar (the superior one)—because he was my mother's first born; Ashkal—because he was my brother by my mother and father and was tested by God; Aḥyā—for having been alive (*ḥayyan*); Khayyir—because he was generous (*khayr*) wherever he was; Nu'mān—because he lived carefree (*nā'im*) among his parents; Ward—for he was like a rose

(*ward*) in beauty; Ra's—because he was to me as the head (*ra's*) in the body; Haytham—for my father told me that he was alive (*hayy*); and finally, 'Aytam—because if I beheld his face, I would be delighted (*qarrat 'aynī*) and my joy would be complete (*tamma*).”

Joseph said to him, “Would you like me to be your brother in place of that brother of yours who perished?” Benjamin said, “O king, who could find a brother like you? But you were not born of Jacob and Rachel.” (Juwaybir) continues, “Joseph wept, turned to him and embraced him, saying, *‘I am your brother, so do not grieve for what they had done.’* (12:69) But do not disclose to them a thing of what happened.’ Joseph then filled the measure for his brothers, and loaded a camel for Benjamin in his name.”

As Ka'b tells it, when he revealed to him, *‘I am your brother,’* Benjamin said, “Therefore I shall not part from you.” Joseph said, “But I know the depth of our father's grief, and if I arrest you, he would grieve even more. I cannot imprison you unless you had done some abominable deed.” He replied, ‘I do not mind. Do as you will.’ Joseph said, ‘I shall slip my grain-measure<sup>21</sup> into your saddle-bag, then I shall proclaim that you are thieves, to make it possible for me to return you after sending you away.’ He said, ‘Do it,’ for that is His word, *‘So when he provided them with their provisions, (someone) placed the drinking-cup<sup>22</sup> in his brother's saddlebag.’* (12:70) It was a drinking-cup<sup>23</sup> from which the king drank; it was a golden cup,<sup>24</sup> adorned, set with gems, which Joseph used as a measuring-cup<sup>25</sup> with which to measure. Then they set out and Joseph urged them on until they moved away; then Joseph gave orders concerning them, “Overtake them and prevent them from journeying on.” ‘And then a crier cried, *“O caravan! You are most surely thieves!”*” (12:70) So they stopped, and when the messenger neared them, he said to them, “Did we not provide you with a good dwelling-place, and show you generous hospitality and fill your measure? And did we not do for you what we have not done for anyone else?” They said, *“Yes, indeed; what is it that you miss?”* (12:71) He said, *“We miss the king's drinking-*

<sup>21</sup> Here *ṣāṭī*. Several other terms for “cup, goblet, grain-measure” will occur in the next section.

<sup>22</sup> *Siqāya*.

<sup>23</sup> *Mashriba*.

<sup>24</sup> *Kā's*.

<sup>25</sup> Arabic: *mikyāl*.

cup. (12:72)<sup>26</sup> We found it missing and do not blame anyone but you for that.” *They said, “By God, you know for certain that we have not come to do mischief in the land, and we are not thieves.”* (12:73) Since we have traveled this road we have requited no one with evil; ask anyone by whom we passed whether we have harmed anyone or done any bit of evil. Indeed we returned the *dirhams* when we found them in our saddlebags; had we had been thieves we would not have given them back.”

It says in the *Hadīth* that when they entered Egypt they muzzled their animals lest they eat anything in the cultivated fields of the people.

The messenger said, “Verily it is the king’s great grain measure,<sup>27</sup> with which he practices divination. He entrusted it to me, and if I do not find it, I fear that my standing with him will decline and I shall be found out in Egypt. *Whoever returns it to me will receive a camel-load of grain, I vouch for it*—namely, am a guarantor.” They said, “God forbid that we should steal!” The crier and his companions said, “*What should be the punishment of this* (namely, the penalty for the one in whose saddlebag it was found), *in case you are liars?*” (12:74) “*The punishment for that (should be),*” they said, “*that he in whose bag it is found, should himself be held as punishment. This is how we punish the wrongdoers.*” (12:75) Thereupon the messenger said, “I must search your possessions, and you may not leave until I search them.” Then he set out with them to Joseph, “*and he searched their bags before his brother’s, then produced it from his brother’s bag*” (12:76)—to remove all doubt, for he had searched their belongings one by one.

Qatādah said, “We have been told that he did not open any possessions, nor look at anyone’s bag, without asking God’s forgiveness for that of which he was accusing them, until only the boy remained. He said, ‘I do not think that this boy took anything.’ But the brothers said, ‘By God, we shall not leave you until you look at his saddlebag, for that will be better for your peace of mind and ours.’ When they opened his saddlebag, they withdrew the grain-measure from there. When he drew forth the grain-measure from Benjamin’s saddlebag, his brothers bowed their heads in shame. Then they turned to Benjamin, ‘What have you done to us? You have humiliated

<sup>26</sup> Here *siqāya*.

<sup>27</sup> Another version, *ṣāf*.

us and blackened our faces. Because of you, sons of Rachel, we have had unending distress, and now you have taken this grain-measure.' Benjamin said to them, 'Nay, rather it is the sons of Rachel whom you have caused endless suffering, since you took my brother to the wilderness and killed him. He who placed the measure in my bag is the one who placed the *dirhams* in your bags.' Then they said to Joseph, '*If he has stolen,—no wonder—a brother of his has stolen before.*' (12:77) And this is the source of the well-known proverb: 'His excuse is worse than his offense.'"

The theft attributed to Joseph was explained differently by the commentators. In the view of Sa'īd b. Jubayr and Qatādah, the theft that they attributed to Joseph was that he stole a golden idol of his grandfather, his mother's father, then broke it and threw it on to the road. But according to Ibn Jurayj, it was on the orders of his mother who was a Muslim that he stole such an idol belonging to his maternal uncle, and broke it. Relating a different story, Mujāhid tells about a beggar who approached Joseph one day, whereupon Joseph stole an egg from the house and gave it to the man. But, according to Ibn 'Uyaynah, it was a chicken that he gave the beggar, but he was rebuked for having done so. Wahb related that he used to hide food from the table for the poor.

In a tradition told by al-Ḍaḥḥāk and others, Joseph suffered his first misfortune on account of Isaac's belt. Joseph's paternal aunt was the oldest of Isaac's children; for they used to pass that belt by inheritance to the first born. Rachel, Joseph's mother, had died, so that his aunt brought him up. She loved him dearly and could not be without him. When he reached maturity, Jacob's heart was overcome with love of him. He came to her and said, "Sister, hand Joseph over to me, for by God, I cannot be without him, not even for a moment." She said to him, "I will not let him go." But when Jacob pleaded with her, she said, "Leave him with me for a few days, that I may look at him. Perhaps that will console me for the loss of him," and he did so. Now after Jacob had gone away, she took Isaac's belt and girded Joseph with it under his garments. Then she said, "I have lost Isaac's belt. See who has taken it." Everyone sought the belt, but it was not found. However when the people of the household were searched, the belt was found with Joseph. She said, "By God, he must be delivered into my hands, so that I may do with him what I wish!" That was the rule in the family of Abraham regarding a thief. When Jacob came to her and she informed

him of that [rule], he said, "If that is the case, then he must be handed over to you; I cannot do anything else." Thus she held on to him by the ruse of the belt, and Jacob was unable to take him from her until she died. This is why his brothers said, "*If he steals,—no wonder—a brother of his stole before.*" But Joseph kept it secret in his soul, and did not reveal it to them. He said (to himself), "*You are worse in the degree of evil, for God knows better (the truth) of what you allege.*" (12:77)

According to the narrators, when they came before Joseph and the goblet was taken out of Benjamin's saddlebag, Joseph called for his grain-measure.<sup>28</sup> He struck it, held it near his ear, and said, "My grain-measure tells me that you were twelve men, and that you went off with a brother and sold him." Hearing this Benjamin rose, bowed down to Joseph and said, "O king, now ask your goblet: is my brother alive?" Joseph struck the goblet, then said to him, "Yes, he is alive, and you will see him." Benjamin said, "Now do with me whatever you wish, for if he hears of me, he will rescue me." Then Joseph went into his house and wept, then performed the ritual ablutions. Benjamin said, "O king, now I want you to strike your goblet so it will tell you the truth about who stole it and placed it in his saddlebag." He struck it, and then said, "My goblet is angry and says, 'Why do you ask who stole me when you have seen in whose possession I have been.'" Now, when the sons of Jacob became angry they could not be restrained. And Reuben in his fury said to the king, "If you do not let us go and let our brother go, by God, I shall let forth a scream so fierce that no pregnant woman will remain in Egypt but will drop what is in her belly." As he said these words, every single hair on his body stood up and came out through his clothing. However, when the sons of Jacob became angry, and if one of them touched another, his anger would disappear. And Joseph said to his son, "Get up and stand at Reuben's side and touch him." The lad arose and touched him, and his anger abated. And Reuben said, "Surely there is in this house someone of the sons of Jacob." Joseph asked, "Who is Jacob?" Again Reuben became angry, and said, "O king! You remember Jacob, named Israel by God; son of Isaac, who was to be sacrificed for God; son of Abraham, the Friend of God?" Joseph said, "If you are telling the truth, then you are right!"

<sup>28</sup> *suwā'* = *siqāya*, see Qur'ān 12:70; 12:72.



Joseph wanted to keep his brother with him and take charge of him—for he was more entitled to that than they. When the brothers saw that they had no means of extricating Benjamin, they proposed to Joseph to set him free in exchange for one among them, saying, *“Mighty prince, He has a father, a very old man, therefore retain one of us instead of him. Surely we see that you are a virtuous man.”* (12:78) Joseph replied, *“God forbid, that we should hold anyone other than him with whom we found our property”* (he did not say “he who stole,” being wary of lying) *“or else most surely we would be unjust”* (12:79)—that is, if we detained an innocent one for a guilty one. *“And when they despaired of (moving) him, they went aside”*—that is, withdrew, to be among themselves, whispering to each other, counseling one another—*“the eldest of them (kabīruhum) said”*—namely Reuben; thus in the interpretation of Qatādah and al-Suddī, who take *kabīruhum* as referring to age, but Mujāhid understands it as referring to wisdom, hence to Simeon, the wisest of them (*kabīruhum fī l-‘aql*): *“Do you not know that your father took a solemn pledge by you by God?”*—namely that you would return this lad—*“and how you fell short of your duty with respect to Joseph before.”*—that is, that you failed in the matter of Joseph. *“Therefore I shall never leave this land”*—meaning the land of Egypt—*“until my father permits me”*—that I may return to the king and engage him in a struggle—*“or God decides for me. He is the Best Judge. Go back to your father and say, ‘Father! Surely your son has committed theft. We bear witness to what we have known’*—that is, because we saw his stolen goods with him—*‘we could not keep watch over the unseen, when we asked you to send him with us. Had we known what was not known, namely that he would steal, we would not have taken him with us. Inquire from the town’*—that is, from the people of the town—in which we were, and the men of the caravan with which we traveled hither’—meaning, some folk from Canaan who accompanied them—*‘we most surely speak the truth—in what we have said.’* (12:80–82)

And they returned to Jacob with these words, and he said, *“Nay, but your minds have conjured up a story. But good patience,”*—that is, a patience without sadness. *“God may bring them back to me together”*—meaning Joseph and Benjamin.<sup>29</sup> *“Surely He alone is All-Knowing, All-Wise.”* (12:83) *And Jacob turned away from them and cried out, “Oh, unending*

<sup>29</sup> Tha‘labī inserts this here because the preceding phrase is in the plural rather than the dual.

sorrow over Joseph!" (12:84)<sup>30</sup> For when he heard the news about Benjamin, his sadness reached its limit, and his exhaustion further aroused his sorrow over Joseph.

According to Sa'īd b. Jubayr, Ibn 'Abbās related that the Messenger of Allah said that the phrase '*Lo! We are God's and unto Him we shall return*' (2:156) was bestowed on no other nations except Muḥammad's nation when misfortune strikes. Hence consider Jacob, when he was overcome by grief over his sons, he did not say these words but said, "*Oh, unending sorrow over Joseph!*"

Al-Ḥasan said that eighty years passed from the time Joseph left his father until the day he saw him again, during which Jacob's eyes were never dry from tears. No man on earth was more honored by God than Jacob. When he complained and wept, his sons said to him, '*By God, you will never cease mentioning Joseph until you are consumed*'—that is, ill, losing your reason from worry; '*or until you perish*' (12:85). When Jacob became aware of their crudeness and loathsomeness, he said, '*I only make complaint of my anguish and sorrow to God*' (12:86)—not to you." And the *ḥadīth* tells us that when Jacob became old and weak so that his eyelids sank over his eyes, he would raise them with a scrap of cloth. One of his neighbors said to him, "You have become weak and frail, though you have not yet even reached your brother's age. What brought you to this state?" He said, "The long years and many sorrows." Then God inspired Jacob, saying, "Are you making a complaint about Me to man whom I have created?" He said, "Lord! I committed an offense, forgive me." God said, "I have forgiven you." Thereafter when he was asked, he would say, "*I make complaint of my anguish and my sorrow only to God.*" (ibid.)

According to al-Ḥusayn b. Faḥawayh, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥasan b. Ḥāmid—al-Ḥusayn b. Ayyūb—'Abdallāh b. Abī Ziyād—Sayyār b. Ḥātim—from 'Abdallāh b. al-Simṭ who said that he heard his father say that a man asked Jacob, "What is it that took away your sight?"—"My grief over Joseph," he replied.—"What bent your back?"—"My sadness for his brother." Then God revealed to him, "Jacob, are you complaining about Me? By My might and My glory, I shall not lift your burden until you appeal to Me." Thereupon he said, "*I make complaint of my anguish and my sorrow only to God.*" (ibid.) Then God revealed to him, "By My might and My glory, even if both of

<sup>30</sup> Here Arabic has word-play on the name of Yūsuf/Joseph: *yā asafa 'alā yūsuf*.

them were dead, I would bring them forth so that you might look at them. I have become angry with you only because you once slaughtered a sheep, and when a poor man came to your gate asking for food, you did not share the meat with him. Verily, in all of My creation, it is the generous, followed by the poor, that I love most. Prepare a meal and invite the poor." Jacob did so, and therefore he called out, "Whoever is fasting, let him come and break his fast tonight with the family of Jacob."

As Wahb b. Munabbih tells it, God revealed to Jacob, "Do you not know why I have punished you and kept Joseph from you for eighty years? He said, 'No, my Lord.' He said, 'Because you roasted a she-kid and were stingy toward your neighbor; for you ate and did not feed him.'"

In a different explanation, Jacob was afflicted by the loss of Joseph because a cow of his gave birth to a calf, and he slaughtered the calf right in front of her as she was lowing, and Jacob had no pity on her. For this God punished him with the loss of the son dearest to him. Then Jacob said to his sons, "*O my sons, depart and search out tidings of Joseph and his brother, do not despair of God's mercy [surely none despairs of God's mercy except the unbelieving people].*" (12:87)

Al-Suddī said, "When his sons told him about the ruler and his words and actions, Jacob's soul had a presentiment and became hopeful, and he said, 'Perhaps it is Joseph.'"

It is related that he saw the Angel of Death in a dream and he asked him, "Have you taken Joseph's soul?" "No," he said, "by God, he is alive and is sustained."

In another tradition he was visited by the Angel of Death, who spoke to him, "Peace be with you, O you who suppresses his anger!" He returned his greeting, his skin shivering and his whole body trembling with fear. He said, "Who are you? And who let you into this house? I have locked the door so that no one may enter to see me, for *I complain of my anguish and sorrow only to God.*" (12:86) "Prophet of God, I am the one who orphans children and makes women widows and drives people apart."—"Then you are the Angel of Death."—"Yes."—"Angel of Death, I implore you by God to tell me," he said, "do you take the soul of a man devoured by wild beasts?"—"Yes, I do." Jacob said, "Do you take the souls together, or separately?" He said, "I take them one by one."—"And was Joseph's soul one that crossed your path?" He said, "No."—"Have you come to summon me?" He said, "Prophet of God, I have come only to

greet a Muslim. For God will not let you die until He rejoins you with Joseph, even if it had to be inside the rock on which the Earth rests. God permitted me to visit you only to bring you the good tidings and to answer what you will ask me. If you want, I shall tell you why you have been afflicted by the loss of your son." He said, "Do tell me, 'Azrā'īl." He said, "O you whom God called Israel! Do you remember the slave girl you bought in such-and-such a month in such-and-such a year, and separated her from her parents?"—"Yes, Angel of Death, I remember it as though it were yesterday."—"Because of this deed you were afflicted with the loss of your son. And do you know why you were afflicted with the loss of your eyesight?" "No," Jacob said. "A lamb was slaughtered and roasted on your orders," said the Angel of Death, "on such-and-such a day in such-and-such a month. When Tamīm the pious, upright slave passed by, (after fasting for a week), he smelled the aroma of the roast, but you did not give him anything to eat." Thereupon Jacob set free the male and female slaves in his possession, and gave orders to slaughter each day two sheep of his flocks, and to distribute their meat to the poor and the needy. God accepted this offering from him and thanked him for it and brought him deliverance, whereupon Jacob said, "*Go, my sons, and inquire concerning Joseph and his brother [and despair not of God's mercy; surely none despairs of God's mercy] except disbelieving people.*" (12:87)

Qatādah was told that the prophet of God, Jacob, never thought ill of the Lord throughout his tribulations, not even for one moment, either by night or by day."

Then Joseph's brothers returned to Egypt, for the third time. So when they came (again) before him, they said, "O ruler"—meaning 'king' in the language of Egypt—"distress has afflicted us and our family, and we have brought but scanty merchandise" (12:88)—namely, too little and of too poor a quality to pay for the grain except if the seller is willing to accept less than the full value. Now there is disagreement about what this merchandise really was. Ibn 'Abbās thought that it was low quality *dirhams* (rather than real merchandise), acceptable only to those willing to sell at a loss. Ibn Abī Mulaykah said that worn-out sacks and badly made ropes were the merchandise. To 'Abdallāh b. al-Ḥārith and al-Ḥasan it consisted of things such as Bedouins have: wool, butter, and curds. Al-Ḍahḥāk said that it was sandals, skins, and gruel of parched barley—"But give us full measure and be charitable unto us. Surely God rewards the charitable." (12:88bis)

Al-Ḍaḥḥāk observed that they did not say, “Verily God will reward you if you are charitable to us” because they did not know that he was a believer. ‘Abd al-Jabbār b. al-‘Alā’ī tells that Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah was asked, “Was charity forbidden to any of the prophets other than our Prophet Muḥammad?” And Sufyān replied, “Did you not hear God’s word *‘and be charitable unto us?’* (ibid.)” Thereby Sufyān showed them that charity was permitted to them (*i.e.*, to other prophets), but forbidden to our Prophet.

Then Joseph said in response (to their request to be charitable), “*Do you know how you treated Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?*” (12:89) Now scholars disagree about the reason that brought Joseph to say these words, which signaled the beginning of Jacob’s deliverance and recovery, and the end of his trials and tribulations. As Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq explains, when they spoke these words to him, his spirit overwhelmed him and he was overcome by compassion; tears welled up in him and he cried. Then he revealed to them what he had been hiding and said, “*Do you know how you treated [Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?]*” (ibid.).

In al-Kalbī’s account, he said these words when he told his brothers what Mālik b. Du‘ar had said, “I found a boy in a pit of such-and-such qualities, and I bought him from some people for such-and-such an amount of *dirhams*.” And they said to him, “O king, we sold that boy.” Joseph became enraged at hearing this and ordered them to be killed. As they were taken away, Judah turned and said, ‘Jacob wept and mourned at the loss of one of us until he lost his eyesight; how will it be when he hears of the killing of all of his sons?’” Then they said to him, “If you do this to us, then send our belongings to our father, he is in such-and-such a place.” At that time [Joseph] was overcome by compassion for them and he wept, and spoke these words to them.

In the view of another commentator, Joseph said these words after reading his father’s letter to him. For when Jacob was told that ‘your son has stolen’, he wrote a letter to Joseph: “From Jacob, whom God named Israel, son of Isaac the intended sacrifice of God, son of Abraham, the Friend of God, to the ruler of Egypt, who manifests justice and fills the measure, salutations. We are a family chosen to suffer trials. My grandfather was tortured by Nimrod; his hands and feet were bound and he was cast into the fire but God made it *“coolness and safety”* (21:69) for him; and my father’s hands and feet were bound and the knife was placed on his nape to be

sacrificed, but “*God ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice;*” (37:107) and as for me, I had a son who was most beloved to me of all my sons, but his brothers took him to the wilderness and then brought me his shirt soaked with blood and told me that a wolf ate him. My eyes have lost their sight from my weeping for him. Then I had another son who was his brother by his mother, and I consoled myself with him. But they took him and returned, saying that he had stolen and that you kept him with you for that reason. We are a family that does not steal, nor do we give birth to thieves. If you do not return him to me, I shall call down upon you a curse which will reach the seventh generation of your offspring.” When Joseph read this letter he could not hold back his tears; he lost his composure and revealed what was on his mind to them.

According to yet another commentator, he spoke these words when he asked his brother Benjamin, “Do you have children?” and he answered, “Yes, three sons.”—“What names did you give them?”—“I named the eldest *Joseph*.” “Why?” “Out of love for you and in your memory,” he answered.—“And what did you call the second?”—“*Dhūb* (wolf).”—“Why, isn’t the wolf a rapacious beast?”—“So that I might remember you by him.” He asked, “And what did you name the third?”—“*Dam* (blood).” He asked, “Why?” He answered, “So that I might remember you by him.” When Joseph heard all this, tears choked him and he could not refrain from saying to his brothers, “*Do you know how you treated Joseph and his brother in your ignorance?*” They said, “*Are you indeed Joseph?*” (12:90)

Ibn Ishāq said that when Joseph said to his brothers, “*Do you know how you treated Joseph and his brother,*” the screen in front of him was pulled away, the curtain lifted, and they recognized him and said “*Are you indeed Joseph?*” He said, “*I am Joseph and this is my brother.*” (ibid.)

According to Juwaybir, al-Ḍaḥḥāk related that Ibn ‘Abbās said that when “*Joseph said to them, ‘Do you know how you treated Joseph and his brother?’*” he smiled. Now whenever Joseph would smile, his front teeth would seem like a string of pearls. So when they noticed his front teeth, they likened him to Joseph and asked, “*Are you indeed Joseph?*”

‘Atā’ quoted Ibn ‘Abbās who said that Joseph’s brothers did not recognize him at first, but when he took the crown off his head, and they saw something like a birthmark where his hair was parted, they recognized him, because Jacob, Isaac, and Sarah had the same

birthmark. They said to him, *“Are you indeed Joseph?”* He said, *“I am Joseph and this is my brother. God has indeed been gracious to us. He brought us together after you had parted us. Surely those that keep from evil and endure with fortitude God will not deny them their reward.”* (12:90bis) Then they acknowledged Joseph’s superiority over them and their sin against him, and said, *“By God, now has God chosen you over us, and we were certainly sinners.”* (12:91) And Joseph, being of a mild temper, noble heart, and a conciliatory nature, said, *“Have no fear this day! God will forgive you, for He is the most Merciful of the merciful.”* (12:92)

Al-Suddī and others have said that when Joseph made himself known to them, he asked, *“How did my father fare after I [had gone]?”* *“He lost his eyesight,”* and he gave them his shirt.

Al-Daḥḥāk said that that shirt was woven in Paradise, and it had the smell of Paradise. When it only touched an afflicted or ailing man, that man would be restored to health and be cured. It was that shirt Joseph gave them that had belonged to Abraham, and its story was told above. He said to them, *“Take this shirt of mine and cast it on my father’s face, he will again be able to see; and come to me with all your families.”* (12:93) *And when the caravan had departed—from Egypt, making its way to Canaan—their father Jacob said, “Truly I perceive the smell of Joseph, though you pronounce me weak in judgment (12:94)—namely, you consider me foolish.”*

It is related that the east wind asked leave of its Lord to bring Jacob the smell of Joseph before the messenger should bring him the shirt. The Lord granted the wish, and it carried the smell to him. Ibn ‘Abbās said, *“Jacob perceived the smell of Joseph from a distance of eight nights and days away.”* Mujāhid said, *“This came about because a wind blew and shook out the shirt so that the east wind carried the smell of the shirt to Jacob. He perceived the smell of Paradise and knew that there were no smells of Paradise on earth except those that wafted from that shirt. For that reason he said, “Truly I perceive the smell of Joseph, though you pronounce me weak in judgment,”* and his grandsons said to him, *“By God, you are most surely in your old error.”* (12:95) *So when the bearer of good news came (12:96)—and he was Judah, son of Jacob.*

Ibn Mas‘ūd said, *“The bearer of good news came to him before the caravan.”* Al-Suddī said, *“Judah said to Joseph, ‘I brought Jacob the shirt covered with blood and told him that a wolf had devoured Joseph; so now, give me your shirt that I may tell him that you are alive and give him joy as I gave him sadness.’”* Ibn ‘Abbās said

(that) Judah took the shirt and set out on his journey barefoot and bareheaded, he kept running all the way until he came to his father. He had seven loaves of bread with him, but before he finished eating them he reached Canaan which was at a distance of eighty *parasangs*. When he brought Jacob the shirt, "*He put it over his face and his eyesight was restored.*" (ibid.) Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said, "His sight came back to him after he had been blind; his strength after he had been weak; his youthfulness after he had reached old age; his joy after his sadness."

Abū Hurayrah said that of all people on Earth, Jacob was the most honored by the Angel of Death. That Angel asked his Lord to permit him to visit Jacob and He granted his wish, so he came to him. Jacob said to him, "Angel of Death, I ask you by Him Who created you; is Jacob's son among the souls whom you have seized?" He replied, "No." But then the Angel of Death said to him, "Shall I teach you some words?" He said, "Surely." So he said, "Say: 'O You Who bestows endless acts of kindness which no one but You can count.'" That night Jacob called out these words before the break of dawn and the shirt was cast upon his face, he recovered his sight once again, whereupon he said to them, "*Did I not say to you that I know from God that which you do not know?*" (ibid.) *They said, "O our father! Ask forgiveness for our sins for us, for surely we were sinners."* He said, "*I will ask forgiveness for you of my Lord, [for surely He is Forgiving and Merciful.]*" (12:97-98)

According to some commentators, Jacob delayed this (interceding on their behalf) until dawn on the night of Friday that corresponded to the night of 'Āshūrā', because prayer at dawn is not veiled from God. When Jacob came to his promise (to intercede) he rose to pray at dawn. After he finished, he raised his hands to God, the most Glorious and said, "Lord, forgive me my anguish and my soul's impatience about Joseph. Forgive my sons their crime they committed against their brother Joseph!" And God inspired Jacob, "Verily I have forgiven you and all of them." Wahb said, "He would ask pardon for them every Friday night for twenty-odd years."

According to al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. Faṭḥawayh, 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Shaybah—Aḥmad b. Abī l-Safar b. Thawbān al-Baṣrī—Ishāq b. Ziyād al-Armalī—al-Faḍl b. Ḥamīd al-Baghdādī—Ishāq b. Ziyād and Ibn Ḍamrah—Rajā' b. Abī Salamah—'Aṭā' al-Khurāsānī, who said, "Petitioning is easier for the young than for the aged. Do you not see Joseph's statement to his brothers '*There*



*is no blame on you this day*" (12:92) and Jacob's words, *I will ask my Lord to forgive you?*" (12:98)

It is related that Jacob asked the bearer of good tidings, when he informed him that Joseph was alive, "How is Joseph faring?" He said, "He is king of Egypt." So Jacob said, "What shall I do with the king? What was his religion when you left him?" He said, "The religion of Islam." Jacob said, "Now God's grace is complete."

Al-Thawrī said that when Jacob and Joseph met they embraced, and Joseph said, "My father, you wept for me until you lost your eyesight. Did you not know that the Resurrection would rejoin us?" He said, "Indeed, my son, but I feared you might have been stripped of your religion and we would be separated on the Day of Resurrection."

They say that Joseph sent provisions with the bearer of good tidings and two hundred riding camels, and requested that he bring his father and his family to him. And Jacob prepared for the journey to Egypt. When he neared Egypt, Joseph spoke to the Great King who was his superior, and he set out with Joseph accompanied by four thousand troops, and the people of Egypt rode along with them to meet Jacob. Jacob was walking, leaning on Judah, and when he saw the troops and the people he said, "Judah, this is the great Pharaoh of Egypt!" And he said, "No, this is your son." When they came near each other, Joseph went towards his father to greet him first, but God kept him from doing so, for Jacob was worthier and more deserving, so Jacob greeted him first saying, "Peace be upon you, O remover of sorrows!" *So when they entered unto Joseph, he took his father and mother into his arms . . . and lifted them up on the throne.* (12:99,100)<sup>31</sup> His father and mother [here] were Jacob and his maternal aunt Leah, for He called the aunt mother, just as He called an uncle father, in His words, *We shall worship your God, the God of your fathers, Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac.*" (2:133)

Al-Ḥasan said, "God raised Rachel, Joseph's mother from her grave so that she could bow down to him in verification of the dream, for that is His word, *They fell down before him in prostration.*" (12:100)

In those days people would greet each other by bowing down, not by falling down prostrate with the forehead touching the ground.

<sup>31</sup> This is Arberry's translation, which fits the following statement best.

Therefore when Joseph saw his father, mother, and his brothers falling down prostrate before him, his flesh trembled and he said, *“O my father! This is the significance of my vision of old. My Lord has made it to be true [and He was indeed kind to me when He brought me forth from the prison and brought you from the desert after the Devil had sown dissension between me and my brothers, surely my Lord is benign to those whom He pleases; surely He is the Knowing, the Wise.]”* (12:102)

Wahb said that when Jacob and his children entered Egypt they were seventy-two men and women, and when they left with Moses, the warriors numbered six hundred thousand five hundred and seventy-odd men, not counting offspring, old men, and cripples. The offspring were one million in addition to the warriors.

Al-Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād said that he had been told that after Jacob came to Egypt he saw Joseph and his kingdom. As he was walking around his storehouses one day, he saw one storehouse filled with blank sheets (of paper). “My son,” he said, “you have surely changed after leaving me. You have all those sheets (of paper), and you would not even take one of them to write to me.” Joseph said, “These sheets were all for you. Whenever my longing grew strong, I would take a sheet in order to write to you, father, but Gabriel would prevent me from writing to you, so I would leave the sheet in the storehouse until they reached this quantity.” Jacob asked Gabriel about this matter and he said, “My Lord prevented me.” So he asked God and God inspired him, “Because you said, *‘I fear lest the wolf devour him.’* (12:13) Why did you not fear *Me*? You are being punished because you feared someone other than *Me*!”

Ṣāliḥ al-Murrī related from Yazīd al-Raqqāshī from Anas b. Mālik who said that when God gathered all his offspring unto Jacob, his sons conferred in secrecy and spoke to one another in this manner, “Do you not know what you have done to the patriarch Jacob and to Joseph?” They said, “We do know.” “And even if these two forgive you, what about the Lord?” They agreed among themselves and went to the patriarch. They sat down before him and Joseph was seated beside his father. They said, “Our father, we have come to you with a matter, the like of which we have never brought you. Something that has never before occurred to us, for the prophets are the most merciful of all created beings.” He said, “What is on your minds, my sons?”—“Do you not know what happened between us and you and our brother Joseph?”—“I know indeed.” They said, “And have both of you not pardoned us?” They said, “Indeed we

have.” They said, “But the pardon given by the two of you avails us nothing if God does not pardon us.” He said, “What do you wish then, my sons?” They said, “We want you to pray to God for us; and when He reveals Himself to you, ask Him whether He has pardoned us. If He answers you that He pardoned us—all of us—our hearts will be gladdened and our minds will be at rest; if not, we will never have peace of mind in this world.” The patriarch arose and turned his face towards the Qiblah<sup>32</sup> while Joseph stood behind him, and all of the others stood behind them in submission and humility. Then Jacob prayed and Joseph said “Amen”, but they had remained without a response for nearly twenty years.

Ṣāliḥ al-Murrī said, “Then Gabriel came down to Jacob and said, ‘God has sent me to you to give you tidings: He has answered your prayer about your sons and has pardoned what they have done, and covenants concerning prophecy after your death are concluded.’”

They said that after arriving with his family and sons, Jacob spent twenty-four years in Egypt in great bliss and utmost comfort, perfect ease and uninterrupted well-being. Then death came to him, and when he was about to die, he assembled all his sons and said, “What will you worship after my death?” They said, “*We shall worship your God, the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac.*” (2:133) Then he said, “*O my sons. God has chosen this as the religion for you. Do not die but as those who have submitted (unto Him).*” (2:132)<sup>33</sup> Then he charged Joseph to carry his corpse to the Holy Land and to bury him with his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham, and Joseph did so. He brought Jacob to Jerusalem in a coffin of teak, escorting him with his army, his brothers, and the dignitaries of Egypt. That corresponded to the day of the death of Esau, both of them were buried on the same day. Each of them was one hundred and forty-seven years old, because they were born from the same womb and buried in the same grave.

Now it is said that when God gathered unto Joseph all his family, gladdening his heart, fulfilling his dream as Joseph had foretold, lavishly bestowing on him dominion and worldly pleasures—Joseph knew that these do not last and that he would have to leave them

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<sup>32</sup> This is rather strange as the Qiblah indicates the direction of Mecca so Muslims may pray correctly.

<sup>33</sup> Here given as a command to Jacob.

behind. And he desired the pleasure of Paradise, for it is superior to this world. His soul longed for Paradise and yearned for death and prayed for it. No prophet before him or after him yearned for death, for he said, "*O my Lord! You have given me dominion and taught me the interpretation of dreams, [Creator of the heavens and the earth! You alone are my Guardian in this world and the hereafter; make me die submitting<sup>34</sup> to You and place me among the upright.*" (12:101)

It is related that when death came to Joseph, he gathered his family members from among the Israelites (they were eighty men) and informed them that his end was near and that God had given His orders concerning him. They said, "Prophet of God, pray let us know how we shall fare after your departure from our midst, and what shall be our destiny, and the destiny of our religion and our community." He said, "Your affairs will remain as they are; and you will proceed on the straight path of your faith. But then an insolent tyrant will arise from among the Copts of Egypt who will claim divinity and will oppress you, kill your sons, while sparing your women, and impose upon you the worst punishments. His days will last for a long time. Then there will come forth from the Israelites, from among the sons of Levi, the son of Jacob, a man named Moses, son of Amram, a tall, curly-haired man of ruddy complexion. And God will save you from the hands of the Copts through him."

It is said that every one of the Israelites named his son Amram, and every Amram would name his son Moses. It is also related that Joseph had a rooster who was five hundred years old. Joseph said to the Israelites, "It will be well with you as long as this rooster crows among you. But when that tyrant is born, the rooster will fall silent and will crow no more until the end of his rule. Then God will herald the birth of that prophet; and at that moment the rooster will crow and return to his usual crowing. This will be the signal that the tyrant's rule has ended and of the appearance of the prophet of God on Earth." From then on the Israelites were on the alert for what would happen, and when the rooster stopped crowing, their spirits fell, for they knew that the pillars of their faith were threatened and that the tyrant was about to be born as Joseph had foretold to them. Therefore they kept apart in silence, until, at long last, that rooster crowed, and they rejoiced at the good news, they gave

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<sup>34</sup> *Lit.*, a Muslim.

alms and celebrated, for they knew that redemption had come and they were at rest.

Then Joseph died having appointed his brother Judah as trustee and made him his successor to rule over the Israelites. God took Joseph unto Himself, noble and pure, and he was buried in the Nile in a coffin of marble. That was because when he died the people guarded over him jealously, each man wishing that he be buried in his quarter of the town for they hoped to obtain blessing through him. When a battle was about to break out, it was decided to bury him in the Nile whence the waters spread all over Egypt, so that the water would pass over him and then reach all of Egypt and all of them would have the same share of him. This plan was carried out. So Joseph's grave was in the Nile until Moses took him along when he left Egypt with the Israelites and carried him to Syria. He buried him in the land of Canaan outside the Fortress, where it is still today. For this reason the Jews carry their dead to Syria—so great was the effect of all this upon them.

Yūnus b. 'Imrān quoted Abū Mūsā as saying that once the Messenger of Allah lodged with a Bedouin who was generous to him; and the Messenger of Allah said, "You have been very hospitable to us, ask for whatever you need." He said, "A camel to ride, and a goat that my family may milk." And the Prophet said, "The most difficult (sort of request) would be like that of the old woman of the Israelites!"—"Who is the old woman of the Israelites, Messenger of Allah?" they asked. "When the Israelites set out," he said, "they lost their way and the night became dark." They said, "Why is this?" Their sages said, "When death came to Joseph, he made a covenant with us before God that we not leave Egypt without taking his bones with us." Moses said, "But who knows where his grave is?"—"An old woman of the Children of Israel," they said, and Moses sent for her. She came and he said, "Lead me to the grave of Joseph." She replied, "And will you give me the price I demand?" He asked, "What is your price?" She said, "That I should be with you in Paradise." But he was reluctant to grant her price to her, but the Lord inspired him, "Grant her the price she demands" and he did so.

Another tradition has it that this old woman who was crippled and blind offered to tell Moses the place of Joseph's grave and he agreed. So she said to him, "But I will reveal it only if you perform four good deeds for me: free my legs, give me back my eyesight and

my youth, and let me dwell with you in Paradise.' This seemed too difficult to Moses, but God inspired him, "Grant her what she asked for, because you give only through Me," and he did that. She went with him to a spring in a swampy marsh on the banks of the Nile, and took him out in a marble coffin. When they lifted up the coffin, the Moon rose and lighted the way as though it were day. They were guided by that light and carried Joseph away.

Historians have said: Joseph lived for thirty-three years after Jacob's death, and he was one hundred and twenty years old when he died.

## MOSES, SON OF MANASSEH

### A SESSION ON THE TALE OF MOSES SON OF MANASSEH, SON OF JOSEPH

He was the first Moses.<sup>1</sup> We have already mentioned above that Joseph had two sons, one named Ephraim and the other Manasseh, as well as a daughter named Raḥmah who was the wife of the prophet Job. Now Ephraim begot Nun and Nun begot Joshua, who was the servant of Moses son of Amram and his successor over the Israelites. As for Manasseh, he begot Moses, whom God made a prophet. The people of the Torah claim that he was the companion of al-Khidr (Khaḍir), but scholars generally think that the companion of al-Khidr was Moses son of Amram, and so it was related on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās from the Messenger of Allah.

Historians have said that when Jacob and Joseph died, the supreme authority passed into the hands of the tribes; they multiplied and grew, and kings arose from their midst who changed their customs and acted wickedly on Earth. Witchcraft and soothsaying spread among them. Therefore God sent Moses son of Manasseh to them as a Messenger to call them to worship God, to fulfill His commandments and follow His laws. This was two hundred years before the birth of Moses, son of Amram. Some of the people obeyed him, and others did not.

Wahb b. Munabbih and others have said that among the words which God spoke to Moses: “Say: I am absolved (of blame) for whoever practices witchcraft, or has it practiced for him: for whoever soothsays, or has it done for him: or whoever draws evil omens, or has it done for him. Whoever believes in Me truthfully, and relies on Me, I shall be sufficient to him and reward him. I shall spare him worries in his faith and in his daily life. I shall be his best helper

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<sup>1</sup> See also Kisā’ī, (ibn Manashsha) pp. 194–195; Thackston, pp. 208–209. Mentioned in passing in Ṭabarī, p. 414; Brinner, *PP*, p. 185 and n. 492 there. It is not known where this story originates, unless it is in some way connected with a late Rabbinic concept of two messiahs, one being the descendant of David, the other of Joseph through Ephraim, by whom the Ten Tribes of Israel would be reunited. See *Ej* 11:1411–12.

and guide, and be there when he thinks of Me. Whoever turns away from Me and trusts anyone but Me,—even though I have made polytheism useless to the polytheists—I shall put them into the hands of those in whom he has put his faith instead of Me. If I entrust a man to one other than Me in whom he has trust, let him be prepared for trial and punishment. When a man moves away from Me, I move further away from him; but he who seeks my closeness, I shall draw closer to him. And say to My worshippers, neglect not to invoke My name, or to make much mention of death at every pleasure, for death destroys all pleasures and delights.” They said, “He remained with them as long as God willed, setting their affairs aright and improving their conditions, and then he died. May God bless him and give him and all the prophets and messengers peace, for God is All-knowing.”



## IRAM OF THE PILLARS

### A SESSION ABOUT THE REMNANT OF 'ĀD, THE TALE OF SHADĪD AND SHADDĀD, AND A DESCRIPTION OF IRAM OF THE PILLARS<sup>1</sup>

God has said, "Have you not seen what your Lord did to 'Ād of Iram of the Pillars [the like of which were never created in the realm]?" (89:7)

Sufyān—Manṣūr—Abū Wā'il, who said: A man called 'Abdallāh b. Qilābah went out seeking some of his camels that had got lost, that is, had run away. While he was in a wasteland of Aden, he came across a city guarded by a fortress. That fortress was surrounded by mighty castles and high mountains. Coming near them, he thought that he would find someone to ask about his camels, but he saw no one, neither within nor without. He dismounted and tethered his camel, drew his sword, and entered the gate of the fortress. Suddenly, he found himself before two (other) gates, mightier and taller than any he had seen in the world. They were made from the finest aloe-wood, with stars on them of yellow sapphires<sup>2</sup> and red rubies<sup>3</sup> whose brilliance filled the place. When he saw this, he was struck with wonderment. He opened one of the gates; and behold, he was in a city the likes of which no one has ever seen. There were castles built in the air supported underneath by pillars of topaz and sapphire, with chambers on top of each castle built of gold, silver, pearl, sapphire, and chrysolite. Each gate of those castles had panels like the panels of the gate of that city, of fresh aloe-wood, with sapphires arrayed on them. The floors of the castles were covered with pearls and pellets of musk and saffron. When he saw all of this and did not see anyone there, he was overcome by fear. He looked at the lanes, and behold, in every one of them stood fruit-bearing trees with streams flowing beneath them in channels of silver, that were shining more brightly than snow. He said to himself,

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<sup>1</sup> Identity not known, possibly the name of a tribe. See *ET*<sup>2</sup>, III: 1270. Mentioned only in passing in other *qisās* collections. See Tottoli, *Storie*, pp. 120–121.

<sup>2</sup> *yāqūt asfar*, also translated as topaz. See Lane, 2979.

<sup>3</sup> *yāqūt aḥmar*, *lit.*, red sapphire. See *ibid*.

"This is the Garden that God has described to His servants in this world. Praised be God Who let me enter the Garden!" He took with him some of the pearls and pellets of musk and saffron, but he was unable to pull out any of the chrysolites or sapphires because they were inlaid in the doors and walls, whereas the pearls and pellets of musk and saffron were scattered like sand in those castles and chambers. Of those he took as much as he wanted, and went out and came to his camel. He mounted it and set out on his way, following the footprints of his camel until he came back to Yemen. He showed what he had brought with him and told people his story. He sold some of those pearls that had become yellow and changed color because of the long time that had passed.

His story spread until it reached Mu'āwiyah b. Abī Sufyān, who sent a messenger to the ruler of Sana'ā' with a letter that he should dispatch him, and he did. He journeyed and came to Mu'āwiyah who withdrew to be alone with him. He asked him about what he had seen, and he told him about the city and what he had seen there. Mu'āwiyah marveled at the story and refused to believe what he told him, saying, "I do not think what you say is true." He replied, "Commander of the Faithful, I have with me something of the things that are spread about the palaces and chambers of that city."—"What are they?"—"Pearls, pellets of musk, and saffron." "Show them to me," said the Caliph, and he spread out in front of him the pearls and musk pellets he had brought from that city. He smelled the musk-pellets, but they had no fragrance; so he ordered one pellet to be crushed, and a fragrance of musk and saffron filled the air, and now he believed him. Then Mu'āwiyah said, "What should I do in order to know the name of that city, to whom it belongs, and who built it? By God, no one was given what Solomon, son of David was given, yet I do not think that he had the likes of this city." One of his companions said, "Solomon did not have a city like this, and the knowledge about this city can be found in our day only with Ka'b al-Aḥbār. Now, if the Commander of the Faithful deems it right, let him send for Ka'b and order that he be brought here. Let this man (i.e., 'Abdallāh) be concealed from him in some place close by so that his description of the city can be overheard. He may discern whether the reality of this city is like his description. And Ka'b will tell the Commander of the Faithful its story and tell whether this man had indeed entered it. Because this man could not have entered this city, the one that fits this description, unless

it had been foreordained in the Book, that he entered it. For only in this way could he have known all of this."

So Mu'āwiyah sent for Ka'b al-Aḥbār, and when he stood before him, he said, "Abū Ishāq, I have summoned you in a matter of which I hope you have knowledge." He replied, "Commander of the Faithful, you have come upon the most knowledgeable man—ask whatever is on your mind." He said to him, "Tell us, Abū Ishāq, have you heard that there is a city in this world built of gold and silver with pillars of chrysolite and sapphire: the pebbles of its castles and chambers are pearls; the streams in its lanes flow beneath trees?" Ka'b said, "By Him Who holds Ka'b's soul in His hand! Before anyone asked me, I thought that I would be asked about that city and what is in it. I shall tell you about it, Commander of the Faithful,—to whom it belongs and who built it. That city is real as the Commander of the Faithful has been told and as it has been described to him. Its builder was Shaddād, son of 'Ād; the city is Iram on pillars, the likes of which has not been created in the lands." Mu'āwiyah said to him, "Tell us its story, Abū Ishāq, may God bless you!" Ka'b said, "Commander of the Faithful, 'Ād had two sons, one named Shadīd and the other Shaddād. 'Ād died and his two sons remained. They took the rule into their hands and tyrannized and subjugated all the lands, until all the people yielded to them—there remained no one in their time but became their subject, neither in the East of the Earth or in the West. When their domination was firm, Shadīd son of 'Ād died, leaving Shaddād to rule by himself. No one contested his rule—the whole world belonged to him.

Now he was devoted to reading the ancient books, and every time he found the Garden mentioned therein, his soul urged him to create for himself its likeness in this world, thereby putting himself above God and blaspheming Him. When the picture stood vividly before his eyes, he gave orders to build that city, which is Iram of the Pillars. He appointed in charge of the work one hundred overseers with one thousand assistants to each. He said to them, "Set out to the most excellent and the largest piece of land in the world, and build there for me a city of gold, silver, chrysolite, sapphire, and pearl. Under that city shall be pillars of chrysolite and sapphire, and castles shall tower over it, with chambers at the top of the castles. Below the castles you shall plant trees, bearing every kind of fruit, and make rivers flow beneath those trees. For I saw in the

books a description of the Garden, and I desire to create a likeness of it on this earth, and hurry to dwell in it.'

"But the overseers said to him, 'How can we obtain the chrysolite, sapphires, pearls, gold, and silver of which you speak in order to build a city such as you have described to us?' Shaddād said to them, 'Do you not know that the wealth of the whole world is in my hand?' 'Of course, we do know,' they said.—'Go then to every place in which there is a mine of chrysolite, sapphire, gold, or silver, and every sea where there are pearls, and appoint men from every nation who will bring out to you all there is in each mine of that land. Then go and take what people possess of all that, besides what the owners of the mines will bring you. The mines of this world hold much of this wealth and they hold even more of which you have no knowledge—more magnificent than what was demanded of you for the building of this city.'" Ka'b continued, "Then they went with a letter from him to each king in the world, commanding him to hand over to them all the jewels in his land and to dig up its mines. And these overseers handed every king the letter demanding all the riches of his realm. And after doing this work without stop for ten years, they had accumulated all the chrysolite, sapphires, pearls, gold, and silver, that they needed for Iram of the Pillars and they seized a place such as he had desired and described to them."

Mu'āwiyah said, "Abū Ishāq, how many kings were under Shaddād's rule?" He said, "Two hundred and sixty kings." Ka'b continued, "Then the workmen and overseers went on their way to look over the deserts to choose a place that suited his wishes, but they found none save in the land of Abīn in the country of Aden. There they came upon a vast steppe free of mounds and hills, and lo! with ever-flowing springs. They said to one another, 'This fits the description of the land that we were demanded to find.' So they took hold of a very wide and long terrain as he had ordered them, and laid down fixed boundaries. They then went to the locations where the water was to flow, and put to use the channels for those streams. Next they laid foundations of onyx-stones of Yemen, and the mortar for those foundations they kneaded with the oil of the ben-tree and the *mahlab*.<sup>4</sup> After they completed laying the foundations and making the

<sup>4</sup> For *ben-tree* or *ban-tree*, see 67, n. 8 above. *Mahlab* is *prunus mahaleb*. According to Lane, 625, it is either a small kernel of the stone of a wild cherry used for

channels work within the lanes, the kings sent them the jewels, and the gold, and the silver. Some of them sent hammered bars, others sent skillfully-wrought gold and silver. They gave all that to those overseers and helpers, and they remained there until they had finished building the city in the manner Shaddād had demanded.”

Mu‘āwiyah said, “Abū Ishāq, it must have taken a long time to build the city.” He said, “Yes, Commander of the Faithful. I have found in the Torah that it took three hundred years to build.” Mu‘āwiyah asked, “And how long was the life of its master, Shaddād?”—“He lived for seven hundred years.” Then Mu‘āwiyah said, “Abū Ishāq, you have told us a wonderful story—do tell us more.” He said, “Commander of the Faithful, God named the city Iram of the Pillars, because of the pillars of chrysolite and sapphire beneath it. There is no other city of chrysolite and sapphire in the world. For that reason He said, ‘The like of which was not created in the lands.’”

Ka‘b said that when they came and told him that they had finished the work, he said, “Go and build a fortress to overlook the city, and build around the fortress one thousand castles, with one thousand watchtowers near each castle. One of my ministers shall be in every one of the castles, and in charge of each watchtower.” So they returned and built those castles, the watchtowers, and the fortress. And again they came and told him of the completion of that which he had commanded them. And Ka‘b continued, saying that then he commanded one thousand ministers from among his chief men to prepare their affairs and undertake to move to Iram of the pillars. And he commanded other men to live in those watchtowers, and to stay there by night and by day. He ordered that they be given a soldier’s pay and provisions. The king then ordered whomever he wanted of his wives and servants to prepare for the journey to Iram of the Pillars, and they busied themselves with their preparations for twenty years. The king then traveled accompanied by those he had chosen, to the land of Abīn, and more of his people remained behind than journeyed with him. When he was at a distance of a day’s and night’s journey from that city which he desired to make his residence—God sent upon him and upon all who were with him a noisy punishment from Heaven, and it destroyed all of them—not one

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relieving coughs or flatulence; or a kind of tree having a kernel that is used in the making of perfume.

remained. Thus neither Shaddād, nor anyone with him, entered Iram of the pillars, nor could anyone enter the city until now. This is the account of Iram of the Pillars. However, in your era, a Muslim man will come into the city, see it, and tell what he has seen with his own eyes, but he will not be believed. "Abū Ishāq!" Mu'āwiyah said, "Can you describe him for us?" He said, "Yes. He is ruddy, red-haired, short, with a mole on his eyebrow and a mole on his neck. He will set out in search of some of his camels in those deserts; and will come upon Iram of the Pillars, enter it, and carry away some of what is there."

All the while, that man was sitting with Mu'āwiyah. Then Ka'b turned, saw him, and said, "This is the man, Commander of the Faithful, he has visited that city,—ask him about what I said about it." Mu'āwiyah said, "Abū Ishāq, this is one of my servants, and he has not been away from me." Ka'b said, "He has entered that city—or, if he has not, he will enter it, and so will the adherents of this religion at the end of time." "Abū Ishāq," Mu'āwiyah said, "God made you superior to all other scholars, for you have been given all the knowledge of the ancients and of the modern (sages) such as has not been given anyone." Ka'b said, "Commander of the Faithful! By Him Who holds the soul of Ka'b in His hand, God has created nothing on Earth but has fully explained it in the Torah to Moses. But verily this Qur'ān holds more severe tenets, and God is the best witness and protector!"

Al-Sha'bī said: Daghfāl al-Shaybānī told us about a man from Ḥaḍramawt called Biṣṭām who came upon the grave of Shaddād, son of 'Ād in one of the mountains of Ḥaḍramawt overlooking the sea. He said, "From my childhood until I reached middle age, I often heard of a cave in one of the mountains of Ḥaḍramawt which people were afraid to enter. I did not set great store by all of that, until one time, when I was sitting in my people's meeting place, they recited verses that told of that cave at great length and detail. So I said to my folk, 'I shall not desist until I enter that cave. Is there anyone among you who will help me?' A young man in their midst said, 'I shall accompany you.' But I said, 'O nephew, do you dare do that?' He said, 'I possess a man's composure and courage.' Then we prepared a candle and took along large leather vessels filled with water and enough food to sustain us and we would be able to carry. Then we set out towards that mountain with the cave—the mountain overlooked the sea at a place from which the people of

Ḥāḍramawt used to set sail. When we reached the opening of that cave, we fastened our clothes to our bodies, and lit the candle. Then we spoke the name of God and entered with those leather vessels of water and the food. It was a huge cave, twenty cubits wide, and about fifty cubits high. We walked along, and tumbled down on a smooth, even track, and then came to a staircase, belonging to 'Ād, in which each step was twenty cubits wide, and ten cubits high. We braced ourselves to descend those steps, and I said to my companion, 'Come, give me your hand!' And I would hold his hand so that he could descend, and when he had got down and was standing on the step, I would hang from the edge of the step and cling to it until my foot reached his shoulder.

We went on doing this all day long until we had descended them—one hundred steps in all. Then we reached a huge vaulted hall, dug into the mountain, one hundred cubits long, forty cubits wide, and one hundred cubits high. Facing the entrance was a bed of gold studded with rows of gems of every kind. On it was a man of 'Ād with a large body that took up the length of the vaulted hall and its width. He was stretched out on his back like someone sleeping. He had seventy sets of clothes on him, according to his length and breadth, interwoven with rods of gold and silver. That vault was lighted through an opening two cubits in width and three cubits in height leading out into a vast expanse. At the head of the bed was a huge tablet of gold bearing a script unlike any other. It was the writing of the scribe of the 'Ād who wrote it in his time. It was engraved into the tablet. We ascended and drew near to that man, and touched those garments, whereupon they fell into decay while the gold rods remained. We gathered them up—they weighed one hundred *ratl*. We put them into our waist-wrappers and cloaks. We wanted to pull out some of the gems with which the bed was studded, but could not, because they were too tightly fastened into the bed stead, so we left them. Then the night descended upon us while we were in that vault; we knew that the day had passed by the disappearance of the light that came through the hole.

We spent the night in that vault; the candle that we brought with us went out. When we arose in the morning I said to my companion, 'What do you think?' He said, 'There is no way for us to return by the way we came because of the height of the stairs, which we will not be able to climb, especially now that the candle has gone

out. But come! Let us stay with the light that we see in that hole: this way I hope that we can go out to the open air, if God wills.'

'By my life!' I said to him, 'This is indeed a good idea.' We lifted the gold rods we had taken along, and the tablet that had been at the head of the bed, and made our way through the opening. We walked along a narrow path for a distance of one hundred cubits and emerged from it into a grotto in that mountain, resembling (i.e., steep like) a wall, and bordered by the sea. For three days and nights we sat at the entrance to that opening, living on the rest of the water and food that we had. On the fourth day we saw a ship approaching on the sea; we waved to it, and its crew saw us and sent a boat to us. We climbed down from the entrance of the opening—it was an arduous descent—and jumped into the boat. When we returned from the sea we divided the gold between us, and the tablet became my share. Then our souls called us to return to that cavern near the opening, so we embarked in a boat and traveled on the sea towards the place from which we had set out; but its location was hidden from us. We realized that we would not benefit from that place except by what we had already taken and we went home.

The tablet remained with me for a whole year, during which time I found no one who could read it for me. At long last a man from Ṣana'ā', a Ḥimyarī, came to me who could read that script. We took out the tablet for him and he read it. Here are the verses that were written on it:

*O you who are allured by long life, take a lesson from me!*

*I am Shaddād, son of 'Ād, the lord of the fortress,*

*Brother of might and misery and endless wealth;*

*All the people of the earth submitted to me, fearing my threats.*

*I ruled the east and the west with cruel might and supreme authority,*

*With military equipment and many men .*

*Hūd came to us, we had gone astray before Hūd; and he called to us;*

*had we but heeded him, it would have been the right path.*

*But we disobeyed him and called out: Is there a way to swerve from that path?*

*And a punishment came upon us, swooping down from the distant horizon,*

*And in the middle of the desert, we all came in like harvested crops."*

Daghfal said, "The sages of Ḥimyar asked about Shaddād, and I said that he had come close to Iram of the Pillars when he was killed, and that he was found in that cave—that is, the one in Ḥaḍramawt.



It is told that when he and those with him were killed by the punishment from heaven a day's journey from that city, Mazīd, son of Shaddād became ruler after him. His father had appointed him his successor over his dominion in Ḥaḍramawt. Mazīd commanded that his father be brought to Ḥaḍramawt, and he was carried, daubed with myrrh and camphor. Then, on his orders, that cave was dug out, and there he laid him down on that bed of gold. And God is All-knowing!"

## THE PEOPLE OF AL-RASS

### THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE OF AL-RASS<sup>1</sup>

God said, "As for 'Ād and Thamūd and the people of al-Rass." (25:38) Qur'ān exegetes and scholars who know the stories hold different opinions as to who the people of al-Rass were. According to Sa'īd b. Jubayr, al-Kalbī and al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad whose reports overlap, each telling a part of the story of the people of al-Rass—the people of al-Rass were a remnant of Thamūd, the folk of Šālīḥ. They were in possession of the well of which God spoke in His Book when He said, "(how many) a well and fortress lie deserted!" (22:45) They were in the rift of al-Yamāmah, and dwelling near that well,—and any well which is not encased with stones and bricks is called a *rass*. They had a prophet called Ḥanḥalah b. Šafwān, and there was in their land a mountain called Fataj rising a mile into the heavens, where the phoenix stay at night. It was the largest bird, and had every color. They named her Al-'Anqā' because her neck (*unq*) was long. She would swoop down from that mountain, attack birds and eat them. One day she was hungry and there were no birds around, so she pounced on a boy and carried him away, therefore she was called 'Anqā' Mughrib, because she would vanish into the air (*tughrib*) with whatever she seized and it would be no more. Then she dived down on a girl who had come into the prime of life, grabbed her and held her tight against her two small wings she had besides the two large ones. The people protested that to their prophet, and he said, "O God, seize her, and cut off her progeny, and make a miracle to destroy her!" A thunderbolt struck her and she burned up, and no trace of her was seen thereafter. The Arabs coined an idiom about her (which they used) in their poems, maxims, and proverbs. Then the people of al-Rass killed their prophet, and God destroyed them.

A scholar said: I have heard that there were two tribes called Rass: the inhabitants of one of them were nomads, who owned flocks

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<sup>1</sup> Mentioned also in Qur'ān 50:12, and in passing in Kisā'ī, pp. 120–121; Thackston, p. 128. See also *EP*, VIII: 453 for various attempts at explaining the term.

and herds; God sent them a prophet and they slew him. Then God sent to them another messenger and placed a *walī* (holy man) at his side to aid him, and they killed that messenger as well. But the *walī* contended with them in debate and silenced them with arguments. They used to say, "Our god is in the sea." They lived near the coast, and once each month a devil would emerge to them from the sea; they would sacrifice on that occasion and make this their sacred feast. Then the *walī* said to them, "Do tell me, if your god, to whom you pray and whom you worship, comes forth to me and obeys me, will you accept that to which I have summoned you?" They replied, "Yes, we will," and gave him their pledge and made a covenant with him on it. He waited until that devil appeared in the likeness of a fish, riding on four other fish. He had a high-rising neck something like a crown on his head. When they saw him, they fell to the ground prostrating themselves. Now the *walī* went towards him and said, "Come close willingly or unwillingly in the name of God, The Generous," whereupon he descended from the backs of his brethren. The *walī* said to him, "Come to me riding on them, lest the people be in doubt about them." So the other fish brought him closer until they reached the dry land with him—they were dragging him and he was dragging them. But even as they were witnessing all that, they scoffed and called him a liar, and revoked the covenant. So God sent a wind to them which cast them and all their cattle into the sea together, and all the gold, and the silver, and the vases which they owned. The *walī* then came to the sea and took the gold, the silver, and the vessels, and divided them equally among all his companions both young and old. Thus that lineage of people came to an end.

As for the other Rass, they had a river called al-Rass, after which they were named.<sup>2</sup> There were many prophets in their midst, but they slew every prophet who rose among them. That river is at the far corner of Azerbaijan, between it and Armenia: if you cross the river going west, you enter the border of Armenia, but if you cross it going east, you enter the boundary of Azerbaijan. The people of Armenia around them worshipped idols, and the people of Azerbaijan, who were in front of them, worshipped fire. They themselves prayed

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<sup>2</sup> Possibly the Araxes river, locally called Rud-e Aras, presently the border between Iran and Azerbaijan. See *EI2*, VIII, 453.

to virgin girls, and when one of them reached the age of thirty, they would slay her and replace her with another. Their river was three *parasangs* wide, and every day and night it rose until it reached the middle of the mountains around it. It did not flow into the sea nor into dry land, but when it left their boundary it stopped and turned around, then came back to them. God sent thirty prophets to them in a single month and they slew them all, so God sent them another prophet and helped him by granting him His protection. He sent a *walī* along with him who tried his utmost in disputing with them about God. Then God sent Michael to the *walī* when they resisted him. This was in the season when the seeds were falling to the ground and the people were in the greatest need of water, and Michael dug open their river so that it flowed into the sea, so that which lay at its bottom poured out and reached the springs above and stopped them up. God sent five hundred angels more to help him, and they drowned in this river whatever had remained alive. Then God ordered Gabriel to descend into their land, and he left no spring or river that he did not dry up at God's command, He dispatched the Angel of Death to the cattle and he killed them all at once. He ordered the four winds: Janūb, Shimāl, Dabbūr, and Šabā,<sup>3</sup> and the people gathered all their belongings, then God cast a deep slumber upon them. Now the four winds blew away all those possessions and flung them onto the tops of the mountains and into the depths of the valleys. And as for the jewelry, and the gold, and the vases, God commanded the Earth to swallow them up. When they awoke in the morning, they no longer had a single sheep or cow, or any property to return to, nor water to drink or food to eat. Witnessing all this a few of them turned to believe in God. And God guided them to a cave in a mountain that had a path behind it, and they were saved. They numbered twenty-one men, four women, and two boys. The others—men, women, and children, numbering six hundred thousand—died of thirst and hunger, nothing remained of them.

When the people returned to their dwellings, they found them turned upside down. At that time they prayed to God in sincere devotion to Him, that He bring them water, grain, and cattle, and that He make it a little, lest they be excessive. And God granted

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<sup>3</sup> The names of the south, north, west, and east winds.

that wish to them because He knew their righteous purpose and sincerity, and they said that God would send no messenger to their neighboring peoples unless they helped Him, spoke the truth to Him, and stood up for Him. And because God knew their faithfulness, He released their river to them and gave them more than they had requested. These people remained obedient to God both outwardly and in their hearts until they passed away and died out.

After them there arose among their offspring a people who obeyed God outwardly but were heretics in their hearts. God allowed them a respite but had already decreed their fate, for their sins were greater than their obedience and they had opposed God's *walīs*. Therefore God sent against them one who abandoned them and clashed with them: and hastened to stir up murder among them, until only a handful survived. Then God inflicted the plague on them, and not one was left alive. Only their river remained, but their dwellings with all that was in them stayed empty for two hundred years, no one living there.

Thereafter God brought another people to dwell therein; they were righteous and stayed there for sixty years. But then they began to engage in fornication: a man would call on his daughter, or sister, or wife, and let his neighbor, brother, or friend spend the night with her, thereby trying to solicit kindness and establish contact. From this they moved on to another kind (of abomination); men abandon the women until they became lustful and the men would find satisfaction with other men. Then a female demon came to the women, in the likeness of a woman: she was al-Dalhān, the daughter of Iblīs and the sister of Satan—both of them having come from a single egg. She instilled in the women the desire to mount each other and she taught them how to do it. Thus the originator of women's mounting one another was al-Dalhān. But then, that very night, God brought down upon those people a stroke of lightning and an eclipse of the moon at its end, then a single scream at the rising of the sun, whereupon not one of them remained. Their dwelling places fell into ruin—I do not think that they are inhabited nowadays.

‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, speaking through the authority of his father, said that a noble man from the Banū Tamīm, called ‘Umar, approached his grandfather ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, “Prince of the Believers,” he said, “tell me about the people of al-Rass—in what age did they live; where were their dwellings; who was their king;

did God send them a messenger; how were they destroyed? For I find them mentioned in the book of God, but I find nothing told about them." 'Alī, the Prince of the Believers, said to him, "You have asked me something no one had asked me before, and no one will be able to tell you after I pass away. This was their story, man of Tamīm: they were a people who worshipped a pine tree called Shāt Dirakht,<sup>1</sup> that had been planted by Japheth, son of Noah, beside a spring called Dawsān that welled up for Noah after the Flood. They were called the people of al-Rass because they had buried (*rassū*) their prophet in the earth. That was before the time of Solomon, son of David. They had twelve towns in the eastern land alongside the banks of a river called al-Rass. (The river had been named after them.)<sup>2</sup> At that time there was no river on earth with more abundant or sweeter water, nor any towns more populous or more thriving. The most magnificent of their habitations was Isfāndiyā, where their king was residing. His name was Tarkūn b. 'Ābūr b. Nūsh b. Sārib son of Nimrod, son of Canaan, the Pharaoh of Abraham. In it was the spring from which they watered the pine tree they worshipped. In each of their towns they planted one grain from the pollen of that pine tree; that grain would sprout and become a large tree, then they declared the water of that spring and of the rivers holy, so that neither they nor their cattle could drink from it, and they would slay anyone who did. For they said, 'It is the life of our gods and no one is permitted to diminish their life.' They and their cattle drank the water of al-Rass, the river along which lay their towns.

"During every month of the year they celebrated a feast in each town at which all the townsfolk would gather and cover that tree with a sunshade of silk on which were various pictures. They would bring lambs and cattle and slaughter them as a burnt offering to the tree and light fires with much firewood. And when all the smoke and smells and fumes from these offerings would rise into the air and they could no longer see the sky, they would fall to the ground in prostration, weeping and imploring the tree to take pleasure in them. Then the devil would come and screech from inside its trunk in the voice of a boy, 'My servants, I have indeed taken pleasure

<sup>1</sup> *dirakht* is "tree" in Persian.

<sup>2</sup> The Araxes River. See n. 2 above.

in you, therefore be of good cheer.' Thereupon they would lift up their heads, drink wine and strum their lutes, and go on like that all day and all night long, and then depart.

And when the time came for the feast of their largest town, young and old would assemble near the pine tree and the spring and pitch a tent of silk brocade on which were shown all sorts of figures. It had twelve doors, each for the people of one of their towns. They would bow down to the pine tree outside the tent and present to it many more offerings than to the tree in their own towns. Iblīs would appear and shake the pine tree strongly and speak from inside its hollow with a loud voice promising them and making them wish for more than all the devils had promised them. Then they would end their prostration and lift up their heads with such ecstasy and bliss that they would come to their senses, but continue to drink and play their lutes. This they would do for twelve days and nights, equal to the number of their feast days during the year. Then they would depart.

"After they had rejected God for a long time and continued to worship other gods, God sent them a prophet from the Children of Israel, one of the descendants of Judah, son of Jacob. He remained among them a long time, calling them to God and teaching them that He is the Lord, but they did not follow him, and did not listen to his words. When he saw how deeply they were steeped in sin and error and how strongly they rejected the right way and good conduct to which he called them, he went to their large town. He said, 'Lord, Your servants have refused to accept me and my call to them. They have persisted in calling me a liar, and blaspheming You—yea, they even worshipped a tree which neither helps nor harms. Therefore dry up all their trees and make them see Your omnipotence and dominion.' When the people arose in the morning, all their trees had dried up—terror seized them and their spirits fell. Then they became two groups: one group said, 'This man who claimed that he is the messenger of the Lord of Heaven has cast a spell on our<sup>6</sup> gods so that he may turn our faces away from them towards his own God.' The other group said, "Not so, but our gods became angry when they saw this man denouncing and

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<sup>6</sup> *Lit.* "your" and so in several following sentences. A common feature in classical Arabic of turning the 2nd person into 1st person in direct speech.

defaming them and calling us to the worship of a different god. Therefore they veiled their beauty, their loveliness, and their luster, so that we stand up for them and take revenge on him.' And they agreed to kill him. They made something like a house; then took hold of some long lead pipes with wide openings, which they let down to the bottom of the spring, placing one on top of the other as one does with water ducts, and thus drained the water that was in the spring. In its bottom they dug out a deep well with a narrow shaft, and buried in it their prophet, then dropping a big rock over the opening. Then they took the pipes out of the water (sic!) and said, 'We hope that our gods are pleased with us seeing that we have slain him who denounced them and opposed their worship, and we have buried him under the biggest (tree) among them so he will be cured by this, and their luster and bloom will be restored to them all as it was before.' They went on talking in this vein all day long, listening all the while to their prophet moaning and saying, 'My Lord and Master, see how narrow my confinement is, and how grievous my distress. Have mercy on me for my strength is waning and I have no means of escape. Hasten to take back my soul. Do not delay the response to my plea'—until he died.

"Then God said to Gabriel, 'See these servants of Mine who were deluded by My forbearance and felt safe from My cunning and worshipped other gods and killed My messengers. I take revenge on those who rebel against Me and fear not My punishment. I have sworn by My Might that I shall make them a warning and example to all beings.' Now while they were celebrating their feast, a terrible, violent wind fell upon them suddenly. They became confused and frightened and clung to each other. Then the Earth beneath their feet began to blaze like brimstone; a black cloud cast its shadow upon them, and dropped a flaming stone shaped like a dome over them melted their bodies as lead melts in fire. May God save us from incurring His fire and vengeance. *He is the Hearer, the Knower.*' (2:137) There is no strength or power except in God, the Most High, the Mighty. May God bless our master Muhammad and his family and companions and grant him perfect salvation. God is All-knowing."



## JOB

### A SESSION MENTIONING THE STORY OF GOD'S PROPHET JOB AND HIS TRIALS<sup>1</sup>

God has said, "Remember Our servant Job, because he called to his Lord, [Satan afflicted me with disease and distress]." (38:41) And He has said, "And Job, when he called to his Lord (saying), 'I am afflicted with distress, and You are most compassionate of all who show mercy.'" (21:83)

Wahb, Ka'ab, and others who knew the Scriptures have said that Job was a man of Byzantium<sup>2</sup>—tall, with a large head, curly hair, beautiful eyes, a goodly build, a short-neck, sturdy legs and arms. On his forehead was written, "The afflicted, forbearing man." He was Job, son of Amūs, son of Tārikh, son of Rūm, son of Esau, son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, while his mother was of the descendants of Lot, son of Haran. God had chosen him and imparted knowledge to him and made life comfortable for him: he owned the second (-ranked) part of all of the land of Syria—the coastland as well as the mountains and all therein. He owned all manner of wealth—camels, cattle, sheep, horses, donkeys; no other man, not even those more distinguished, owned more than he. He had five hundred *faddāns* therein, to which were attached five hundred slaves, each of whom had a wife, children, and possessions. A she-ass would bear the working-tools of each *faddān*, and each she-ass would have from two to more than five young ones. And God had given him a family, male and female children. He was a devout man, taking pity on the poor, providing for widows and orphans, helping the traveler reach his destination. He was always grateful for God's blessings and always fulfilled his obligations to Him, so much so that Iblīs, the enemy of God, was unable to obtain from him what he had obtained from other men of wealth—namely heedless or fool-

<sup>1</sup> For the *midrash* on Job, see Ginzberg, *Legends*, II:223–242.

<sup>2</sup> Biblical "in the land of Uz," indicates either Aram or Edom in different texts. Wahb b. Munabbih indicates that he is paternally Rūmi (Byzantine); in the Bible he was of maternal Edomite origin, namely neither Israelite nor Arabian. See *EJ*, 16:38–39 (*Uz*); 10:111–128 (*Job*). Ṭabarī, pp. 361–364; Brinner, *PP*, pp. 140–143; Kisā'ī, pp. 179–190; Thackston, pp. 192–204.

ish actions, or negligence towards God's ordinances, despite all the worldly possessions surrounding him. With him were three men who believed in him and found him trustworthy and knew his merit: one man from Yemen called Alifan,<sup>3</sup> and two of his own land, one by the name of Mālik and the other Zāfir<sup>4</sup>—all three in the prime of life.

Wahb said, 'Gabriel has a position of closeness and esteem in the presence of God such as is held by no other angel. It is Gabriel who receives the word—that is, when God speaks well of a man, Gabriel hears it first, then Michael, then the privileged angels who were standing near him and surrounded the Throne. When this becomes known among those favored angels, a blessing for that man is spoken by the dwellers of the Heavens; and when the angels of the Heavens have made their blessing of him, that blessing for him is carried down to him to the angels on earth.

Now Iblīs was not hindered from access to any of the Heavens, standing wherever he pleased; therefore he was able to reach Adam when he sent him from the Garden. All the while he would thus ascend to Heaven until God raised Jesus, at which time he was barred from four Heavens, and he stayed in the three others, and when God sent Muḥammad, he was prevented access to the remaining three, and now he and his hosts are barred from all the Heavens until the Day of Resurrection—'Excepting the ones who listen on the sly, yet they are chased away by a shooting flame.' (15:18)

The narrator continued, 'When Iblīs heard how the angels called out to each other the blessings for Job—at the time when God mentioned his name and praised him—he was seized with envy. He hurriedly flew up until he climbed on to a place where he used to stand and said, 'O my God, I have looked into the case of Your servant Job and found him to be a man upon whom You have bestowed favors, and he thanked You. You have kept him in good health, and he praised You. However, You have not put him to the test by inflicting any hardship or misfortune upon him. I vouchsafe to You that if You strike him, he will surely blaspheme You and forsake You.' God said, 'Go down to him. I give you power over his possessions.' The enemy of God dashed down to earth and assembled the most cunning and powerful demons and said to them, 'What

<sup>3</sup> *Eliphaz* in the Bible.

<sup>4</sup> *Bildad* and *Zophar* in the Bible.

faculty and knowledge do you possess? For I have been given power over Job's property—and the loss of wealth is the one serious misfortune and trial which men cannot endure.' One of the demons said, 'I have been given the power, if I wished, to turn into a whirlwind of fire and burn everything I touched.' 'Then go to the camels,' Iblīs said, 'and burn them and their herdsmen.'"

He went off toward the camels at the time when they had laid down their heads and were resting in their pasture. And before the people realized it, there broke out from under the Earth a whirlwind of fire fanned by hot sandstorms which consumed everything in its vicinity until it destroyed all the camels and their herdsmen to the last. After he had been rid of them, Iblīs appeared in the likeness of a herdsman riding on the back of one of the young camels and went to seek Job. He found him standing in prayer. He said, 'O Job!' 'I am at your service,' Job said. 'Your Lord Whom you have chosen and worshipped—do you know what He has done to your camels and your herdsmen?' Job replied, 'It is His wealth which He loaned to me, and He has more right to it; if He wishes He leaves it, and if He wishes He takes it away. For I have assured myself and set my mind at ease that I and my possessions are but passing.' Iblīs said to him, 'But your Lord sent a fire from Heaven, and it burned everything, and people stood around speechless and in wonderment. Some were saying, 'Job worshipped nothing at all; he was only deluded.' Others were saying, 'If Job's God had been able to do anything, He would have protected His friend's animals from the fire.' Still others were saying, 'Nay, but He Himself was the One Who did it.'

Now his enemies gloated over him, his friends were saddened by his misfortune, but Job said, 'Praise be to God Who has given to me and, when He wished, has taken away. Naked came I from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return to the grave, and naked shall I be assembled before my Lord. You must not rejoice when God loans you something, nor be unhappy when He takes back His loan, for He has more right over you, and all that He gave you. If God had discerned in you that which is good, O man, He would carry away your soul with those other souls and make you a witness among witnesses. But He has discerned evil in you, and therefore has cut you down and saved you from trial, but only as weeds are cleaned out from the pure grain.' Iblīs returned to his companions frustrated and humiliated. 'What other faculty do you have,'

he asked, 'for I have not spoken to his heart?' One of the mightiest demons said, 'If you want, I could let out a shout so loud that any breathing creature hearing it would let go of his soul.' Iblīs said to him, 'Then go to the flocks and their herdsmen!' He went off, seeking the flocks and their herdsmen, and when he stood in their midst he shouted so loud that all the flocks died, and the herdsmen too.

"Iblīs then went forth in the likeness of the herdsmen's overseer and came to Job, who was standing in prayer. He said to him what he had said the first time, and Job responded likewise. Then Iblīs returned to his companions and said, 'Do you have yet a further skill—for I have not yet spoken to Job's heart.' Another of the mightiest demons said, 'I have a skill to turn into a violent wind, if you so desired, that dries up everything in its path, until nothing is left.' 'Then go to the plowing oxen and the plowmen,'" Iblīs said to him, and he went there. When he came close to them, he stood erect amidst the plowmen, just as their children were enjoying themselves with food and drink. Then, all of a sudden, there rose a violent wind that dried up everything, until it was as if it had never been. Then Iblīs, in the guise of the plowmen's overseer, came to Job, who was standing in prayer. He spoke to him as he had spoken previously, and Job replied as before. Thus did Iblīs destroy Job's property until, bit by bit, he wiped it out entirely.

The narrator continued: But the more Job lost of his wealth, more fervently would he praise God, eulogize Him beautifully, and be content with His decree and patiently enduring his misfortune until he was left without any possessions. When Iblīs saw that, even after he had wiped out all of Job's property, he had still not gained anything from him, and none of his machinations had succeeded, he was much aggrieved. He ascended quickly, took up his usual place, and said, 'My Lord, Job sees that no matter how much favor You had bestowed on him or his children, You still will grant him more wealth. Will You now give me power over his children? For that is the one trial that leads astray; the one affliction that the heart of no man can endure—even the most steadfast.' God said, 'Go, I have given you power over his children.' The enemy of God swooped down and came to the sons of Job, the prophet of God, while they were in their palace. He shook the palace until it cracked to its foundations, and rammed the walls against each other. Then he hurled logs and stones against the sons of Job, making a dreadful example of them; then lifted up the palace into the air and turned it over

with them inside, so they were upside down. Then Iblīs went off to Job, disguised as his sons' teacher who taught them wisdom. He came to him injured, with a bruised head and face, blood streaming from his skull, and told him what happened. He said to him, 'Ah Job, to see your sons in their agony, your heart would have been torn to pieces, as they were falling down on their heads in the upturned castle, their blood and brains spilled from their nostrils and lips, their bellies split open and their entrails scattered about.' As he repeated this again and again, Job's heart filled with compassion. He wept and grabbed a handful of dust and put it on his head. Iblīs seized the moment and flew up, rejoicing in Job's anguish. Presently Job came to his senses, and asked forgiveness and gave thanks. Thereupon his companions among the angels flew up, carrying with them words of his repentance. They surprised Iblīs, preceding him to God. God knew best what had happened, for Iblīs stood disgraced and humiliated. He said, "My Lord, Job has come to attach little importance to the loss of wealth or children, for he understands that how much favor You grant him, You will bestow upon him even more wealth and children. Therefore, will You give me power over his soul<sup>5</sup> and his body? For I vouchsafe to You: if I afflict his body he will surely forget You, curse You, and abjure Your blessings." God said, "Go hence, for I have given you power over all his body, but you have no power over his tongue, his heart, or his mind." Now, by God, Iblīs knew well that He gave him power over Job only as an act of kindness, so as to increase Job's reward; to make him an example to those who are steadfast, and to remind worshippers suffering any affliction, to emulate his composure and his anticipation of reward.

The enemy of God swooped down quickly and found Job prostrating himself. Even before he could even raise his head, Iblīs came to Job from under the ground, and while Job's face was down, blew into his nostrils with such force that his body flared up, and he fell into a daze. Now, there appeared all over him, from the parting of his hair to the bottom of his feet, warts like the fat tails of sheep, and an itching befell him which he could not bear. He could not hold back any longer from scratching, so he scratched with his fingernails until they all fell off. Then he rubbed his body with coarse

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<sup>5</sup> Or: "*his life.*"

pieces of hair-cloth until he tore the warts open, then with potsherds and rough stones. He went on scratching until his flesh was sagging, ripped open and turned putrid. The townspeople sent him away, made him sit on a dung heap and set up a hut for him. All of God's creatures shunned him except for his wife, Raḥmah, daughter of Ephraim, son of Joseph, the son of Jacob, who visited him frequently with whatever would help him, and was kind to him. When the three friends saw that God had visited the affliction upon Job, they blamed him for it; they abandoned him, yet without abandoning his creed. After his predicament had lasted for a long time, they came out to him to rebuke him while he was afflicted, and blamed him, saying, "Repent to God for the sin for which you are being punished."

(The narrator) continued: "A young man was present there with them who had come to believe in him that he spoke the truth. He said, "You have spoken, O you older men, and you have more right to speak because of your years. But what you left out of your speech is of greater value than what you have said; and the opinions you have expressed are less pertinent than those you have neglected; and you did not conduct yourselves as appropriately as you should have. For Job's share of truth and dignity surpasses what you have described of him. Do you know, O venerable men, whose portion you have diminished, whose honor you have violated, and who the man is whom you have accused and disgraced? Do you not know that Job is a prophet of God, and His beloved and sincere friend, His treasure among the people on the Earth during this age? You did not discern, nor did God inform you, that He had been in any way displeased from the time He brought upon him what He did until this very day; nor have you God take away one bit of the honor that He had shown him; nor have you known Job as any other than truthful in all the time you have been his friends until this day. But if it was his misfortune that detracted from him in your eyes and humiliated him among you, then remember that God afflicts the prophets, the upright, the martyrs, and the pious. However, their affliction is not an indication of His displeasure with them nor their disgrace in His eyes—it is rather a blessing and token of honor to them. But if Job had not held this position of dignity with God but you were friends with him in truth, because it is not proper for the wise man to reproach his brother in his affliction; to revile him in his mishaps; or to blame him for what he does not know while he

is grieving and saddened; rather, he should have compassion for him and mourn with him, ask God's pardon for him, and be grieved by his grief and guide him to the right path in his affairs. A man who does not know this is not wise and not rightly guided. By God, by God—O men advanced in years, the Lord's glory and magnificence and the remembrance of death should have sufficed to silence your tongues and discourage you. Do you not know there are worshippers of God who are silenced by their fear of Him, though they are not incapable of expressing themselves nor mute, rather they are the truly eloquent and noble ones, the profound and wise, who know God and His signs—but, when they remember God's greatness, their tongues are silenced, their flesh shivers, they lose heart, and their minds are overwhelmed with the veneration of God. When they recover their senses, they vie with each other with good deeds for God. They count themselves among the sinners and wrongdoers, though they are without blame, and among the remiss and negligent, though they are sagacious and steady. They do not consider anything too excessive for God, nor are they willing to offer Him just a little. They do not point out their good deeds to Him, but fear Him, and are submissive, and humble."

Job said, "God, in His mercy, sows wisdom in the heart of the believers, old or young, and when it sprouts in the heart God makes it appear on the tongue. Wisdom is not due to years or white hair, nor long experience, for if God makes a servant wise in his youth, his standing in the eyes of the wise will not diminish, because they see upon him the light of God's grace." Then Job turned to the three and said, "You come to me in anger, you were frightened before anyone threatened, and crying before anyone struck you. I can imagine what you would do if I asked you to give charity for me with your wealth, so that God might save me, or to offer a sacrifice for me, that He might accept it and be pleased with me!—You are satisfied with yourselves thinking that you have been preserved in good health through your good works, but in your wellbeing you were greedy and boastful with pride. If you looked at what is between you and your Lord and were sincere, you would find in yourselves failings which God has hidden from you by the good health with which he has clothed you.

In bygone days men honored me, my word carried weight, my right was acknowledged. I obtained from my opponent what was due me. But today I no longer have any opinion or any words in

your eyes and you have become more painful to me than my misfortune.”

Then he turned away from them and spoke to his Lord, beseeching Him, supplicating Him, and said, “My God, why did You create me? Would that You had not created me, if You hate me. O would that I had been a menstrual cloth that my mother cast away! If only I knew that I knew the sin that I had committed or the deed I had done, that You had turned Your noble face from me. Had You killed me and gathered me to my forefathers—death would have been better for me! My God! Was I not a home for the stranger, a place of rest for the beggar, a protector of the orphan, a caretaker of the widow? Lord, I am but a humble slave. If I did that which is good, grace is in Your hand. If my ways were evil, in Your hand is my punishment. You have made me a target for affliction, an aim for misfortune. A scourge has befallen me which, if You had inflicted it on a camel, the camel would have been too weak to bear it—so how can my weakness bear it? Lord, my fingers are severed, cut up and I cannot pick up a morsel of food except with both hands, and they reach my mouth only with great effort on my part. My God! My uvula and the flesh of my head have fallen off, and there is barely any barrier left between my ears, so you can see from one to the other. My brain spills out of my mouth. My God! My eyelashes have fallen out as though my face had been burned with fire, and my pupils are dangling on my cheeks. My tongue is so swollen that it has filled my mouth, and it chokes me when I put food into it. My swollen lips cover my nose and my chin. My intestines are all chopped up in my belly: when I put food in, it comes out as it entered, I do not feel it and it is of no benefit to me. The strength of my feet is gone as if they had dried up, they have become a burden to me. My wealth is gone and now I beg with my hand, and those I used to sustain, feed me a single morsel which they deign to bestow upon me and then insult me. My God! My children have perished; if only of them remained alive, he would help me in my affliction and be of aid to me. My family has become tired of me, my relatives treat me with disrespect, my acquaintances with hostility, my friend loathes me, my companions shun me, my rights are disowned, my good deeds are forgotten. I cry out, and they do not come to my rescue; I ask for pardon, and they do not pardon me. I called my servant and he did not answer me; I pleaded with my slave-girl, but she had no pity on me. It is Your judgment



that has abased me, and brought me close to You, humiliated me, and raised me up. It is Your power which has made me ill and weakened my body. If only my Lord would remove the dread that is in my breast and set my tongue free, I would speak with a loud voice. If it is proper for a slave to plead for himself, I should want Him to restore me to health at that (of my pleading) from what ails me, but He has cast me off and abandoned me. He sees me, but I do not see Him; He hears me, but I do not hear Him. He did not look at me, nor had mercy on me; He did not draw close to me, nor did He bring me near so that I could speak of my innocence and argue on my behalf."

When Job had said this while his companions were with him, a cloud cast a shadow on him, and his friends thought that it was a punishment, then there was a voice, "Job! God says to you, 'Behold, I have come near you, and have never ceased being near you. Arise, give voice to your plea, speak of your innocence, argue for yourself. Gird up your loins and stand as a giant does—for only a giant such as I am, may argue with Me; and only a man may argue with Me who puts the bridle in the mouth of the lion; puts lambs in the mouth of the griffin, and flesh in the mouth of the sea-monster; who weighs a measure of light, and takes the weight of the wind; who fills a purse with sunshine, and restores yesterday. Your soul has tempted you with something no one with your strength can achieve. If only you had remembered, when your soul tempted you and invited you, what desire it instilled in you! Or did you want to vie with Me in your weakness; argue with Me in your misguided way, to debate with Me in your sinfulness? Where were you when I created the Earth and placed it on its foundation? Did you know by what measure I measured it? Were you moving about its edges with Me? Do you know the width of its angles, or upon what I placed its sides? Is it in obedience to you that the waters bear the Earth? Or is it by your wisdom that the Earth is a cover upon the waters? Where were you on the day when I raised up the Heaven as a ceiling in the air, with no pendants to hold it up, or pillars to bear it from below? Does your wisdom comprehend how its stars move and travel? Was it by your command that its night and day interchange? Where were you when I caused the seas to overflow and caused the rivers to burst forth? Was it your power that confined the waves of the seas to their limits, or is it your power that opens up the wombs when they reach their terms? Where were you on the day when I

poured forth the water on the dry Earth and set up the lofty mountains? Would you be able to carry them, or would you know the weight of what is in them? Where is the water that I caused to descend from Heaven? Do you know how many towns I have destroyed, or how many drops I have counted and divided up for sustenance? Or is it in your might to stir up the clouds and to disperse the waters? Do you know what are the voices of the thunder, the flame of lightning? Have you seen the depths of the sea, or do you know the dimensions of empty space? Do you know where the day is stored at night? Where is the path of the light, in what language do the trees speak? Where is the storehouse of the wind, and where are the mountains of hail? Do you know who placed minds in the insides of men? Who opened up hearing and sight, and to whose rule do the angels submit? Who subdued the mighty ones with His might, and apportioned the sustenance of beasts and men in His wisdom? Who gave the lions their sustenance, taught birds their way of life and softened their hearts for their fledglings? Who freed the wild beasts from their service and made the wasteland their dwelling-place, so that they are not accustomed to voices and will not fear rulers? Was it with your wisdom that I made their mothers have compassion for them, so that they bring forth food from their own insides and would rather that their offspring live than they themselves? Is it through your wisdom that the eagle perceives its distant prey sharply in the deserts?

Where were you on the day I created the *behemoth*, whose place is at the end of the Earth, and the *leviathan*—both of whom bear the mountains and the villages and cultivated lands, their tusks like the tall pine trees and their heads like mountains, the veins of their thighs like brass pillars? Did you fill their skins with flesh, or did you fill their heads with a brain? Did you have any part in their creation, or did your two hands partake in the force that subdued them? Can your strength enable you to place your hands on their heads, or can you sit on the path and restrain them or avert them from their food? Where were you on the day I created the sea monster whose sustenance is in the sea while its abode is in the sky; its eyes burn with fire, and its nostrils rage with smoke; its ears are like the bow in the clouds, a flame flaring from them as though it were a whirlwind of dust, its inside is burning, its breath all ablaze, while its frost is smoldering coals like rocks. The clatter of its closing teeth is like the sound of thunderbolts, and the glance of its eyes like the

flash of lightning. Armies may pass by while it leans back; it has no joint. The counts the iron anvil as straw; brass as thread. It does not fear arrows, nor when rocks are falling on its body. It flies through the air as though it were a bird and kills everything it passes by. Can you catch it with your snares and put a bridle in its jaw? Can you reckon its age, or do you know its life term? Do you know its sustenance? Are you aware of what it has destroyed on Earth, or what it will yet destroy in what remains of its life? Can you withstand its rage when it is angry? and when you command it, will it obey you?"—"Blessed is God, the best of creators!"

Job replied, "I am unable to bear what has come upon me. Would that the Earth had split open for me, and I had died and not spoken anything that displeased my Lord when all the disasters together befell me. My God! You have turned matters as if I was an enemy of Yours, but You know me and my sincerity. Indeed I know that everything of which You have spoken is the work of Your hands, the design of Your wisdom, and greater than that—if You wished. I know that nothing is impossible for You, no secret hidden from You, no unseen thing invisible to You. Who is it who thinks that he can keep a secret from You when You know what occurs to minds. I have learned from You in this trial of mine what I would not have known before. I feared it would be something more than I had feared. I heard Your voice but now—it is the glance of the eye when I spoke only so that You may forgive me. I have been silent only so that You would forgive me a word that slid off my tongue and I will never repeat. I have placed my hand in my mouth, I have bitten on my tongue, I have joined my cheeks to the dust and have buried my face in it because of my smallness. I have been silent when my wrongdoing has silenced me, so forgive me for what I have said, and I shall never repeat a thing which You dislike in me."

God said, "Job, My judgment has been carried out on you, but My mercy has overtaken My anger. When you did wrong I have forgiven what you said and had mercy upon you. I have restored your family and possessions to you and therewith the likes thereof, so that you would be a sign to those who come after you, an example to those who are tried, and a consolation to the steadfast. Therefore *'strike the ground with your foot. This is a cool bathing-place and a refreshing drink'* (38:42)—and offer a sacrifice for your companions and ask pardon for them, for they have disobeyed me regarding you." So he

struck with his foot and a spring opened up for him, and he entered it and washed himself, and God removed from him all that ailed him. When he went forth and sat down his wife came and began looking for him in his bed, but did not find him. She became troubled like a despondent woman, and passed him by and said, "O servant of God, do you have any knowledge of the afflicted man who was here?" He replied to her, "Would you know him if you saw him?" She said, "Yes, how could I not know him?" Then he smiled and said, "I am he." And she recognized him when he laughed, and she embraced him.

Ibn 'Abbās said, "By Him Who holds my soul in His hand, she did not stop embracing him until all the possessions and children they had had passed by them, for that is His word: *'And Job, when he cried unto his Lord (saying), 'I am afflicted with distress, [and You are the most compassionate of all.]'*" (21:83)

The sages differ about the time in which he cried out, the length of his affliction, and the cause on account of which he said, *"I am afflicted with distress."*

The Imām Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Sahl related to us "It was completed during the month of Rabī' I in the year three hundred and eighty-four."<sup>6</sup> Abū Ṭālib 'Umar b. al-Rabī' b. Sulaymān, the timber merchant in Egypt—Yahyā b. Ayyūb, the provender merchant—Sa'īd b. Maryam, Nāfi' b. Yazīd—'Uqayl—Ibn Shihāb—Anas b. Mālik said, "The Messenger of Allah said, 'God's prophet Job remained in affliction for eighteen years, and he was shunned by near and far except for two men among his brothers who would visit him in the morning and in the evening. One of them said to the other, "By God! Job has sinned as no other human has sinned." His companion replied, "How do you know?" He said, "He has been afflicted for eighteen years, and God has not had mercy on him or removed what ails him." So when they came to Job one evening, the man did not refrain from mentioning all that, and Job said, "I do not know what you are saying, but God knows I used to pass by two men who would contend with each other and mention God's name, but I would return home and withdraw from them, for I abhorred that the name of God be mentioned except for a just cause."

<sup>6</sup> That is 994 C.E.

He continued, 'He would go out to perform his functions, and whenever he did so, his wife would lead him by the hand until he reached the place. One day he tarried, and that was because God had revealed to Job at that place "*Strike the ground with your foot, [this is a bathing-place, cool, and a drink.]*" (38:42) She thought that he was slow in coming, so she went to see what had happened with him. He came towards her, God having removed from him the affliction which had beset him, and he was better looking than he had been. When she saw him, she said to him, "Have you seen the afflicted prophet of God?" He said, "Indeed, I am he." He had two threshing-floors, one for wheat and one for barley, and God sent two clouds. When one of them was above the threshing-floor for wheat it emptied gold on it until it overflowed, and the other emptied silver on the threshing-floor for barley until it overflowed.' It is narrated that God rained golden locusts upon him and began scattering some of them on his clothes, and He called out to him, "Job, did I not give you enough of that which you see?" He said, "Indeed, You did, O Lord, but I cannot do without Your kindness, Your sustenance, and Your mercy, and who can be sated with Your grace?"

Al-Ḥasan said, "Job was lying prostrate upon some refuse on a dung-heap belonging to the Children of Israel for seven years and a few months, while the animals quarreled over him." Wahb said, "There was not enough for a meal (for them) in Job, but something like women's breasts came forth from him and then would burst." Al-Ḥasan said, "Neither possession, nor a son, nor a friend, was left to him, nor anyone who would come near him, except for his wife Raḥmah, who endured it calmly with him, served him, brought him food, and praised God with him when he praised Him. Despite his predicament, Job did not become remiss in mentioning God's name, praising Him, and remaining steadfast despite God's afflictions.

Then the enemy of God, Iblīs, emitted a single cry, thereby gathering his troops from the ends of the Earth, impatient with Job's steadfastness: they gathered around him and said, "What is your wish?" He said to them, "This servant of God has defied me! I asked my Master to give me power over his possessions and children, and I left him neither possessions nor children—but this only increased his steadfastness and his praise of God. Then I was given power over his body and I left him ulcerated, cast upon rubbish, and no one would draw near him except his wife. I have been put to shame before my Master and have called upon you to assist me against

him." They said to him, "Where is your guile? Where is your knowledge with which you destroyed those gone by?" He replied, "All of that is useless with Job, so give me advice." They said, "We propose to you the way by which you got to Adam when you cast him out of the Garden. From what side did you get to him?" He replied, "By way of his wife." They said, "Then your approach to Job should also be by way of his wife. He cannot disobey her, for no one will draw near him except for her." He said, "You are right."

Then he set out and came to Job's wife while she was begging for charity. He appeared to her in the form of a man and said to her, "Where is your husband, handmaiden of God?" "There he is," she said, "scratching his boils, and the animals come again and again." When he heard her he desired that there be a word of impatience, so he whispered to her and reminded her of the comfort and wealth in which she had lived. He also reminded her of Job's handsomeness and his youth and the distress in which he now was, and that this would never end for him.

Al-Hasan said, "Then she screamed, and when she screamed he knew that she was impatient, so he brought her a lamb and said to her, 'Let Job slaughter this for me and he will be cured.'" He continued, "She went away screaming and said, 'Job, until when will your Lord punish you and have no mercy on you? Where is the wealth? Where are the cattle? Where the children? Where is the true friend? Where is your beautiful garment—now altered and become like ashes? Where is your beautiful body—now afflicted so that the worms frequent it? Slaughter this lamb and have rest.' Job said to her, 'The enemy of God came to you and breathed into you, and you responded to him. Woe unto you! Look here: that about which you cry—the wealth, the children, and well-being that were ours—Who favored us with that?' She said, 'God.' He said, 'And how long did He let us enjoy it?' She said, 'For eighty years.' He said, 'And since when has God afflicted us with this misfortune?' 'For seven years,' she said. He said, 'Woe unto you! By God, you have not dealt justly nor treated your Lord fairly. Why have you not been steadfast in this distress, with which our Lord has afflicted us for eighty years, just as we were at ease (for that long)? By God! If the Lord heals me, I will flay you one hundred lashes, just as you ordered me to sacrifice to someone other than God. Your food and drink that you bring me is forbidden to me. I shall not taste anything of what you bring to me after you have said that—get away

from me, I shall not see you!’ He drove her out and she went away. When Job saw, after he had driven his wife away, that he had neither food nor drink nor companion, he fell to the ground prostrating himself before God, and said, ‘Lord! *I am afflicted with distress,*’ then he returned the matter to his Lord and submitted, and said, ‘*And You are the most compassionate of all.*’ (21:83) It was said to him, “Raise up your head, for your prayer has been heard—‘*Strike the ground with your foot.*’ (38:42) Then he struck the ground with his foot and a spring of water flowed forth; he washed himself and nothing visible remained of his illness, but all of its traces disappeared. And God removed from him every pain and illness. God restored to him his youth and beauty, better than they had been and more excellent than in the past. Then he struck with his foot and another stream gushed up; he drank of it and no illness remained in his body, but it departed, and he arose healthy and clothed himself in vestments.”

He continued, “He began to turn to the right and the left, but whatever he saw of family, children and wealth he had possessed, God had multiplied. He then departed and sat down on an elevated place, and his wife said, “I wonder whether he drove me out to the one who consumed him. Should I leave him to die of hunger and thirst and get lost or wander off so that wild beasts might eat him? By God! I shall go back to him.’ She returned, but she did not see the rubbish heap or the scene to which she had been accustomed, for matters had changed. She began to wander about where the rubbish heap had been, weeping, and Job was watching her.”

He continued, “She was too much in awe to approach the one in vestments and ask him, so Job sent for her and called her, saying, ‘What is it you wish, O handmaiden of God?’ She wept and said, ‘I am seeking that afflicted one who was cast out upon this rubbish heap. I do not know whether he has perished, or what has been done to him.’ Then Job said, ‘What was he to you?’ She wept and replied, ‘My husband. Have you seen him?’ He said, ‘Would you know him if you saw him?’ She said, ‘How could I not know him?’ Then she began to look at him, still fearing him, and then she said, ‘Verily, he would be most like you of all of God’s creations, if he were healthy.’ He said, ‘I am Job. You ordered me to sacrifice to Iblis, but I obeyed God and disobeyed Satan, so He restored me to what you see.’”

Ka’b said, “Job was in his predicament for seven years.” Wahb

said, "He remained in that affliction for three years, not one day longer. When Job overcame Iblīs the accursed and he was powerless to do anything to him, Iblīs presented himself to Job's wife with a countenance unlike that of any human in magnificence, size, and beauty, riding on a vehicle unlike those of men—it was splendid, glorious, beautiful. Then he said to her, 'You are the companion of Job the afflicted?' She replied, 'Yes.' He said, 'And do you know me?' She said, 'No.' He said, 'I am the god of the Earth, and did to your companion what I did because he served the God of Heaven and abandoned me and angered me. If he had bowed down to me but once, I would have restored to you all the wealth and children you had, for they are with me.' And he showed them to her in the bottom of the valley in which he met her."

Wahb said, "I have heard that he said to her, 'If your companion could eat food upon which God's name is not invoked, he would be cured of his affliction, for God is All-knowing.' The enemy of God wished to get to him by way of her. I have seen in a certain book that Iblīs said to Raḥmah, 'If you wish, bow down to me only one time so that I may restore to you the children and the property, and I will cure your husband.' She returned to Job and informed him of what Iblīs had said to her and what he wanted, and he said to her, 'The enemy of God wishes to lure you away from your religion.' Then Job swore that if God cured him he would whip her one hundred lashes, and he said, 'Misfortune has befallen me, for Iblīs yearns that my wife bow down to him, and call her and me to unbelief.' But then, it is said, 'God had mercy on Raḥmah, the wife of Job, for her steadfastness at his side during the affliction, and gave her relief. But He also wanted to honor Job's oath, so He commanded him to take a bunch of shrubs altogether amounting to one hundred twigs, all thin and soft, and strike her just one blow, as He has said, *'Take in your hand a branch and smite therewith, and break not your oath. [We find him patient in adversity, an excellent devotee, always turning in repentance.]'* (38:44) Job's wife took upon herself earning, and working for people, and would bring him his food. When the affliction had lasted too long in her eyes and people grew tired of her and no one would give her work, she sought one day something to feed him and found nothing. She cut off a plait of her hair and sold it for a loaf, and brought it to him. He said to her, "Where is your plait of hair?" She told him, whereupon he said, "*I am afflicted with distress.*" (21:83) Others say that he spoke these words when the



worms made for his heart and his tongue, and he feared that he would be unable to utter God's name and to think. Yet others say that he spoke these words when a worm fell from his thigh, and he picked it up and returned it to its place. He said to it, "Eat, for God has made me your food." It bit him so painfully that his pain exceeded all that he had suffered from the bites of the worms.

'Abdallāh b. 'Umar said, "Job had two brothers; they came to visit him but stood at a distance, not able to come closer because of the stench. One of them said to the other, 'If God knew of any good in Job, He would not have afflicted him with what you see.'" He continued, "Job never heard anything that was harder on him than these words, nor had he ever been grieved by anything that befell him as much as he was saddened by these words. It was then that he said, *'I am afflicted with distress.'* Then he said, 'O my God! You know that I never returned home sated when I knew of someone somewhere who is hungry, then attest to my truthfulness.' And He did so while they were listening. Then he said, 'O my God! If you know that I have never made use of a shirt when I knew of someone who is naked anywhere, then attest to my truthfulness.' He attested to that while they were listening, and Job fell down prostrating himself to God. And it is said that the meaning of *'I am afflicted with distress'* is on account of the gloating of enemies. This is supported by a tradition, according to which he was asked when he was cured, 'What was the hardest on you during your affliction?' and he said, 'The gloating of enemies.'" Someone composed verses on this theme:

*All adversities may pass over a youth,  
And they are easy, except for the gloating of the envious.  
For the days of adversities come to an end,  
While the gloating of enemies still lies in wait.*

Al-Junayd said regarding this verse, "God let him know the destitution of beggars in order to bestow upon him the magnanimous gift of favor, for that is the word of the Exalted, *'And We relieved him of the misery he was in, and We restored his family to him along with others similar to them [as a grace from Us and a reminder for those who are obedient.]'*" (21:84)

The sages have differed about how that was done. One group said that when God afflicted Job in this world, He punished his family as an example to him. Now those who perished were not returned

to him in this world, but God promised him that He would give them back to him in the Hereafter. (Wahb said, "He had seven daughters and three sons.") Others said, 'Not so! Rather, God returned them to him as they were, and gave him his family *and* others like them too." These are the words of Ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās, Qatādah, and Ka'b. They said, "God brought them back to life *and* gave him their equivalent," and this statement is closer to the plain meaning of the Qur'ānic verse.

It is mentioned that Job lived ninety-three years; and that upon his death, in his will he appointed his son Ḥawmal, his trustee; that God sent after him Bishr, son of Job, as a prophet, naming him Dhū l-Kifl, and commanding him to call people to acknowledge His unity; and that he remained in Syria for all of his life until he died. His life span was ninety-five years. Bishr appointed his son 'Abdān, his trustee, and after him God sent Shu'ayb, and God is All-knowing.

## DHŪ L-KIFL

### A SESSION ABOUT THE TALE OF DHŪ L-KIFL<sup>1</sup>

This session comes at the end of the book after the tale of Elisha. What is written here is an addition to the session just mentioned.

Al-A‘mash—al-Manhāl b. ‘Amr—‘Abdallāh b. al-Ḥārith, that one of the prophets said: “Who will guarantee me that he will stay awake all night and fast all day and not become angry?” A young man arose and said, “I shall.” But he said to him, “Sit down.” Then he repeated the same as his first words and that young man said, “I shall,” but he said to him, “Sit down.” Then he repeated the same as his words a third time and the young man said, “I shall,” and he said to him, “You will stay awake all night and fast all day and not become angry?” Then he said, “Yes,” and their prophet died, and the young man sat in his place, judging between people, and would never become angry. Satan came in human form to anger him while he was fasting but was about to break his fast. He knocked loudly at the door and he said, “Who is it?” He replied, “A man who needs something.” He sent out a man to him and Satan said, “I don’t want this man.” So he sent another one with him and he said, “I don’t want him either.” Then he went out to him and Satan took him by the hand and went off with him, and when they were in the marketplace, he let go of him and went away. Therefore he was called Dhū l-Kifl (guarantor).

Someone said: “Dhū l-Kifl was Bishr, the son of Job the Steadfast,<sup>2</sup> whom God sent after his father as a messenger to the land of Byzantium. They believed in him and considered him truthful and followed him. Then God commanded *jihād* to them, but they refrained from that and became weak, saying, ‘Bishr, we love living and dislike dying, yet we also dislike disobeying God and His Messenger, so if you would ask God to lengthen our lives and not cause us to die until we want, then we will serve Him and fight against His ene-

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<sup>1</sup> A prophet mentioned in Qur’ān 21:85 and 38:49. See discussion in *EF*<sup>2</sup>, II: 242; also the second account of Dhū l-Kifl, pp. 476–478.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 284.

mies.' Bishr answered them, 'You have asked of me a tremendous thing, and have expected too much of me.' But he arose and prayed and called out, saying, 'My God! You commanded me to deliver the message and I have delivered it. You have commanded me to fight Your enemies. But You know that I have power only over myself, and now my people have asked me that which You know better than I. Do not blame me for another's sin. I take refuge in Your goodwill from Your anger, and in Your forgiveness from Your punishment.'" He said, "Then God inspired him, 'O Bishr! I have heard the words of your folk and I have granted them what they have asked of me. I have lengthened their lives and they will not die until they want to. Give them this assurance from me.' Bishr delivered God's message and informed them of what God had inspired him, and he pledged this to them as God had commanded them. Hence, he was called Dhū l-Kifl (guarantor).

Then they multiplied and increased and grew in number until their land became too narrow for them, their lives became troublesome, and they suffered because of their large numbers. They asked Bishr to pray to God to return them to their appointed terms of life, and God inspired Bishr, 'Did not your people know that My choice for them is better than their choice for themselves?' So then they were returned to their life spans and died at their appointed terms. He said, "Therefore the people of Byzantium are so numerous. So much so that it is said that the world is their habitation, five-sixths of it belongs to Byzantium. They were called Rūm because they were traced back to their grandfather Rūm, son of Esau, son of Isaac, the son of Abraham." Wahb said, "Bishr, son of Job, known as Dhū l-Kifl, remained in Syria until he died, his age being ninety-five years." And God is All-knowing.

## SHU'AYB

### A SESSION MENTIONING THE TALE OF SHU'AYB<sup>1</sup>

God has said, “*We sent to Midian their brother Shu‘ayb. [He said: ‘O people, worship God and be ready for the Day of Resurrection. Do no evil and create no mischief in the land.]’*” (29:36; also 7:85; 11:84) Scholars have disagreed about Shu‘ayb’s genealogy. The people of the Torah say he is Shu‘ayb b. Şayfūn b. ‘Ayfā b. Nābit b. Madyan, the son of Abraham. Muḥammad b. Ishāq said, “He is Shu‘ayb b. Mīkā’il b. Yashjar b. Madyan, son of Abraham, and his name in Syriac is Yatrūn. His mother was Maykīl, daughter of Lot, and Shu‘ayb was blind, for those are His words informing about his folk, ‘. . . *we see you are weak among us*’ (11:91)—(weak, here) meaning blind. He was called the Greatest Orator among the Prophets because of the excellence of his instruction to his people, for God sent him as a prophet to the people of Midian; they are the dwellers in the thickets,<sup>2</sup> and thickets are intertwined trees.”

Qatādah said, “God sent him to two nations: the people of Midian and the dwellers in the thickets.” It is said that Shu‘ayb’s folk were a people who did not believe in God, but wronged people and were deficient in measures and weights. God had been generous to them with sustenance and made life easy for them as a sign of His forbearance towards them. Then Shu‘ayb said to them, “*O my people, worship God. You have no other God but He. So do not give in short measure nor under weigh. [I see you are prosperous, but I fear the doom of an overwhelming day for you.]*” (11:84, 85) And similarly, in *al-A‘rāf*:<sup>3</sup> “. . . *so give in full measure and full weight; and do not wrong people in their goods [and do not corrupt the land after it has been set aright].*” (7:85) That was

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<sup>1</sup> Usually associated with the Biblical figure of Jethro (Hebrew: *Yitro*), father-in-law of Moses, hence the statement below, that “*his name in Syriac is Yatrūn*”. See Ṭabarī, pp. 365–371; Brinner, *PP*, pp. 143–147; Tottoli, *Storie*, pp. 117–119; Kisā’ī, pp. 190–194; Thackston, pp. 204–208.

<sup>2</sup> Arabic: *aṣḥāb al-ayka*. So in Pickthall. Ahmad Ali translates “*dwellers in the wood*”. All associate the group with Midian.

<sup>3</sup> Sūrah 7: *Al-A‘rāf (The Heights)*.

because they would sit on the road and inform those who were coming to Shu'ayb to believe in him that he was a liar—"Let him not seduce you from your religion"—and they would threaten believers with murder and frighten them.

Al-Suddī and Abū Rawq said that they were tax gatherers. 'Abdallāh b. Zayd said that they were highwaymen.

The Prophet said, "I saw on the night that He took me on the journey,<sup>†</sup> a piece of wood on the road; no one's garment would pass without being torn apart by it, nor anything else without being set on fire by it. So I said, 'What is that, Gabriel?' He said, 'This is like some people of your nation, sitting on the road and engaging in highway robbery.' Then he recited, 'And do not sit on every road threatening (wayfarers) [and barring from God's way those who believe in Him, desiring to make it crooked.]'" (7:86) Some of the words of Shu'ayb and his people's responses to him are mentioned by God in the Sūrah of *The Heights* (*al-A'rāf*, Sūrah 7), the Sūrah of *Hūd* (Sūrah 11), and the Sūrah of the Poets (*al-Shu'arā'*, Sūrah 26).

The commentators have said that among the things which Shu'ayb forbade them, and for which they were punished, was the debasing of *dinars*—for those are His words—"They said, 'Shu'ayb, does your piety teach you that we should forsake what our fathers worshipped [or desist from doing what we like with our goods?]' You are the mild, the guide to right behavior' (11:87)—meaning, (you are) a fool, a tempter, i.e., the opposite, just as one would call an Ethiopian 'father of whiteness,'" and like His words, "Taste it, You were indeed the mighty and noble!" (44:49)

Ibn 'Abbās said, "Shu'ayb prayed much, and when the wickedness of the people increased and goodness decreased, he invoked evil upon them, saying, 'Our Lord, decide fairly between us and our folk, for You are the best of those who decide.' And God responded to his prayer and destroyed them with a tremor (*rajfa*), (7:91) that is the earthquake according to al-Kalbī, and according to others, with 'the shout (*sayha*)' (11:94) and 'the punishment of gloom (*zulla*).'" (26:189)

According to Ibn 'Abbās and others it happened in this way: God opened against them one of the gates of Hell and sent against them a severe cold and heat, which took their breath away, they entered

<sup>†</sup> This is the *Isrā'* or Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. See p. 34, n. 55 above.

the innermost rooms of their houses so that neither shade nor water could help them. The heat cooked them, and so they went out fleeing into the desert, and God sent a cloud over them that provided them shade and they felt relief. Then a pleasant wind came and they called one another. When they had gathered under the cloud, God ignited it over them with fire, the earth shook under them and they burned up as locusts burn in a frying pan;—they turned into ashes, for those are His words, “[*Those who were wicked were seized by a punishment from heaven*] and lay prostrate in their homes in the morning, as though they had not dwelt there, at all.” (11:94–95) And He said, “[*There seized them the torment of the day of gloom. It was indeed the torment of a terrible day.*” (26:189)

Ibn ‘Abbās said, “I have been told that when a man from the people of Midian by name of ‘Amr b. Jalham saw the darkness bearing the retribution, his flesh shivered and he said:

*O my people, Shu‘ayb was sent as a messenger, so leave behind  
Shamīr and ‘Imrān ibn Shaddād  
O people, I see a cloud, has already risen,  
summoning with a shout against the moaning in the valley.  
For never again will be seen there the break of day,  
only al-Raqīm walking among places with no trees.*

Shamīr and ‘Imrān were two of their priests, and al-Raqīm<sup>5</sup> was their dog. Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Bajlī said, “Abū Jād, Ḥattā, Hawaz, Kalaman, Sa‘faṣ, and Qarasht<sup>6</sup> were the names of their kings. Their king on the day of gloom during the time of Shu‘ayb was Kalaman.” The sister of Kalaman said, bewailing him when he perished:

*Kalaman’s death threatened my support  
in the middle of the encampment.  
The lord of the people, death came to him  
as a fire in the midst of darkness.  
Which also put fire on them,  
their habitations becoming as if faded away.*

<sup>5</sup> The name of the dog of the People of the Cave, as the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus are known in Islam. See below, pp. 728ff.

<sup>6</sup> These imaginary names form the usual order of letters of the Semitic alphabet, used for special purposes in Arabic and called *abjad* i.e., a, b, j, d, etc. Note that the “words” *Ḥattā* and *Hawaz* are in reverse order, *h* coming before *ḥ* in the Arabic alphabet. See another example, p. 648 below.

God said, "They who called Shu'ayb a liar, became as though they had not existed. Those who called Shu'ayb a liar, they were the losers" (7:92)—that is, they faced destruction in this world and punishment in the Hereafter.



## MOSES

### A SESSION ABOUT THE TRUE FRIEND OF GOD AND HIS CONFIDANT, MOSES SON OF AMRAM, WHICH INCLUDES SEVERAL CHAPTERS<sup>1</sup>

#### *Chapter 1 About the Genealogy of Moses*

God the Exalted said, “*And make mention in the Scripture of Moses. He was a chosen one, both a Messenger, a Prophet.*” (19:51) He was Moses son of Amram son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi<sup>2</sup> son of Jacob. Those learned in the history of the ancients and in the biographies of those past have said, “Levi was born to Jacob when eighty-nine years of his life had passed. Then Levi married Nābitah bt. Māwī b. Yashjab and she bore him Gershon, Merari, Mardī,<sup>3</sup> and Kohath. Then Kohath, after forty-six years of his life had passed, married Fāhī bt. Mabīn b. Tanwīl b. Alyās, and she bore him Izhar son of Kohath, and Izhar son of Kohath married Samīt bt. Yatādam b. Barakiyā b. Yash‘ān son of Abraham, and she bore him Amram when sixty years of his life had passed. Izhar lived one hundred and forty-seven years. Amram son of Izhar married Najīb bt. Shamwīl b. Barakiyā b. Yash‘ān son of Abraham, and she bore him Aaron and Moses. There is disagreement about the name of their mother. Ibn Ishāq said Najīb, others say Nājiyah, and others Jochabed<sup>4</sup>—which is the well-known one. Amram’s life span was one hundred and thirty-three, and Moses was born to him when seventy years of his life had passed, but God knows best.

#### *Chapter II About the Birth of Moses*

Those who know history have said: after the death of al-Rayyān b. Walīd, the first pharaoh of Egypt, and Joseph’s master who had

<sup>1</sup> For the *midrash*, see Ginzberg, *Legends*: II:245–375.

<sup>2</sup> In the Arabic text: *Mūsā ibn ‘Imrān b. Yashār b. Qāhith b. Lāwī*.

<sup>3</sup> *Gharsān. Mawazī. Mardī* or *Mardā*.

<sup>4</sup> Arabic has *Yūkhāyīl*.

appointed Joseph over the granaries of his lands and became a Muslim at Joseph's hand, Qābūs b. Muṣ'ab became the ruler. That is, he was Joseph's next master. Joseph summoned him to accept Islam, but he refused. He was a tyrant and God took Joseph during his reign. He reigned for a long time, and then perished. After him, his brother Abū l-'Abbās b. Walīd b. Muṣ'ab b. al-Rayyān b. Irāshah b. Tharwān b. 'Amr b. Fārān b. 'Imlāq b. Lāwudh b. Shem son of Noah, rose to rule. He was richer and grander than Qābūs, and more impudent, and the days of his rule lasted long. The Children of Israel lived on after the death of Joseph, spreading out and multiplying. Meanwhile, they came under the rule of the Amalekites, still keeping the remnants of their religion of Islam which Joseph, Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham had begun for them, holding fast. Then arose the pharaoh of Moses, to whom God had sent Moses,—we have already mentioned his name and genealogy. They had not had a pharaoh more insolent towards God than he, nor haughtier in words, nor harder of heart, nor long lasting in his reign, nor more evil in his rule towards the Children of Israel. He inflicted pain on them and enslaved them; made them servants and bondsmen, and sorted them out for his chores: one group for building, another for farming, and another charged with filthy work, and whoever was not fit for work was forced to pay poll tax, for God has said, “. . . *who were afflicting you with dreadful torment.*” (2:49; 7:141; 14:6) Pharaoh had taken in marriage a woman from among them named Āsiyah<sup>5</sup> bt. Muzāḥim<sup>6</sup>—one of a few of the best of women. It is said that she was Āsiyah bt. Muzāḥim b. 'Ubayd b. al-Rayyān b. Walīd, the first pharaoh and contemporary of Joseph. She had accepted Islam through Moses.

Muqātil said, “Only three Egyptians accepted Islam: Āsiyah, Hizqīl, and Maryam bt. Tāmūsā who led Moses to the grave of Joseph.”

It is said that Pharaoh lived a long life among them while they were under his rule (some say it was four hundred years) imposing on them dreadful punishments. When God wanted to deliver them, He sent Moses. According to al-Suddī, who received it from his authorities, the events began when Pharaoh saw in his dream a fire

<sup>5</sup> The name may have been borrowed from the Coptic name of Isis—*Eṣī*, according to Geoffrey Graham.

<sup>6</sup> A longer and very different story of Āsiyah is in Kisā'ī, pp. 199–211; Thackston, pp. 213–225.

coming from Jerusalem which encompassed the houses of Egypt and burned them down, and burned the Egyptians<sup>7</sup> but spared the Children of Israel. Then Pharaoh called the soothsayers and magicians, the interpreters and astrologers, and asked them about his dream. They said, "A boy will be born among the Children of Israel who will wrest dominion from you, gain the upper hand over you in your reign, drive you and your people from your land, and change your religion. The time of his birth is drawing near." Then Pharaoh ordered the slaying of every boy born among the Children of Israel. He assembled all the midwives among the women of his realm and said to them, "Every boy who falls into your hands among the Children of Israel you must kill, and every girl you should spare." He appointed overseers over them, and the midwives did as they were told.

Mujāhid reported, "I have been told that, on the order of the Pharaoh, reed stalks were split, then made as [sharp] as the edges of sword blades and set up next to each other, then the pregnant women of the Children of Israel were brought there. He ordered them to stand on those reeds so that they would injure their feet. Now when one of their women gave birth and her child dropped between her legs, she would keep on treading on it, thereby guarding her feet from the sharp edges of the reeds when her exhaustion reached its limits. He would kill the boys of a given period and then kill those born after them, and tortured the pregnant women so that they would bring forth what was in their wombs. Death came early to the old among the people of Israel, so the chiefs of the Egyptians entered unto Pharaoh and said to him, 'Death has befallen the old among the people of Israel, and you are slaying the young and causing their elders to die, hence the work will fall upon us.' Pharaoh then ordered the slaying of newborn boys during one year and leaving them alive in another. Aaron was born during the year in which no one was killed, and was left alive, whereas Moses was born during the year in which they were slain."

Then he said, "Aaron's mother bore him openly, feeling secure, but when it was the year when he ordered the slaying of the newborn boys she was pregnant with Moses. When she wanted to give

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<sup>7</sup> Text has here, and several places later, *aqbāt*, *lit.* Copts, an anachronism. as that term was not used until much later, hence the substitution for Egyptians—actually the same word in different form. See p. 289, n. 14.

birth to him, she became sad on his account and her worry grew. Then God inspired her, *'Nurse him and, if you are afraid for him, then cast him into the river [without any fear or regret, for We shall restore him to you, and make him one of] Our messengers.'*" (28:7) When she brought him forth in secret, she nursed him, then she found a box for him, put the key to the box inside, and placed him in it."

Muqātil said, "The one who made the box was Hizqīl,<sup>8</sup> a believer among the people of Pharaoh; it is said that it was made of papyrus. Moses' mother took the box and put carded cotton in it, and placed Moses inside, tied up its top and then cast it into the Nile. When she had done this and it disappeared from her view, Satan whispered to her and she said to herself, 'What have I done to my son? If he had been slain while with me, I would have dressed him in a shroud and buried him, which would have been dearer to me than casting him into the river with my own hand and later cause him to enter some river reptile.' But then God protected her and the water carried Moses away, the waves raising him up one time and lowering him another time, until they carried him between the trees near Pharaoh's courtyard, to a meadow which was the place where Pharaoh's maidservants drew water. Nearby was a large stream in Pharaoh's courtyard that flowed into his orchard. Pharaoh's maids went out to wash and draw water, and they found the box. They took it, for they thought there was money in it and, without opening it, carried it away and brought it to Āsiyah. When she opened it she saw the boy, and God cast upon her love for him, and she took pity on him and loved him greatly. When the executioners heard about this matter, they came to Āsiyah with their knives to slay the youth, and Āsiyah said to the executioners, 'Go away, for this one does not increase the Children of Israel. I shall go to Pharaoh and ask him to give the child to me. If he grants him to me, you have acted well. But if he orders you to slay him, then I shall not blame you.' Then she took him to Pharaoh, saying, *'He will be a comfort to me and to you. Do not slay him. He may well be of some advantage to us.'* Pharaoh replied, *'Let him be a comfort to you. As for me, I have no need of him.'* (28:9) The Messenger of God said, 'By the One by Whom one swears oaths! If Pharaoh had consented that Moses

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<sup>8</sup> Here, and later as the Arabic form of Ezekiel, sometimes also Ḥazqīl, and Ḥazqiyāl.

be a comfort to him as she had, God would have provided him guidance through Moses as He had provided to his wife. But God denied him that (privilege).”

Muqātil continued, “He wanted to slay him, saying, ‘I fear this is one of the Children of Israel, and that he is the one at whose hands our destruction and our rule’s end will take place.’ But Āsiyah continued speaking to him until he granted him to her. When Āsiyah had become a believer, she wished to give him a name called for by his status, so she named him Mūshā because he was found between water and trees, for in the Coptic language *Mū* is for water and *Shā* is for trees. This was Arabicized and is pronounced Mūsā.”<sup>9</sup>

Ibn Faḥawayh—Ibn Ja‘far, al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alawiyah, and Ismā‘il b. ‘Īsā—Ibn Bashīr—Juwaybir and Muqātil—al-Ḍaḥḥāk—Ibn ‘Abbās who said, “When the Children of Israel multiplied in Egypt displaying arrogance towards the people and acting rebelliously, and the best among them matched the worst. They did not enjoin the doing of good nor prevent that which is reprehensible, so God made the Copts rule over them. They abased them, and visited them with evil chastisement and slew their sons.’ Both he and Abū Ilyās reported that Wahb said, “I have heard that in the search for Moses seventy thousand boys were slain.”

Ishāq—Ibn ‘Abbās: When the mother of Moses neared the time of childbirth, one of the midwives, whom Pharaoh had assigned to the pregnant women of the Israelites, felt affection for Moses’ mother. When the labor pains came to her, the mother of Moses sent for her, saying, “Such and such has come upon me, now let your love for me benefit me.” She agreed, and attended to her delivery. When Moses fell to the ground, a light shone for her from between his eyes.<sup>10</sup> Now every joint in her shivered and love for Moses entered her heart. She said to Moses’ mother, “O you! When you called me I came only with the thought of slaying your son and informing Pharaoh of that, but then I felt such love for your son as I have never felt for anything before. Guard your son, for I think that he is our enemy.” When the midwife left her, one of the spies observed her. He approached her door to come in to Moses when his sister

<sup>9</sup> Compare Hebrew folk etymology in Exodus 2:10 where *mosheli* is said to be from the root *m-sh-lh*, to draw forth, *i.e.*, from the water.

<sup>10</sup> This feature would seem to identify him with Horus, son of Isis. In the Bible the midwives in the story of Moses were Israelites, Exodus 1:15.

said, "O mother, the guardsmen are at the door!" Her mind became confused and she was at a loss what to do with Moses, fearing for him, so she wrapped him in a rag and cast him into the oven, which was fired up. This was an inspiration from God to her, in accordance with what God had intended for His servant Moses. They entered, and behold! the oven was fired up, but the color of Moses' mother did not change, nor was any milk visible on her. They said to her, "What brought that midwife to you?" She answered, "She is a good friend of mine and came to visit me." so they left her and she regained her senses. Moses' sister said, "Where is the boy?" "I do not know," she replied, but she heard the boy crying in the oven. She went and found that God had made the fire cold and safe for him, so she carried him away.

Ishāq b. Bishr—Juwaybir and Muqātil—al-Dahhāk—Ibn 'Abbās said, "When Moses' mother saw Pharaoh's persistence in seeking out the male babies, she feared for her child. Now God had put into her soul that she should acquire a box for him cast it into the river—which is the Nile. She went off to an Egyptian carpenter, of the folk of Pharaoh, and bought a small box from him. The carpenter asked her, 'What will you do with this box?' She said, 'I shall hide a son of mine in it,' for she hated to lie. He said, 'Why?' She answered, 'I fear the wiles of Pharaoh.' The narrator went on, 'When she bought the box and carried it away, the carpenter went to the executioners to inform them about her. But when he intended to speak, God arrested his tongue and it would not move. He began to make signs with his hands, but the guardians did not know what he was saying. When they tired of him, their leader said, 'Strike him,' so they struck him and drove him away. The carpenter came home and God returned his speech to him and he spoke, but he went again to seek out the guardians and tell them, and God took away his speech once more, and his sight too, so he could not speak or see anything. So they beat him and drove him away, and he tumbled into a valley, and ran in it, confused, until he swore before God that if He restored his speech and sight to him, he would not show anyone the way to Moses, but would stay with him and guard him, wherever he might be. And God knew that he was truthful, and He restored his speech and sight and he fell to the ground before God prostrating himself. He knew that this was from God, and he believed in Him and put his trust in Him.

"Then Moses' mother took him and cast him into the river; this

happened after she had nursed him for three months. At that time, Pharaoh had a daughter but he had no child beside her. To him she was the most precious person, and every day she had three wishes that she would put before him. She suffered from severe leprosy, and Pharaoh had assembled for her the physicians and sorcerers of Egypt, and they examined her. They said to him, 'O king, we think that she cannot be cured except by something in the form of a human being to be taken out of the river. A bit of its spittle may be taken and smeared on her leprous skin, and she will be cured of it. That will be on such-and-such a day of such-and-such a month at such-and-such an hour, at sunrise.' When Monday came, Pharaoh went early for a council he held on the shore of the Nile, and his wife Āsiyah bt. Muzāḥim came with him. Then the daughter of Pharaoh came with her servant girls and sat down with them on the bank of the Nile. While they were playing with each other, splashing water into each other's faces, suddenly the Nile brought the box, the waves beating against it. Pharaoh said, 'Surely there is something in the river which is caught on a tree. Bring it to me.' They caught up with it in boats and brought it before him. They tried hard to open the box, but could not; then they attempted to break it open and failed. Then Āsiyah came forward and saw a light inside the box no one beside her could see, for this was the way God wished to honor her and guide her to the true faith. She tried and opened the box, and behold! there was a little boy in his cradle with a light between his eyes. God had placed his sustenance in his thumb, whence he sucked milk, and God cast love for Moses into her heart, and Pharaoh loved him and felt affection towards him. The daughter of Pharaoh approached Moses, and when he was taken him out of the box, took the spittle that flowed from his mouth and smeared her leprous skin with it and she was cured. She kissed him and pressed him to her bosom, but the tempters among Pharaoh's people said, 'O king, we think that the newborn child of the Children of Israel, against whom you were warned, is this one. Cast him into the river or kill him!' Pharaoh intended to kill him, but Āsiyah asked him to give her the child, and he did so. Then he said, 'Name him!' and she said, 'I have named him Mūsā, for he was found between the water and the trees.'"<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> But see n. 17 above.

They say that Moses' mother said to his sister, whose name was Miriam (*Maryam*), "*Inquire after him,*" (28:11) meaning by this, "Follow his traces and seek him out; perhaps you will hear whether he is alive or whether the beasts of the river have killed him," thus she forgot God's promise. *Miriam kept an eye on him from afar*, or from the distance, *while they were not aware that she was his sister.* (28:25) Āsiyah had sent word to every woman around her who had milk in order to choose a nurse who would bring up Moses. But whenever one of these women took Moses to nurse him, he would not accept her breast. Now Āsiyah was concerned that he would be deprived of milk and would die. This aggrieved her and she ordered that he be taken out to the marketplace, so that the people would gather around him, thereby hoping to find a wet nurse for him he would accept and whose breast he would take and suck. But he would not accept any woman's breast, for that is His word, "*And We made (Moses) refuse a wet-nurse.*" (28:12)—when they all were wearied by fondling him, as were the wet-nurses, Moses' sister said—"*Should I lead you to a family which will take charge of him for you, and who will look after him?*" (ibid.) They seized her and said, "How do you know of their goodwill toward him? Perhaps you already know this boy—now lead us to his family!" She said, "I do not know them. Their goodwill toward him and their concern for him is due only to their wish for the king's wet-nurse and to be of use to him." So they let go of her, and she went to his mother and told her the story. When she put him in her lap and held him to her breast, the milk ran down from her breast until it filled up everything around them. The messenger hurried to bring Āsiyah the good news: "we have found a wet-nurse for your son." She sent for her and she was brought, but when she realized what was to be done to her, she said to her, "Stay with me and nurse this son of mine, for I have never liked anything as much as loving him." She said, "I cannot leave my house and my children, lest they perish. If it please you to give him to me, I shall take him to my house and my children, and he will stay with me, and I shall confer only good upon him. But if you do not grant this to me, I shall not leave my house and children." For Moses' mother remembered what God had promised her, so she behaved harshly with Pharaoh's wife, for she knew with certainty that God will fulfill His promise. Then she returned to her house with her son immediately.

It is said that Moses' absence from his mother lasted three days, whereupon God returned him to her, for that is His word, "*So We*



*restored him to his mother, that she might be comforted and not grieve.*" (28:13) When his mother brought him to her house, she almost said, "This is my son," but God protected her, for that is His word, "*And she would almost have betrayed him, if We had not fortified her heart, that she might be of the believers.*" (28:10) God reared him well and protected him. When he grew up, Āsiyah said to Moses' mother, "I should like you to show me your son," so she named a day on which she would show him to her. Āsiyah said to her confidantes and housekeepers, "Every one of you must greet my son with a gift and a token of esteem, for I am sending a trusted woman to count what each housekeeper among you does." Now the gifts and precious objects kept on greeting him from the time he was taken out of his mother's house until he came in to the wife of Pharaoh. When he came in to her room, she honored him and rejoiced in him, and was pleased, seeing his mother's good influence on him. Then she said to her, "Take him to Pharaoh so that he may honor him." When she brought him in to Pharaoh, he took him and sat him in his lap. Moses reached for Pharaoh's beard and pulled it, plucking out some hairs, for Pharaoh had a long beard. It is said that he slapped his face.

Certain accounts tell that he used to play in front of Pharaoh holding a small stick in his hand, and once struck him on the head with it. Pharaoh became very angry with him and saw therein an evil omen, saying, "This is my enemy that I am seeking." He sent for the killers to slay him, but news of it reached the wife of Pharaoh. She ran to him and said, "What has come into your mind about this boy whom you have given me?" He told her what Moses had done and she said, "But he is only a child who does not understand! He only did this because of his young age. I shall place something before him,—here, between the two of us, by which you will know the truth. I shall put in front of him a trinket of gold and sapphire, and I shall put in front of him a live coal. If he takes the sapphire, then he understands, and you may kill him; but if he takes the coal, you will know that he is only a lad." Thereupon she placed before him a basin in which were the gold and sapphire, and another basin in which was the coal. Moses stretched out his hand in order to take the jewel and seize it, but Gabriel turned his hand away to the coals, and he grabbed a coal and put it in his mouth. It touched his tongue and burned it, and that is what the Exalted One said, "*Remove the defect from my tongue, that they may understand my speech.*"

(20:27–28) Āsiyah said to him, “Do look at what he has done. Surely he is only a boy who does not understand—all the more reason to refrain from killing him.” Thus God diverted this evil from him, and he continued to be beloved and favored in Pharaoh’s house. God endeared him to Pharaoh and to all people, so that everyone who saw him loved him.

It is related that Iblīs was asked, “Have you ever loved anyone among human beings?” He said, “No, except Moses, son of Amram.” They asked him, “How so?” He replied, “Because God said, ‘*And I endowed you with love from Me,*’ so I could not refrain from loving him.” (20:39)

### *Chapter III The Appearance of Moses Son of Amram, and of Aaron*

Ka’b al-Aḥbār said, “Aaron son of Amram, the prophet of God, was a man of eloquent speech and clear words. When he spoke, it was with deliberation and knowledge. He was taller than Moses, and had a mole on his head, and a black mole, too, on the tip of his tongue. Moses, son of Amram, was a man with a ruddy skin, curly hair, and was tall, as though he was of the men of Azd Shanū’ah.<sup>12</sup> Moses had an impediment and heaviness in his speech, yet also haste and hurry. He too, had a black mole on the tip of his tongue.”

### *Chapter IV The Story of How He Slew the Copt, How He Left Egypt, and Came to Midian*

The (Qur’ān) commentators have said that when Moses son of Amram reached maturity he used to ride in Pharaoh’s carriages and wear what Pharaoh used to wear, and he was called Moses son of Pharaoh. Because of him the Children of Israel were spared much of the oppression and forced labor that used to be their lot. This was all because of the nursing. They continue: One day Pharaoh was riding in a carriage and Moses was not with him. When Moses came, he was told that Pharaoh had gone out riding, so Moses went out after him. He arrived during a midday siesta in the city called Memphis, entering it at high noon. The marketplaces were already locked up, and no one was on the streets, for this is what God has

<sup>12</sup> A tribe of Arabia.

said, *“And he entered the city at a time when its folk were unheeding.”* (28:15) While walking in some part of the city, he suddenly came upon two men fighting. One of them was of the Children of Israel, and the other was of Pharaoh’s people, as God has said, *“And he found there two men quarreling, one belonging to his own party, the other to his enemies. [The man who belonged to his party appealed for help against the one who belonged to the enemies. Moses struck him a blow with his fist and killed him. ‘This is of Satan’s doing,’ he said. ‘He is certainly an enemy and a corrupter.’]”* (ibid.) The man of his own party was named al-Sāmīrī,<sup>13</sup> and the other, belonging to his enemies, was an Egyptian, a baker of Pharaoh’s, named Fātūn. He had bought firewood for the kitchen and had forced al-Sāmīrī to carry it, but he refused. When Moses passed by him al-Sāmīrī called for help against the Egyptian, and Moses said to the Egyptian, “Leave him alone!” The baker said to Moses, “I am only taking him for your father’s work,” and refused to let him go. Moses became angry and snatched him away, releasing al-Sāmīrī. But the Egyptian fought with him, so Moses struck him with his fist and killed him, although he did not wish to kill him. For this is God’s word, *“Moses struck him a blow with his fist and killed him.”* He (that is, Moses) said, *“This is of Satan’s doing. He is certainly an enemy and a corrupter.”* Then he said, *“O Lord, I have done wrong, forgive me.”* Then He forgave him. *“Verily He is forgiving and kind.”* (28:16)

Wahb said, “God inspired Moses, son of Amram, ‘By My Power and My Glory! If the soul you have slain had acknowledged to Me, for the duration of the blinking of an eye, that I am a god who creates and sustains, I would have made you taste punishment. But I forgave you because that soul did not acknowledge for even a brief moment that I am God Who creates and sustains.’” They say that when Moses slew the Egyptian, no one saw the two of them except God and the Israelite. When he slew him, *‘in the morning he came to the city, fearing, vigilant’* (28:18) waiting for reports. They came to Pharaoh and said to him, The Children of Israel have slain a man of the folk of Pharaoh, so exact our due for us and do not lower the price for them in this matter. Pharaoh said, ‘Bring me his slayer and whoever witnessed it, because it is not right to judge without evidence, and dominion cannot stand firm upon wrongful seizure. Now go and search.’ While they were making the rounds, unable

<sup>13</sup> Possibly “Samaritan.” See the later use of this name in connection with the story of the Golden Calf.

to find evidence, behold Moses was passing by in the morning. He saw the same Israelite fighting a Pharaonite,<sup>14</sup> and the Israelite called to him for help to fight the Pharaonite. As it happened he now met Moses while he was regretting what he had done on the previous day and abhorred that which he saw. Moses became angry, stretched out his hand wishing to assault the Pharaonite, and said to the Israelite, "*You are indeed a meddling fellow*" (ibid.) The Israelite fled from Moses, thinking that he would assault him, because he spoke harshly with him and was angry. When he approached to help him and stretched forth his hand, he thought that he wanted to kill him, so he said to him, "*O Moses, do you want to kill me as you killed that person yesterday? [You only want to be a tyrant in the land and no peacemaker.]*" (28:19) He said this only out of fear of Moses, thinking that Moses intended him, although he did not intend him—rather he intended the Pharaonite. The two of them contended with each other, and the Pharaonite went and told them what he had heard from the Israelite, reporting that it was Moses who had killed the man the previous day. As the current proverb says: 'A reasonable foe is easier on you than a foolish friend.' And people recite this line on that theme:

*The sensible man—even if his hatred is great—  
is easier for you than a foolish friend.*

He continued, "When Pharaoh was informed of that, he sent out the executioners with orders to kill Moses, saying to them, 'Seek him out, for he is a youth who will not find his way to the road.' So they looked for Moses in the narrow mountain paths, but Moses traveled along the high road.

Now a man of his own party came to him from the most distant parts of the city. His name was Ḥizqīl and he had held on to a remnant of the creed of Abraham and was the first who declared that Moses was truthful and believed in him. It is told that the Prophet said, "Three men were the first among the nations who did not reject God—not even for one instant: Ḥizqīl, the believer among the people of Pharaoh; Ḥabīb the carpenter, who had the *Sūrah* of *Yā Sīn* (*Sūrah* 36); and 'Alī, son of Abū Ṭālib—may God honor him in Paradise—and he is the most distinguished of them."

He continued: "Ḥizqīl, the believer among Pharaoh's people, came

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<sup>14</sup> Note this sudden change from Copt to Pharaonite in naming an Egyptian.

and told Moses of Pharaoh's orders that he be killed. Ḥizqīl took a short, nearby road whence he arrived before the executioners, and he had given him the information, for that is the word of the Exalted, 'And a man came from the uttermost part of the city running. He said, 'O Moses, the chiefs are deliberating against you to slay you; depart. I am one of your sincere advisers.' (28:20) but Moses was confused and did not know where to go. Then an angel came to him on a horse with a spear in his hand. He said, 'Follow me.' He followed and he led him on the road to Midian."

According to a tradition related from Sa'īd b. Jubayr, Ibn 'Abbās said that Moses left Egypt for Midian, (and between them is a journey of eight days and nights, or, according to others, about the distance from al-Kūfāh to Baṣrah) having no food other than the leaves of trees. When he arrived there the sole of his foot was worn off, and the green of the herbage could be seen in his stomach.

*Chapter v How Moses entered Midian and how Shu'ayb gave His Daughter to Him in Marriage*

The sages have said: When Moses reached the land of Midian eight days and nights later, he sat down at the trunk of a tree, and behold, there was a well under it—the one of which God said, "*And when he came to the waters of Midian, he found a company of men there drawing water. And he found, apart from them, two women holding back their flocks. (That is to say, the two of them were restraining their sheep,) and he said to them, 'What troubles you?' The two said, 'We cannot water our flocks until the shepherds have driven away theirs'*"—meaning, because we are two weak women unable to contest with the shepherds. After they have watered their cattle, we water our flocks from what they leave over in their troughs and have not used,—"*and our father is a very old man*" (28:23)—meaning Shu'ayb.

Ḥamād b. Salamah—Abū Ḥamzah—Ibn 'Abbās, "The name of the father of Moses' wife, the one who hired him, was Thabrūn; he was the lord of Midian, and son to the brother of Shu'ayb the prophet. The name of one of the two young women was Liyā, (according to others: Ḥanūnā) the name of the other was Zipporah (Ṣafūrā), and she was the wife of Moses. When the two said that to Moses, he had pity on them. There was a well there with a large stone on its top, and a number of men would gather there to lift it off its top."

Master Abū Saʿīd ʿAbd al-Malik b. Abī ʿUthmān, the preacher, recounted that the well in question was not the one from which the shepherds would draw water, and said, “I have visited it and have seen it.” He continued, “Moses lifted the stone off its top; he took a bucket of theirs and said, ‘Bring your sheep,’ and he watered their flocks for them until he quenched their thirst. They returned to their father hurriedly before the men. *Then Moses turned away to the shade—the shade of the tree—and said, ‘My Lord, I have need of whatever good You send down for me.’*” (28:24) Ibn ʿAbbās said, “Moses said this because if a man had wished to see the green of his bowels due to his great hunger, he could have seen it; for Moses never asked God for anything except food.” Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad al-Bāqir said, “He said it needing no more than a date pit.” They said, “When the two returned to their father, he said to them, ‘What made you rush and hurry your return home this evening?’ They said, ‘A good man found us and pitied us, and watered our flocks for us.’ He said to one of them, ‘Go and call him to me!’ So one of them came to him—she was the one whom Moses married—walking modestly, and said to him, *‘My father invites you, that he may repay you for having watered our flock for us.’* (28:25) So Moses arose and she preceded him while he was following her, that is to say, he went behind her. Then a wind blew and pressed the woman’s garment against her buttocks. Moses was loathe to see this on her, so he said to her, ‘Walk behind me and direct me on the way. If I err, throw a pebble in front of me so I may follow the track, for we sons of Jacob do not gaze at women’s rumps.’ So she described to him the way to her father’s house, and walked behind him until he came to Shuʿayb. Shuʿayb asked Moses about his concerns and his story, so “when he told him the story, he said, *‘Be not afraid! You have escaped from the wicked people.’*” (ibid.) *Then one of the two women said—she was the one who had been the messenger to Moses—‘O my father, hire him! For the best (man) you can hire is one who is strong and trustworthy.’* (28:26)

The Prophet said, “Two women were the most insightful of all women, both observing Moses and making the right judgment: one was the wife of Pharaoh when she said, *‘He will be a comfort to you and to me. Do not kill him.’* (28:9) The other was the daughter of Shuʿayb when she said, *‘O my father, hire him! For the best (man) you can hire is the one who is strong and trustworthy’* (28:26) She said ‘strong and trustworthy’ because he removed the large stone which only forty men could lift. Then her father said to her, ‘You may know

that he is strong: what makes you know that he is trustworthy?' So she told him that Moses had asked her to walk behind him on the path, and Shu'ayb's desire for him increased, and he said to him, *'I desire to marry you to one of these my two daughters, on condition that you hire yourself to me for eight years. [If you complete ten, that shall be of your own accord. I do not want to press you. You will surely find me, God willing.] one of the righteous.'* (28:27) meaning, in good friendship relations with you and fulfilling your condition. Moses said, *'This is agreed between you and me. Whichever term I fulfill, [no injustice will be done to me. God is witness to our agreement].'*" (28:28)

It is related that the Messenger of Allah was asked, "Which of the two terms did Moses complete?" He said, "The fuller and the preferable of the two (in his eyes)." And it is related that he also said, "He completed the fuller of the two (terms, *i.e.*, ten years) and married the younger of the two women."<sup>15</sup>

#### *Chapter 17 A Description of the Staff of Moses and its Story*

The sages differ about its name; the benefits it held, and the evidence of God's omnipotence it manifested. They said, "Then Shu'ayb ordered his daughter to bring him a staff he might give Moses, to be useful to him in his herding. She brought him a staff, but that staff had been with him for safekeeping, was handed to him by an angel in the likeness of a man. Shu'ayb returned it to her and ordered her to bring him another staff. She continued to return and bring him the very same staff, because whenever she returned it to its place, intending to take another one, that same staff fell into her hand. She kept doing this until at last Shu'ayb took it and gave it to Moses. But after he had given it to him, he felt regret, because it was his for safekeeping. So Shu'ayb said to him, 'Return the staff to me.' But he refused to give it back to him, and they quarreled until they agreed on a condition that they would accept the judgment of the first man who would come to them. An angel came walking to them and they sought his judgment. He said, 'Place it on the ground, and whoever lifts it, it is his.' Moses placed it on the ground, and the old man tried but could not lift it. Then Moses took it in his hand and raised it. When Shu'ayb saw this, he let him keep it."

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the story of Jacob and Laban in Gen. 29.

According to another account, Moses stayed with Shu'ayb as God willed, then asked him for permission to depart; he gave him leave and said to him, "Enter this house and take one of the staffs, so it may be with you to ward off wild beasts from yourself and your sheep." Now Shu'ayb kept the staff of the prophets, and when Moses came into the house, the staff leapt up to him and came to rest in his hand, and he left with it. But Shu'ayb said, "Return it and take another one." That was because Shu'ayb had been told about the staff, but did not know that Moses was its owner. So Moses brought it back to the house and threw it down and went to take another one, but again it leapt up and came to rest in his hand, he repeated this several times. Shu'ayb said, "Did I not tell you to take another one?" Moses said, "I have returned it several times, but whenever I did, it leapt into my hand." Now Shu'ayb understood that this was a matter that God wanted, and he said to him, "Take it."

They continued, "He gave his daughter to him in marriage, and Moses herded his flocks for him for ten years. Sons were born to Moses from the daughter of Shu'ayb. After Moses left Midian and came to Egypt, Shu'ayb would visit him every year, and when he ate, Moses would stand before him, break bread for him, place it before him, and say, 'Eat!'"

Muqātil said, "Nay, rather it was Gabriel who handed the staff to Moses when he was heading for Midian by night." Ka'b said, "When 'Abdallāh b. 'Amr b. al-Āṣ came to Mecca, I said, 'Ask him about three things, and if he is able to provide you with information, then he is a learned man. Ask him about some thing of the Garden which God has set aside for humans, and about the first thing placed on Earth, and about the first tree that was planted on Earth.' 'Abdallāh was asked about these and answered, 'As for the thing in the Garden which God placed on Earth for mankind, it is the Black Corner;<sup>16</sup> as for the first thing which He placed on Earth for mankind, it is the well of Barhūt in the Yemen, to which travel the spirits of unbelievers; and as for the first tree which God placed on Earth, it is the box-thorn, from which Moses cut his staff.' When Ka'b heard this, he said, 'The man speaks the truth and in agreement with this teaching, for, as he said, indeed that tree from which Moses cut his staff, and through that staff God manifested His power,

<sup>16</sup> *I.e.*, the Corner of the Ka'bah in Mecca in which the Black Stone is placed.



and Moses' miracle was in it." Ibn 'Abbās said, "The ruler of Byzantium wrote to Mu'āwiyah asking him about four things which did not move in a womb. When Mu'āwiyah read the letter, he said, 'May God confound him! What do I know about those things?' Someone said to him, 'Write to Ibn 'Abbās and ask him about that.' He did so, inquiring about it, and Ibn 'Abbās wrote him in reply, 'As for the four things which did not move in a womb, they are Adam and Eve, the ram by which Ishmael was redeemed, and the staff of Moses which, when he cast it down, became a serpent.'"

Most scholars say that the staff of Moses was taken from the myrtle of the Garden; it was ten cubits in length—just as the height of Moses—and Adam carried it from the Garden to Earth and bequeathed it from generation to generation, until it reached Shu'ayb, who gave it to Moses. The sages have differed about its name. Sa'īd b. Jubayr said, "Its name was Māsā," but Muqātil b. Sulaymān said, "Its name was Naf'ah (useful)," while Ibn Ḥabbān said, "Its name was Ghiyāth (aid, succor)," and others have said its name was 'Ulayq (twining shrub, the burning bush?).

#### *Chapter VII The Uses it Held for Moses*

People who know the stories of past generations say that Moses' staff had two prongs with a hook at the end of each, and a spearhead at the tip of the staff. When Moses entered a desert at night and there was no moon, the two prongs would light the way for him like two boughs of fire as far as the eye could see. When he needed water he would let down the staff into a well, and it would extend down to its bottom. At its tip, the staff had something like a pail, with which he would draw water. If he needed food, he would strike the earth with the staff and bring forth what he would eat that day. If he desired a certain fruit, he would plant it in the ground and it would sprout branches of that very tree whose fruit he had desired, and it would bear fruit for him immediately. It is said that the staff of Moses was from the almond-tree, and when he became hungry he would stick it in the ground and it would sprout leaves and bear fruit, and he would eat almonds from it. Every time he confronted his enemy with it, two dragons would appear on its prongs to do battle. With it he would strike every rugged mountain that was hard to ascend, and the stones and the thorns, and it would open a way for him. And even when he wanted to cross any river without a

boat he would strike it with the staff, and it would split and a wide-open path would present itself to him. From one of the prongs he would drink honey, and milk from the other. When he became tired on the road he would mount the staff and it would carry him wherever he wished without him moving his feet and it showed him the road. It would do battle with his enemies for him. When he desired perfume, perfume would waft from it; and he would perfume himself and his clothing. If he was on a path where there were robbers whom the people feared, the staff would speak to him and say, "Take such-and-such a slope and do not go in such-and-such a direction." He would chop off leaves for the cattle with it, and drive beasts, insects, and snakes away from them. When he traveled he put the staff on his shoulder and hanged from it his provisions and belongings, his feedbag and slingshot, his clothing, food and drink.

Ibn Ḥabbān said that when Shu'ayb gave Moses his daughter in marriage and handed over to him his herds to pasture, he told Moses, "Take these sheep with you; when you come to the crossroads, go to the left; do not go to the right even though the grass there is more abundant; for a mighty dragon is there and I fear it might harm you and the sheep." Moses led the sheep away, and when he reached the crossroads they were about to go to the right. He tried hard to direct them to the left, but they did not obey him, so he let them do what they wanted. Then Moses fell asleep while the sheep were grazing; all of a sudden, the dragon appeared. The staff stood up straight; it did battle with the dragon and slew it, then it came back and lay down beside Moses besmeared with blood. When Moses awoke, he saw the staff covered with blood, and the dragon slain. Then he knew that God's power was in that staff and he understood that it had great importance. These then were the feats of Moses' desire when he held the staff in his hand, but when he cast it down, he would see it turn into a snake the size of the largest red serpent, very black, crawling, and its two prongs becoming a mouth with twelve fangs and a molar tooth that screeched and creaked as flames of fire came out of it. Then its crook became a crest, appearing like burning fire, its eyes flashing like a stroke of lightning and hot winds blowing from it. Whatever the serpent touched it destroyed with its fire; it would pass by a rock the size of a big-humped camel and swallow it, and the rock pieces would rattle in its belly. When passing by trees it shattered them with its fangs, breaking and swallowing them, then smacking its lips impatiently

as though looking for something to eat. It also possessed the strength of such a serpent, yet was swift as a demon, and supple as a (common) snake. All of this accords with the text of the Qur'ān where God says in one verse, "And it became a serpent manifest," (26:32) and in another, "As it had been a demon," (27:10) and in another, "And lo, it was a snake gliding." (20:20)

*Chapter VIII How Moses Leaves Midian, God Speaks to Him on the Way, and Sends Him to Pharaoh, Moses Asks God to let his Brother Aaron Help Him, and How they Came to Pharaoh to Accomplish their Mission*

God has said, "When Moses had fulfilled the term [and jwas traveling with his household, he observed on the side of the mount a fire.]" (28:29) Scholars of the biographies of the prophets have said, "When Moses had arrived in the land of Midian, (nine years had now passed since he arrived), Shu'ayb had said to him, 'I give you every varicolored male and female of the offspring of my flocks which will be born during this year'—that is, the tenth year, thereby desiring to be charitable to Moses and strengthen the bond to his daughter Zipporah, the wife of Moses. So God revealed to Moses, 'Strike the water in the trough of the flocks with your staff,' and Moses did so, and he watered the flocks with that water. Now not one of those sheep failed to bear both male and female varicolored lambs twice. Then Shu'ayb understood that this was a blessing that God sent to Moses and his family, he fulfilled his promise to Moses and handed over to him the sheep which he had granted him freely. So Moses stayed the fuller and more complete of the two terms."

"Then when Moses had fulfilled the term, and was traveling with his household," (ibid.) separating himself from the land of Midian. It was winter and he was travelling with his wife and his flocks; and she was in that month wherein she did not know whether she would give birth that night or day. He set off in the desert of Syria, keeping away from the towns and settlements for fear of the rulers who were in Syria. His greatest concern at that time was to seek out his brother Aaron and bring him out of Egypt if he were able to do so. Moses was traveling in the desert, not knowing its paths, when the jour-

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<sup>17</sup> Also called *Sīnā'*, though text has *al-Tūr*, the common name for this mountain in the Qur'ān.

ney brought him to the western, right-hand side of Mount (Sinai)<sup>17</sup> on a very cold, rainy evening. The night became dark, and the sky began to thunder and flash with lightning and it rained, and birth-pangs took hold of his wife. Moses took up his flintstone and striking-iron, but no fire came. He was at a loss and alarmed, for he had never witnessed the like of this with a flint. He began to look out near and far, confused and troubled. Then he listened for a long time in order to hear a sound or movement. Suddenly he saw a light from the direction of the mountain and thought it was a fire—*“He said to his folk, ‘Wait here. I have seen a fire afar off. Perhaps I may bring you news of it, or an ember from the fire’”* (28:29)—meaning someone who would lead me to the path, for he had lost his way. When he reached it he saw a mighty light extending from the horizon to a large tree there. There is disagreement about the kind of tree it was; some say it was a box-thorn, and some say a jujube. Moses was baffled, and his whole body shook with fear when he saw a very big fire which had no smoke but was flaring up and blazing from the inside of a green tree: as the fire grew more intense, the tree became greener. When Moses drew near the fire, it drew away, seeing this, he retreated, for he was afraid. Then he remembered that he needed the fire and returned to it, and it too drew near him. Then a voice called out from the right side of the valley, in the sacred hollow, coming from the tree, *“O Moses”*. He looked, but saw no one, and again a voice called out, *“I am God, the Lord of all Being.”* (28:30) When he heard these words, he knew that this was his Lord; and his Lord called out to him, *“Come close and approach”*. When he drew near and heard the call and saw that awesome sight, his heart throbbed, his tongue became feeble, his body weakened, and he now was as much dead as alive—only the breath of life in him continued to come and go, then, though his body was motionless, God sent an angel to him to strengthen his courage and fortify his heart. When he recovered his senses, he was called, *“Take off your shoes, for you are in the holy valley of Tuwa.”* (20:12) The reason for His order that he take off his shoes was: we were told by Ḥāmid b. ‘Abdallāh al-Aṣbahānī—Yaḥyā al-Suddī—Aḥmad b. Bajdah—al-Jamālī—‘Īsā b. Yūnus—Ḥumayd—‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd the Prophet, who said about His words, *“Take off your shoes,”* *“They were from the hide of a dead ass.”* But some other accounts say from untanned hide.

Mujāhid and ‘Ikrimah said, *“Not so! Rather He said, ‘Take off your*

*shoes*' so that the soles of his feet should touch the good land and bestow upon him its blessing, for it was twice blessed." Sa'īd b. Jubayr said, "No! He said it because being barefoot is among the signs of humility and respect, for he was told, 'Tread this earth barefoot, as you would enter the Ka'bah, so you might attain the blessing of the valley.'" Those who understand symbols have said, "A shoe means a woman, and that is how it is interpreted in dreams. Therefore he was told, 'Empty your heart of preoccupation with your wife.'"

Then He said, so as to calm his heart and take away his bewilderment, "*What is that in your right hand, Moses?*" He said, "*This is my staff. [I lean on it, and with it I beat down leaves to feed my sheep; other uses also I find in it.]*" And God said, "'Cast it down, Moses!' So he cast it down, and behold it was a serpent, sliding." (20:17–20) Its two prongs became its mouth, and its hook a mane on its back, and it had quivering fangs, and was as God wished it to become, so Moses witnessed an amazing thing "*and turned his back and fled without turning (to look).*" But his Lord called to him, "*O Moses! Draw near and have no fear; for you will be safe.* (28:31) *We shall return it to its former state*" (20:21)—that is, We shall make it a staff again as it was.

It is said that the wisdom in God's commanding him to cast down the staff before he reached Pharaoh was so that Moses might not be terrified when he sees it in (its changed) state before Pharaoh. Then when Moses drew nigh, He said to him, "'Grasp it, for it was your staff, and fear not," for he had claimed ownership. Then he said, "It is my staff," pointing to it. Moses was wearing a woolen garment and he rolled his sleeve over his hand, for he was afraid of the snake, and there was a voice, "Lay bare your hand," and he removed the sleeve from his hand; then he inserted his hand under its two jawbones, and as he did so, he grasped . . . and behold, it was his staff in his hand, and his hand was between the staff's two branches where he used to put it. Then He said to him, "*Put your hand into the bosom of your robe, it will come out white without blemish*" (27:12) (a different verse.)<sup>18</sup> He said "*into the bosom of your robe*" because his garment did not have a wide sleeve; rather, it was tight on him. He placed his hand in his bosom and then withdrew it, and behold, it was a blazing light which the sight is too weak to endure. Then

<sup>18</sup> *I.e.*, Qur'ān 28: 32 (a very similar verse).

he put it back and it came forth as it had been, the color of his hand. God said, "*Then these shall be two proofs from your Lord unto Pharaoh and his nobles. [They are certainly a rebellious people.]*" (28:32) Then He said, "*Go unto Pharaoh, Lo! He has transgressed.*" But Moses said, "*My Lord! I have killed a man of theirs, and I fear that they will kill me. My brother Aaron is more eloquent than I. [Send him with me as a helper and to confirm I speak truly, for I fear they] will give the lie to me.*" (28:33-34) Then He said to him, "Moses, I shall surely grant you a place where I will allow no one to have power over you—other than Myself. Nor should anyone after you hear My words, for you are in the closest place to Me." At that time Moses was wearing a long woolen coat open in the front whose sides he made hold together with a wooden pin; an upper gown with very long sleeves made of wool; garments of wool, and a woolen head-covering. God would speak to him and empower him saying, "Moses, go forth with My message; you will be in My sight and hearing, and My power and eyesight will be with you. I am sending you to a weak creature among My creation who has disregarded My grace and has felt secure against My devising. He has worshipped gods other than Me. The world has so much deluded him that he denied My right, disavowed My divinity, and claimed that he does not know Me. I swear by My might and glory, if not for the proof and might which I have established between Me and My creation, I would strike him the strike of a mighty giant whose anger enkindles the rage of the heavens and the earth, of the seas and trees and the beasts. If I permitted it, the heavens would rain pebbles on him; the Earth would swallow him; the mountains would level him; the seas would drown him. However, he has become contemptible in My eyes, despicable, insignificant, though My forbearance encompasses him. I am not in need of him nor for all of My creation—so it ought to be, for I am the creator of rich and poor—there is no rich man but I have enriched him, nor poor man but I have impoverished him. Deliver My message to him and call him to worship Me; to acknowledge My unity, My vengeance and My harm. Remind him of My benefits and tell him to be faithful to Me and tell him that nothing stands up to my anger. But at the same time *speak to him regarding that softly; perhaps he will remember, or be afraid,* (20:44) and treat him with deference when you speak to him. But let not the worldly garment with which I have clothed him not frighten you, for I hold him by the forelock in My hand; he does not blink, nor utter a word, nor take

one breath except by My knowledge. And tell him that I forgive and pardon more speedily than I anger and punish. Say to him, 'Defer to your Lord, for He is lavish in forgiveness. For He has shown you forbearance all this long time, while you have been arrogating sovereignty to yourself with the exclusion of Him, refusing to worship Him. Yet all that while He asked the Heavens to rain upon you and the Earth to sprout seeds for you. He clothed you in health so that you did not become frail in age, or diseased, or destitute or be vanquished. But if He had wished, He would have avenged Himself on you and would have taken away from you what He had given you. Yet He possesses great forbearance.'

And He refrained from speaking to Moses for seven days and seven nights. After seven nights it was said to him, "Answer your Lord, Moses, concerning what He said to you." He said, "*My Lord! Relieve my mind [and make my mission easy. Untie the knot of my tongue that they may understand my words, and give me as assistant from my family Aaron my brother to strengthen me and share my task, that we may glorify You, and remember You abundantly.] Surely You see into us.*" (20:25-35) And God said, "You are granted your request, Moses. So wage war, you and your brother." Then this thought came to Moses' mind: "Pharaoh has great strength and many troops, whereas I and my brother are just two men alone." But God said to him, "You are two mighty armies of Mine, and I am with you, hearing, seeing and observing you, and shall be at your side, so you will not be deemed weak or be despised. If you wanted that I come with troops against him, I would. But let that weak wretch who admires himself and his troops know that a small band (for there is nothing trifling with Me) will subdue a numerous band if I will it. Do not marvel at his adornments, and do not be frightened by his multitudes. For if you wanted that I adorn you with the embellishments of this world and its splendor, so as to render Pharaoh and his princes speechless when he saw it, letting him know that his might was too feeble for that which I have bestowed upon you, I would do it. But do not be sad that I have kept from the two of you the goods of this world and its pomp. For that is My custom towards My saints and My chosen ones; to drive them away from the ease of this world and its pleasures as the compassionate shepherd drives his sheep away from bad pasture, so that you be paid in full your portion of My grace in the life to come. Know that no one among My worshippers can adorn

himself with any adornment more lasting than abstinence in this world, for it is the adornment of the pious."

It is said that God spoke to him during that period one hundred and fourteen thousand words, while Moses was saying to Him with each word, "I killed someone unjustly."

Someone said to Moses, 'How did you know that it was God who spoke to you?' He replied, "Because the speech of a creature is heard from only one direction and by means of one sense, namely hearing. I, however, used to hear God's words from all directions and with all my limbs, so I knew that it was the speech of God." It is said that when Moses ascended the mountain to talk with God in confidence, the mountain turned to red carnelian stone; and when Moses descended from it, it returned to its previous state. When Moses returned, the angel accompanied him.

Moses' heart was occupied with his child for he wanted to circumcise him. So God commanded an angel, then he put forth his hand, and his foot did not leave its place before the angel brought the child wrapped in a rag and handed him to Moses. Then he took two stones, and rubbed one against the other until he had sharpened it like a knife of iron, and circumcised his son with it. The angel then attended to the open cut of the circumcised child; he spat upon it and it healed immediately, by God's leave. The angel then returned him to the place from which he had taken him.

Now Moses' family had remained standing in that place (i.e., where he had left them), not knowing what Moses had done, until a shepherd of the people of Midian passed by who informed them and brought them back to Midian. They stayed with Shu'ayb until news of Moses reached them after he had split the sea and crossed it with the Children of Israel, and God drowned Pharaoh. Then Shu'ayb sent them to Egypt to Moses.

They said that Moses left forthwith after God sent him to Egypt without any knowledge of the road. But God guided him and showed him the way; he had no provisions, no weapons, no beast of burden, no companion, nothing but the staff and a long coat of wool, a woollen head covering, and sandals. He was fasting all the time and spent the night standing up; he sought sustenance from game and the herbs of the Earth until he reached Egypt. When he came near Egypt, God spoke to him, "Do not be afraid and do not be anxious." Then God spoke to Aaron, his brother, bringing him the



good news of Moses' arrival and telling him that He had made him his helper and a messenger, together with him, to Pharaoh. He commanded him to walk on Saturday, the first day of Dhū l-Ḥijjah, in disguise, to the banks of the Nile to meet Moses then and there.

He continued, "Aaron set out and Moses drew near and they met on the banks of the Nile before the sunrise. It happened that it was the day that the lions went down to the water—for Pharaoh had lions to guard him in a thicket surrounding the city on all sides. They would go down to the water every other day to drink. Pharaoh was at that time in a fortified city surrounded by seventy walls. Between each two walls there were fruit gardens and rivers alongside cultivated fields, and a wide expanse of land as a resting place for animals. Seventy thousand warriors were assigned to each wall. Beyond the city was a clump of trees by the water, which Pharaoh took upon himself to plant with his own hands. He worked there, watered it from the Nile, and populated it with lions who multiplied until they became numerous; he used them as one of his troops to be his guards. Around that forest he made paths that would lead those who followed them to certain gates of the city—there were no other paths leading to those gates—so anyone who missed them walked into the forest and was eaten by the lions. The lions who went down to the Nile would remain there all day, later at nightfall, they would come up again."

He continued, "Moses met Aaron on the day when the lions went down to the Nile. When they saw the two of them, they stretched out their necks and heads and fixed their eyes on them. But God cast fear into their hearts so they took off for the thicket in a great hurry, fleeing straight ahead, one trampling on the other, until they hid in the thicket. They had keepers who handled them and nobles who led them—that is they incited them and set them on people. Now when this happened to the lions, their keepers were filled with fear of Pharaoh—they were out of their wits with fear.

"Then Moses and Aaron rushed through that thicket until they came to the largest gate of the city, the gate nearest Pharaoh's palace—the one through which he could enter and depart. It was the night of Monday, one day after the new moon of Dhū l-Ḥijjah. They remained at the gate for seven days until one of the watchmen spoke to them, saying, 'Do the two of you know whose gate this is?' Moses said, 'This gate, and the entire Earth and all in it, belong to the Lord of all being, and its inhabitants are His slaves.'

That man heard words the likes of which he had never heard; nor did he think that any human could utter such words. When the man heard what he heard, he hastened to the important men who were his superiors and said, 'Today I heard words and I witnessed a thing most strange from two men who, in my eyes, are mightier and more horrible and frightening than that which befell us with the lions: those two would not have been able to venture to do what they did except by powerful magic,' and he told them the story. That account kept passing from to another of them until it reached Pharaoh."

According to al-Suddī and his chain of authorities, Moses traveled with his family towards Egypt and entered it by night. He came to his mother as a guest but she did not know who he was. When he came to her, on that night they were eating *tifshil*,<sup>19</sup> and he settled down in a corner of the house. Then Aaron came, and when he saw his guest he asked his mother about him and she told him that he was a guest, so he invited him and he ate with him. When the two of them sat down and began talking, Aaron asked him, 'Who are you?' He said, 'I am Moses.' So each arose and embraced the other. After they had recognized each other, Moses said, 'O Aaron, come with me to Pharaoh, for God has sent us to him;' and Aaron said, 'I hear and obey.' But their mother arose screaming and clamoring, 'I adjure you by God, do not go to Pharaoh, for he will kill you both!' But they refused to listen and went off in keeping with God's decree. They traveled at night and arrived at the gate. They sought entrance that night and knocked at the gate; Pharaoh and the gatekeeper were alarmed, and Pharaoh looked down upon them and said, 'Who is that knocking on my gate at this hour?' The gatekeeper looked down upon them and spoke to them, and Moses said to him, 'I am the messenger of the Lord of all Being.' The gatekeeper became frightened and went to Pharaoh to inform him of what he had heard, and said, 'There is a madman who claims that he is the messenger of the Lord of all Being.'"

Ibn Ishāq said, "When God sent Moses on his mission and he arrived in Egypt, he and his brother Aaron went to the gate of Pharaoh, seeking admittance to him. They said, 'Lo, we bear a message of the Lord of all Being.' According to what we have heard, for two years they kept coming to his gate in the morning and leav-

<sup>19</sup> A dish of grains, also a type of broth, or milk left in the udder. See 583 below.

ing in the evening: Pharaoh did not know of them, and no one dared tell him about them, until one of his court jesters, who used to play with him and make him laugh, entered and said to him, 'O king, two men are at your gate who are saying something strange. They claim that they have a god other than you.' Pharaoh said, 'Let them in,' so he let Moses enter, with Aaron at his side."

*Chapter IX Moses and Aaron enter unto Pharaoh*

God has said, "*And go together to Pharaoh and say*"; "*We bring a message from the Lord of all Being.*" (26:16) And He has said, "*And speak gently to him. He may possibly take heed or may come to fear.*" (20:44) 'Amr b. 'Ubayd cited al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī about this verse: "God said to the two of them, 'Give him a respite that he may be mindful or afraid. Therefore say to him, "There is a Lord for you and a Hereafter; within your reach is a Garden or a Fire," perchance he'll remember then or fear your warning, but I think that he will neither remember nor have fear.'" He added, "Lest he say, that I ruined him, before I gave him an opportunity."

He continued: When Pharaoh admitted Moses and Aaron they entered unto him, stood before him, and Moses uttered a prayer, "There is no god but God, the Patient, the Noble. There is no god but God, the Exalted, the Mighty. Praised be the Lord of the Seven Heavens and the Seven Earths and all that is in them and between them, the Lord of the Mighty Throne. And peace be upon the Messengers, and glory to God, Lord of all Being! Through You, my God, I ward off his killing, and with Your help I take refuge from his malice; I ask for Your help against him, and protect me however You wish!"

He continued: Thereupon all the fear that was in Moses' heart turned to certainty. And so it is for anyone who recites this prayer when in fear; God will allay his fear, dispel his grief, and make light for him the agony of death.

Pharaoh asked Moses, "Who are you?" "I am the Messenger of the Lord of all Being," he said. Pharaoh looked at him carefully and recognized him. He said, "*Did we not nurture you among us as one of our children, and you spent some years of your life among us, and you did that deed that you have done and are one of the ungrateful*" (26:18-19) that is, living among us, sharing this custom of ours, the one with which you now revile. Moses said, "*I did it then while I was one of those who are astray*"

(26:20)—namely, one of those who are at fault, but I did not desire that murder. *“Then I, fled from you because I feared you, and my Lord gave me wisdom and made me one of the messengers.”* (26:21)

Then Moses drew near and blamed him for the tyrannical hand he held over him, of which he reminded him, then saying, *“And that is a favor which you bestow on me, that you have subjugated the Children of Israel* (26:22)—taking them as slaves, tearing their sons from out of their hands, putting into bondage and slaying whomever you chose. This is what caused me to come to you.”

Pharaoh asked, *“What is the Lord of all Being?”* He said, *“The Lord of the Heavens and the Earth and all that lies between them, if only you had sure belief.”* Pharaoh said to those around him—of his leading men, *“Hear you not?”* (26:23–25)—rejecting what Moses said. *Moses continued, “Your Lord and the Lord of your ancient fathers.”* Pharaoh said, *“Lo! Your messenger who has been sent to you is indeed a madman”* (26:26–27)—meaning, these are not the words of a man of sound mind, since he claims that you have a god other than me. *Moses said, “Lord of the East and the West and all that is between them, if only you understood.”* (26:28) Then Pharaoh said to Moses, *“If you choose a god other than me, I shall surely place you among the prisoners.”* He said, *“Even though I show you something plain* (26:29:30) through which you will recognize my truth and your lie, my veracity and your falsehood?” Pharaoh said, *“Produce it then, if you are of the veracious, truthful.”* Then Moses flung down his staff and it became a living serpent. (26:31–32) It opened its mouth, and it filled the entire ground between the two wings of the palace. When it put its lower jaw on the ground and the upper on the town wall surrounding the palace, someone who was outside the city of Miṣr<sup>20</sup> saw its head. Then it turned toward Pharaoh to grab him and the people scattered in all directions. Pharaoh was so terrified that he jumped off his throne, dropping excrement; indeed, he had to rise forty times that day on account of his bowels. They claim that he never coughed, blew his nose, or had a headache, nor did any illness such as befalls people strike him. He would get up only once every forty days; he mostly ate bananas, for he had no saliva to need to rise. These were the things that led him to say what he said—for there was no human like him.

<sup>20</sup> *I.e.*, Egypt, the name of the country for the capital city as well is still done today, when *Miṣr* can mean either Egypt or Cairo.

They say that when the snake headed towards him, he shouted, "Moses, I adjure you by God and by the sanctity of the nursing mother and her infant: if you hold it and keep it away from me, I will believe in you and let the Children of Israel go with you." So Moses seized it, and it turned back into a staff as it had been. Then Moses removed his hand from his bosom and drew it forth, and Pharaoh said to him, "This is your hand, but what about it?" So Moses put it back into his bosom, then drew it forth, and a light was shining from it into the sky (so brilliant) that the eyes were too weak to behold it. Everything around the hand became illuminated, its light penetrated the houses and was seen through windows and from behind screens, so that Pharaoh was unable to look at it. Then Moses returned it to his bosom, then withdrew it again, and behold, it had its original color. They said that Pharaoh intended to believe in him, but Haman,<sup>21</sup> who was sitting in his presence, arose and said to him, "Whereas you are a god who is worshipped, you are following a slave." So Pharaoh said to Moses, "Give me a respite today and tomorrow." Then God said to Moses, "Say to Pharaoh, 'If you believe in God alone, I will shall grant you a long reign and make you a tender youth once again.'" Pharaoh asked him for a delay. On the next day, Haman entered and Pharaoh told him what Moses had promised to him from his Lord. Haman said to him, "By my troth! This can never measure up to worshipping these (idols) even if only for a single day." And he puffed up with pride and Haman said to him, "I shall make you young again." So he brought him a tattoo and dyed him with it. He was the first to use black tattoo, for this reason Muḥammad abhorred that and forbade it. When Moses entered to him and saw him in that condition, he was frightened, but God said to him, "Do not be frightened by what you see, for it will only last a short time until he will return to his original condition."

In one of the accounts it is told that when Moses and Aaron departed from Pharaoh, they were overtaken by rain on the road, so they went to an old woman, a relative of their mother. Pharaoh had sent out searchers after them, and when night came upon them they slept in the woman's home. The searchers came to the door

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<sup>21</sup> Here Haman, one of the chief figures of evil in the Qurʾān, is placed in the time of Pharaoh unlike the Biblical Haman of the much later Persian period.

while the old woman was awake, and when she became aware of them she feared for the two of them. The staff slipped out through the side of the door while the old woman was watching, and it fought with them and killed seven of them. Then it returned to the house. When Moses and Aaron awoke, the old woman told them what had happened with the searchers and how the staff did damage to them. Then the old woman believed in them and knew that they were truthful speakers.

*Chapter x How Moses and Aaron Encountered Pharaoh and the Sorcerers and their Departure to the Wilderness on the Day of the Feast of the Nile for the Contest*

Those knowledgeable about the tales of the prophets have said that Pharaoh ascribed the acts of Moses and Aaron, and the miracles they performed to him from God, to sorcery, and he said to the chiefs about him, "Lo! These two are knowing sorcerers, so what do you instruct?" They said, "Kill them." Then the pious servant Ḥizqīl, the believer among the folk of Pharaoh, said, "*Will you kill a man who says, 'My lord is God' [when he has brought clear signs from his Lord to you? If he is a liar his lie will recoil back on him; but if he speaks the truth, then what he predicts will befall you. Surely God does not show the way to the shameful liar. O my people, authority is yours today being the most powerful in the land; but who will save us from the scourge of God if it fall upon us?]*" "I show you," said the Pharaoh, "*only what I see (is right), and guide you to the] wise policy.*" (40:27-29) The chiefs from among the folk of Pharaoh said, "*Put him off, with his brother, and send into the cities summoners, who will bring you every knowing sorcerer.*" (26:36) Pharaoh had cities in which there were sorcerers ready for any matter that troubled him.

Ibn 'Abbās said, "When Pharaoh saw what he saw of God's power over the hand and staff, he said, 'We cannot confront Moses except by one who is like him.' So he took some youths of the Children of Israel and sent them to a city called al-Gharqā', that they might teach them sorcery, as they teach boys in school, and they taught them much sorcery. Then Pharaoh set a time for meeting Moses, and sent for the sorcerers and brought them with their teacher. He said to the teacher, 'What have you done?' Their teacher replied, 'I have taught them much mighty sorcery which none of the sorcerers of the Earth can master—except it be a matter from Heaven,

for over such they have no power.' Then Pharaoh dispatched some guards from his kingdom, and they left no sorcerer behind, but brought him." There is disagreement regarding the number of sorcerers whom Pharaoh gathered. Muqātil said that there were seventy-two sorcerers, two of them Copts, who were among the leaders of the group of the people, and seventy from the Children of Israel.

Al-Kalbī said that there were seventy sorcerers, not counting their leaders; and those who taught them sorcery were two Magians of the people of Nineveh.<sup>22</sup>

Ka'b said, "There were twelve thousand." But al-Suddī said, "They were some and thirty thousand;" 'Ikrimah said seventy thousand; Muḥammad b. al-Munkadar eighty thousand. What is generally accepted of these accounts is that Pharaoh, according to what has been told, assembled the sorcerers who were seventy thousand and chose from among them seven thousand who were none but the most skillful sorcerers; from among them he selected seven hundred, and from those he chose seventy who were the greatest and wisest among them.

Muqātil said that the name of the chief sorcerer was Sham'un, but Ibn Jurayj said it was Yūḥanā. 'Aṭā' said, "The chiefs of the sorcerers lived in the farthest reaches of Upper Egypt, and they were two brothers. When the messenger of Pharaoh came to them, they said to their mother, 'Lead us to our father's grave;' and she led them there. They drew near and called out his name, and he answered them. They spoke to him, 'The king has sent a messenger to us to go to him; he has been visited by two men who bore no arms and had no other men with them, yet were mighty and unassailable and the king was powerless to stand up to them. They brought along a staff and whenever they cast it down, nothing can stand in its way, it even swallows iron and wood and stones.' Their father said, 'Watch them when they sleep: if you can take away the staff, do so, for no sorcerer does work while he is sleeping. But if the staff does work while they are sleeping, then it must be the decree of the Lord of all being, and neither you nor the king nor all the people of this world have power against it.' So the two came to them secretly as they were sleeping to take away the staff, and the staff came towards them."

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<sup>22</sup> Magians, Persian priests of Zoroastrianism, see p. 14, n. 24 above.

They say: Then Moses set the date for the morning of the Feast of the Nile<sup>23</sup> that was a market day for them. According to Sa'īd b. Jubayr, Ibn 'Abbās said, 'It was the Day of 'Āshūrā',<sup>24</sup> which fell on the Sabbath, the first day of the year, that is the Day of Nayrūz.<sup>25</sup> It was a festival day for them, for which people used to assemble from all distant lands." 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd b. Aslam said, "The assembly took place at the appointed time in Alexandria. It is said that on that day the tail of the serpent reached the island beyond the river."

They said, "*The sorcerers spoke to Pharaoh, 'Will there surely be a reward for us if we are the victors?' Pharaoh said, 'Yes, and you will then surely be among the honored (26:41–42; 7:113–14) brought near to me'*—that is, in rank. After the sorcerers and the people had gathered, Moses came along, leaning on his staff, his brother Aaron walking with him. They arrived at the gathering while Pharaoh was sitting in council together with the nobles of his people. When he came to them, Moses said to the sorcerers *'Woe to you! Invent not a lie against God, lest he extirpate you by some punishment. He who lies fails miserably.'* (20:61) So the sorcerers whispered among themselves saying to one another, 'This is not the speech of a sorcerer,' for that is His word, *'Then they debated with one another what they must do, and they kept their counsel secret.'* The sorcerers said, 'We will bring you today sorcery the likes of which you have not seen.' And they said, *'By Pharaoh's might! Lo! Verily we are the victors.'*" (26:44) They had brought along staffs and cords which sixty camels carried, and when they refused except to persevere in sorcery, they said to Moses, *'Either throw (first) or let us be the first throwers.'* (7:115) Moses said to them, 'Nay, you throw your cords and staffs.' So they threw, and behold! They were serpents as big as mountains, which filled the valley, one riding the other as though they were running, for that is His word, *'By their magic, they appeared to him as though the [the cords and the staffs] were flying, and Moses conceived a fear.'* (20:66–67) Moses said, 'By God, verily they were staffs in their hands and they turned into serpents, and what is this staff of mine?' When he said that to himself, God spoke to

<sup>23</sup> The Feast of the Nile was celebrated when the river reached plenitude as determined by the Nilometer. See Popper, *The Cairo Nilometer*, pp. 82–85.

<sup>24</sup> See p. 101 n. 18 above.

<sup>25</sup> So in Arabic; in Iran called *Nayrūz*, originally an Iranian festival of Spring. See *EI2*, VII:1047.



him, saying, *“Fear not! You will certainly be the uppermost. Cast down what is in your right hand. It will swallow what they have wrought. (20:69) For they have wrought a sorcerer’s artifice, and a sorcerer does not prosper wherever he goes.’* Then Moses rejoiced and *“flung down his staff”* from his hand, and *“and behold! It became a serpent manifest,”* (7:107; 26:32) like the largest serpent there is, jet black, crawling on four short, thick, strong legs. It was mightier and taller than a large Bactrian camel. It had a tail on which it stood up erect and its head, neck, and upper back towered above the city walls. Whatever it struck with its tail, it broke and smashed into bits. With its feet it shattered hard and massive rocks, grinding everything to dust, with its breath of fire cutting through walls and houses. Its eyes flared up with flame, and its nostrils puffed a pestilential, hot wind; where a horse has its mane the serpent had hairs the likeness of spears; and the two prongs became a mouth, twelve cubits wide, with fangs and molars and a hissing, gnashing and grinding. And the serpent went forth against the sorcerers’ cords and staffs which they had cast down and which, in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his people, seemed as though it were running, and swallowed them one by one, until nothing of what they had cast down could be seen in the valley thereafter. The people of Pharaoh were routed in their flight, being knocked over and pushed against one another, trampling on each other, so much so that twenty-five thousand died in this rush on that day in that mob. Pharaoh, too, fled with the others, terrified, losing his senses. On that day his bowels were loosened four hundred times, and the same happened to him forty times every day and night continually until he perished.

When the people were routed and the sorcerers saw with their own eyes what they saw, they said to one another, *“If he were a sorcerer, he could not have triumphed over us, and his secret would have remained hidden from us. And if he were a sorcerer, where are our cords and staffs?”* And the sorcerers fell down in prostration, saying, *“We believe in the Lord of All-Being, the Lord of Aaron and Moses. (26:47–48) Among them were seventy-two old men, scholars and chiefs, whose backs were bent from age. The chiefs of the sorcerers were five: Ṣabūr, Ghādūr, Ḥafaz, Khiṭaṭ, and Muṣifā. They were the ones who became believers when they witnessed God’s might. But when Pharaoh saw all that, he felt regret and said to them, showing hardness, ‘You put faith in him before I give you leave. He is your chief who taught you sorcery. [I will have your hands and feet cut off*

on alternate sides and crucify you on the trunks of palm trees. You will come to know whose] punishment is sterner and more lasting.’” (20:71) They said, “We choose you not above the clear proofs that have come to us, [and over Him who created us. So do what you are determined to do. All that you would do will only be confined to our life on earth.]” (20:72) So he cut off their hands and feet alternately, and crucified them on trunks of palm trees. He was the first to do this. They had begun the day as unbelieving sorcerers, and ended it as pious martyrs. Pharaoh returned defeated, a broken man, but still refused to abandon his godlessness and persevered in his evil ways. Therefore God brought upon him and his people the signs and punished him and his people for years until He destroyed them.

Moses then returned to his people while the staff was in its form of a snake following him, or wagging its tail close by him, seeking shelter with him as a tame dog does with its master. People would look at it and marvel filled with terror. All the while, that staff remained in the form of a snake, people would talk and gaze at it and crowd together and press against each other, until Moses entered the camp of the Children of Israel, when he took hold of its head, and behold, it was a staff as it had been at first. Now God confused matters for Pharaoh’s command, and he could find no way leading to Moses. Moses left Pharaoh’s city and joined his own people and camp. They held together until they became victorious.

*Chapter XI The Tale of Hizqīl, the Believer among the Family of  
Pharaoh, His Wife, His Execution, and about his Children,  
May God be Pleased with Them All*

The narrators have said: Hizqīl was of the people of Pharaoh, a carpenter; it was he who made the box for the mother of Moses when she gave birth to him and cast him in the river. It is said that he was a treasurer of Pharaoh and had served as his treasurer for one hundred years. He was a faithful believer who concealed his creed until Moses triumphed over the sorcerers; then he revealed himself. On that day he was seized and executed with the sorcerers by crucifixion. It was he of whom God speaks in the Qur’ān when He says, “And a believing man of Pharaoh’s family, who had kept his faith to himself, said, [Will you kill a man because he says, “My Lord is God?]]” (40:28) And the Messenger of Allah said, “Three men were the first among the nations who did not reject God, not even for

one instant: Ḥabīb the carpenter, the believer among the people of Yāsīn; Ḥizqīl, the believer among the family of Pharaoh; and ‘Alī, the believer of the family of Muḥammad, and he is the most distinguished of them.”

As for the wife of Ḥizqīl, she was the hair-comber of the daughters of Pharaoh and a believer, one of the pious maidservants of God, yet she was with the daughters of Pharaoh, serving them. Part of her story has been related to us in chains of authority from Sa‘īd b. Jubayr, from Ibn ‘Abbās; who told that the Messenger of Allah said, “When I was carried up on my Night Journey, I passed by a beautiful fragrance, and I said to Gabriel, ‘What is that fragrance?’ He said, ‘That is the fragrance of the hair-comber of the family of Pharaoh and of her children. One day she was combing the hair of Pharaoh’s daughter and the comb fell from her hand; whereupon she said, ‘In God’s name!’ and the daughter of Pharaoh said, ‘My father?’ She replied, ‘No, rather my Lord and the Lord of your father.’ So she said to her, ‘I shall tell my father about this.’ When she told him, he summoned her and her children and said to her, ‘Who is your Lord?’ She replied, ‘My Lord and your Lord is God.’ Thereupon he ordered that an oven of brass be heated up, and that she and her children be thrown into it. ‘I have one request of you,’ she said.—‘What is it?’—She replied, ‘That you gather my bones and my children’s bones and bury them.’ He said, “‘This is granted to you, for it is our duty.’ Then he gave the order and her children were brought, and thrown into the oven one by one, until there remained the last of her children, an infant boy who was nursing. He said, ‘Mother, be steadfast, for yours is the truth!’ And she was cast into the oven with her child.”

Ibn ‘Abbās was asked about those who spoke in the cradle, and he said, “Four spoke in the cradle: Jesus, son of Mary; the witness of Joseph,<sup>26</sup> the companion of Jirjīs (George); and this little boy.”

*Chapter XII Āsiyah, Daughter of Muzāḥim, Pharaoh’s Wife,  
and her Execution*

God has said, ‘And God cites an example for those who believe: the wife of Pharaoh . . .’ (66:11) It is said that Pharaoh’s wife, Āsiyah, was an

<sup>26</sup> See Qur’ān 12:26.

Israelite and was a sincere believer. She used to worship God in secrecy, and even went so far as to offer as a pretext that she was going to relieve nature, then step out and pray that day, veiled, for fear of Pharaoh. This was her custom until Pharaoh slew the wife of Ḥizqīl while Āsiyah was looking out of a window in Pharaoh's palace, watching the hair-comber, the wife of Ḥizqīl being tortured and killed. When the hair-comber was slain, with her own eyes Āsiyah witnessed the angels carrying her spirit upwards, for that was the mark of honor and the blessing that God had intended for her. Therefore Āsiyah's unwavering conviction and faith in the Lord grew stronger. Now while she was having these thoughts, Pharaoh came to see her and told her the story of what he had done to the hair-comber, Ḥizqīl's wife. Āsiyah said to him, "Woe to you, Pharaoh, what has emboldened you against God?" He said to her, "Perhaps you have been afflicted by the same madness that befell your companion!" She replied, "No madness has afflicted me, but I believed in God, my Lord and your Lord, the Lord of All-Being." Thereupon Pharaoh summoned her mother and said to her, "Your daughter has been seized by the same madness that afflicted the hair-comber," and he swore an oath: you will taste death unless you deny the God of Moses." Then her mother secluded herself with her, and requested that she concur with Pharaoh in the matter he demanded, but she refused and said, "You want me to forswear God, but I shall not—by God! I will never do that!" Then on the orders of Pharaoh she was stretched out between four stakes and was tortured until she died, may God bless her. That is His word, *'And with Pharaoh of the stakes.'* (38:12)

Ibn 'Abbās said, "Pharaoh took hold of his wife Āsiyah when he began torturing her so that she might enter his religion. While he was tormenting her, Moses passed by. She complained to him with her finger, and Moses prayed to God to ease her agony. Thereafter she no longer felt any pain from the torture until she died from Pharaoh's punishment. She said, while she was being tortured, *'My Lord! Build me a home with You in the Garden [and deliver me from Pharaoh and his deeds, and save me from the wicked people.]'* (66:11) and God spoke to her, 'Raise your hand!' She did so, and saw the house in the Garden, made of pearls, and she smiled. Pharaoh said, 'Look at the madness in her—she smiles while being tortured.'"

*Chapter XIII The Building of the Tower*

God, the Most High, has said, “*And Pharaoh said, ‘Build for me a lofty tower, O Haman! [that I may perhaps find the means of reaching the tracts of heaven and look at the God of Moses, though I think he is a liar.]’*” (40:36) Scholars say that God had long shown forbearance to Pharaoh in all matters, such as the seizure of property, and usurpation and accumulation of wealth, luxuries, his arrogance, and unapproachability—all of which were shrugged off by the citizens of his kingdom until he enslaved them and they became his serfs. He claimed divinity and they acquiesced, for he had been granted long life, strength of body, earthly pleasures, wealth, armies, might, military equipment, and a multitude of people. He had attained such excellent bodily health, an unwavering disposition, and a strong physique, that sometimes forty days and nights would pass and only once would something come forth from him. Yet all this time he would eat and drink, but would not spit, nor blow his nose; or clear his throat, or cough; nor would his stomach pain him, or his eyes become inflamed; nor would he fall ill nor would any affliction or displeasure overcome his spirit. They continued: God’s forbearance was so great that he (would be permitted to) ride all of his beasts, unruly or tame.

Sa‘id b. Jubayr said that Pharaoh ruled four hundred years without ever experiencing any discomfort, and had he become hungry just one day during that period, or gotten a fever just one night, he would not have claimed divinity. Therefore he dared mighty feats and braved great dangers, no harm or adversity came his way—only that which is desirable and pleasing. One of his castles looked down upon a thousand steps; so God put in his service one of His beasts to ride on, and he would ride on it up to that castle and down, that being one of the pleasures that God Most High bestowed upon him, to lure him to his destruction. Now, when he witnessed all of Moses’ deeds, he grew haughtier and more recalcitrant. He knew that his people were scared, and he feared that they might believe in Moses instead of him. So he devised a ruse in his heart; he decided to build a tower by which he would strengthen his rule and fortify its foundations. He spoke to his minister, “*O Haman! Build for me a tower, that I may reach the stairs, the stairs to the Heavens, and may look upon the God of Moses—though verily I think him a liar,*” (ibid.) and he commanded Haman to build it. He gathered workers and craftsmen for it, and left no one he could find who could do building

work but he rounded him up for the construction, until he had assembled fifty thousand builders, besides the helpers and day laborers who baked the bricks and plaster. He then chose wood and doors and nails and continued building the tower. God made matters easy for him, in order to lure him to destruction, and everything fell into his hands the way he had wished, and he completed the tower in seven years. It rose to a height not reached by any other edifice built by man since God had created the Heavens and the Earth.

This distressed Moses, but God spoke to him, "Leave him and what he desires, for I lure him into destruction and I shall seize him unexpectedly, rendering worthless all he has done in one moment." Whenever the sun rose, that tower cast its shadow towards the West, and when it set, it cast its shadow towards the East, in such a manner as only God knew. When he completed building it, God sent down Gabriel; with his wing he smote the tower with a single blow, which shattered it into three pieces: one falling into the sea, one into India, and one piece into the Maghrib.

Al-Ḍahḥāk said, "God sent Gabriel, and he smote the tower with his wing and hurled it down onto Pharaoh's troops, killing two thousand thousands of their men." They say that everyone who worked on the tower suffered death, or burning, or a plague. The hand of every carpenter, iron-smith and mason withered; those who baked the bricks and the plaster were burned up to the last man; and the surveyors and workmen perished. All of this destruction of Pharaoh by God's order, took from the break of dawn until the rising of the sun. When Pharaoh saw that all this came from God's decree, he knew that his scheme was of no help to him, so he determined to do battle against Moses and his people. He ordered his companions and they declared war on him. Then the troops of Pharaoh said to Moses, "You are a sorcerer and one of Pharaoh's slaves who ran away from him; you are ungrateful for his kindness in raising you; you have forgotten how good and gracious he was to you when your mother cast you into the river because she disapproved of you and hated you; for she knew toward what ill fate you were going. But Pharaoh saved you from death by drowning, he gave you shelter, became your guardian, and raised you as his child. But you ran away, an ungrateful fugitive slave; and came to him as an enemy to do battle. But we will not let go of you until we return you to worship him and serve him, or else we will make you taste humiliation and contempt." When God saw all that, He afflicted them

with signs and punishment for He knew now that nothing Moses presented to them would spare them because God's wily ruse had taken hold among them, and the verdict of their punishment was justified.<sup>27</sup>

*Chapter XIV The Signs that God Visited upon Pharaoh and His People when their Destruction drew near, to Show His Power and impose his Argument*

God Most High has said, "And We gave unto Moses nine clear signs." (17:101) The commentators said that these are the staff, the white hand, the *tūfān*, locusts, *qummal*, frogs, blood, darkness, and the splitting of the sea.<sup>28</sup> The Most High has said, "We straitened the people of Pharaoh with famine and the dearth of fruits." (7:130)

Qatādah said, "The famine was among their nomads and their livestock; and the dearth of fruits was in their settled places. God said, 'So we sent them the *tūfān* [and locusts and *qummal*, frogs and blood—a succession of clear signs.]'" (7:133)

The commentators have differed over the meaning of *tūfān*.

Ibn 'Abbās said, "The first sign was the *tūfān*, which is the water sent against them from Heaven." Muqātil said it was water that inundated their tilled lands and destroyed them. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that it meant drowning, while Mujāhid and 'Aṭā' said that it was a swift, sweeping death, and the same has also been transmitted on the authority of the Messenger of Allah.

Wahb said, "It means plague in the language of the inhabitants of the Yemen. God sent the plague against the virgins<sup>29</sup> among the people of Pharaoh, and it deflowered them in a single night and no trace of them remained." Abū Qalābah said, "*Tūfān* means small-pox, and they were the first to be punished by that. It remained in the land, together with locusts and *qummal*."

There are differing opinions about the meaning of *qummal*. According to Sa'īd b. Jubayr, Ibn 'Abbās said that they were worms that come out of wheat, but they are flies (*dhubāb*) in a tradition from Abū

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Qur'ān 39:19: "Can he against whom the sentence of punishment has been justified (be rescued)? Can you save him who is in the fire?"

<sup>28</sup> Note the different presentation of the Biblical ten plagues in Exodus 7:14: 11:10. In poetic form in Psalms 78:43-51; 105:27-36.

<sup>29</sup> Possibly a confusion of the Biblical Hebrew *bekhor*, "first-born", with Arabic *bikr*, "virgin".

Ṭalḥah. In the view of Mujāhid, al-Suddī, Qatādah, al-Kalbī, and others, while *jarrād* are the flying locusts that have wings, *qummal* are the young ones that have no wings. Mi'mār said that Qatādah related that *qummal* are the offspring of the locust, but to 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Aslam they are fleas. However, 'Aṭā' said that *qaml* are lice, the evidence of this being the reading of al-Ḥasan: *al-qaml*, that is with a after the q and a vowelless *m*. Abū 'Ubaydah said that they are *ḥamnān*, which is a species of camel ticks (*qirdān*)." Abū l-'Āliyah said, "God sent *ḥamnān* upon their draught animals and they ate them until nothing remained of them, and they were unable to travel." Umayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt al-Thaqafī said:

*He sent small ants and locusts upon them  
as well as other chastisements,  
And a west wind destroyed them.*

A CHAPTER DESCRIBING WHY THESE SIGNS WERE SENT DOWN;  
HOW THEY WERE ALLOTTED, AND THE CIRCUMSTANCES

Ibn 'Abbās, Sa'īd b. Jubayr, Qatādah, Muḥammad b. Ishāq, and others who are expert in narratives have said—some of the accounts overlapping: When the sorcerers became believers, and God's enemy, Pharaoh, crucified them, and God's enemy returned overpowered, defeated, Moses and Aaron departed to the troops of the Children of Israel. Then Pharaoh ordered his people to impose on the Children of Israel tasks that they could not endure. An Egyptian man would come to an Israelite, saying to him, "Come with me: sweep out my privy, feed my animals, draw water for me." An Egyptian woman would come to a daughter of the Israelites and impose upon her work that she was unable to endure, and with all that, they would not feed them any bread, but when the day was half over they would say to them, "Go and find yourselves something to eat." When they complained to Moses, he said to them, "*Seek help in God and be patient. The Earth belongs to God. He bequeaths it to whom He will of His servants. The future is for those who keep their duty (to Him).* (7:128) They said, "Moses, we suffered hurt before you came to us and since you came to us. We used to be fed when they made us work before you came to us, but since you came to us they have made us work and have not fed us." Moses said, "*It may well be that your Lord is going to destroy your enemy*" meaning Pharaoh and the Egyptians "*and make you viceroys*



*in the Earth*” meaning Syria and Egypt “*that He may see how you behave.*” (7:129)

When Pharaoh and his people refused to give up their godless and evil ways and their tyranny, Moses prayed to his Lord, saying, “God, Your servant Pharaoh has been a tyrant in the land, he acted wickedly and with impertinence; his people violated Your covenant and contradicted Your promise. My Lord, impose a punishment on them and let it be Your revenge on them, and a warning to my people, and a cause for reflection to those nations who come after them.”

Then He brought upon them from Heaven the clear signs one after another. He punished them with famine and a dearth of fruit, then He sent the *tūfān* against them, that is, water, until they almost perished. Now the houses of the Children of Israel and those of the Egyptians were intertwined, mingled among each other. Whereas the houses of the Egyptians filled up so that they stood in the water up to their collarbones and any of them who were sitting drowned, not one drop of the water entered the houses of the Children of Israel. The water flooded the surface of their fields and stood still so that they could not plow or do any work, and they became exhausted. When this situation had lasted for seven days—from one Sabbath to the next—they said to Moses, “Pray to your Lord for us, to remove this punishment from Israel then we shall believe in you and send the Children of Israel with you.” So Moses prayed to his Lord and He lifted the *tūfān* from them, but they did not believe, nor did they send the Children of Israel with him. Rather, they returned to more evil ways than before.

During that year God made more grass and seeds, and fruit to sprout for them than ever before, and their land grew herbs and was fertile. They said, “This is what we had been hoping for, so this water was nothing but a boon and something which made us happy that rain did not fall upon us.” They lived a good life for a month, then God sent the locusts upon them and they devoured their entire crops, their fruit, the leaves and flowers of their trees—they even ate the doors, clothes, and their belongings, the roofs of their houses, the wood, and the iron nails, until their houses collapsed, for He had smitten the locusts with a hunger that could not be sated, but they did not enter the houses of the Children of Israel, nor did any of that affect them.

(The Egyptians) were filled with wonder and cried out, “*O Moses! Pray unto your Lord for us, by the covenant He has made with you. If you*

*remove the wrath from us we will surely believe in you and will send the Children of Israel with you.*" (7:134) They gave him God's covenant and pact, so Moses asked his Lord and He removed the locusts after they had been with them from Sabbath to Sabbath. They say that Moses went out into the wilderness and pointed to the East with his staff, and the locusts went back whence they had come, as though they had never been.

#### SECTION ABOUT SOME OF THE STRANGE STORIES THAT OCCURRED WITH THE LOCUSTS

Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad told me based on his chain of authorities going back to Jābir, from Anas b. Mālik, the Prophet would call down evil upon the locusts, saying, "O God! Cut off the locusts! Eradicate them! Kill their adults and their young! Destroy their eggs and turn their mouths away from our daily bread, for You are the Hearer of prayer!" Then one of the people said, "How so, O Messenger of Allah, that you call down peril and destruction on one of God's hosts?" He replied, "Locusts are the myriad offspring of a fish from the sea."

Ibn 'Alāthah said, "I was told by a man who saw the fish scatter them." He also related in a line of transmission going back to Abū Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah said, "It is written in the breast of the locust, 'God's Mightiest Army';" and in transmission from Jābir b. 'Abdallāh was said; there was not a locust during one of the years of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb's caliphate, and no report at all about it came in and this worried the Caliph. Therefore he dispatched a rider to the Yemen, another to Syria, and another to Iraq, to ask whether or not they had seen locusts. The rider who had gone to the Yemen came back to him with a handful of locusts and dropped them into his hand. When the Caliph saw them he glorified God three times, and said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah say, 'God created a thousand nations, six hundred in the sea and four hundred on land; the first of these nations that He will destroy are the locusts. When they are destroyed, they will follow one another in an uninterrupted sequence just as do pearls on a string when the string is cut.'"<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *nizām* = order, and is used to describe both a string of pearls and a swarm of locusts.

And (he further relates) with a line of transmission going back to Abū Umāmah al-Bāhilī, that the Prophet said, “Miriam, daughter of Amram, asked her Lord that He feed her meat without blood, and He fed her locusts. So she said, ‘O God! Cause them to live without nursing, and make them come successively (*shiyāʿ*);’ and I said, “Abū l-Muḍī, what is ‘*shiyāʿ*?’ He replied, ‘Sound.’”

And he also relates, based on a tradition going back to ‘Abdallāh b. Ḍamrah al-Salūlī, that when God expelled Iblīs from Paradise he said, “I shall take unto myself a prescribed portion of Your servants.” God said, “And I am taking unto Myself a host from among My creatures—the locusts.” Iblīs then said, “My host are women. They are a snare, which will never fail”.

Al-Ḥusayn, with his line of transmission, related to us, going back to al-Awzāʿī, “There was a good person in Beirut who reported having once seen a pious man riding on a locust.” He continued, “He wore large slippers, (I think they were red), and he was saying, ‘The world is vain, and vain is all there is in it.’ He would beckon with his hand like that, guiding the locusts wherever he pointed. We have heard that that man was the king of the locusts.”<sup>31</sup>

He continued, “For one month the people of Pharaoh lived care-free, but then God sent the vermin (*qummal*)<sup>32</sup> against them. This happened when Moses was ordered to go to a reddish sand-hill in one of the towns of Egypt called ‘Ayn Shams. Moses went to that sand-hill, (it was a big hill), and struck it with his staff, whereupon the vermin rained down upon them. They went after what had survived of their planted fields, trees, and their vegetables, and devoured all, licking the land clean. The vermin would enter between a man’s clothes and his skin and bite him. While people were eating their food, it filled up with vermin. A man would erect a column of gypsum and make it slippery so that nothing could climb on it, then lift the food to the top, then raised himself up to eat it, and would find it full of vermin. No plague before had been harder on them than the vermin. The vermin stripped off their hair and their scalp, the their eyelids and eyebrows. They clung to their skin as though they were smallpox on it, depriving them of sleep or rest, and they could find no means for dealing with them.

<sup>31</sup> Probably a reference to Iblīs.

<sup>32</sup> See previous paragraphs for varying interpretations of the word.

According to Saʿīd b. Jubayr *qaml* are worms that come out of grain. A man would take ten *qāfiḥ* of grain to the mill and barely three *qāfiḥ* would arrive there. When they witnessed all that, they complained to Moses and cried out, saying, “O you sorcerer!” or else, “O you man of learning! We will be penitent and not backslide, so pray to your Lord for us, by that with which you have been pledged, to remove this punishment from us.” And Moses prayed to his Lord and He cleared them of the vermin, whereupon they spread out over the (four) quarters of the Earth and the outer limits of the land, after the vermin had remained with them for seven days from Sabbath to Sabbath. Then they violated the covenant and returned to the worst of their deeds. They said, “We were in the right to believe that Moses worked sorcery on us, except today when he turned the sand into beasts. Why should we become believers and send off the Children of Israel? He has destroyed our crops and fields, and our property has disappeared. What more harm can he possibly do than he could already possibly have done? By the honor of Pharaoh, we will never believe in him or follow him.”

After one month in which they lived untouched by harm—some say forty days—Moses called down evil upon them. And God spoke to him in a revelation to stand on the bank of the Nile and plant his staff in the water, then to point with the staff near and far, up and down. He did so, whereupon from every direction frogs upon frogs came out croaking, each informing the other, those nearby telling those far away. Like a black night they came from the Nile, rushing toward the city gate. They came upon their houses and courtyards unexpectedly, they filled their hallways, their public buildings, even their plates and dishes. No one could unfold a garment, or take a lid off a vessel with food or drink, but find frogs in it. A man would sit up to his chin in frogs, and when he intended to speak, frogs would jump into his mouth; sleeping on his bed or couch he would be suddenly awakened by frogs on top of him, a cubit high, riding one on top of the other, a rising pile such that he could move neither onto his right side nor his left. Whenever he would open his mouth for a morsel, a frog had gotten into it first. Whenever they kneaded dough, a frog was crushed in it; and they even cooked in pots filled with frogs. They jumped into their fires and extinguished them, and into their food and spoiled it; they suffered greatly from them.

ʿIkrimah heard from Ibn ʿAbbās: The frogs had been (originally)

land animals. Now when God sent them against Pharaoh, they listened and obeyed, and kept hurling themselves into pots with boiling water, and into red-hot ovens. And for their excellent pious deed God rewarded them with the coolness of the water. The people cried out to Pharaoh, they nearly died in their anguish. Now the city with its alleyways was full of the multitude of carcasses that they crushed under their feet, and all the places stank with them. When they witnessed all that, they wept and complained to Moses, "Remove this plague from us and we will indeed be penitent this time and not backslide," and he took their oaths and pledges on the strength of this promise. And Moses prayed to his Lord and He took the frogs from their midst. It happened this way, as is told—Moses was commanded to call out to his staff and tip it. He did so, whereupon the frogs that stayed alive were chased away and reached the Nile. Then God sent a wind over the dead ones and it took them away from their city after they had been with them for seven days, from Sabbath to Sabbath.

For one month they lived untouched by harm (some say for forty days), then they violated the covenant and returned to their godlessness and their slander. Then Moses cursed them and God sent blood against them—that is, He commanded Moses to go to the bank of the river and to strike the water with his staff. And the Nile flowed with blood, and all of their water turned to blood. And whatever they drew from the rivers and wells they found to be red, fresh blood. When they complained to Pharaoh, "We are afflicted with this blood and have nothing else to drink besides it." He said, "Moses has duped you by witchcraft."

When two men, one an Egyptian and the other an Israelite, would be standing together in front of a container, on the side of the Israelite there would be water, but on the side of the Egyptian there would be fresh blood. Or if an Egyptian and an Israelite would draw water from the same well, it would come out as blood for the Egyptian, but sweet water for the Israelite. Or, the Israelite would walk to a jar and water would flow from it and blood for the Egyptian. It would come to the point that when an Egyptian woman suffered thirst, she would go to a woman of the Children of Israel and say, "Let me drink some of your water;" she would pour some from her jar or her water-skin, and it would turn into blood in her vessel. At long last she would say to her, "Put it in your mouth and then spit it into mine." The Israelite would take the water into her mouth, but when she spat it out, it would become blood.

They continued: the Nile during all that time continued watering plants and trees. Whenever they went out to seek water among the plants, the water turned into fresh blood. Pharaoh was so overwhelmed by thirst in those days that he was forced to chew tender shrubs. But as he chewed on them, their juice turned into bitter salt and bitter gall. For seven days they kept eating and drinking only blood.

Zayd b. Aslam said, "The blood which he inflicted upon them was nose blood." When they became exasperated, they said to Moses, "Pray to your Lord for us to free us from that blood, and we will believe in you and send the Children of Israel with you." And Moses prayed to his Lord and He freed them of the blood—Moses was ordered to strike the Nile one more strike with his staff. When he did so, the water turned pure water again as it had been before. Yet they still did not believe, and did not keep what they had promised. Hence God's word, "*So We plagued them with floods [and locusts, with vermin and frogs and blood.]*" (7:133)

Said Nawf al-Bakkālī, son of the wife of Ka'b al-Aḥbār, "After Moses defeated the sorcerers, he remained among the people of Pharaoh for twenty years, making them see signs: the flood and the locusts, and the vermin, and the frogs, and the blood." Those who know the history have said that when Moses gave up all hope that Pharaoh and his people would become believers; when he saw them become more tyrannical, more persistent in their arrogance, he called down evil upon them, and Aaron said "Amen." And this was the invocation, "*Lord! You have bestowed on Pharaoh and his nobles splendor and riches in this life, our Lord, so that they may stray from Your path. Lord, obliterate their possessions and harden their hearts so that they shall persist in unbelief until they face the painful punishment.*" And God answered their prayers as He has said, "*Your prayer will be answered. Follow the right path and do not walk [in the footsteps of ignorant men].*" (10:88–89)

They continued: Pharaoh and his companions owned so many objects of beauty and splendor of this world, and gold, and silver, and rubies, and jewelry, and precious stones, of all kinds that no one but God could count. The source of his wealth was what Joseph had gathered in his time, in the days of famine, and this had remained in the hands of the Egyptians. So God revealed Himself to Moses saying, "I shall bequeath to the Children of Israel the goods and the jewelry which are in the hands of the people of Pharaoh, and I shall give all of it to them as supply and provision for the Holy Land. And because of that you shall make it a feast day on which

you and your people shall apply yourselves zealously to My service, and thank Me, and evoke My Name, and worship Me on that day for all the victories I shall let you witness, and the deliverance of (My) holy men, and the destruction of your enemies. And for your feast day borrow from the people of Pharaoh jewelry and finery of every kind, for they will not refuse you on account of the plagues which will afflict them at that time, and because of the fear of you which I have cast into their hearts.”

Moses did as God had commanded him. And on Pharaoh’s order, the finery of his family and his children, and jewels of every kind from his treasuries, were loaned to the Children of Israel; for in this way God wanted to give as booty to Moses and his people the best possessions of their enemies—without warfare and without the agitation of horses and men, as an act of kindness from Him, and a token of honor to them. And Moses cursed them, whereupon God turned what remained of their possessions into stone—all of it, even the sieve and the flour.

Muḥammad b. Ka’b al-Quraḏī said, “‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz asked me about the nine miracles which God showed Pharaoh and his people, and I said, ‘The flood, the locusts, the vermin, the frogs, the blood, the staff, the white hand, the obliteration,<sup>33</sup> and the splitting of the sea.’ ‘Umar said, ‘This is the only way this is to be understood.’ Then he called for a leather bag in which there were things which had fallen into the hands of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Marwān (‘Umar’s father), for there were in it remnants of the possessions of Pharaoh. He took out an egg, split it in two—it was of stone; then split a nut, and it too was of stone; and so was a chick-pea and a lentil.”

Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq reported from a Syrian man who had been in Egypt, who said, “I saw a palm-tree struck to the ground, and behold, it was of stone, then I also saw a man—and I had no doubt that it was a man—but he was of stone. This change befell only their slaves, not their freemen, because the slaves were part of their belongings, and no possessions were left to them but God turned them into stone—save the jewels, and the precious stones, and the finery that were in the hands of the Children of Israel.”

Ibn ‘Abbās said, “The first of the miracles was the staff, and the obliteration was the last.” It has been said—and we have also been

<sup>33</sup> Referring to Qur’ān 10:88.

told so—that the *dinars* and *dirhams* turned into engraved stone, either remaining whole, or split into halves or thirds. And He also turned their sugar into stone.

*Chapter XV Moses takes away the Israelites on a Journey by Night;  
and the Sea Splits for them*

God has said, “Verily We inspired Moses in a revelation. saying: ‘*Set forth with my servants by night, for you will be pursued.*’” (26:52; 44:23) Thus said men learned in the accounts about the Prophets: When God wanted to make Moses victorious over his enemy, He revealed Himself to him, saying: “Assemble each group of four families of the Children of Israel, all in one house; then slaughter young sheep and sprinkle their blood on the door posts. For I am visiting punishment on your enemies. I am sending down angels, but they shall not enter any house with blood on its door. And I shall command them to slay all the first-born in the house of Pharaoh, of their men and of their animals, you will remain but they will perish. Then bake unleavened bread, for it is faster for you. Then set out by night with My servants until you reach the sea with them; My command will come to you then.”

The Children of Israel did as Moses commanded, and the Egyptians said to them, “Why are you putting this blood on your doors?” They said, “God is sending punishment upon you: we will be saved and you will perish.” Then the Egyptians asked them, “Will your Lord recognize you just by this sign?” They said, “Thus did our prophet command us.” When they awoke in the morning the first-born among Pharaoh’s people had been smitten by the plague—dying in a single night. There were seventy thousand of them, and the Egyptians were preoccupied with burying them and grieving over their misfortune.

Moses and his people traveled by night, heading for the sea; they numbered six hundred and twenty thousand, not counting those who were seventy years old, because of their age; nor those twenty years of age, because of their youth. Those counted were the fighting force, except for the children. Moses was with the rear guard, and Aaron in the vanguard. When the Egyptians ended burying their first-born, they heard that the Children of Israel had departed. Pharaoh said, “This is the doing of Moses and his people; they slew our first-born, and then departed; they were not content to go by themselves, but they took our possessions with them.’ Then Pharaoh proclaimed



among his people, as God has said, *'Then Pharaoh sent out into the cities criers' (who said,) 'These are but a little band who have provoked us much. But we are a numerous army, well prepared.'*" (23:53-56)

And Pharaoh pursued them with his people, and in the vanguard was Haman with a thousand thousands and seven hundred thousand (men), each man on horseback with a helmet on his head and a spear in his hand. Ibn Jurayj said, "On the heels of Moses and his people, Pharaoh sent one thousand thousand and five hundred thousand powerful kings, each accompanied by a thousand men. Then Pharaoh himself set out in their rear (riding) in a group of black horses—for there were one hundred thousand black horses in Pharaoh's army beside those of other colors. That happened when the sun rose and was shining, as God says, "*They overtook them at sunrise. And when the two hosts saw each other,* (26:60-61) and the Children of Israel saw the dust of Pharaoh's army, they said, 'Moses, where are the succor and the victory that you promised us? The sea is in front of us: if we enter it we drown; and Pharaoh is at our back—if he catches up with us he will kill us. We suffered before you came to us and since you have come to us.'" And Moses said to his people, "Seek God's help and be patient. Lo! The Earth is God's. He gives it for an inheritance to whom He will of his servants. And lo! The reward is for those who keep their duty (unto Him). It may be that your Lord is going to destroy your foe and make you viceroys in the Earth, that He may see how you behave."

#### SECTION<sup>34</sup>

It has been said that when Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt and they wanted to go on, God imposed upon them a trackless waste, and they did not know where to go. So Moses called together the elders of the Israelites and asked them about that matter. They said to him, "When Joseph died in Egypt, he put his brothers under an obligation that they not depart from Egypt without taking him along with them and placing him in the Holy Land. Therefore this misfortune has overtaken us." He asked them about the place of his burial but they did not know it. Then Moses arose and proclaimed,

<sup>34</sup> A *midrash* on the Exodus from Egypt is in Ginzberg, *Legends*: IV.

"I adjure by God every one who knows the place of Joseph's grave to tell me, and whoever does not know, let his ears be silent about my words." Whenever he passed between (two men) and made this proclamation they would not hear his words; but then an old woman among them heard him and said to him, "Tell me, if I lead you there, will you give me what I ask of you?" He declared, "Not before I ask my Lord's permission." God commanded that he grant her that desire and he did so. She said to him, "I want you not to dwell in any room of Paradise unless I dwell there with you." And he agreed. She said, "I am a very old woman and I cannot walk—carry me." So he carried her. When they approached the Nile she said to him, "He is in the midst of the water; pray to God to pull away the water from him." He prayed to God and He removed it from him. She said to Moses, "Dig down here!" He did so, and brought Joseph forth—he was inside a coffin of marble. He carried him and buried him in the Holy Land.

'Urwah b. al-Zubayr said, "God had commanded Moses to set out with the Children of Israel at the rise of dawn; so he prayed to his Lord to delay its rising until he completed the matter of Joseph, and he did so. Since that time the Jews carry their dead from every country to the Holy Land because their prophet had done so."

I was told the following about the Prophet by al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad, whose *isnād* went back to the son of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī, and to his father: (Al-Ḥasan) said: "The Prophet once stayed with a Bedouin who showed him good hospitality. The Prophet said to him, 'We have entered a mutual contract.' Then the Bedouin approached the Prophet who said, 'What do you need?' 'A she-camel, Messenger of Allah, with its saddle, and some goats that my family could milk,' he said. Then the Messenger of Allah asked him a second time, 'What else do you need?' He said, 'I have no other need.' Then the Prophet said, 'Verily, the old woman of the Children of Israel had a better request than this one,' and he told the tale which was in the story of Joseph."

The narrator continues: When Moses reached the sea, the wind blew furiously and caused waves to well up like mountains. Then Joshua son of Nun said to him, "O he who speaks with God! Where have you been commanded to go? For Pharaoh has come upon us and the sea is before us!" Moses said, "Here." So Joshua son of Nun waded into the water and crossed the sea—and not even the hoof of his mount concealed the water (so shallow had it become).

Then said Ḥizqīl, the man who was keeping his faith secret, the believer among the family of Pharaoh, "You who speak to God, where have you been commanded to go?" "Here," he replied. Then he reined in his horse with its bridle until the froth flew from the corners of its mouth; he plunged into the sea and sank into the water. The people were about to do likewise, but could not. Moses (himself) did not know what to do, but God inspired him, "*Smite the sea with your staff!*" (26:62) At that time the water was at its highest tide ever, and Moses smote the sea with his staff, but it did not obey him. Then God inspired him, "Call (the sea) by its *kunyah* (by-name)." He struck it a second time and said, "Abū Khalid,<sup>35</sup> split apart, with God's permission!" And it split apart and each part was like a mighty mountain. After the sea split, behold!: There was the man who had forced his horse into the sea standing straight on its back, and neither its saddle nor its mane had suffered any damage. Twelve paths appeared in the sea for the twelve tribes, a path for each tribe, and God sent the wind and the sun to the bottom of the sea until it became dry, as He has said, "*And strike for them a dry path in the sea, fearing not to be overtaken, nor let anything dismay you*" (20:77).

Sa'īd b. Jubayr said, "Mu'āwiyah sent word to Ibn 'Abbās to ask him about a place where the sun rose only one time. He replied to him that it was the place from which the sea split for the Children of Israel."

We were told by al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad, based on his chain of authorities back to 'Abdallāh b. Salām: when Moses reached the sea he said, "O You Who were before all things, Creator of all things, Who will remain after all things are gone—give us comfort, or a way to escape!" And God spoke to him, "*Smite the sea with your staff,*" and he smote the sea with his staff, "*and it parted and each part was as high as a mighty mountain*" (26:62–63).

Al-A'mash—Shaqīq—'Abdallāh, who heard the Messenger of Allah say, "Shall I teach you the words which Moses spoke when he led the Children of Israel across the sea?" We replied, "Yes, indeed, Messenger of Allah." "He said, 'Say: God, Yours alone is praise; and to You one turns in suffering; You are the One asked for help; and in You alone we put our trust. There is no might or strength except in God, the High, the Powerful.'" 'Abdallāh said, "I have

<sup>35</sup> *Lit.*, Father of Immortality.

never abandoned (those words) since I heard them from the Messenger of Allah.”

They continue the narrative: the Children of Israel waded into the sea, each tribe to a path, with water on both sides of it like a high mountain; they could not see one another and were afraid. Each tribe said, ‘Our brothers have been slain.’ Then God spoke to the mountains of water: “Make holes,” and round holes appeared in the water like windows. Now they saw each other, and they crossed the sea, seeing and hearing each other and arrived at the other shore safely. For thus He says, “*And when We divided the sea for you*”—meaning, We parted the water to the right and to the left—“*and, taking you to safety, drowned the people of Pharaoh while you were watching*” (2:50).

This happened thus: when the rearguard of Moses’ army emerged from the sea, the vanguard of Pharaoh’s army reached it; now Moses wanted to call upon the sea to return to its earlier state. But God spoke to him, “*Leave the sea undisturbed (behind you)*,” that is, resting in its condition, “*for they are warriors doomed to drown*” (44:94). For when Pharaoh’s army reached the sea, they saw it split in two, and Pharaoh said, “Look how the sea has split for of fear of me, that I may catch my runaway enemies and slaves and kill them. So go into the sea!” But his people were afraid to enter it.

Now among all of Pharaoh’s horses there was not a single mare, only stallions. So Gabriel appeared on a mare of his which was in heat, desiring a stallion. He wore a black turban; he rode before them and plunged into the sea, while Pharaoh’s companions were thinking that the rider was one of them. When the stallions smelled the mare’s scent, they rushed blindly into the sea after her until all of them had plunged in. Then Michael appeared on a horse in the back of the host, and urged them on, “Catch up with your comrades.” Pharaoh wished to follow the path of Moses, but his minister Haman held him back, “I have come to this place many times,” he said, “and I am not acquainted with this passage. I am afraid and I do not feel safe; it might be that man’s (Moses’) ruse to lead us to our destruction and that of our companions.” But Pharaoh did not heed him, but rushed forward on his horse urging it on to go into the sea. The horse balked, but Gabriel came up on a white mare that whinnied and Pharaoh’s horse neighed to her. Gabriel rushed into the sea and Pharaoh’s horse followed the mare, carrying Pharaoh into the sea. When all of them together had come into the sea and the first of them wanted to get out, God commanded

the waves to grab them, and they crashed over them, and drowned them all. All of this was in the sight of the Children of Israel, for that is His word, “*And we drowned the people of Pharaoh while you were watching*” (2:50)—that is, their death struggles.

Gabriel devoted all his attention to Pharaoh, and when drowning overtook Pharaoh, he exclaimed: “Now I believe that there is no god save the God in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am one of those who surrender.” But Gabriel said to him, “*Only now? But before this you were a rebel and have been a wrongdoer?*” (10:90–91) Then Gabriel showed him his edict which he had issued, and his signature which was on it, and he said, “This is none other than the edict which you have issued,”—and he began to thrust some mud from the bottom of the sea into his mouth for fear that he might repeat that declaration of faith.

It says in the *Ḥadīth* that Gabriel spoke to the Messenger of Allah, “In all of creation I loathed no one more than two men. One is of the *jinn*, namely Iblīs (may God curse him), when he refused to bow down to Adam. The other was a human, namely Pharaoh, when he said, “*I am your supreme lord.*” (79:24) If only you had seen me, Muḥammad, when I took mud from the sea and thrust it into his mouth, for fear that he might utter the *tawḥīd*<sup>36</sup> and God would have mercy on him for that.”

It is said: When the Children of Israel heard the crash of the waves, they said to Moses, “What is that noise?” He replied, “At this moment God has destroyed Pharaoh and all of those with him by drowning.” They said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not die. Did you not see how he lasted for so many days without requiring anything that a man needs?” Then God commanded the sea, and it cast him onto some elevated ground, clad in his armor, so that the Children of Israel might look at him, for that is His word, “*We shall save your body this day, so that you may become a sign for those after you*” (10:92).

It is said that if God had not brought him forth bodily, some people would have doubted. When Moses crossed the sea with the Children of Israel, they came upon a people devoted to idols that they owned. They said, “Moses, make a god for us even as they have gods.” He said, “Lo! You are an ignorant people. As for these, their way will be destroyed and all that they do is vain.”

<sup>36</sup> Words professing God’s unity, “*There is no god but Allah.*”

I was told by al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad—Muḥammad b. Qays who said, “A Jew came to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, ‘O Abū l-Ḥasan,’ he said, ‘You barely restrained yourselves for more than twenty-five years after your Prophet’s death until you slew each other.’ ‘Alī said, ‘Indeed, but there was also forbearance and goodness; but you—your feet had not yet dried from the mud of the sea bottom when you were saying, “*Moses, make us a god like their gods!*” (7:138). And when God drowned Pharaoh and those with him, saving Moses and those with him, Moses sent two mighty armies of the Children of Israel to the cities of Pharaoh, each army numbering twelve thousand men. Those cities were empty at that time, for God had destroyed their powerful men, their leaders, their commanders, and warriors. He spared only the women and boys, the sick and the old. Moses placed in command of the two armies Joshua, son of Nun and Caleb, son of Jephunneh. They entered Pharaoh’s land and took all the possessions of the Egyptians as booty, carrying off as much of it as the sacks on the camels could hold. And what they were not able to carry away they sold to other people, and He says, “*How many were the gardens and fountains they left behind then!*” [Sown fields and noble palaces and good things] they enjoyed. All this they left; and what once was theirs, We gave to another people. “[*Neither did the heavens weep for them nor the earth; nor were they granted respite. We saved the Israelites from the degrading suffering under Pharaoh, who was a tyrant and transgressor, and chose them knowingly above all beings, and showed them miracles which tested them beyond all doubt!*” (44:25–33). Then Joshua, son of Nun appointed as viceroy over Pharaoh’s people one of their own men, and thereafter Joshua returned to Moses, who had been with the Muslims, rich with spoil and thankful.

*Chapter XVII How Moses Went to the Mountain to Meet His Lord;  
How God Gave Him the Tablets; How He Revealed the Torah;  
and Related Matters*

God said, “*And We promised Moses thirty nights, to which We added ten*” (7:142), and He said in another place, “*And when We communed with Moses for forty nights*” (2:51). Scholars versed in the lives of the prophets and tales about the great men of the past have said that Moses had promised the Children of Israel, while he was still in Egypt, that when they departed there and their enemy was destroyed, he would bring them a book which would say what they should do and what

they should avoid. When God destroyed Pharaoh and his people and He delivered the Children of Israel from their hands and made them safe from their enemy, and they had no book, or law by which they could be guided, they said, "Moses! Bring us that book which you promised us." Moses presented their request his Lord and He commanded that he fast for thirty days, then purify himself and purify his garments, then come to Mount Sinai so that He might talk to him and give him that book. He fasted for thirty days, and when he went up the mountain, he disliked the foul smell of his mouth; so he cleansed his teeth with a twig from a carob tree.

Abū l-Āliyah said, "He took some of the inner bark of trees and sucked on it, then the angels said to him, 'We used to smell the aroma of musk from your mouth, but you have spoiled it with the tooth stick.' Then God spoke to him: 'Fast an additional ten days,' and He said to him, 'Did you not know that the smell from the mouth of one who is fasting is more pleasant to Me than the aroma of musk?'"

Now, their apostasy was during those additional ten days which God imposed on Moses, for that is His word, '*We promised Moses thirty nights*'—that is, Dhū l-Qa'dah<sup>37</sup>—'*to which We added ten*' (7:142)—that is, from Dhū l-Hijjah.'" Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad related to me, with his *isnād* from Abū Hurayrah, that all the months fall short except for Dhū l-Qa'dah, for He has said, "*We promised Moses thirty nights, to which We added ten.*"—namely from Dhū l-Hijjah—"so that the appointment with his Lord reached forty nights" (ibid.). When the forty nights had passed, Moses purified himself and his garments for the meeting with his Lord. When he came to Mount Sinai, his Lord whispered to him; drew him close, as He has said, "*We brought him near in communion*" (19:52).

Wahb said, "There were seventy veils between God and Moses, and God lifted all of them except for one, now Moses gave himself entirely to the speech of God and deeply yearned to see Him, he said: '*My Lord; show me (Yourself) that I may behold You*'" (7:143)

Al-Suddī said, "While God was speaking to Moses, evil Iblīs penetrated into the Earth and came out between Moses' feet. 'The one speaking to you is Satan,' he whispered to his heart, and it was then that Moses asked to see the Lord. But God said, 'You will not see

<sup>37</sup> The eleventh month in the Islamic calendar, 30 days in length. The twelfth month is 29 days.

Me, for mankind cannot look at Me in this world. Whoever looks at Me, dies.' Moses said, 'My Lord, I have heard Your words, and now I yearn to gaze upon you. To see You and die is preferable to me than living and not seeing You.' He responded to him, 'Look at that mountain.' It was the tallest mountain in Midian, called Zubayr. This is how it came to be: when the mountains heard that God wanted to reveal Himself to one of them, each grew haughty and boastful, anticipating that God will reveal Himself to it, whereas Zubayr humbled itself among them. When God saw its humility, He raised it from among them and chose it for the revelation. God said, *'If it remains firm in its place, only then shall you see Me'* (ibid.). Then God appeared to the mountain."

Scholars have disagreed about how the revelation could have been perceived. Ibn 'Abbās said, "It is God's light that became visible to the mountain." Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said "No, rather it was the light of the veils, of which God revealed no more than the nose of a bull." 'Abdallāh b. Salām and Ka'b al-Aḥbār said, "No sooner had as much as the eye of a tailor's needle of God's majesty been revealed to the mountains, than it crumbled to fine dust." Al-Suddī said, "Only the amount of a size of a little finger was revealed, which is proven by what is related by Thābit—Anas—the Prophet, who read this verse and said, 'This much,' putting his thumb on the upper joint of one little finger, 'and the mountain sank'—that is, into the ground." Al-Ḥasan said, "God spoke to the mountain, saying, 'Can you bear seeing Me?' and the mountain sank into the Earth while Moses was looking at it, until all of it disappeared." Abū Bakr b. 'Umar al-Warrāq said, "It was told, on the authority of Sahl b. Sa'd al-Sā'dī that God caused a light the size of a *dirham* to emanate from among seventy thousand veils, and then He made the mountain crumble to dust."

Abū Bakr said, "At that moment, (the water of) every well became sweet, every madman became sane, every sick person recovered, thorns vanished from bushes, and the Earth became green and blossomed; the fire of the Magians died out and the idols fell flat on their faces."

Al-Suddī said, "No sooner had the measure of a gnat's wing of God's majesty been revealed to the mountain, but it crumbled to dust.' Ibn 'Abbās, agreeing, said it did become dust. Sufyān said, "It sank until it dropped into the sea." 'Aṭīyah al-'Awfī said, "It became a gigantic sand hill." Al-Kalbī said (commenting on a verse



that he understood to mean), “*He made it crumble,*” (7:143) implies ‘broken up into small mountains’. And according to a chain of authorities back to Anas b. Mālīk, “The Messenger of Allah said about that verse *‘And when the Lord revealed Himself to the mountain He leveled it into dust,’* because of His might it became six mountains, three of which fell onto Medina: Uḥud, Warqān, and Raḍwā, and three onto Mecca: Thawr, Thabīr, and Hīrā. *‘And Moses fell down sā’iqan,*’ (7:143) which Ibn ‘Abbās interpreted as “fainted”, and Qatādah as “dead.” Al-Kalbī said, “Moses fell down unconscious on a Thursday, the day of ‘Arafah, and was given the Torah on Friday, the day of the Sacrifice.”<sup>38</sup> Al-Wāqidī said, “When Moses fell down unconscious, the angels said, ‘Why would the son of Amram be asking to see (the Lord)?’”

It is said in one of the books that the angels of Heaven and Earth came to Moses while he was unconscious and began to kick him with their feet, “O son of menstruating women!” they said, “You desired to behold the Lord of Glory.” Wahb said: “When Moses wished to see God, God sent fog, lightning bolts, darkness, thunder and lightning, and they surrounded the mountain where Moses was. God then commanded the angels of the Heavens to clear up for Moses four *parasangs* in each direction. The angels, namely the angels of the Heaven of this world, passed in front of him many times, in the likeness of cattle, their mouths flowing with God’s praise and sanctification in voices as loud as powerful thunder.<sup>39</sup> Then God commanded the angels of the Second Heaven, “Descend to Moses”, and they descended upon him in the likeness of lions, with roars of God’s praise and sanctification. Moses was terrified by what he saw and heard, and every hair on his body trembled, and he said, “I regret having made my request. Is there anything that can save me from where I am? If I go forth I shall burn, and if I remain I shall die.” Whereupon the Supreme Angel said, “Moses! Be steadfast in what you have requested, for what you have seen is only a little of much.” Then the angels of the Third Heaven descended in the likeness of eagles, thundering and quaking and roaring mightily,—their mouths were flowing with God’s praise and sanctification and jubilation like the clamor of a vast army. Their colors shone like a flame

<sup>38</sup> *Yawm al-Nahr* in Arabic.

<sup>39</sup> Note in this, and the succeeding Seven Heavens, the striking similarities with the vision of the prophet Ezekiel, in Ezekiel 1.

of fire. Moses was greatly frightened, and he gave up hope to live on.

Again the Supreme Angel said to him; "Do not move from your place, son of Amram, you will see what you shall not endure." Then the angels of the Fourth Heaven descended upon him who looked unlike anything that had seen before. They too had the radiant colors of a flame of fire, but the rest of their bodies were like white ice, and their praises and sanctifications were far louder than all those he had heard before. Then the angels of the Fifth Heaven came down upon him: they had seven colors, and Moses' eyes could not follow them. He had not seen their likes, or heard voices like theirs. And Moses' bowels were gripped with endless terror, and he wept much.

Once more the Supreme Angel said to Moses; "Son of Amram, stay where you are! You will see some things that you shall not be able to bear!" Then God commanded the angels of the Sixth Heaven: "Descend to My servant who wished to see Me and stand in his way." They descended, each angel holding in his hand a long spear, ablaze with fire and shining brighter than the sun, and each wearing a dress of flames. When they uttered praises and sanctifications, all the heavenly angels who had preceded them shouted in response to them with their loudest voices: "The All-glorious God, the Holy One, Who will never die!" The head of each angel showed four faces. When Moses saw the angels, he lifted his head and raised his voice praising God together with them, and weeping, "O Lord! Remember me, and do not forget Your servant who does not know whether he will be saved from his fate: if I go forth I burn, and if I stay back I burn." The Supreme Angel said to him, "O son of Amram! Your terror will grow so as nearly to pluck out your heart. Yet hold your own—for that is what you requested."

Then God commanded that the angels of the Seventh Heaven carry His Throne and He said, "Show it to him!" And when the light of the Throne came into view, the mountain split apart under the majesty of the Lord of Glory. Then the angels of all the Heavens lifted their voices together, shouting with all their strength, "Praised be the Most Holy King, the Lord of Glory, Who will never die!" The mountains trembled and were flattened. Moses fell on his face in a swoon, with no breath of life in him. God turned over the stone on which Moses was lying and made it like a cupola (over him) so that Moses would not be burned. Then God sent to him the breath of life in His mercy, and Moses rose to his feet, and praised God

and said, "I believe in You for You are my Lord, and I attest that no one may see You and live: and whoever looks at Your angels, is seized by terror. How magnificent You are! And how mighty are Your angels! You are the Lord of lords, God of gods, and King of kings—You have no equal, and nothing can stand up to You. I have turned to You in repentance. Yours is all praise You have no equal. You are Lord of all being."

Al-Suddī said, "God surrounded the mountain with angels, and the angels with fire; then He surrounded the fire with angels, and those angels, with fire. Only then did the Lord of Moses reveal Himself to the mountain."

Al-Ḥasan related to me through his line of transmission back to 'Urwah b. Daylam al-Lakhmī: "Before God revealed Himself to Moses, the mountains had been hard, and solid, and smooth, but after God revealed Himself to the mountain, the mountain<sup>40</sup> became flat, and in all the mountains there appeared cracks, and caves and caverns formed in them." They continued, "Then God sent Gabriel to the Garden of Eden to cut down a tree, and from it he made nine tablets, each of them ten cubits long—like Moses' arm length—and its width likewise. The tree from which he made the tablets was of green emerald. Then He commanded Gabriel to bring Him nine branches from the Lote-tree in the Seventh Heaven. He brought them, and all of them together became light, and this light became a pen, longer than the distance between Heaven and Earth, and He wrote the Torah for Moses with His own hand, and Moses heard the scratching of the pen. God wrote *for him on the Tablets all manner precepts, and instructions concerning all things*' (7:145) in detail. That was on Friday, and the Earth shone with light.

"Then God commanded Moses to *'hold fast to them'* (ibid.) and read them to his people. The tablets were loaded onto the sumac-tree, but it was unable to bear them because of the great weight of the promises and covenants that were in them. The tree said, 'Lord, How can I carry Your blessed heavy Book? Have You created any being which can carry it?' God then sent Gabriel and commanded him to carry the tablets and bring them to Moses, but he could not carry them. He said, 'O Lord, who can carry these tablets with the light and eloquence and covenants therein? Have You created any

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<sup>40</sup> Probably a reference to Mount Sinai.

being which can carry them?’ So God provided him with angels to carry the Tablets, as many as the number of the letters in the Torah. They loaded them up, and brought them to Moses, and displayed the tablets before him on the mountain. Thereupon the mountain was split apart on account of the Tablets, and it humbled itself and said, ‘O Lord, who can bear these Tablets and all that is written in them?’ Whereupon God coined a simile in the Qur’ān, saying, *‘Had We brought down this Qur’ān upon a mountain, you (Muhammad) would have seen it itself and break asunder for fear of God. In such parables We speak to mankind, so that they may give thought’* (59:21)—just as He had sent down the Torah onto the mountain and it was unable to bear it.”

He continued, “And when they put the Tablets onto the mountain before Moses (this was at the time of the evening prayer) and Moses took hold of the Tablets, he was unable to carry them. Then he prayed to God, and prayed again, until God made the carrying easier for him, and he lifted them onto his shoulders, this is God’s Word, ‘O Moses! I have chosen you [of all mankind to make known My messages and My speaking to you. So take what I have given you and be thankful’ (7:144). And His Word, ‘And We wrote down for him upon the tablets [admonitions and clear explanations of all things and ordered him, “Hold fast to them and command your people to observe the best in them. I will show you the abode of the wicked”]’ (7:145).

SECTION ON THE COPY OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS THAT GOD  
WROTE ON THE TABLETS FOR MOSES, HIS PROPHET AND HIS  
CHOSEN ONE; THEY CONTAIN THE MAIN PORTION OF THE TORAH  
ON WHICH EACH PRESCRIPTION OF RELIGIOUS LAW CENTERS

Each is given in the Name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful. This is a Writing from God, the All-powerful King, the Mighty, the Subduer, to His servant and messenger Moses, son of Amram.<sup>41</sup> “Praise Me and sanctify Me. There is no God but Me.

Worship Me and associate nothing with Me; be grateful to Me and to your parents. To Me alone is a homecoming, and I shall

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<sup>41</sup> Note: In Qur’ān 17:22–38 we have a Muslim equivalent of the Ten Commandments, with a shorter form in Qur’ān 6:152–54. In both, God speaks to the people in plural form. Here, God speaks to Moses in the singular. See Brinner, “An Islamic Decalogue” in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, pp. 67–84.

make you live a good life. Take not a life that God has forbidden you, lest I make strait for you the sky and its (four) quarters, and the Earth and its entire expanse. Do not swear falsely by My name, for I shall not hold blameless whoever does not honor My name. Do not bear witness to what your hearing did not perceive, or your eyes did not see, or your mind did not comprehend, for I shall call attention to those who bore witness to their testimony on the Day of Resurrection and I shall ask them about it. Do not envy people for the favors and blessings which I bestowed upon them, for the envious man is an enemy to My kindness, and resents My apportionment. Do not fornicate. Do not steal, lest I hide my face from you and lock the gates of the Heavens against your prayers. Sacrifice to none but Me, for the burnt offerings of mankind shall rise up to Me only if My Name is invoked over it. Do not commit adultery with your neighbor's wife, for that is most abominable to Me. Wish for people what you wish for yourself; do not wish on them what is repugnant to you.

These, then, are the words of the Ten Commandments. God gave them in their entirety to the Prophet Muhammad in ten verses, namely in Sūrat *Banī Isrā'īl*, that starts "*Your Lord has enjoined you to worship none but Him*" (17:23) to where He says: "*These injunctions are but part of the wisdom which your Lord has inspired you.*" (17:38) Further He condensed these words in three verses of the Sūrat *al-An'ām* beginning with His words "*Come, I will tell you what your Lord has made binding on you: [that you shall serve no other Gods besides Him; that you shall show kindness to your parents; that you shall not kill your children because you cannot support them (We provide for you and for them); that you shall not commit foul sins, whether openly or in secret; and that you shall not kill—for that is forbidden by God—except for a just cause.] These things has God enjoined that you may take heed*" (6:151)

According to Abū 'Umar Muḥammad al-Faryābī whose chain of authorities reaches back to Ibn 'Abbās, the Messenger of Allah said, "When Moses was given the tablets, he looked at them and said, 'O Lord! You have bestowed upon me an honor such as You have bestowed upon no human being before me.' God replied, 'O Moses! I have preferred you above mankind by My Messages and by My utterance (to you). So hold fast to what I have given you, and be among the thankful' (7:144)—meaning, with strength, and diligence, and watchfulness—'and you will die having gained the love of Muḥammad.' Moses

said, 'Lord, Who is Muḥammad?' God replied, 'Aḥmad,<sup>42</sup> whose name I determined while sitting on My throne two thousand years before I created the Heavens and the Earth. He is My prophet, and My sincere friend, whom I have chosen among My creatures. He is dearer to Me than all My creatures and all My angels.' Moses said, 'My Lord, if Muḥammad is dearer to You than all Your creatures, have You created a people which is more noble to You than my people?' God responded, 'The superiority of Muhammad's people over all the other peoples is like My superiority over all creation.' He said, 'My Lord, I wish I could see him and see them.' He said, 'Moses, you shall not see them, but if you wish, I shall let you hear their words.' 'Lord,' he said, 'I wish indeed to hear their words.' Then God said, 'O people of Muḥammad!' and we all responded from the loins of our fathers and the wombs of our mothers, 'Here we are, Our God, here we are! Yours is praise, and blessing, and dominion. You have no partner.' God said, 'O community of Muḥammad! Verily My mercy precedes My anger, and My pardon precedes My punishment. I have given you before you asked Me; I have responded to you before you cried out to Me, I have forgiven you before you have disobeyed Me. On the Day of Resurrection, he who speaks the testimony that there is no god but Allah and that Muḥammad is My servant and messenger, will enter Paradise—even if his sins were more than the foam on the sea,' for that is His word, '*And you (Muḥammad) were not on the Western side (of the mountain) when We expounded to Moses the commandment, nor were you among those present*' (28:44)—and His word, '*And you were not beside the Mount when We did call.*' (29:46)

Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. 'Alī b. Nuṣayr al-Makkī—Abū l-'Abbās Muḥammad b. Ishāq al-Sarrāj—Qutaybah b. Sa'īd—Sa'īd b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mu'āfarī, who heard from his father: "When Ka'b al-Aḥbār saw a rabbi of the Jews weeping, he asked him why he was crying. He said, "I thought about something." So Ka'b al-Aḥbār said, "I adjure you by God that if I tell you what caused you to weep, you will respond to me with the truth." He said, "I will." Ka'b said, "I beseech you by God, do you find in God's Book which was revealed to Moses that Moses looked into

<sup>42</sup> See Qur'ān 61:6 for the appearance of this name.

the Torah and said, 'I find here a people, who are the best people ever brought forth for mankind, commanding the good and forbidding what is disapproved;<sup>43</sup> believing in the first Book and the last and doing battle with the people of error so that they may do battle with the one-eyed Dajjāl.'<sup>44</sup> And when Moses said, 'O Lord! Let them be my people!' God replied, 'They are Muḥammad's people, Moses!' "It is so, indeed," the rabbi agreed.

And Ka'b continued, "I beseech you by God to tell me do you also find written in God's Book which was revealed to Moses, that Moses looked into the Torah and said, 'I see here a people who pray; who observe the Sun (as a guide for daily prayers); who act in the proper way. When they have in mind to do something they say, "We will do it, God willing."<sup>45</sup> But that when Moses said, 'Make them my people.' God answered, '*They are the community of Muḥammad, O Moses!*' (3:110)" the rabbi agreed. "Indeed it is so."

Ka'b said, "I swear to you by God that you do find in God's Book that was revealed to Moses, that Moses looked into the Torah and said, 'O Lord! I see a people make use of their gifts and voluntary donations (by giving to the poor), whereas the ancients used to burn their donations in fire,<sup>46</sup> but Moses would collect the alms of the Children of Israel, and whenever he found a slave or bondswoman, he would buy them off with those donations and for what remained he would dig a deep hole, throw it in there and bury it so that they could not claim it back. They are the people who glorify God; who make requests which are answered; who intercede and for whom intercession is made.' Moses said, 'O Lord! Make them be my people.' He said, 'They are the community of Muḥammad, O Moses!'" The rabbi said, "It is so."

Ka'b said, "I pray to you by God, do you find in the Book of God which was revealed, that when Moses looked into the Torah he spoke, 'I see here a people among whom each member, when rising to a position of honor, exalts God, and after falling into a valley, praises God. A people for whom the soil serves for ablution, and the entire Earth as their place of prayer. Who, wherever they wish, may clean themselves from (ritual) impurity—their cleaning

<sup>43</sup> Found in Qur'an 31:17, also 7:157; 9:67, 71; 22:41.

<sup>44</sup> The name of the Antichrist in Muslim tradition. See 135, n. 14 above.

<sup>45</sup> This common formula is based on Qur'an 18:40.

<sup>46</sup> Probably a reference to the making of the Golden Calf.

with soil being as if they had cleaned with water, if water could not be found<sup>47</sup>—who will have whiteness, the traces of their ablution. Make them be my people!’ God said, ‘They are the community of Muḥammad, O Moses.’” The rabbi said, “It is so indeed. I found all of this in the Book revealed to Moses.”

Ka’b said, “I swear to you by God that you will find in the Torah that Moses looked into it and said, ‘O Lord! I see here that whenever one of these people intends a good deed and does not do it, a good deed is still recorded for him, and if he does do it, it is recorded for him tenfold to seven hundredfold. If he intended an evil deed and did not do it, it is recorded against him; but if he did it, an evil deed like it is recorded against him. My Lord! Let these be my community.’ He said, ‘They are Muḥammad’s community, Moses!’” The rabbi said, “It is so.”

Ka’b said, “I swear to you by God that you will find in God’s revealed Book that Moses looked into the Torah and said, ‘O Lord! I find a people upon whom there is mercy; they are the Chosen, who will inherit the Book; though there be among them some who wrong themselves, some who follow the middle course, and some who surpass others in good deeds. Yet I find that there is mercy on every one of them, so let them be my community!’ He replied, ‘They are the people of Muḥammad, Moses.’” The rabbi said, “It is so.’

Ka’b said, “I swear to you by God that you will find in God’s revealed book that Moses looked into the Torah and said, ‘O Lord! I find a people whose Qur’āns are in their hearts; they who wear the kinds of garments of the colors of the dwellers of Paradise; they align themselves in rows for their prayers as do the angels; their voices in their mosques are like the drone of bees. Not one of them will enter Hell—some of them will see the reckoning only as one experiences heat (shielded by) the back of a tree; so let them be my people!’ He said, ‘They are Muḥammad’s community, Moses!’” The rabbi said, “It is so.”

He concluded: Then Moses marveled at all the good, which God had allotted to the people of Muḥammad, God bless him and everyone with him, and Moses said, “O would that I were of the Companions of Muḥammad!” Thereupon God revealed these three verses to him to please him, saying, “*O Moses! I have preferred you above*

<sup>47</sup> Qur’ān 4:43; 5:7.



*mankind by My messages and by My speaking (to you). So hold that which I have given you, and be among the thankful. [And We wrote for him, upon the Tablets, the lesson to be drawn from everything and the explanation of all things. So take it forcefully, and command your people to take the best of it. I shall show you] the abode of evil-livers (7:144-45)”* And His words, “*And of Moses’ people there is a community who guide with truth and establish justice therewith (7:159).*” He continued: And Moses was completely satisfied.

Ibn ‘Abbās said, “When Moses came to Mount Sinai for the appointed meeting, his Lord said to him, ‘What do you desire?’ And he said, ‘I come to seek guidance.’ He responded, ‘You have found it, Moses!’ Moses said, ‘O Lord! Whom of Your servants do You love the most?’ He replied, ‘The one who evokes My Name and does not forget it.’ Moses asked, ‘And who of Your servants is the best judge?’ He replied, ‘The one whose verdict is just and who does not follow his whim.’ He said, ‘And who of Your servants is the most knowledgeable?’ God said, ‘The man who seeks out the knowledge of other people (that it may lead him) to his own insight; and listens to words that guide to the right path and turn him away from evil.” (And God said, “This is Muḥammad.”)

‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd said, “When God brought Moses near to Mount Sinai, he saw a man sitting in the shadow of the Throne, and he said, ‘My Lord! Who is this?’ God said, ‘A man who does not envy people for the favor which God has shown them; who is reverent towards his parents; does not spread slander.’ Moses said, ‘My Lord! Forgive me my current sin, and those I committed in the distant past, and those in between, and of which You have more knowledge than I. I take refuge with You from the evil whispers of my soul,<sup>48</sup> and I take refuge with You from my evil deeds.’ God said, ‘Moses, you have already been saved from all that.’ Moses said, ‘O Lord! What ought I do to please You most?’ He replied, ‘Invoke My Name, and do not forget Me.’ Then Moses said, ‘Who of Your servants conducts himself best?’ He said, “The man whose tongue does not lie; who does not sin in his heart, who does not fornicate; he is a believer of a noble nature.’ He said, ‘And whose way is most wicked?’ God replied, “The adulterer—an idler by day, and a putrid corpse by night.”

He continued: When Moses returned to his people, after he had

<sup>48</sup> A suggestion of the last sūrah of the Qur’ān, 114.

given them the Torah, they refused to accept it and abide by it, because of the heavy burden and shackles it had put on them, for it was a heavy law. Then God ordered Gabriel to uproot a mountain the size of the camp, one *parasang* by one *parasang*, and he lifted it up over their heads like a canopy the height of a man. Abū Šāliḥ said, from Ibn ‘Abbās: “God commanded one of the mountains of Palestine, and it was torn up from its base until it stood over their heads like a canopy, for that is His word: ‘*When We made a covenant with you and caused the mount to tower above you*’ (2:63, 93), and His word: ‘*And when We shook the mount above them as if it were a canopy*’” (7:171).

‘Aṭā’ reported from Ibn ‘Abbās: God raised the mountain above their heads and sent a fire in front of their faces, while the sea fell upon their backs, and they were told, “*Hold on firmly to what We have given you and take heed*” (2:93); if you accept what I have commanded you, it is good; but if you do not accept, I will crush you under this mountain, and I will drown you in this sea, and burn you with this fire.” When they saw that there was no escape for them, they yielded and prostrated themselves on one side of their faces, watching the mountain while they were prostrate. And so it became a custom among Jews never to prostrate themselves except on one half of their faces. When the mountain withdrew, they said, “*O Moses! We hear and obey.*”<sup>49</sup> If not for the mountain, we would not have obeyed you.”

Qatādah related from al-Ḥasan, saying that after the light of the Lord of All Being descended on Moses, he went off to his people. For forty nights, no one could look upon him but died, until he took for himself a veil, for fear that anyone who saw his face might die.

Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Thaqafi told me—Muḥammad b. Abī Shaybah—Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Qazwīnī—Muḥammad b. Marzūq al-Naḍarī—Hānī’ b. Yaḥyā al-Sulamī—al-Ḥasan b. Abī Sahl—Ja‘far—Qatādah—Yaḥyā b. Wathāb—Abū Hurayrah, who said, “The Messenger of Allah said, ‘After God had spoken to Moses, he could see an ant crawling on a rock in the darkest night from a distance of ten *parasangs*.’”

Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Thaqafi—‘Abdallāh b. Shaybah—Abū Ḥāmid al-Mustamlā—Ishāq—Khālid b. Kharrāsh—‘Abdallāh b. Zayd b. Aslam quoting his father, that when Moses became angry, his head covering caught fire from the intensity of his anger.

<sup>49</sup> See Qur’ān 24:51; also 4:46; 5:47.

CHAPTER THE STORY ABOUT THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL  
AND AARON, AND THE SĀMIRI WHO MADE THE CALF FOR  
THEM AS A GOD

Those who know the lives and stories (about the great people of the past) have said: After God destroyed Pharaoh and his people, Moses said, "I am departing to the mountain to meet my Lord; I shall bring a book to you which makes evident that which you ought to do and what you must avoid." Then he allotted a period of thirty nights for them and left his brother Aaron in charge of them. Gabriel came to them on a piebald mare who was named "the Horse of Life"; whatever it touched, came to life. When the Sāmīrī saw Gabriel on that mare, he recognized him and said, "This is a mare of great consequence," and he took a handful of the dust from the hoof of Gabriel's horse. This is what al-Suddī said.

Al-Kalbī said: The Sāmīrī took some of the dust from the hoof of Gabriel's mare for the Calf, for God had sent Gabriel down on a piebald mare when they crossed the sea. Every step of hers was as wide as the eye can see, and all prophets rode on her. She plunged into the sea. The horses of Pharaoh's troops smelled her scent and plunged into the water with her. They said that the Sāmīrī alone of the Children of Israel recognized Gabriel, because when Pharaoh gave the command to slay the sons of the Children of Israel, every woman giving birth to a boy took him secretly in the dark of night to a desert ravine, or valley, or cave in the mountain, and hid him. God would send one of the angels to feed him and give him to drink until he could mix with the people. It was Gabriel who raised the Sāmīrī. The child would suck melted butter from one of Gabriel's thumbs and honey from the other; that is why he recognized Gabriel at the crossing. From that time on, if the child became hungry, he would suck his thumb and thus quench his thirst, for by way of that thumb he was given sustenance. But according to another source, it is said that Gabriel entrusted to the Sāmīrī a wild milch-ewe that would give him milk in the morning and in the evening; and so it went until he grew up and mingled with the people. Therefore he alone of the Children of Israel recognized Gabriel, for it was he who had raised him.

Abū 'Amr al-Iskandarī was fond of quoting a Persian saying whose meaning is "the riding beasts of Moses and Gabriel, and of Pharaoh". The riding beasts of Moses and Gabriel were of the folk of Paradise,

and those of Pharaoh and the Sāmirī of the folk who dwell in Hell.<sup>50</sup>

Qatādah and al-Suddī said, "He was one of the mighty men of the Children of Israel from a tribe called al-Sāmirah, but he was an enemy of God, one who put on a false appearance." According to Sa'īd b. Jubayr, the Sāmirī was of the people of Kerman, others said he was a goldsmith of the people of Bājirmī by the name of Munjā. Ibn 'Abbās said, "His name was Mūsā Zāfir (Moses Triumphant) but he was a dissembler who feigned Islam. He came from a people who worshipped cows, and a love for cows had entered his heart." When Moses departed for his meeting with the Lord, he had promised his people that he would return in thirty nights and days, and God added to them another ten, and they became forty nights.<sup>51</sup> The Children of Israel counted thirty nights and days, and when he did not return to them, (being unaware of the change), they fell into temptation and said, "Moses has broken the promise." The Sāmirī seized the opportunity and did what he did.

But others say (following a different interpretation) that they counted the entire night as an extra day<sup>52</sup> and the day likewise. Moses had promised them forty nights and days, so when twenty had passed they fell for the Sāmirī's seduction. He appeared before them and said, "Moses has been withheld from you, so you must get yourselves a god: Moses will never return to you. The meeting came to an end long ago, and now it is necessary that you get a god." The Sāmirī was filled with desire to get them in his power, because on the day when Moses crossed the sea, they passed by a group of Amalekites who were busying themselves with some idols they owned and (the Israelites) said: "*Moses! Make for us a god even as the gods they have. [Moses replied: 'You are surely a people who are ignorant. That which they follow is doomed, and all their works are vain.']*" (7:138) and the Sāmirī saw it was the right time.

The day arrived—it had been twenty days since Moses' departure. When they had wanted to leave Egypt on the pretext of a festival, they borrowed much jewelry from the people of Pharaoh. Then God destroyed Pharaoh and his people, and those jewels remained

<sup>50</sup> Thus according to an annotation in the Arabic text used as the main basis for this translation. The editor states there that the Arabic translation was provided in the margin of the original Ms. he used.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Qur'ān 7:142. The word *layla*, "night" refers to a 24 hour period.

<sup>52</sup> I.e., *yawm*, "day", as 24 hours.

in the hands of the Children of Israel. When Moses went forth from Egypt, Aaron said to the Children of Israel: "The jewels of the Egyptians which you borrowed from them count as spoils, and are not permitted to you. Therefore gather all of them and dig a pit and bury them until Moses returns and makes known his judgment about the jewels."

And they did so. Then the Sāmīrī brought the handful of dust which he had taken from beneath the hoof of Gabriel's horse and said to Aaron: "Prophet of God, shall I cast it among the jewels?" Aaron thought he meant to throw in his jewels as his companions had done before, and said: "Throw them!" He threw it (the dust) into the pit over the jewelry and it turned into a calf of flesh and blood that lowed.

Ibn 'Abbās said that Aaron lit a fire and commanded them to cast their jewels into it. The Sāmīrī threw that handful into the fire and said: "Become a calf of flesh and blood that lows." When this came to pass there was tribulation and riots broke out. This is the story: the Sāmīrī had said to Aaron: "Shall I throw what is in my hand?" And Aaron, thinking that it was some of those jewels, said: "Yes."

Some say that it was the Sāmīrī who told the Children of Israel that "the spoils are not permitted to you", and they put their trust in him and believed him. They collected all their jewels and gave them to him. In three days he cast a calf out of them then threw the handful of dust at the calf whereupon it crouched down and lowed,<sup>53</sup> just once,—not more. However al-Suddī claimed that it kept lowing and walked about. When the Sāmīrī brought out the calf (it was of gold, inlaid with jewels—as beautiful as could be) he said: "This is your god, and the god of Moses, but he forgot"—that is to say, he lost the way—"and went searching for it. Therefore he kept you waiting and did not keep his promise."

In some of the accounts they say that when the Sāmīrī cast the calf and threw the dust on it, it gave the calf understanding, and it ran about and lowed, for it had become flesh and blood. They say that Iblīs was lowing inside it. According to different versions, the

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<sup>53</sup> The calf's lowing is based on Qur'ān 7:148. See also 20:88. In the Biblical story (Exodus 32) the calf is not alive. Note that in the first tradition here, it is the dust that creates the calf; in the second, the calf is created and the dust brings it to life.

Sāmīrī placed the rear end of the Calf against a wall and dug a hole in the ground on the other side of the wall. He asked a man to sit in it and put his mouth against the wall at the level of the Calf's buttocks, and he lowed and said whatever he said, namely: "This is your god and the god of Moses!" Thus did the Sāmīrī confound the wretched and ignorant among the Children of Israel and make them stray from the right path. He said to them, "Moses failed to meet his Lord, therefore his Lord has come to you. He wished to show you that He is capable of summoning you to Himself by Himself, and that He did not send Moses because of any need for him. And now He has made the Calf become visible to you so that He might speak to you from its inside as He had spoken to Moses from the bush."

ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib said that it was called the Calf (*al-ʿijl*) because they made it in a hurry (*taʿajjalūhu*) before Moses returned to them.

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said: The name of the Calf that the Children of Israel worshipped was Bahamūt.<sup>54</sup> They said that when they saw the Calf and heard the Sāmīrī's words, they were roused to rebellion by those words except for twelve thousand. There were altogether six hundred thousand people with Aaron. They worshipped the Calf with deep devotion as their only god, and loved it unlike anything they had ever loved before. Aaron said to them: "*O Children of Israel! You are only being misled by it. Surely your Lord is the All Merciful; therefore follow me and do as I bid you.*" They replied: "*We will worship it until Moses returns to us.*" (20:90) Therefore Aaron stayed among the Muslims,<sup>55</sup> while those who worshipped the Calf continued to worship it. For Aaron feared that if he were to go, the Muslims who remained with him would go on the path of those sinners who succumbed to temptation, and Moses would say to him: *You have sown discord among the Children of Israel!* (20:94) For Aaron revered him and was obedient to him.

Qatādah said about this story: "The pious people of old abhorred division."

Al-Ḥasan told me with his *isnād* from Rāshid b. Saʿīd, who said: "After God had set a period of forty days for Moses, God said to

<sup>54</sup> Perhaps a reference to Job 40:15ff.; "*Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee . . .*"

<sup>55</sup> Here in the basic meaning of *muslim*, "one who surrenders (to God)", *i.e.*, a believer.

him: 'Moses! Your people have been lured into rebellion after you departed.' He replied: 'My Lord! How could they have been seduced to rebel when You have saved them from Pharaoh and from the sea and have bestowed blessing on them?' God said: 'They have made of the Calf their god to replace Me, and it is a calf of flesh and blood, one that lows.' (Moses) said: 'O Lord! Who blew breath of life into it?' 'I did,' God said. Moses said: 'By Your glory! You Yourself have led them into temptation. *It is only Your trial of us [to confound whom You please. You alone are our guardian. Forgive us and have mercy on us. for You are the noblest of those who forgive]*' (7:155). Then God said to him: 'O Moses, chief of the prophets! father of laws! I have seen all that is in their hearts and therefore made it easy for them.'"

Moses was returning from his meeting (with God) and drawing near his people when he heard their wild roars as they were playing their instruments and dancing around the Calf. Moses did not tell his seventy companions what God had told him of the story of the calf. They said: "There is a battle in the camp!" But Moses said to them: "No, but it is the sound of rebellion—for in our absence the people were seduced to worship a thing that is not God." For that is His word: "*And when Moses returned to his people, angry and sorrowful . . .—that is to say, when he saw them surrounding the Calf and saw what they were doing,—he threw down the tablets*" (7:150) from his hands, and they broke, and most of the Words (Commandments) that were on them rose upward—only one-sixth remained—but then the Words were given to him again on two tablets.

According to Ibn 'Abbās: The Messenger has said: "He who witnesses with his own eyes is unlike him who is given the message. God said to Moses: 'The people have rebelled', and he did not break the tablets. But when Moses saw them, he threw down the tablets and broke them."

According to Tamīm al-Dārī, he said: "Messenger of Allah! I passed by a town, the description of which is thus and so, near the lowland of the sea." And he responded: "That is Antioch (Anṭākya). In one of its caves are shards of the tablets of Moses, and there is not a cloud, either from the east or the west, that passes over it but casts its blessings down upon it. Days and nights will not pass before people of my family will inhabit it, filling it with justice and truth as it is now full of oppression and tyranny."

They said that when Moses saw what his people had done in his

absence in worshipping the Calf, he seized the hair of his brother Aaron's head in his right hand and his beard in the left, though Aaron had abandoned them with twelve thousand who did not worship the Calf. He said to Aaron: "What held you back when you saw them gone astray that you did not follow me? Have you then disobeyed my order? Why did you not fight them, when you know that if I had been among them I would have fought them for their infidelity?" *"O son of my mother," said Aaron, ["the people overpowered me and almost did me to death. Do not let my enemies gloat over me; do not number me among the wrong-doers"]* (7:150).

The commentators say that Aaron was Moses' brother by his father and mother, but by saying "son of my mother" he wanted to make him compassionate and conciliate him. *"Let go. I pray you, of my beard and my head"*, that is to say, my forelocks. *"I was afraid that"* if I fought them, they would become two parties, each of them killing the other, and *"you might say: 'You have sown discord among the Children of Israel and did not wait for my orders,'* (20:94) that is to say, you did not keep my charge when I said to you: "Take my place among the people. Do right, and do not follow the way of mischief-makers."

Then Moses approached the Sāmīrī and said to him: "What have you to say, O Sāmīrī," (meaning, what are you doing?). The Sāmīrī said, *"I perceived what they do not perceive, so I seized a handful from the footsteps of the Messenger,—meaning, I took some dust from the footprints of Gabriel's horse, then flung it down and cast it on the Calf. Thus too did my soul entice me* (20:95–96), that is to say, it allured me." When the Children of Israel knew that they had erred and gone astray in worshipping the Calf, they regretted it and asked God for forgiveness, as He has said: *"When they feared its consequences and saw that they had gone astray, they said: Unless our Lord have mercy on us and forgive us, verily we are of the lost"* (7:149).

Moses said to them: "O my people! You have wronged yourselves by your choosing the Calf." They said to him: "What shall we do? What is the way out?" He said: "Turn in penitence to God your creator," namely, go back to the One who formed you. They said: "How shall we repent?" He said: "Kill (the guilty) yourselves." That is to say, let the innocent one kill the guilty one; that (namely killing) will be best for you with your Creator."

Ibn 'Abbās said: "God refused to accept the repentance of the Children of Israel except for the circumstance that they disliked fighting each other when they worshipped the Calf." Qatādah said:



“God set slaying as the penitence for worshipping the Calf because they were apostates and infidels, and infidelity makes bloodshed permissible. When Moses ordered them to kill, they surrendered to his command, saying: ‘We will be steadfast in God’s command.’ They sat in the enclosures, squatting, and the people drew near them with swords and daggers. A man saw his brother, son, father, relative, or neighbor but was only permitted to carry out God’s command. They said: “Moses! How can we do it?” God sent a fog and a black cloud so that they could not see each other. They were told, “Whoever stands up or stretches his fingertips toward his murderer or is afraid of him by hand or by foot is cursed, his penitence is rejected.” So they kept killing them until evening.

When the killing had increased and the number of slain had reached seventy thousand, Moses and Aaron prayed to their Lord, they showed their grief and humility, saying: “O Lord, the Children of Israel are being destroyed, have mercy! Spare us!” So God removed the cloud from them and ordered them to remove their swords, let the killing suffice. When the cloud was removed from the slain, it was too much for Moses, but God revealed to him, “Will it not satisfy you that I will cause both slayer and slain to enter Paradise?” Whoever was slain among them was a martyr, while whoever remained alive was considered an unbeliever, may God punish him! For that is His word: *“He turned to them in mercy, so that they might repent. He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful”* (9:118).

They say that God commanded Moses to file the Calf into filings and to burn them, then to sprinkle that on the Nile. Whoever among those who worshipped the Calf drank its water, the color of his face would turn yellow and his lips black. It was said that that proved that he drank the gold and was a sign of his crime.

Moses took the Calf, slaughtered it, then filed it down and burned it. He gathered its ashes and ordered al-Sāmīrī to urinate on them to make light of the Calf and denigrate it, then he scattered it on the water, for that is His word: *“Now look upon this idol of which you have remained a votary: [we will burn it to cinders and scatter its ashes far and wide over the sea]* (20:97). They say that Moses then commanded them to drink of that water, and when they drank, the faces of those who had worshipped it turned yellow and their lips became black, so they acknowledged their love of the Calf and worship of it. They said: “O Moses! We regret what we have done and we repent to God. If you command us to slay ourselves so that our repentance

would be accepted, we would do so." It was said to them: Slay yourselves! And Moses intended to kill al-Sāmīrī, but God revealed to him, "Do not kill him, for that is generous." But Moses cursed him and said to him: "*Then go! And lo! In this life you will say: Touch me not! There is for you an appointment you cannot break*" (20:97)—namely your punishment on the (day of) judgment.

Moses ordered the Children of Israel not to associate with him nor draw near to him. Al-Sāmīrī became barbarous; he did not spend time with anyone nor frequent them, nor come near people nor touch any one of them. Anyone who touched him would cut off that spot with shears. So it was until he died.

Qatādah said: Those who survived until today said that—namely: "*Touch me not!*" And in some books we find that if one of them touches someone (not of their sort) or one of them, both of them turn black immediately.

They say that God commanded Moses to bring him some of the people, from the best of the Children of Israel, to seek forgiveness from Him for their people's worship of the calf. Moses chose seventy men to go to the mountain with him as God had commanded him. He had commanded that they be elders, but he found only sixty. Then God inspired him to choose ten from among the young men. He selected them and they became elders.

It has been related that he selected six men from each tribe, amounting to seventy-two men, and he said, "I have been commanded (to take) seventy, so let two men from among you depart." And Moses said that the reward of him who remained behind would be equal to that of one who went. So Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh remained. Moses commanded the seventy to fast, and to purify themselves and their raiment; then he took them to the mountain to the meeting with his Lord, for that is His word: "*And Moses chose seventy men of his people for Our appointed meeting [and when the Earth shook beneath their feet, said: 'Had it been Your will, Lord, You could have destroyed them long ago, and myself too. But would You destroy us because of what the fools among us did? That trial was ordained by You, to confound whom You willed and to guide whom You pleased. You alone are our guardian]'*" (7:155). But he was not able to approach Him except with His permission. When Moses drew near the mountain, the pillar of cloud fell upon it until it covered the mountain entirely. Moses drew near and entered into it and said to the people, "Draw near". When God spoke to Moses there came over him a radiant light so

that none of the Children of Israel could look at him. Therefore He placed a veil before him and the people drew near until they entered the cloud and fell down prostrate and heard God while He was speaking to Moses, commanding and forbidding him, and God let them hear: "Verily I am I, there is no God but Me, Possessor of Mecca. I have brought you forth from the land of Egypt, so worship Me and worship none besides Me." When Moses finished speaking and the cloud disappeared, he approached them and they said, "*We will not believe in you until we see God plainly!*" (2:55) Whereupon the lightning seized them, which is a fire which comes from Heaven, and burned them up altogether.

Wahb said, "Nay, rather God sent a host against them from Heaven, and when they heard the sound of them, they died by day and by night, for that is His word: "*When you said: O Moses! We will not believe in you until we see God plainly, even while you gazed the lightning seized you*" (2:55).

When they died, Moses said, "O Lord! If You had wished, You would have killed them and me before this. Will You destroy us because of what the fools among us have done? O Lord! How will I return to the Children of Israel when You have destroyed their elite?" And Moses continued addressing his Lord until God revived all of them for him, one man after another; each one saw the other being revived, for that is His word: "*Then We revived you after your extinction [so that you might give thanks]*" (2:56).

Al-Hasan—from Anas related to me saying: The Messenger of Allah said, "When seventy departed from us for the gathering, they were like the seventy who were a deputation with Moses to their Lord, and better."

## KORAH

A CHAPTER ABOUT THE STORY OF KORAH WHEN HE REBELLED  
AGAINST HIS LORD AND BECAME ARROGANT, AND HIS WEALTH  
MADE HIM INHERIT OPPRESSION AND VANITY UNTIL GOD ALMIGHTY  
DESTROYED HIM

God Almighty has said: “*Now Korah (Qārūn) was of Moses’ people, but he oppressed them. [We had given him such treasures that their very keys would have weighed down a band of sturdy men. His people said to him: ‘Do not exult in your riches; God does not love the exultant.]*” (28:76) Those learned in the narratives of ancient peoples said that Korah was the son of Moses’s paternal uncle because he was Korah son of Izhar son of Kohath son of Levi son of Jacob, while Moses was the son of Amram son of Kohath. This is what most of the sages say.

Ibn Ishāq said: “Izhar son of Kohath married Samīn bt. Mārīt b. Barkiyā b. Yaqshān son of Abraham, and she bore him Amram son of Izhar and Korah son of Izhar. Amram married Bakhīt bt. Shamwīl b. Barkiyā b. Yaqshān and she bore Aaron and Moses, the two sons of Amram. Moses, according to Ibn Ishāq’s words, was the son of Korah’s brother, and Korah was his uncle on his mother’s and father’s sides, whereas the others say he was his paternal cousin, and thus say the historians. Korah was the most learned of the Children of Israel after Moses and Aaron, the most excellent of them and the handsomest.

Qatādah said: He was called “The Light” (*al-nūr*) because of his handsome appearance. No one among the Children of Israel was better read in the Torah than he. But the enemy of God played the hypocrite as al-Sāmīrī had done, and he oppressed his people as God has said, “. . . *but he oppressed them.*” (7:103) There is a difference of opinion about the meaning of this oppression. Ibn ‘Abbās said: “Pharaoh had appointed Korah ruler over the Children of Israel when they were in Egypt.”

Al-Ḥusayn related to me with his chain of authorities from al-Musayyab b. Sharīk, that Korah was of the people of Moses, but he oppressed them. He continued, saying that he was an agent of Pharaoh over the Children of Israel but he oppressed them and

treated them tyrannically. 'Atā' al-Khurāsānī and Shahr b. Ḥawshab said, "He exceeded them in dress by a span." Shaybān related from Qatādah who said: "He treated them unjustly in pride, haughtiness, and the abundance of his wealth, having been the wealthiest man of his time and the richest, as He has said: *'We gave him so much treasure that the stores thereof would have been a burden.'*" (28:76) In other words, they would be heavy and would bend men over if they carried them, because of their heaviness."

The commentators have disagreed about the number of the troops (needed to carry the treasures) in this place. Mujāhid said between ten and fifteen, while Qatādah said between ten and forty. According to 'Ikrimah there were those who said forty and others who said seventy. According to al-Ḍaḥḥāk, (it was) between three and ten, whereas others have said they were sixty.

Jarīr—Khaythamah who said, "I found in the Gospel that the keys of Korah's treasuries would be a load for sixty special mules; they would not exceed one key for each finger. Belonging to each of those keys there was a treasure. It is said that Korah would carry with him the keys to his treasures wherever he went, though they were of iron. When they became too heavy for him, he made them of wood. When they became too heavy for him, he made them of cow leather as long as fingers. They would be carried with him when he went out, on forty mules."

Scholars have differed over the reason for his amassing such wealth, some saying that it was through his possession of knowledge of alchemy.

Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab said: "Moses knew alchemy and taught Joshua son of Nun one third of that knowledge; he taught Caleb son of Japhunneh the same amount, and taught Korah likewise. But the latter duped the other two so that he was able to add their knowledge to his."

In the historical account it is said that God taught alchemy to Moses, who taught it to his sister, who taught it to Korah, and that was the cause of his riches, for that is God's word: "*I have been given it only on account of knowledge I possess*" (28:78)—or through free use of commerce and agriculture and other forms of acquisition and claims.

It has also been said, regarding the cause of his gathering this wealth, what al-Thaqafī related to us with his chain of authorities from Abū l-Ḥawārah who said: "I heard Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī who used to say, Iblīs appeared to Korah. Korah had been staying

on a mountain for forty days of devotion to God's service, until when he had mastered all of the Children of Israel in worship, Iblīs sent his demons to him, but they were unable to reach him. So he himself approached him and worshipped together with Korah. Iblīs began to outdo him in worship and surpass him, and Korah submitted himself to him, and Iblīs said to him, 'O Korah! We are content with what we are doing; we shall not be present at a gathering of the Children of Israel, nor visit a sick person among them, nor be present at a funeral.'" The narrator continued: "He brought him down from the mountain to a temple, and they would bring him food. Then Iblīs said to him: 'O Korah! We are content to be thus, both of us, over the Children of Israel.' And Korah said to him, 'What are you thinking of?' He said, 'We will acquire (wealth) one day a week, and worship the rest of the week.'" He said: "The two of them acquired (wealth) on Friday and worshipped on all the others. Then Iblīs said, 'We are content to be like this,' but Korah said, 'What is your idea?' He said, 'Let us earn one day, worship one day, and give charity and gifts.' He said that when they earned one day and worshipped one day, Iblīs sat down and left him."

Then the gates of this world were opened for Korah, and his wealth reached what we were told by Ibn Faḥawayh through his chain of authorities from Musayyab b. Sharīk, who said: "If his keys were weighed in a group, they were four hundred thousand in forty storehouses, and he became so rich in possessions that proverbs were coined about him which Abū l-'Abbās Sahl b. Muḥammad al-Marwazī recited to me from someone:

*You made such promises to me that  
 You made me covetous of Korah's treasure.  
 You brought a washerwoman by night  
 To wash what you had said with soap.*

Korah coveted and oppressed and was tyrannous when he became rich and wealthy, until he was destroyed and became an example to those remaining, a warning to those who survived. The first of his oppression and rebellion was that he became haughty and considered himself powerful over the people because of his abundant wealth. He would go forth among the people in his pomp and garb and be haughty, as He has said: "Then he went forth among his people in his pomp [those who loved this life said: Would that we had the like of Korah's fortune! He is indeed a lucky man" (28:79).

Mujāhid said: "He went forth on white nags on which were purple saddles upon which were blazes." 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd ibn Aslam said: "He went forth with seventy thousand, all of them with blazes." He said: "That was the first day that blazes appeared on Earth."

According to what Ubayy mentioned to me from Muqātil: He went forth on a grey mule on which was a golden saddle with purple on it. With him were one thousand horsemen, upon whom and upon whose mounts there was purple. He also had six hundred white slave girls wearing ornaments and red garments on gray mules. Erring and ignorant people wished for what he had attained, and said: "Would that we had what Korah has attained, for it is pleasure and great fortune." People who had knowledge about God disapproved of them and said: "Trust God and do what God has commanded you and cease what he has forbidden you, for verily 'the reward of God is best for one who believes and acts devoutly. For only the steadfast will attain it from among the pleasures of this world and its desires. God has said: "*But none shall receive it save the steadfast,*" (28:80; 41:35) meaning that only those who are steadfast in obedience to God and not the pomp of the life of this world comply with these words.

They say that God revealed to His prophet Moses that he should command his people to hang four threads from the ends of their cloaks, one thread at each end, its color as green as the color of Heaven.<sup>1</sup> Moses said: "O Lord! Why did You command the Children of Israel to hang these green threads on their cloaks?" God replied: "Verily the Children of Israel are forgetful, so I wished to place a sign on their garments through which they would remember Me whenever they looked at it, and they would remember the God of the Heavens and know that I reveal My words from there." Moses said: "O Lord! Why do You not command them to make their entire garments green, for the Children of Israel will think lightly of these threads." He replied to him: "Moses, the smallest of My commandments is not small. If they do not obey Me in a small matter, they will not obey Me in a great matter." It is said that Moses called upon the Children of Israel and said to them: "Verily God has com-

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<sup>1</sup> Probably referring to the Biblical commandment in Numbers 15:37-41 for the Israelites to make fringes on their garments with blue cord (not green as here) on each corner. See p. 659 below.

manded you to hang on your robes green threads like the color of the Heavens, so that you might remember your Lord when you see them." So the Children of Israel did what he commanded them, but Korah was proud and did not obey him, saying: "This is something masters do to their slaves to distinguish them from others." And this, too, was of his lying and rebellion.

They say that when Moses crossed the sea with the Children of Israel, he gave the priesthood (which is in charge of the altar and the house of sacrifice) to Aaron. The Children of Israel would bring their gift and give it to Aaron who placed it on the altar. A fire would descend from Heaven and consume it. Korah became angry in his soul because of this and went to Moses, saying: "O Moses! You have leadership and apostleship and Aaron has the priesthood, while I have nothing of that, though I am more well-versed in the Torah than the two of you. I have no patience with this." Moses said: "By God! I did not give that to Aaron, but God gave it to him." Korah said to him: "By God! I shall not believe you regarding that until you show me proof." So Moses gathered the chiefs of the Children of Israel and said: "Bring your staffs! And whose staff is green is most worthy of the priesthood." They gathered the staffs and brought them, each of them writing his name on his staff. Moses bundled them up and threw them into the shrine in which they worshipped God. They guarded their staffs until they got up in the morning. Aaron's staff had grown long and it had green leaves, for it was from an almond tree. Moses said: "O Korah! See this deed of mine." But Korah said: "By God! This is no more wonderful than what magicians do." Korah went off angrily and abandoned following Moses, yet Moses would try to appease him because of their close relationship, whereas Korah would constantly harm him and every day he would only increase in insolence and pride, in contradicting Moses and treating him as an enemy. Finally he built a house and made its door of red gold and attached golden plates to its fence. The community of the Children of Israel would come to him early in the morning and in the evening, and he would feed them while they conversed with him and joked with him.

Ibn 'Abbās said: "Then God revealed to Moses the matter of alms, and when God made alms obligatory upon them, Korah came to Moses and came to an agreement with him to pay one *dinar* for every thousand, one *dirham* for every thousand, one sheep from every thousand, and something from everything. Then Korah went to his



house and counted it up and found that it was much, and he would not comply with it, so he assembled the Children of Israel and said to them: 'O people! Moses has commanded you about everything and you have obeyed him. Now he wants to take your possessions.' They said to him: 'You are our great one and our master, so command us as you wish.' Korah said: 'I command you to bring such-and-such a prostitute and let us give her a bribe to accuse Moses falsely of adultery with her. If she does that, the Children of Israel will rebel against him and shun him, and we will have rest from him.' So they brought her and Korah bribed her with one thousand *dirhams* (some say a thousand *dinars*, while others say a cup of gold and others, her rightful due). (Korah) said to her: 'I shall provide you with food and mix you with my wives to the end that you accuse Moses of adultery with you tomorrow when the Children of Israel appear.'

When the morrow came, Korah assembled the Children of Israel, and when Moses came he said: 'The Children of Israel have gathered to witness your coming forth to command them and forbid them and to clarify to them the signs of their religion and the rules of their law.' Moses went forth to them while they were in a desert plain and he arose among them to preach to them and admonish them, saying what he said: 'O Children of Israel! Whoever steals, we will cut off his hand. Whoever testifies falsely, we will beat with eighty stripes. Whoever fornicates and does not have a wife, we will beat with one hundred stripes, but if he has a wife, we will stone him until he dies.'

Korah said to him: 'And if it were you?' (Moses) said: 'Even if it were I.' He said: 'The Children of Israel claim that you have acted immorally with so-and-so.' He said: 'I?' (Korah) replied: 'Yes.' (Moses) said: 'Call her, and if she says so, then it is as she says.' So they called her, and when she came, Moses said to her: 'O so-and-so! Did I do to you what these say?' It became difficult for her, so he asked her by Him Who split the sea for Moses and the Children of Israel and revealed the Torah to Moses, if she had not told the truth. When he made her swear, God overtook her with victory and she said to herself: 'If I show repentance today, it will be better than to harm the Messenger of God' So she said: 'No, they have lied, and Korah bribed me to accuse you falsely of adultery with me.' When she spoke these words, Korah became perplexed and he lowered his head and the community was silent, knowing that he had

fallen into destruction. Moses fell down kneeling to God and weeping, saying: 'Lord! This enemy of yours has harmed me and wished to do a shameful thing to me. But release me, O my God, if I am your messenger, and rouse me to anger and give me power over him!' God revealed to him: 'I shall raise up your head and command the earth to obey you in whatever you desire.'

Moses said: 'Children of Israel! God sent me to Korah as He sent me to Pharaoh. Whoever is with him, let him stay where he is; whoever is with me, let him abandon him.' So they abandoned Korah and only two men remained with him. Then Moses said: 'Earth, seize them! And it seized them by their ankles. Then he said: 'Earth, seize them!' And it seized them by their backs. Then he said: 'Earth!, seize them!' And it seized them by their sides. Then he said: 'Earth, seize them!' And it seized them by their belts. Then he said: 'Earth, seize them!' And it seized them by their necks. All that time, Korah and his companions were pleading with Moses and Korah was swearing to him by God and by blood-kinship, so that it is related in some accounts that he adjured him seventy times, and Moses, all that time, did not turn to him because of his anger against him. He said: 'Earth, seize them!' And the Earth turned over upon them. God revealed to Moses: 'O Moses! How harsh you are! They asked your help seventy times and you did not help them nor have mercy on them. As for My command and glory, had they called upon Me, they would have found Me near, answering.'"

Qatādah said: "It has been mentioned to us that every day God causes them to sink down one measure, and he tosses them about, and they will not reach its bottom until the Day of Resurrection. "Muḥammad b. 'Abdullāh b. Ḥamdūn related to us as I was reading in his presence from Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn from Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā and 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Bashīr and Aḥmad b. Yūnus, all of whom said, quoting 'Abd al-Razzāq—Mu'ammār b. Munabbih—Abū Hurayrah: "The Messenger of Allah said: 'While a man walks about proudly both morning and evening, observing his inclinations and pleased with himself, behold, God causes him to sink into the ground and he rolls about therein until the Day of Resurrection.'"

They said that when God caused the Earth to swallow up Korah and his two companions, the Children of Israel began whispering to each other about what had happened in their midst, that Moses had only cursed Korah that his house and possessions and treasures

depart, but God called upon Moses until God had the Earth swallow up his house and his possessions. Then God revealed to him: "I shall not restore the Earth for anyone after you ever." For that is His word: "*So We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling-place. Then he had no host to help him against God, nor was he of those who can save themselves.*" (28:81) When God's vengeance befell Korah, those believers who had admonished him and warned him of God's misfortune praised God, as God relates: "*When his own folk said to him: Exult not! Lo! God does not love the exultant*"—meaning: do not be merry and do not be cheerful—"but seek the abode of the Hereafter in what God has given you. [Do not forget your share in this world. Be good to others as God has been good to you, and do not strive for evil in the land, for God does not like the evil-doers." (28:76-77) Meanwhile, those who on the previous day had coveted his position, wealth, and condition now regretted it, as God has said: "*And morning found those who had coveted his place but yesterday crying: Ah, well! God enlarges provisions for whom He will of His worshippers and straitens it (for whom he will).*" (28:82) Then God rescued His prophet Moses—may the blessings of God and His peace be upon our master Muḥammad and upon him—as well as the believers, from every misfortune and test. He destroyed their enemies, Pharaoh, Haman, and Korah, as He has said: "*And Korah, Pharaoh and Haman! Moses came to them with clear proofs, but they were boastful in the land.*" (29:39)

## AL-KHIDR

### CHAPTER ABOUT THE STORY WHEN MOSES MET AL-KHIDR AND WHAT WONDERS OCCURRED BETWEEN THEM UNTIL THEIR TALE REACHED THE POINT IT DID

God has said: *“When Moses said unto his servant: I will not give up until I reach the point where two rivers meet, though I march on for ages.”* (18:60) The Imām, my teacher, has said: “Scholars disagree as to why Moses betook himself to al-Khidr for his purpose. Al-Wasan b. ‘Imārah—al-Ḥakam b. ‘Uyyaynah—Sa‘īd b. Jubayr: ‘I was sitting with Ibn ‘Abbās and a group of people of the Book were with him. One of them said: “O Ibn ‘Abbās! Nawf, the son of a wife of Ka‘b, claims from Ka‘b, that the Moses who sought knowledge was Moses son of Mīshā.”<sup>1</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās said: “Nawf lied. Ubayy b. Ka‘b told me from the Messenger of Allah, that Moses, the prophet of the Children of Israel asked his Lord, saying: ‘O Lord! If there is anyone among Your worshippers who is more learned than I, lead me to him.’ God Almighty said: ‘Yes, there is someone more learned than you.’ Then He described to him the place of al-Khidr and gave him permission to meet him.”

Hārūn b. ‘Antarah—his father—Ibn ‘Abbās: “Moses asked his Lord, saying: ‘O Lord! Which of Your worshippers is most beloved by You?’ He answered: ‘He who remembers Me and does not forget Me.’ (Moses) asked: ‘And which of Your worshippers is most just?’ God replied: ‘The one who judges by truth and does not follow his passions.’ (Moses) asked: ‘O Lord! Which of Your worshippers is most learned?’ He replied: ‘The one whose learning is that for which the people’s learning strives. Perhaps he will find in it a word which will lead him to (divine) guidance or turn him away from evil.’ (Moses) said: ‘Is there anyone on Earth more learned than I?’ God said: ‘Yes.’ Moses said: ‘O Lord! Who is he?’ God said: ‘Al-Khidr.’ (Moses) said: ‘Where can I seek him?’ God said: ‘On the seashore at the rock at which he set free the fish, and made

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<sup>1</sup> Possibly referring to Moses son of Manasseh, p. 236 above.

the fish a sign for himself and a guide.' He said: 'If that fish lives, then your friend is there, so prepare a salted fish.'"

'Afiyah al-'Awfi—Ibn 'Abbās: "When Moses and his people overcame Egypt and their living place had been settled for them, God sent down to them manna and quails. Moses spoke to his people, reminding them of the goodness and kindness that God had brought them since he had saved them from the people of Pharaoh, destroyed their enemy, and appointed them (His) agents on Earth. He said: 'God spoke to your prophet in words and took him as His friend, casting His love upon him and bringing you all you asked of Him. Your prophet is the best of the people of the Earth, and you should read the Torah.' He did not forsake the favor that God had granted them, but mentioned it and informed them of it. One of the Children of Israel said to him: 'We know what you are saying. Is there anyone on the face of the Earth who is wiser than You, O prophet of God?' He replied: 'No.' God became angry with him so that He did not return wisdom to him. He sent to him Gabriel, who said: 'O Moses! How do you know where I placed My wisdom, for I have a servant at the meeting of the two rivers who is wiser than you.' Then Moses asked his Lord to show him to him. God revealed to him: 'Go to the river, and on the shore you will find a fish. Seize it and hand it over to your servant, then keep to the shore of the river. When you have forgotten the fish and your manna is destroyed, then you will find the pious servant.'"

Moses and his servant went forth, heading for the meeting-place of the two rivers to meet al-Khiḍr, taking with them a salted fish, for that is His word: "*When Moses said*"—that is, the son of Amram—"*unto his servant*"—namely his companion Joshua son of Nun son of Ephraim son of Joseph—"I will not give up"—namely, I will not cease journeying—"until I reach that point where the two rivers meet" (18:60)—it means the Persian Sea (Gulf) and the Byzantine Sea (Mediterranean), which is contiguous to the east. Qatādah as well as Ubayy b. Ka'b have said that it is Ifriqiyah; Muḥammad b. Ka'b (said that it is) Tangiers (*Tanjah*). He traveled for a considerable period, a long time. The two of them went carrying bread and salted fish until they reached the rock at the meeting-place of the two rivers by night. Mu'qil b. Ziyād said that it is the rock that is near the river of oil. He said that there is a spring there known as the water of life; anything which that water touches returns to life. When the spirit of that water and its coolness touched that fish, it began to move in

the basket, and became alive and entered the sea, for that is His word: *“And when they reached”*—meaning Moses and his servant—*“the point where the two met”*—meaning the two seas—*“they forgot their fish”* (18:61) The fish was only with Joshua and it was he who forgot it, which is proven by His saying: *“I forgot the fish”* (18:63)—except that the attribution of the forgetting is grammatically to the two of them, intending, however, one of the two of them, as He has said: *“There comes forth from both, pearls and corals.”* (55:22) They came forth from the salt without punishment, and the fish *“took its way into the waters, being free”* (18:61)—namely, along a way and a path. There has been argument over how that happened. Ubayy b. Ka’b from the Messenger of Allah who said: *“The water cleared away from the path of the fish and it became a trench, and the water did not come together again, so that Moses entered the trench on the trail of the fish, and behold! There was al-Khidr.”*

Ibn ‘Abbās said that he saw the trace of its fins in the mud when it fell into the water, and whatever part of the sea the fish touched dried up until it became a rock. Ibn ‘Abbās related from Ubayy b. Ka’b from the Messenger of Allah, who said: *“When the two of them reached the rock, they put down their heads and slept. The fish began to move in the basket and got out of it, falling into the sea, fleeing. ‘It took its way into the waters, being free,’ and God removed the current of water from the fish and it became like an arch over it. When Moses woke up, his companion forgot to tell him about the fish and the two of them went on all that day and night until next morning came and Moses said to his servant: ‘Bring us our breakfast [we are worn out with our travelling].’”* (18:63)

Qatādah said: *“God returned its spirit to the fish and it went free until it arrived at the sea. Then its path became so that as it traveled any section of it, it became solid water, a dry path.”*

Al-Kalbī said: *“Joshua son of Nun washed himself at the spring of life. Some of that water was sprinkled on the salted fish while it was in the basket, and it lived and jumped into the water. It began to beat the water with its tail, and whatever water it struck with its tail while it was going, dried up.”*

The sages have said that Moses had five books. The first was the Book of Flight, as He has said: *“Then I fled from you when I feared you.”* (26:22) The second was the Book of the Mountain, as He has said: *And when he came near it, a voice called out, saying: “Blessed is He who is in this fire and all around it!”* (27:8) The third was the Book of Request,

and that was when he left Egypt; God said: "*And verily We inspired Moses, saying: Set forth with My servants by night.*" (20:77; 26:52) The fourth was the Book of Battle, and that is His word, informing him of the speech of his people: "*So go you and your Lord, and fight. [Here we will stay.]*" (5:24) The fifth is the Book of Fatigue, for it is His word: "*We are worn out with travelling.*" (18:62)<sup>2</sup> That was when He made hunger befall Moses after he had passed the rock, so that he would remember the fish and return to the place of seeking it. Then his servant said to him and remembered: "*Did you see, when we took refuge on the rock, and I forgot the fish*"—namely, I left it and forgot it, this has been called "the idea of His predestining"—I forgot to mention the matter of the fish. "*It was Satan who caused me to forget to mention this. The fish made its way miraculously into the waters.*"

‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd has said: "What is more of a marvel than a fish which was, at one time, to be eaten, and then became alive so that it slithered into the sea?" He said: "It was a piece of fish."

Wahb b. Munabbih said: "There appeared in the waters, from the tracks of the movement of the fish, furrows like a river from where it entered until where it ended. Moses returned until he reached the meeting-place of the rivers, and behold! there was al-Khiḍr, for that is His word: "*He said: This is what we have been seeking*"—namely, searching for—"So they retraced their steps." (18:65) They went back on their footsteps as they had come following, that is, following the traces. "*Then they found one of Our servants*" (18:66)—meaning al-Khiḍr.

#### A SECTION ABOUT THE STORY OF AL-KHIḌR AND HIS CIRCUMSTANCES

His name was Baliyā b. Malikān b. Peleg son of Eber son of Shelah son of Arpachshad son of Shem son of Noah. He was given the by-name of al-Khiḍr because of what was related to us by Abū Sa‘īd b. Muḥammad b. ‘Abdullāh b. Ḥamdūn while I was reading before him. He said: "Abū Ḥāmid Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-

<sup>2</sup> The Five Books of Moses in the Torah are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, with no relation to the names of these books.

Sharqī—Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Bishr and Aḥmad b. Yūsuf all said that ‘Abd al-Razzāq—‘Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid al-Warrāq—Makkī b. ‘Abdān Abū l-Azhar told us that ‘Abd al-Razzāq related from Mu‘ammar—Hammām b. Munabbih—Abū Hurayrah who said: “The Messenger of Allah said: ‘He was named al-Khidr only because he sat on a white fur, and behold, it shook under him (to become) green.’” Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Faḍl al-Khuzā‘ī—Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Qaṣṣār—Aḥmad b. Yūsuf al-Salāmī—Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Firyābī—Sufyān—Maṣūūr—Mujāhid who said: “He was named al-Khidr because wherever he prayed became green all around him.”

#### A CHAPTER CONCERNING THE BEGINNING OF THE MATTER OF AL-KHIDR

It is related that when the Messenger of Allah was made to travel by night to the Heavens, while riding upon Burāq with Gabriel accompanying him, he smelled a pleasant fragrance, whereupon he said: “O Gabriel, what is this pleasant fragrance?” He replied: “Indeed there was a king in former times who behaved well towards the inhabitants of his kingdom. He had a son, with no other children. Those who relate narratives have said that his father was also a great king. So he entrusted his son to the teacher to educate him, and the son would visit him frequently. Between his residence and his teacher’s there was a pious man whom he would pass by. This man’s condition pleased the youth, so he became acquainted with the man and would sit in his presence, while his teacher would suppose that he was at home and his father would imagine that he was with his teacher. (This continued) until he became a young man and had grown up, and had acquired from this pious man his good qualities and his (practice of) worship.

Then (the counselors) said to his father, “You do not have any other son to inherit your kingdom. Were you to get him married, perhaps he would be endowed with children.” So his father suggested marriage to him, but he refused. Then he came back to his son and suggested (marriage again) to him, and (this time) he consented. Thus the king married him to a girl who was of royal descent, and she was given in marriage to him. When she remained (alone) with him in his presence he said to her, “I will inform you of a



matter which, if you are attentive to it, God will avert from you the evil of this world and the punishment of the Hereafter; but if you divulge my secret, God will punish you in this world and in the Hereafter." She said: "What is it?" He said: "Indeed I am a man who surrenders.<sup>3</sup> I am not in accordance with the religion of my father, and women are not among my needs. So if you will be content to live with me in light of that, and will follow me in my religion, that is up to you. And if you refuse, you can reunite with your people." So the woman said: "Nay, I will live with you."

Then when a period of time had come (and gone) for her, the king's counselors said to the youth's father: "We assume that your son must be sterile, and that a child will not be born to him." So his father inquired of him, and he said: "That is not in my hands. That is only in the hands of God. He gives it to whomever He wants." So he summoned the woman, and he asked her. And she replied to him as al-Khiḍr had replied to him. So his father waited a while, then called his son to him and told him, "I would like you to divorce this wife of yours, and I will marry you to another woman, one who will bear children. Perhaps you will be endowed with a son from her." Al-Khiḍr disliked this, but his father urged him until he caused a separation between them. Then he married him to another woman, one who was fertile but widowed, whereupon al-Khiḍr proposed his previous discourse to her. So she consented and said, "I will reside with you." They stayed together for a while. When his father had waited a long time for a son from him, he summoned him and said to him, "(No child) has been born to you." Then he answered, "That is not in my hands; rather it is in God's hands." Whereupon he summoned his wife and said to her, "You are a young, fertile woman, having conceived with a man other than my son, yet you are not conceiving with my son." So she said, "He did not touch me while I was in his company, and it was the same way with the first woman." So he summoned the latter and asked her, and she answered likewise. Then he summoned his son, and reproached him and berated him; as a result he became afraid of his father and did not feel himself safe with him. So he left his immediate domain, and wandered about aimlessly while none of God's creation knew where he was going.

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<sup>3</sup> Namely, to God; lit. *muslim*.

Then his father regretted what he had done, and sent a hundred men by various and different ways in order to seek him out. They set out to find him, and ten of those men reached him on one of the ocean's islands. He said to them, "Indeed I will say one thing to you, so conceal what I say. If you conceal it God will avert from you the evil of this world and the punishment of the Hereafter. If you refuse to conceal that, and divulge my secret, God will punish you in this world and in the Hereafter." They said to him, "Say whatever you want!" He asked, "Did my father and anyone other than you search for me?" They answered, "Yes." So he said to them, "Therefore, conceal my affair and do not inform my father that you have seen me, and speak just like your peers who, if the king sent them to search for me, would not see me. This is because if you inform him about me, or bring me to him, he will kill me, and you will be held responsible for my death." So they left him and departed. But when they returned to his father, nine of them said, "We have indeed got him. And he said to us thus and so, and we left him." The tenth said, "We have no knowledge of him, and I have no report about him," while the nine said, "Yes, we have overcome him, and if you wish, we will bring him to you." So he answered them, "Return to your search for him, and bring him to me!" Indeed al-Khidr was afraid that they would seize him, so he withdrew from that place to another place. Then they came but did not find him. So they returned and said, "We did not see him." As a result, his father killed them.

His father then called the widowed woman and said to her, "You arranged this with my son in order that he escape." So he killed her, and when the first wife heard about that, she fled out of fear of being killed. The tenth man, who had denied seeing al-Khidr, said, "What will safeguard me from his killing me just as he killed the nine?" So he fled until he came to a village, and lo! the fleeing wife was also in that village, and she was gathering firewood. One day she spoke the name of God, and the fleeing man heard her and said, "Who are you?" So she reported to him what had happened to her. Then he said, "O you! I am the tenth man; I left out of fear of being killed. So would you like me to marry you and we will worship God until we die?" And she said, "Yes." Then they set out until they came to a village in which was one of the Pharaohs. So they occupied a house made of reeds and stayed in it. And there they were endowed with three children. (At some point) the man

said to her, "When I am put to sleep, then bury me in this house and do the same for those of you who die, since indeed I do not want our graves to be with theirs. So when the last of us nears death, let him order that the house be destroyed on top of our graves."

Then the man died and his wife buried him. Then the Pharaoh of their time was informed that they affirmed the unity of God and worshipped Him. The wife was brought into his presence, and he ordered her to give up her religion, but she refused. So he ordered that a pot made of copper (be brought) and that it be filled with water, and the water be boiled to a vigorous boil. And he ordered that the woman and her offspring (be brought forth). So when they were brought he said to them, "Give up your religion, or I will cast you and your children into this pot." But she refused him. So he ordered that her oldest son be brought forth, and he threw him into it, and he disintegrated in it, and in a like manner (he treated) the second son, but the infant son was in her lap. Then they were about to throw him in, while the woman became terrified and fought them about his condition. Then the infant son spoke and said to her, "Patiently endure; indeed we are all (about to be) in Paradise." So when they were about to throw her in the pot she said to them, "I have one little request of you." They asked, "What is it?" She answered, "When you have thrown me into the pot, then bring it, along with our bones that it contains, into our house, and destroy it on top of us." So they did that.

And when the Messenger of Allah made the journey by night, he smelled a pleasant fragrance. So he asked, "What is this, O Gabriel?" Then he informed them of their story and said, "This is their fragrance."

And it is related that Gabriel said to the Messenger of Allah that a group from among the inhabitants of that city were traveling by sea in the course of their trading. The waves battered them, and their ship, with them (on board), was broken to pieces by the waves. But two of the men escaped on one of the ship's planks. Then the waves battered them until they brought them to rest on one of the ocean's islands. Then they went forth to go around the island, when suddenly they beheld al-Khidr. He was wearing white garments and was standing, performing ritual prayer, so they sat down until he finished his prayer. Then he turned to them and said to them, "Who are you?" They answered, "We are from such-and-such a city. We

went out into the ocean in order to seek commerce. Then this ship broke apart with us (on board) and we were driven to this island.” So he said, “Choose! If you want, you may stay in this place worshipping God (may He be exalted) with your sustenance coming to you, or if you want I will return you to your homes.” They answered, “Nay, you may return us to our homes.” So he said to them, “On condition that you give me your oath before God and your covenant with Him that you will not report anything of what you have seen (here).” So they gave him their oath and covenant to conceal (what they had seen).

Then he looked, and beheld that the clouds were passing. He called them and inquired of them. Then each one of them replied, “I am going to such-and-such a region.” So he summoned the one that was going to their regions, and he said to it, “Carry these two until you place them upon their roofs.” So the cloud descended and split open for them. Then it raised them up and departed until it placed both of them on their roofs.

Now one of them intended to conceal (his knowledge of al-Khidr), while the other intended to disclose it. The latter came down from his roof, went out of his door, headed for the gate of the city, and cried out, “Good counsel!” So he was permitted to see the king. He asked him, “What is your good counsel?” He answered, “I have seen your son in such-and-such a place, and he did such-and-such to me.” So he asked him, “Who (else) knows that?” The man replied, “So-and-so was my companion.” So the king sent for him and asked him about what the man had said. Then he replied, “As for traveling by sea, we indeed traveled, all together, with the ship breaking up with us (on board), and we came to be on one of the ship’s planks. Then the waves unceasingly battered us until we came to the beach. Then we came out of the ocean, and continued living due to the trees and plants of the Earth and the fruit, which one land raised for us and another threw down for us; this continued until we ended up at our homes.” Then the traitor said to him (the king), “Send out your messengers with me in order that I hand him (al-Khidr) over to you, and in order that you come to know that this man has indeed lied.”

So the king commanded the man who was concealing (the truth about al-Khidr to come) and imprisoned him. And he threatened him with crucifixion if his companion fulfilled what he had said. And he threatened the traitor with crucifixion if he was lying, and

did not bring al-Khidr back. So he sent some messengers with (the traitor), whereupon they traveled by sea until they came to the island. They searched for al-Khidr, but did not find anything. So they returned with the (traitor) to the king. And they said, "This man has called one of God's creation a liar, (yet) we saw nothing of what he said." So he crucified him and freed the other. Then, indeed, the inhabitants of that city continued to commit sins until God became angry with them. Gabriel said, "Then God sent me to them, and I inserted my wing under (the city), pulled it up, and raised it until the inhabitants of this world's Heaven heard the barking of dogs and the crying out of roosters. Then He commanded me, so I turned it upside down or, I reversed it (in its upward path) and it began to come down with those who were in it until it came to the face of the Earth. But the house of the man who was concealing (al-Khidr's secret) and the house of the woman who was concealing remained sound. Then the land became leveled, along with its inhabitants, and none of them was saved except for the two of them (the man and woman who concealed al-Khidr's secret). So they began to go around within the limits of the city, and neither of them met anyone except for the other, and indeed that occurred often. The man said, "Woman, I have indeed seen what afflicted the people. And verily, except for me and you, no one escaped. So, by what means did we save ourselves? Tell me and I will tell you." So each of them promised the other to keep the secret and they consented, and behold, their story was the same. Only their concealing had saved them. Then he said to her, "Would you like to give yourself in marriage to me, and we can go to some city. Then I can take you on and you can take me on until God appoints some one to command us (to do) what he wants." So she did that and they went to the city of a Pharaoh. Then they chose for themselves a house, and children were born to them.

The woman was friendly with the family of the Pharaoh, and she became a lady's-maid for them, and a favorite to them. Meanwhile, one day, as was customary, she was combing the hair of the king's daughter when the comb fell from her hand, so she said, "In the name of God, it fell due to denial of God." So the girl became frightened because of that, and she asked her, "Who is God?" She answered, "My Lord." So she asked her, "Do you have a lord other than my father?" So she answered, "Yes, He is my Lord and your father's Lord and the Lord of everything." So the girl went down

and went in to see her father, and she said, "You know that so-and-so says strange words; she says such-and-such." So he sent for her, and she appeared. Then he asked her, "What is this that has been reported to me about you?" So she said, "It is that which has been reported to you." He said, "Is there anyone else who speaks with your words?"

She said, "Yes, my husband and my sons." So he sent someone to them and he tested them, and lo, they were all speaking one (kind of) speech. So the king said to them, "We will not agree with you concerning what you believe until you return to our religion." So they said to him, "Do what you will do!" Then he ordered that a large copper pot (be brought forward). It was filled with water. Then underneath it (a fire) was lit until the water became agitated (boiled). At that point he summoned the sons and proposed to them, one by one, that they deny God. But they refused to deny God, so he took them and threw them into the pot. Following that, he summoned the woman and said to her, "Indeed you have a claim upon us. So if you return to our religion, (good); otherwise we will throw you into the pot." Then she said to him, "Do what you will do." Next, indeed, she said to him, "I have a request of you." He said, "What is it?" She answered, "When you have done what you will do, then go by our house, that a hole may be dug in it. Then you will order the pot (to be brought), and you will be carrying (it) along with what is in it. You will then bring it to our house, and what is in the pot will be poured into the hole. Following that the dirt will be put back over us. Lastly the house will be destroyed on top of us." So he did that. Now, this fragrance is the aroma of musk that will emanate from their house until the Day of Resurrection.

This is the story of al-Khidr with his father. The tale begins at the time of Afarīdhūn, the king,<sup>1</sup> son of al-Qabā', according to the words of those learned in the earliest books. They say that he was in advance of Dhū l-Qarnayn the great, who lived at the time of Abraham. It was he who passed judgment at Bi'r al-Yasa', which is a well that Abraham dug for his cattle in the desert of Jordan.

Some people among the inhabitants of Jordan laid claim to the land on which Abraham had dug it, so Abraham brought them to trial before Dhū l-Qarnayn. It is said that al-Khidr was in his

<sup>1</sup> Also *Afarīdhūn*, the Persian king mentioned often by Ṭabarī, pp. 201-230; Brinner, *PP*, pp. 1-27.

vanguard during the days of his journey over the Earth, and that, together with Dhū l-Qarnayn, he reached the River of Life and drank of its waters. Neither he nor Dhū l-Qarnayn and his companions who were in his camp knew about it, but he became immortal and is alive until now. They say that Dhū l-Qarnayn, who lived at the time of Abraham and in whose vanguard was al-Khiḍr, was Afarīdūn the king. Some claim that al-Khiḍr was the son of one who believed in Abraham, the Friend of God, and followed him in his religion, emigrating with him from the land of Babylon.

Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq b. Yasār—Wahb b. Munabbih that al-Khiḍr was Jeremiah son of Hilkiah who was of the tribe of Aaron son of Amram, and he was the one whom God sent as a prophet during the days of Josiah son of Amon, king of the Children of Israel. But the first statement is more like the truth and better suited for honesty and truth, because Josiah son of Amon lived at the time of Karafasht son of Karārasht during the days of Nebuchadnezzar. Between the days of Afarīdūn and Karafasht lay periods and eras of which no expert in the history and eras of mankind can be ignorant.

The account from the Messenger of Allah in the telling of Ubayy b. Ka'b is true, namely that the master of Moses son of Amram, who was commanded to seek him out and to learn from him, was al-Khiḍr. Now the Messenger of Allah is the most knowledgeable of all creation regarding past and present events, and Moses son of Amram prophesied only during the days of Manūshihhr the king.<sup>5</sup> Manūshihhr the king ruled after his grandfather Afarīdūn. So this proves the error of whoever says he was Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, because Jeremiah lived during the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Between the eras of Moses and Nebuchadnezzar was a period well known to scholars—O God!—except if matters were as said by the one who claimed that he was in the vanguard of Dhū l-Qarnayn, the companion of Abraham, and drank from the waters of the spring of life and became immortal, and was not sent during the days of Abraham and those after him until the days of Josiah son of Amon when he was sent as a prophet. God is All-knowing! The truth is that he was a long-lived prophet, concealed from sight.

Muḥammad b. al-Mutawakkil—Ḍamrah b. 'Ubaydallāh b. Siwār, who said, "Al-Khiḍr was a descendant of the Persians, while Elijah

<sup>5</sup> Mentioned in Brinner, *PP*, p. 27, n. 94, as *Manūchihhr*, grandson of *Afarīdhūn*, a figure in the *Shāhnāmeh*, the great Persian epic.

was of the Children of Israel. The two of them would meet every year at the festive season.”

Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim—Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim—Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb—Yazīd b. Sam‘ān b. Ḥibbān al-Wāsiṭī—‘Alī b. al-Mundhir—Sufyān b. ‘Uyaynah—‘Amr b. Dīnār, who said that al-Khiḍr and Elijah will remain alive on the Earth as long as the Qur’ān exists therein. If the Qur’ān should be removed from it, they will die.

Abū ‘Amr al-‘Imrānī—Abū Aḥmad b. Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Rāzī—Ibrāhīm b. Ishāq al-Anamāṭī—Abū Hammām al-Walīd b. Shuja‘ al-Salmī and ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid—Ibn Thawbān—certain scholars—Anas b. Mālīk, who said: “I went out with the Messenger of Allah when suddenly there was a sound coming from some people. He said, ‘Anas, go away so that I may see what this sound is.’” He said: ‘So I went away and behold, there was a man praying and saying,’ “O God! Consider me one of the community of Muḥammad upon which (You) have mercy, which is forgiven, whose requests are granted, whose repentance is accepted!” So I went to the Messenger of Allah and told him about that. He said to me, “Go and say to him: ‘The Messenger of Allah extends greetings to you and says to you, “Who are you?”’ I then told the man what the Messenger of Allah had said and he said to me, “Extend my greetings to the Messenger of Allah and tell him: “Your brother al-Khiḍr says to you, ‘Pray to God to consider me one of your community, upon which (He) has mercy, which is forgiven, whose requests are granted, whose repentance is accepted.’”

We return to the account of Moses and his servant.<sup>6</sup> They say that Moses and his servant reached al-Khiḍr while he was standing in prayer on a green carpet on the surface of the water, attired in a green garment. Moses greeted him and al-Khiḍr said, “Where is there peace in your land?” He replied, “I am Moses.” He said, “Moses of the Children of Israel?” He responded, “Yes.” Al-Khiḍr said, “Is there some task among the Children of Israel?” Moses responded, “My Lord sent me to follow you and to learn from your wisdom.” Then they sat in conversation and a swift came and carried

<sup>6</sup> The story of al-Khiḍr/Khaḍir and his servant—or Moses, is studied in detail by B. Wheeler, “Moses or Alexander . . .”. Much of the story is in Brinner. *An Elegant Composition*, Chapter II: “R. Joshua ben Levi and the Strange Actions of Elijah.”



off some water in its beak. Al-Khiḍr said, "O Moses! Pay attention, for you are the most learned of the people of the Earth, but your learning and mine and the learning of all the ancients and moderns, next to God's knowledge, are nothing but less than the water which the swift carried off in its beak." And that is God's word: "*Then they found one of our servants, unto whom We had given mercy from us*"—namely, prophecy and wisdom—"and had taught him knowledge from Our presence." (18:66)

Ibn 'Abbās said, "Al-Khiḍr used to study occult lore and Moses said to him, 'May I follow you so that you may teach me right conduct such as you have been taught?' He said, '*Lo! You will not be able to bear with me.*' (18:68) For I study the esoteric lore which God has taught me, and *how will you be able to bear with that of which you cannot compass any knowledge?*" (18:69)—namely, that which you have not learned. Moses said, 'God willing, you will find me patient, and I will not contradict you.' He said, '*Well, if you go with me, do not ask me concerning anything*'—you have learned, of which you disapprove—"and I will explain its significance to you." (18:71) They set out, journeying to seek a ship on which they would sail. A new, trustworthy ship passed by them and they boarded it. The master of the ship said, 'They are robbers,' and he ordered them to leave it. Then the master of the ship said, 'They are not robbers; rather, I think that their faces are the faces of prophets.'"

Ubayy b. Ka'b said from the Messenger of Allah: "They went forth, walking along the shore of the sea, when a ship passed them and they spoke to them to carry them. They knew al-Khiḍr, so they took them without charge. When they were out at sea, al-Khiḍr took an ax and made a hole in a board of the ship so the water would enter. Moses stuffed it with his garment and said, 'Did you make a hole in it to drown its people? For they have taken us on board and have treated us kindly, whereas you have made a hole in their ship. This is not their reward from us—*You have done a dreadful*—that is to say, surprising, disapproved—*thing.*' (18:72) Al-Khiḍr said, '*Did I not tell you that you would be unable to bear with me?*' (18:73) Moses said, '*Do not be angry with me that I forgot, and do not be hard on me for my fault*' (18:74)—namely, do not hold me responsible and do not let what I have done make you angry.'"

Ibn 'Abbās said, "When al-Khiḍr made a hole in the ship, Moses drew aside and said to himself, 'What am I doing in the company of this man? Among the Children of Israel I would recite to them

morning and evening the book of God, and give them commands, and they would obey me.' Al-Khiḍr said to him, 'O Moses! Do you want me to tell you what you were saying to yourself?' He said, 'Yes.' He said, 'You were saying such-and-such.' He said, 'Did I tell the truth?' Then they left, walking until they left Aylah<sup>7</sup> where they came upon ten lads, among whom was one who was the handsomest and most radiant-faced among them."

Ibn 'Abbās said he was a lad who had not yet reached puberty. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said he was a lad who had acted corruptly, whose parents were hurt by him. Al-Kalbī said the lad used to steal goods at night. When morning came, he would take refuge with his parents who would swear on his behalf, out of compassion for him, saying, "He spent the night with us."

There was disagreement about his name. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said his name was Ḥasanūd, and some say al-Ḥusayn. Wahb b. Munabbih said the name of his father was Malās and his mother's name was Raḥmah. He said, "Al-Khiḍr seized him and killed him."

They disagreed about the manner of his slaying. Sa'īd b. Jubayr said: "He seized him and laid him down, then he slew him with a knife." Al-Kalbī said: "He flung him down and then took off his head." Some people said that he kicked him with his foot and then he killed him, while others said that he struck his head against a well until he killed him. In another story, he put his finger in the boy's navel and pulled it out, whereupon he died.

When he had killed him, Moses said: "*Have you slain an innocent soul?*"—meaning a pure one, which has not sinned and is not deserving of being killed—"who has slain no, man? *Verily, you have done a horrid thing*" (18:75)—namely, something reprehensible. Qatādah said: "'Reprehensible' is stronger and greater than the matter (involved)." He said: "Then al-Khiḍr became angry and tore out the right shoulder of the lad and skinned the flesh from it, and lo! on a bone of his shoulder was written: 'An infidel who will never believe in God.'"

A proof of this statement is what 'Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid—Aḥmad b. 'Ubaydallāh—Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Sulaymān—Yaḥyā—Qays—Abū Ishāq—Sa'īd b. Jubayr—Ibn 'Abbās—Ubayy b. Ka'b, who said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah say, 'The lad whom al-Khiḍr slew was an infidel by nature.'"

<sup>7</sup> Today's Eilat in Hebrew. See 482, n. 1, below.

Al-Khiḍr said: “*O Moses! Did I not tell you that you could not bear with me?*” (18:76) (Moses) “said: *If I ask you about anything after this, do not keep company with me, You have received an excuse from me*” (18:77)—namely, for parting from me.

‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Ḥamid al-Wazzān—Makkī b. ‘Abdān—‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Bishr—Ḥajjāj b. Muḥammad—Ḥamzah al-Zayyāt—Abū Ishāq—Sa‘īd b. Jubayr—Ibn ‘Abbās—Ubayy b. Ka‘b who said: “If the Messenger of Allah mentioned anyone in his prayer, he would begin with himself. One day he said: ‘The mercy of God be upon us and on my brother Moses. If he had remained with his companion he would have seen the greatest of wonders. But he had said: ‘If I ask you about anything after this, do not keep company with me. You have received an excuse from me.’ *So the two of them journeyed on, when they came to the folk of a certain township.*” (18:77)

There has been disagreement about that township. Ibn ‘Abbās said that it was Antioch; Muḥammad b. Sīrīn said that it was Aylah, which is the farthest from Heaven of all God’s Earth. It has been said that it was a town of Byzantium called Nazareth to which the Christians<sup>8</sup> trace themselves. They say that they arrived there at sunset, and “*they asked its folk for food,*” and asked them for hospitality, “*but they refused to have them as guests.*” (18:77)

They say that the folk of that town were miserly. Qatādah said about these verses: “The worst of towns gives no hospitality to guests, nor does it recognize its due to wayfarers.” They say that on that night they did not find either hospitable reception or water or shelter. It was a cold night and they took refuge by a wall on the main road “*which was on the point of falling*”—meaning that it was almost destroyed and collapsing—so that neither the people of the town nor anyone else would pass by it without being filled with fear of it, though a pious man had erected it.

In certain accounts there is that the height of that wall was thirty cubits, in the cubits of that era, and that its length on the surface of the Earth was five hundred cubits, and its width fifty cubits. Al-Khiḍr “*repaired it,*” that is, he straightened it up. Ibn ‘Abbās said: he destroyed it and rebuilt it. Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr said: He smoothed the wall and straightened it with his hand and his shoulders and it

<sup>8</sup> Nazareth, Arabic: *al-Nāṣira*; Hebrew: *Notzrat*; Christians, Arabic: *Naṣrānī*, pl. *Naṣārā*; Hebrew: *Notzrī*, pl. *Notzrīm*.

stood erect. Moses said to him: "*Had you wished, you could have taken payment for it, so that it would supply us with food and a means of subsistence for our journey, since we asked them for hospitality and they would not give it to us.*" Al-Khiḍr replied to him: "*This is the parting between you and me! I will announce to you the interpretation of what you could not bear patiently.*" (18:79)

Ka'b and others have said: The ship belonged to ten chronically ill brothers, and they had no means of livelihood without it, and they had inherited it from their father. Five of them worked on the ship in the river, and five of them were unable to work. As for the workers among them, one of them suffered from leprosy; the second was one-eyed; the third was lame; the fourth suffered from hernia; and the fifth was afflicted with fever, his fever never stopping for any length of time, and he was the youngest of them. Those who were unable to work were a blind man, a deaf man, a mute, an invalid, and a madman. The river on which they worked was between Persia and the Mediterranean.

Ikrimah: "I said to Ibn 'Abbās regarding His words: *'As for the ship, it belonged to poor people'* . . . they were poor, yet their ship was worth a thousand *dinars*." He replied: "Verily the traveler is poor even if he has a thousand *dinars* with him. For that reason it is said: 'The traveler and his wealth are trivial except for what God protects.' I wanted to mar it for certain because of the greed of the covetous and for warding off their evil, *for there was a king behind them who was taking every ship by force.* (18:80) Behind them means before them, as God has said: *'Behind them there is Hell'* (14:16) and *'behind them is a barrier until the day when they are raised up'* (23:100) . . . namely, in front of them. And it is said 'in back of them' because their return on their way was past him, but they did not know the account of him. God informed al-Khiḍr of his account, so he would take every pious ship by force." Thus Ibn 'Abbās used to read it. "So I (al-Khiḍr) bored a hole in it and marred it so that that king would not pay attention to it."

They disagreed about the name of that king. Most of the scholars said his name was Jalandī and he was an infidel. Ibn Iṣḥāq said: His name was Manwāh b. Jalandī al-Urdunnī. Shu'ayb al-Jubā'ī said: His name was Hadad b. Badad. It is said that the king possessed tree hundred and sixty castles, in each of which there was a wife. He said: "And when they had passed that king, al-Khiḍr stopped up the hole in the ship and repaired it."

*“As for the lad, his parents were believers and we feared”*—that is, we knew—*“lest he should oppress them”*—overwhelm them—*“with rebellion and disbelief”* (18:81)—and kill them. It is said that He feared that when he grew up he would call his parents to unbelief and they would respond to him and enter his religion with him because of their excessive love for him. It is said, out of fear that the boy would perform an adulterous act and his parents would overlook it and enter the Fire. *“And We intended that their Lord should change him for them for one better in purity”*—and piety—*“and nearer to-mercy.”* (18:82)

Ibn ‘Abbās said: “It means reaching out to mercy and being dutiful to his parents. God changed him for them with a believing girl who attained (the time of) Yūnus b. Mattā (Jonah) and one of the prophets married her. She bore him a prophet at whose hands God guided one of the religious communities.” ‘Abdullāh b. Ḥāmid—Ḥāmid b. Aḥmad—Abū Muḥammad ‘Abdallāh b. Yaḥyā b. Hārith—‘Abd al-Wahhāb b. Fulayḥ—Maymūn b. al-Qaddāḥ—Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq—his father regarding this verse, saying: He exchanged the two of them for a girl who bore seventy prophets. Ibn Jurayj said: He exchanged him for them with a Muslim lad, while the slain one was an infidel. Qatādah said regarding this verse: “His parents rejoiced for him when he was born and mourned for him when he was killed; yet had he survived, he would have been their destruction. The believer is content with God’s decree in what he dislikes, which is better for him than his being contented with what he likes.”

As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city whose names were Aṣram and Ṣarīm. Beneath it was a treasure belonging to the two of them. There was debate over what that treasure was. Ibn ‘Abbās and Sa‘īd b. Jubayr said it consisted of pages buried beneath it which contained knowledge. Al-Ḥasan and Ja‘far b. Muḥammad said that it was a golden tablet on which was written: “In the name of God the Compassionate, the Merciful! How remarkable it is how the one who believes in (his own) ability is saddened! How remarkable it is how the one who has certitude about (his own) sustenance is worn out (with work)! How remarkable it is how the one who is certain of death becomes joyful! How remarkable it is how the one who believes in the Reckoning is added up! How remarkable it is how the one who knows this world and its fickleness feels secure in it! There is no god but Allah and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah.”

Others said that the treasure consisted of wealth, which is proven by what we were told by Abū Bakr al-Ḥamshādī al-Mazakī—Abū Yūsuf Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Qaydūs al-Jarā'iqī—'Uthmān b. Sa'īd—Şafwān b. Şāliḥ al-Dimashqī—Yazīd b. Muslim al-Şana'ānī—Yazīd b. Yazīd—Makḥūl—Abū l-Dardā' said: The Messenger of Allah said regarding His word *'and there was beneath it a treasure belonging to them'*: "It consisted of gold and silver. Their father, whose name was Kāshih, was pious, god-fearing, upright. They were pressured because of the piety of their father, though piety was not mentioned regarding them. Between them and the (fore)father through whom they were saved, there were seven fathers."

'Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid b. Muḥammad—Bishr b. Mūsā—al-Ḥumaydī—Sufyān—Muḥammad b. Sūqah—Muḥammad b. al-Munkadar who said: "God preserves through the pious man his sons and grandsons, as well as the spot on which he is and the surroundings which are around him, and he remains in God's protection and His shelter. According to Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab: When he saw his son he would say, "My little son! I shall increase my prayers on your account. Perhaps I shall be preserved through you," and he would recite that Qur'ānic verse.

Yaḥyā b. Ismā'īl b. Salamah: I had a sister who was older than I. She became confused, her sense left her, and she became wild. She was in a chamber on one of the farthest of our terraces and remained thus for some ten years. But in spite of the loss of her faculties she kept up her prayer and ablution. One night while I was asleep, there I was at the door of my house where someone had been knocking for half the night. I said: "Who is there?" She said, "Baḥḥah." I said, "My sister." She said, "Your sister." I said, "At your service," and I got up and opened the door and she entered. She had not experienced the house for more than twenty years. I said, "O my sister! Is it well (with you)?" She answered, "Well, my brother. While I was sleeping tonight, someone came to me in my dream and said to me, 'Peace be upon you, Baḥḥah!' And I said, 'And upon you be peace.' He said to me that 'God has preserved your father Ismā'īl b. Salamah b. Kuhayl through Salamah your grandfather, and has preserved you through Ismā'īl your father. If you wish, I can pray to God for you and what you have will go away. If you wish, you can be steadfast with it and you will have Paradise, and Abū Bakr and 'Umar will intercede for you with God for love of them by your father and grandfather.' I said, 'If I must

choose between one of the two, then let it be steadfastness in the situation I am in and Paradise. For God is abounding in His kindness to His creation; He is not impressed by anything in His wisdom. If he wished, He would join the two of them to me.” She said, “Someone said to me, ‘God has joined both of them to you, and He is pleased with your father and grandfather because of their love for Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. So be at rest, for God has removed what was in you.’”

It is stated regarding a certain ‘Alid that he entered unto Hārūn al-Rashīd intending to kill him, but when he entered unto him, he honored him and let him go free. (Hārūn) was asked, “By what did you pray so that God saved you?” He replied, “I said: ‘O One Who preserved the two lads because of the piety of their father, preserve me from him because of the piety of my forebears.’”

*“And your Lord intended that they should come to their full strength and should bring forth their treasure”—which was buried under the wall—“and I did it not upon my own will”—I did it only at the command of God. “This is the interpretation of that with which you could not be patient.” (18:83)*

It is said that when Moses found fault with al-Khiḍr for making a hole in the ship, killing the boy, and straightening up the wall, anticipating reward in the Hereafter, he said to him: O Moses! Do you blame me for spoiling the ship, fearing that its people will drown—you have forgotten yourself when your mother placed you in the water, when you were small, weak, and yet God preserved you. You blamed me for killing the infidel boy for no reason, and you forgot yourself when you killed the Egyptian for no reason. You blamed me for not taking payment for straightening the wall, and forgot yourself when you watered the flocks of Shu‘ayb for reward in the Hereafter, because of the omnipotent King.”

A certain historian said: “This is the story of Moses and his servant when they set out for al-Khiḍr and they were in the trackless wilderness. When Moses parted from al-Khiḍr he returned to his people who were in the wilderness.”

It is related from ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib and others, that when Moses wished to part from al-Khiḍr, al-Khiḍr said to him: “I commend you to God’s protection!” Then Moses said to him: “Entrust me with advice.” Al-Khiḍr said to him: “Do not want without a need. Beware of obstinacy! Do not laugh without wonderment. Do not

revile wrongdoers for their sins, but weep for Your (own) sins. Do not put off today's work until tomorrow."

Abū Umāmah al-Bāhili related from the Prophet who said: "Should I not give you an account of al-Khiḍr?" They replied: "Of course, O Messenger of Allah!" He said: "While al-Khiḍr was walking in one of the markets of the Children of Israel, a scribe met him and said to him: 'Give me alms, may God bless you.' He replied: 'I have trust in God, and what God decides will be; I have nothing to give you.' The man repeated: 'Give me alms, may God bless you! I see kindness in your face and I want the kindness that is in your heart.' Al-Khiḍr said to him: 'I have trust in God. Whatever God decides in a matter will be. I have nothing to give you, but take my hand, lead me to the market, and sell me.' The man said: 'Will it be like that?' (Al-Khiḍr) replied: 'I say the truth. You have asked me for a great thing; you have asked me concerning my Lord and I have answered you. Take my hand, lead me through the market, and sell me.' He took al-Khiḍr's hand, led him through the market, and sold him for four hundred dirhams. He remained with the buyer for several days, but he did not use him for anything. Al-Khiḍr said to him: 'Employ me!' The man said: 'You are very old and I dislike overburdening you.' He said: 'It will not overburden me.' He said: 'Then arise and move this stone from here to here.' The stone was one which only six persons could move in a whole day, but he got up and moved it in one hour, and God assisted him in moving it with one of the angels. The man was very pleased with him, and said: 'Well done!' The man needed to go on a journey and he said to al-Khiḍr: 'I consider you reliable, pious, of good counsel, so take my place among my people.' He said: 'All right, if God wills, but use me for something.' He said: 'I dislike overburdening you.' He said: "That will not overburden me.' He said: 'Make me some bricks which I need for a palace.' He described it to him and left on his journey. When his need was met and he returned from his journey, behold! Al-Khiḍr had erected the building as he had desired, and his wonderment at him was increased. He said to him: 'Who are you?' He said: 'I am the slave whom you purchased.' He said: 'I ask you by God to tell me who you are.' Al-Khiḍr said: 'This is the oath that placed me in servitude. As for me, I am al-Khiḍr. A beggar asked me for something by my Lord to give it to him, but I had nothing to give him, so I made myself available for him to sell



me. It has reached me that one who is asked by God, and who responds to the one who asks and is able to fulfill his need, stands on the Day of Resurrection before his Lord, and on his face their is neither flesh nor skin, but only chattering bones.’”<sup>9</sup>

The narrator said: “That man began to weep and bowed down to him, kissing him and saying to him: ‘By my mother and father! I have indeed overburdened you, but I did not know you. So judge me in my wealth and my people. If you wish me to set you free, I should do so.’ He said: ‘Yes, but I would like servants of my Lord to set me free.’ The man was an unbeliever, but he accepted Islam at his hands, gave him four hundred *dinars*, and set him free. God inspired him saying: ‘I saved you from slavery, and the unbeliever became a Muslim and gave you a *dinar* for every *dirham* so that you might learn that no one will ever suffer loss in my service.’”

This is the last story about al-Khidr and Moses and his servant. God is All knowing.

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<sup>9</sup> This story closely resembles the Jewish tale of “Elijah the Prophet as Builder” in Brinner, *An Elegant Composition*, pp. 99–102.

## MOSES

### CHAPTER ABOUT THE STORY OF ‘ĀMĪL, THE SLAIN ONE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, AND THE STORY OF THE COW<sup>1</sup>

God has said: *“And when Moses said to his people: Lo! God commanded you to sacrifice a cow.”* (2:67) The commentators have said that a person whose name was ‘Āmīl was found slain among the Children of Israel, but no one knew who had killed him. The commentators have disagreed over who had slain him and the reason for his being slain. ‘Aṭā’ and al-Suddī said: “Among the Children of Israel there was a very wealthy man who had a poor paternal cousin and no heir besides him. When he lived too long for him, he slew him in order to inherit from him. Someone said that under ‘Āmīl there was a female paternal cousin who had no peer among the Children of Israel in goodness and beauty, so a paternal cousin of hers killed him in order to marry her. When he had killed him he carried him from one city to another one and threw him down there.”

‘Ikrimah said: “The Children of Israel had a place of worship that had twelve doors, each of their tribes having one door. The slain man was found at the door of one tribe and was dragged to the door of another tribe, and the two tribes argued about it.”

Ibn Sīrīn said: “The killer slew him, then carried him and placed him at the door of a certain man. Then in the morning they demanded vengeance for him and his blood and laid claim to it. Some said that he placed him between two towns, and the people of the two quarreled over it. (The dead man’s) avengers came to Moses, bringing with them people from whom they demanded (vengeance) for the slaying, and asked him for retaliation. Moses questioned them about the matter and they disclaimed responsibility, though they had no proof, so the matter of the slain man was doubtful to Moses, and conflict and dissension developed between them. This was before the revelation regarding swearing oaths in the Torah. They asked Moses to pray to God to clarify the matter of that slain man for

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<sup>1</sup> This story is based on the Biblical commandment regarding the Red Heifer, Numbers 19:2; though here the cow is yellow rather than red.

them. Moses asked his Lord and He commanded them to slaughter the cow, for Moses said to them: *'Lo! God commanded you to slaughter a cow.'* They said: *'Do you jest with us?'* (2:67) We came to you to ask you about a slain man, and you command us to slaughter a cow.' They said that only because of the apparent distance between the two matters, and they did not leave the intent of the reason behind it. Moses said: *'God forbid that I should be among the foolish'* (2:67) meaning among those who make jest of the believers."

When the people realized that the slaughter of the cow was a commandment from God which was incumbent upon them, they asked Moses for a description, saying: *"Pray to your Lord for us to clarify what (cow) it is,"* (2:68) although they intended to take the most inferior cow and slaughter it as compensation from them, although they were strict in this matter with themselves and God was strict with them. Their strictness was predestined by God and wisdom.

The reason was as al-Suddī and others have mentioned regarding a man of the Children of Israel who was devoted to his father. His devotion reached the point that a man brought him a pearl and he bought it for fifty thousand, and there was a surplus and profit in that. The seller said: "Give me the price of the pearl!" He replied: "My father is sleeping and the key to the chest is under his head. Give me time until he awakens, and I will give you the price." He said: "Wake up your father and give me the money." He said: "I cannot do that, but I will increase the price for you by ten thousand, and watch me until my father wakes up." The man said: "I will take the ten thousand so that you wake up your father and speed up the payment." He said: "I will increase it by twenty thousand for you if you will wait until he wakes up." He said, "I accept," and he sat, and his father was not awakened. When his father woke up, he told him about that, and he prayed for him and rewarded him well and said to him: "You did well, my son, and this cow is yours for what you did," it was the last cow remaining to them. The Messenger of Allah said regarding this tale: "Look at what God did for him because of his devotion."

Ibn 'Abbās, Wahb, and other people of the Scriptures have said: Among the Children of Israel there was a pious man who had an infant child, and he also had a calf. He brought the calf to a thicket and said: "My God, I entrust this calf to you for my son, until he grows up." Then the man died and the calf grew up in the thicket until it became mature. It would flee from anyone who saw it. When

the man's son grew up, he was devoted to his mother. He divided the night into three thirds; he prayed for one third, slept for one third, and sat at his mother's head for one third. One day his mother said to him: "My son, your father left you a calf as an inheritance and took it to such-and-such a thicket, entrusting it to God. So go out and adjure it by the God of Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac that it return to you. Its distinguishing mark is that when you look at it, it will seem to you that rays of the Sun are coming forth from its skin, for its name is Gilded-One because of the beauty of its form, the purity of its color, and its yellowness."

He came to the thicket and saw the calf grazing, and the youth shouted to it, saying: "I adjure you by the God of Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob that you return to me." It came hurriedly until it stood before him, and he took it by the neck and led it. The cow spoke by God's permission and said: "O youth devoted to his mother! Mount me, for that will be easier for you." He said: "My mother did not order me to do that; she said only: 'Take it by the neck!'" The cow said: "By the God of the Children of Israel! If you had mounted me you would not have been able to control me ever. So go, for if you were to indicate to the mountain to be uprooted from its foundation and move, it would do so because of your devotion to your mother."

The youth went off with it and God's enemy, Iblīs, met him in the form of a herdsman and said to him: "Youngster, I am a herder of cows and I took one of my oxen and carried on it my provisions and belongings until, when I reached the middle of this road and went to take care of my needs, it ran away to the midst of the mountain and I cannot get it. I fear death for myself. If you think you could carry me on this cow of yours and save me from death, I will give you two cows like yours." The youth did not do it, but said: "Go and trust in God, for if God knows about you, then of a certainty, He will make you arrive even without provisions or a riding animal." Iblīs, may God curse him, said: "If you wish, sell it to me for whatever you judge right; or if you wish, carry me on it, and I will give you ten times the equivalent of it." The youth responded: "My mother did not order me to do this." While the youth was doing this, a bird flew in front of the cow and the cow bolted, fleeing into the open country, and the herdsman had disappeared. The youth called the cow, saying: "In the name of God, the God of Abraham!" And the cow returned to him and said to

him: "O youth devoted to his mother! Did you not see the bird that flew? It was Iblīs, the enemy of God, who stole me away. If he had ridden me, you would never have been able to do anything with me. But when you prayed by the God of Abraham, an angel came to me and wrested me from the hand of Iblīs and returned me to you because of your devotion to your mother and your obedience to her." The youth took the cow to his mother and she said to him: "You are poor and possess nothing, and it is becoming burdensome for you to collect firewood by day and to stay up at night, so go and sell this cow and take its price." He said: "For how much should I sell it?" She said: "For three *dinars*. And do not sell it without my consent and advice." The price of a cow at that time was three *dinars*, so he took it to the market. God sent an angel to the boy to show His creature his power, to test the youth as to how devoted he was to his mother, for God was well acquainted with him.

The angel said to him: "For how much will you sell this cow?" He replied: "For three *dinars*, but on the condition of my mother's satisfaction." The angel said to him: "I will give you six *dīnārs* if you do not consult your mother." The youth said to him: "If you were to give me its weight in gold, I would not accept it without my mother being satisfied." So he returned the cow to his mother and informed her of the price. She said: "Return and sell it for six *dīnārs* with my satisfaction." So the youth took the cow to the market, and the angel came and said to him: "Did you consult your mother?" The youth said to him: "Yes, and she ordered me not to go for less than six *dinars*, but that I consult her." The angel said to him "I shall give you twelve *dinars* if you do not consult her." But the youth refused and returned to his mother and told her about that. She said: "That man who comes to you is one of the angels, coming to you in human form to test you. If he comes to you, say to him: 'Do you order me to sell you this cow or not?'" The youth did that and the angel said to him: "Go to your mother and say to her: 'Keep this cow, for Moses, son of Amram, will buy it from you for a slain man who will be killed among the Children of Israel, but do not sell it except for a full sack of *dinars*.'" The two of them took that cow, and God ordained the killing of that very cow for the Children of Israel as a recompense to the youth for his devotion to his mother, as a favor and mercy from Him, for that is His word: "*They said: Pray to your Lord for us to clarify for us what (cow) it is, and what is its like?*" Moses said,—that is to say, God said: "*Verily she is*

a cow neither with calf nor immature—namely, neither old nor young—“(she is) between the two”—halfway between the two ages—“so do that which you are commanded” (2:68) and do not ask too many questions. “They said: Pray for us to your Lord to make clear for us what color she is.” (Moses) answered: “Lo! He says: Verily she is a yellow cow. Her color is bright, gladdening the beholders” (2:69) of her; she would please them with her beauty and purity, for the eye is gladdened and desires the sight of something beautiful. ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb said: “Whoever wears yellow shoes lessens his sorrow, for God has said: “. . . yellow, her color is bright, gladdening the beholders.”

“They said: Pray for us to your Lord that He make clear to us what (cow) she is”—whether stray or working—“Lo! Cows are much like us. If God wills, we may be led aright” (2:70)—to the description of her.

The Messenger of Allah said: “By God! If they had not made that exclusion, it would not have been accepted from them until the end of time.” (Moses) said: “Lo! He says: Verily she is a cow unyoked”—not broken to work—“she does not plow the soil”—turning it over for cultivation—“nor does she water the tilled land; one whole”—free of defects—“and without blemish.” (2:71) ‘Aṭā’ said: “She had no flaw”, whereas Qatādah said: “She had no whiteness in her originally.” Muḥammad b. Ka’b said: “She had no color in her that differed from most of her color.” It is said: When Moses said that to them, they said, “Now you have brought us the truth” (2:71)—namely the reliable, complete, and clear description. They sought her, but found none with her complete description except with the youth who was devoted to his mother. They bought her from him for her a full sack of gold. Al-Suddī said: “They bought her for her weight ten times over in gold.” “So they sacrificed her, although they almost did not” (2:71)—because of the dearness of her price.

Al-Qarazī said: “They almost did not sacrifice her despite the totality of her description, for that is His word: ‘And when you slew (a man)’—meaning ‘Āmīl, for these verses are the beginning of the story—‘and disagreed concerning it’—namely, you argued about it—‘and God brought forth’ that is, made apparent—‘that which you were hiding’—that is, concealing. ‘And We said: Smite him’—meaning the slain one—‘with some of it’—namely some of the cow. (2:72–73) Then they differed over what that part of it was.” Ibn ‘Abbās said: “They smote him with the bone that connects with the cartilage, for that is a vital organ.” Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: “With her tongue.” Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl said: “This is the first likeness, for what is sought in reviving the slain

man is his speech, and the tongue is an instrument.” Sa‘īd b. Jubayr said: “Her tail.” Ghiyāth said: “This is the first of the correct interpretations, because the root of the tail is the foundation of the body upon which the creature is mounted. It is the first thing that God creates, and the last thing to decay.” Mujāhid said: “With her tail,” while ‘Ikrimah and al-Kalbī said: “With her right thigh.” Al-Suddī said: “With the piece that is between her shoulders,” and some say with her two ears.

They did it and the slain man arose by God’s permission, his jugular veins gushing blood. He said: “So-and-so killed me,” and fell down, dying where he was. God has said: “*Thus God brings the dead to life*”—as He revived ‘Āmīl after his death—“*and shows you His signs*”—proofs of His might and witness to His wisdom—“*so that you may understand.*” (2:73)

It was said that when this happened to ‘Āmīl, God revealed to Moses that when he headed for the Holy Land with the Children of Israel he should observe any slain man found between two towns or two places, and take the closest of the two towns to him and make it responsible for the blood-wit. If they knew his slayer they should turn him over to (the slain man’s) family, but if they did not know, they should choose fifty of their elders and pious men. Let them take a one-year-old cow and sacrifice it at the bottom of a valley that He would name for them. Then let the fifty men place their hands on it and swear: “By Almighty God, Lord of Heavens and Earth, God of the Children of Israel and of Isaac, Jacob, and Ishmael, verily we have not slain him, nor do we know his slayer.” When they swore, they were innocent of shedding his blood and the paying of his blood-wit to his kindred. Moses continued enforcing the oath-taking among them until he died, and so did the Children of Israel until the coming of Islam when the Messenger of Allah enforced the oath. And God is All-knowing.

CHAPTER ABOUT THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE, THE SACRIFICE,  
THE ARK, THE *SUKĪMAH*, AND A DESCRIPTION OF THE FIRE THAT  
CONSUMED THE SACRIFICE, AND WHAT MOSES COMMANDED  
REGARDING THAT

God said: “To those who say: ‘*God has commanded us not to believe in any messenger unless he brings down fire (from Heaven) to consume an offering,*’

say: [*Other messengers before me have come to you with true signs and worked the miracle you asked for. Why did you slay them, if what you say be true?*]" (3:183)

Muḥammad b. Ḥamdūn told us through his chain of authorities from Wahb b. Munabbih who said: "God revealed to Moses to select a place of worship for their community, a holy place for the Torah, the Ark, the *Sakīnah*,<sup>2</sup> and tabernacles for the sacrifice. He was to make for that place of worship some tents, the inside and outside of which were skins covering them over. These skins were to be the skins of sacrificial animals, and the ropes with which they were led were to be of the wool of those animals. He enjoined them not to let a menstruating woman spin that rope, nor a polluted man tan those skins. He commanded them to erect those tents on pillars of brass, the height of each of those pillars to be forty cubits. He was to place in them twelve lighted sections, and when he had finished and there were twelve parts, he placed in each part and the pillars therein one of the tribes of the Children of Israel. He commanded him to make the width of those tents six hundred by six hundred cubits. He was to set up therein seven pavilions, six of them intertwined with rods of gold and silver, each of which was erected on a pillar of silver, the height of which was forty cubits; and on them were four seats of honor, the insides of which were decorated: the first of green brocade, the second of reddish purple, the third of silk brocade, and the fourth of sacrificial skins. They were to have protection against rain and dust. The ropes that were stretched out in them were to be of the wool of the sacrificial animals. Its width was to be forty cubits, and there should be erected in the midst of it square tables of silver on which the sacrifices were to be placed, the width of each of these tables to be four cubits by four cubits. Each of those tables was on four legs of silver, each leg being three cubits. A man could not reach it without standing. He commanded him to place the sanctuary on a pillar of gold seventy cubits high and to set it on an ingot of red gold ninety cubits long studded with all sorts of jewels, while he should make the bottom of it of intertwined rods of gold and silver. He was to make its ropes, which would stretch out from it, from the wool of the sacrifices, which he was to dye with colors of red, yellow, and green. He was to cover it over

<sup>2</sup> See the description on p. 161, n. 24 above.



with seven saddlecloths decorated from within: the first of them of green brocade, the second of reddish purple, the third of yellow brocade, and the fourth of yellow silk. With these were the garments of part of them, and the rest of brocade and embroidering. The outside was to have a covering of skins of the sacrificed animals, protected from damage and from moisture. He commanded him to make its width seventy cubits and to cover the pavilions with red raw silk. He ordered him to erect therein an ark of gold like the Ark of the Covenant, studded with all kinds of jewels, and with red rubies and gray ones, and with green emeralds, while its supports were to be of gold. Its width was to be seven by four cubits, while its height was to be as that of Moses. He was to make four doors for it: one for the angels to enter, a door from which Moses would enter, a door from which Aaron would enter, and another from which the sons of Aaron would enter, for they were the custodians of that house and the keepers of the Ark."

God commanded His prophet Moses to take from each marriageable adult of the Children of Israel a weight of gold and spend it for that house, and to place the remainder of that wealth which was not needed—from the ornaments and clothing which God caused the Children of Israel and Moses to inherit from Pharaoh and his people—buried in the ground of the sanctuary. He did that, and the number of the Children of Israel reached six hundred thousand and fifty-seven men, and he took that wealth from them.

God revealed to him: "Behold, I am bringing down to you from Heaven a fire that has no smoke, nor does it burn anything, but it will never be extinguished, so that it may consume the sacrifices which are accepted and light the lamps which are in the sanctuary; these are gold, being with chairs of gold strung with sapphires and pearls and all kinds of jewels." He commanded him to place in the midst of the house a huge boulder of marble and to carve out a cavity in it to be a stove for that fire which would descend from Heaven. Moses called his brother Aaron and said to him: "Verily God has chosen me with a fire that will descend from Heaven to consume the accepted sacrifices and to light the lamps, and He has committed it to me. Verily I select you for it and commit it to you."

Aaron called his two sons and said to them: "Verily God has selected Moses for a matter and committed it to him, he selected me and committed it to me, and I select the two of you and commit it to you." The sons of Aaron were the ones who were respon-

sible for the custodianship of this house and the matter of sacrifices and fires. That night they drank until they became drunk. Then they entered the house and lighted the lamps from that fire which was in this world. God became angry with them and gave the fire power over them, and it burned them while Moses and Aaron were keeping the fire from them, but it did not help them at all from God's command. God revealed to Moses: "Thus will I do to whoever rebels against Me of those who know Me, so how much more will I do to those of My enemies who do not know Me." This is the end of the story, and God is All-knowing.

CHAPTER ABOUT THE JOURNEY OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL TO SYRIA,<sup>3</sup> WHEN THEY CROSSED THE SEA; A DESCRIPTION OF THE BATTLE WITH THE TWO TYRANTS, THE TALE OF THE DESERT AND ALL CONNECTED WITH IT

God has said: "*When Moses said to his people: O my people! Remember God's favor to you, how He placed prophets among you and made you kings, [and given you that which He has given to no other nation. Enter, my people, the holy land which God has assigned you. Do not turn back, or you shall be ruined].*" (5:20–21) The opinions of the commentators have differed about which is the Holy Land. Mujāhid said that it is Mt. Sinai and its surroundings, while Muqātil said it is Jerusalem and the Temple. 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar said: "The Inviolable Place is inviolate because of its distance from Heaven and Earth, and Jerusalem is sacred because of its distance from Heaven and Earth." 'Ikrimah and al-Suddī said that it is Jericho. Al-Kalbī said it is Damascus and Palestine and part of Jordan. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said it is Ramleh and Jordan and Palestine. Qatādah said it is all of Syria.

SECTION ON THE MERIT OF SYRIA AND ITS PEOPLE

Zayd b. Thābit said: "Once while we were sitting with the Prophet, becoming familiar with the Qur'ān from the scattered pieces, he said, 'Blessed are the people of Syria.' Someone said, 'Messenger of

<sup>3</sup> As seen above, Syria is very often used for Palestine in this book.

Allah, why is that?' He said, 'Verily the angels of the Merciful One spread their wings over them.'" From 'Abdallāh b. Khawalah who said: "We were with the Prophet when he said, 'By God, this matter will continue for you until you conquer Persia, Byzantium, and Ḥimyar, and until you become three armies: one army in Syria, one in Iraq, and one in the Yemen.' I said, 'Messenger of Allah, select for me that it should reach me.' He said, 'I select for you Syria, because it is the choicest of God's lands, and for it He selects the choicest of His servants. People of Islam, you must have Syria, for the choicest of God's lands is Syria, and God has guaranteed for me both Syria and its people.'"

'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd said: "The Messenger of Allah related to us: 'God divided goodness into ten parts: nine parts of that He placed in Syria and one part in Iraq. And God divided evil into ten parts: of that he placed nine parts in Iraq and one part in Syria. And ten thousand eyes that saw the Prophet entered Syria; nine hundred companions of the Prophet settled in Homs, of which seventy had fought at Badr.'"

Al-Kalbī said: "Abraham ascended to Mt. Lebanon and he was told, 'Look! Whatever your sight encompasses is sanctified and is an inheritance for your progeny after you,' for that is His word: "*Enter my people the holy land, which God has assigned for you*" (5:20)—meaning God has inscribed on the Preserved Tablet that it is dwelling-places for you." Al-Suddī said: "He commanded you to enter into it."

#### MENTION OF BALAAM, THE SON OF BEOR<sup>1</sup>

God has said: "*Recite to them the tale of the man to whom We gave Our signs and who turned away from them: [how Satan overtook him as he was led astray].*" (7:175) And They differed about who he was, most of the commentators saying that he was Balaam, son of Beor (*Bal'am b. Bā'urā'*) b. Ayd b. Mārit son of Lot. He was a Canaanite from the town of Balqā', which is a city of the giants and was named Balqā'<sup>5</sup> because its king was a man named Balak son of Zippur

<sup>1</sup> See also the Biblical account in Numbers 22–24 for this story. Ṭabarī, pp. 508–13; Brinner, *CI*, pp. 91–95; Rosenthal, pp. 91–5; Kisā'ī, pp. 227–28; Thackston, pp. 244–45.

<sup>5</sup> The name of an area of present-day Jordan, once a district of Syria with Amman as its capital. See LeStrange, *Palestine*, pp. 34–35; Yāqūt, *Muḥjam*, I:728–729.

(Bāliq b. Šāfūrā'). The story of Balaam is as Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Ishāq, al-Suddī, al-Kalbī, and others have related: When Moses set out for battle with the giants, and camped in the land of the sons of Canaan of the land of Syria, Balaam's people came to Balaam, who possessed the most powerful name of God, and said to him that Moses was a man of iron and many troops were with him. "He has come to remove us from our land, to kill us so that the Children of Israel may settle it. But we are your people, your paternal cousins and neighbors, and we have no place to stay, while you are a man whose prayer is answered. So come to us and give us counsel concerning this enemy who has already oppressed us. Pray for God to take back Moses and his people from us." Balaam replied to them: "Woe unto you! This is a prophet of God, and with him are the angels and the believers. How can I pray against them? For what I know, I know from God, and if I did this thing I would lose both this world and the Hereafter."

They continued with him until he said to them: "Be patient until I consult with my Lord," for he would not pray until he would see what he would be ordered to do in his dream. He conspired to curse them in his dream, but he was told: "Do not curse them." He therefore said to his people: "I have consulted my Lord about cursing them and was forbidden to do so." They came back to him and he said: "Let me consult a second time." He took counsel and was not permitted, so he said: "I took counsel and was not permitted to do anything." They said to him: "If your Lord had disliked your cursing them He would have forbidden you as He did the first time." They kept on being friendly to him, imploring him, beseeching him in order to entice him, and he was tempted. They said to one another: "Give him gifts," and it is said that they gave him gifts and he accepted them.

It is said that when Balaam son of Beor refused to curse Moses and his people, his people agreed together to carry something to his wife, saying: "She is poor and he pays attention to her opinion." Ten of their prominent men went off, each of them carrying a sheet of gold filled with leaves (of gold). They presented them to her and she approached her husband and urged him, saying: "Go back to your Lord and ask Him to permit you to support them and to curse their enemies." She continued thus until he agreed, but he was not given permission for anything. She said to him, "Verily He has given you the choice to curse them even if He did not permit to forbid you."

They said that he mounted a she-ass he had, heading for a mountain called Ḥassān to let him see the army of the Children of Israel. She-asses were the mounts of the ancient servants (of God). He had not traveled on it very far until she lay down with him. He dismounted and beat her, making her slip, so she arose and he mounted her. She did not travel with him much until she lay down with him and he did the same thing to her. She arose and he mounted her, and she had not traveled much with him until she lay down with him. He beat her until, when he made her slip, God permitted her to speak an argument against him, and she said to him: "Woe unto you Balaam! Where are you going? Do you not see that the angels in front of me are turning me back from this direction of mine? Will you go to the prophet of God and the believers and curse them?" When he heard this he fell down kneeling, and did not cease weeping and imploring until the angels went away from him. Then he raised his head and Satan came to him and said to him: "Go on your way! For your Lord permits you. If He had not wanted it, the angels would not have gone away from you and they would not have cleared your way." So he mounted his she-ass and God cleared her way, and she followed it until she overlooked Mt. Ḥassān. It came to be that whatever evil with which he cursed them, God turned his tongue towards his own people; and whatever good he prayed for his own people, God turned his tongue towards the Children of Israel. His people said to him: "Do you know what you are doing Balaam? You are praying for them and against us." He replied: "This is a matter over which I have no control. God has overcome me in it." His tongue stuck out until it fell onto his chest, and he understood what had happened to him and said to his people: "Both this world and the next are lost to me and only tricks and deception are left to me. I shall advise you and use a stratagem. Assemble the women and adorn them and give them some goods, then send them to the army to buy and sell with them. Order them that no woman should deny herself to any man who wants her, for if any man among them fornicates, you will have saved yourselves from them." They did that, and when the women entered the camp, a Canaanite woman named Cozbi daughter of Zur (*Kabshā bt. Šūrijā*) passed by one of the leading men of the Children of Israel named Zimri son of Salu (*Ẓamrī b. Salūm*) of the tribe of Simeon son of Jacob son of Isaac son of Abraham. He stood up for her and took her hand, for her beauty and loveliness pleased him. Then he

stood before Moses and said: "I think that you are going to say: 'This is forbidden to you.'" He said: "Indeed! She is forbidden to you; do not draw near to her." He said: "By God! I will not obey you in this." Then he entered his pavilion with her and had intercourse with her. Immediately God sent the plague upon the Children of Israel. Phineas son of Eleazar (Finḥaṣ b. 'Ayzār) son of Aaron, the companion of Moses, was a man who was given abilities in his character, and strength in courage. He had been absent when Zimri son of Salu did what he did, and when he came, the plague was going about among the Children of Israel and he was told of the affair. He took his sword, which was all of iron, and entered to the two of them in the pavilion, while they were having intercourse, and he ran them through with his sword. Then he brought them out, raising them to Heaven with his hands, holding the sword with his forearm, resting his elbow on his waist and propping the sword against his chin. He was Eleazar's firstborn, and he began to say: "My God! Thus should You do to those who rebel against You." And He lifted the plague from them. They counted those of the Children of Israel who perished from the plague, from the time Zimri met the woman until Phineas slew him, and they found that seventy thousand souls had perished during one hour. From that time onward the Children of Israel gave to their sons, from every sacrifice which they offered, the waist, foreleg, and chin, because of his resting the sword against his waist, his taking it in his forearm, and his propping it against his chin. (They also offered) the firstborn all of their possessions, because he was the firstborn of Eleazar son of Aaron. As for Balaam, God revealed concerning him: "*Recite to them the tale of the man to whom We gave Our signs [and who turned away from them: how Satan overtook him as he was led astray]*" (7:175).<sup>6</sup>

Muqātil said: The king of al-Balqā' said to Balaam: "Pray to God and curse Moses or else I will kill you." He replied: "Verily he is one of the people of my religion, and I cannot curse them." So he brought some wood to crucify him. When (Balaam) saw this, he went out on a she-ass of his to curse him, but when the she-ass observed their army she stopped with him and stood still. He beat her and she said to him: "Do not beat me, for I am ordered to do this. Do not oppress me, for this fire in front of me prevents me from going." So (Balaam) returned and told the king, who said to

<sup>6</sup> The Biblical version is in Numbers 25:1-18.

him: "You will indeed curse him, or I will crucify you." So he cursed Moses with the most powerful Name,<sup>7</sup> that he should not enter the city, and his prayer was answered, and Moses and the Children of Israel remained in the wilderness because of his prayer. Moses said: "O Lord! For what sin do we remain in the wilderness?" He replied: "Because of Balaam's prayer." So Moses said: "Lord, just as You heard his prayer cursing me, hear my prayer against him that You remove from him the most powerful and fortunate Name." God stripped him of what he had, removing his knowledge from him, and it left him like a white dove; and then God revealed this verse.

Others have said that he was one of the prophets of the Children of Israel called Balaam, who was given prophecy; but his people bribed him to remain silent and he left them because of what they did to him. 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar, Zayd b. Aslam, and Abū Rawq said: This verse was revealed regarding Umayyah b. Abī al-Ṣalt al-Thaqafī. His story was that in the beginning he used to read the books of the ancestors and learned that God was going to send a messenger in that age, and he wanted himself to be that messenger. When He sent Muḥammad, he envied him. He went out to some kings, and when he returned he passed by the slain of Badr and asked about them. He was told that Muḥammad had slain them. He said: "If he were a prophet, he would not have slain his own relatives." When Umayyah died, his sister came to be reconciled with the Messenger of Allah. He asked about her brother's death, and she said: "While he was asleep, two men came and pulled off the roof of the house. They came down and sat down, one at his feet, the other at his head. The one at his feet said to the one at his head: 'Does he know?' He responded: 'He hears.' He said: 'Is he pure?' He responded: 'He is pure.' She said: 'Did you ask him about that?' He said: 'I want goodness for myself.' Then his eyes began to flow with tears and he fainted. When he revived, he said:

*Every life, no matter how long it lasts*

*Goes on its way until it ends.*

*Would that I—before all that has already befallen me*

*Were herding mountain goats in the small hills.*

*Verily the day of reckoning is a mighty day*

*In which a young man matures as on an oppressive day.*

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<sup>7</sup> In Judaism the Ineffable, Mighty, or Powerful Name of God is called upon in various instances.

The Messenger of Allah said to her: "What a fine poem that is! I ask you, by God, to recite a poem of your brother." She recited to him:

*To You belong praise and favor and superiority, O our Lord!  
There is nothing higher than You in earnestness, or more gracious.  
King, on the Throne of Heaven controlling.  
To His power all faces intend and bow down.*

It is a long ode, and she recited it until she reached the end of it, whereupon she recited to him an ode in which he says:

*With the Possessor of the Throne, there are submitted to Him  
Knowing what is overt as well as hidden speech.  
One day we will come to Him, for He is a merciful Master;  
His promise is the ending-place.  
One day we will come to Him—as He has said—alone;  
He does not leave alone, neither rightly-guided nor one led astray.  
Is it the happy, whose happiness I desire,  
Or condemned, miserable because of what I have attained  
O Lord, if You will pardon, pardon is my thought;  
Or if You will punish, You do not punish the innocent.  
If I were taken for the wrongs I have committed,  
Then I would suffer heavy punishment.*

(Muḥammad) said: "His poetry is believing, but his heart is blasphemous." And it was about him that God revealed: "*Recite to them the tale of the man to whom We gave Our signs [and who turned away from them, how Satan overtook him as he was led astray].*" (7:175)

Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab said: "I alighted with Abū 'Āmir b. al-Nu'mān b. Ṣayfī, the monk, whom the Prophet called "the dissolute one". He had become a monk during the Jāhiliyah and wore the hair-shirt, and he came to Medina. The Prophet said: 'What is it that you have brought?' He said: 'I have brought the Ḥanafī religion, the religion of Abraham,' and said: 'And I am part of it.' The Prophet said: 'I am not part of it, because you have included in it what does not belong to it.' Abū 'Āmir said: 'May God kill the one who lies in disputing about Him, banished, alone, isolated.' Then he went out to Syria and he sent to the hypocrites (saying): 'Prepare force and weapons and build me a mosque, for I am going to the Emperor and I will bring an army to expel Muḥammad and his companions from Medina.' For that is His word:—"as an outpost for those who warred against God and His Messenger previously" (9:107)—meaning, waiting for his arrival. He died in Syria, banished, isolated, alone."



There are those among them who said the verse was revealed regarding a small amount of food. There was a man who was given three prayers that would be granted. He had a wife and a son from her. She said to him: "Give me one of (those prayers)." He said: "You may have one of these prayers. What do you want?" She said: "Pray to God to make me the most beautiful woman among the Children of Israel." So he prayed and she became the most beautiful woman among the Children of Israel. When she learned that there was no one like her among them, she turned away from him and he became angry and cursed her so that she became a barking dog. Thus two prayers went for her, and her son came and said: "We can have no rest or patience regarding this. Our mother has become a barking dog, and the people insult us because of her. Pray to God to return her to the condition she was in previously." He prayed to God and she became as she had been, so all three prayers were spent on her.

CHAPTER ABOUT THE CHIEFS WHOM MOSES CHOSE TO BE  
RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR PEOPLE WHEN HE SENT THEM TO  
THE LAND OF CANAAN AS SPIES FOR HIMSELF AND  
THEIR PEOPLE

God has said: "*We established a covenant with the Children of Israel and raised among them twelve chieftains. [God said: 'I shall be with you. If you attend to your prayers and render the alms levy; if you believe in My messengers and assist them and give God a generous loan, I shall forgive you your sins and admit you to gardens watered by running streams. But he that hereafter denies Me shall stray from the right path].*" (5:12) That was because God had promised Moses to cause him and his people to inherit the Holy Land, which is Syria. The Canaanite giants used to inhabit it; they were the Amalekites, sons of 'Amlāq son of Lud son of Shem son of Noah. God had promised him that He would destroy them and make the land of Syria dwelling places for the Children of Israel. When the Children of Israel had established their residence in Egypt, God commanded them to journey to Jericho in Syria, which is the Holy Land. He said: "Moses, I have destined it for you as a home and habitation, so leave it (Egypt) and struggle against whatever enemy is in it, for I shall make you victorious over them. Take twelve men from your people, a chief from each tribe to be responsible

for their people to carry out what they have been ordered to do.”

Moses chose a chief from each tribe and gave him command over them, and these are their names: from the tribe of Reuben: Shammua b. Zaccur;<sup>8</sup> from the tribe of Simeon: Shaphat b. Hori; from the tribe of Judah: Caleb b. Jephunneh; from the tribe of Gad: Geuel b. Machi; from the tribe of Zebulun: Gaddiel b. Sodi; from the tribe of Asher: Sethur b. Michael; from the tribe of Naphtali:<sup>9</sup> Nahbi b. Vophsi; from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel b. Gemalli; from the tribe of Levi: Khaulā b. Malikā; from the tribe of Joseph: Ephraim (*Afrāthūm*), and from the tribe of Ephraim, Joshua son of Nun—for Moses they were two tribes—and from the tribe of Manasseh (*Mīshā*): Ḥayy b. Moses (*Ḥayy b. Mūsā*); and from the tribe of Benjamin: Palti b. Raphu.<sup>10</sup> Then he journeyed with the Children of Israel, heading for Jericho. And Moses sent there these chiefs to spy out information about it and to know its circumstances and those of its people, when a man of the giants met them who was named Og son of Anaq.

#### SECTION ABOUT ALL OF THE ACCOUNTS OF OG<sup>11</sup> SON OF ANAQ AND HIS CIRCUMSTANCES

Ibn ‘Umar said: “The height of Og was twenty-three thousand cubits, or three hundred and three of the original cubits. Og carried the clouds and drank water from them. He took fish from the bottom of the sea and would roast them in the sun’s rays, raising them up to it and then eating them.”

It is related that at the time of the Flood, he came to Noah<sup>12</sup> and said to him, “Carry me with you in your ship.” But Noah said to him, “Go, enemy of God, for I have not been given orders regarding

<sup>8</sup> See Numbers 13:4–15. Arabic: *Shamū‘ b. Zakūr*; *Shūqat b. Hūrī*; *Kālīb b. Yūqanā*; *Jābidh b. Yūsuf*; *Hadī b. Sūrī*; *Shāyūn b. Malikīk*; *Ḥay b. Waqṣī*; *Ḥaml b. Wakīl b. Khamī*; Levi’s chief is not listed in Numbers; *Yūshā b. Nūn*.

<sup>9</sup> Text has *Yaqālī*.

<sup>10</sup> Text has *Nāzīm b. Zaqūn*.

<sup>11</sup> Arabic: *‘Aṣṣ*. In the Bible, *Anāq/Anak* is not connected with Og but is Hebrew for “giant,” and in Numbers 12:33 and Deut. 9:2. refers to an individual or a group of giants. See *Kisā’ī*, pp. 233–235; Thackston, pp. 251–53. Ṭabarī, pp. 498–501 calls him Og (‘Āj) king of Bashan; Rosenthal, pp. 81–83.

<sup>12</sup> Note that as in Jewish legend, Og is mentioned from the time of Noah up to the time of Moses.

you.” The waters covered the earth from plain to mountain, but did not reach beyond Og’s knees. He lived for three thousand years until God destroyed him through Moses. Moses had an army one *parasang* by one *parasang* in extent. Og came and looked at them; then he went to the mountain, cut out a rock from it as large as the army, and carried it to cover them with it. But God sent the hoopoe-bird and other birds with him, and they began to peck with their beaks until the rock was cut up, so that it was perforated and fell on the neck of Og, son of Anaq, encircling it and throwing him down. Moses, whose height was ten cubits and the length of his rod was ten cubits, jumped ten cubits high in the air and could only reach Og’s heel when he was thrown to the ground. He killed him and they say that a numerous group approached Og carrying daggers and exerted themselves until they cut off his head. When he was killed he fell on the Nile, and he covered it for a year.

They say that his mother was one of the daughters from the loins of Adam, and it is said that she was the first one to act wrongly on the face of the earth. Each of her fingers was three cubits long by two cubits wide, each finger having two sharp nails like two sickles. The place where she sat was the anus of the earth. When she was worn out, God sent to her lions like elephants, wolves and tigers like camels, and eagles like donkeys, and He gave them power over her, and they killed her and ate her.

They say that when he met them, meaning the companions of Moses, he had a bundle of firewood on his head. He took the twelve chiefs, placed them on his bundle, took them to his wife and said to her: “Look at these who claim they want to fight us.” And he threw them down in front of her, saying, “I shall grind them with my foot.” His wife said to him: “Don’t do that, let them go free, so that they will tell their people what they have seen.” He did that and released them. They began to examine their circumstances and found that it took five of their people to carry a cluster of their grapes on a wooden post and that four or five of them could enter the peel of a pomegranate when its seeds were removed. When the chiefs went forth they said to each other, “Men, if you relate the story to the Israelites, they will lose courage and turn away from the prophet of God, so conceal their situation and tell only Moses and Aaron, so that they may express their idea about that.” They made an agreement among themselves about that. Then they went

to Moses, bringing their cluster of grapes<sup>13</sup> and their pomegranate peel. They informed him of what they had seen of their situation except from two men among them, fulfilling what they had said: Joshua, son of Nun, son of Ephraim, the servant of Moses, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, the son in law of Moses through his sister Miriam, daughter of Amram.

When the people heard that from the spies, they raised their voices in weeping, saying, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt, or would that we die in this desert and that God will not make us enter their land. For our women, our children, and our possessions will become spoils for them." One of them would say to another, "Come, let us place a leader over us and go back to Egypt." For that is His word, speaking of them: They said: "*O Moses, a giant people dwells in that land;*" (Qatādah said that they had mighty bodies and constitutions, the likes of which no one else possessed) "*we will not enter there until they leave, When they leave, we shall enter.*" (5:22) Moses said: "*Enter the Holy Land, that God has ordained for you, (5:21) for truly God will conquer it for you. He who saved you from the people of Pharaoh and split the sea for you, will bring you and make you victorious over them.*" But they did not accept his words and did not do thus, but refuted his command and intended to return to Egypt. Then Joshua, son of Nun and Caleb, son of Jephunneh went out to the people, and they were the two about whom God had related victory and safekeeping when He said: "*Then spoke up two of those who feared (their Lord), (men) unto whom God had been gracious*"—with victory and safekeeping—"Enter upon them by the gate"—meaning the gate of the city of the giants—"for if you enter by it, you will be victorious," because God fulfills His promise. We have seen them and are well acquainted with them. Though their bodies are huge and unassailable, their hearts are weak. So do not fear them, but "*put your trust (in God) if you are indeed believers.*" (5:23) The Israelites wanted to stone them and rebelled against them, saying: "*Moses, we will never enter (the land) while they are in it. So go, you and your Lord, and fight! We will sit here.*" (5:24)

It is related that the Messenger of Allah said to his companions on the day of Hodaybīyah,<sup>14</sup> when he was deterred from the House:

<sup>13</sup> Probably referring to the story of the spies sent by Moses, Numbers 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Tawm, lit.* "day", often "the battle". Hodaybīyah was a village near Mecca

“I am bringing a sacrifice and will slaughter it at the House,” and he asked counsel of his companions regarding that. Al-Miqdād b. al-Aswad al-Kindī said: “By God, we will not say to you what the people of Moses said to him: *“So go, you and your Lord, and fight! We will sit here.”* (ibid.) We will say: ‘We are fighting with you, and by God, we will fight on your right and your left and in front of you. If you ford a river, we will ford it. If you climb a mountain, we will climb it. If you take us to the Pools of al-Ghumād—meaning a city in Ethiopia—we will follow you.’ When the companions of the Prophet heard this, they followed him, and the Prophet’s face shone because of it. Ibn ‘Abbās said: For me to have been a member of that assembly would have been more beloved to me than this world and all that is in it.”

The narrator continued: When the Israelites rebelled against their Prophet and contradicted the command of their Lord, except for Joshua and Caleb, Moses became angry and cursed them. He said: *“My Lord! I have control of none but myself and my brother, so distinguish between us and the wrongdoing people”* (5:25)—namely, the rebellious ones, and it was with haste that Moses hurried them. A cloud approached over the entrance to the tent of Moses, and God revealed to Moses: “Until when will this people disobey Moses, and until when will they not believe these signs. I will surely destroy them and give you a people stronger and more numerous than they.” Moses said: “My God! If you were to kill this people to a man, the nations who heard that would say, ‘He killed this people only because He was unable to bring them into the Holy Land, and therefore He killed them in the desert.’ But You, Your patience is great and Your favor is abundant. You save sons and preserve the fathers from the sons, and the sons from the fathers. So pardon them and do not destroy them.” God said to Moses: “I have forgiven them because of your words. But after you called them ‘wrongdoing people’ and cursed them, I swear by My glory that I shall forbid them to enter the Holy Land, except for My servants Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, and I will lead them in the wilderness for forty years—in place of each of the days you were detained, a year, for they were forty days. Their deaths will overtake them in this wasteland, but their sons, who did not rebel against Me and did neither good nor bad, they will enter

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where negotiations took place in 628 C.E. between Muḥammad and the Meccans that ended in a treaty named for this village.

the Holy Land.” For that is His word: *“For this will be forbidden them for forty years that they will wander in the earth bewildered. So grieve not over the wrongdoing people.”* (5:26)

For forty years they stayed within six *parasangs*. They were six hundred thousand warriors, and each day they would journey in earnest, yet when they traveled, they would still be in the place from where they had set out. They wearied of the place in which they were, so they would set out again. Those ten chiefs who disseminated the reports died, and all those who entered the wilderness who were older than twenty also died during that period, except for Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh. And not one of those who had said: “We will never enter there” entered Jericho. When they had perished and forty years had ended and their young offspring grew up, they set out to fight the giants and God gave them victory.

A CHAPTER ABOUT THE FAVOR WHICH GOD GRANTED THE  
CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS, HIS FAVORING THEM  
WITH THAT, KEEPING DESTRUCTION FROM THEM AS A KINDNESS TO  
HIS PROPHET AND FRIEND MOSES

God has said: *“O Children of Israel! Remember my favor with which I favored you [and how I preferred you to (all) creatures.]”* (2:47) as He has said: *“And if you would count the favor of God, you will never number that—numbering does not appertain to single stems—with which I favored you”* (14:334, 16:18) meaning, your forefathers and predecessors. That was because God split the sea for them, saved them from the people of Pharaoh, killed their enemy, and caused them to inherit their land and houses and wealth. He revealed the Torah to them, in which is the explanation of all things of which they have need, and He gave them what He gave them in the wilderness. That was because they said to Moses: “You have destroyed us and have taken us away from civilization and buildings into the wasteland in which there is no shade or shelter.” So God sent down upon them a light white cloud—not a rain cloud but lighter, better, and cooler than that—and shaded them. It traveled where they journeyed during their wanderings, and it circled around above them when they encamped, for that is His word: *“And We caused the white cloud to overshadow you,”* (2:57) meaning in the wilderness, to shield you from the heat of the sun. And from there we learn that He made a pillar of

light for them to shine for them at night when there was no moonlight. They said: "This shade and light have come to be, but where is the food?" So God sent down the manna for them.

There were differing views about that, Mujāhid saying that (the manna) was gum-like and fell on the trees, and its taste was like honey. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that it was baked wheat. Wahb said that it was flat unleavened bread. Al-Suddī said that it was honey that fell on the trees during the night and they would eat of it. 'Ikrimah said that it was a substance that God sent down to them like thickened fruit juice. Al-Zajājī said that manna is what God bestows (*yamunnu*), which involves neither drudgery nor illness.<sup>15</sup> The Prophet said: "The truffles of manna and their water are a medicament for the eyes." They say that God sent down this manna every night, falling upon the trees like snow, each person among them receiving one measure every night. They said: "O Moses! This manna kills us with its sweetness. Pray to God, your Lord, to find us some meat." Moses prayed and God sent the quail (*sakwā*) to them.

There were differences about that: Ibn 'Abbās and most others saying that it was a bird resembling the *sumānī*.<sup>16</sup> Abū l-'Āliyah and Muqātil said that it was a red bird that God sent down to them, raining it down from the sky for the expanse of a mile as high as a spear in the sky, one on top of another. The sky rained this down upon them, and some say that it was a bird like the young of a dove, tasty and fat, with feathers and down already plucked. The wind would bring them to them, and when they awoke in the morning (the quail) were in the camp. It is said that the quail would come to them and be friendly with them, and they would take them in their hands. 'Ikrimah said: "It is a bird that is found in India and it is bigger than a sparrow."<sup>17</sup> Al-Mu'arrij said that it means "honey" in the language of Egypt. Their poet said:

*Its divider is, by God, a strain.*

*Verily you are more delicious than the quail,*

*Whenever its day of resurrection may be.*

<sup>15</sup> See the Biblical story of the manna, Exodus 16:4-36, esp. v. 31, "it was like coriander seed, white; and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey."

<sup>16</sup> *sakwā* and *sumānī* are the two Arabic words for quail but do not refer to different species.

<sup>17</sup> The Biblical story of the quail is found in Numbers 11, esp. vv. 31-34.

God sent down to them the manna and quails, and everyone would take what would suffice him for a day and a night. When Friday came, each one would take enough for himself for two days, because He would not send it down to them on a Saturday. For that is His word: “*And We sent down on you the manna and quails, (saying) Eat*”—namely, We said to them: “*Eat of the good things*”—which are permissible—“*wherewith We have provided you*” and do not save it up for the morrow. But they hid it for the morrow and there were worms and decay in what they had saved. So God stopped doing that for them, saying: “*They did not wrong Us,*”—namely, hurt Us with rebellion and contravening commands—“*but they did wrong themselves,*” (7:160) by their taking food as a companion. He cut off from them the stuff of sustenance that He had been sending down to them without provisions or toil in this world, and without reckoning on responsibility for the outcome.

Shu‘ayb b. Muḥammad—Makkī b. ‘Abdān—Aḥmad b. al-Azhar—Rūḥ b. ‘Abādah—‘Awn b. ‘Abdallāh—Jalās b. ‘Umar—Abū Hurayrah—the Messenger of Allah said: “Were it not for the Children of Israel, meat would not stink and food would not become foul. Were it not for Eve, no woman would deceive her husband.”

From that we learn that they were thirsty in the wilderness and said: “O Moses, from what shall we drink?” Moses sought water for them (from God) and God inspired him: “*Strike the rock with your staff.*” (2:60; 7:160)

Scholars have differed about that. Wahb said that Moses would strike the nearest rock in a rocky terrain and springs would break forth from it, one for each of their tribes, they being twelve tribes. Then each spring would flow in a little stream to the tribe that he had commanded to give them water. The (people) said: “If Moses lost his staff, we would die of thirst.” So God inspired Moses: “Do not strike the rock with your staff, but speak to it, and it will obey you; perhaps they will reflect on it.”<sup>18</sup> So he did that, and they said: “How will it be for us if we cross over to sands and to terrain where there are no rocks?” So He commanded Moses to take a rock with him, and to cast it down wherever they encamped.

Others said that it was a rock specific for its spring, and the proof

<sup>18</sup> Compare the very different version of the Biblical story, Numbers 20.



of that is His saying "*the rock*"; placing the *alif* and the *lām*<sup>19</sup> for the sake of definition and specification, as though He were to say: "I saw *the man*."

They differed about what the rock was. Ibn 'Abbās said it was a light stone, square like a man's head. Moses was ordered to carry it and he did so, placing it in his animal's nosebag. When they needed water, he took out the rock, struck it with his rod, and it would open up and flow with springs, as we have mentioned, and he would give them water. Abū Rawq said: "The rock was of pumice-stone in which there were twelve springs or holes, and from each of those holes a spring of sweet water flowed which they would take. When the water flowed, and Moses wanted to carry the rock, he struck it with his rod and the water went away. Each day it would water six hundred thousand (people) of all sorts.

Sa'īd b. Jubayr said it was the rock which, when Moses placed his clothes on it while washing himself, fled with his clothing. When the rock stopped, Gabriel came to him and said: "Moses, God says to you: 'Lift up this rock, for I have power over it and you have (in it) a miracle.'" For that is what He mentioned in His word: "*O you who believe! Do not be like those who maligned Moses, but God proved him innocent of what they alleged [and he was held in high esteem with God].*" (33:69) That is what we were told by al-Ḥasan b. Aḥmad al-Khaldī from Abū Hurayrah citing the Prophet, who said that the Israelites used to wash themselves while naked, each one looking at the other's genitals, but Moses bathed alone. They said: "The reason that Moses does not bathe with us is that he has small testicles." He continued: One day he went to bathe and placed his clothing on a rock, and the rock fled with his clothing. Moses raced after it, saying: "My clothes, O rock! My clothes, O rock!" So the Children of Israel were able to look at Moses' genitals, and they said: "By God! There is nothing wrong with Moses!" He continued: The rock halted after the Israelites had looked at him, he took his clothing and began to beat the rock. Abū Hurayrah said: There are, indeed, six or seven traces of Moses' blows on the rock. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Sakatānī said that Moses struck the rock with twelve blows, and in each spot there appeared a mark like a woman's breast, then it opened up into flowing rivers, for that is His word: "*There gushed out from there twelve springs.*" (2:60)

<sup>19</sup> Namely the two letters of the Arabic definite article *al-*.

Among these (tales) is that they said to Moses in the wilderness: "From where will we have clothing?" So God made the clothing that was on them everlasting, so that during the days and the passing of the years it only increased in newness and elegance. It did not become shabby or worn out, and it grew on their boys as they grew, and it remained thus for a long time. And God is All-knowing.

#### CHAPTER ON THE CONQUEST OF JERICHO, AND THE SETTLEMENT OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL IN SYRIA

Scholars have differed about who carried out the war against the giants and at whose hand the conquest was achieved. Some people said that only Moses and Joshua conquered Jericho (*Ariḥā*), and that Joshua was in the vanguard and Moses traveled to them with those Israelites who had remained in the wilderness and had not died there. Joshua entered with them and killed the giants who were in Jericho, and then Moses and the Israelites entered it, and he remained there as long as God wished him to remain. Then God took him, and no one of the people knew his burial place. And this is the original of true sayings and the nearest of them to the truth of the consensus of the scholars dealing with the accounts of the prophets: that Moses killed Og son of Anaq. Others say that only Joshua son of Nun fought the giants, and that he did not set out for them until after the death of Moses and the destruction of those who refused to travel to (the land). They also said that Moses and Aaron died in the wilderness.

#### THE STORY OF THE DEATH OF AARON<sup>20</sup>

Al-Suddī said that God inspired Moses, saying: "I am taking Aaron, so bring him to such-and-such a mountain." Moses and Aaron set out toward that mountain, when behold, there was a tree the like of which they had never seen, and an established house in which there was a bed with a spread on it, and in the house there was a pleasant smell. When Aaron looked at it, it pleased him and he said:

<sup>20</sup> The deaths of Aaron and Moses are in Tabarī, pp. 502–16; Rosenthal, pp. 85–98; Kisāʾī, pp. 237–40; Thackston, pp. 255–58.

“Moses, I should like to sleep on that bed.” Moses said: “Sleep on it.” “But,” Aaron said, “I am afraid that the master of the house will come and be angry at me.” Moses said: “Do not be afraid. I shall protect you from the master of the house, so sleep.” He said: “Moses, sleep with me, so if the master of this house comes, he will be angry at both of us together.” So Moses slept, and death took Aaron. When he felt its touch, he said: “Moses, you deceived me!” When he was taken, the house was raised up, the tree disappeared, and the bed was lifted up to heaven.

When Moses returned to the Israelites and Aaron was not with him, they said: “Moses killed Aaron, for he envied him our love for him.” Moses said to them: “Woe unto you! Aaron was my brother and my viceroy. How could I kill him?” When they increased (thus) against him, he arose, performed two *rak'as*<sup>21</sup> and then prayed to God; and the bed descended so they could see it between Heaven and Earth, and they believed him.

‘Amr b. Maymūn said: “Moses and Aaron died in the wilderness, and Aaron died before Moses. They went out into the wilderness to a certain cave, and Aaron died and Moses buried him and went off to the Israelites. They said: ‘Where is Aaron?’ He said: ‘He is dead.’ They said: ‘You lie. You killed him because of our love for him, for he was beloved by the Children of Israel.’ Moses implored his Lord and complained to his Master about what he had endured from the Israelites. So God inspired him: ‘Take them out to the grave and I shall revive him, so he died a natural death and you did not kill him.’ So he took them out to the grave of Aaron and called out to him: ‘Aaron!’ And he came forth from his grave, shaking the earth from his head, and Moses said to him: ‘Did I kill you?’ He replied: ‘No, by God, I died.’ He went back and they departed, and God is All-knowing.

#### CONCERNING THE DEATH OF MOSES

Ibn Ishāq said that Moses hated death and regarded it as very great. As he hated it, so did God want to make death beloved by him and make life detestable to him. Joshua son of Nun used to come to him

<sup>21</sup> A *rak'a* is a single prostration in Muslim prayer, which requires several.

early in the morning and in the evening, and Moses would say to him: "Prophet of God! What did God cause to happen to you?" And Joshua would say to him: "Prophet of God! Have I not accompanied you so-many and so-many years? Have I asked you about anything that God caused to happen to you? So you should be the one to begin and mention it." And he did not relate anything to him. When Moses saw that, he hated life and loved death.

The Master said, with his chain of authorities—'Abd al-Şamad b. Mu'qil saying: "I heard Wahb speak, mentioning that (an example of God's) esteem for Moses was that when he could not bear the Israelites when they became too much for him, God sent one thousand prophets to him to be his helpers. When the people inclined towards them, Moses felt jealousy in his soul, so God killed them in one day, out of esteem for him."

(Scholars) differed about the description of the death of Moses. Abū Sa'īd Muḥammad b. 'Abdallāh b. Ḥamdūn, with his chain of authorities—Abū Hurayrah—the Messenger of Allah said: "The Angel of Death came to Moses and said to him: 'Accede to your Lord!' Moses struck the eye of the Angel of Death and gouged it out." He continued: "Then the Angel of Death returned to God and said: 'O Lord, You did indeed send me to a servant who does not want to die and he gouged out my eye.' God restored his eye and said: 'Go back to My servant and say to him: 'Is it life you want? If you want life, place your hand on the back of a bull; for every hair your hand covers, you will live one year for each hair of that beast.'" Moses said: 'And what then?' (The Angel) said: 'And then you will die.' He said: 'Let it be now, soon.' He said: 'O Lord, bring me to the Holy Land, to within a stone's throw.'" The Messenger of Allah said: "If I were there, I would show you his grave by the side of the road at the Red Dune."

He said: I heard Abū Sa'īd b. Ḥamdūn relate—Abū Ḥāmid al-Sharqī—Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā saying: "This is a true account from the Messenger of Allah, meaning the story of the Angel of Death and Moses. Only a false contriver would contradict it." In another tradition it is related that the Messenger of Allah said: "The Angel of Death used to come to people visibly until he came to take Moses, who struck him, gouging out his eye, and since then the Angel of Death comes in stealth."

Al-Suddī in an account mentioned to him by Abū Mālik and Abū Şāliḥ—Ibn 'Abbās, Murrah al-Ḥamdānī, Ibn Mas'ūd, and others

among the companions of the Prophet said: While Moses was walking with his servant Joshua son of Nun, suddenly a black wind came up. When Joshua looked at it, he thought the Hour had come, and said: "O people! I think that this is the Hour." And it was while I was accompanying the prophet of God (here: Moses). He slipped out from under his shirt and left the shirt in Joshua's hand, and when Joshua brought the shirt, the Israelites seized him, saying: "You killed the prophet of God." He said: "By God! I did not kill him, but he slipped away from me." But they did not believe him and wanted to kill him. He said to them: "Since you do not believe, give me a delay of three days." Then he prayed to God and someone came in (their) dreams to each of the people who were keeping watch over Joshua, informing him that "Joshua did not kill Moses, but We passed him up to Us," so they let him go.

Wahb b. Munabbih said: Moses went out to take care of a need and passed by a band of angels. He recognized them and approached them until he stood by them, and lo! they were digging a grave, more beautiful than any he had ever seen, nor had he seen the likes of it in greenness, opulence, and splendor. He said to them: "Angels of God, for whom are you digging this grave?" They replied: "We are digging it for a pious servant, favored by his Lord." Moses said: "Truly, this servant must have a high station with God. I have not seen any bed more beautiful than it until now." The angels said: "Bosom friend of God, would you like to be that one?" He said: "I would like it." They said: "Go and lie down in it and face your Lord, then you will breathe the easiest breath ever." He went and lay down in it, then faced his Lord and breathed, and God took his soul. Then the angels leveled the earth over him. It is said that the Angel of Death brought him an apple from Paradise, and when he smelled it, God took his soul,

It is related that Joshua son of Nun saw him in a dream after he had died, and asked him: "How did you find death, prophet of God?" He said: "Like a sheep that is skinned while it is alive."

It is related that when Moses died, the angels said to each other, "The bosom friend of God, Moses son of Amram, has died, so who can desire immortality?" The length of Moses' life was one hundred and twenty years, twenty of them during the reign of Afarīdūn and one hundred during the reign of Manujahr.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> This refers to two Persian kings: *Afarīdhūn*, mentioned in Ṭabarī, p. 201; Brinner,

The Master said: Let us return to the story of the battle of Jericho and the account of its conquest. He said: When forty years had ended and Moses had died, God sent Joshua son of Nun as a prophet. He informed them that he was a prophet and that God had commanded them to fight the giants; they believed him and swore obedience to him. He turned towards Jericho with the Children of Israel, and the Ark and the Covenant were with him. He circled the city of Jericho for six months, and in the seventh month they blew horns and shouted with one cry, and the walls of the city fell down.<sup>23</sup> They entered it and fought the giants and put them to flight; they charged them and began to slay them. A whole band of Israelites would gather around the neck of one man and strike it, but they could not cut it off. The battle was on a Friday, and a remnant was left of them when the sun was about to set and the night of the Sabbath would begin. Joshua feared that they would be impossible for him (to defeat). So he said: "O my God! Return the sun to me!" Or he said to the sun: "Verily you are obedient to God and I am obedient to God," and he asked the sun to stand still and the moon to remain, until he would take vengeance from the enemies of God before the setting of the sun. The sun returned for him and added a whole hour during the day until he slew all of them.<sup>24</sup>

Aḥmad b. 'Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid al-Īṣfahānī with his chain of authorities related that 'Urwah b. 'Abdallāh said: "I came to Fāṭimah daughter of 'Alī and saw on her neck an amulet and on her hand two coarse handles; she was then a very old woman. I said to her: 'What is this?' She said: 'Verily it is disapproved for a woman to liken herself to a man.' Then she told me that Asmā' bt. 'Umays al-Khath'amīyah had told her that 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib was with the Prophet of Allah and God had inspired him. He had wrapped himself in his garment and remained thus until the sun turned away—you would say it set, or was about to set. Then the Prophet of Allah regained his composure and said: 'Have you prayed, 'Alī?' He said:

PP, pp. 1, 4, 5, *passim*; and *Manūshūhr*, in Ṭabarī, p. 429; Brinner, *CI*, pp. 18, 19, *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> In the Biblical account it was six days, with daily blowing of rams' horns and carrying the Ark; on the seventh, the rams' horns, the carrying of the Ark and the people's shouting all brought the walls down. Joshua 6:1-20.

<sup>24</sup> Probably a reference to the battle against the five kings of the Amorites in Joshua 10:1-14 and Joshua's poem about calling the sun and moon to stand still to enable the Israelites to conquer their enemy.

'No.' The Prophet said: 'O God! Turn the sun back for me!' And it turned until it reached the middle of the mosque."<sup>25</sup>

He continued: Then the kings of the Arāminah, who were five, sent out to one another, and they took counsel together regarding Joshua and his people. The Children of Israel attacked the kings, sending them to the mountain pass of Hauran<sup>26</sup> where God struck them with hailstones. Those whom the hail killed were more numerous than those killed by the Israelites with the sword. The five kings fled and hid in a cave. Joshua gave orders concerning them, and they brought them out and crucified them. Then they took them down and cast them into that cave. Then they pursued the kings of Syria and he seized thirty-one of their kings until he had conquered most of the land of Syria. Then all of Syria belonged to the Children of Israel, and he divided up their governors over their districts. He then gathered up the spoils, but the fire did not descend. Then God inspired Joshua: "There is withholding of spoils there, so command them to offer homage to you." They paid homage to him and one man's hand clung to his hand. He said to him: "Give me what you have!" He brought him the head of a bull made of gold encircled with pearls, sapphires, and jewels, which he had withheld from the spoils, and placed it among the sacrifice. He put the man with it and the fire came and consumed both the man and the sacrifice.

The Messenger of Allah said: One of the prophets went on a raid and said to the people: "Let no man follow me who has taken possession of a woman's vulva and wants to consummate the marriage with her, nor another who has built a house but not yet erected the roof, nor another who has bought flocks and pregnant camels and is awaiting their offspring."<sup>27</sup> He continued: The time of the evening prayer neared for the people or near that time, so he said to the sun: "You are commanded (by God) and I am commanded. My God! Hold it back for me one hour." And it was held back for them for an hour until God granted him victory. He continued: Then the sacrificial animals were placed, and the fire came but did not con-

<sup>25</sup> This seems to be in line with the tales of the previous prophetic act of Joshua above.

<sup>26</sup> Joshua 10:10 speaks of the "ascent of Beth-Horon", which is in central Canaan, possibly the source of his saying "the mountain pass of Hauran," which is in the north and across the Jordan River.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Deut. 20:5-8 where somewhat similar exceptions are made for participating in battle.

sume them. He said: "There is indeed withholding of spoils among you. So let one man from each tribe among you pay homage to me." They paid homage to him, and one man's hand clung to his hand. He said: "Among you there is withholding of spoil; you have acted unfaithfully." He continued: They brought out the likes of the head of a cow made of gold and cast it in among the spoils which were on the ground, and the fire came and consumed them. The Prophet said: "Spoils were not permissible to anyone before us, but God saw our need and our weakness, so He gave it to us."

They said that then God commanded them to enter Jericho humbly, seeking forgiveness, with lowered heads, for that is His word: "*And when We said: 'Enter this town and eat freely of what is in it, and enter the gate in humility and say: 'Repentance.'*" (2:58) There were seven gates for prostration, meaning humbly bowing down. "*And say: 'Repentance (ḥiṭṭah)'—means, "relieve us of our sins."*<sup>28</sup>

Wahb said: They wronged their forefathers, and their repentance, since they had done wrong, was the entering of Jericho. When they were relieved of the wilderness, God wanted to save them from sin.

Ibn 'Abbās said: "Repentance is saying 'There is no God but Allah'; it is called that because it relieves (one) of sin. '*We will forgive you your sins and will increase for the right-doers'*—right-doing—but those who did wrong changed the word which had been told them for another saying' (2:58bis)—that was because they entered crawling on their buttocks." Some say that ḥiṭṭah (repentance) means *sumqāth*, that is, red wheat,<sup>29</sup> for disdainng God's command: "*And We sent down upon evildoers wrath from heaven—namely, punishment from heaven—for their evil-doing.*" (2:59) That was because God sent down upon them a plague of darkness and destroyed seventy thousand of them during one hour, then He removed it from them and had mercy upon them. They say that when the Children of Israel settled in Syria and it became undisturbed for them, God took His prophet Joshua to Himself and he was buried on Mount Ephraim at the age of one hundred and twenty years. His administering the affairs of the Children of Israel after the death of Moses lasted for twenty-seven years.

<sup>28</sup> Possibly connected with Hebrew *het*, which means "sin." Hebrew *ḥiṭṭah* is "wheat."

<sup>29</sup> According to Lane, 592: *ḥiṭṭah shumqāyā* is "good wheat"; in Nabataean, according to al-Suddī and Mujāhid, *ḥiṭṭa sumhātā* is "red wheat".



A SESSION CONCERNING THE PROPHETS AND KINGS WHO  
CONDUCTED THE AFFAIRS OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL AFTER  
JOSHUA; AND THE STORY OF CALEB

Scholars of the accounts of past generations and the affairs of bygone peoples say that when death appeared to Joshua son of Nun, Caleb son of Jephunneh, the son-in-law of Moses, took his place over the Children of Israel. He was one of the two men whom God had favored. God has said: "*Thereupon two God-fearing men whom God favored said [‘Go in to them through the gates, and when you have entered you shall surely be victorious’].*" (5:23) He ruled well until God took him and his son Yūsāqūs<sup>30</sup> was appointed by God to succeed him. From what has been recorded, Yūsāqūs was like Joseph in goodness, beauty and splendor, so that the Israelites were tempted by him. Out of passion for him they would come and look at him and say to him: "Pious servant (of God), we have come to greet you." He was ashamed to send them away, but when their number increased, he feared temptation and asked God to alter his appearance while retaining the soundness of his senses and limbs. So God afflicted him with smallpox and he became pockmarked and twisted. Yūsāqūs remained among them for one hundred and forty years and then God took him to himself, and God is All-knowing.

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<sup>30</sup> May be a misreading for Josephus, the much-later (ca. 38–100 C.E.) Jewish historian, author of *The Wars of the Jews* and *Antiquities of the Jews*. See Kisāʿī, pp. 242–243; Yūsāfus b. Kālīb; Thackston, pp. 261–262; Josephus son of Caleb.

## EZEKIEL

### CONCERNING THE ACCOUNT OF EZEKIEL (HIZQIL)<sup>1</sup>

Scholars of the accounts of the prophets have said that when God took Caleb and his son, He sent Ezekiel to the Children of Israel as a prophet. This was Ezekiel son of Buzi, and he was nicknamed "Son of the Old Woman". He was given this nickname because his mother had asked God for a child even though she was an elderly woman and had already become old and barren. Nonetheless, God gave Ezekiel to her, and it was he through whom God revived the people "*who fled their homes by the thousands for fear of death*". But God revived them after they had died through Ezekiel's prayer, as He has said: "*Consider those who fled their homes by the thousands for fear of death. [God said to them: 'You shall perish,' and then he brought them back to life.]*" (2:243)

Most of the commentators say that there was a town named Dāwārdān, a town near Wāsiṭ,<sup>2</sup> which was stricken by plague. One faction left it fleeing from the plague, while another faction remained. Most of those who stayed behind in the town perished, while those who fled remained safe and when the plague abated they returned in safety. Those who stayed behind said: "Our companions were more prudent than we; had we done as they did, we would have survived. If a plague should strike here a second time, we will most certainly depart for a land in which there is no epidemic." Then a plague struck the next time and most of the town's people fled until they reached a wide valley. When they had reached that valley in which they sought safety and survival, behold, there was an angel at the lower end of the valley and another at the upper end, each one of whom called out to them "Die!" and they all died.

From Muḥammad b. Zākariyyā who said, "I heard al-Aṣma'ī say: 'When plague struck Basra, one of its men left it together with his

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<sup>1</sup> While parts of this story evoke Biblical Ezekiel, the location in time and place does not fit his story.

<sup>2</sup> Two early Islamic towns on the Tigris in Iraq. For Dāwārdān, see Yāqūt, *Muḥjam*, II, 542; for Wāsiṭ, Yāqūt, *Muḥjam*, IV, 881-87.

son, both of them on a donkey, while behind him an Ethiopian slave drove the donkey. All of a sudden the slave began reciting a *rajaz*<sup>3</sup> verse:

*He will never outdistance God on a donkey,  
Nor dangers on an invincible steed.  
God is there in the morning ahead of the night traveler.*

And the man turned back with his family because of these words that he had heard.

‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. ‘Awf quoted the Messenger of Allah, who said: “If you hear of an epidemic in a village, then do not go there; but if it strikes you when you are there, then do not flee.” And al-Ḍalḥāk, Muqātil, and al-Kalbī said: “These people really fled from battle (*jihād*), because one of the Israelite kings commanded them to go out and fight their enemy, so they went forth and set up camp. But then they became cowardly and loathed death, so they sought a pretext and said to their king: ‘There is an epidemic in the land to which we are going, therefore we will not go there until the epidemic abates.’ So God sent death upon them, and when they saw that death had multiplied among them, they abandoned their houses, fleeing from death. And when the king saw that, he said: ‘O God! Lord of Jacob and God of Moses! You see the rebelliousness of your servants, Show them a sign so that they learn that they are incapable of escaping from your judgment and decree.’ So when they went forth, God said to them, “Die!” and they died, all of them, and their animals died just as they died, struck down all at once. Not three days passed before the bodies burst and gave off a stench. The people went out to them but were unable to bury them, so they erected an enclosure around them to ward off predators and left them there.”

The scholars also differed about the size of their numbers. Thus ‘Aṭā’ al-Khurāsānī said: “They were three thousand.” And Ibn ‘Abbās and Wahb said: “They were four thousand.” Muqātil and al-Kalbī said eight thousand, Abū Rawaq said ten thousand; Abū Mālik said thirty thousand; al-Suddī said thirty-odd thousand; Ibn Jurayj said forty thousand, and ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Ribāḥ said: “Seventy thousand.”

He continued: Some time had passed after that and their bodies had decayed and their bones were laid bare and their joints were

<sup>3</sup> The name of one of the sixteen traditional meters of classical Arabic poetry.

severed; Ezekiel the prophet passed by them and stood there absorbed in thought and wonderment. Then he received an inspiration from God: "Ezekiel, do you want me to show you how I revive the dead?" He said: "Yes, O Lord!" So God revived them all. This is the word of al-Suddī and a group of commentators, but Muqā'il and al-Kalbī said: "No, they were Ezekiel's people, and when this befell them, Ezekiel wept and said: "O Lord! I used to belong to a people who worshipped You and remembered You, but now I am left all alone; I have no people. However, if You so desired, You could revive these corpses, and they would populate Your cities and worship You." God said: "I have given their lives unto you." So Ezekiel said to them: "Live, with God's permission!" And they came to life.

Wahb said: Misfortune and hardship of that time befell them and they complained about what had befallen them, saying, "Would that we had already died and had rest from the state we are in." So God inspired Ezekiel: "Your people are clamoring because of their distress, and they claim that they would prefer to die and be at rest—what rest is there for them in death? Do they think that I am incapable of resurrecting them after death?" So Ezekiel went off to such-and-such a cemetery in which there were people who had died, and he came to them. Then God inspired him: "Ezekiel, arise and call out to them!" Now their bodies and bones had already come apart and the birds and beasts of prey had torn them, but Ezekiel addressed them: "O you bones! God commands you to be covered with flesh." So all of them were covered with flesh, and after the flesh, with skin and blood and nerves and veins, so that they became bodies.<sup>4</sup> Then he proclaimed: "O you souls! God commands that you return to your bodies!" So all of them arose, with the clothes that they had been wearing when they died upon them, and they proclaimed all together: "God is great!"

Manṣūr b. al-Mu'tamir related from Mujāhid that when they came alive they said: "Praise be to You, Our God! Our Lord! And in Your glory there is no god but You." Then they returned to their people, but became forgetful after God had revived them. They lived for a long stretch of time knowing that they had been dead, the appearance of death on their faces, and any clothing that they put on became decayed like a shroud until they died at their appointed times which God had decreed for them.

<sup>4</sup> A variant version of the story of the valley of the bones in Ezekiel 37.

Ibn ‘Abbās said: “Truly that smell is present among the tribe of Jews.” Qatādah said: “God despised them for fleeing from death and for being derelict in *jihād*, so God killed them as punishment, but subsequently resurrected them for the remainder of their term of life in order that they might complete it. If the appointed term of the people had already come, they would not have been resurrected after their death. After God had revived them, He commanded them to go on *jihād* and said: “*Fight for the cause of God and bear in mind that He hears all and knows all.*” (2:244)

## ELIJAH

### A CHAPTER ON THE STORY OF ELIJAH<sup>1</sup>

God has said: “*We also sent forth Elijah. And lo! Elijah was one of those sent (to warn), [and he said to his people: Have you no fear? Would you invoke Baal and forsake the Most Gracious Creator, God, your Lord and Lord of your forefathers? But they rejected him, and thus will be called to account. Not so God’s true servants. We bestowed on him praise of later generations: Peace be upon Elijah! Thus do We reward the righteous. He was one of our believing servants.]* (37:123–31) Ibn Ishāq and scholars of history have said that when God took Ezekiel, misfortunes multiplied among the Children of Israel and iniquity appeared among them. They forgot God’s covenant with them in the Torah, so that they erected idols and worshipped them instead of God. Then God sent Elijah to them as a prophet.<sup>2</sup> He was Elijah son of Yāsīn son of Phineas son of Eleazar son of Aaron son of Amram.<sup>3</sup> Now the prophets who came after Moses were sent only to renew what the Children of Israel had forgotten and neglected of the laws of the Torah. The Children of Israel at that time were divided up in the land of Syria, and there were many kings among them, and the reason for that was that when Joshua son of Nun conquered the land of Syria and ruled

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic: Ilyās, from a Greek treatment of the original Hebrew Eliyahu. Q 37:125 has the main allusion to him regarding the worship of Baal. Muslim tradition has confused him with both al-Khiḍr (al-Khaḍīr) and Idrīs. This is not the case in either this work or Ṭabarī, see *EP*<sup>2</sup>, III:1156, *s.v.* Ilyās. On the separate identities of Ilyās and al-Khiḍr see Brinner, *CJ*, III:1, n. 1; 122, n. 665. For the Biblical treatment of Elijah, see 1 Kings 17–22, and 2 Kings 1–2; the aggadic material is collected in Ginzberg, *Legends*, IV:195–235. See too, *EJ* 6:631–46, *csp.* p. 639.

<sup>2</sup> Note the incorrect placement of Elijah after Ezekiel. See also in Ṭabarī, p. 540; Brinner, *CJ*, III:122–23; Tottoli, *Storie*, p. 236.

<sup>3</sup> A problematic genealogy with Elijah in the fourth generation after Aaron, but this is in accord with both Islamic and Jewish traditions that provide him with immortality and appearing in various generations. Traditions about Elijah being identical with Phineas the priest, are no doubt due to their zealotry regarding foreign influence, especially the worship of foreign gods. This view prevails in later *midrash*. In *Kisā’ī*, p. 245 his genealogy is: Elijah b. Asasiah b. Eleazar b. Aaron b. Amram; Thackston, p. 265. Tottoli, *Storie*, p. 236 omits Eleazar but has him as a maternal cousin of al-Khiḍr.

over it, he set the Children of Israel in it, and divided it among them. One of the tribes took Baalbek and its environs,—this was Elijah's tribe—and God sent to them a prophet. At that time there was a king who ruled over them called Ahab,<sup>4</sup> who had gone astray and had led his people astray, forcing them into the worship of idols. He and his people worshipped an idol called Baal, who was twenty cubits tall and who had four faces.

Ibn Ishāq said: I have heard some scholars say that Baal was nothing but a woman<sup>5</sup> whom they would worship instead of God, for that is His word: "*When he said to his people: Have you no fear? Would you invoke Baal and forsake the Most Gracious Creator?*" (37:124–25) He<sup>6</sup> continued: Elijah began to call them to God, but they did not obey him and did not comply, except for what was commanded by King Ahab in Baalbek, for he believed in Elijah and trusted him, and Elijah used to carry out his commands, guide him, and advise him. Now Ahab had a wife named Jezebel<sup>7</sup> whom he placed in charge of his subjects when he was absent from them on a military campaign or the like. She would appear among the people as her husband did, ride as he did, sit as he did in the court of justice, and judge among the people. And she was murderous towards the prophets, but she had a scribe—a wise man and believer in God—who concealed his belief.<sup>8</sup> He had already rescued three hundred prophets from her hands,<sup>9</sup> each of whom she had wanted to kill by the time Elijah was sent, this in addition to those she succeeded in murdering. She herself was not a chaste woman; there was not on the face of the earth anyone more shameless than she. Nevertheless, she had married seven Israelite kings, and had assassinated each of them while she remained alive. It is said that she bore seventy children.

He said: And this Ahab had an Israelite neighbor, a righteous man called Mazdakī.<sup>10</sup> He had a garden from which he made his

<sup>4</sup> Arabic: *Lājab*. The account in Kisāʾī is somewhat confused. There Ahab is the king of one of seventy villages, whilst Ammiel was the greatest of kings.

<sup>5</sup> Kisāʾī, p. 245; Thackston, p. 264: "*They worshipped an idol called Baal, which is in the shape of a woman.*"

<sup>6</sup> *I.e.*, The narrator . . .

<sup>7</sup> Here Arabic: *Arabil*.

<sup>8</sup> Parallel with the story of Obadiah, the steward of the palace "*who revered the Lord greatly*" (1 Kings 18).

<sup>9</sup> The Bible records that Obadiah saved a hundred prophets, 1 Kings 18:4, and 13.

<sup>10</sup> Compare 1 Kings 21 and the story of Naboth the Jezreelite; specifically the

living, and he devoted himself to making it flourish and beautified it. And the garden was located next to the palace of the king and his wife; the two of them would gaze down upon it, stroll about in it, and eat, drink, and rest in it from time to time. Ahab, notwithstanding, thought well of the proximity of its owner Mazdakī, but despite this, his wife Jezebel envied Mazdakī on account of that garden. She plotted to seize it when she heard the people mentioning the garden and its beauty, saying: "How much more fitting it would be for this garden to belong to the inhabitants of this palace." And the people wondered at this matter of the king and his wife, how it was that they had not seized the garden. The king's wife continued plotting against God's pious servant Mazdakī, whereby she would kill him and take his garden, however, the king forbade her from doing so, such that she found no way to get at him. Then, however, the king chanced to leave on a distant journey and when his absence became prolonged, his wife Jezebel took the opportunity to carry out her plot against God's pious servant Mazdakī. So as to kill him and take his garden. Then, however, the king chanced to leave on a distant journey and when his absence became prolonged, his wife Jezebel took the opportunity to carry out her plot against God's pious servant, Mazdakī, so as to kill him and take his garden. Mazdakī, however, unaware of what designs she had on him, was devoting himself to worshipping of his Lord and perfecting his way of life. Then Jezebel gathered a group of people and ordered them to testify falsely that Mazdakī was defaming King Ahab and they acquiesced in what she asked of them regarding the false testimony. Now the sentence in those times for one who defamed the king was execution—if the evidence stood up—and so she had Mazdakī brought and said to him: "It has come to my attention that you have insulted the king and slandered him." Mazdakī denied that, but then she furnished the evidence and her group witnessed falsely against him before the people, and so she ordered his execution. Therefore he was killed and she expropriated his garden,

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culpability of Ahab and his complicity in the crime. "*When Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out for the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to take possession of it.*" (1 King 21:16) Note the claim of incitement and partial absolution in the narrator's editorial comment: "*Indeed, there never was anyone like Ahab, who committed himself to doing what was displeasing to the Lord, at the instigation of his wife Jezebel.*" (v. 25) and the disaster promised by Elijah does not take place until the days of Ahab's son. Jezebel's fate is realized later in 2 Kings 21:7.



whereupon God grew angry at them for the slaying of His pious servant.<sup>11</sup>

Then when the king returned from the journey she told him the news and he said to her: "You have not attained any blessing, nor have you been granted success. I do not foresee us ever prospering after this. Surely we were as wealthy people without having his garden, for we used to stroll in it and we lived nearby it while it was long inviolable to us before our claims; yet we thought well of Mazdaki's proximity and we refrained from harming him because of our obligation to honor his claim to the land over and against ours. But you have made its proximity repugnant for us. Only your foolishness, your evil mind, and your lack of thinking of the consequences led you to have the audacity to do this." She replied: "I only became angry for your sake, and passed judgment by your decree." He said to her: "Your forbearance and the greatness of your station did not suffice you to exonerate one man that you might be worthy of his proximity." She said: "What has been, has been."

Then God sent Elijah to Ahab and his people and ordered him to inform them that God had grown angry at him because of His friend (*i.e.*, Mazdaki), when they killed him unjustly in their midst. God had sworn that if the two of them did not repent of their deed and return the garden to Mazdaki's heirs, He would destroy the two of them, *i.e.*, Ahab and his wife, within the garden, shedding their blood in the worst possible way, then leaving them, two discarded corpses—until their bones would be stripped of their flesh, and thus they would enjoy (the garden) for but a short time.

The narrator continued: Elijah came and informed the king of what God had inspired him regarding this matter of his and that of his wife and the garden. When the king heard that, his anger intensified. Hence, he said to him: "Elijah, I do not see that which you are calling on us to do as anything but futility. By God! I do not consider so-and-so and so-and-so"—here naming kings among whom were those who worshipped idols—"other than doing what we do—eating, drinking, and enjoying, taking possession, all of which does not diminish their temporal possession nor their power at all,

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<sup>11</sup> This would seem to accord with the Biblical version, where Ahab seems a willing, albeit silent, accomplice to the crime and takes no action to prevent Jezebel from carrying out her plan which she devised to please him: "*I will get the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite for you.*" (1 Kings 21:7)

though you claim that it is vanity, nor do I see you as being superior to us."<sup>12</sup>

He continued further: Then Ahab determined to punish Elijah and kill him. When Elijah heard of that and sensed his evil intentions he rejected him and went away from him, ascending the tops of mountains, while the king returned to the worship of Baal. Elijah climbed the most difficult and highest mountain and entered a cave where, it is said, he remained for seven years as a fearful and solitary fugitive,—seeking shelter in ravines and caves, eating of the plants of the earth and the fruits of the trees,—all the while they were searching for him, for they had sent out scouts anticipating news of him and endeavoring to seize him. Meanwhile God was concealing and protecting him, and keeping him from distress. When seven years had elapsed, God permitted him to be found by them, and the healing of his anger with them, for God had caused the son of King Ahab—who was the most beloved of his sons, dearest to him and most like him among them—to fall ill.<sup>13</sup> He became seriously ill so that Ahab gave up all hope for him and prayed to his idol Baal. They had already become enamored of Baal and glorified him, naming their city for him, since they called it Baalbek. They placed four hundred custodians whom they assigned to him and made them his guardians. And Satan began to enter into the interior of the idol and speak to them all sorts of speech while the four hundred inclined their ears to what Satan said. He whispered to them a false law which they recorded for the people, and the people acted according to it, and called the custodians “prophets.”

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<sup>12</sup> Parallel with the account in Kisāʾī, p. 246; Thackston, p. 266, where Ahab complains to Elijah of having been misled by his promising power to whoever believed in him. Yet his followers have neither power nor honor although Ahab gave up pleasurable things, and banishes Elijah. But Jezebel demurs, saying to Ahab, “*Even if you revert to your old religion after having converted to Islam, I shall never renounce my Islam!*” And she joined Elijah and became one of the pious.” In a note on this passage, Thackston writes “the story of Ahab and particularly of Jezebel has been confused with the legend of a pious, probably Christian queen. In other Islamic renderings Jezebel meets the same end as in the Biblical account of her.” Compare, also, the differing fates ascribed to Potiphar’s wife (Zulaykha) in the traditions surrounding the story of Joseph.

<sup>13</sup> This story of the son’s illness is not in the Biblical text, but could be motivated here by the conclusion of the Biblical story of Ahab when God reveals to Elijah “*because Ahab has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the disaster in his lifetime; I will bring the disaster upon his house in his son’s time.*” (1 Kings 21:29)

When the illness of the king's son grew worse, the king desired that they intercede with Baal for his sake and seek from him a cure and healing for his son. They prayed to Baal for him, but he did not respond to them, and God, through His power, kept Satan from their idol and did not permit him to enter into it or to speak, while they were exerting themselves in supplicating him, and the illness only became more painful and intense. When this lasted too long for them, they said to Ahab: O king! There is in the vicinity of Syria another goddess who is great like your god, so send the prophets to her to intercede with her for you; perhaps she can intercede for you with Baal, for he is angry with you. Were it not for his anger with you, he would have answered you and cured your son's illness. Then Ahab said: "For what reason is he angry with me? For I obey him and seek to please him, and have not been displeased with him for one moment." They said: "Because you did not<sup>14</sup> kill Elijah but you were remiss with him so that he escaped safely, for he is an unbeliever in your god and worships other than him. That is what has angered him against you." Ahab said: "How can I kill him this day, when I am distracted from pursuing him by my son's ailment? There is no seeking Elijah, for his whereabouts are not known that they<sup>15</sup> may be followed. If my son were to be cured, I would be free to pursue Elijah and I would have no care or concern other than him until I would seize him, kill him, and give my god rest from him and satisfaction.

He continued: Then he sent the four hundred prophets to intercede with the goddess in Syria and to ask her to intercede with the king's idol to cure his son. So they went off to the idols and spoke to them, but God prevented Satan<sup>16</sup> from penetrating the idols, and he did not speak to them, so they returned to the king and reported that to him. The king said: "How am I to slay Elijah on this day?" He continued: Then the four hundred went forth until, when they were in front of the mountain where Elijah was, God inspired him to go down from the mountain, to stand before them, to stop them and to speak to them. God said to him: "Do not fear, for I will avert their evil from you and will cast terror into their hearts." So

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<sup>14</sup> "*were to kill*" emended thus, based on other sources which read more logically "*lam taqtul.*"

<sup>15</sup> So in Arabic text.

<sup>16</sup> Other texts have the plural: *Satans*.

Elijah descended from the mountain. When he met the men, he stopped them, and when they stood still, he said to them: "God has sent me to you and to the one who supports you, so return, O people, to the message of your Lord, so that you may convey it to your master. Return to him and say: God says to you: "Do you not know, Ahab, that I am God, and there is no God but I, God of the Children of Israel, Who created them and sustained them and gave them life as well as death. Let not your ignorance and paucity of understanding lead you to associate anything with Me,<sup>17</sup> or to seek healing for your son from other than Me, from those who possess nothing for themselves except for what I will. For I swear by My Name that surely I shall exasperate you through your son and slay him at this very moment, so that you may know that no one controls anything but I."

When he said that to them, they returned full of dread of him, and when they came to the king and approached him, they repeated to him what Elijah had said to them. They informed him that Elijah had descended to them from the mountain and that "he was a tall, thin man,—ascetic and withered, his hair fallen out, his skin dried up, and upon him was a hair shirt and a cloak on his chest which he had pierced full of holes with a pin,—and he stopped us. When we stopped, he came to us, and fear and awe of him were thrown into our hearts, and our tongues were powerless, though we were a great number while he was one—yet we could not speak to him nor respond to him, and he pleased us so that we returned to you." Then they recounted to him the words of Elijah, and Ahab said: "I can derive no benefit from life so long as Elijah is alive. What prevented you from striking him when you met him, and tying him up and bringing him to me, when you know that he is my quest and my enemy?" They replied to him: "We have already told you what caused us to refrain from speaking to him or striking him." Ahab said: "Then we will not succeed with Elijah except through deceit and trickery." So he sent after Elijah fifty of his strong and courageous men, and charged them with his trust, commanding them to use stratagems against Elijah and to embolden him by pretending that they believed in him,—both they and whoever was behind

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<sup>17</sup> A clear statement of Islamic repugnance for *shirk*, the association of other gods with Allah.

them,—to reassure him about them, to be misled by them so that they would gain influence over him and bring him to the king. They went off until they climbed the mountain where Elijah was. They split up to find him and were calling out at the top of their voices: “Prophet of God, come out before us and approach us, for we believe in you and trust you, as does our king Ahab. And all of our people agree to this and call out peace to you and say: ‘Your message has reached us, we acknowledge what you have said, and we believe in you and assent to what you have called us. So come to us! For you are our prophet and the messenger of our Lord. Stand before us and judge between us, for we will obey what you have commanded us and cease what you have forbidden us. You cannot fail to come to us after we have come to believe in you and obey you, so catch up with us and return to us.’” Now all of this was trickery on their part and deceit. When Elijah heard their speech, trust in them entered his heart and he feared God and worried about His anger if he did not appear to them and respond to them after what he had heard from them. But when he had determined to come out to them, he returned to himself and said: “Perhaps I should pray to God and ask Him to inform me what is in their hearts and to acquaint me with the truth of their situation.” This was an inspiration from God and good fortune for him. Then he said: “My God, if they are truthful in what they are saying, then permit me to go forth to them, but if they are lying, then turn me away from them and throw them into fire that will burn all of them.” Hardly had he finished his speech when they were covered by fire from above and all of them were consumed.

He continued: The account of this reached Ahab and his people, but he was not deterred from thinking up evil and planning a second trick for Elijah. So he sent another party to him as numerous as the other, stronger than they, and more capable of deceit and thinking up ideas. They approached until they reached that mountain and climbed it, splitting up and beginning to call out: “Prophet of God, we take refuge in God and you from God’s wrath and His might. We are certainly not like those who came to you before us. They were a dissembling and contrary party, and came to trick you against our advice. If we had known of them we would have slain them. So now God has satisfied you regarding them and destroyed them for their evil intention; He has avenged you and us of them.” When Elijah heard their words he prayed to God in the manner of

his first prayer and God rained fire on them and they were all consumed, down to the very last one. While this was happening, the son of the king was in great distress from his pain which, as God had promised him by the tongue of His Prophet Elijah, would not kill him; but when he died, He would not lighten his punishment. When the king heard of this second destruction of his companions, his anger increased greatly and he wanted to go out and search for Elijah himself, except that the illness of his son deterred him from doing that. So he sent the pious scribe, who was his wife's scribe, to Elijah, hoping that he would be on familiar terms with him. So he took the scribe and showed him that he wished Elijah no harm nor anything unpleasant, but he only showed the scribe that because he became aware of his belief. In spite of the king's awareness of his belief, he ignored that because of the scribe's competence, faithfulness, wisdom, level-headedness, and keen perception of matters. When he sent him to (Elijah), he also sent along with him a band of his companions, and commanded them, in the scribe's absence, to tie up Elijah and bring him to him. If Elijah did not want to be alone with them but to come with them in the company of the scribe and be secure in his position, they should not make him uneasy or frighten him. Then Ahab showed the scribe the authorization and said to him: "It is time for me to repent and receive admonition, for afflictions have befallen us, whether the burning of my companions or the distress in which my son finds himself. I know that this is because of Elijah's prayer. I did not believe that he would curse me and all of my people and that we would perish because of his prayer. So be our messenger to him and inform him that we have repented and turned back. Only if Elijah would be in our presence would it improve our repentance and the pleasure of our Lord we desire and the removal of our idols, through his commanding us and forbidding us<sup>18</sup> and informing us of what pleases our Lord.

He continued: Then he commanded his people to avoid the idols, and he said to (the scribe): "Tell Elijah that we have abandoned our goddess whom we used to worship and have disregarded her command, so that he will come down to us and he will be the one to burn her and destroy her." All of this was deceit on the part of the king.

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<sup>18</sup> The important Muslim concept based on repeated injunctions in Qur'ān 3:114; 7:157; 9:67,71,112; 22:41; 31:17. See above p. 39, n. 58.

He continued: Then the scribe left, accompanied by the troop, so that they ascended the mountain where Elijah was, and the scribe called him. Elijah recognized his voice and longed for him and for being close to him, and desired to meet him. God inspired him: "Go forth to your pious brother and meet him and renew your pact with him." So he went forth to him, greeted him, and wished him peace, and said to him: "What is new?" The pious man said to him: "This oppressive tyrant and his people sent me to you." And he related to him what Ahab had said to him saying: "Indeed I fear that if I return and you are not with me, he will kill me. So command me whatever you want me to do and how you want me to end up. If you wish, I will occupy myself with you and be with you and abandon him. Or if you wish, I shall struggle against him with you, or if you wish, send me to him with whatever you want, and I will get your message to him. If you wish, pray to your God to give us relief and deliverance from our situation." God inspired Elijah: "Whatever comes to you from them is trickery and falsehood designed to overcome you. As for Ahab, if his messengers tell him that you met this man and he did not bring you to him, he would suspect him and realize that he was cheating concerning you, and did not believe that he would kill him. So go with him, for your going with him is his excuse and innocence with Ahab. I shall distract him from the two of you and double his son's affliction so that he will have no concern besides him. Then I shall kill his son in the worst condition, and when he dies, you return and do not remain with him."

He continued: Elijah went with them until they reached Ahab, and when they entered his presence, God increased his son's pain and death began to cut him off. By these means God distracted Ahab and his companions from Elijah, so Elijah returned to his place safely. And when Ahab's son died and they had finished with him, and anguish for him had abated, he turned his attention to Elijah and asked the pious scribe, who had brought him, about him. He replied: "I know nothing about him, and that is because the death of your son and anguish for him distracted me from him. I could only suppose that you had made certain of him." Ahab remained silent about the scribe and left him because of the grief he felt for his son.

When his sojourn in the mountain and his being there began to wear on Elijah, and he felt a desire for bustle and people, he

descended from the mountain and went off until he stopped by a woman of the Children of Israel.<sup>19</sup> She was the mother of Jonah son of Amittai, Dhū l-Nūn,<sup>20</sup> and he hid himself with her for six months. Jonah, her son, was a newborn nursing baby at that time, but Jonah's mother served (Elijah) herself and assisted him with her possessions, not withholding from him any generosity she could show.

He continued: Then Elijah wearied of the confinement of houses after having lived in the mountains and their lofty trees, and loved staying among the mountains, so he returned to his place there. Jonah's mother grieved at Elijah's departure, and his absence made her lonely. Then, after only a short time had passed, her son Jonah died when she had weaned him and this calamity with him overwhelmed her. She went out in search of Elijah and kept on climbing the mountains, wandering about in them, until she stumbled upon him, found him, and greeted him. She said to him: "I was made miserable, after you had left, by the death of my son, and my calamity with him overwhelmed me; and my distress at losing him is great, for I have no child besides him. So have mercy on me and pray to your Lord to revive my son for me and restore my calamity to normal. For I have left him in a shroud but did not bury him, and I have hidden his whereabouts." Elijah said to her: "This is not something about which I have been commanded, for I am an obedient servant who does what my Lord commands, and He has not given me a command about this." But the woman became sad and pleaded with him, and God inclined Elijah's heart toward her, and he said to her: "When did your son die?" She replied: "Seven days ago." So Elijah went forth with her, traveling for seven days until he came to her dwelling and found her son Jonah dead now for fourteen days. Elijah performed his ablutions and worshipped and prayed, and God revived Jonah son of Amittai. When he came to life and sat up, Elijah got up and left, leaving Jonah to return to his place.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Parallel with Elijah's visit with the widow of Zarephath, 1 Kings 17:7-23.

<sup>20</sup> The midrashic interpretation of the name Amittai connects it with *emet*, (truth) the last word in 1 Kings 17:24. In Hebrew *Nūn* means fish, thus connecting Dhū l-Nūn with Jonah.

<sup>21</sup> Parallel to the story of Elisha and the woman of Shunem in 2 Kings 4:8-37.



He continued: When the rebelliousness of his people persisted, Elijah could not bear this any more and the distress wearied him. God inspired him, after seven years during which he was afraid, dismayed, and worn out, saying: "Elijah, what is this sadness and grief that you feel? Are you not My custodian of My inspiration and My argument on My Earth, and My sincere friend among My creation? So ask of Me, and I will give to you, for I am merciful, generous, and abundant in kindness." Elijah said: "Cause me to die and let me join my ancestors, for I have become weary of the Children of Israel and they have become weary of me, and I detest them on Your account and they detest me." Then God inspired him: "What would you want Me to give you, Elijah?" He said: "Provide me from the storehouses of Heaven with prayer, and not a drop of rain will fall upon them for seven years except through my intercession. For nothing but that will humble them." Then God said: "Elijah, I am more merciful to My servants than that, though they be wrongdoers." "Then six years," Elijah said. God said: "I am more merciful to My creatures than that, though they be wrongdoers." "Then five years." He replied: "I am more merciful to My creatures than that, though they be wrongdoers." Elijah said: "Four years." And God said: "I am more merciful to My creatures than that, though they be wrongdoers, but I shall give you your revenge on them. For three years I shall put the storehouses of rain into your hand, and I shall not spread a cloud out over them except through your prayer, nor will I send a drop down upon them except through your intercession." Elijah said: "With what shall I stay alive?" "I shall make a flock of birds subservient to you who will carry your food and drink to you, from the countryside and the land that will not suffer drought."

Elijah said: "I am satisfied." And God held the rain back from them for three years so that the animals, beasts of burden, reptiles, and trees perished. People exhausted themselves from great exertion while Elijah remained hidden from his people in a place where provisions were brought to him; such sustenance came to him wherever he was, and his people recognized him by this. So if they noticed the smell of bread in a house, they said: "Elijah has entered here." And they would search for him so that the people of that place suffered evil from them. Ibn 'Abbās said: "Drought had afflicted the Children of Israel for three successive years when Elijah passed by an old woman and said to her: "Do you have any food?" She said:

“Yes, a bit of wheat and a little oil.” So she brought him some of the wheat and oil, and he prayed for blessing over both of them and touched them. God blessed them so that her sacks were filled with wheat and her jars with oil. When the Children of Israel saw that happen to her, they said to her: “What is the source of that?” She said: “A man whose appearance was so-and-so passed by me.” And she described him in his appearance, and they recognized him and told her: “That was Elijah.” Then they sought him and found him, so he fled from them to the mountains. And God is All-knowing.

## ELISHA

### THE STORY OF ELISHA (AL-YASA'<sup>1</sup>)

Then Elijah came to the house of a woman of the Children of Israel who had a son named Elisha son of Akhtüb<sup>2</sup> who had a disability; she sheltered him and hid his condition, and people prayed for him. He was cured of his disability and followed Elijah, believing in him, trusting him and clinging to him, accompanying him wherever he went. Elijah had already become advanced in years and old, while Elisha was a young lad. Then God inspired Elijah: "By withdrawing rain from the Children of Israel you have destroyed many creatures among the cattle, beasts of burden, reptiles, trees, and plants who did not rebel against Me, other than the Children of Israel." And the scholars claim—though God is All-knowing—that Elijah said: "O Lord, let me be the one who prays for them, and I shall bring them relief from the distressing condition in which they find themselves and which has befallen them, then perhaps they will turn back from worshipping other than You." He was answered positively, so Elijah came to the Children of Israel and said to them: "Woe unto you! You have perished from hunger and travail. The cattle, beasts of burden, birds, trees, and plants have perished because of the withholding of rain from you on account of your sins. For you have, indeed, followed vanity and delusion. If you would like to know that the idols, to whom you pray instead of to God, will be of no use to you, then bring these idols forth, and if they respond to you, then it is as you say. But if they do not perform, then you

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<sup>1</sup> Seeming conflation of elements from several Biblical stories. See *CI*, p. 124, n. 667: "The widow and her unnamed son, whom Elisha restores to life (1 Kings 17:10–24), seems to be confused with the story of Elisha ben Shaphat, who followed Elijah (1 Kings 19:19–20) and who later helped the woman of Shunem bear a son and then restored him to life. (2 Kings 4:8–37)." Also see above, p. 460, n. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Arabic: Al-Yasa' b. Akhtüb, Biblical Elisha ben Shafat/Shaphat. The name Akhtüb is possibly based on the confusion of the name of the father of Ahitub, Phineas b. Eli (1 Samuel 14:3) with Phineas b. Eleazar b. Aaron (1 Chron. 6:4). Thackston, pp. 353–54, n. 109: "Elisha is clearly spoken of as son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah in 2 Kings 3:11; nonetheless, he is consistently spoken of in Islamic sources as Elisha son of Ahitüb."

will know that you follow vanity and delusion. Then you will remove them from you and I will pray to God for you to relieve you from the distress in which you find yourselves."

They responded: "You are behaving justly." Then they left, their images with them, and they prayed to them, but the idols did not respond to them and did not relieve them of the distress they were in. They said: "O Elijah, we are at death's door. Pray to God for us." So Elijah prayed to God, while Elisha was with him, for relief from their condition and for rain to water them. A cloud came out like the disk of the sun on the face of the sea while they were watching it. It approached them and covered the horizon, and then God sent rain upon them and gave them succor and revived their land. He continued: Then they complained to Elijah that the rain had destroyed walls and wiped out seedlings, and they said: "We have no seeds." So God told him to order them to sow salt on the earth, and they did so, and from it God caused chickpeas to sprout forth for them. Then he commanded them to sow sand, and from it God caused millet to sprout forth for them. However, when God had removed the damage from them, they violated the covenant and did not shed their unbelief, nor did they cast off their erring ways, but persisted in the most wicked of them.

When Elijah saw that, he prayed to his Lord to give him rest from them, and he was told: "Wait for such-and-such a day and then go forth to such-and-such a place. Whatever comes to you, mount it and do not fear. Elijah went out with Elisha son of Akhtūb with him, until when they were both in the place to which he had been commanded to go, a fiery horse approached so that it stood before him. Elijah jumped upon it and the horse took him away. Elisha called out to him: "Elijah, what do you command me?" A garment was thrown down from the highest sphere of Heaven, and that was a sign of Elisha's appointment as successor to Elijah over the Children of Israel. Elijah departed, and that was the last contact with him. God raised up Elijah in front of them and deprived him of the pleasure of food and drink, and covering of clothing. He had been human, regal, lofty, earthly. Then God gave power over Ahab, his wife, and his people to an enemy of theirs, and this enemy came toward them from a place of which they had not been aware, so that he overcame them. He killed Ahab and his wife in the garden of Mazdakī, and no sooner had their corpses been thrown down in that garden than their flesh decayed and their bones rotted. God

in His graciousness raised up Elisha and sent him as a prophet and messenger to the Children of Israel. God inspired him and aided him as He had helped His servant Elijah through him. The Children of Israel believed in Elisha, exalted him and ended up with his opinion and command, and God ruled over them firmly until Elisha departed from them.

Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Ḥāfiẓ informed us on the authority of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Abī Dāwud who said that al-Khiḍr and Elijah were both fasting during the month of Ramaḍān in Jerusalem, appearing at this festival each year.

Ibn Faṭḥawayh informed me about a man from the people of Ashkelon who was walking by the Jordan during midday and saw a man and said: “Servant of God, who are you?” “I am Elijah,” he replied. He said: “A terrible fear befell me, so I said to him: ‘Pray to God to remove from me what I feel, so that I may understand your conversation and comprehend you.’” He continued: “He prayed for me with eight prayers, and they are: ‘O Kind One! O Merciful One! O Compassionate One! O Munificent One! O Living One! O Everlasting One!’ and two prayers in Syriac which I did not understand, and it is said that they are *Bāhayā Sharāhayā*. Then God removed from me what I was feeling, and Elijah placed his palm between my shoulders, and I felt its coldness in front of me. I said to him: ‘Will you be inspired today?’ He replied: “Since God sent Muḥammad as a Messenger, He does not inspire me.”

The man continued: I said to him: ‘How many prophets are alive today?’ He said: “Four, two on Earth and two in Heaven. As for the two in Heaven, they are Jesus and Idrīs, while the two on Earth are Elijah and al-Khiḍr.” I said: ‘How many Substitutes are there?’ He replied: “Sixty men, fifty of whom are from the area between ‘Arīsh of Egypt and the Euphrates, while two men are in al-Ṣīṣah, one man in Ashkelon, and the other seven in the rest of the countries. Whenever God takes away one of them, He brings another in his place. Through them God averts misfortune from people, and through them they are given rain.” I said: ‘And al-Khiḍr, where is he?’ He said: “Among the islands of the sea.” And I said: ‘Do you meet him?’ “Yes,” he said. I said: ‘Where?’ “At the festival.” I said: ‘And about what do you converse?’ “He takes some of my knowledge and I take some of his.”

He continued: That was when the battle took place between

Marwān b. al-Ḥakam and the people of Syria.<sup>3</sup> I said: 'What do you have to say about Marwān b. al-Ḥakam?' He replied: "A tyrannical man, insolent against God, a slayer and slain, a witness in the Fire." I said: 'I have been a witness, but I have never pierced with lances, nor shot arrows, nor smitten with a sword, and I ask Moses' forgiveness for that position that I never return to the likes of it ever.' He said: "You have done well, and thus shall you be."

He continued: While he and I were sitting, suddenly there were placed before him two loaves, whiter than snow, and I ate, as did he, one loaf and part of another. Then I lifted my head and the remainder of the other loaf was lifted up, and I did not see anyone put it down, nor did I see anyone lift it up. He said: He had a she-camel that grazed in the Jordan valley, and he raised his head toward her, and when he called her, she came and knelt in front of him and he mounted her, and I said to him: 'I should like to accompany you.' He said: "You cannot be in my company." He continued: I said to him: 'I am alone; I have no wife and no family.' He said: "You will marry. But beware of four (types of) women: the disobedient one, the divorced one, the cursed one, and the one who goes about brazenly; but marry the woman who seems good to you." He continued: I said: 'I should like to meet you.' He replied: "If you see me, then you will have met me. I busy myself in Jerusalem during the month of Ramaḍān." Then a tree interposed itself between me and him, and by God, I do not know how he disappeared! This is the end of my story."

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<sup>3</sup> The founder of a dynasty of the Umayyads that lasted from 684 CE. to the Abbasid victory some 60 years later. The battle mentioned here had to do with his successful efforts to prevent the Zubayrids from succeeding to the Umayyad throne after Mu'āwiya II.

## DHŪ L-KIFL (II)

### SESSION ON THE STORY OF DHŪ L-KIFL<sup>1</sup>

God has said: “*And you shall also tell of Ishmael, and Idrīs, and Dhū l-Kifl who endured with patience.*” (21:85)<sup>2</sup>

Mujāhid said that when Elisha became old, he said: “Would that I could be succeeded in rule over the people by a man, who would labor among them during my lifetime so that I might observe how he acted.” Then he assembled the people and said: “Whoever commits himself to me in three things, I will take as successor: to fast by day, to remain awake by night, and not to become angry.” A young man rose up, whom all eyes held in scorn, and said: “I will.” But Elisha rebuffed him that day. And Elisha said the same thing the next day and the people were silent, but that man arose and said, “I will do that”, so he took him as successor.

He continued: When Iblīs saw that, he began to say to the devils: “Go after so-and-so!” But God thwarted him. Iblīs said: “Leave him to me.” So he went to him in the form of a very old poor man when Elisha lay down to take his midday nap (for he did not sleep by night or by day except for that nap) Iblīs knocked at the door and the man said: “Who is there?” He replied: “An old man who has been wronged.” So he opened the door and (the old man) began to tell him his story, saying: “There is a dispute between me and my people, and they have wronged me and done so-and-so.” And he prolonged the tale until the time to leave came and midday had passed. Elisha said to him: “If you go now, I will take care of your complaint.” So (the old man) left and Elisha went to his session. When he sat there he began to look about in search of the old man,

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<sup>1</sup> Note the earlier story using this name, pp. 288–89 above; also the differing order of these prophets in Ṭabarī, who has Ezekiel b. Buzi preceding Elijah.

<sup>2</sup> Qur’ān 38: 48: “remember also Our servants Ishmael, Elisha, and Dhū l-Kifl.” Ṭabarī, p. 364; *PP*, p. 143 and n. 341 says: “God sent (Job’s) son Bishr b. Job as a prophet, calling him Dhū l-Kifl.” Also mentioned by Kisā’ī, p. 190; Thackston, p. 204, esp. n. 98. The name may mean “he who requites doubly, gives a double portion.” Tradition equates him with Elijah or Zachariah, see end of this section p. 438 below.

but did not see him, so he arose to locate him. When the next day came, Elisha began to judge between people and expected him, but he did not see him, and when he returned for his nap and lay down to sleep, the old man came to him and knocked on the door, and Elisha said: "Who is there?" He replied: "I am the wronged old man." So he opened for him and said: "Did I not tell you that you should come to me when I am seated in court?" He replied: "They surely are most wicked people. When they knew that you were sitting, they said: 'We will give you your due,' but when you arose, they disavowed me. He said: "Go, and when I have rested, come to me." But sleep eluded him, so Elisha went and came there, and sat down awaiting him, but he did not see him. And drowsiness troubled him, so he said to one of his people: "Do not let anyone come near this door until I get up," for he was troubled by lack of sleep. When that hour arrived, the old man came but no one allowed him in, so when he became wearied, he noticed a small window in the house. He climbed through it, and lo, he was in the house, knocking at the door from within. Elisha awoke and said: "O so-and-so! Did I not order you not to permit anyone to get at me?" He replied: "No one came on my part, so look to see on whose part he came." So Elisha arose to go to the door, but he found it locked, just as he had left it, and yet, the old man was with him in the house. Thereupon the old man said to him: "Will you sleep when the conflict<sup>3</sup> is at your door?" So Elisha recognized him and said to him: "Enemy of God! What compelled you to do this thing?" He said to him: "You have thwarted me in everything I wanted to do to you, therefore I did to you what you see so that I might make you angry, but God has preserved you from me." He named him Dhū l-Kifl, because when he was entrusted with something he fulfilled it.<sup>4</sup>

Ibn Fathawayh—'Umar b. al-Mufaḍḍal—Abū Hāshim—Ibn al-Faḍl—al-A'mash—'Abdallāh b. 'Ubaydallāh al-Dārī—Sa'īd—Ibn 'Umar, who said: "I heard the Messenger of Allah relate a story which, had I heard it only once or twice, I would not transmit. But I heard it from him more than seven times. He would say: 'There was an Israelite who was called Dhū l-Kifl, who did not desist from

<sup>3</sup> Arabic *khuyām* which can be a litigant in court or an adversary, here the satanic figure of Iblīs.

<sup>4</sup> See n. 26 above for a different meaning.



a sin that he committed. He followed a woman and gave her sixty *dinars* in order that she give herself to him. And when he sat with her as a man does with a woman, she trembled and wept. He said to her: "What has made you cry?" She said: "This act which I have never committed before." He said to her: "Do I displease you?" She said: "No, but only need brought me to do it." He said: "Go, the money is yours." Then (Muḥammad) said: "By God, he never disobeyed God after that ever, for he died that night." It is said that when Dhū l-Kifl died, they found an inscription on his door: "God has forgiven Dhū l-Kifl."

Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī said that Dhū l-Kifl was not a prophet, he was only a pious worshipper who carried out the duties of a pious man, he prayed to God one hundred prayers each day, so God made his praise beautiful. It is said that he was Elijah, and others have said that he was Zachariah, but God knows best what the truth is.

## ELI AND SAMUEL

A SESSION ON THE STORY OF ELI<sup>1</sup> AND SAMUEL<sup>2</sup>  
(ISHMAEL<sup>3</sup> IN HEBREW) AND THE STORY OF THE ARK.  
THE STORY OF SAUL<sup>4</sup> AND GOLIATH<sup>5</sup>

*A Great Story Consisting of Many Chapters*

God has said: "Have you not heard of the Leaders of the Children of Israel [after Moses' death, when they said to one of their prophets, 'Raise up for us a king, and we will fight for the cause of God.' He replied: 'What if you refuse to fight, when ordered to do so?' 'Why should we refuse to fight for the cause of God,' they replied, 'when we and all our children have been driven from our dwellings?']" (2:246)

(Section on the Context of This Verse and an Introduction to the Tale)

Wahb b. Munabbih said that when God raised up Elisha after Elijah, and appointed him his successor over the Children of Israel, whatever God willed befell them. Then God took Elisha to Himself. Successors followed one after the other, among whom sins increased. The Ark was with them, the eldest (of them) inheriting it from the eldest. In it was the *sakīnah*<sup>6</sup> and the rest of what the family of Moses and the family of Aaron had left behind. Whenever an enemy encountered them, they would send forth against them the Ark and march against them with it, and God would scatter that foe. God had blessed them with their sustenance, for when one of them—according to what the scholars have mentioned—would gather dust upon a stone, then scatter a grain on it, God would bring forth for him from it what he and his family could eat. And when one of them had an olive, he could press from it what he and his family could

<sup>1</sup> Arabic: *ʿIlī* or *ʿAylī*.

<sup>2</sup> Arabic: *Shameil* for Hebrew: *Shemuʿel*.

<sup>3</sup> Arabic: *Ismāʿīl* for Hebrew: *Yīshmaʿel*.

<sup>4</sup> Arabic: *Tālūt*.

<sup>5</sup> Arabic: *Jālūt*.

<sup>6</sup> For Hebrew *shekhinah*, with many conflicting interpretations in Islamic texts. See above 161, n. 24.

eat for a year. But when their misdeeds increased and their sins became great and they abandoned what God had enjoined upon them, God gave the Amalekites<sup>7</sup> power over them. These were a people who dwelt in Gaza and Ashkelon and the seacoast between Egypt and Palestine.<sup>8</sup> Goliath was their king, and they triumphed over the Children of Israel and subdued them in most of their territories, captured many of their offspring, imprisoned four hundred and fifty of their princes, imposed a poll-tax upon them, and seized their Torah. The Israelites remained in a state of unrest and controversy regarding their condition, at times persevering in their transgression and error. Then, at times, God would impose upon them someone who would avenge Him upon them so that they would return to penitence. God protected them from the worst of those who hated them until He sent Saul as king among them and returned their Torah to them, set their affairs in order, and strengthened their rule. The period from the death of Joshua son of Nun to the time when dominion was established among them and prophecy returned to them through Samuel the prophet, lasted four hundred and sixty years. During that time the affairs of the Children of Israel led in part to loathing of them and in part resulted in others conquering them and being given rule over them. The last of those who ruled over them during this period was a man called Īlaf,<sup>9</sup> and during his reign an old man named Eli the Priest<sup>10</sup> was in charge of their affairs. He was their rabbi and in charge of their sacrifices, and they would submit to his opinion. When the period during which he tended to their affairs had passed, God sent Samuel as a prophet.

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<sup>7</sup> An ancient people of Canaan who did not permit the Israelites to cross their territory after the Exodus from Egypt. See the account in Exodus 17.

<sup>8</sup> Actually referring to the Philistines and not Amalekites. Gaza and Ashkelon were two of the five Philistine cities and Goliath was a Philistine in the Biblical account.

<sup>9</sup> Also mentioned by Ṭabarī, p. 545; *CI*, p. 126, see there n. 671: *Īlaf* or *Aylaf* is not identifiable with any biblical figure except possibly Eli the priest who is mentioned separately. The story of the death of *Īlaf* is similar to that of Eli. See n. 45 below.

<sup>10</sup> *kāhīn* in Arabic, Hebrew *kohen*, i.e., priest. The *kāhīn*, in ancient Arabia, was a soothsayer. The position of rabbi did not exist at that time.

A REPORT ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF THE MATTER OF SAMUEL AND A DESCRIPTION OF HIS PROPHECY<sup>11</sup>

Wahb b. Munabbih said that Samuel's father had two wives, one of whom was old and barren and had not borne a son to him, and she was destined to be the mother of Samuel, while the other had borne him ten sons. He continued: The Children of Israel had a certain festival, all the observances of which they carried out and where they offered up sacrifices, at which Samuel's father and his two wives and ten sons were present. When they offered up their sacrifices, each of them drew a lot, and while the mother of the sons had ten lots, the old woman had only one, and Satan brought between them the envy and hatred which he brings between fellow wives. The mother of the sons said to the old woman: "Praise be to God, who made my offspring many and gave you little." The old woman was silent with great grief. When it was dawn, she turned to her devotions and said: "God, the speech of my companion was known to You and heard by You, and her overcoming me was through Your grace with which You have favored her over me, and You have started her out with favor and kindness. Have mercy on my weakness and grant me a pure, responsible son, and I will dedicate him to You in one of Your sanctuaries to worship You and not deny You, to obey You and not abjure You. If You have pity on my weakness and lowliness and will answer my prayer, give me a sign whereby I shall know that my prayer has been accepted." When morning came she menstruated, whereas previously she had despaired of that happening again, and God made it a sign of what she had asked. Her husband had intercourse with her, and she became pregnant but concealed her condition.

At that time the Children of Israel suffered tribulation and distress from their enemy, and they had no prophet who could conduct their affairs, so they asked God to send them a prophet who would advise them so that they might contend with their enemy with his help. The tribe of prophecy had been destroyed, and only that pregnant woman remained of it. When the Israelites<sup>12</sup> learned

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<sup>11</sup> See 1 Samuel 1ff., and Ginzberg, *Legends*, IV:57-72. See also Kisā'i, pp. 250-251; Thackston, pp. 270-271; Tottoli, *Storie*, pp. 324-326,

<sup>12</sup> Text has "they learned," but the context requires that the community's name be mentioned.

that she was pregnant they wondered at it and said: "What you are bearing can only be a prophet, for those women who have lost hope of bearing a child bear only prophets—like Sarah the wife of Abraham who bore Isaac, and Īshā<sup>13</sup>, the wife of Zachariah who bore John." So they took her and imprisoned her in a house for a year for fear that she might give birth to a girl and exchange her for a boy. When she saw the eagerness of the Israelites for her progeny, the woman began to pray to God to grant her a son. She gave birth to a boy and named him Samuel, saying: "God has heard my prayer."<sup>14</sup> When the boy grew up she handed him over to study the Torah. Eli took charge of him and adopted him as a son.

When the boy reached the time when God was to send him as a prophet, Gabriel came to him while he was sleeping near the old man Eli the Priest, for he would trust no one with him. Gabriel called to him in the old man's voice: "Samuel!" The boy rose up suddenly, all afraid. He went to the old man and said: "Father, did you call me?" The old man did not want to say "No" and frighten the boy, so he said: "Son, go back to sleep." So the boy went back to sleep, but Gabriel called him a second time and the boy arose and said: "Did you call me, father?" The old man said: "What is the matter?" He replied: "Did you not call me?" "No," he answered. Samuel said: "I heard a voice in the house, but there is no one here besides us." The old man said: "Go, perform your ablutions and pray: 'If I pray in Your name, then answer!' And say: 'Here I am! I am obedient to You, so command me whatever You wish; I shall do whatever You command me.'" The lad did this, and he was called three times and he replied: "Here I am! I am obedient to You, so command me with Your command; I shall do whatever You order me." Then Gabriel appeared to him and said to him: "Go to your people and inform them of your Lord's message, for God has sent you among them as a prophet, for God destined you, on the day you were created, for prophecy, and He had mercy on your mother's loneliness on the day her rival wife bragged, so that today there is no one stronger than she in vigor or in pleasure. Then go to Eli and say to him: 'You have been God's vice-regent over His worshippers and His religion. For a (long) time you carried out

<sup>13</sup> Hebrew: *Elisheva'* (English: *Elizabeth*), the mother of John the Baptist. Luke 1:5.

<sup>14</sup> A folk etymology similar to the statement of Hannah in the Bible explaining the meaning of the name: "*I asked the Lord for him,*" 1 Samuel 1:20.

His command, judging by His book, carrying out His punishments. But as your appointment dragged on, your power diminished, your strength vanished, your life came to an end, your term (of life) neared its completion, you became as needy as one can be for God, and you continue to be in need of Him. You have discontinued the punishments and committed wrong between adversaries. You have acted through bribes and flatteries. You have weakened the rule of law, so that falsehood and its champions have become strong, while right and its party have become humiliated. The reprehensible has become manifest, while the approved has become hidden. Lying has gained ground while truth has diminished. But God did not make an agreement with you regarding this, nor was it for this that He made you a vice-regent. How evil is the way you have concluded your work! *Surely God does not love the treacherous.* (8:58) Inform him of this message, and carry out the vice-regency after him.”

When Samuel brought this message to Eli, he became frightened and upset. The reason for which God reproved His servant Eli and reprimanded him was that he had two young sons who had done something in the sacrifice that was not a part of it. That was that the stirrer used for stirring the sacrifice consisted of two tongs, and what those tongs took out belonged to the priest who stirred it. But his two sons placed hooks there. God inspired Samuel: “Go to Eli and say to him: ‘Love for your sons has prevented you from restraining them from doing wrong with My sacrifice, and from rebelling against Me. So I shall indeed strip the priesthood from you and from your two sons, and I shall cause you and them to perish.’” Samuel informed Eli and he was terribly frightened. Their enemy and those around them came towards the (Israelites), and Eli ordered his two sons to go out with the people and fight that enemy. So they went forth and took the Ark with them. When they made ready for battle, Eli waited to hear what the people had done. A man came to him while he was sitting on his seat, and informed him: “The people were put to flight and your two sons have been killed.” (Eli) said: “And what happened to the Ark?” The man replied: “The enemy took it.”

He continued: And Eli moaned and fell out of his seat onto the back of his head, and died. When the news reached King Īlāf that the Ark had been taken and that Eli had died, he died of grief.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Note the continuing confusion of the figures of Eli and the mysterious Īlāf. See n. 9 above.

When the king and his advisor<sup>16</sup> died and the Ark was taken, command over the Children of Israel became confused and divided, and the enemy became bold against them. The Children of Israel said to Samuel: “*Raise up for us a king and we will fight for the cause of God!*” (2:246) This was after Samuel had been conducting their affairs for ten years, but when the humiliation, disgrace, killing, and captivity at the hands of their enemy afflicted them with the calamity of their rebelliousness, they asked their prophet Samuel to raise up a king for them, with whom they would fight for the cause of God. Only the keeping of command over the Children of Israel was by concurrence to the king, but the king’s obedience was to the prophets. The king was the one who journeyed with the armies and fought the enemies, but the prophet was the one among them who corrected his order, advised him, directed him aright, and brought him word from God.

Wahb b. Munabbih said that God sent Samuel as a prophet and for forty years the people were in the best condition; then there occurred what happened with Goliath and the Amalekites, and they asked Samuel to set up a king for them, for that is His word: “*Have you not heard of the Israelite leaders after Moses, who said to one of their prophets: ‘Raise up for us a king and we will fight for the cause of God?’ (ibid.) ‘One of their prophets’*” refers to Samuel. In Hebrew he was Ishmael son of Bālī b. ‘Alqamah b. Mājīd b. ‘Amūša b. al-Nahr b. Dawn b. ‘Alqamah,<sup>17</sup> master of ‘Amūša b. ‘Azariyā. Mujāhid said that he was Samuel b. Halfāqā, and he did not trace his genealogy further than that. Muqātil said that he was of the stock of Aaron.

Their prophet said to them: “What if you would refuse to fight when ordered to do so?” And they answered as God related in His book: “*They said: Why should we refuse to fight for the cause of God when we and all our children have been driven from our dwellings? [Yet when fighting was prescribed for them, they turned away, all except a few of them. God is aware of evildoers.]*” (2:246) When Samuel had obtained their agreement on obedience, unity, and warfare, he asked God to set up a king for them.

<sup>16</sup> Arabic *al-amīr wal-wazīr*. Reference unclear unless Eli is meant here.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Samuel 1:1 has the father’s genealogy as Elkanah b. Jeroham b. Elihu b. Tohu b. Zuph, an Ephraimite.

## SAUL

### CONCERNING THE STORY OF KING SAUL, THE COMING OF THE ARK AND THE WAR WITH GOLIATH, AND WHATEVER CONCERNS THAT

God has said: *Their prophet said to them: "God has appointed Saul to be your king" [They said: "How should he be king over us who have better right than he to kingship, seeing he is not wealthy enough?"]* (2:247) The commentators have said: When they said to Samuel, "*Raise up for us a king and we will fight for the cause of God,*" (2:246) he asked God to set up a king for them. Then he brought a staff and a horn in which was holy oil. And it was said to him: "Your companion who will become king is as tall as this staff. Note the horn in which the oil is: if a man comes to you and the oil that is in the horn sizzles, he is the king of the Children of Israel; anoint his head with it and make him king over them." Then they measured themselves against the staff, but they were not equal to it; but Saul was its length (in height). His name in Syriac is Sādil, and in Hebrew Shāwul b. Kīsh b. Afīl b. Šārū b. Naḥurat b. Afīḥ b. Anīs,<sup>1</sup> son of Benjamin son of Jacob son of Isaac son of Abraham the Friend, and he was a tanner, in work with hides.

Wahb b. Munabbih said that he tanned hides. But 'Ikrimah and al-Suddī said: "He was a water-carrier, carrying water on his donkey from the Nile, but his donkey strayed and he went out to search for it." Wahb b. Munabbih said: "On the contrary, rather the donkeys of Saul's father were lost, and he sent him and a servant boy to look for them, and they passed Samuel's house. The servant boy said to Saul: 'If we entered in unto this prophet and asked him about the donkeys, he would guide us aright and pray for us for a good outcome with them.' He replied: 'Yes.' So they went to him. While they were with him recounting the story of the donkeys, the oil in the horn sizzled. Then Samuel arose and measured Saul with

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<sup>1</sup> In the Bible, between Kish and Benjamin, the genealogy is "son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah," 1 Samuel 9:1.



the staff and it was like his height, so Samuel said to him: 'Come, bring your head near me.' And he anointed his head with the holy oil. Then Samuel said to him: 'You are the king of Israel, for my Lord has commanded me to make you king over them.' Saul asked: 'Me?' 'Yes.' Saul said: 'Do you not know that my tribe is lowest among the tribes of Israel?' He replied: 'Indeed.'" He said: "Then what will be the portent?" He replied: "The portent will be that when you return home, your father will have found the donkeys.' And it was so."

Then Samuel said to the Children of Israel: "*God has appointed Saul to be your king*"—Mujāhid said: "as commander over the army"—*They said: "Should he be given the kingship, when we are more deserving of it than he? Besides, he is not wealthy enough."* (2:247) They said that only because there were two tribes among the Children of Israel: the tribe of prophecy and the tribe of royalty. The tribe of prophecy was the tribe of Levi son of Jacob, and from among them were Moses and Aaron. The tribe of royalty was the tribe of Judah son of Jacob, and from them were David and Solomon. But Saul was neither from the tribe of prophecy nor from that of royalty, but he was from the tribe of Benjamin son of Judah, who had committed a grave sin, having had intercourse with women by the side of the road during broad daylight,<sup>2</sup> so God became angry at them and stripped both prophecy and royalty from them.

When he said to them: "*God has appointed Saul to be your king,*" they disliked that because he was from that tribe, so "*they said: Should he have kingship over us when we are more deserving of it than he? Besides, he is not wealthy enough?*" (2:247) So Samuel said to them: Lo! God has chosen him above you, and has increased him abundantly in wisdom—of warfare—and in body—meaning in the height of his stature and of his strength, and he was named Saul (*Tālūt*) only because of his height (*tūl*), therefore he surpassed the people by his head and shoulders. Ibn Kaysān said: In handsomeness too. For Saul was the most handsome man, and the most learned, among the Children of Israel. "*God gives His sovereignty upon whom He will. God is munificent, All-knowing.*" They said: "What is the portent of that?" *Their prophet said to them: "The portent of his reign is that the Ark should come to you [wherein is peace of reassurance from your Lord, and a remnant of that which the house*

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<sup>2</sup> Perhaps a misreading of the story of Judah and Tamar?

*of Moses and the house of Aaron left behind, the angels bearing it. Herein shall be a portent for you if you are believers].” (2:248)*

THE STORY OF THE ARK AND ITS DESCRIPTION,  
AND THE BEGINNING AND END OF IT

Those who write commentaries and collect stories have said that God sent down an Ark to Adam from Paradise when he descended to Earth. In it were pictures of the prophets among (Adam’s) children, and in it were houses in the number of messengers among them. The last of the houses was the house of Muḥammad, made of a red sapphire, and lo, he was standing in prayer, and on his right was the obedient mature man on whose forehead was written: This is the first one to follow him of his people: Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq. And on his left was (‘Umar) al-Fārūq, and on his brow was written: An iron horn of which the censure of one who blames God will never take hold. And behind him was the Possessor of Two Lights<sup>3</sup> (‘Uthmān), and written on his brow was: Upright of the Righteous. And in front of him was ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, his sword drawn on his shoulder, and on his brow was written: This is his brother and paternal cousin, aided with victory by God. And around him were his uncles, and the caliphs, and the leaders (of the ‘Alids) and the mass of Green Ones (descendants of ‘Alī), helpers of God and helpers of His Messenger. The light of the hooves of their steeds on the Day of Resurrection is like the light of the Sun in the house of this world.

The Ark was approximately three cubits by two and was made of *shamshādh* wood,<sup>4</sup> from which combs are made, covered with gold. It had been with Adam until he died, then was passed on conscientiously to the children of Adam until it reached Abraham. When he died it was with Ishmael because he was his elder son, and when Ishmael died, it was with his son Kedar (*Qaydhar*). The sons of Isaac disputed with him about it and said to him: “Prophecy has turned away from you and you possess only this one light, (meaning the

<sup>3</sup> So called because he married two of Muḥammad’s daughters in succession: Ruqayya and Umm Kulthūm.

<sup>4</sup> This wood (also *shamshār*, *shamshūr*) has not been definitely identified. Dozy, I: 787 states that *shamshādh al-rumād* is “buis” i.e., boxwood, that is reduced to ashes for use in washing.

light of Muḥammad), so give us the Ark.” But Kedar refrained from doing so, saying: “It is the heritage of my father, and I shall not give it to anyone in either world.” He continued: So he went, that very day, to open that Ark, but opening it was difficult for him, and someone called to him from Heaven: “Slowly, Kedar! You have no way to open this Ark, for it is the heritage of a prophet, and only a prophet can open it. So give it to your cousin Jacob, Israel of God.” So Kedar carried the Ark on the back of his neck and went forth, heading for the land of Canaan, for Jacob was there. He continued: And when Kedar drew near, the Ark gave forth a noise which Jacob heard. He said to his sons: “I swear by God! Kedar has brought you the Ark, so go toward him.” Then Jacob and his sons arose together, and when Jacob looked at Kedar, he ran to him weeping and said: “Kedar, why do I see your complexion changed and your strength weakened? Has an enemy oppressed you, or have you carried out rebellion after the death of your father Ishmael?” He replied: “No enemy has oppressed me, nor have I rebelled, but the light of Muḥammad is heavy upon my back and therefore my complexion is changed and my support is weak.” Jacob asked: “Among the daughters of Isaac?” He said: “No, but among the Jurhumī Arabs,<sup>5</sup> and she is al-‘Āmiriyyah.” Jacob said: “Excellent! Glory to Muḥammad! God would not bring her forth except among the pure Arabs, O Kedar, and I have good news to give you.” He said: “What is it?” He replied: “The knowledge that yesterday al-‘Āmiriyyah bore a son for you.” Kedar said: “How did you know this, cousin, when you are in Syria and she is in the Sacred Land?”<sup>6</sup> Jacob said: “I knew that because I saw the gates of Heaven open, and I saw a light like that of the Moon circling between Heaven and Earth, and I saw the angels bringing down blessings and mercy from Heaven, and I know that that is because of Muḥammad.” Then Kedar gave the Ark to his paternal cousin Jacob and returned to his family, and found that al-‘Āmiriyyah<sup>7</sup> had given birth to a son; and he named him Ḥaml, and the light of Muḥammad was in him.

<sup>5</sup> The Jurhumī Arabs were considered to be ‘*arab al-‘āribah*, “authentic” Arabs, original speakers of Arabic, descended from Qaḥṭān (Biblical Joktan), unlike the *muta‘āribah* Arabs, descendants of Ishmael who learned the language after coming to Arabia. See Ṭabarī, 216; *PP*, 17–18. See also *EF*, II: 603–4, *s.v.* *Djurmum*.

<sup>6</sup> *I.e.*, Arabia in the view of Islam.

<sup>7</sup> Not in the text, which uses here the polite way of speaking of one’s wife, namely the word for “family.”

It is said that the Ark remained among the Children of Israel until it reached Moses, and Moses placed the Torah and some of his possessions in it, and it remained in his possession until he died. Then it passed down among the prophets of the Children of Israel until the time of Samuel. Then it reached Samuel, and the Ark and its contents had reached completion; and there was in it, as God has mentioned in His book: "*Therein shall be the Sakinah from your Lord.*" (2:248)

There have been different opinions about what the *sakinah* is. 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said: "The *sakinah* is a strong, gusting wind which has two heads, and its face is like that of a human being." And Muḡāhid said that it has a head like that of a cat, and a cat's tail and two wings. And Muḡammad b. Ishāq said, on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih, from one of the scholars of the Children of Israel regarding the *sakinah*, that it had the head of a cat, and whenever she cried out in the Ark, they would be certain of aid, and victory would come to them.

Al-Suddī—Abū Mālik—Ibn 'Abbās said that it is a basin made of the gold of Paradise, in which the hearts of prophets are washed.

Bakkār b. 'Abd al-Raḡmān—Wahb b. Munabbih that it is a spirit from God which spoke to them when they differed about something, and would inform them of the explanation of whatever they wished; *and the relic of what the House of Moses and the House of Aaron left behind.* (2:248)

The commentators have said that in the Ark were the staff of Moses and shards of the tablets. That was because when Moses threw down the tablets, they shattered and some of it (the shards) was raised up, and he gathered the remainder and placed it in the Ark. In it, too, were the two tablets of the Torah and a measure of the manna that He would send down to the Children of Israel, and a sandal of Moses, and Aaron's turban and his staff. They said: "The Ark would speak to the Children of Israel when they differed about a matter and would judge between them. When they were involved in battle, they placed it in front of them, seeking God's assistance through it against their enemy. But when they rebelled and acted corruptly, God gave the Amalekites power over them, and they were victorious over them in spite of the Ark, and they deprived them of it." That was in the days of Eli the priest who raised Samuel, and its story lasted long; for Goliath, when his people took the Ark captive, was young. The affairs of the Children of Israel became

disordered until God sent Saul as a king, and they asked for a sign of his kingship and Samuel said to them: "*The advent of the Ark shall be the portent of his reign.*" (ibid.)

The story of that Ark was as follows: The people who captured the Ark took it to one of the towns of Palestine called Urdunn,<sup>8</sup> and placed it in the house of one of their idols, setting it under the greatest idol. When they awoke the next day, the idol was under it, so they took the idol and placed it atop the Ark, nailing the feet of the idol to the Ark. When they awoke in the morning, the two hands of the idol were cut off as well as its two legs, and it was cast down under the Ark. All of the idols were overturned, so they took the Ark out of the house of the idols and placed it in the vicinity of their city. Then the people of that vicinity began to feel pain in the backs of their necks until most of them perished. They said to one another: "Do you not know that no one can stand up to the god of the Children of Israel? So send the Ark forth from your city!" He continued: They took it out to another town, and God sent rats against the people of that town. A man would go to sleep in good health, and then the rats would chew at him, and in the morning he would be dead and everything in his belly would be eaten. So they took (the Ark) out of the town to the desert and buried it in one of their watercourses. Everyone who went out there would be stricken with hemorrhoids and colic, so they took it out and placed it in a house. It remained among them for ten years and seven months. Any one of them who drew near it would be burned, there befell them in the city epidemics and diseases, among their cattle death, and among their women the plague.

They were bewildered, but there was among them an Israelite woman from the sons of the prophets, and she said: "You will continue seeing what you loathe so long as this Ark is among you, so take it out from your midst." So they brought a wagon, on the advice of that woman, and placed the Ark on it and hitched it to two oxen. They struck the oxen's sides and they set off. God entrusted to them four angels to drive them on,<sup>9</sup> and any land through which the Ark passed became holy. The oxen went on until they halted

<sup>8</sup> *I.e.*, Jordan, not a town but the name of the river and of a province of the Islamic Empire.

<sup>9</sup> An emendation, reading *yasqūnahumā* for *yasruqūnahumā*.

at land where there was an Israelite farmer. He broke their hooves and cut their ropes, and placed the Ark on it,<sup>10</sup> and the oxen returned to their land. The Children of Israel hardly turned about but the Ark was among them. They glorified and praised God and gathered around Saul, for that is His word: “. . . *it will be borne by the angels*” (2:248)—meaning, the angels were driving it on.

Ibn ‘Abbās said: The angels brought the Ark, bearing it between Heaven and Earth all the while watching over it, until they had placed it in the house of Saul, and thus they established his rule. God has said: “*That will be a portent for you if you are true believers.*” (ibid.) Ibn ‘Abbās said: “The Ark and the rod of Moses are in Lake Tiberias (*Ṭabariyah*),<sup>11</sup> but they will be brought forth before the Day of Resurrection.” And God is All-knowing.

A CHAPTER ON THE STORY OF SAMUEL, WHEN GOD INSPIRED HIM  
TO COMMAND SAUL TO JOURNEY WITH THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL,  
AND A DESCRIPTION OF THE “RIVER OF THE ORDEAL”

God has said: “*And when Saul marched out with his army, he said: ‘God will put you to the proof by (the ordeal of) a river; [whosoever drinks of it is not of me, and he who does not taste it, shall be one of mine, saving him who scoops it up with his hand.]’*” (2:249) He said: When God inspired Samuel to command Saul to journey to Goliath from Jerusalem with his troops, no one disobeyed him except an old man because of his age, or a sick man because of his illness, or a blind man because of his lack of sight, or one who was excused because of some reason. That was because when they saw the Ark, they said: “The Ark has come to us and it is without a doubt (a sign) of (divine) assistance.” So they rushed off to the battle. Saul said: “I do not need what I see,<sup>12</sup> so let no one who has built a house but has not finished it go forth with me, nor the owner of a business with which he is preoccupied, nor a man who owes a debt, nor a man who has married a woman but has not had intercourse with her. Let only those young men who are energetic and unencumbered accompany me.”

<sup>10</sup> Meaning: “on the land.”

<sup>11</sup> Also known as the Sea of Galilee, or Lake Kinnereth.

<sup>12</sup> The implication is that there were too many volunteers.

Eighty thousand gathered to him according to his conditions, and he went forth with them. It was very hot, and they complained of paucity of water between them and their enemy. They said: These waters will not carry us, so let God make a river flow for us. Saul said to them at the behest of Samuel: “*God will put you to the proof by (the ordeal of) a river*” (ibid.)—testing you to see your obedience, for He knows all concerning you, (it is a river of sweet water between Jordan and Palestine called Admā),<sup>13</sup>—“*He who drinks of it is not one of mine*”—namely, not of the people of My religion and obedience to Me—“*and he who does not taste it*”—does not drink it—“*he shall be one of Mine*”—then he made an exception and said “*except him who scoops it up in the hollow of his hand*”—that is, a handful, (and by the *fathah* on the *ghayn* He intends one time)<sup>14</sup>—“*but they all drank from it, except a few of them.*”<sup>15</sup>

Al-Suddī said that they were four thousand, but others said they were three hundred and ten-odd people, and this is correct.<sup>16</sup> The proof of this is the tradition of al-Barrā’ b. ‘Āzib, who said: The Messenger of Allah said to us on the day of Badr:<sup>17</sup> “Today you are the same number as the companions of Saul when they crossed the river, and only one who believed crossed over with him.” He said: On that day they were three hundred and thirteen men, and whoever took of it in the hollow of his hand, his heart was strengthened and became sound, his faith was restored, and he crossed the river in safety, while this single handful sufficed him as a drink for him, his beast of burden, and his riding animals; whereas for those who drank and disobeyed God’s command, their lips turned black and thirst overcame them, and they were not sated. So they remained on the banks of the river and were afraid to meet the enemy, and

<sup>13</sup> Yāqūt, *Muġam*, I:170 lists Udamā in various places, mostly in Arabia; a mountain in southern Arabia in Yamamah. Le Strange, *Palestine*, 289, cites Mas‘ūdī, I: 85, as listing Admah (Admuta) as one of the cities of Lot, destroyed with Sodom.

<sup>14</sup> The word as vocalized here refers to a single act of taking or ladling out with the hands. See Lane, 2249.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* Compare this account with Judges 7. Tabarī also has this account.

<sup>16</sup> Differing accounts reconciled in Ṭabarī (550; *CI*, 132) state that of the four thousand who crossed the river (from an original force of eighty thousand who went out with Saul), an additional three thousand six hundred and eighty-odd also turned back out of fear of Goliath. See also Kisā’ī, pp. 252–253; Thackston, pp. 272–274; Tottoli, *Storie*, pp. 136–139.

<sup>17</sup> Referring to the fateful battle in which a small band of Muslims under Muḥammad’s command defeated a much more numerous force of Meccans in March 624. For a full description see Watt, *Medina*, 10–13.

did not witness the victory. When the few who were steadfast with him crossed over the river with Saul, they said—meaning those who had drunk and disobeyed God’s command—“*We have no power this day against Goliath and his warriors,*” and they abandoned Saul and did not witness the battle of Goliath. “*But those who thought*”—that is to say, knew and were certain—“*that they would meet God replied*”—and they were the few who were steadfast with Saul—“*Many a small band has, by God’s grace, vanquished a mighty army! [God is with the steadfast].*” (2:249) And they passed on, intent on battle.

A CHAPTER ABOUT THE STORY OF DAVID AND GOLIATH  
AND A DESCRIPTION OF GOLIATH’S SLAYING<sup>18</sup>

God has said: “*When they met Goliath and his warriors, they cried: ‘Lord! [Bestow on us endurance, make our foothold sure, and give us help against the disbelieving folk. So they routed them by God’s grace] and David slew Goliath.’*” (2:250–51)

The commentators and narrators have said, in differing expressions but corresponding meanings, that among those who crossed the river with Saul was David’s father Jesse, along with his thirteen sons among whom David was the youngest and most disdained. That very day David came to his father and said: “Father, never have I flung anything with this sling of mine but I have struck it and brought it down.” He responded: “I am delighted, my dear son! For God has placed your means of sustenance in your projectile, that is to say, your slingshot. Then he came to him another day and said: “Father! I entered in among the mountains and saw a sleeping lion. I mounted him and grabbed his two ears, and he paid no attention to me. Then I seized his jaws and split them apart in his head and neck down to his throat with my hands, without a knife or striking him with iron, and you can see him there slain.”<sup>19</sup> His father said to him: “I am delighted, my dear son! This is a goodness that God has given you.” Then David came to him another day and said: “Father, as I walk among the mountains and sing God’s praises, there is not a mountain that does not sing with me.” He said: “I am delighted,

<sup>18</sup> Tabarī, p. 555; *CI*, p. 136;

<sup>19</sup> See the story of Samson, Judges 14.



my dear son! This is a benefit that God has given you, and you will have great importance.”

He continued: And when the campaign of the Children of Israel with Saul reached the army of Goliath, the latter sent to Saul (saying): “Come out before me, or send out to me someone who will fight me! And if he kills me, my possessions are yours, but if I kill him, your possessions are mine.” This weighed heavily on Saul and he announced to his army: “I will marry my daughter to whoever kills Goliath, and I pledge my kingdom to him.” But the people were terrified at the prospect of combat with Goliath, so no one responded to him. Then Saul asked their prophet Samuel to pray to God about that, and he was brought a horn in which there was holy oil and the likeness of an iron breastplate.<sup>20</sup> And it was said to him: “He who slays Goliath is the one upon whose head this horn will be placed, and the oil will bubble until he anoints his head with it, and it will not flow down over his face, but will be on his head in the form of a crown, and he will enter this breastplate and fill it and not tremble in it. Then Saul called the strongest and most powerful of the Children of Israel and tested them, but not one of them was suitable for it. Then God inspired Samuel: “Among the sons of Jesse is one who will kill Goliath, and I wish to make him a vice-regent upon the Earth after you. I will teach him distinctness of speech even though he is a herder of sheep. So tell Jesse to array his sons before you one by one.” So he called Jesse and said to him, “Array your sons before me.” So Jesse brought out to him twelve sons like cavalymen, and among them was a skillful man, and he arrayed them with the horn and the breastplate and saw nothing. Then he spoke to that large one and brought him back to the breastplate. Then God inspired him: “We do not select men because of their appearance; rather, We select them because of the piety of their intentions and of their hearts.” So Samuel said to Jesse: “Do you have a son left besides them?” He replied; “No.” Samuel said: “Lord, he claims that he has no son besides them.” God replied: “He lies!” So Samuel said: “Jesse, my Lord says you lied.” He said: “He is right, prophet of God! I have a small son named David. I was ashamed that people might see him because of his short stature

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<sup>20</sup> *Tannūr*, here is “breastplate” and not the usual meaning of “oven.” See *GI*, p. 136, n. 732.

and insignificance, so I left him behind among the sheep to herd them, and he is among such-and-such a tribe." Now David was short, lean, blond, and blue-eyed. Then Saul called Samuel and he was told to go out to him, but he found the valley inaccessible, with water between him and the sheepfold towards which he went in the evening, and he found (David) carrying the sheep, two by two, crossing the flood with them and not wading through the water with them. When Samuel saw him, he said: "This is he without any doubt. He has mercy towards animals, and he will be more merciful with people." So he called him and placed the horn on his head and it overflowed, and he put him into the breastplate and he filled it.<sup>21</sup>

When Saul saw that he said to him: "Will you kill Goliath? For I will give my daughter to you in marriage, and I will enforce your judgment in my kingdom." He said: "Yes." Saul continued: "Have you encountered in yourself anything that will enable you to kill him?" He said: "Yes. I am a shepherd, and when a lion or tiger or wolf comes to take anything, I stand up to him and seize him, opening his jaws from it and twisting them back to the nape of his neck." When Saul heard that from him he returned him to his army, and David passed a stone in the road and it called out to him: "O David, pick me up, for I am the stone of Aaron with which he slew such-and-such a king!" So he placed it in his bag. Then he passed another stone and it called out to him: "Pick me up, for I am the stone of Moses with which he slew such-and-such a king!" So he carried it in his bag. Then he passed another stone and it said: "Pick me up, for I am your stone with which you will slay Goliath, for God has hidden me for you." So he placed it in his bag. Then, when they drew up ranks for battle, Goliath went forth and asked for the contender, so David presented himself to him. Saul had given him a horse and armor and weapons, and he mounted the horse and wore the weapons and rode for a bit, and he felt some arrogance in himself and left, returning quickly to the king. And those around the latter said: The boy has become cowardly. But he went on until he stopped before the king, who said: "What is the matter with you?" David said to him: "If God will not aid me, these weapons will be of no use to me at all, so let me fight as I wish." Saul said to him: "Do as you please." Then David took his bag and girded himself

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<sup>21</sup> This account is also found in Ṭabarī, see *CI*, n. 65 above.

with it, and he took the slingshot and went toward Goliath. Now Goliath was one of the mightiest and strongest of men, and would attack entire armies all by himself. He had a helmet that weighed three hundred *rats*<sup>22</sup> of iron, and he had a piebald horse, like unto him in power and strength and enormous size. But when Goliath went forth toward David, God cast fear into his heart and he said to David: “*You* are going to challenge *me*?” He said: “Yes.” Now Goliath was mounted on a piebald horse and on him was a complete set of arms, and he said to David: “Little boy, would you come at me with a stone in a slingshot as one might throw a stone at a dog?” He said: “Yes. You are worse than a dog.” Goliath said: “I shall surely divide up your flesh between the wild beasts of the Earth and the birds of the skies.” And David said: “In the name of God, God will divide up your flesh among the beasts and birds of the skies.” Then he took a stone from the bag and said: “In the name of the God of Abraham!” and he placed it in his slingshot. Then he took a second stone and said: “In the name of the God of Isaac!” and he placed it in his slingshot. Then he took out a third and said: “In the name of the God of Jacob!” and he placed it in his slingshot.

He continued: The three stones all became one stone, and he turned the slingshot and released it, and God made the wind subservient to him so that the stone struck the nosepiece of the helmet, mixed up his brain, and left through the back of his neck, killing thirty men behind him. It is said that when it left through his neck, it broke apart and became fragments by God’s leave, until it covered all of the troops of Goliath and no one was left of them who had not been struck by a piece of it. (Similar to this was His favor to His prophet on the day of Badr, when He poured dust of the ground and put the army to flight.)<sup>23</sup> Goliath fell down slain, and David rushed up and cut off his head and stripped his signet-ring off of his hand, and he drew near with his head, dragging it until he cast it down before Saul. The Muslims<sup>24</sup> rejoiced greatly and left for their city, safe and sound, with praise to God, Lord of all Being.

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<sup>22</sup> This weight varied in different areas and periods in the Islamic world, see W. Hinze, *Islamische Masse und Gewichte*, 1955. See also, *ET*, VI:118, *s.v.* *makāyil*.

<sup>23</sup> A parenthetical element introduced here and reinforced by the last sentence of this paragraph.

<sup>24</sup> As we saw previously in n. 17 above, the comparison with the battle of Badr is a standard feature of Islamic historiography.

MENTION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE STORY OF SAUL AND DAVID'S  
BEHAVIOR TOWARDS HIM AFTER THE SLAYING OF GOLIATH

They said that when David slew Goliath, the people talked about David and he was great in their hearts. David came to Saul and said: "Carry out what you promised me and give me my wife!" Saul said to him: "Do you want the daughter of the king without a dowry? Hurry the dowry of my daughter and she is yours." David said to Saul: "You did not lay down a condition about a dowry and I have nothing yet, so decide about the dowry as you wish and impose her bride-price upon me, and its payment and fulfillment are my obligation to you." Saul said: "I set her at your share of the property." But the Children of Israel said to him: "Do not wrong him; and carry out for him what you promised him." When Saul saw the inclination of the Children of Israel towards David, his praise seemed good to him, so he said, "My daughter has no need of wealth, nor will I charge you with something of which you are incapable. You are a courageous man. In our mountains there are enemies from among the unbelievers, so go and fight them, and when you kill two hundred, bring me their heads and I will bring my daughter to you in marriage." So David went to the unbelievers, and whenever he killed one of them, he would cut into his head and string it on a cord until he had strung all of them. Then he brought them to Saul, flung them down before him and said: "Hand over my wife to me!" So he gave him his wife in marriage and set his seal on his property. The people were favorably disposed towards David, and the Children of Israel loved him and talked about him often, and Saul suffered in his heart because of this and wanted to kill him.

Wahb b. Munabbih said that in those days, the prophets and kings used to lean on staffs and would set on their ends iron spearheads. David was sitting near the house when Saul entered and suddenly cast the staff at him in order to kill him with it in captivity. When David noticed it, he turned aside from the toss and leaned over without moving from his spot, and the stick implanted itself in the wall. Then David said to him: "Did you want to kill me?" Saul said to him: "No, but I wanted to verify your steadiness in the face of attack, and your self-possession before opponents." David said to him: "And did you find what you could in me?" He said: "Yes, but perhaps you were frightened." He replied: "God forbid that I should fear anyone but God, for there is no refuge but in Him, nor anyone

to avert evil but Him.” Then David drew it out of the wall and brandished it, feigning ignorance, and said to Saul: “Show your firmness to me as I showed it to you.” But Saul was certain of being killed, so he said to him: “I adjure you by God and by the inviolability of kinship by marriage between me and you”—though this speech of David’s did not bespeak an intention to kill Saul but simply a way to frighten and warn him. Then David said to Saul: “God has written in the Torah that the reward of evil is a single similar evil, and the obvious one is more vile.” Saul said: “Will you not speak the words of Abel: *‘Even if you stretch out your hand to slay me, I shall not stretch out my hand against you to slay you, for I fear God, the Lord of all Being.’*” (Q 5:28) David said: “I have forgiven you for the sake of God.” But Saul persisted for some time in his desire to kill David, and he determined to go to him and kill him in his house, but the daughter of Saul, David’s wife, was informed of that—a man called “the two-eyed one” having informed her—so she said to David: “You are to be slain tonight.” “Who will kill me?” he asked. “My father.” David asked: “Have I committed a crime?” She said: “A man who does not lie told me, and it will do you no harm to be absent tonight in order to receive a confirmation of that.” He said: “If he really wants that, I cannot go out, but bring me a wineskin.” She brought him one and he placed it in his couch on the bed and covered it over and went under the bed.

He continued: Saul entered in the middle of the night intent on wanting to kill David, but he did not find him, so he said to his daughter: “Where is your husband?” She said: “He is sleeping on his bed.” And he struck him with the sword and the wine flowed forth. When he sensed the smell of wine, he said: “May God have mercy on David—how much wine he has drunk!” He went out, and when he awoke in the morning he learned that he had accomplished nothing, and he said: “It is only natural that any man from whom I wanted what I did, would not let me be until he attains his revenge upon me.” So he hid himself along with his doorkeepers and guards and locked the doors behind him.

He continued: Then David came, that very night, when all eyes were resting, and God blinded the doorkeepers from observing him and God opened the doors for him, and he entered in unto Saul while he was asleep on his bed, and David placed an arrow at his head, an arrow at his feet, an arrow on his right side, and an arrow on his left side, and then went out. When Saul woke up, he found

the arrows and recognized them and said: "May God have mercy on David! He is better than I. I have overcome him and wanted to kill him, and he has overcome me and restrained himself from me. If he had wanted, he could have put an arrow in my throat, but I am not one to reassure him." When the following night came, David came to him a second time and God blinded the eyes of the doorkeepers from him, and he entered while Saul was sleeping on his bed. He took Saul's water-jug from which he washed himself and the mug from which he drank, and he cut off some hairs of his beard and a bit of the fringes of his garments. Then he went out and fled and hid himself. When Saul awoke in the morning and saw that, he set all eyes (to search) for him and intensified the search for him, but was unable to find him. Then Saul rode out one day and found David walking in the wilderness, and Saul said to himself: "Today I shall kill David, for I am mounted and he is on foot." But when David fled, he could not be overtaken, though Saul raced in pursuit of him. David speeded up his pace and entered a cave. God inspired a spider and it spun a web over it, and when Saul reached the cave and saw the spider's web, he said: "If he were here, he would have torn the web of the spider." So he left him and went on. When he went off, David came out of the cave and went to the mountain with the pious ones and began to devote himself to God. The scholars and god-fearing people spoke ill of Saul in regard to David. Meanwhile whoever would forbid Saul to kill David would be killed. Then he began to kill the scholars: Any scholar over whom he had power among the Children of Israel, whom he could kill, he slew. And whatever army he fought, he routed it—then a woman was brought to him who knew the Almighty Name.<sup>25</sup> He ordered his baker to kill her, but the baker had pity on her and said: "Perhaps we will have need of a sage," and he let her be.

God placed repentance in the heart of Saul, and he regretted what he had done. He began to weep until the people had pity on him. Every night he would go out to the graves and weep and cry out: "I adjure by God any person who knows of any repentance for me to tell me about it." When his weeping had become too much

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<sup>25</sup> Or "Great Name", the Ineffable Name of God, mentioned above. See p. 421, n. 7 above.

for them, someone cried out from the graves: "Saul, are you not satisfied that you slew us when we were alive, that you trouble us when we are dead?" Saul's sadness and weeping intensified and the baker had pity on him, saying: "What is the matter with you, O king?" He replied: "Do you know any sage in the land whom I can ask whether I have any chance of atonement?" The baker said to him: "O king! Do you know what you resemble?" He said: "No." He told him: "You resemble no one more than a king who alighted in a town in the evening, and the cock crew and flew away from him. That king said: "Do not leave a single cock in the town, but kill it." When he wanted to sleep, he said to his companions, "When the cock crows, he will awaken us so that we can set out." But they said to him: "Did you leave a cock so that its sound can be heard?" "As for you, have you left a sage in the land?" His sadness and weeping increased again, and when the baker saw that, he said: "Do you think that if I directed you to a sage, you would kill him?" He replied: "No." So the baker acted in trust of him and told him that the wise woman was with him. Saul said: "Let us go to her so that I may ask her if there is any atonement for me."

She knew the Great Name. Only members of her family knew the Name; their men had perished but the women knew it. When Saul reached the door, the baker said to him: "When she sees you she will be afraid of you." So the baker placed Saul behind him and the baker entered in unto her and said: "Am I not the kindest of people to you, saving you from execution and giving you protection with me?" She said: "Certainly!" He said: "I have need of you. This is Saul who asks whether there will be any atonement for him." When she heard mention of Saul she fainted from fright. When she recovered, the baker told her: "He does not wish to kill you, but wants to ask you whether there is any atonement for him." She said: "No, by God! There will not be any atonement for him, but do you know the grave of Samuel?"<sup>26</sup> They said: "Yes." So she said: "Let us go to his grave." When they reached it, she performed two prostrations of prayer and then called out: "Denizen of this grave!" Samuel came forth from the grave, shaking the dust from

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<sup>26</sup> Tabarī records it as the grave of Joshua b. Nun and also mentions the opinion of Ibn Ishāq that the prophet involved was Elisha b. Ahitub, *cf.* *CI*, p. 139. For Ahitub, see p. 463, n. 23 above.

his head. When he looked at the three—the woman, the baker and the king—he said to them: “Has the Day of Resurrection come?” They said: “No, but this is Saul who asks you whether there is any atonement for him.” Samuel said to him: “What have you done after my death, Saul?” He said: “There was no evil act that I did not perform, but I have come seeking atonement.” He said: “How many sons did you have?” He said: “Ten men.”<sup>27</sup> Samuel said to him: “I know of no atonement for you except that you relinquish your kingship and go forth, you and your sons, fighting for the sake of God. Then send forth your sons until they are killed in your presence, and then you fight until you are killed, the last of them.” Then Samuel returned to his grave and fell down dead.

Saul returned sadder than he had been, for he was afraid lest his sons not follow him, so he wept until his eyelashes fell out and his body wasted away. His sons entered before him and he said to them: “Do you think that if I were delivered to the fire you would save me?” They said: “Yes, we would save you however we could.” He said: “It is surely the fire if you do not do what I tell you.” They said: “Then reveal your words to us.” And he told them the story. They said: “And you would be killed after us?” He said: “Yes.” They said, “Surely there is no good in life for us after you. We are pleased with what you have requested.” So he outfitted his sons for battle—there were ten of them in all—they fought before him until they were slain, then he became strong after their deaths and fought until he was killed. His slayer came to David to inform him by saying: “I have slain your enemy.” David said: “You do not deserve to live after his death”—and he cut off his head.”

<sup>27</sup> Ṭabarī, p. 558 has Saul as the father of thirteen sons. In a tradition traced to al-Suddī, Ṭabarī, p. 554 also has David as being one (the youngest) of thirteen sons (*CI*, p. 135). Similarly, in an account given by Yūnus b. ‘Abd al-A‘lā—Ibn Wahb—Ibn Zayd (p. 560), but in an account given on the authority of al-Muthannā, it appears that he was the youngest of eight sons (*CI*, p. 161).



## DAVID

### A SESSION ABOUT THE SUCCESSION OF DAVID AND ALL IT CONCERNS<sup>1</sup>

God has said: *“David, behold, We have appointed you a viceroy in the earth; [therefore judge between men justly, and follow not caprice, lest it lead you astray from the way of God.]”* (38:27) Scholars of the tales of the prophets have said that when Saul was martyred, the Children of Israel came to David and gave him Saul’s treasury and made him king over them. That happened seven years after David slew Goliath, and the Children of Israel had not agreed on a single king since Joshua son of Nun, except for David, for that is His word: *And David slew Goliath; and God gave him the kingship, and wisdom, [and He taught him such as He willed.]* (2:251)

#### *Chapter About His Appearance and Character*

Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad al-Dīnawarī related to me from his chain of authorities—Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab—Abū Hurayrah, who said: The Messenger of Allah said: Blueness in both eyes is good luck. David was blue in both eyes, ruddy of face, fine-limbed, lank of hair, pale-bodied, with a long beard with curls in it, had a beautiful voice and character, was pure of heart.

#### *Chapter About the Superiority of Favor with Which God Distinguished His Prophet David, When God Gave Him Prophecy and Rule*

Among them was that He revealed to him the Psalms in Hebrew, comprising one hundred and fifty *sūrah*s, in fifty of which He mentioned what would happen to Nebuchadnezzar and the people of Babylon. In fifty of them, He mentioned what they would encounter from the Byzantines, from the people of Ayrun. In fifty of them are admonitions and wisdom, but there is nothing of the permissible or

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<sup>1</sup> For the *midrash* on David see Ginzberg, *Legends*, vol. IV:81–121.

forbidden in them.<sup>2</sup> And that is His word: “*And We gave to David Psalms.*” (4:163; 17:55)

Among God’s favors were David’s pleasant voice, delightful and agreeable comfort, a trilling voice, and modulations in singing. God had not bestowed upon any of His creatures a voice like his. He would recite the Psalms with seventy melodies so that those with fever would sweat and the unconscious would revive. When he recited the Psalms, he would go forth into the desert and stand there, and the scholars of the Children of Israel would stand about him while the people would stand behind the scholars, the *jinn* behind the people, and the demons behind the *jinn*. Wild beasts and beasts of prey would draw near and be seized by the neck, while birds shielded him from the sun’s rays, the flowing water stood still, the wind died down, and the heavenly pipes, lutes, and cymbals did not make a sound. Cursed Iblīs envied him for that and it became unbearable for him. He said to his demons: “Do you not see what has befallen you?” They replied: “Command us to do what you wish.” He said: “The only thing that will turn the people away from David is something that will contradict him and be contrary to his situation.” So they arranged pipes and lutes and strings and instruments of kinds like David’s sounds. The foolish among the people heard them and inclined toward them and were deceived by them. It is said that when David recited the Psalms after having committed sins, the water did not stand still for him, the wild animals, domesticated animals, and birds no longer paid attention to him as they had before that, and his melody was impaired. He said: “My God! What has happened?” Then God inspired him: “That is the sociability of obedience, while this is the loneliness of disobedience, David, indeed it is sinfulness that has altered your voice and your condition.” He asked: “My God, have You not already forgiven me for it?” He responded: “Yes, of course. But the condition of love and closeness that existed between you and Me has gone, and you will never overtake it.”

Abū Sa‘īd b. Aḥmad ibn Ḥamdūn—Wahb b. Munabbih said: This is what Abū Hurayrah related to us concerning the Messenger of Allah: He said: “God made the Qur’ān easy for David, for when he would order that his animals be saddled, he could read the Qur’ān before the animal was saddled, and he ate only of what his hands

<sup>2</sup> Namely, no laws or commandments, unlike many other Biblical revelations.

produced.” The Imām, my teacher, said that by Qurʾān (here) he meant the Psalms.

With a chain of authorities Abū Bakr al-Jawzaqī informed us from Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī, who said: “The Messenger of Allah said to me: ‘You have been given one of David’s woodwinds’, and I replied: ‘But, by God, Messenger of Allah, had I known that you were listening, I would have composed a piece for you.’”

Abū Bakr—Abū l-ʿAbbās informed us with the chain of authorities, from al-Barāʾ b. ʿĀzib, who said: “The Prophet heard the voice of Abū Mūsā, and said that it was as though the voice of this one was of the voice of the family of David.”

Among (his special attributes) was subduing the hills and the birds to him, hymning praises when he sang praises, as He has said: “*We gave David bounty from Us, (saying:) O you mountains, echo God’s praises with him, and you birds! And We softened iron for him,*” (34:10) and His word: “*With David We subjected the mountains to give glory (to their Lord) at evening and at sunrise.*” (38:18) It is said that when David walked among the hills and praised God, the hills would begin to answer him with hymns similar to what he was saying. Then, one night, he said to himself: “I shall worship God with worship the likes of which no one has ever offered.” So he climbed the mountain, and when it was the middle of the night, loneliness overcame him, so God inspired the hills to keep David company, and they shook with praise, sanctification, and jubilation. David said to himself: “How will He hear my voice with all these voices?” So Gabriel descended to him and seized him by his arms until he ended up with him at the sea. Then he struck it with his foot and the sea split for him and he ended up on dry land. Then he struck that with his foot and the earth split for him and he ended up with him at a great fish, which he struck with his foot and he ended up with him at the stone. He struck the stone with his foot and it cracked, and from it emerged a worm gurgling. Gabriel said to him: “Verily, your Lord hears the gurgling of this worm in this place.” His word: “. . . *to hymn the praises (of their Lord) at nightfall and at sunrise*” (38:18)—the commentators say: He means the dawn prayer and the prayer of penitents between sunset and dusk. Ibn ʿAbbās said: “So David understood the praises of stones, of trees, and of clods of clay.”

Among them, too, is that God favored him with *ḥikmah*<sup>3</sup> and with

<sup>3</sup> Usually translated as “wisdom.”

*faṣl al-khiṭāb*.<sup>4</sup> As for *ḥikmah* it means acuteness about things, while regarding *faṣl al-khiṭāb* they have differences of opinion. Ibn ‘Abbās says it means the elucidation of words; Ibn Mas‘ūd and al-Ḥasan said that the meaning is knowledge of judgment and examination of decision; he would not use compulsion in judgment between people. ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib said: It means evidence against the claimant, and an oath against the one who denies.

Abū ‘Abdallāh related to us saying: “I heard Ziyād say: ‘*Faṣl al-khiṭāb*, which David was given, is what Abū Ḥafs told us from al-A‘mash—Abū Šāliḥ—Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, who said: “I heard Ziyād say that *faṣl al-khiṭāb*, which He gave to David, was *ammā ba‘du*.””<sup>5</sup> My teacher, the Imām, said that he was the first one to say that.

Among the (gifts) was the bell that God gave him to distinguish the truth speaker from the liar in cases brought to him. This is what al-Ḍaḥḥāk related from Ibn ‘Abbās, who said that God gave David a bell fixed in the galaxy and the celestial sphere. Its head was at the *mihrāb*<sup>6</sup> of David where people would bring one another for judgment before him. Its strength was the strength of iron, and its color that of fire. Its throat was round, set off with jewels and nailed with rods of cool pearls. No event would take place in Heaven without the bell ringing so that David would know of that event. No diseased person touched it without being cured. A sign of his people’s entering the religion was that they would touch it with their hands, then rub their chests with their palms. They would bring each other to judgment before him, and whoever wronged his friend and denied his legal right would come to the bell. The one who was honest and truthful would stretch out his hand to the bell and reach it, but the one who was a liar and a wrongdoer would not reach it. It remained among them until deception and treachery appeared among them.

He continued: We have heard that one of their kings entrusted a man with a precious jewel, and when he came to seek its return, the man disclaimed it. So the two of them came to judgment at the bell. The man who possessed the jewel knew that his hand would

<sup>4</sup> Obviously difficult to determine from the great variety of suggestions given here.

<sup>5</sup> “*As for what (comes) after,*” a phrase used at the beginning of a paragraph after introductory platitudes. See the longer discussion of this in Tottoli, *Storie*, p. 141, n. 13.

<sup>6</sup> A structure at the front of a Muslim place of prayer indicating the direction of prayer towards Mecca.

not reach the bell, so he applied himself to a staff of his, hollowed it out and inserted the jewel in it, leaning on it until his adversary appeared at the bell. The owner of the jewel said: "Verily I have a deposit with you." His opponent said: "I know of no deposit; if you are honest, reach the bell." And he reached it with his hand. Then they said to the one who denied: "Arise, you too, and reach it." But he said to the owner of the jewel: "You keep my staff and watch it until I reach the bell." And he took it. The man arose and said: "My God, if You know that the deposit he claims has already reached him, bring the bell near me." He reached out his hand and took hold of (the bell), and the people wondered and thought about it. When they arose in the morning, God had taken up that bell. When 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb would be in doubt about a matter between two adversaries who brought a case for judgment before him, he would say: "How you need the bell of the Children of Israel! It would seize the neck of the wrongdoer and drag him to the truth."

Among them were strength in worship and power in effort, as God has said: "*and remember Our servant David, lord of might*" (38:18)—meaning strength in worship, a penitent; that is, one who repents, gives praise, and is obedient. He would fast one day and eat on another, fast during daylight and stay awake all night; and no hour of the night passed but someone of David's family would be awake and praying, nor a single day but one of them was fasting.

Among them was strength of rule, as He has said: "*We made his kingdom strong*" (38:21)—that is to say, we strengthened him and he read the beauty, and We strengthened his kingdom with power.

Ibn 'Abbās said: He was the most powerful ruler on Earth in his authority. Every night thirty-three thousand men guarded his prayer niche. Al-Suddī said that four thousand men guarded it each night.

'Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid—Ikrimah—Ibn 'Abbās: A man of the Children of Israel acted unjustly toward one of their important men, and the two of them met with David. The aggressor said: "This man took my cow illegally." David asked the man about this and he denied it, so he asked the other man for proof, but he had none. So David said to them: "Arise so that I may examine your affair." They arose from being with him, and God inspired him in his dream that he should kill the man who was the aggressor. But he said: "This is a dream; I shall not hurry until it becomes clear." Then God inspired him another time that he should kill him, but he said: "This is a dream." Then God inspired him a third time that he should kill

him. So David sent to the man and said to him: "Verily God has inspired me that I should kill you." The man said to him: "You would kill me blameless and without proof?" David replied: "Yes, by God! I will certainly execute God's command regarding you." When the man realized that he was his executioner, he said: "Do not hurry with me until I tell you that I, by God, am not to blame for this crime, but I snatched away the son of this man and killed him." So David gave orders, and he was killed. With this, awe for David among the Children of Israel became strengthened and his rule became more powerful, for that is His word: "*We made his kingdom strong.*" (ibid.) It is said that when David set out to pass judgment, one thousand prophets stood on his right hand and one thousand soldiers on his left.

Among them was strength of valor, for it is related that he never fled nor withdrew from any enemy of his. Among them was that iron turned soft for him. The reason for this is related in the accounts of when David ruled the Children of Israel. It was his custom to go forth among the people incognito, and if he saw a man who did not recognize him, he would approach him and ask him about David, saying to him: "What do you say about David, and what sort of person is he to you?" And he would praise him and say good things. One day, while he was doing this, God sent an angel to him in human form. When he saw him, David approached him as usual and asked him, and the angel replied: "What an excellent man he is, were it not for one peculiarity." That surprised David and he said: "What is that, servant of God?" He replied: "Verily David eats and feeds his family from the treasury." He paid heed to that and asked God to bring forth a means by which he could do without the treasury, from which he could spend and feed his family. So God made the iron pliable for him and it became in his hand like wax or dough or moist clay. He would turn it in his hand as he wished, without putting it into fire nor striking it with iron. God taught him the manufacture of coats of mail, and he would use armor, but he was the first to make it. Before that, it had been made of sheets (of metal). It is said that he would sell each coat of mail for four thousand dirhams and could eat and feed his family and spend from that on the poor and needy, for that is God's word: "*And We taught him the art of making garments (of mail) to protect you,*" (21:80) and His word: "*And We made the iron supple for him*" (34:10) (saying) make long coats of mail—meaning ample, complete coats of

armor—and measure the links (thereof), namely, make the nails fine and attached, not thick and not broken links. He did this until he had increased in wealth from it.

It is related that Luqmān the Wise<sup>7</sup> saw David while he was working and wondered at that, not knowing what it was. He wanted to ask him, but was silent until David had finished weaving the mail; then he arose and put it on and said: “How goodly is this shirt for a fighting man!” Then Luqmān knew what he wanted regarding it and said: “Silence is wisdom, though the doers of it be few.”

#### A SECTION ABOUT THE STORY OF DAVID WHEN HE WAS TESTED WITH SIN, AND THE EVENTS SURROUNDING THIS

God said: “*Has the story of the litigants come unto you? How they climbed the wall into the royal chamber, how they burst in upon David and he was afraid of them. [They said: Be not afraid! (We are) two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other, therefore judge aright between us; do not be unjust; and show us the fair way.]*” (38:23)

Scholars have differed about the stories of the prophets as to the reason why God put David to the test in the manner that He did. People have said: The reason for this is that he requested from his Lord one day the status of his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. David asked God to test him in the same manner that He had tested them, and that He grant him favors such as He had given them. Al-Suddī, al-Kalbī, and Muqātil have related on the authority of their elders, whose traditions were included in each other’s, that David divided his time into three days; one day he would adjudicate between the people, another day would be spent in seclusion with his wives, and the third day would be spent worshipping his Lord and reading the Scriptures. In his readings he came across the superiority of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and said: “My Lord, I see the excellence that was given my forefathers who were before me.” Then God revealed to him: “They had been tried with tribulations with which no one else was afflicted, and they stoutly endured them. Abraham had to suffer the fire of Nimrod and the slaughter of his son; Isaac was tried by slaughter; and Jacob was tried with grief and the loss of his vision because of Joseph. You

<sup>7</sup> See below, pp. 586–92, the Chapter about Luqmān the Wise.

have not been tried with a thing like that." Then David said: "My Lord, try me as You have tried them, and give me that which You have given them." God revealed to him: "Indeed, you shall be tested in such-and-such a month and on such-and-such a day, so beware and be patient." And on the day that God promised, David entered his private chambers, closed the door, and began praying and reading the Book of Psalms. While he was doing this, the devil came to him and took the shape of a golden dove with every beautiful color. The dove fell in front of David. He stretched forth his hand to pick it up.

In some accounts, David pushed the dove to a young son of his. Then, when he reached for it, it flew a short distance but not so far away as to make him despair of ever catching it. He reached out to grasp it. The dove stopped and he went to it, but then it flew up and alighted in a small window. Again David went to catch it, and again it flew off. David looked to where it might settle down and sent someone to snare it. Then he noticed a woman in a garden washing herself on the bank of a small pond. These are the words of al-Kalbī, whereas al-Suddī says that David saw her washing on a terrace, and that he viewed her as the most beautiful woman in creation. David marveled at her perfection. She happened to turn around and notice the shadow of David. She then shook out her hair, and with it covered all of her body. David's wonder at her increased and he asked about her. He was told that she was Bathsheba, daughter of Shā'ī, wife of Uriah (*Awriyā'*) b. Ḥunān, and that her husband was on a raid in the plain of al-Balqā' with Joab son of Zeruah, a nephew of David. David wrote his nephew Joab, who was in charge of the Balqā' expedition, ordering him to send Uriah to such-and-such a place and to send him ahead in charge of the Ark. It was not permissible for the one in charge of the Ark to return until God gave victory through it or until he was martyred. So he sent him out with it and He gave him victory. Joab wrote to David about this, and David immediately wrote back telling him to send Uriah on a certain raid, but the chieftain (of the place) was more courageous than he. So Joab sent him out, and Uriah was killed this second time. Then, when the wife of Uriah had completed her waiting period, David married her and she became the mother of Solomon.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Compare the Biblical story in 2 Samuel, 11.



Other scholars say that, instead, the reason for his tribulation was that he had convinced himself that he could endure the passing of a day without yielding to sin. And al-Ḥasan said that Shu‘ayb b. Muḥammad informed us that David scheduled his time in four parts. One day was for his wives, another day for the worship of his Lord, another to tend to the needs of the Muslims, and the last for the Israelites in which they counseled one another and questioned one another. When his day with the Israelites came, they spoke and asked: “Has a day (ever) come over mankind in which no sin has occurred?” David kept secret to himself the fact that he was going to try to do this. When it was his day of worship, he shut the doors, ordered that no one was to enter, and applied himself to the Torah. While he was thus reading, a dove of gold, everything about it beautiful, alighted in front of him. David reached out to pick it up, but it flew away and stopped, not so far away that he might despair of ever catching it. He was still chasing it when he drew nigh to a woman who was washing herself. He marveled at her physical form and beauty. When she noticed his shadow on the ground, she draped her body with her hair, and with this his wonderment increased. He had already dispatched her husband off with one of his armies, so he wrote to him, ordering him to “Travel to such-and-such a place”—a place where, when he arrived, he would be killed and not return. He did so and was struck down. David then proposed to the woman and married her. One of the scholars said regarding this: it is just as Qatādah related to us from al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad: David said to the Israelites when he ruled: “By God, I shall indeed act in a most equitable manner towards you.” He himself was not excepted, and so was put to the test.

Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Warrāq said: The reason for this is that David was extremely pious and was pleased with his work. So he said: “Is there anyone on Earth who behaves as I do?” Gabriel came to him and said: “Indeed, God says: ‘I admire your devotion, but pride consumes acts of devotion. If you admire yourself a second time, I will entrust you with your own affairs.’” David said: “My Lord, entrust me with my own soul for one year.” God said: “That is quite a long time.” David said; “Then a month.” God said: “That is much, too.” David said: “Then a week?” God said: “That is still much.” David said: “A day?” God said: “Too much.” David said: “A moment?” God said: “It is your affair, then.” So he appointed watchmen, then dressed in wool, entered his private chamber, and

placed the Psalms in front of him. While he was thus at his devotions, the bird alighted in front of him, and the matter of the woman happened as it did.

They said: After David had consummated his marriage with the wife of Uriah, it was only a short time until God sent two angels in the form of men. They requested that they be let in. Upon entering, they found David to be in his day of worship. The guards forbade them entry to where David was, so they scaled the walls of his private chamber while he was praying. Before he even realized what was happening, they were sitting down in front of him, for such is the word of God: *"Has the story of the litigants come unto you? How they climbed the wall into the royal chamber, how they burst in upon David and he was afraid of them."* And when they intruded upon him in his private place without his permission, they said: *"Be not afraid! (We are) two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other. Therefore judge between us; be not unjust;"*—that is, do not deviate from the truth and go beyond that which we ask of you—*"show us the fair way"*—that is, lead us along the upright path. *"Lo! This brother of mine has ninety-nine ewes while I had only one"* (38:24)—this is among the best examples of how one comes to be called ewes (*nī'āj*) instead of women. Arabs do this a great deal. One who hides from women is then known by a nickname like *hibā'* (gazelle) or *nī'āj* (ewes) or *baqr* (cow). This is widely used in their poetry. *"And he said: Entrust it to me. And he conquered me in speech."* Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: Give it to me and transform me with it. Make it my guaranty, that is, my lot. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: He claims that when he speaks, he is more eloquent than I, and that when he fights, he is braver than I. *"David said: He has wronged you in demanding your ewe in addition to his own ewes" . . .* (38:25)

Al-Suddī said, according to his chain of transmission: Indeed, one of them said: "This is my brother who has ninety-nine ewes." David said to the other: "What do you say?" He said: "I have ninety-nine ewes and he has a single ewe; I want to take it and make my sheep an even one hundred." David said: "And he is reluctant to do this?" He said: "Yes." David said: "If we do not let you and you should desire that, we will beat you in such-and-such a way"—meaning, from the tip of the nose to the base of the forehead. The man said: "David, you are more entitled to this beating than I, inasmuch as you had ninety-nine women and Uriah had only one. You did not prepare him for battle, so he was killed and you married his woman." This is the sense of the Qur'ānic verse, except that David judged

before he heard the words of the other disputant. They said moreover that David then looked but did not see anyone, and knew what had happened. For this is the word of God: "*And David guessed that We had tried him*" (ibid.)—that is, We had put him to the test. Sa'īd b. Jubayr said: "The trial of David was in that glance."

My teacher said: David did not intend to look at the woman, but rather returned her glance, and she became an evil consequence to him. As the Messenger of Allah said: Let not one glance follow another, for if the first is for you, then the last is against you. These are the words of the virtuous forefathers among the commentators regarding the story of David.<sup>9</sup>

Al-Ḥarīṭ the One-Eyed related the following from 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who said: He who has related a *ḥadīth* concerning David in accordance with what the storytellers relate, believing in its truth, him I would flog with two penalties, for the greatness of (the fault) he committed and the enormity of (the crime) he perpetrated, meaning the crime and sin he has acquired by charging one whose place God has elevated and whom He has sent from among His creation as a mercy to all beings and as a proof for those who struggle in the way of God.

The narrators have said regarding the irreproachable quality of the messengers: In this story, there is no sin. However, he did want to possess the wife of Uriah in a lawful manner, and he made up his mind to do this. A raid came to pass and he sent out Uriah to the front of the fight where he was martyred. When the news of his death reached him, he felt no regret toward him, nor did he feel compassion the way he had felt pity towards others of his army when they had perished, for his death conformed with his desires. Subsequently he married Uriah's wife and God censured him for this, since the sins of the prophets, even if small, are great in the eyes of God. One of the narrators said: The sin of David was that Uriah had proposed to this woman and made up his mind to marry her. When he disappeared during the raid, David proposed to her and she married him for his majesty. Uriah was greatly distressed at this, and God reproved David for this inasmuch as he had not left this single one to her first suitor, even though he had ninety-nine women with him. For this, the Prophet said: "Let not a single

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<sup>9</sup> See 2 Samuel, 12.

one of you compete with his brother's sale, nor let him compete in his brother's marriage proposals."

What confirms the truth of what we have mentioned is what the earlier commentators have said regarding what 'Aqīl b. Muḥammad al-Faqīh al-Mughāfirī informed us from Zakariyyā from Anas b. Mālik who said "I heard the Messenger of Allah say: David, when he looked at the woman, set aside an expedition from the Israelites and charged the leader of al-Balqā' that should the enemy show up, he was to send forth a certain man in front of the Ark. The Ark at this time was used as a defense. He who was sent out in front of it did not return until he was killed or the (enemy) army was put to flight by him. So the husband of the woman was killed and the two angels came down to tell David about it. David realized what had happened and prostrated himself on the ground. He remained forty nights in prostration, weeping so that green grass sprouted around his head from his tears, and the earth consumed his face. Meanwhile, he was saying while prostrate: "David has erred greatly, a sin beyond that which lies between the East and the West. My Lord, if You do not have compassion for the frailty of David and forgive him for his sin, You will make his sin the talk of people after him." Gabriel went to him after forty nights and said: "David, God has forgiven you for that about which you have been worrying." David said: "I understand that God is able to forgive the distress about which I am concerned, and I know that God is just and deals not wrongly. So what will happen with so-and-so—that is, Uriah—when the Day of Resurrection comes, and he says: 'My Lord, my blood is that which is with David.'" Gabriel said: "You did not ask your Lord about that, but if you, I will do so." He said: "Yes." Gabriel returned to God, and David prostrated himself and remained so for as long as God wanted. Then Gabriel descended and said: "I have asked God, David, about what you sent me to ask. God said: 'Tell David that God will gather you both on the Day of Resurrection and He will say (to Uriah): "Give me your blood which is with David." Uriah will say: "It is yours, O my Lord." And I, God, will say: "Indeed, you will have in Paradise that which you have wanted and longed for in exchange for your blood."'"

Ibn Faṭḥawayh told us with his chain of transmission from Ka'b al-Aḥbār and from Wahb b. Munabbih, who all agreed, saying: When the two angels came to David and he passed judgment on them himself, they changed their form and ascended while saying:

“The man passed judgment on himself.” David knew that they had tried him. He fell to the ground in prostration for forty days, raising his head only if there was an inescapable need, or for prescribed prayer. Thereafter he would return and prostrate himself a full forty days, neither eating nor drinking, just weeping so much that the grass grew around his head.

While he was calling out to his Lord and asking him for repentance, this is what he said while lying prostrate: “Praised be the most powerful King, Who tries mankind as He wills. Praised be the Creator of light. Praised be the One who intervenes between hearts. My God, You left me alone with my enemy, Iblīs. I was unaware of his tempting when my foot slipped. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. The bereaved mother weeps for her child when she has lost him, and David weeps for his sin. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. When a garment is washed, its filth and squalor depart, yet this sin remains with me and does not leave. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. I was not warned by that with which You warned others. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. You commanded me to be like a merciful father to orphans and to be to the widows as a compassionate husband, but I forgot Your covenant. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. You created me, and in Your prior knowledge, that toward which I was going came to be. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. Woe to David if the veil is thrown off and it is said that this is David the sinner. Praise be to the Creator of light my God. With what sort of eye shall I behold You on the Day of Resurrection, since the iniquitous shall look in a furtive manner? Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. On which foot shall I stand before You on that day, the Day of Resurrection, on which the feet of those in error shall slip from the evil reckoning. Praise be to the Creator of light, by their names. Put me at my ease, for You have abandoned me, though my sin has stayed with me. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. The skies have rained, but rain did not fall on me. The Earth became grassy, but it did not become grassy around me because of my sin. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. I am one who is unable to bear the heat of Your Sun. How then will I be able to endure the heat of Your fire? Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. I am he who is unable to stand the noise of Your threat. How, then, shall I be able to endure the noise of Hellfire? Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. You once forgave the sinners for their

errors, even though You saw wherever they were. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. My heart is weakened and my eyes rigid in fear of the conflagration which will burn over my body. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. The birds praise you while I, the weak, erring servant, do not follow your charge. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. Woe to David for his great sin which befell him, from which he learned nothing. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. I seek help and You give help. Upon whom does the one who seeks help call, other than the Helper? Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. I ask You in the name of my father Abraham, and Ishmael, Isaac, and Jacob that You grant me my request. Praise be to the Creator of Light, my God. O my God, in Your mercy, forgive me for my sins and do not keep me far from Your mercy because of my lowliness. You are the most compassionate of those who show compassion. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. Indeed I seek protection in You for an unanswered request, an unaccepted prayer, an unforgiven sin, and an unabated pain. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. I seek protection in You and in the light of Your noble face from my sins which destroyed me. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. I fled to You from my sins and I have recognized my error, so do not make me one of the discouraged and do not torment me on the Day they are resurrected. Praise be to the Creator of light, my God. The entreaty has stopped, the tears have stopped, the worms have fallen off my neck and my sin is closer to me than my skin. Praise be to the Creator of light.”

The narrators have said: Then the exhortation came to him: “If you are hungry, then eat; if you are thirsty, then drink; and if you are tyrannized, then seek aid.” But He (God) did not answer him with a single thing concerning mention of his sin. Then David shouted so loudly that everything around him grew agitated. Then he called forth; “O my Lord! The sin is what I have obtained.” Then it was proclaimed: “David! Raise your head, for I have forgiven you.” But he did not raise his head until Gabriel came to him, and then he raised it.

Wahb b. Munabbih said that an exhortation came to David (in this manner): “I have forgiven you.” And David said: “O Lord! How can this be, as you have never treated a single soul unjustly?” God said: “Go to the tomb of Uriah and call him. I will make him hear your summons.” And God departed from David, and David hurried

off to the tomb of Uriah. He sat near the tomb, having meanwhile put on garments of coarse cloth, and then called forth: "O Uriah!" Uriah said: "Here I am. Who is this who has interrupted my pleasure and woken me?" David said: "I, David." Uriah said: "What has brought you, prophet of God?" David said: "I have come to free myself from what I did to you." Uriah said: "And what is that?" David said: "I exposed you to murder." Uriah said: "You exposed me to Paradise as you were free to do." Then God revealed Himself to David: "Do you not understand that I am an impartial arbiter Who judges only in truth? Have you not informed him that you married his wife?" He spoke and David hurried off and called forth: "Uriah!" And Uriah answered him and said: "Who is this who interrupts my pleasure?" David said: "It is I, David." Uriah spoke: "Prophet of God, what need have you? Have I not forgiven you?" David said: "Yes, but I did what I did only for the presence of your wife, and behold, I have married her." He spoke, and Uriah fell silent and did not answer him. Again David called out to him, but he did not answer. He went and stood by Uriah's grave and scattered dirt over his head, then called out: "Woe and more woe to David. Praise be to the Creator of light, woe to David. May he have everlasting woe to the Creator of light. Woe and woe everlasting to David when he is taken by his neck and pushed into the darkness. Praise be to the Creator of light. Everlasting woe to David when he is dragged on his face with the rest of the sinners into the Fire. Praise be to the Creator of light. May his woe be everlasting when Hell's angels move him and the rest of the tyrants close to the Fire. Praise be to the Creator of light." Then a summons came to him from the sky: "David, I have forgiven you for your sin and have had compassion for you, and have lamented the scope of your doings. I have answered your supplication; your stumbling has decreased." David said: "My Lord! How can it be that you forgive me while my companion does not?" God said: "David, whether he does or not, I will give him on the Day of Resurrection that which his eyes have not seen' He will say: 'My Lord! Whence comes this, when my deed has not been imparted to him?' And I will say: 'This is compensation for the sake of my servant David. I will give you to him and he will give you to me.'" David said: "My Lord! Now I know that You have indeed forgiven me." And this is the word of God: *"He sought forgiveness of his Lord, and he bowed himself and fell down prostrate and repented. So We forgave him that (sin); and lo! He had access to Our presence and a happy*

*journey's end.*" (38:25–26) Abū Ma'shar—Muḥammad b. Ka'b and Muḥammad b. Qays, both of whom related regarding the word of God, *Lo! He had access to Our presence and a happy journey's end*, that indeed, the first who will drink from the chalice on the Day of Resurrection will be David.

Abū l-Ḥusayn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī—Bakr b. Aḥmad b. Ma'qil, 'Umar b. Muḥammad al-Sharqī—al-Naṣr al-Ka'bī—Abū Sa'īd 'Abdallāh al-Mazanī—Muḥammad b. al-Munkadiar—Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf—Abū Sa'īd al-Khudarī said: I came to the Messenger of Allah and I said: "Messenger of Allah, tonight I have seen in my dreams as if I were under a tree and the tree was reading *Sūrat Ṣād*. When the tree reached the place of prostration, it fell down and prostrated itself, and I heard it say while prostrate: 'O God! Prescribe for me recompense thereby, and by it, as well, reduce my heavy burden and bestow upon me gratitude and receive them (my prostrations) from me as You have received them from Your servant David.'" The Messenger of Allah said to him: "Then had you yourself fallen down in prostration, Abū Sa'īd?" He said: I said: "No, Messenger of Allah." Then he said: "You are more in need of prostration than the tree." Thereupon the Messenger of Allah read (the *surah*) until the (mention of) prostration, which he then did. Then he spoke much as the tree had spoken.

Wahb b. Munabbih said: When God forgave David, he wept for his sin for thirty years. His tears did not cease flowing for a single night or day. His sin occurred when he was seventy years old. After the occurrence of the sin, he partitioned his time into four parts; that is, (he scheduled his time into) four days. He made one day the day of judging among the people; another day was set aside for his wives, another day to be spent glorifying God in the deserts, mountains, wastelands, and seacoasts, and the last day to seclude himself at his home which had four thousand private chambers. Monks would assemble to meet with him, lamenting with one another and encouraging David in this as well. When it was the day for travel, David would depart to the deserts and raise his voice like reed pipes and weep. The trees, clumps of clay and mud, birds, and wild beasts would weep with him until his tears flowed like rivers. Then he would betake himself to the mountains and there raise his voice again like reed pipes and weep, and the mountains, rocks, riding beasts, and birds would weep with him until the valleys flowed from their weeping. Then David would go to the coast and again



raise his voice like reed pipes and weep. The sea creatures, birds, water, and beasts of prey would weep with him as before. When it became evening, he returned. When it was the day of lamentation, his herald proclaimed that it was the day of David's lamentation, and those who were to be with him went into his presence. He spoke, then entered the house that had many private chambers. Three cushions would be spread out for him, each made from hair cloth and stuffed with fibers, so that he might sit on them. Four thousand monks would arrive with their hooded cloaks and hair cloth. In their hands were staffs. They would sit in the private chambers. David would raise his voice in weeping and lamentation, and the monks would raise their voices with him. He remained thus, weeping, until the cushions were soaked with his tears. David would fall down in their midst, agitated like a faint-hearted man, until his son Solomon would become worried and come and carry him off. David would then scoop up his tears in his palm and wipe them on his face, saying, "My Lord, forgive me as You see fit. If the lamentation and tears of David are equal to those of the people of the Earth, then their tears are indeed the equal of them."

Ibn Faḥawayh related to us from 'Uthmān b. Abī 'Ātikah, who said that David said in his supplication to God: "Praise be to You, my God. When I remember my sin, the earth becomes too confined for me with its quaking, but when I remember Your compassion, my spirit returns to me. My God, I went to the physicians of mankind so that they might treat me, and all of them directed me to You." The Prophet said: "The tears furrowed David's face as the water furrows the earth."

Ibn Faḥawayh related to us from al-Ḥasan b. 'Abdallāh al-Qurashī: When the sin befell David, he devoted himself to worship. He went to a monk on the summit of a mountain and called to him in a high voice. The monk did not answer him. When he called out louder, the monk said: "Who is this who calls me?" David said: "It is I, David, prophet of God." He said: "You are the Master of impregnable and beautiful castles, pasturing horses, women, and carnal appetites! If you get to Paradise by this, then you are indeed (who) you (say you are)." David said: "Who are you?" He said: "I am a desiring, expectant, yearning monk." David said: "Who are your close friends and table companions?" The monk said: "Climb up, you may see him if you want." He spoke, and David came between the base and the summit, climbed to the top, and suddenly

came upon a corpse. "Is this your friend?" asked David. "Yes," said the monk. David said: "Then what is this all about?" The monk said: "That is his story, recorded on the copper tablet lying near his head." David read the writing, and this is what he read: "I am so-and-so son of so-and-so, King of Kings. I lived a thousand years, and I built a thousand castles and a thousand cities. I vanquished a thousand armies, married a thousand women, and deflowered a thousand virgins. While I was ruling my dominions, the King of Death came to me and took me and turned me out from what I was doing. This dirt is my bed and the worms are my neighbors." David spoke and fell down fainting.

Nāfi<sup>2</sup>—Ibn 'Umar said: The Messenger of Allah said: "The people came to visit David, thinking him ill. But the only thing wrong with him was his shame and fear of God."

Wahb b. Munabbih said: When God forgave David, David would begin, when he prayed, to ask forgiveness for other sinners beside himself, and would say: "O God! Forgive those who sin. Perhaps You might forgive David with them."

According to Qatādah—al-Ḥasan: After his sin, David would sit only with other sinners and would say: "Come here to David the sinner!" He drank only whatever was mixed with the tears of his eyes. He would make dry barley bread in a large bowl, weeping all the while so that the bread would become moistened with his tears. He would sprinkle salt and ashes on it, eat it, and say: "This is the food of sinners." Before his sin, David would stay up half the night and spend half his time fasting. After his sin, he fasted all the time and stayed up the entire night.

Wahb said: When God forgave David, David said: "Lord, have You pardoned me?" He said: "Yes." David said: "Then how is it that I cannot forget my sin? I ask forgiveness for it and for (all) sinners for the Day of Resurrection." He spoke, and God branded sin on his right hand. He lifted up neither food nor drink with this hand except that he wept when he saw it. He would only rise to address the people by spreading out his palm, and people went to see the brand of his sin.

'Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid—Thābit, who said that when David remembered God's punishment, his limbs grew limp and only lamentation could strengthen them; but when he remembered the mercy of God, they returned to their original state.

According to Abū 'Abdallāh al-Bajlī, who said: After his sinning,

David could never again raise his head to the skies until he died. May God bless our Prophet Muḥammad, and may great peace be upon him until the Day of Judgment.

A SECTION CONCERNING THE REBELLION OF DAVID'S SON  
AGAINST DAVID AND WHAT HAPPENED TO THEM BOTH

Wahb and other writers have said: David held dominion after Saul until what happened between him and the wife of Uriah. When the sin occurred and he became preoccupied with seeking penance for it, the Children of Israel became alarmed and behaved arrogantly toward him. The rash ones among the Children of Israel gathered together and betook themselves to a son of David from the daughter of Saul—he is called Shālūn (*Absalom*) but some say Īshā—and said to him: “Your father has become old and preoccupied with his sin and doing penance. The rights of the people have disappeared and the kingdom has grown weak.” They continued in this vein with the son and finally acknowledged him as king. They deposed David and renounced him, and this son prayed for himself. When David saw this, he went out from them with a nephew of his called Thawāb and went deep into the mountains. His people advised his son to kill him. When news of this reached David, he sent his companion to him and said to him: “Say to this son: ‘Have you (ever) heard of a son who killed his father?’” And the son said to David’s nephew: “Have you yourself heard of a prophet who has sinned and whose repentance was not accepted?” The messenger said to him: “Even if God has permitted you to destroy him, do not pursue it. Indeed, its occurrence would be inappropriate for you in the Hereafter.” The son accepted this from him and refrained from killing his father David. The son remained king for two years, but when God forgave David, the people began coming to him again. He warred against his son and vanquished him. He sent one of his chiefs to seek him, and charged him to be cautious in seizing him and to be moderate in his capture. But the chief went seeking him in his flight and forced him to a tree, and he lay down by it. The young boy had luxuriant hair, and one of its branches caught his hair and held him thus. The chief caught up with him and killed him, at variance with the command of David. David felt great sadness and became estranged from the chief, who had possessed great fortitude in his

encounters with the enemy. David hated to kill him, and finally let him be because of his efforts in fighting the enemy. When death came nigh unto David, he commissioned his son Solomon to kill this chief, and Solomon did kill him after he finished burying his father. It was two years from the day David left his kingship and the revelations ceased for him until God accepted his penance and returned his kingdom to him and he returned to his people.

## DAVID AND SOLOMON

### A CHAPTER ABOUT THE TALE OF THOSE WHO POSSESS THE SABBATH

God has said: “Ask them about the city which overlooked the sea, and what befell its people when they broke the Sabbath. [Each Sabbath the fish appeared before them floating on the water, but on weekdays they never came near them. Thus did We tempt them because they had done wrong.]” (7:163)

Ibn ‘Abbās and Wahb b. Munabbih have said: A community of the Israelites dwelt in a town on the seacoast between Egypt and Midian called Aylah.<sup>1</sup> God had forbidden them to fish or do any other work on the Sabbath order that they would be free to worship Him on that day. This was during David’s time. It would happen that when the Sabbath came, all the fish in the sea would gather there raising their snouts out of the water, until one could not see the water for their multitude; whereas when the Sabbath had passed, they swam apart and kept to the ocean depths so that only a few could be seen. And that is His word: “Each Sabbath the fish appeared before them but on week-days they never came near them. [Thus did We tempt them because they had done wrong.]” (ibid.)

I heard Abū Qāsim, who said that he heard his father say that al-Ḥasan b. al-Fuḍayl was asked: “Have you found in the book of God that something permitted (*ḥalāl*) comes to you only for nourishment, and something forbidden (*ḥarām*) comes to you in unknown quantity?” He replied: “Yes, in the story of David and the people of Aylah, when their fish would appear to them on the Sabbath, whereas on the non-Sabbath days they would not come to them.” Abū Qāsim continued: Some men among them set out and dug pools by the sea [shore] and created channels of streams to them. When it was Friday evening, they opened those channels and waves of fish would enter the pools, however, [the fish] could not get [back]

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<sup>1</sup> The present-day Red Sea port of Eilat. Midian (Arabic: Madyan) was an area in northern Arabia across from the Sinai Peninsula, along the Gulf of Aqaba. See also the story of Shu‘ayb in Midian, p. 290 above.

out of the pools because of their multitude and the shallowness of the water, so when extreme depth and shallow water. When Sunday came they would take them. It is said that the people would set up nets on Friday and would take the fish out on Sunday.

He continued: The fish would come to them on the Sabbath in great numbers, but on days other than the Sabbath, not one fish would come to them. One of the Israelites took a fish, tied a string to its tail, and then tied the string to a piece of wood on the shore. He left the fish in the water until Sunday when he took it out and roasted it. A nephew of his noticed the fish-smell and said to him: "So-and-so, I smell the odor of fish in your house." He denied it, but his neighbor examined his oven, and when he was in his house said to him: "I truly think that God will punish you." However, when the man saw that punishment had not befallen him, he took two fish on another Sabbath. And when the others saw that punishment did not descend upon him, they began to catch fish and they salted them, and ate or sold. They became wealthy and their possessions increased and as punishment did not come down upon them, their hearts became hardened and they became oppressive and bold in sinning. They said: "We consider the Sabbath as being not binding upon us; it was proscribed only for our forefathers, because they slew their prophets." When they did that, the people of that town, who numbered about seventy thousand, became divided into three categories: one (group) that both abstained and forbade, one that abstained but did not forbid, and one that desecrated what was sacred. Those who forbade were twelve thousand persons. When the sinners refused to accept good counsel, those who forbade and those who abstained said: "By God! We will leave this town, for we will not live side by side in the same town." Then they divided the town between them with a wall, and they remained separated for some years.

God cursed them by the tongue of David<sup>2</sup> and grew angry with them for their having persisted in rebelliousness. One day those who forbade went forth from their gate, but the sinners did not open their gate and not one of them went forth. When it became late, those who forbade climbed the wall overlooking them, and lo, all of

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<sup>2</sup> Not clear why David's name is mentioned here except for his beautiful language in the Psalms.

the sinners had been turned into apes. For that is His word: *“And when they forgot to remember the warning, We rescued those who forbade evil, but inflicted on those who did wrong dreadful”* (or *shadīd*, that is, powerful) *“punishment because they were evildoers. So when they took pride in that which they had been forbidden, We said to them, ‘Become apes despised’”* (or *ṣāghirīn*, that is, lowly). (7:165–66)

Similar to this is His word: *“Those of the Israelites who disbelieved were cursed by the tongue of David”* (referring to the rebels among the people of Aylah)<sup>3</sup> *“and of Jesus, son of Mary”* (meaning the unbelievers of the people of the Table)<sup>4</sup> *“because they rebelled and committed evil.”* (5:78)

They continued: When they entered [through the gates] to the sinners and saw that they had been transformed, the apes recognized their kinsmen among the humans, but the humans did not recognize their kinsmen among the apes. Each ape would approach his relative among the humans and sniff his clothing and weep, and the man would say to him: *“Did we not forbid it for you?”* And the ape would say with a nod of his head: *“Yes.”*

Qatādah said: The young men became apes, but the old men became pigs, and no one but those who forbade escaped; the rest of them perished. Thus those who were transformed went forth from the city, wandering aimlessly in confusion, remaining thus for three days until they were destroyed. Thus none of the people remained transformed for more than three days, nor did they reproduce or procreate. Then God sent a wind and rain against them and flung them into the sea. But when the Day of Resurrection comes, God will return them to their human form and cause them to enter the Fire.

Abū Naṣr—Abū Saʿīd al-Khudarī—the Messenger of Allah said: God did not destroy a people, nor a generation, nor a religious community by punishment from Heaven after God revealed the Torah on the Earth, except for the people of one township, which was the *“city by the sea,”* who were transformed into apes. Have you not heard God’s word: *“After We destroyed the previous generations [We gave the Book to Moses, as a clear sign, a guide and a blessing, so that they might remember.]”* (28:43)

<sup>3</sup> Said to be the site of the *“People of the Sabbath”* which is incorporated here in the story of David. See Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, I:423–25; LeStrange, *Palestine*, p. 549 s.v. Wailah, or Ailah.

<sup>4</sup> Namely those disciples who asked for a table laden with food be sent down to them from Heaven, see Qurʾān 5:11–117 and p. 664 below.

A CHAPTER ABOUT THE STORY OF DAVID AND SOLOMON  
CONCERNING THE FIELD

God has said: *“And tell of David and Solomon: how they passed judgment regarding the field (ḥarth) in which strayed sheep of some people had grazed by night; We were witnesses to both their judgments.”* (21:78)

Ibn ‘Abbās and Qatādah said: A field (*ḥarth*) is a plantation. But Ibn Mas‘ūd and al-Shurayḥ said that a field (*ḥarth*) is a vineyard whose grape-clusters have hung down when the people’s herds have pastured alone among them, grazing by night and spoiling it. Grazing alone by night and pasturing freely by day both mean [that the sheep] were grazing without a herdsman.

*“We were witnesses to both their judgments;”* i.e., nothing is hidden from Us. Ibn ‘Abbās and Qatādah said that two men appeared before David; one owned herds, and the other a field. The owner of the plantation said: “This one let his sheep loose one night and they came upon my field, so that nothing in it remained.” David said: “Go, for the sheep belong to you,” and he made the [herd owner] responsible for the [actions of his] sheep in the field. The two men passed by Solomon and he said to them: “How did [David] judge between you?” They told him, and Solomon said: “Had I had charge of your matter, I would have judged otherwise.” They told this to David, who called [for Solomon] and said to him: “How would you have acted in the case between them?” He said: “I would have handed over the sheep to the owner of the field for a year so that their offspring, their wool, and their profits would be his, while the owner of the sheep would sow for the [owners] of the field the equivalent value of their field. When the next year came, the field would be in the state in which it had been on the day when it was eaten, and it would be handed over to its owner, while the owner of the sheep would take his sheep.”

Ibn Mas‘ūd and Shurayḥ said: One night a shepherd alighted next to a vineyard and his sheep entered the vineyard while he was unaware, and they ate the branches and spoiled the vines. The owner of the vineyard traveled to David the next day who ruled that the sheep belonged to the vintner because there was no difference between the value of the sheep and the value of the vineyard. He continued: They passed by Solomon, who was eleven years old, and he said to them: “What did David decide between the two of you?” They related the story to him and Solomon said: “This does not treat the



two parties fairly." So they returned to David and related this to him. He called Solomon and said to him: "By prophethood and parenthood! Why do you not tell me what is fairest to the two parties?" Solomon said: "You should hand over the sheep to the owner of the vineyard so that he may benefit from their offspring, their wool, and their profits, while the shepherd works for the improvement of the vineyard until it goes back to its (previous) condition and he returns it to its owner, who will return the sheep to their owner." David said: "The judgment shall be as you have decided," and he ruled so. That is His word: "*We gave Solomon insight into the case; and to each of them We gave judgment and knowledge.*" (21:79)

Al-Ḥasan said: The judgment was what Solomon decided, and God did not regard David's ruling with favor. My teacher said that this proves that every *mujtahid*<sup>5</sup> is correct.

#### A CHAPTER ABOUT THE STORY OF DAVID MAKING HIS SON SOLOMON HIS SUCCESSOR, AND MENTION OF THE BEGINNING OF THE MATTER OF THE SIGNET RING

Abū Hurayrah said: God sent down to David a book from Heaven, sealed with a golden seal, in which there were thirteen questions. God inspired him: "Ask your son Solomon about them, for if he can explain them, he will be the successor after you." Abū Hurayrah continued: So David called seventy priests and seventy rabbis<sup>6</sup> and sat Solomon down in front of them and said: "My son, God has sent down to me from Heaven a book in which there are questions, and He commanded me to ask you about them, for if you explain them, then you will be my successor." Solomon said: "Let the prophet of God ask which ever [of them] appears to him. For my success is only through God."

David said: "My son, what is the nearest thing and the farthest? What is the most intimate thing and the loneliest? What is the most beautiful and what is the ugliest thing? What is the least and the most of things? What are the two stationary things and the two

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<sup>5</sup> A *mujtahid* is a legal scholar who renders his opinion on a case—in this case possibly a Shi'ite.

<sup>6</sup> An anachronism given that the term and function of "rabbi" were not used in that period.

moving things? What are the two combined things and the two mutually incompatible things? What is the thing which, if a man commits it, his end is praised, and what is the thing which, if a man commits it, his end is blamed?"

Solomon said: "As for the nearest thing, it is the Hereafter, while the farthest thing is what has eluded you of this world. The most intimate thing is a body with a soul in it, while the loneliest is a body without a soul in it. The most beautiful is belief after unbelief, while the ugliest is unbelief after belief. The least of things is certainty and the most abundant is doubt. The two stationary things are the Earth and the Heaven, while the two movable ones are the sun and the moon. The two combinable things are night and day, while the two mutually incompatible things are death and life. As for the thing which, if a man commits it, his end will be praised, is gentleness after anger; while that which, if he commits it, his end will be blamed, is violence after anger."

He continued: So they undid the book's seal, and Solomon's answers to the questions were just as had been handed down from Heaven. Then the priests and monks<sup>7</sup> said: "We will not be satisfied until we ask him a question which, if he can interpret it, then he will be the successor after you." Solomon said: "Ask me, for success comes only from God." They said: "What is the thing which, if in order, everything about a man is in order, but if corrupt, then everything about a man is corrupt?" He said: "It is the heart."

Then David arose and ascended the pulpit and praised God and exalted Him. Then he said: "God has indeed commanded me to appoint Solomon my successor over you."

He continued: Then the Children of Israel raised a hew and cry and said: "Shall a raw youth be appointed over us when we have among us one who is superior to him and wiser than he?"<sup>8</sup> Their words reached David and he called the chieftains of the Israelite tribes and said to them: "I have learned of your talk, so show me your staffs; whichever staff will sprout, its owner will rule after me." They said: "That is satisfactory to us." So they brought their staffs and David said to them: "Let each of you write his name on his staff," and they did so. Then Solomon brought his staff and wrote

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<sup>7</sup> Another anachronism seeming to have Christian overtones.

<sup>8</sup> Obviously meaning Solomon here.

his name on it. Afterwards, the staffs were placed in a house and the door was closed upon them, and it was barred with locks, and the Israelite chieftains guarded it. When morning came, David prayed the morning prayer with them. Then he went and opened the door and brought out their staffs as they had been, while the staff of Solomon had put forth leaves and sprouted.<sup>9</sup> They continued: So they turned this matter over to David, and when David saw this, he praised God, brought Solomon behind him, then journeyed with him among the Children of Israel, saying, "After me, this one will surely rule over you."

Wahb b. Munabbih said: When David made his son Solomon his successor, he admonished him, saying: "My son, beware of jest, for it is of little utility and it stirs up enmity between brothers. Beware of anger, for anger sweeps away its possessor. Be full of piety and obedience to God, for they will overcome everything. Beware of much jealousy of your people for no reason, for that will bring down distrust upon the people even though they are innocent. Control your jealousy of the people, for that is wealth. Beware of covetousness, for it is present poverty. Beware of words or deeds for which pardon needs to be asked; return your soul and your tongue to truth and cleave to doing good. If you are able to let your today be better than your yesterday, then do so, and pray with humility and do not associate with fools. Do not answer back to a wise man, and do not contend with him about religion. If you become angry, humble yourself and change your place and seek God's mercy, for it suffices for every thing."

They continued: Then Solomon, after being named successor, concealed his situation, married a wife and kept himself from the people, turning to study and worship. Then one day, his wife said to him, "By my father and my mother! How perfect are your qualities! How goodly is your fragrance! I know of no quality of yours that I dislike except that you are supported by my father. If you would only go to the marketplace and deliver yourself over to God's sustenance, I would hope that God would not disappoint you." Solomon said: "Never before have I done any work, nor would I be any good at it," but he went to the market early in the morning

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<sup>9</sup> See the story of the sprouting staffs in the stories of Jacob and his sons, p. 185, and of Moses, pp. 292ff.

of that day. However, he was unable to accomplish anything, so he returned and told her, and she said: "Tomorrow it will come about, if God wills." When the next day came, he went out until he reached the seashore, where he found a fisherman. He said to him: "Can I be of help to you so you might give me some wages?" He replied: "Yes." He continued: So he helped him, and when he finished, the fisherman gave him two fish. He took them and praised God. Then he slit open the belly of one of them, and lo, there was a signet ring within its belly. He took it and tied it up in his garment and praised God. He took the two fish and brought them home, and his wife rejoiced at that. Then he brought out the signet ring and placed it on his finger; and the birds and the wind cleaved to him, and the glory of kingship descended upon him. Then his father died not long after (that), and when he died, (Solomon) took his wife and her father to Iṣṭakhr,<sup>10</sup> and God is All-knowing.

#### CHAPTER ABOUT THE DEATH OF DAVID

Shaykh Abū Zayd said: I heard Shaykh Abū 'Amr al-Fārābī narrate that David had a servant girl who would lock the doors every night and bring him the keys. Then she would sleep while David devoted himself to his private prayers in his worship. One night she locked the doors, brought the keys and went off to sleep, but she saw a man standing in the middle of the chamber, and she said to him: "How did you enter this chamber? Its master is very zealous, so be careful." He replied: "I am the one who enters kings' chambers without their permission." He continued: When David overheard this, having been standing at prayer in the prayer niche, he became frightened and upset, saying to her: "Bring him to me!" And he came to him. David said to him: "How did you enter this chamber at this time without permission?" He replied: "I am one who enters chamber unto kings without permission." David said to him: "Then you are the Angel of Death." He replied: "Yes." Then he said: "Then did you come just to call on me or to announce my death?" He replied: "Nay, announcing." So David said: "Why did

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<sup>10</sup> The Muslim name of the ancient city of Persepolis in Persia, cf. Yāqūt, *Muġjam*, pp. 299–300; also LeStrange, *Lands*, several citations.

you not send to me beforehand, to permit me to prepare myself for death?" He said: "How many people have I sent to you and yet you have paid no heed!" David said: "Who were your messengers whom you sent to me?" He replied: "David, where is your father Jesse and where is your mother? Where is your brother and your neighbor, where are your household servants (*qahārumatuka*), where is so-and-so and so-and-so?" He replied: "All of them have died." So he said: "Did you not know that they were my messengers to you and that your turn would come?"

[My] teacher said: On this subject, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq said: "A man continues announcing someone else's death until he is the one; he expects to have hope that it will keep death from himself." One of the poets composed [some verses] about this, saying:

*When you carry a bier to the grave  
 Know that you will be carried after it.  
 And when you have administered a people's affairs for a time,  
 Know that you will be dismissed by them.*

Historians have said that David's life extended one hundred years, while his reign lasted forty years. This has already been recounted in the story of Adam and the lifetime that he allotted to David.<sup>11</sup>

#### A SESSION ON THE STORY OF SOLOMON AND WHAT PERTAINS TO IT<sup>12</sup>

God Almighty has said: "*And Solomon inherited of David*" (27:16)—that is to say, he inherited his prophecy, his wisdom, his knowledge, and his rule, to the exclusion of the rest of David's children—for David had nineteen sons.

Muqātil said: Solomon was a more powerful ruler than his father David, and more decisive, while David was more pious. When God gave dominion and wisdom to Solomon, he was thirteen years old and his rule extended from Spain to Iṣṭakhr; some say that he possessed the whole Earth.

<sup>11</sup> See this story on pp. 88–9.

<sup>12</sup> For the midrash on Solomon see Ginzberg, *Legends*, IV:125–176.

Mujāhid—Ibn ‘Abbās, who said: Four have ruled the Earth, two believers and two infidels: the believers were Solomon and Dhū l-Qarnayn, while the infidels were Nimrod and Nebuchadnezzar.

#### A CHAPTER DESCRIBING HIS EXTERNAL ATTRIBUTES

Wahb b. Munabbih and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār said: Solomon was fair-skinned and corpulent, smiling and handsome, with much hair, and he dressed in white garments. He was also humble and self-abasing. He mingled with the poor and sat with them, saying: “A poor man is associating with the poor.”

His father David, during the days of his reign, had been accustomed to consult him in many of his affairs, notwithstanding Solomon’s youthfulness and the excellence of David’s own mind and knowledge.

#### A CHAPTER ABOUT THE KINDS OF VIRTUES, TALENTS AND OTHER THINGS WITH WHICH GOD ENDOWED HIS PROPHET SOLOMON WHEN HE MADE HIM KING

God has said: “*We bestowed knowledge on David and Solomon. The two said: Praise be to God Who has exalted us above many of His believing servants.*” (27:15)

God has related stories about Solomon in which he said: “*Forgive me, Lord, and bestow upon me such power as shall belong to none after me. You are the Bountiful Giver.*” (38:35) Then God answered his prayer, and granted him special favors, which He did not grant to any of His creatures either before or after him.

Among them was God’s harnessing for him the power of the wind, as He says: “*We subjected the wind to him, so that it blew softly at his bidding, wherever he directed it (aṣāba)*” (38:36)—which means *arāda* “he wished” in the Himyarite language.

Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq and other historians have said: Solomon was a very good conqueror, who rarely rested from invading. Whenever he heard of a king in any part of the world he would come to him, weaken him, and subdue him. When he wished to go on a raid, he would issue orders to his camp, and some wood would be cut on which his throne was erected. Then people, and beasts of burden, and all the materiel of war would be loaded upon it. Finally, when

everything that he wished had been brought aboard with him, he gave a command to the violent wind. It entered under the raft and lifted it up. When the wind began to beat the raft too roughly, he issued a command to the gentle wind and it carried him wherever he wished, the distance of a months journey in the morning and the distance of a months journey in the evening, as He has said: "*To Solomon We subdued the wind travelling a month's journey morning and evening.*" (34:12)

Ibn Ishāq said: I have been told that a man alighted at a camping-place in the region of the Tigris, and found there an inscription which some friends of Solomon—either *jinn* or human beings—had written: "We alighted here, but we did not build it; we found it built. We have come early in the morning from Iṣṭakhr. Thus have we said! And we shall leave in the evening, if God wills, and shall pass the night in Syria." I have also heard that the wind that used to pass through Solomon's camp, blowing wherever he wished, was so gentle that it would pass through a field without stirring it.

Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. Faḥawayh related with his chain of authorities—Wahb b. Munabbih—his father, saying: One day, Solomon rode the wind and passed by a plowman. The plowman looked up at it and exclaimed: "The tribe of David has certainly been given a mighty domain!" But the wind carried his remark and cast it into Solomon's ear. So Solomon descended to the plowman and said: "I have indeed heard what you said; and I have come down to you only to make you realize that a single glorification which God receives from you is better than everything which has been given to the tribe of David." And the plowman replied: "May God take away your cares as you have taken away mine!"

Muqātil said: The devils wove for Solomon a great carpet of silk shot with gold, a *parasang* long and a *parasang* wide; and a gold platform was placed for him in the midst of the carpet. Then he sat upon it, with three thousand chairs of gold and silver around him. The prophets sat on the golden chairs and the learned men on the silver chairs. Around them were the people, and around the people were the *jinn* and the devils. Birds shaded them from the sunlight with their wings. The breeze carried the carpet between morning and evening for a distance of a month's journey, and for a distance of a month's journey from evening till morning.

Ibn Faḥawayh related to us, with his chain of transmission—Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Qurazī, who said: I have heard that Solomon's

army was a hundred *parasangs* in extent: twenty-five of them made up of human beings, twenty-five of them of *jinn*, twenty-five of them of beasts, and twenty-five of them of birds. On the wooden raft he had a thousand houses of glass, in which were three hundred beds and seven hundred women. He commanded the violent wind and it lifted him up; and he commanded the gentle wind and it carried him along; and God revealed to him, while he was traveling between the sky and the Earth: "I have surely added to your domain, so that none of the creatures shall make any remark that the wind does not bring to your ear."

Among (the talents with which he was endowed) was that God taught him the speech of birds, and even of ants. As God has said: "*Know my people, we have been taught the language of birds [and have been endowed with all things. Surely this is a signal favor.]*" (27:16)

Ibn Fathawayh related to us, with his chain of transmission—Ka'b al-Aḥbār, who said: A wild dove cried out near Solomon, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" (His courtiers) said: "No." He said: "It says: 'Bear children for death, and build for ruin!'"

A ring-dove cried out near Solomon, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They said: "No." He said: "It says: 'Would that these creatures had not been created!'"

A peacock cried out, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They said: "No." He said: "It says: 'As you judge, so will you be judged.'"

A hoopoe bird cried out, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They said: "No." He said: "It says: 'He who shows no mercy will have no mercy shown him.'"

A sparrow-hawk cried out, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They said: "No." He said: "It says: 'Beg pardon of God, O sinners!'" And on that account the Prophet Muḥammad—may God be gracious unto him and give him peace—forbade the killing of this bird.

The sandpiper cried, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They said: "No." He said: "It says: 'Every living thing is dead, and everything new is rotten.'"

The story goes that a swift cried out, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They said: "No." He said: "It says: 'Prefer the good and you will find it.'" And on account of this the Prophet Muḥammad forbade anyone to kill it.

A pigeon cooed, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They



said: "No." He said: "It says: 'Glory be to my Lord the Most High, filling His Heaven and His Earth!'"

A turtle-dove cried out, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They said: "No." He said: "It says: 'Glory be to the Living One Who will never die!'"

A crow cawed, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They said: "No." He said: "It curses tax-gatherers, and the kite says: 'Everything is perishing except His face.' And the sand-grouse says: 'He who keeps silent will be safe.' And the phoenix says: 'Woe to him who cares for the world!' And the falcon says: 'Glory to my Lord the Most High!' and praises Him. And the frog says: 'Glory be to my Lord the Most Holy!' And the sparrow says: 'Glory be to Him Who is remembered everywhere!'"

Ibn Maymūn related to us with his chain of transmission—Makḥūl, who related to us: A heather-cock cried out near Solomon, and he said: "Do you know what it says?" They said: "No." He said: "It says: 'The Merciful is sitting on His throne.'" And with his chain of transmission from Ṣāliḥ al-Marawī—al-Ḥasan, who said: The Messenger of Allah said: "When the cock crows he says: 'Remember God, O heedless ones!'"

It is related from Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq—his father—his grandfather—al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī who said: "When the vulture cries, it says: 'Son of man, live as you wish, for your end is death.' And when the eagle cries, he says: 'In distance from mankind there is friendliness.' And when the lark cries, it says: 'My God! Curse those who hate the family of Muḥammad.' And when the swallow cries, it calls out: 'Praise be to God, Lord of all creation, and may He help those who go astray as one who recites helps them.'"

Farqad al-Sanjī said that Solomon once passed by a nightingale up in a tree, moving its head and inclining its tail, and he said to his friends: "Do you know what this nightingale is saying?" They said: "God and His Messenger know best." He said: "It says: 'I have eaten half a date, so the world can go to ruin.'"

Abū 'Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid related to us with his chain of transmission—Ibn Mas'ūd—his father, who said: We once were with the Messenger of Allah on a journey, and we passed by a tree in which there were two dove chicks, and we took them. The dove came and complained to the Prophet, and the Prophet said: "Who distressed this dove about her young?" We said: "We did." He said: "Return them to their place."

It is related that a lark once laid eggs in Solomon's path. The male said to the female: "Did I not forbid you to lay our eggs in the path of Solomon the king? If he rode our way, he would certainly break them." But the female said: "Woe to you! The Prophet of God is too merciful for that." Solomon heard what they said, and when he wished to ride, he sent a *jinnī*, saying to him: "Put their eggs under your legs and let nothing happen to them." When Solomon passed with his retinue, and had gone by them, the female said: "Did I not tell you that the Prophet of God is too merciful to break our eggs?" The male then said to the female: "I have a gift for the king." She said: "And what have you?" He said: "I have a locust which I have been saving up for my son." The female said: "I have a date which I have saved up for my son." So they took the locust and the date, and flew till they alighted before Solomon, who was sitting on his couch in his chamber. They placed their gifts before him, and bowed down to him. Then he prayed for them, and stroked their heads with his hand, and it is related that the naked patch of skin on the lark's head is from Solomon's stroking them.

The story goes that Solomon with his retinue came upon an ant. And the ant said: "Glory be to God the Great! How great is that which has been given to the tribe of David!" Solomon smiled at what she said, and disclosed it to his troops. Then he said: "Shall I not announce to you something good which is still more wonderful about this ant?" They said: "Certainly." He said: "She says: 'Fear God in private and in public, observe temperance in wealth as well as in poverty, and act justly when you are angry and when you are content.'"

Solomon went out one day to pray for water, accompanied by people and *jinn*. He came upon a lame ant, with her wings spread, raising her hands and saying: "God, we are Your creatures. We cannot exist without Your provision, so do not punish us for the sins of the children of Adam. Give us water." Then Solomon said to those who were with him: "Return, for you shall be given water by the prayers of someone other than yourselves."

An ant once crawled on Solomon, and he took her up and threw her down. But she stood up and said: "Why this violence and aggressiveness? Don't you know that I am the handmaiden of Him Whose slave you are?" Then Solomon swooned. When he had come to himself he said: "Bring her to me." So they brought her to him. He questioned her and she said: "My skin is thin and my body is weak,

yet you took me and threw me down." Then Solomon said to her: "Absolve me, for I did not intend to do it." But she said: "On condition that you do not look on the world with a covetous eye, and that you do not be immoderate in your appetites and your laughter, and that no one will beg assistance because of your high rank to whom you do not give generously." He said: "So shall I do." She said: "Then you are absolved"

Among (the special grants to Solomon) was the Valley of the Ants. God has said: "*And there were gathered together unto Solomon His forces of the jinn and men and birds—and were called to Solomon's presence—and ranged in battle array*"—he kept back the first of them for the last of them—"When they came to the Valley of the Ants [an ant said: 'Go into your dwellings, ants, lest Solomon and his warriors should unwittingly crush you.']" (27:17-18)

Al-Sha'bi, Ka'b, and various men of book-learning have said that when Solomon rode forth, he was accompanied by his family and his household, his servants and his secretaries, in his cortege prepared for him. Kitchens and bakeries had been set up in which were carried iron ovens and great pots, each pot big enough to hold ten slaughtered beasts, for he had arranged fields for the beasts before him. The cooks cooked, and the bakers baked, and the beasts moved before him between the sky and the earth, and the wind blew them along, and they traveled from Iṣṭakhr to the Yemen. He penetrated far into the desert and came to the city of the Messenger (i.e., Muḥammad).

Then Solomon said: "This is the *Dār Hijrah* (House of Emigration) of a prophet who will be sent in the fullness of time.<sup>13</sup> Blessed be he who will believe in him and follow him!" When he came to the Sacred Territory, he saw idols around the House<sup>14</sup> which were worshipped instead of God. So he went by the House, and when he had passed on, the House wept. And God, revealing Himself to the House, said: "What makes you weep?" It said: "Lord, this is one of Your prophets and a party of Your saints, and they have passed me by, and did not alight by me, and did not pray in me, and did not mention You in my presence, while these idols are worshipped around me instead of You." The story goes that God revealed to it: "Do

<sup>13</sup> The Hijrah (Hegirah) of the Prophet was his emigration from Mecca to Yathrib (Medinah) in 622 C.E.

<sup>14</sup> Here referring to the Ka'bah in Mecca. See the paragraph below.

not weep, for verily I will fill you with faces worshipping Me, and will reveal to you a new Scripture, and will send forth from you, in the fullness of time, a prophet whom I shall love more than all the other prophets, and will place within you worshippers from among My creatures, who shall worship Me. I will impose upon My worshippers a religious duty, which shall hasten their walk to you with a gait as hurried as the swift flight of eagles to their nests, and they shall yearn for you with the yearning of the female camel for her young, and of the pigeon for her eggs. And I will purify you from idols and from devil-worship."

Then God commanded Solomon to go down to the House and pray in it, and to offer a sacrifice there. The story goes that Solomon slaughtered five thousand oxen and twenty thousand ewes at the Ka'bah. He said to the nobles of his people who were present: "This, indeed, is the place from which an Arab prophet will appear, who shall be given victory over all who shun him. The sword shall be upon the neck of the one who disobeys him, and the reverential fear of him shall reach the distance of a month's journey. For him the near and the far shall be alike, and in his attachment to God he shall pay no attention to anyone's censure. And blessed be he who perceives his true nature and believes in him." They said: "How long will it be from now till his appearance, Prophet of God?" He said: "Close to a thousand years."

The story goes that Solomon then moved on and reached the Valley of al-Sadīr, one of the valleys of al-Ṭā'if,<sup>15</sup> and came to the Valley of the Ants. And a lame and tufted ant, who looked like a great wolf came walking. Al-Sha'bī said: She had two wings.

Scholars have differed about her name. Ibn Maymūnah told me with his chain of transmission—al-Ḍaḥḥāk said: The ant of Solomon was named Ṭākhiyah, but some say Khurmā. When she saw Solomon in his retinue, she called out: "*Go into your dwellings, ants, lest Solomon and his warriors unwittingly crush you.*" (27:18) Now, no creature used to say anything without the wind carrying it and casting it into Solomon's ear. Muqātil said: Solomon heard her speech three miles away, he *smiled, laughing at her speech, and said: "Inspire me, Lord, to be thankful for the favor You have bestowed on me and on my parents [and to do good works that will please You. Admit me, through Your mercy, among Your righteous servants.]"* (27:19)

<sup>15</sup> A town in a fertile valley to the south-east of Mecca. See *El*<sup>2</sup> X:115-6.

According to some of the accounts, when Solomon heard what she had said, he went towards her and said: "Bring her to me." So they brought her to him, and he said to her: "You have warned the ants? Is it because you have heard that I am a tyrant? Do you not know that I am a just prophet? Why did you say: '*Lest Solomon and his warriors crush you?*'?" The ant said: "Prophet of God, did you not hear me say: '*Unwillingly?*'? Nevertheless, I did not intend the crushing of persons, but only the crushing of hearts. I feared that they would want what has been given to you, and that while they were busy looking at you, they would be distracted from glorifying God." Then he said to her: "Admonish me." And the ant said to him: "Do you know why your father was named David (*Dāwūd*)?" He said: "No." She said: "Verily his heart *dāwā* (soothed) his wounds." Then she said: "And do you know why you were named Solomon (*Sulaymān*)?" He said: "No." She said: "Because you are *salīm*. (content) You have reconciled yourself to your circumstances through your heart's tranquility, and it is therefore your right to surpass your father David." Then she said: "Do you know why God has harnessed the wind to work for you?" He said: "No." She said: "To let you know that all the world is wind." And (Solomon) smiled, laughing at her speech, wondering at it, and said: "*Inspire me, Lord, to render thanks for the favors you have bestowed on me and on my parents [and to do good works that will please You. Admit me, through Your mercy, among Your righteous servants.]*" (27:19)

Ibn Maymūnah informed me with his chain of transmission from Ibn 'Abbās saying that the Prophet Muḥammad is said to have forbidden the killing of four animals: the hoopoe bird, the sparrowhawk, the bee, and the ant.

#### AND NOW FOR THE STORY OF THE PHOENIX,<sup>16</sup> CONFIRMING THE DECREE AND POWER

Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid—his chain of transmission—Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, who said: Solomon once remonstrated with the birds, saying: "You commit such-and-such acts and do such-and-such things." But they said: "By God, the Lord of the sky and

<sup>16</sup> Arabic: *al-'Anqā'*. Possibly connected with the epic of Gilgamesh, as in the case of Bulūqiyā.

earth! We want to follow the right course, but the decree of God is as final as His knowledge and His power." He said: "You speak the truth. No cunning can avail against destiny." But the Phoenix bird said: "I do not believe this." And Solomon said to her: "Shall I not tell you of the most wonderful of wonders?" She said: "Certainly." He said: "There have been born tonight a boy in the West and a girl in the East. He is the son of a great king, and she is also the daughter of a king. By the decree of God, the girl and the boy will come together in the most inaccessible of all places, on an island in the midst of the sea." The Phoenix said; "O Prophet of God, have these two children already been born?" He said: "Yes, tonight." She said: "And have you been told about them, who they are, and what their names are, and the names of their parents?" He said: "Certainly; their names are such-and- such and the names of their parents are so-and-so." Then the Phoenix said: "Prophet of God, I shall annul fate and shall separate them from each other." Solomon said to her: "You are not able to do that." She said: "I certainly am." Then Solomon called the birds to be her witnesses, and the owl vouched for her.

So the Phoenix departed. She was as large as a camel, but her face was human, and her hands were human, and her breasts were the breasts of a woman, and her fingers likewise. She was borne along in the air till she had looked over the world and had seen into every house and what was in it, and every human being. She saw the girl in her cradle, where they had placed her. She carried her away by stealth, and flew till she came to a mountain high in the sky, in the midst of an island far within the sea. On the island was a tree, so tall that no bird could reach its branches except by the most arduous flight. It had more than a thousand mighty branches—each one like the greatest of all the trees on earth—with many leaves. In the midst of the tree she made a nest, wonderful, spacious, light and soft. There she suckled the girl and fostered her under her wings, and set about to bring her various kinds of food and drinks, and to protect her from cold and heat, and to keep her company at night. She did not tell anyone about her, in order that she might accomplish her plan. She used to go to Solomon early in the morning and come back to her nest in the evening. But Solomon knew about it and did not tell her.

The boy reached manhood and became a worldly prince. He used to divert himself with hunting, which he grew to love. It came to a

point where he did not stay still night or day. When his father, a mighty king, saw him diverting himself in this way, he did not discourage him. One day the boy said to his friends, "I have bagged every species of game on dry land and its open spaces and deserts. But if I sailed the sea, then I could get some of its quarry; for indeed it has a great variety of game, and many wonders." His counselors said to him: "Yes, what you suggest is true. The sea has the most game and the most wonders of all of God's creation." So he commanded the young men to prepare what they needed. He made ready the ships, and set about to take some of everything he possessed. He took some ministers of state, and counselors, and young male slaves, and slave girls, and cooks, and bakers, and livestock, and falcons, and kestrels, and hunting spaniels, and all that was needed for what he desired in the way of diversion. He sailed the ships and passed over the sea, fishing and enjoying amusements; and he did not think of anything else until he had traveled for a month's time.

Then God sent a light wind upon the ship that drove it along till it came near to the island of the Phoenix and the girl. After fifty nights, it had made a journey of fifty years—every night a year's journey. Finally, by God's permission, the ship stopped, and in the morning the prince saw that it was becalmed. So he put out his head in one direction and looked, and lo, there was a lofty, saffron-colored mountain on an island so large that he could not discern its borders. On the summit of the mountain there was a green tree, twisted, with many branches and leaves. Its leaves were as broad as elephants' ears, and diffused the scent of chamomile; it was without fruit, and had a white trunk. So he said to his friends: "I see something! I see a lofty mountain in the middle of an island; I have never before seen one like it, nor one so large. And I see a tree with every sort of beauty. This has piqued my interest." Then he set sail, came to the island and anchored the ship there, and said to his friends, "Stay here until I go and look over the island and the mountain, to see whether there is any building or trace of mankind, and bring you an account of it." Then he disembarked, he and his comrades, and went over to the island, and found no trace of a building, nor any sign that a human being had been there before.

Finally he ascended to the summit of the mountain and saw the base of the tree. Now the girl had looked out at the ship. She was only a young girl and did not know what it was, because she had

been taken away when she was little before she learned what ships were. She kept on wondering, but had nobody to ask about it. While she was thinking about the ship, the talk of human beings was heard. So she put her head out of the nest and looked to the right and the left and did not see anyone. Then she looked down toward the base of the tree, and there were the youth and his companions. She was amazed by them when she saw their beauty and their elegance, and was puzzled as to how they had gotten there.

Now the boy, when he reached the base of the tree, looked to the right and the left, and still marveling at its girth and height, and he began to look up at its branches. The girl had put out her head to look at the ship, and she happened to look toward the base of the tree, and her eye met the boy's eye. Then he saw her features, and marveled at her great beauty, the abundance of her hair, and her hanging locks. And he said to her, with plain speech: "Are you a *jinnī* or a human being?" She said: "Nay, by God, I am one of the best of people. But who are you?" Then he tried to make her understand his language, but she said: "I do not know what you are saying, or what you are, but I see that your face is like my face, and that your speech is like my speech. For indeed I do not know anyone except the Phoenix. She is my mother, who brought me up and fostered me, and she comes to me every night and calls me her daughter."

The boy said to her: "Where is this Phoenix?" She said: "She is doing her shift." The boy said: "And what is 'her shift'?" She said: "She goes every morning to her king, Solomon, and greets him, and stays with him till nighttime. Then she comes to me and tells me all about Solomon's judgments. He is certainly a mighty king, according to what my mother the Phoenix describes to me. Indeed, she tells me that he has the most beautiful face of all men, and that he is more perfect in features than I."

The story goes that the boy trembled with emotion. Then he said: "I know him. It is he who killed my father and conquered his domain; I, indeed, am one of those who have been released by him, and one of those who pay him tribute. God has delivered the birds and the winds into his service." Then he wept for an hour, and the girl said: "What makes you weep?" He said: "I have found you in a place like this, where there is no human being nor anyone else. Out in the world, people like you are as numerous as trees and villages, and they all dwell in chambers of gold and silver, leading an easy life with their spouses, in luxury; making love, and leading a soft



life, and giving birth to children with features like yours and mine. Don't you see that if the wind arose and snatched you from your nest, nothing would prevent you from falling into the sea? And if you fell into the sea, who is there who would pull you out?"

The story goes that the girl was frightened by these remarks. She said: "But how can I have a human being like you, to relate such things as you relate to me, and protect me from what you have mentioned?" The boy said: "Don't you know that God made Solomon a prophet, charmed the wind and the birds to work for him, and that it is He who has shown you mercy, and sent me to you, to be a companion and a kind friend to you, and that I am the son of a king?" Then the girl said to him: "But how can you become mine and I become yours, when the Phoenix will come in the evening and gather me to her bosom, between her wings?" The boy said to her: "Tonight, why don't you become more fretful and lonely, and weep before the Phoenix. When she comes to you and says: 'What do you desire? What is the matter with you?' tell her of your loneliness in the daytime. Then see what answer she gives you, and tell me about it." So she did; the Phoenix returned and found her weeping and grieving. She said to her: "What is the matter with you, little daughter?" She said: "Loneliness and solitude are killing me, which makes me disturbed and restless." So the Phoenix said to her: "Little daughter, do not fear and do not grieve, for I shall ask Solomon to command me to come to him on one day, but not to come to him on the next, and thus you shall have some company."

In the morning the girl told the youth about this solution and he said to her: "Can you bear that patiently? No! But I shall slaughter a horse from among these beasts of mine, and shall cut its belly open, take out its entrails, and cleanse it. Then I shall go into its belly, and it will be thrown over the rear of my ship. When the Phoenix comes to you, you will say to her: 'I see something extraordinary. I see a creature cast out at the stern of that ship. If you snatched it up and carried it to me, and if it were here with me in my nest, I could look at it and enjoy its company. That would be more preferable to me than your being with me on alternate days and telling me about Solomon and the Muslims.'"

So when the Phoenix returned, she found her in her previous state. [That day] Solomon had been too busy to notice the Phoenix, so she had not approached him to ask his permission to be with him one day and away the next. So the Phoenix said to the girl:

“Little daughter, the Prophet of God has been too busy for us today, in giving judgments among the Adamites, so I did not approach him.” The girl said to her: “I certainly do not wish you to stay away from him on alternate days from the accounts of Solomon and the Muslims. But I see an extraordinary thing in the sea. I see something drifting on the surface. What is it?” The Phoenix said to her: “That is a ship of a party of travelers who are sailing the sea.” The girl said: “And what is it that I see cast over the end of the ship?” The Phoenix said: “A dead beast which they have cast away.” The girl said: “Then carry it to me, so that I may find companionship in it and look at it.” So the Phoenix swooped down and snatched up the horse, with the boy in its belly, and carried it to her nest. Then the girl said to her: “O mother, how beautiful it is!” and she laughed. At that the Phoenix rejoiced, and said: “Little daughter, if I had known, I would have brought you something like this a long time ago.” Then she flew off to her shift with Solomon. So the youth came out from the belly of the horse, and dallied with the girl, and fondled her, and deflowered her, and made her pregnant right then and there. Each one of them rejoiced in the other, and they enjoyed each other’s company.

Now the wind had brought to Solomon the news of their union. His court, on that day, was held for the judgment of the birds, so he held audience for them on his divan. He summoned their chiefs and commanded them not to fail to bring before him every single bird. So the chiefs assembled all of the birds before him. Then he commanded the chiefs of the *jinn* to assemble the tribes of the *jinn*—those dwelling in the seas, and those dwelling in the islands, in the air, the caves, the deserts, and the towns—and they were assembled before him. Then he commanded the devils, and they were brought into his presence likewise. So were the human beings, and every beast that crawls on the face of the Earth. Intense fear prevailed, and they said among themselves: “We swear by God that something awful has troubled the Prophet of God.”

The first lot that was drawn for the coming forward of the birds was that of the kite. The birds used to present themselves only by lot, the same way as the *jinn* and the devils. The kite came forward to lodge a complaint against her mate. He had denied paternity of her child. She said: “Prophet of God, he leaped on me, but after I brooded upon my eggs and they hatched, he denied the paternity of the child that I brought forth.” Then Solomon said to the male:

"What do you say?" He said: "Prophet of God, she does not deny herself to the other birds and she hovers around the deserts, so I do not know if it is from me or from someone else." The story goes that Solomon ordered that her child be brought to him and he found that the resemblance was perfect, so he confirmed the paternity to the male kite. Then he said to her: "Do not allow him to have intercourse with you till you cry out to these other birds to witness it. Then he will issue no more such denials till the Resurrection Day." So [that is why] when the male kite leaps her, she cries out and says: "O birds, he has leapt me. Bear witness, all groups of birds, bear witness!"

Then the lot of the Phoenix was drawn, and she advanced towards him, and Solomon said to her: "What have you to say concerning fate?" She said: "Prophet of God, I have power to avert evil and do good." Solomon said to her; "Then where is the agreement that was between you and me? You asserted that you would keep the boy and the girl apart." She said: "I have done so." Solomon said: "God is most great! Bring her to me at once, and the people shall be witnesses, that I may know if what you say is true." Then he commanded the chief of the birds to be with the Phoenix and not to leave her until she brought the girl.

So the Phoenix flew away until she drew near to her nest. When the Phoenix approached, the girl heard the flapping of her wings, and the boy hurried into the belly of the horse. When the girl saw her, she said to her, in fear: "You have come with important word since you have returned so soon." The Phoenix said: "Yes, by my life! I have important news indeed. This blessed Solomon has ordered you to be brought before him at once, because of some business between him and me concerning you; indeed, I hope to be victorious today in your case." The girl said to her: "How will you carry me?" She said: "On my back." The girl said: "And shall I be at ease on your back when I see the terrors of the sea, and dare not descend? I shall fall and perish!" The Phoenix said: "Then in my beak . . .?" The girl said: "But how can I endure your beak?" The Phoenix said to her: "How then shall I do it? I must of necessity bring you before Solomon; this chief of the birds is with me, and the owl has vouched for me." So the girl said to her: "I shall enter the belly of the horse. Then you will carry it upon your back, or in your beak, and I shall not see anything, and shall neither fall nor be afraid." The Phoenix said: "You are right."

The story goes that the girl entered the belly of the horse, joining the boy, and the Phoenix carried the horse in her beak, and flew until she placed the horse before Solomon. She said: "Prophet of God, she is now in the belly of this horse, but where is the boy?"

Solomon smiled for a long while, then replied: "Don't you believe in Fate and in God's Decree? No one has any ability to avert Fate, His Decree and God's pre-existing Knowledge and Being, with regard to all good and all evil." But she said: "I believe in God, yet I say that His mankind have will and power of their own, and that he who wishes will certainly do good or evil." Solomon said: "You lie. God did not give His devotees any will of their own. He whom God wishes to be blessed will be blessed, and he whom He wishes to be an unbeliever will be an unbeliever. No one can avert fate and the decree of God by cunning. One can do nothing, and knows nothing. Indeed, the boy who was born in the West is with the girl who was born in the East. They have now been united in a single place in fornication, and the girl has conceived a child by the boy." The Phoenix said: "Say not so, Prophet of God, for I have the girl in the belly of this horse." Then Solomon said: "God is most great! Where is the owl that vouched for the Phoenix?" The owl said: "Here I am, Prophet of God." Solomon said: "Are you in accord with what the Phoenix has said?" She said: "Yes." And Solomon said: "The Decree of God, the Pre-existing, existed before Creation. Bring the two of them out, according to His decree and His will."

The story goes that he commanded the owl, and she opened the belly of the horse, and brought both of them out. As for the Phoenix, she was terrified and departed. She flew into the sky, and fled toward the West, concealing herself in one of its seas, believing now in Fate. She swore that she would never look any bird in the face, she was so ashamed. As for the owl, she confined herself to the thickets and the mountains, and said: "In the daytime there is no going forth for me, or means of livelihood." When she came out by day, the birds upbraided her, and flocked upon her, and said: "Qadariyyah—denier of Fate!" And she was duly humbled.

Such was the affair of the Phoenix and the owl, with regard to Fate and Destiny, and God is All-knowing about occult things.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> These are examples of predestination as we have seen above in p. 33, n. 48 and p. 65, n. 2.

God gave exclusively to Solomon the excellent Arab horses which He brought out of the sea for him—according to what most historians say, God has said: “*When, one evening, his light-footed coursers were ranged before him*” (38:32)—the light-footed ones are the fine horses that stand on three feet, with either one forefoot or one hind foot resting on the tip of the hoof, while the coursers are the speedy ones. Al-Ḥasan has said: “I have heard that it was a horse that came forth from the sea and had wings.” Al-Kalbī said: “Solomon raided the people of Niṣībīn and captured one thousand of their horses.” Muqātil said: “Solomon inherited one thousand horses from his father David, who had captured them from the Amalekites.”

They say that once, when Solomon prayed the noontime prayer and sat upon his throne, nine hundred of these horses were arrayed before [him and his court], and he became preoccupied with their beauty, their multitude, and pleasure from them until the sun set and he had missed the afternoon prayer. No one had informed him of that out of respect for him. He was distressed by that and said: “Bring the horses back to me!” They brought them back to him, and he cut their hamstrings and slaughtered them with his sword, offering them to God. Only one hundred remained, and whatever Arabian horses people possess are from the stock of those one hundred.

Ka'b said: “There were fourteen horses, and he commanded that their necks and legs be cut by the sword, and he killed them—so God deprived him of his reign for fourteen days because he had wronged the horses by killing them.”

Al-Ḥasan said: When he slaughtered the horses for the sake of God, God substituted for them something that was better and faster that was the wind, which moved at his command as gently as he wished. Its morning journey was the equivalent of a month and its evening journey the equivalent of a month. He would set out from Jerusalem in the morning, be in Iṣṭakhr by midday, and fly from there in the evening and spend the night in Babylon.

It is said that Solomon with his horses and troops set out from Iraq early in the morning, stopped in the city of Merv, and prayed the mid-afternoon prayers in the city of Balkh—the wind carrying them and the birds shading them. Then he traveled from Balkh through the land of the Turks to the land of China. Thence he turned to his right at the place where the sun rises, on the coastal plain, and came to India. From there he proceeded to Makran and Kirman. Then he went on till he came to the land of Persia, and

alighted there for several days. He set out from there one morning, took a midday nap in Kaskar,<sup>18</sup> then returned to Syria.

His abode was in the city of Palmyra.<sup>19</sup> Before his departure from Syria to Iraq, he had ordered the devils to build this city for him. They constructed it of slabs of columns of white and yellow marble. Regarding this, the poet said:

*And mention Solomon when his Ruler said to him:  
Arise, in the desert, and keep from it the multitudes,  
As well as the army of armies. For I have permitted  
The building of Palmyra with stones and columns.*

The story goes that the following verses were found engraved on a rock in the land of Kaskar. One of the friends of Solomon the son of David had composed them:

*And we, though there is no power equal to the power of our Lord,  
Are going in the evening to our homes in the land of Palmyra.  
When we go, it takes but an evening for a month's journey,  
and only a morning for another month's journey.  
People rejoiced, and God stirred up their spirits  
To the aid of the religion of the pure prophet.  
In the noblest religion they have grace and compassion.  
And if, one day, their pedigree should be inquired after,  
Who could come from a better stock?  
When they rode the obedient wind, it went swiftly,  
Hastening in its month's journey without failing;  
Birds shading them, rank upon rank above them,  
Fluttering above them the whole journey long.*

Let us return to our tale. Certain scholars have told us as follows: The meaning of His saying: “*And with this he fell to hacking [with his sword their] legs and necks*” (38:34) was to keep them in the way of God. He branded their legs with the brand of charity. Al-Zuhrī said: “He touched, (*i.e.*, wiped) their legs and necks (clean) of dust.”

It is said that there is an account of al-Wāqidi from Ibn ‘Abbās, who said: “‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said that then God ordered the angels who were responsible for the sun, to turn it back for Solomon so that he could recite the afternoon prayer at the proper time.”

Abū ‘Abdallāh ‘Uqayl al-Anṣārī, with his chain of authorities—‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, who said: “The Prophet Muḥammad once said

<sup>18</sup> The travel of Solomon from Central Asia through Iran to Iraq to Syria.

<sup>19</sup> Arabic: *Tadmur*.

that when God wished to create horses He said to the south wind "Indeed I am creating something from you, and I shall make it the glory of My friends and the humiliation of My foes, and the beauty of the people who obey Me." Then the wind said: "My God, my Master, and my Lord, I shall indeed obey." So God pinched off a handful of wind, and created a horse, and said to it: "I have created you Arab, and have made good things to be tied to your forelock, and booty to be gathered on your back; and I have inspired your master with affection for you, and have made you fly without wings. You are for pursuit and you are for escape. And I shall place upon your back men who will glorify Me, praise Me and magnify Me. You shall glorify Me when they glorify; and when they repeat 'There is no god but God,' you shall do so; and you shall magnify Me when they magnify." Muḥammad said: "There is no glorification, praise, exaltation, or magnification, which the horse's master utters and it hears, that it does not answer likewise."

The story goes that when the angels heard the description of the horse, and beheld how it was created, they said: "Our Lord, we, Your angels, praise and glorify You. What is there for us?" So for them God created horses with piebald necks, like the necks of Bactrian camels.

When God had sent the horse to Earth, and its feet were planted thereon, it neighed, and it was told: "You are blessed among animals, for by your neighing God will humble the pagans, and will humble their necks by you, and will fill their ears with you, and you will make their hearts tremble."

When God displayed some of everything to Adam, He said to him: "Choose whatever you wish from among My creatures." So he chose the horse. And it was said to him: "You have chosen your glory and the glory of your offspring, enduring as long as they endure, lasting as long as they remain. My blessing upon you and upon them! I have not created anything which I love better than you and them."

Among [the blessings Solomon received] is His word: "*We gave him a spring flowing with molten brass.*" (34:12) We melted for him the spring of brass, and it was made to flow for Solomon for three days, just as water flows. This took place in the land of the Yemen. All the brass which people use at the present time is what God brought forth for Solomon.

Among [the blessings] is that God subjected the *jinn*, mankind, birds, beasts, and devils to Solomon and made them work for him,

doing whatever he wished. God said in the Qur'ān: "*And of the jinn who served him by leave of his Lord. Those of them who did not do Our bidding We shall chasten with the torment of the Fire.*" (34:12) That was because God had placed over them an angel with a fiery whip in his hand—He would strike with a burning blow anyone who deviated from Solomon's command.

Among the things the devils did at Solomon's command was that they invented baths, water-mills, glass, soap, and many other things for him. They excavated for him the River of the King, and threw its earth between Khāniqīn and Qaṣr-Shīrīn.<sup>20</sup> Among the things that they did for him was diving, as God has said: "*We assigned him devils who dived for him into the sea and who performed other tasks besides.*" (21:82) He has also said: "*And the devils, too, among whom were builders and divers and others, bound with chains.*" (38:38) They used to dive into the seas and bring out various kinds of pearls, mother-of-pearl, coral, and all other jewels of the sea. And they used to bring out for him sapphires and emeralds and various kinds of precious gems from the mines—and they were the first to do that.

#### THE TALE OF THE DOME

Wahb b. Munabbih said: One day when Solomon was at the seashore with the wind bearing him up, and human beings on his right, and *jinn* on his left, and the birds shading him, he looked at the vast waves of the sea, and longed to know what was at the bottom of the sea. So he commanded the wind to subside beneath him, and he sat upon his royal throne. Then he summoned the captain of the divers and said to him: "Choose for me a hundred of your men." And he chose a hundred for him. Then Solomon said to him: "Choose thirty from the hundred." And he chose thirty. Then Solomon said: "Choose ten for me from the thirty." And he chose ten for him. Then Solomon said: "Choose from the ten, three." And he chose three. Then Solomon said to one of them: "Dive down to look at the bottom of the sea, and bring me your report." The diver said: "To hear you is to obey, prophet of God!" Then he dived deep into the sea and went far away.

<sup>20</sup> *Khāniqīn*, a town in Iraq, 6 *parasangs* from Qaṣr Shīrīn, a town in Iran on the way to Jibāl province. See Yāqūt, *Muḥjam*, II:393; LeStrange, *Lands*, pp. 61-63.



When he came out, Solomon asked him: "What have you seen?" The diver said: "Prophet of God, for a while I saw nothing but waves and fish. Then I encountered a great king, and he said to me: 'Where do you wish to go?' I said to him: 'The Prophet of God, Solomon, has sent me to look at the bottom of the sea for him.' He said to me: 'Return to him and give him my salutations, and tell him that a group of men sailed this sea forty years ago, and their ship sprang a leak. They got out to repair it, but one of them dropped his adze. This adze is still sinking into the sea and has not reached the bottom of it yet.'" So the diver returned to Solomon and gave him the report, and Solomon was amazed by it, and no longer attempted to know what was on the ocean bottom.

The story goes that while Solomon was on the seashore, he saw a glass dome that the waves were heaving back and forth in the open sea. He said to the divers: "Dive after it." So they dived, and brought it out. When the dome was placed upon the seashore, two doors in it opened on a pair of hinges, and out from the dome came a youth in garments whiter than silk whose head was dripping with water. He came up and stood before Solomon, and Solomon said to him: "My lad, are you of the *jinn* or of mankind?" The youth said: "Nay, of mankind." Solomon, marveling at him and at his garb, asked him: "How have you come to be as I see you?" The youth said; "Prophet of God, I had a mother, toward whom I was one of the most dutiful persons, giving her food and drink with my own hand, nor is there any act of filial piety which I did not perform for her. When she was at Death's doorstep, I asked her to pray for me, so she raised her head toward Heaven and said: 'O Lord, You know how dutiful my son has been, so grant him a place of worship where Iblīs and his armies can have no access to him.' Then she died, and I buried her. One day I went out to the seashore, and I came suddenly upon this dome, and felt a longing to enter it. When I had gone in, its doors were shut upon me, and the waves swelled up, and that was the last that was known of me, O Prophet of God."

Then Solomon said to him: "But from where do you get your food and your drink?" The youth said: "Prophet of God, when it is night a white bird comes to me with something white in its beak, and delivers it to me, and I eat it, and that sustains me." Solomon asked: "But how can you tell the night from the day, when you are in the darkness of this sea?" The youth said: "Prophet of God, in

the dome are two threads, a white thread and a black one. When I see the white thread increasing in length, I know that it is day, and when I see the black thread lengthening, I know that it is night." Then Solomon said to him: "Do you desire to be in our company?" The youth said: "No, Prophet of God, if you will grant me leave, I shall return to my dome." Solomon granted him leave, and the youth went and entered the dome. Its door was shut upon him, and the rising tide carried him away, and that was the last that was known of him.

And among them was His word: "*They made for him for him whatever he pleased: shrines and statues, basins as large as watering-troughs [it is said that these were basins, the bowl of one of which was wide enough for the food of one thousand men, and they would gather round it and eat in his presence] and built-in cauldrons*" (34:13) [these were sturdy, a single cauldron able to contain ten slaughtered camels].

#### THE STORY OF THE CITY OF SOLOMON IN WHICH HE WOULD JOURNEY INTO THE AIR

Among the things that the devils made for Solomon was a city of glass, ten thousand cubits long and ten thousand cubits wide. In it were a thousand roofs, ten cubits apart. Under each of these was all that he needed in the way of dwellings, pavilions, and furnishings. The [glass] material was denser than iron, yet its surface was more transparent than water, so that by dint of its purity and limpidity one could see from within it what was beyond, both the sun by day and the moon by night. On the uppermost roof was a white dome, with a white beacon from which all the army had light in the darkness of night, its rays shining as far as the eye could see. And in the city were columns: a thousand columns on the shoulders of the devils, ten devils for each column. It accommodated Solomon, his armies, his household, and his companions; while the wind carried it wherever he wished. That city was his abode; he ate and drank and slept there, and enjoyed it for a long while. In its lower parts were stables and hitching posts for his horses and his other animals. Another thing that the devils made for him was his royal throne.

## A DESCRIPTION OF SOLOMON'S THRONE

God said: "*We placed a counterfeit upon his throne, so that he at length repented.*" (38:35) It is related that the Prophet of God, Solomon, had ordered the devils to make this for him to sit upon when he gave judgment; he ordered them to make it something dreadful, so that if a trifler or a perjurer saw it he would be struck dumb with astonishment. The story goes that they made for him a throne of ivory, and studded it with sapphire, pearl, chrysolite, and various kinds of gems, and encompassed it with four golden palm trees, with date-clusters of red rubies and green emeralds. At the top of two of the palms were two gold peacocks, while at the top of the other two were two golden vultures—all facing each other. At the side of the throne they placed two golden lions, on the head of each of which was a column of green emerald. To the palms they had bound grapevines of red gold, with clusters of red rubies, so that the throne would be shaded by the trellis of the vines and the palms.

When Solomon wished to ascend to the throne, he stood upon the lowest step, and the throne, with his foot on it, revolved like a hand-mill turning rapidly. Then those vultures and peacocks spread their wings, and the two lions thrust out their paws and struck the ground with their tails. The same took place with every step that Solomon ascended. When he sat down on the upper part of the throne, the two vultures on the palms took musk and ambergris and sprinkled them over him. Then a golden pigeon, standing on a column of precious stone, one of the columns of the throne, took the Book of the Torah and opened it for Solomon, and he read it to the people, and called them to the rendering of judgment.

It is said that the great men of the Israelites sat upon his right hand, upon a thousand chairs of gold and silver studded with jewels. The chiefs of the *jinn* came and sat upon a thousand chairs of silver at his left, all of them honoring him. The birds shaded them, and the people approached him for judgment. When he called for evidence and the witnesses came forward, the throne, with everything on it and around it, revolved like a rapidly moving hand-mill. Mu'āwiyah said to Wahb b. Munabbih: "What made that throne turn?" He replied: "Two golden nightingales. And that throne was among the things fashioned by Şakhr the *Jinnī*."

They say that when this happened, the two lions extended their forepaws and beat the ground with their tails, and the vultures and

the peacocks spread their wings, and the witnesses were seized with terror, and bore witness only to the truth.

When Solomon died, Nebuchadnezzar sent and had the throne taken and carried to Antioch. He wished to ascend it, but he did not know how, nor did he know its properties. When he placed his feet on the lowest step, the lion raised its right forepaw and struck Nebuchadnezzar's leg a mighty blow, which broke the leg and threw Nebuchadnezzar down. Nebuchadnezzar was carried away; he walked limping and moaning from this injury until he died. The throne remained at Antioch until a certain king called Kadāsh b. Sadas raided them, put the successor of Nebuchadnezzar to rout, and returned the throne to Solomon's temple. Not one of the kings, however, was able to sit upon it or to enjoy the use of it. Finally it was placed beneath the Rock and disappeared, and nothing further is known of its story or its whereabouts. But God is All-knowing. Among [the blessings Solomon received] was the Temple.

#### A DESCRIPTION OF BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE AND ITS EARLY HISTORY

God has said: "*Glory be to Him, Who made His servant go by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Further Mosque whose surroundings We have blessed.*" (17:1) He has also said: "*And We delivered him, and Lot, and brought them to the land which We had blessed for all mankind.*" (21:71) It has been said: These blessings consisted of water, trees, and fruit; furthermore, it has been said that all potable water is sent down from heaven and comes out from under the base of the Rock at the Temple, and that it then flows in different directions throughout the Earth. That is the reason for His saying: ". . . *which We had blessed for all mankind.*"

Khālid b. Ma'dān related that 'Abādah b. al-Ṣāmit said: Muḥammad the Prophet is said to have declared: "This Rock of the Temple rests on a palm tree by a river in Paradise, and by this river Āsiyah bt. Muzāḥim and Miriam, daughter of Amram, arrange the ornaments of the people of Paradise for the Resurrection Day."

Now as for the early history of the Temple, and the manner of its construction, according to the way people knowledgeable about human history have described it: God blessed the descendants of Abraham, making them so numerous as to be uncountable. When David came, he stayed among them for a long time in the land of

Palestine, and they multiplied every day. He was pleased at this, and wished to know the number of the Children of Israel, so he ordered them to be counted.

He sent inspectors and chiefs, commanding them to report the number to him. They went on counting for a long time, until their strength failed them. Finally God sent Gabriel to inspire him with this message: "David, you know that I promised your father Abraham, on the day when I commanded him to slaughter his son, that I should bless him so that his posterity should become as the stars of the sky in multitude, too numerous to be counted. But you have wished to know their number; yet no one but I should count their number. I have therefore sworn to afflict them with a calamity to cut their number down, so that your pleasure at their increase will leave you. Choose whether I shall afflict you with hunger and drought for three years, or shall give your enemy power over you for three months, or shall give you death for three days."

So David assembled the Children of Israel and told them what God had revealed, and gave them their choice in the matter. They said: "You know best what is easiest for us, for you are our prophet, so help us. Nevertheless, we could not endure hunger, and being given into the power of the enemy would be a disgraceful affair. If there is no way out, then we choose death, because it will be by God's own hand rather than by that of another."

David then commanded them to prepare for death. They washed themselves, and prepared themselves for burial, and dressed in shrouds, and went forth with their children and their families to the Mount which would become the site of the Temple. He commanded them to raise a hew and cry before God, and to make humble entreaties to Him, so that perhaps He would have mercy. But God sent a pestilence, which destroyed many thousands of them in a single day and night. The number of the dead is not known, but they did not finish burying them until a month after their death. When the morning of the next day came, David prostrated himself before God, supplicating Him and saying: "Lord, I drink sour vinegar and the teeth of the Children of Israel are set on edge"—that is to say, I have sinned, and the Children of Israel are being punished. "Whatever punishment there is, send it down upon me; but forgive them." Then God answered his prayer, and lifted the pestilence from them, and saved them from death. David had seen the angels drawing their swords, but now they sheathed them and ascended to Heaven on a golden ladder on the Rock of the Temple.

Then he said to the Children of Israel: "God has favored you and has had mercy on you, so go to Him with thanks." They said: "But what do you command us to do?" He said: "I command you to make on this site, on which God has shown you mercy, a house of prayer in which you and those who come after you will not cease to remember Him." Then David undertook to build it; but when he wished to begin building, there came a poor and pious man, to test them as to how devoted they were in this work. He said to the Children of Israel: "I own a place in this area that I need; it is not right that you hinder me from access to my property." They said to him: "O you! There is not one of the Children of Israel who does not have a claim such as yours in this mount. Do not be the most niggardly of people, or treat us harshly about this." But he said: "I know my right, but you do not know yours." They said to him: "Either you will give it up willingly, or we shall take it from you against your will." He said to them: "Do you find this in the Law of God and in the Law of David?"

The story goes that a report of this was taken to David, and he said: "Compensate him." They said: "How much shall we pay him for it, O Prophet of God?" He said: "Pay a hundred sheep or goats." But the man said: "Give me more, O Prophet of God." David said: "Pay a hundred cows." The man said: "Give me more." David said: "A hundred camels." The man said: "Give me more, O Prophet of God! For you are buying it for none but God, and God is generous; He does not act in a niggardly way." So David said: "Since you have said that, decide for yourself what I shall give you." The man said: "Will you give in exchange for it a garden of the same size, with olive trees, palms, and grapevines?" David said: "Yes." The man said: "You are buying it for God, so do not be niggardly." David said: "Ask for what you wish." The man said: "You are held higher in God's estimation than I am, but build around this garden a high wall. Then fill it with gold, or, if you wish, with coined silver." David said: "This will not be a problem." Then the man turned to the Children of Israel and said: "This man is sincerely patient." He then said to David: "No, O Prophet of God, I would prefer that God forgive me a single sin is more preferable to me above everything which you have given me. I have been testing you, and you have passed the test."

So they went back to toiling away at the building of the Temple. That was—it is said—before the eleventh year of David's reign. He himself carried stones on his back, and the best men of the Children

of Israel did likewise, till they had raised the building to the height of a man, but then they lacked the strength to go on. Then God revealed to him: "This is a true temple, and since you are a great shedder of blood, you are not fit to build it. But I shall keep free from bloodshed a son of yours, whom I shall make king after you, whose name shall be Solomon; and I decree that the Temple will be completed by his hand, his good fame, his reputation, and his reward shall be yours forever." So they prayed in [the unfinished Temple] for a while, until David passed away and Solomon succeeded him; and God ordered Solomon to complete the Temple.

Solomon assembled the *jinn*, the men, and the devils and divided the tasks among them, assigning to each group the special work to which it was suited. He sent out the *jinn* and devils to procure and work marble and to extract clear white beryl from his mines. He ordered the city (of Jerusalem) to be built of marble, and of stone slabs, and he made in it twelve walled sections: one section for each tribe [for they were twelve tribes].

When he had finished the city, he began to build the Temple. He sent the devils out in companies: one company to extract gold, silver and corundum from his mines; one company to dive into the sea and bring out various kinds of pearls; another to cut the different sorts of marble; another to dive [into the sea] for gems; and another to bring musk, ambergris, and diverse aromatic substances from their sources. An amount of all those materials was brought which no one but God could reckon. Then Solomon brought in the artisans and commanded them to hew the stones and fit them together, and to set the jewels in their proper places and engrave them.

While they were practicing their craft, the hardness of the stones caused a great noise. Solomon disliked the noise, so he called the *jinn* and said: "Can't you engrave those precious stones noiselessly?" They said to him: "Prophet of God, among the *jinn* there is no one with more experience or more learning than Şakhr the *Ifrit*,<sup>21</sup> so send someone to bring him to you." Then Solomon imprinted his signet on a seal. For the devils he used to impress his seal on brass, while for the other *jinn* he would do so on iron. When he impressed his seal, it flashed like dazzling lightning, and by Divine decree no *jinnī* or devil could see it and not obey him. So he sent the impres-

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<sup>21</sup> *Ifrit* is the name given to imps and demons, malicious, sly or mischievous people.

sion of the seal with ten of the *jinn*, and they brought it to Şakhr the *Ifrit*, who dwelt on an island, and showed it to him. When he looked at it he was nearly stunned with fear, and came hurrying with the messengers into Solomon's presence.

Then Solomon asked his messengers what the *Ifrit* had done on the way, and they said: "Prophet of God, sometimes he laughed at people." So Solomon said to him: "Were your rebellion against me and your failure to render obedience to me not enough for you, that you also had to scoff at people?" But the *Ifrit* said: "O Prophet of God, I was not really scoffing at them; I was only laughing in wonder at what I heard and saw along my way." Solomon asked: "And what was that?"

The *Ifrit* said: "I passed over a riverbank and found a man with a mule which he wished to give to drink, and with a jar with which he wished to draw water. He let the mule drink and filled the jar. Then he wanted to satisfy the call of nature, so he tied the mule to the handle of the jar. But the mule broke loose and broke the jar, so I laughed at the man's stupidity in supposing that the jar would hold the mule fast."

"I came also upon another man, seated at a cobbler's, who sought to engage the shoemaker to repair one of his shoes. I heard him stipulate that he should repair it so that it would last him for four years, but he forgot that the angel of death might come down for him in the meantime. So I laughed at the paucity of his wits and at his folly."

"And I came upon an old woman who was divining and telling people things about the affairs of Heaven which they did not know. In times gone by I had seen a man bury a lot of gold where her bed was, and saw that she would die of hunger without knowing that it was there. Yet she told people about the business of Heaven! So I laughed at her."

"In a certain city I came upon a man who had previously been diseased, and he had eaten some onions and had recovered from his disease. He had begun to doctor people; and no one came to him asking about a sickness whom he did not order to eat onions, though the onion is so dangerous a thing that it even destroys the brain. So I laughed at him."

"I passed through a marketplace and saw garlic, the best of medicines, measured out by volume; and I saw pepper, one of the deadly poisons, being measured out by weight. So I laughed."



“Then I came upon people who sat supplicating God and asking Him for mercy and forgiveness. But a group of them grew restless, and arose, while others came and sat down. And I saw that mercy descended upon these latter and missed those who had been there before. So I laughed in wonder at Destiny and the Divine Decree.”

Then Solomon said to him: “Do you, from your many roamings and peregrinations in the seas, know of anything which will engrave these jewels for me, soften them, and facilitate the silent engraving and piercing of them?” The *Jffrit* said: “Yes, prophet of God. I know a stone as white as milk, called ‘diamond,’ though I do not know the mines where it lies. But there is no bird more skillful or a better guide than the eagle. Order its chicks to be put in a box made of your jewels, and the eagle will certainly bring that stone and strike the box with it until it pierces it, in order to reach its children.” The story goes that Solomon ordered the eagle chicks to be confined day and night in a box made of one of his hard stones. So the eagle was thereby denied access to its chicks, and it went away in haste and brought the diamond a day and a night later, and pierced the box with it until it got at them. Then Solomon sent one of the *jinn* with the eagle, to bring him enough diamonds for the work. They were used in the tools of the workmen, and enabled them to do the engraving noiselessly. Diamond is employed in the engraving of seals and the piercing of gems up to the present day, though it is precious and rare.

The story goes that Solomon built the house of prayer out of marble—white and yellow and green—and compacted its foundations with pure water, and roofed it with tiles of costly jewels, and studded its roof and its walls with pearls and sapphire and various kinds of gems, and paved its floor with tiles of turquoise. There was not found in the world, in those days, any house more splendid or luminous than that house of prayer, it shone forth in the night like the full moon.

When he had finished [the house of prayer], he assembled before himself the learned men of the Children of Israel, and announced that he had built it for God, and that everything about it was entirely for God. He made the day on which he finished it a feast-day. There was not held, anywhere in the world, a grander festival than on that day, or one with more food. He slaughtered thereon a thousand camels, twenty-five thousand stall-fed cattle, and four hundred thousand sheep and goats.

They say that one of the wonderful things that Solomon did in the Temple was to build a room and plaster its wall with gypsum plaster, and polish it. When an innocent man entered, his reflection showed up white on that wall, but when a vainglorious man entered it, his reflection showed black; as a result many people refrained from wickedness and breach of trust. And in one of the corners of the house of prayer, Solomon set up an ebony pole; whenever one of the sons of the prophets touched it, it did not harm him at all, but whenever anyone else touched it, his hand was burned.

When Solomon finished building the Temple, he made a sacrifice upon the Rock. Then he said: "God, You have given me this domain as a divine favor; You have made me Your viceregent on Earth, and You bestowed this on me before I was anything. To You be praise! Lord, I ask of You that no one will enter this house of prayer for as much as two complete prostrations without becoming as free from sins as the day when his mother gave birth to him, and that no sinner will enter it whom You will not forgive, and no one afraid whom You will not make tranquil, and no one sickly whom You will not cure, and no one barren whom You will not make fruitful and satisfied. And if You have answered my prayer and granted me what I desire, then I shall take Your receiving of my sacrifice to be a sign." The story goes that fire then descended from the sky and hit squarely between the East and West. Then a flame reached out from it, carried away the sacrifice, and took it up to Heaven.

The Temple remained as Solomon had built it until Nebuchadnezzar raided the Children of Israel and reduced the Temple to ruins, casting carcasses into it, and filling it up with earth, carrying all the gold, silver, gems, and vessels that were in it away to the land of Babylon. And the Temple was in ruin until the Muslims rebuilt it in the time of 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. But God is All-knowing!

ABOUT THE TALE OF BILQĪS, QUEEN OF SHEBA,  
THE HOOPOE, AND EVERYTHING RELATED TO IT<sup>22</sup>

God has said: "*He inspected the birds and said: Where is the hoopoe? Is he absent? If he does not offer me a good excuse, I shall sternly punish him, or*

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<sup>22</sup> For a study of the story of Bilqīs and Solomon, see Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*.

*even slay him.*" (27:20) The learned men have said, in their histories of the ancients, that when Solomon the son of David had finished building the Temple, he decided to depart for the land of the Holy Sanctuary; so he fitted himself out for the journey. He took with him as companions numbers of people, *jinn*, demons, birds, and beasts, such as caused his host to extend for a hundred parasangs; and he commanded the gentle wind, and it carried them.

When they had arrived at the Holy Sanctuary, he stayed there as long as God wished him to stay, and made sacrifices, and performed the rites of pilgrimage, and announced to its people the advent of our Prophet Muḥammad, and told them that he is the lord of the prophets and their seal, and that that had been confirmed in their holy Psalms. Then he decided to travel to the land of the Yemen. So he set out from Mecca in the morning and traveled toward the Yemen, directing his course by the star Suhayl, and arrived at Ṣana‘ā’ in the mid-afternoon—which is [usually] a month’s journey. He saw there an arable and beautiful land, radiant in its verdure. He wished to descend to it in order to pray and to eat lunch. His party therefore sought water, but they did not find it. The hoopoe was his guide and it was able to see water below the earth as one of you sees his cup in his hand. He would bore into the earth, for he knew the location of water and its depth. Then the demons would come and strip off [the earth’s surface] as one strips off a hide, extracting the water.

Sa‘īd b. Jubayr said: When Ibn ‘Abbās mentioned this narrative, Nāfi‘ b. al-Azraq said to him: "How can the hoopoe see water under the ground, when it cannot see a trap through a finger’s thickness of dust?" He answered him: "Woe unto you! When destiny strikes, the eye becomes blind." Qatādah related from Anas b. Mālik: The Prophet of Allah said; "I forbid you to kill the hoopoe, for it was Solomon’s guide to water."

So Solomon sought the hoopoe and did not find it, and he uttered threats against it. Then, when the hoopoe came, it said: "With truthful news *I come unto you from Sheba*, where I found a woman reigning over the people. She is possessed of every virtue, and has a splendid *throne*" (27:22–23). That happened because when Solomon alighted, the hoopoe said to itself: "Solomon is preoccupied with stopping here." So it soared up toward the sky, and looked over the length and breadth of the world, and looked to the right and to the

left, and saw the garden of Queen Bilqīs, and feeling a desire for its verdure, dropped down into it.

Just then there arrived the hoopoe of the Yemen, and it alighted near Solomon's hoopoe. The name of Solomon's hoopoe was Ya'fūr, and the name of the hoopoe of the Yemen was 'Ufayr. 'Ufayr said to Ya'fūr, "From where have you come, and where do you wish to go?" Ya'fūr said: "I have come from Syria with my master Solomon son of David." The other hoopoe said: "But who is this Solomon son of David?" Ya'fūr said: "The king of the *jinn*, mankind, demons, beasts, and winds. But from where are you?" 'Ufayr said: "I am from this country." Ya'fūr said: "And who is its ruler?" 'Ufayr said: "A woman." Ya'fūr said: "And what is her name?" 'Ufayr said: "She is called Bilqīs, and even if your master has a large domain, still that of Bilqīs is not inferior to it, for she is queen of all the Yemen, and under her hand are twelve thousand chiefs, and under each chief a hundred thousand warriors. So will you not come away with me to look at her domain?" Ya'fūr said: "I fear that Solomon would miss me when he needs water at prayer-time." But the Yemenite hoopoe said to him: "Your master will only be glad that you bring him an account of this queen." So Ya'fūr went away with him to Bilqīs, and looked at her domain, and did not return to Solomon before the mid-afternoon prayer.

When Solomon had encamped and the time of prayer drew near, he sought the hoopoe. That was because he had stopped at a place without water. He asked the human beings about water, but they said: "We do not know of water here." And he asked the *jinn* and the devils, but they said: "We do not know." Thereupon he missed the hoopoe but could not find it and uttered threats against it. Ibn 'Abbās said, in certain narratives emanating from him, that a bit of sunlight fell on Solomon's head; so he looked, and lo, the place of the hoopoe was vacant. Then he called the chief of the birds, the vulture, and asked it about the hoopoe. But it said: "God prosper the king! I do not know where it is. I have not sent it anywhere." Thereupon Solomon grew angry and said: "*I shall sternly punish him or even slay him.*" (27:21) The sages have differed about what "sternly punish" means. Most of the commentators have said that the punishment that Solomon intended was to pluck out the hoopoe's feathers and its tail after which he would cast it into an ant-heap for the ants to sting it. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said [about Solomon's plans for punishment]:

“I shall pluck it and tie its legs and spread it in the sun,” while al-Muqātil said: “I shall smear it with tar and spread it in the sun.” And some said: “I shall put it in a cage.” Others said: “I shall separate it from its lover.” It is also said: “I shall forbid it from attending me, *if he does not offer me a good excuse.*” (27:21)—that is, a clear argument. ‘Ikrimah related from Ibn ‘Abbās, who said: In the Qur’ān, every authority is an argument.

The story goes that Solomon then summoned the eagle, the lord of the birds, and said to it: “Bring me the hoopoe at once.” So the eagle soared up toward the sky, cleaving the air, and surveyed the world like a wooden bowl before one of you, and looked to the right and to the left; and lo, there was the hoopoe, coming from the direction of the Yemen. So the eagle darted down toward it. But when the hoopoe saw that the eagle was coming to it with evil intent, it adjured it by God saying: “I adjure you, by Him Who has strengthened you and given you power over me, that you have mercy upon me. Do not approach me with evil intent.” The story goes that the eagle turned away from the hoopoe and said to it: “Woe to you! May your mother be bereft of you! The prophet of God, Solomon, has sworn that he will punish you or slay you.”

Then [the eagle and the hoopoe] flew away, making toward Solomon. When they reached the camp, the vulture and all the birds met them, and said to the hoopoe: “Where were you today? The Prophet of God, Solomon, has certainly threatened you.” They told it what he had said. But the hoopoe replied: “Did he not stipulate any condition?” They said: “Certainly. He said: *‘Or he offer me a good excuse.’*” (27:21)

Then the hoopoe and the eagle flew to Solomon, who was sitting on his throne. The eagle said: “I have brought him to you, Prophet of God.” When the hoopoe drew near to him, it raised its head and let its tail and wings droop, dragging them along the ground, humbling itself before Solomon. Solomon stretched forth his hand to the hoopoe’s head, drew it to him, and said: “Where have you been? I will indeed sternly punish you.” But the hoopoe said to him: “Prophet of God, remember that you stand before God.” When Solomon heard that, he trembled in fear and forgave him.

Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Thaqaḥī related to me with his chain of authorities from ‘Ikrimah, saying that only Solomon’s reverence for his parents deterred him from slaying the hoopoe.

Then Solomon asked: “What detained you from meeting me?”

And the hoopoe said what God has related concerning it: “*I have just seen what you have not comprehended* [that is, I know something that you do not know]. *With truthful news I come to you from Sheba, where I found a woman reigning over the people. She is possessed of every virtue.*” (27:22–23) Her name was Bilqīs daughter of al-Bushrakh, who was al-Hadhhādh. It is also said that she was Bil‘amah daughter of Sharāhīl b. Dhī Jadan b. al-Bushrakh b. al-Hārith b. Qays b. Ṣana‘ā’ b. Saba’ b. Yashjab b. Ya‘rib b. Qaḥṭān. And Bilqīs’ father, the one called al-Bushrakh, with the by-name of al-Hadhhādh, was a mighty king and was the ruler of all the land of the Yemen. He would say to the kings of the regions: “There is not one of you who is equal to me.” He disdained to marry among them, so they married him to a woman from the *jinn*, who was called Rayḥānah bt. al-Shukr; for human beings, at that time, used to be able to see the *jinn* and associate with them. Bil‘amah, who was Bilqīs, was born to her; and she had no other child.

A verification of this story is what Ibn Maymūnah related about it with his authorities from Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet said: “One of the parents of Bilqīs was a *jinnī*.”

They say that when her father died without leaving any other child, she eagerly desired to reign, and wished her people to acknowledge her as ruler. One group submitted to her; others rebelled against her and chose a man instead, making him king. They thus split into two factions, each faction of them getting mastery over a part of the land of the Yemen. Then this man whom they had made a king led a corrupt life among the people of his kingdom, even to the point of acting immorally with his subjects, committing adultery with them. His companions wished to depose him, but they were not able to do so. When Bilqīs saw this, righteous zeal overwhelmed her, so she sent and offered herself to him. To that the king answered: “Nothing hindered me from initiating the proposal to marry you except lack of hope.” But she said: “I do not shun you, for indeed you are my equal, and a noble man. So assemble the men of my nation, and request me in marriage from them.” He assembled them and asked them for her hand. But they said: “We do not think it right that she should do this.” He said: “It was she herself who initiated the proposal; I want you to listen to what she says, and bear witness to her.” When they came to her and mentioned this, she said: “Yes. I loved the boy, but I did not accept him since I rejected the idea, but just now I have been reconciled to him.”

So they married her to him. When she was conducted to him as a bride, she went forth with so numerous a retinue that his dwellings and houses were overcrowded. When she came to him, she gave him wine to drink until he was drunk. Then she cut off his head and slipped away under the cover of darkness to her dwelling. When morning came, and the people saw the king slain and his head set up on the door of his house, they knew that that marriage had been only her artifice and deceit. So they assembled before her and said: "You are the one most worthy of this authority." She said: "Had it not been for shame and Hellfire, I would not have killed him; but I saw that his illicit behavior had become general, so righteous indignation took hold of me and I did what I did." Then they made her queen, and her rule became established in the kingdom.

Ibn Maymūnah related with his chain of transmission—al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī—Abū Bakr, who said: I mentioned Bilqīs in the presence of the Messenger of Allah, and he said: "A nation will not prosper which entrusts its government to a woman." When Bilqīs was named queen, she had a palace made, and a throne.

#### A DESCRIPTION OF THE PALACE BILQĪS BUILT

Al-Sha'bī said: It is related that when Bilqīs came to power she ordered a palace to be constructed. Five hundred columns of marble were brought, each fifty cubits long. She ordered them to be set up on a hill near Ṣana'ā', ten cubits apart. On them she placed a roof of marble slabs, set in order and joined together with lead, so that they came to be as a single slab. Above that she built a square palace of bricks and gypsum plaster ten cubits apart. On them she placed a roof of marble slabs, set in order and joined together with lead, so that they came to be as a single slab. Above that she built a square palace of bricks and gypsum plaster with a golden dome rising high in the air at each of its corners. In the center, [there were] council-halls, with walls of gold and silver set with rectangular gems of various colors. At the palace gate adjacent to the city, she set up a tower of white, green, and red marble. In the palace sides were quarters for her chamberlains, deputies, guards, and servants, and her retinue, arranged according to rank.

## A DESCRIPTION OF HER THRONE

The front of her throne was of gold set with red rubies and green emeralds, and its back was of silver crowned with jewels of various colors. It had four legs: one leg of red ruby, one of green sapphire, a leg of green emerald, and a leg of yellow pearl. The plates of the throne were of gold. Over it were seventy rooms, each with a locked door. The throne was eighty cubits long and rose eighty cubits in the air.

These are God's words: "*She has been given (abundance) of all things*" (that is, of the tools and equipment in her dominion that she might need) "*and has a splendid throne*" (27:23)—that is, a large, beautiful elevated couch.

"*But she and her subjects worship the sun instead of God.*" (27:24) She had said to her councilors: "What did my bygone forefathers worship?" They said: "They used to worship the God of Heaven." She said: "And where is He?" They said: "He is in the sky, and his evidences are on Earth." She said: "But how shall I worship Him when I do not see Him? I do not know anything stronger than the light of the sun. It is therefore the most suitable thing for us to worship." So she worshipped the sun instead of God, and carried her people over to this worship. They used to bow down to it when it rose and when it set.

The story goes that when the hoopoe told that to Solomon, he said: "*We shall soon realize if what you say is true or whether you are liars.*" (27:27) Then the hoopoe showed them the way to water, and they dug the wells; and those are such wells as are not hidden in the bottom of every valley. So the thirsting peoples and animals got plenty of water.

Then Solomon wrote a letter: "From the devotee of God, Solomon son of David, to Bilqīs, the queen of Sheba: *In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.* Peace be upon him who follows the true guidance. To continue: *Exalt not yourselves above me, but come to me in all submission.*" (27:31)

Ibn Jurayj and others have said that Solomon did not add anything to what God had related in His book but in his style of writing; he was the most eloquent of all people, and the most sparing of rhetoric. In the same way, the other prophets used to write elegantly, not in a verbose manner.



They say that when he had written the letter, he perfumed it with musk and sealed it with his seal, and said to the hoopoe: *“Go and deliver to them this message of mine. Then turn aside”*—but stay near them—*“and await their answer.”* (27:28)

So the hoopoe took the letter and brought it to Bilqīs. She was then in a land called Ma’rib, three days from Sheba, and the hoopoe came to her in her palace. She had locked the doors, taken the keys, and placing them under her head, had gone to bed. The hoopoe came to her while she was asleep, lying on her back, and threw the letter on the upper part of her bosom. This is what Qatādah said, but Muqātil said, rather, that the hoopoe carried it in its beak and flew over the woman’s head. While people looked on, it fluttered for an hour or so until the woman looked up, and then it threw the letter into her bosom. Wahb b. Munabbih said that she had a small, high window facing the sun, into which the sun’s light shone when it rose; and when she saw it, she would bow down to it. The hoopoe came to that window and blocked it with its wings, and the sun rose, but she did not know. When she found the sun to be late, she got up to look for it, and the hoopoe threw the letter in her face.

They say that Bilqīs took the letter [she could read and write Arabic from her association with the tribe of Tubba’ b. Sharāḥīl the Himyarite] and when she saw the seal, she trembled in fear and became submissive because the majesty of Solomon was contained in his seal. She knew that he who had sent the letter was a mightier sovereign than herself. She said, *“A king whose messengers are birds is a mighty king indeed.”* She read the letter, and the hoopoe waited not far off.

Then she came out and sat on her royal throne, and assembled the chieftains of her nation. They were twelve thousand chiefs, with a hundred thousand warriors under every one of them. She used to speak to them from behind a veil, but when an affair distressed her, she unveiled her face. When they had come and taken their seats, Bilqīs said to them: *“I have received a noble letter”* (27:29)—namely honorable, because of the honor of its sender. Al-Daḥḥāk said: She called it noble because it was sealed, indicating what Abū Hāmid al-Warrāq related to me with his chain of transmission from Ibn ‘Abbās, from the Prophet, who said: *“The nobility of a letter is its seal.”* Some say it was called noble because it was introduced by *“In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful,”* for that is what He has said: *“In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful: Do not exalt*

*yourselves above me, but come to me in all submission.*" (27:30–31)

Then she said: "*Nobles, let me hear your counsel*"—advise me as to what has been presented to me—"for I make no decision without your witness" (27:32)—namely, your presence. They replied to her: "*We are a valiant and mighty nation*"—in war—"It is for you to command, and we shall wait your pleasure" (27:33)—that you will find us obedient to your orders.

When they volunteered themselves for battle, Bilqīs said to them: "*When a king invades a city he ruins it and enslaves its chieftains*" (27:34)—that is, they abase their nobles and great men to put their affairs in order. And God verified her words, saying: "*These men will do the same.*" (ibid.)

Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd recited to me on this subject, saying: My father recited on this matter:

*Verily rulers are an affliction wherever they reside;  
Never will you find shade under their wings.  
What can you hope from folk who, when angered,  
oppress you, but if you please them, become bored.  
If you praise them, they think you are deceiving them,  
And will despise you as they despise all others.  
So, by God, do without their gates for (finding) kindness,  
For waiting at their gates is but humiliation.*

God has said, relating about her: "*But I shall send them a present.*" (27:35) That was because Bilqīs was an intelligent and clever woman who dominated the chief men of her people. She exercised control and managed at will. "*I shall send them a present*" (ibid.)—that is, to Solomon and his people, to bribe him away from my kingdom, and to test him to see whether he is a king or a prophet. If he is a king, he will accept the gift and go away; but if he is a prophet he will not accept the gift, and will not be satisfied with us unless we follow him in his religion."

Then she prepared him a gift of menservants and maidservants. Ibn 'Abbās said: She dressed them in one costume, so that he would not know the males from the females. Mujāhid said: She clad the boys in the dress of girls, and the girls in the dress of boys, and made them on unequal numbers. [The scholars] differed about their numbers. Al-Kalbī said: Ten girls and ten boys. Muqātil said: One hundred menservants and one hundred maidservants. Mujāhid said: Two hundred boys and two hundred girls, while Wahb said: Five hundred boys and five hundred girls. She also sent to him sheets of gold, and scholars have differed about their quality and their numbers.

Ibn Maymūnah also related to me with his chain of transmission from Thābit al-Banānī regarding God's word: "*I shall send them a present:*" (ibid.) She said: "I am going to send to him sheets of gold in brocade containers." When [word of] that reached Solomon, he commanded the *jinn* and they overlaid bricks with gold. Then he gave orders about that, and [the bricks] were thrown down on the road everywhere, so that when [her messengers] came they saw [gold] thrown down on the road everywhere, and they said: "We have come carrying something which we see thrown about here; he will pay no attention to it." And what they brought seemed insignificant in their eyes. It is said that it amounted to four bricks of gold.

Wahb b. Munabbih and other scholars have said that she took five hundred girls and five hundred boys, and clad the girls in the dress of boys—full-sleeved gowns and girdles. She clad the boys in the dress of girls, and placed on their forearms bracelets of gold, and on their necks necklaces of gold, and in their ears, pendants, and earrings for the upper part of the ear, set with various kinds of gems. She mounted the girls on five hundred fine horses, and the boys on five hundred nags. On every horse was a saddle of gold set with jewels—the saddle-covers being of variegated brocade.

She sent to Solomon, too, five hundred bricks of gold and five hundred bricks of silver, and a crown ornamented with pearls and precious corundum. She also sent musk, ambergris, and two kinds of fragrant wood. And she took a box and placed in it a costly unpierced pearl, and an onyx bead pierced with a crooked bore.

Then she summoned a noble of her nation, who was called al-Mundhir b. 'Amr, and joined with him some other men, masters of perception and intelligence. She wrote a letter to be sent with them, with an invoice of gifts, and said in her letter: "If you are a prophet, distinguish the maidservants from the menservants, and tell us what is in the box before you open it, pierce the pearl with a straight bore, and pass a thread through the bead."

Then Bilqīs commanded the boys: "When Solomon talks to you, talk to him effeminately and softly." She commanded the girls to talk to him with rough accents, like the speech of men.

She said to her envoy: "Look at the man when you have gone in to him, and if he looks at you with a look of wrath, know that he is only a king, and let not his appearance frighten you, for I am mightier than he. But if you see that he is an affable, kindly man, then know that he is a prophet, one sent by God; and try to under-

stand what he says, and bring back the answer." So the messengers departed with the gifts.

When the hoopoe saw all this, it hurried to Solomon and told him the news. Solomon commanded the *jinn* to make bricks of gold and silver for him, and they did it. Then he ordered them to lay out for him, for a breadth of nine *parasangs*, a single parade-ground of these bricks, and to build around it a high wall of gold and silver. They did so.

He asked them: "What are the finest animals that you have seen on land or in the sea?" They said: "Prophet of God, we have seen, in such-and-such a sea, animals of diverse colors; they have wings and manes and forelocks." Solomon said: "Bring them to me at once." So they brought them to him. He said: "Tether them to the right and the left of the parade-ground, on top of the gold and silver bricks, and throw down fodder for them." Then he said to the *jinn*: "Bring me your children."

A crowd assembled, and he made them stand to the right and the left of the parade ground. Then Solomon sat in audience upon his throne, while four thousand chairs were placed at his right hand, and a like number at his left. And he commanded the demons to draw up in ranks, *parasangs* long; and he gave orders to the human beings, and they drew up in ranks, *parasangs* long; and he commanded the animals, beasts of prey, birds, and venomous creeping things, and they drew up in ranks, *parasangs* long, on his right and on his left.

When the party [from Bilqīs] came, and drew near to the parade-ground, looked at Solomon's property, and saw animals the like of which they had never seen, defecating on the gold and silver bricks, their souls shrank, and they threw down the gifts they had with him. In some of the accounts, when Solomon ordered the parade ground to be paved with gold and silver bricks, he had some places on the road left bare, equal to the number of bricks they were bringing with them. When the messengers of Bilqīs saw these places bare of bricks, and all the rest of the ground paved with them, they feared that they would be suspected of stealing bricks, so they flung away their gifts on the spot.

It is said that when they came to the parade ground and saw the demons, they beheld this strange sight and were frightened. But they were told: "Pass along, and have no fear." The story goes that they passed by squadron after squadron of demons, human beings, birds,

beasts of prey, and animals, and came to a halt before Solomon. Then Solomon looked at them with a kindly look, with a pleasant countenance, and said: "What news have you?" So the captain of the party told him what they had brought, and they gave him the queen's letter. When he had looked at it and read it, he said to them: "Where is the box?" It was brought, and he shook it; and the angel Gabriel came and told him what was in it. So he said: "In it there is a precious pearl, unpierced, and a bead pierced with a crooked bore." The envoy said to him: "You have spoken the truth. Now pierce the pearl, and pass the thread through the bead." Solomon said: "Whom have I who will pierce it?" He asked the human beings, but they did not have that cunning. Then he asked the *jinn*, but they did not have that cunning. Then he asked the demons, and they said to him: "Send for the tree-worm." So he sent for it, and when it had come, it took a hair in its mouth and passed through the bead to the other side. Solomon said to it: "Ask for what you want." It said: "That God give me my sustenance in trees." He said: "You shall have it."

Then he said: "Who is there to pass the thread through this bead?" A white worm said: "I am for that, prophet of God." The worm took a thread in her mouth and entered the bore, and came out from the other side. Solomon said to it: "What do you want?" It said: "That God give me my sustenance in fruits." He said: "You shall have it."

Then he distinguished between the boys and the girls by commanding them to wash their faces and their hands. A girl would take water from the vessels with one of her hands, put it in the other, and then splash her face with it, while a boy would take it from the vessel with both his hands and splash his face with it. A girl would pour water on the underside of the forearm, and a boy on the back of the forearm. A girl would pour water with a pouring motion, while a boy would let the water flow down his forearm with a flowing motion. By this means he distinguished between them.

Then Solomon gave back all the gifts, and said: "*Is it wealth that you would give me? That which God has bestowed on me is better than all the riches He has given you. Yet you glory in your gift,*" (27:36) because you are a vainglorious people, trying to outdo each other in things of this world, for you do not know anything else. The world is not what I need, for God has given me power over it, and has given me what He has not given to any of the creatures therein; and besides, God has favored me with prophethood and wisdom. Then

he said to al-Mundhir b. 'Amr, the leader of the party: "*Return unto them*" the gifts; "*we will march against them with forces they cannot oppose, and drive them from their land humbled and abased*" (27:37)—if they do not come to me surrendering.

The story goes that when the envoys of Bilqīs returned to her from Solomon and reported to her, she said: "By God, this is no mere king, we have no power against him." So she sent to Solomon, saying: "I am advancing toward you with the kings of my nation, to see what you are commanding and what there is in your religion that you are calling us to accept."

Then Bilqīs ordered her throne to be placed in the innermost of seven rooms, arranged one within another, in the most remote of her castles. She closed the doors behind it, and set guards over it to keep it safe. She said to the one to whom she had delegated her authority: "Keep my royal throne secure, and do not trust it to anyone or let anyone see it until I return." Then she ordered a crier to inform the people of her kingdom about the expedition. She went to Solomon accompanied by twelve thousand chiefs of the Yemen, under each of whom were a hundred thousand warriors.

Ibn 'Abbās said: Solomon was an awe-inspiring man. He did not undertake a thing until he had inquired about it himself. One day he went out and sat on his royal throne, and saw a cloud of dust not far off. He said: "What is that?" They said: "Bilqīs, O Apostle of God." He said: "And has she alighted near us?" They said: "Yes."

Ibn 'Abbās said that [the location] was between al-Kūfah and al-Hīrah, about a *parasang* distant.

Solomon then came to his troops and said: "*Which of you will bring to me her throne, before they come to me surrendering?*" (27:38) The scholars have disagreed as to the reason why Solomon ordered the throne to be brought. Most of them have said that it was because Solomon knew that when she surrendered, her property would be unlawful for him, and he wished to seize her throne before it was thus forbidden to him to take it because of her surrender.

Qatādah said: It was because its description amazed him when the hoopoe described it to him, so he wanted to see it before he saw her. It is said that he wanted to show her the omnipotence of God and the greatness of His power by a miracle through which her throne would be brought to him.

An *ifrit* of the *jinn*—he was the rebellious, the strong one—said: "*I will bring it to you before you rise from your seat*" (27:39)—that is, from the assembly in which you pass judgment. Ibn 'Abbās said: [Solomon]

held an assembly each morning in which he passed judgment until midday.

(They differed about the [*ʿifrīʿs*] name. Wahb said it was Kūdā, whereas Shuʿayb said it was Kudhān—“*I am strong enough for that*”—namely, strong enough to carry it—“*and faithful*” (27:39)—regarding the jewels that are in it.) But Solomon said: “I want it more quickly than that.”

“*One who had knowledge of the Book said: [I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye.]*” (27:40) They differ about him, one saying it was Gabriel, while others said that it was one of the angels through whom God confirmed this prophet. Others said: “Nay, it was a man, a human.” Then they differed about who he was. Most of the commentators said that he was Ḥṣaf b. Barakhiyā b. Shamʿīyā b. Malakiyā. He was a pious man and knew the Mighty Name of God, the name to which God would respond if called by it, and would provide if requested by it.

Ibn Maymūnah told us, through his chain of transmission from Ibn ʿAbbās: Ḥṣaf said to Solomon, when he had prayed and called upon God: “Look as far as you can see.” Solomon extended his gaze and looked toward the Yemen. And God sent the angels, and they carried the throne under the Earth, burrowing through the ground with it, and placed it before Solomon.

Scholars have differed about the prayer that Ḥṣaf b. Barakhiyā prayed regarding the bringing of the throne. It is related from ʿĀʾishah and her father, that the Mighty Name upon which Ḥṣaf called was “Ever-living, Eternal!” It is related from al-Zuhrī, who said: The prayer of whoever has knowledge from the Book is: “Our God and God of all things! One God, there is no god but You. Bring me the Throne.” Mujāhid said: “Possessor of Glory and Honor!”

Ibn Maymūnah related to us with his chain of transmission from Zayd b. Aslam, the *mawlā*<sup>23</sup> of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who said: “*But he who was deeply versed in the Book*” (27:40) was a pious man. He dwelt on an island in the sea, and one day he went forth to observe those who dwell on the mainland—whether they worshipped God or not. He came upon Solomon, who was praying, invoking one of the

<sup>23</sup> *Mawlā*, the name given to non-Arab “clients” of Muslim patrons, especially in the early days after the conquest. Word had various meanings in different periods. See *EI*<sup>2</sup> VI:874–82.

names of God, and behold, the throne was being carried [to him]. It was brought to Solomon *"in the twinkling of an eye"* (27:40)

With his chain of transmission from Mujāhid—Suhayl b. Ḥarb—Ibn 'Alī Baradah claimed that the name of the one "who was deeply versed in *the Book*" was Aṣṭūm. Qatādah said his name was Mulayḥā. Muḥammad b. al-Munkadir said: It was Solomon whom God endowed with knowledge and understanding. A learned man of the Israelites said to [Solomon]: *"I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye,"* (27:40) so Solomon said: "Bring it!" He responded: "You are the prophet son of the prophet, and there is no one more honored than you before God. If you prayed to God and asked it of him, you would have it." He said: "You are right." He did that and the throne was brought immediately.

When Solomon saw the throne come to rest before him, carried from Ma'rib to him in Syria in the twinkling of an eye, which is a very short time, he said: *"This is a favor from my Lord with which He would test me, whether I give thanks or am ungrateful. He that gives thanks, gives thanks only for himself"* (27:40)—that is to say, no one but himself profits by it, since his gratitude is deemed necessary for the perfection of grace and its duration; because gratitude holds secure the grace which is already here, and brings additional grace not already possessed. *"Whoever is ungrateful (hurts only himself) for God is not in need"*—of his thanks—[He] *"is bountiful"* (27:40)—with gifts to the one who is not grateful for His favor.

And Solomon said: *"Let her throne be altered"*—that is to say, make parts of it larger and parts smaller, make its highest point its lowest, and its lowest part its highest—*"that we may see whether she is rightly guided"*—to her throne and recognize it—*"or not guided at all"* (27:41)—and not led to it.

The only thing that induced Solomon to do that was what Wāḥb b. Munabbih, Muḥammad b. Ka'b, and other sages have said, that the devils feared that Solomon would marry her and beget a son by her, and that then the secrets of the *jinn* would be divulged to [the son], and thus they would not be released from servitude to Solomon and his descendants after him. So they wished to make him shun her, and give her an evil reputation. They had therefore said to him: "There is out of her mind; furthermore, her feet are like the hooves of an ass." So Solomon sought to test her intelligence by changing the appearance of her throne, and to look at her feet by the ruse of the pavilion.



When Bilqīs came, “*She was asked: ‘Is your throne like this?’*” And she replied: “*It looks as though it were the same,*” (27:42) and she compared that one with hers, though she had left it behind her in a room behind seven locked doors, and had the keys with her. She did not affirm it, nor did she deny it. So Solomon saw how perfect her intelligence was.

Al-Ḥusayn b. al-Faḍl said: They were noncommittal with her, and she was noncommittal with them and answered them according to their questions. If they had said to her: “Is this your throne?” she would have said: “Yes.”

Solomon said: “*Before her*”—that is, before her coming—“*we were endowed with knowledge,*”—about testing her and her coming obediently—“*and before her we surrendered*”—obediently, submissive—“*to God.*” (27:42) This is what Mujāhid and others have said. Someone else said that this was what Bilqīs said when she saw her throne in Solomon’s possession: “We already knew this and were brought knowledge of the truth of Solomon’s prophethood in verses that precede this one—namely, before this verse—and we surrendered—namely, following you, obeying your order even before we came to you.”

When she came to Solomon it was also said to her: “*Enter the pavilion.*” (27:44) That was because Solomon, when Bilqīs drew near, had issued orders to the devils, and they had built for him a palatial pavilion of glass, clear as water, and had made water flow beneath it, and had placed fish in the water. Then he placed his throne above it, and sat upon it, and the birds, the *jinn*, and the human beings crowded around him. He had ordered this pavilion to be built only because the devils had said to one another: “God has given Solomon certain things in servitude, and should Solomon marry Bilqīs the queen of Sheba, and she give birth to a boy, then we will never be set free from slavery and servitude.” So they wanted to make her loathsome to him, and said: “Her foot is an ass’s foot, and she has hairy legs, because her mother was a *jinnī*.” Solomon wanted to know the truth, and to see her feet and her legs—so he built the pavilion.

Wahb b. Munabbih said: He built the pavilion only to test her intelligence and understanding, to weary her thereby as she had done to him by sending the menservants and maidservants and making him distinguish male from female. When Bilqīs came, she was told: “*Enter the pavilion.*” (ibid.) When she saw it, she thought it was a deep sea—a large body of water—so she uncovered her legs to wade

through it to Solomon. And Solomon looked, and lo, she had the most beautiful legs and feet, except that her legs were hairy. When Solomon saw that, he turned his eyes away, and called out to her that it was only a pavilion paved with glass—and not water.

When she had sat down, she said to him: “Solomon, I wish to ask you about something.” He said: “Ask.” She said: “I ask you, what is water which is not from the earth and not from the sky?” Now Solomon, when something came up which he did not know about, would ask human beings about it to see if they had that knowledge; if not, he would ask the *jinn* if they knew; and if not, he asked the devils. So he asked the devils about that, and they said: “How easy that is! Order horses to run; then fill containers with their sweat.” So Solomon said to her: “The sweat of horses.” She said: “You have spoken the truth.”

Then she said: “Tell me about how your Lord exists.” At that Solomon leapt up from his throne and fell down in worship, and [suddenly] it began to thunder. His troops ran and scattered, and the angel Gabriel came to him and said to him: “Solomon, your Lord says to you: ‘What ails you?’” Solomon said: “Gabriel, my Lord knows best what she has said.” Gabriel said: “However your Lord commands you to return to your throne, and to send for her and for whoever is present with her of your army and hers, and to ask her and them what she asked you.” So Solomon did it; and when they had come in to him and settled themselves, he said to her: “What did you ask me about?” She said: “About water which is neither from the earth nor from the sky; and you answered.” He said: “And what else did you ask me about?” She said: “I did not ask you about anything else.” He asked the troops, and they made the same reply. God had made them forget it, and he made the one answer sufficient for Solomon.

Then Solomon called her to accept Islam. She had seen what had transpired with the hoopoe, with the envoys, the throne, and with the pavilion. So she responded and said: “*My Lord! I have sinned against myself by disbelief. Now I submit with Solomon to God, the Lord of the Universe.*” (27:44)

The scholars have disagreed as to what happened to her after she became a Muslim. Most of them have said that when she became a Muslim Solomon wished to marry her, but that when he considered it, he was repelled by the abundance of hair on her legs, and said: “How ugly that is!” So he asked the human beings about something

to remove it, and they said: "The razor." But the woman said: "Iron has never touched me." So Solomon rejected using the razor and said: "It would cut her leg." Then he asked the *jinn*, and they said: "We do not know." He asked the devils, and they lied to him and said: "We do not know." However, when he pressed them, they said: "We shall change it for you so that [her legs] shall be like white silver." Then they prepared for her a depilatory paste and a bath. Ibn 'Abbās has said that that was the first day when depilatory paste was seen. Then Solomon married her.

Ibn Maymūnah informed me with his chain of transmission from Abū Mūsā, reaching back to the Prophet, who said: The first one to use a bath-house was Solomon, and when his back clung to the wall, he would say: "Shelter it from God's punishment."

They say that when he married her, Solomon loved her deeply, and reestablished her in her realm. He issued orders to the *jinn*, and they built three fortresses for her in the land of the Yemen, the like of which for loftiness and beauty people had never seen. They were Silhīn, Ghumdān, and Banyūn. Then Solomon would visit her once every month, after he had returned her to her kingdom, and would stay with her for three days. He traveled early in the morning from Syria to the Yemen, and from the Yemen to Syria.

Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq related from certain scholars from Wahb b. Munabbih: Solomon said to Bilqīs, when she had become a Muslim and completed [her conversion]: "Choose a man from among your people and marry him." She said: "Can someone like me marry a man, O Prophet of God, when I have had such rule over my realm and my people?" He replied: "Yes! There cannot be other than that in Islam. It is not proper for you to forbid what God has permitted." She said: "Then, if it is necessary, marry me to Tubba' the great, king of Hamadān." So he married her to him. Then he returned her to the Yemen and gave her husband Dhū Tubba' rule over the Yemen. Solomon called on Zūba'ah, prince of the *jinn* of the Yemen, and said: "Do for Dhū Tubba' all that for which he seeks to employ you." [The scholars] report that he built for Dhū Tubba' the workshops in the Yemen. Dhū Tubba' continued to rule, doing whatever he wished, until Solomon died.

Some say that when matters changed and the news of the death of Solomon reached the *jinn*, one of them went forth and traveled through the Tihāmah until, when he reached the middle of the

Yemen, he called out at the top of his voice: "Company of *jinn*! Solomon has died, so quit working."

They say that the demons betook themselves to two huge stones upon which they wrote an inscription in *musnad*, that is to say, Himyarite characters: "We built Silhīn and Abniyīn, we built Ṣarwāḥ and Marwāḥ and Fanqūn, Hundah, Hunaydah, and Dalūm." These were the fortresses that were in the Yemen which the devils had built for Dhū Tubba<sup>6</sup>; were it not for the one who called out in the Tihāmāh, they would not have quit. So the rule of Dhū Tubba<sup>6</sup> and of Bilqīs terminated with the rule of Solomon. And God is All-knowing.<sup>24</sup>

AN ACCOUNT OF THE RAID CONDUCTED BY SOLOMON AGAINST  
THE FATHER OF HIS WIFE AL-JARĀDAH; AND OF THE DEVIL  
WHO TOOK HIS SEAL FROM HIS HAND; AND THE  
REASON FOR THE TERMINATION OF HIS RULE

God has said: "(We) placed a body upon his throne. Then did he repent." (38:35) Muḥammad b. Ishāq related from certain scholars: Solomon was once told that on an island in the sea there reigned a man named Ṣaydūn, a king of great importance, to whom people had no means of access because of his isolated location. But to Solomon God had given such power in his rule that nothing on land or sea was inaccessible. Now Solomon departed for that kingdom, the wind carrying him upon its back until he and his troops of *jinnī* and people alighted there. He killed the king and completely plundered his realm. Among other things he took captive the king's daughter, called Jarādah, whose like in beauty and loveliness he had never seen. So he picked her out for himself, and called her to accept Islam. But she became a Muslim through him only outwardly, out of fear of him and with little confidence in him. He loved her deeply, such as he loved none of his other wives, and her status with him was great; but in spite of this her grief did not depart, nor did her tears cease to flow.

That was painful for Solomon, so he said: "Woe to you! What is this grief that does not depart, and these tears that do not cease?"

<sup>24</sup> See also Tottoli, *Storie*, pp. 147-48.

She said: "I remember my father, and I remember his kingdom and his authority and his rule, and this is what grieves me." Solomon said: "God has given you in exchange a kingdom which is greater than his, and God has guided you to Islam—this is better for you than all that." She said: "Indeed that is so, but nevertheless, when I remember him, the grief that you see comes upon me. Now if you commanded the demons to shape for me an image of my father in the house where I dwell, that I may look upon it morning and evening, I believe that this grief of mine would go away, and that the image would divert my mind from some of my inner troubles."

So Solomon commanded the demons to reproduce for her the image of her father in her house; they made it so like him that it seemed that she looked her father himself in the eye—except that there was no spirit in him. After they had made it, she attended to it and clothed it—clad it in a shirt, put a turban on it, and dressed it with the garments that he used to wear. Then, when Solomon had gone out of the house, she would come to it early in the morning accompanied by her slave girls, and bow down to it, and they would bow down to it with her, just as she had done to him during his reign. She went to it every evening, doing the same thing, and Solomon knew nothing about it for forty days.

Then Āṣaf b. Barakhiyā heard about it. He was a trusted friend, and was not turned away from Solomon's door at any hour. Whenever he wished to enter the house, he entered, whether Solomon was present or not. So he came to him and said: "Prophet of God, I have grown old, and my bones have become frail, and my life has been fulfilled, and the time has come for me to go. I wish to remain a while before death, to call to mind those prophets of God who have passed away, and to praise them with my knowledge of them, and to inform the people of some of the things about them of which they are ignorant." Solomon said: "Do so." He assembled the people and Āṣaf stood up among them as a preacher. He mentioned those prophets of God who had passed away, and praised every prophet for what he had been, and mentioned the things with which God had favored them, until he came to Solomon. Then he said to him: "How wise you were when you were young, and how goodly you were when you were young, and how virtuous you were when you were young, and how judicious you were when you were young, and how far you were from everything that is hateful!" Then he went away, and Solomon pondered it until he was full of rage.

When Solomon had entered his house, he sent for him, and when he came to him he said: "Āṣaf, you mentioned those prophets of God who have passed away, and you praised them well through all their lifetimes and in every circumstance. But when you mentioned me, you praised me for my virtue when I was young, and were silent about those of my affairs that have been equally praiseworthy in my old age. Now, what have I done in the latter part of my life?"

Āṣaf said to him: "Someone other than God has been worshipped in your house for forty days, because of the whim of a woman." Solomon said: "In my house!" Āṣaf said: "Yes, in your house." Solomon said: "Verily we belong to God, and to Him we are returning! You certainly know what you say. You have not told anything except what you have learned." Then Solomon returned to his house, and broke up that idol, and punished the woman and her slave-girls.

Then he ordered that garments of purification be brought, and they were conveyed to him—these were garments which none but virgins spin, and which a menstruating woman does not touch. He put them on, and then went out by himself to one of the earth's desolate regions, and he ordered some ashes be brought, and to be spread out. Then he approached God penitently, sitting in those ashes and rolling about in them with his garments, abasing himself before God and beseeching Him, weeping and begging forgiveness for what had been in his house, and saying, among other things, "Lord, it was not fitting for the family of David to worship other than You, or to establish in their houses and their households worship other than for You." He continued in this way until evening came. Then he returned to his house.

He had a slave-girl called Amīnah. When he entered his privy, or wished to answer a call of nature, or wished to have relations with one of his women, he placed his seal in her keeping until he was purified, for he did not touch his seal unless he was pure. It was a green emerald that the angel Gabriel had brought to him. Inscribed upon it was "There is no god but God; Muḥammad is the prophet of God! God be gracious unto him and give him peace!" His sovereignty was in this signet ring.

One day he left it with her, as he used to leave it on entering his privy. But the demon who was master of the sea came to her in the likeness of Solomon. His name was Ṣakhr. She thought that

he was Solomon, for she could not deny him a single one of Solomon's characteristics. He said: "Amīnah—my signet-ring." She handed it to him, and he placed it on his hand. Then he went out and sat on Solomon's throne, and the birds, the *jinn*, the human beings, and the devils flocked around him.

Solomon came out and came to Amīnah. Everything about him that everyone who had seen him before had become different. He said: "Amīnah—my signet-ring." She said: "Who are you?" He said: "Solomon the son of David." She said: "You lie. You are not Solomon, for Solomon has come out and taken his signet; and there he is, sitting on his royal throne." Then he knew that his sins had caught up with him.

Solomon went out and stood before the houses of the Children of Israel, and said: "I am Solomon the son of David." But they poured dust upon him, and abused him, and said: "Look at this madman! And what does he assert? He says that he is Solomon!"

When Solomon saw that, he departed, making his way to the sea. He set about to carry fish for seafaring men from the sea to the market, and he would carry two fish every day. When evening came, he traded one of the fish for some loaves, and broiled the other, and ate it. He went on in this way for forty days, the number of days in which that idol had been worshipped in his house.

But Āṣaf b. Barakhiyā and the learned men of the Children of Israel found fault with the rule of the enemy of God, the demon, in those forty days. Āṣaf said: "Assembled Children of Israel! Have you seen the irregularities in Solomon's administration that I have seen?" They said: "Yes." He said: "Grant me a delay, so that I may go in to his women and ask them if they have found such fault with him in his private affairs as we have found in his general, public affairs, or such notorious conduct." Then he went in to Solomon's women and said: "Woe to you! Have you found such fault in the affairs of Solomon son of David as we have found?" They said: "Worse. He does not leave any of us woman alone when we are menstruating, and he does not wash himself of sexual pollution." Then Āṣaf said: "Verily we belong to God, and to him we are returning! This is indeed the clear proof." Then he went out to the Children of Israel and said: "What is going on in private is more infamous than what is in public."

When forty days had passed, the demon left his seat. Then he went into the sea, and threw the signet ring into it; and a fish swal-

lowed it, and one of the fishermen caught the fish. Solomon had worked for him at the beginning of that day until, when it was supertime, he gave him his two fish. One of them was the fish that had swallowed the signet ring. Solomon carried off his fish, and exchanged for loaves of bread the one that did not have the signet in its belly. Then he took the other fish and slit it open to broil it, and found his signet inside it. He took the signet and placed it on his hand, and fell down worshipping. Then the birds, the *jinn*, the human beings, and the demons flocked around him; and he approached the people, and let them know that what had come upon him was because of the worship of the idol he had caused in his house. He then returned to his sovereignty and showed contrition for his sin.

Then he commanded the demons and said: "Bring me Şakhr the Rebellious." So the demons brought him, and Solomon hewed out a rock and placed him within it. Then he sealed him with another rock and bound it with iron and lead. Then he gave the command, and he was cast into the sea. This is the account of Wahb b. Munabbih.

Al-Suddī said regarding this: Solomon had one hundred wives, and one of them, called Jarādah, was most favored by him and the most trusted. When he wished to tend to his needs and enter the privy he would take off his signet ring, and he would not entrust it to anyone but her. One day she came and said to him: "My brother has a dispute with someone and I should like you to support his claim when he comes to you." He said: "Yes." But he did not do so, and thus he was tested [by God] for his having said so. He gave her his signet ring and entered the privy. The demon came out in the image of Solomon and said to her: "Give me the signet!" She gave it to him and he went out and sat in Solomon's seat. Solomon came out afterwards and asked her to give him his signet, and she said to him: "Didn't you take it?" He said: "No."

He went forth repentant from his palace, while the demon remained for forty days, passing judgment on the people. The people disliked his judgments, and the leaders and sages of the Children of Israel gathered and went to the wives of Solomon. They mentioned to them that of which they disapproved, and the woman said: "We, too, disapprove of that. If he is Solomon, then his sense has departed and he is judging badly. We cannot tolerate it any longer." Then the women wept.



[These scholars] say that all of them then went to him; they surrounded him and sat down. Then they rolled out the Torah and read it. When they read the Torah, he flew away from them until he came to the sea. The signet ring fell from him into the sea and a fish swallowed it. It is said that Solomon came in that situation he was in until he reached one of the fishermen. He was hungry, and when his hunger became intense, he asked them for food from their catch, saying: "I am Solomon son of David." One of them arose and struck him with his staff, and his blood flowed while he was on the seashore. The fishermen reproached their companion who had struck him, saying: "How shamefully you behaved when you struck him!" He replied: "But he claimed that he was Solomon son of David." So they brought him two fish from the one who had struck him, even though the pain of that blow did not concern him. Then he stood at the sea's edge, slit the bellies of both fish, and began to wash them when he found his signet ring in the belly of one of them. He took it and wore it, and God restored his rule and his glory to him. The birds came, hovering about him, whereby the people recognized him and came to him, asking pardon from him for what they had done.

He said: "I shall not punish you for your enmity, nor shall I blame you for what happened. What happened had to happen." Then he went till he came to his realm, and he commanded that they bring the demon that had taken his signet ring. They brought him and placed him in an iron container, which they proceeded to cover, locking it with a lock and sealing it with his signet. They threw him into the sea, and he is there in that condition until this very time.

In certain accounts they say that when Solomon became infatuated, the signet—within which was his sovereignty—would fall from his hand. Solomon would take it and put it back on himself, but it would fall again from his hand. When Solomon saw that it would not remain on his hand, he was certain of temptation. Āṣaf said to Solomon: "You are tempted by your sin and the signet ring cannot remain firm for fourteen days. So flee in repentance from your sin and I will remain in your place. I will behave in your way of acting, and the people of your households will do so too, until God forgives you and returns you to rule." So Solomon ran off, fleeing to his Lord, while Āṣaf took the signet ring and placed it on his hand, and it stayed there.

As for the body about which God said: "[We] placed a body upon

*his throne, then did he repent,*" (38:35) that was Āṣaf, the scribe of Solomon who was the one "*who was deeply versed in the Book.*" (27:40) He placed Āṣaf in charge of Solomon's rule and his domain, carrying on his practice, performing his deeds for fourteen days, until Solomon returned to his place, repentant to his God, and then God returned his rule to him. He raised Āṣaf from his seat and placed Solomon on his throne, returning his signet ring to his hand where it remained.

They say that the reason for that is what Shu'ayb b. Muḥammad al-'Ajli related to us with his chain of transmission from Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab: Solomon son of David was concealed from the people for three days, and God inspired him (saying): "Solomon, you have been concealed from my servants for three days, not concerning yourself with their affairs, not seeking justice for the oppressed from his oppressor." Then (Shu'ayb) mentioned the story of the signet-ring and the demon's taking it as we have related it, at the end of which he said: 'Alī said: "I mentioned that to al-Ḥasan and he said: 'God would never impose on [Solomon's] wives—God forbid that he should ever impose the Devil on the wives of His prophets in practice—how could anyone believe that? For God has declared His prophets free of anything like such ugliness.' And these words are the truest and most fitting words regarding the prophets of God, and the truest to piety."

A certain commentator said: The reason for Solomon's testing was that he was commanded not to marry any woman except from among the Children of Israel, but he married a woman from another people and was punished for that. They say that when Solomon took captive the daughter of king Ṣaydūn, he was delighted with her and proposed that she accept Islam. She refused, so Solomon intimidated her, and she said to him: "If you force me into Islam, I shall kill myself." Solomon feared that she would kill herself, so he married her as an unbeliever. She worshipped a sapphire idol of hers for forty days all the while fearing Solomon, until she [finally] accepted Islam. Therefore Solomon was punished by the cessation of his rule for forty days.

Al-Sha'bī said, regarding the cause of the cessation of his rule, that Solomon begot a son and the devils assembled. One of them said to another: "If a son of his lives, we will never be released from the trials and sorcery to which we are subject. Our only way is to slay his son or rob him of his senses." Solomon heard of this and

commanded the clouds to take his son and for the winds to carry him, so his son was nourished in the cloud and was safe from the devils' harm. God censured Solomon for his fear of the devils, and the boy died. Then God cast him down on his throne, so he was the body about which God told us in His words: *"placed a body upon his throne, then did he repent."* (38:35) And God is All-knowing.

#### A CHAPTER ABOUT THE DEATH OF SOLOMON

God has said: *"And when We had decreed his death, [they did not know that he was dead until they saw a worm eating away his staff. And when the corpse fell down, the jinn realized that had they had knowledge of the unknown, they would not have remained in shameful bondage]."* (34:14) Historians have said that Solomon continued to rule after God restored him to power, the *jinn* and devils making for him whatever he wished in the way of private apartments, statues, bowls the size of wells, stable cooking pots, and other things. He would punish by means of the devils whomever he wished, and release whomever he wished. He ordered [the devils] to lift heavy stones and carry them wherever he wished.

They say that Iblīs adorned himself for them while they were worn out from work. He said: "How are you?" They replied: "We cannot bear the state in which we find ourselves." Iblīs said: "You go carrying stones and return empty-handed, carrying nothing?" They said: "Yes." He replied: "Then you are resting." They say that the wind carried this to Solomon, so he commanded that they carry both going and returning. Then Iblīs came to them and said: "How are you?" They complained to him and informed him that they were now carrying both going and returning, so Iblīs said to them: "Do you sleep at night?" They replied: "Yes." So he said: "Then you are resting." They say that the wind carried this to Solomon, and he commanded them to work by night and by day. Iblīs adorned himself for them and they complained to him that they were working night and day and that they were worn out with toil, and he said: "How are you?" They replied: "We cannot bear the state in which we find ourselves." So Iblīs said to them: "Whatever he wishes, he does?" They said: "Yes." He said: "Then expect relief, for the matter has reached its end." Not long thereafter Solomon died.

Ibn 'Abbās and others have said that Solomon was concealed in

the Temple either for one year, two years, for one month or two months, less than that and more. He had brought his food and drink into it and he entered it at the time of his death. The beginning of this matter was that there was not a day that he awoke there but that a tree would sprout. Solomon would ask it: "What is your name?" The tree would reply: "My name is such-and-such." Then he would say: "For what purpose are you?" It would respond: "For such-and-such," and [Solomon] would order it cut down. But if it had sprouted to be planted, then he would write an order for it to be planted in such-and-such a place, and if it was for medicinal purposes, he would write such-and-such about it. While he was praying one day, he saw a tree sprouting in front of him, and he said to it: "What is your name?" It replied: "Carob."<sup>25</sup> He said: "And for what purpose have you sprouted?" It replied: "For the destruction of this place of worship." Solomon son of David said: "God would not destroy it while I am alive. You are the one concerning my death and the destruction of the Temple." He removed it and planted it within a wall. Then he said: "O my God! Spread among the *jinn* word of my death, so that humans will learn that the *jinn* do not know what is hidden." (Now the *jinn* used to inform humans that they knew things that were hidden, and that they knew what would happen the next day). Then Solomon entered his private apartment and stood praying, leaning on his staff, and he died. He remained in this state, but none of the devils knew anything of this. Meanwhile, they [continued] working, afraid that he would come out and punish them.

‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd said: Solomon said to the Angel of Death: "When you have been commanded concerning me, let me know." ‘Abd al-Raḥmān] said that [the Angel of Death] came to [Solomon] and said: O Solomon! I have been commanded about you; only a little time is left to you." So Solomon called the devils and they built him a lofty structure made of glass vessels which had no door. He stood praying, leaning on his staff, and the Angel of Death entered and seized his spirit while he was leaning on his staff.

In other accounts we are told that Solomon said one day to his friends: "God the Exalted has given me such sovereignty as you see,

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<sup>25</sup> The Arabic word may have two connotations: *kharṛūb* is the carob bean, while *kharāb* is ruin, desolation. Here it may be used as a play on words, given the situation.

and during my whole reign I have not passed one day free of trouble. I have always wished to have one day completely clear until nightfall, a day when I shall feel no distress. Let that day be tomorrow." So when the morrow came, he entered one of his palaces, and ordered its doors to be locked, and forbade the people to come in to him, and forbade the bringing of news, lest he should hear something that should grieve him. Then he took his staff and placed it above his waist and leaned upon it, looking at his slaves.

Suddenly he stood face to face with a youth of beautiful countenance, cloaked in white garments, who had come up to him from a side of the palace. The youth said: "Peace be upon you, Solomon!" And Solomon said: "Upon you, Peace! How have you been introduced into this palace without my permission; I have forbidden anyone to enter it. Did not the doorkeeper and the chamberlains stop you? Did you not dread me when you entered my palace without my permission?" But the youth said: "I am one whom no chamberlain keeps from entering, and whom no doorkeeper turns away; I do not fear kings or accept bribes from them, and I certainly did not enter this palace without permission." Solomon said to him: "Then who gave you permission to enter it?" The youth said to him: "My Lord." They say that Solomon trembled and realized that this was the Angel of Death. So he said to him: "You are the Angel of Death." He said: "Yes." Solomon said: "And why have you come?" The youth said: "To snatch away your spirit." Solomon said: "O angel of death, this is a day which I wished to be cloudless for me, on which I would hear nothing to grieve me." But the angel said: "Solomon, you indeed desired a day in which your life would be cloudless, so that nothing in it would grieve you. That day was not created in this world, so be satisfied with your Lord's decree, for indeed it is His command." Solomon said: "Then snatch [me] away, as you have been commanded." So while he was leaning on his staff, the angel of death snatched away his spirit.

They say that the devils used to gather around Solomon, and around his private apartment and prayer-room wherever he was. The apartment had two doors—a door in front of him and a door behind him. One of the devils said to his companion: "If you are steadfast, enter the door which is before him, and come out through the door which is behind him." So that other one went in. Now no devil used to look at Solomon in the apartment without being burnt up, but that devil passed through and did not even hear his voice.

Then he returned and heard nothing, and he stood in the room and was not burnt up. So he looked at Solomon . . . and Solomon had fallen down dead. Then the devil came out and told the people that Solomon had died. So they opened the doors where he was, and brought him out, and they found that the woodworm had eaten his staff. They did not know how long he had been dead, so they placed the woodworm on the staff, and it ate from it for a day and a night. They reckoned from that rate, and found that he had died a year before. They had been working before him while looking at him, thinking that he was alive, not finding anything wrong in his refraining from going out to the people because of the length of his prayers before that.

In the account of Ibn Mas'ūd we find that after his death they continued approaching him for a full year. Therefore people claim that certain of the devils were lying in their claim to know hidden things; for if they had known of hidden things, they would have known of the death of Solomon, and would not have stayed in crushing toil and pain for a year, working for him.

Then the devils said to the woodworm: "If you ate food, we would certainly bring you the choicest; and if you drank beverages, we would certainly give you the most delicious. But we will bring you water and clay in gratitude to you, and that which is in the inside of wood." So that is what the devils bring the woodworm, and the devils rely on them. For that is the word of God: *And when We decreed his death, they did not know that he was dead until they saw a worm eating away his staff. [And when his corpse fell down, the jinn realized that had they had knowledge of the unknown, they would not have remained in shameful bondage].* (34:14)

Historians say that Solomon lived for fifty-three years, of which the period of his reign was forty years; that is because he became king when he was thirteen years old. He began building the Temple after four years of his reign had elapsed.

After Solomon, a son of his named Rehoboam reigned, Solomon having appointed him his successor. God communicated with him and he became a prophet, but not a messenger. Then he was snatched away in the seventeenth year of his reign.

Then, after him, his son, Abijah b. Rehoboam, ruled over them, and his reign lasted sixty-three years.

Then his son, Asa b. Abijah, reigned after him, [he was] a pious man, lame, afflicted by the sweat of women. The kings coveted his

domain because of his weakness. The Israelite kings became divided and one of the kings of India, called Rūḥ al-Hindī, attacked them with a numerous band and a large tribe, but God sent angels against them who attacked them. They made for the sea, but when all of them had set sail, God sent winds and waves, and their ships struck one another and broke apart. Rūḥ al-Hindī and those who were with him drowned. The waves crashed, throwing their loads, wealth, and spoils to where the Children of Israel were. It was proclaimed: "Take what God has given you as spoils, and be among those thankful to Him."

Then the kings continued attacking them, one after another, the kings of Iraq and others, but God destroyed them until wrongdoing and corruption appeared among the Israelites and rebelliousness spread so that some of the Israelite kings worshipped idols instead of God. God became angry with them for their unbelief and apostasy and gave rule over them to Nebuchadnezzar.

## ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, DANIEL, AND EZRA

### A SESSION ABOUT THE STORY OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR AND ALL CONNECTED THERETO, AND ACCOUNTS OF ISAIAH, JEREMIAH, DANIEL, AND EZRA

God has said: *And We declared to the Children of Israel in the Scripture: [“Twice you shall commit evil in the land. You shall become great transgressors.” And when the prophecy of your first transgression came to be fulfilled, We sent against you a formidable army which ravaged your land and carried out the punishment with which you had been threatened.<sup>1</sup> Then We granted you victory over them and multiplied your riches and your descendants, so that once again you became a numerous people. We said, “If you do good, it shall be to your own advantage; but if you do evil, you shall sin against your own souls.” And when the prophecy of your second transgression came to be fulfilled, We sent another army to afflict you and to enter the Temple as the former entered it before, utterly destroying all that they laid their hands on.<sup>2</sup> We said: “God may yet be merciful to you. If you again transgress, you shall again be scourged.] We have appointed Hell a dungeon for the unbelievers” (17:4–8).*

#### THE STORY OF ISAIAH (SHA‘IYĀ’)

Muḥammad b. Ishāq and other scholars of biography and history have said that among the things God revealed to Moses was the account of the Children of Israel, their happenings and what they would do after him, as God has said: *“And We declared to the Children of Israel in the Scripture: “Twice you shall commit evil in the land. You shall become great transgressors” . . . to where He says “. . . a dungeon for the unbelievers”.* (ibid.) For the Children of Israel committed misdeeds and sins, which were disregarded by God out of compassion for them and kindness to them. The first of those occurrences that befell them

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<sup>1</sup> Probably meaning the Babylonian destruction of the first Temple in 586 BCE.

<sup>2</sup> Here the Romans are intended, and the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE.



because of their sins is as God related through the tongue of Moses. That is, that one of their kings would be called Hezekiah. When one of the kings ruled, God would send to him a prophet who would guide him and show him the right way, serving as a mediator between the king and God regarding what happened in their affairs. God would not reveal a scripture to him, but He would command them to rule them by the laws of the Torah and to desist from rebelliousness and what is forbidden, calling them to the obedience they had abandoned. When that king ruled, God sent Isaiah son of Amoz. That was before the sending of Zachariah, John, and Jesus. Isaiah was the one who brought good tidings to Jerusalem when it complained to him of its destruction, saying: "Rejoice! For He will bring to you one mounted on an ass<sup>3</sup> and after him the master of the camel."<sup>4</sup>

The king reigned over the Children of Israel and Jerusalem for a while, and when his rule over them came to an end, evil actions increased, while Isaiah was with him. Then God sent Sennacherib, the king of Babylon,<sup>5</sup> against them, and he and his armies encamped, with six hundred thousand banners. He approached travelling, and encamped around Jerusalem, while the king was ill with a badly ulcerated leg. Isaiah came to him and said: "King of the Children of Israel, Sennacherib, the king of Bablyon, has encamped, he and his troops with six hundred thousand banners. He approached journeying until he encamped around Jerusalem. The people are terrified by them and have scattered before them." That was distressing to the king and he said: "Prophet of God, has any revelation come to you from God about what has happened, through which you may inform us of what God will do with us and with our enemy Sennacherib and his troops?" The prophet replied: "No revelation has come." But while they were speaking, God began to inspire Isaiah: "Go to the king of the Children of Israel and command him to make his last testament, and to appoint as successor over his kingdom whomever he wishes from his family and of his stock."

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<sup>3</sup> Namely Jesus.

<sup>4</sup> Namely Muḥammad. The Biblical book of Isaiah does not contain this verse.

<sup>5</sup> Sennacherib, king of Assyria, from 705–682 BCE, besieged Jerusalem in 701. Hezekiah, who had allied himself with Egypt, sued for peace and the siege was lifted. See 2 Kings 18:13–19:36 where the end of the siege is explained as having been due to an angel of the Lord striking down the Assyrians.

Isaiah came to Hezekiah and said: "Your Lord has inspired me to command you to make your last testament and to appoint whomever you wish as successor in your rule from among your family, for you are a dead man." When Isaiah said that to Hezekiah, the latter approached God, praying, supplicating and weeping, saying in his supplication while weeping and pleading with God with sincere heart and pious thoughts: "My God, Lord of lords and God of gods, Holy and Sanctified! Compassionate, Merciful, Benevolent One! One Who is overcome by neither sleep nor slumber! Remember me by my intent and my deeds and my good administration among the Children of Israel, all of which was from You, for You are All-knowing about it. My secret (acts) and my public acts are Yours."<sup>6</sup>

Then God accepted his supplication and had mercy on him, for he was a pious servant, so God inspired Isaiah and commanded him to inform Hezekiah the king that his Lord had responded to him and had mercy on him and accepted from him, postponing his end (of life) by fifteen years, and that God had rescued him from his enemy Sennacherib, the king of Babylon, and his armies. Isaiah came to him and informed him of that. When he said that to him, his pain left him and his emaciation came to an end. Hezekiah fell down, prostrating himself to God, and said: "My God and God of my fathers! To You I bow down and You I glorify, and exalt, and magnify. You give dominion to whomever You wish and remove it from whomever You wish. You give power to whomever You wish and humble whomever You wish. Knowing the hidden and the seen, You are the First and the Last, the Visible and the Unseen. You have mercy and respond to the supplication of the destitute. You are the One Who answered my supplication and had mercy on my entreaty."

When he raised his head, God inspired Isaiah as follows: "Say to king Hezekiah: 'Command one of your servants to bring some water of figs,' and let him place it on his ulcer, and it will be healed." He did this and was cured, and the king said to Isaiah: "Ask your Lord to give us knowledge of what He is doing to this enemy of ours." So God said to Isaiah: "Tell him: I have saved you from this enemy of yours and rescued you from him. All of them will be dead in the morning except Sennacherib and five of his commanders and his

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<sup>6</sup> See the story in 2 Kings 20 and in Isaiah 38.

scribes." When they awoke in the morning, a crier came to the gate of the city calling out: "King of the Children of Israel, God has saved you from your enemy, so come forth, for Sennacherib and those with him have perished." When the king went forth he looked for Sennacherib, but he was not found among the dead. So the king sent seeking him, and the search party found him and those with him—five men of his commanders—in a cave, among whom was Nebuchadnezzar. They placed them in bonds, and then the king of the Israelites came to them. When he saw them, he fell down, prostrating himself before God from sunrise until the afternoon. Then he said: "Sennacherib, what do you think of our Lord's action concerning you, that He did not kill you with His power and His might while we and you were unaware?" Sennacherib said to him: "Reports about your Lord and his assistance to you came to me before I left my country, but I did not obey a guide to the right way, and nothing but my lack of sense cast me into distress. Had I but listened and understood, I would not have attacked you. But distress has overwhelmed me and those with me."

They say that Hezekiah said: "Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds, Who saved us from you as He wished. Our Lord did not let you and those with you live because of your respect for Him, but He let you and those with you live so that you may increase in misery in this world and punishment in the Hereafter, so that you may inform those coming after you about our Lord's action with you and those with you. Verily your blood and that of your companions is of less worth to God than the blood of a camel-tick if it were killed." Then the king of the Children of Israel ordered the commander of his army to throw bonds around their necks and to make them go circle round the Temple and Jerusalem for seventy days. He fed each of them two loaves of barley bread each day. Sennacherib said to the king of the Children of Israel: "Execution would be better than what you are doing to us, so do what you wish." The king then ordered them imprisoned for execution, but God inspired Isaiah: "Say to the king that he should send Sennacherib and his companions forth to warn those coming after them, and let them be treated generously and with forbearance until they reach their land." Isaiah informed the king of that and he did so. Sennacherib and his companions went forth to warn those coming after them until they reached Babylon. When they arrived, Sennacherib assembled the people and informed them of what God had done to his

troops. His soothsayers and magicians said to him: "Oh king! We have told you their story and the story of their prophet and God's revelations to him, but you did not obey us. They are a people against whom no one can prevail." There was in the affair of Sennacherib something that frightened them, but then God saved them from him as a reminder and a warning. Sennacherib remained for seven years after that, and then he died.

He was succeeded by his grandson, Nebuchadnezzar,<sup>7</sup> who acted as his grandfather had, decided according to his judgments, and continued for seventeen years. Then God caused the king of the Children of Israel, Hezekiah, to die, and the affairs of the Children of Israel became confused; they contended for dominion so that they slew one another. Injustice and corruption appeared in their midst. Although their prophet Isaiah was among them, they neither consulted him nor accepted what he said. When they did that, God said to Isaiah: "Arise among your people, inspire them with your tongue!"

When the prophet arose, God unleashed his tongue with inspiration and he said: "Listen, O Heaven! And O Earth, give ear! For God wishes to judge the case of the Children of Israel whom He has reared in His kindness and whom He has chosen for Himself.<sup>8</sup> He has set them apart with His favor, preferred them above His other servants, and received them with generosity, but they are like straying sheep who have no shepherd. He has sheltered their wandering ones, gathered those straying, set their broken bones, healed their sick, fattened their emaciated ones, and kept their fat ones. But when He had done all that, they became reckless and their chiefs struggled with one another and slew one another until not one bone remained whole whose break could be set. So woe unto this sinful people who do not know whether good or evil has befallen them! The she-camel remembers its birthplace and returns there repeatedly; the ass remembers the stable where it ate its fill and returns to it, while the ox remembers the pasture where it grazed and comes back to it often; but this people does not know whence good comes

<sup>7</sup> Also Nebuchadnezzar, Arabic: *Bukhtnaş(s)ar*. Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon from 604–561 BCE, besieged and took Jerusalem in 587 BCE. See 2 Kings 24, 25. He was not a son of Sennacherib, who was king of Assyria from 704–681.

<sup>8</sup> This paragraph is based somewhat loosely on Isaiah 1:2–3: "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord has spoken: 'I reared children and brought them up—and they rebelled against me! An ox knows its owner, an ass its master's crib: Israel does not know, My people takes no thought.'"

to them, though they possess intelligence and reason, being neither cattle nor asses.

Behold, I shall point out an example for them; let them listen. Say unto them: ‘What do you think of a land which was ruined and uncultivated, and remains in ruins for a long time with nothing flourishing there, though it had a wise and powerful lord. He devoted himself to building and did not want his land to be ruined. He surrounded it with a wall and erected a fortress in it, made a river flow, and planted seedlings of olives, pomegranates, dates, grapes, and all kinds of fruit. He carried this out and entrusted it to what he saw as a strong, trustworthy guardian, and he waited for it, but when it sprouted, its sprouts came out as carobs.’”<sup>9</sup>

Then they said: “Wretched is this land! We think that He should destroy its fence and its fortress, lessen the water of its river, and burn its plantings, until it becomes as it was, a ruin as before, a wasteland with no cultivation in it.”

Then God said: “Say unto them: ‘The fence is My protection, the fortress is My law, the river is My scripture, the watchman is My prophet, and they are the plants. The carobs that the plants sprouted are their hidden deeds. Verily I have decreed for them the judgment they have decided for themselves. So command them to approach Me with sacrifices of cattle and sheep, yet their flesh will not reach Me, nor will I eat of it; but let them approach Me with piety and refraining from slaying the soul I have forbidden them to slay, for their hands are dyed from that and their fingertips are covered with their blood. They build houses and places of prayer for Me and purify their interiors, yet they defile their hearts and their bodies and pollute them. What need have I of building houses, in which I shall not dwell? What need have I of the adornment of places of prayer, which I shall not enter? For I commanded that they be raised up so that I might be mentioned and praised, and that they be a place for whoever wishes to pray therein.’”<sup>10</sup>

But they say: “If God were able to bring our union together, He would have done so. And if God were able to understand our hearts,

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<sup>9</sup> Based on Isaiah 5:1-2: “My beloved had a vineyard on a fruitful hill. He broke the ground, cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines. He built a watchtower inside it, He even heaved a wine press in it; for He hoped it would yield grapes. Instead, it yielded wild grapes.”

<sup>10</sup> Loosely based on Isaiah 1:10-17.

He would have understood them.” So take up two pieces of dry wood and set them up to be as close together as possible, and say to the two pieces of wood: “God commands you to become one piece of wood!” And when he said that to them, they mingled and became one piece of wood. Then God said: “Say to them: ‘Behold! I was able to join two pieces of dry wood, so why would I not join you together if I wished? And why should I not be able to understand their hearts when I am the God who formed them?’”

They said: “We have fasted, but our fasting has not been regarded; we have prayed, but our hearts have not been enlightened; we have given alms, but our alms have not been found suitable. When we pray it is like the yearning of camels, and our weeping is like the howling of wolves, in that it is not heard nor are we answered.” God said: “Ask them what prevents Me from answering them. Am I not the most hearing of those who hear, the most seeing of those who see, the nearest of those who respond, the most merciful of those who have mercy? Is the wealth of My hand diminished? How can this be when My two hands are open wide with good—I dispense it as I wish. The keys of the treasuries are with Me; no one else can open them. Or they say that My mercy is straitened. How can this be when My mercy encompasses everything, but those who have mercy on others do so through My superfluity? Or they say that My avarice takes possession of Me. Am I not the most generous of the most generous? Am I not the Opener of all benefits? Am I not the best of those who give and the most generous of those requested? Would that this people would look at their souls with the wisdom with which I have enlightened their hearts and put them in order, and had they not purchased this world with it, they would see for certain that (their souls are) their greatest enemy. How can I regard their fasting, when they clothe it in injustice and strengthen themselves against it with forbidden food? How can I shed light on their prayer when their hearts are tyrannical, relying on those who fight Me and violating My holy places? Or how can their alms be found suitable by Me when they give alms with the possessions of others? But I shall reward their owners who have been cheated. Or how shall I answer their prayers when it is only the speech of their tongues, but their understanding of that is far away? I answer only the speech of the weak, the miserable.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Isaiah 58 for similar statements.

One of the signs of My satisfaction is satisfying the miserable—for if they had had mercy on them and drawn near to the weak and dealt justly with the oppressed and aided those extorted and fed the absent one, and had given the poor and the orphan and the widow and the miserable one their due portion, and if it should be necessary for me to speak to mankind then, I would speak to them and curb their offense. I would be the light of their eyes, and the hearing of their ears, and the understanding of their hearts. I would rebuild their supports and be the strength of their hands, and I would be their tongues except if they say when they hear My words and My message reaches them: ‘These are imitated words, and repeated stories and compositions written about sorcery and magic.’ And they will claim that if they wished they could bring a story like it, or that they are acquainted with occult knowledge in that with which the devil inspires them when they appear. But all of them will be hidden in what he says, and are kept secret, while they know that I know the hidden things of the Heavens and the Earth, and I know what they reveal and what they conceal, and that I decreed on the day I created the Heavens and the Earth a fate which I made clear to Myself, and I put a fixed term for it which must take place. If they speak truly in what they claim concerning knowledge of the occult, let them inform you when I will carry it out, and at what time it will take place. If they are indeed able to bring about what they wish, let them bring the likes of this power with which I judge. For I demonstrate it entirely with the religion, although the unbelievers find it odious. If they are able to bring about what they wish, let them bring the likes of this wisdom with which I arrange the matter of this decree if they are truth-speakers. For I have decreed, on the day on which I created the Heavens and the Earth, that I would place prophecy among the freeborn, and place royalty among the shepherds; I would give power to the humble, strength to the weak, wealth to the poor, riches to the insignificant, mines in the waterless plains, forests in the desert, fertile soil in the jungles, knowledge among the ignorant, and wisdom among the illiterate. So ask them from whom this is and who is the custodian of all this, at whose hand this was brought into being, who are the helpers of all this and its protectors?

“For I shall send forth an illiterate prophet,<sup>12</sup> not one of the blind,

<sup>12</sup> *I.e.*, Muhammad, who is known as *al-nabī al-ummī*, usually understood by

nor one of those gone astray; not one who is coarse, nor one who is uncouth; not one who is boisterous in the markets, nor one attired in obscenity, nor one who speaks indecently. I shall guide him with everything beautiful, and grant him every noble quality. I shall make the *Sakīnah* his garment, piety his mark, godliness his conscience, wisdom his intellect, truth and faithfulness his nature, forgiveness and kindness his character, justice his way, truth his law, guidance his leader, and Islam his religious community. Aḥmad<sup>13</sup> is his name. I shall give guidance through him after going astray, I shall teach through him after ignorance, through him I shall raise up after weakness, I shall make him well known after his being unknown, I shall give him many after the few, I shall give him riches after poverty, and through him I will join together after separation. I shall unite through him various hearts and different desires and separate peoples. I shall make his people the best nation I have brought forth of mankind, commanding the good and forbidding the reprehensible through My signs and My unity. They pray standing, sitting, kneeling, and bowing down, and they fight in God's way in ranks and marching. They go forth from their houses and their possessions desirous of God's pleasure. I shall inspire them with exaltation, glorification, praise, and magnification in their journeys and in their assemblies, in their sleep and in their restlessness; in their homes they will exalt, proclaim My unity, and sanctify the heads of the *ashrāf*.<sup>14</sup> In Me they will cleanse their faces and their extremities; they will gird up their garments in the middle. Their offerings are their blood, their Qur'ān is in their hearts. Monks by night and lions by day. "*Such is the bounty of God, which He bestows upon whom He will, and God is of infinite bounty.*" (57:21)"

When their prophet Isaiah finished his speech, they came after him to kill him and he fled from them. A tree met him and split itself open for him and he entered it. The devil came upon him and seized a fringe of his garment and showed it to them, so they took saws in its middle and sawed it until they cut it and cut him while he was in its midst,<sup>15</sup> and God is All-knowing.

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Muslims to mean "the illiterate prophet" who, unable to read, could not have taken his message from earlier scriptures. See p. 1, n. 3 above.

<sup>13</sup> A variant of the name Muḥammad based on the same verbal root. See p. 339 above.

<sup>14</sup> Pl. of *sharīf*, a title given to descendants of Muḥammad.

<sup>15</sup> Nothing is known of Isaiah's later life but this is in keeping with both the



THE STORY OF JEREMIAH (ARMIYĀ<sup>2</sup>)<sup>16</sup>

God appointed over the Children of Israel, after they had slain Isaiah, a man from among them named Josiah son of Amon, and God sent al-Khiḍr<sup>17</sup> to them as a prophet to guide him and bring him an account from God. The name of al-Khiḍr was Jeremiah son of Hilkiah, who was of the tribe of Aaron son of Amram. He was called al-Khiḍr only because he sat on a white fur and when he arose it shone green. God said to Jeremiah when He sent him to the Children of Israel: "Jeremiah! Before I created you, I chose you; before I formed you in the womb of your mother, I sanctified you.<sup>18</sup> Before I brought you forth from your mother's womb, I purified you; and before you could walk, I apprised you. For a grave matter have I chosen you; it is reminding your people of My kindness and informing them of their misdeeds and calling them to Me."

Jeremiah responded: "I am weak if You do not give me strength; powerless, if You do not help me." God responded: "I shall inspire you." So Jeremiah arose among them preaching, but he did not know what to say. But God inspired him instantly with a long eloquent sermon in which he made clear to them the reward of obedience and the recompense of disobedience. At the end of it he said to them that God had said: "Verily I swear by My might and My glory that if they do not cease, I shall send unrest among them from which the mild-tempered ones will become perplexed, and I shall give rule over them to a harsh tyrant whom I shall clothe with dread, and I shall remove all mercy from his heart. And a number like the long dark black night will follow him."

Then God inspired Jeremiah saying: "Verily I am going to destroy the Children of Israel with Japheth,"<sup>19</sup> and Japheth are the people

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Jewish *midrash* about his having been slain by order of Menahem, king of Judah, and the Muslim concept that the Jews killed their prophets.

<sup>16</sup> Unlike Isaiah, Jeremiah is in the *midrash* of Ginzberg, *Legends*, IV:294–326.

<sup>17</sup> Among the identifications of al-Khiḍr, Jeremiah is a persistent theme. See p. 372 above for the story of Moses and al-Khiḍr regarding this mysterious figure. The following explanation of greenness has to do with the relationship of the root *kh-d-r*, the basis of the Arabic word for "green".

<sup>18</sup> Based on Jeremiah 1:5: "Before I created you in the womb, I selected you; before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet concerning the nations."

<sup>19</sup> Possibly based on Jeremiah 1:14: "From the north shall disaster break loose upon all the inhabitants of the land!" The descendants of Noah's son Japheth are generally seen as peoples of the north, see Gen. 10:2–5.

of Babylon who are descendants of Japheth son of Noah. When Jeremiah heard that, he wept and cried out and tore his clothes and heaped ashes on his head. When God heard the entreaties of Jeremiah and his weeping, He called to him: "Is what I have revealed too unbearable for you?" He replied: "Yes, O Lord! Destroy me before I see among the Children of Israel that in which I will not rejoice." God said: "By My might and My glory! I shall not destroy anyone of the Children of Israel until the command for that is by you." Jeremiah rejoiced at that and felt better and he said: "By Him Who sent Moses with the truth! I do not desire the destruction of the Children of Israel."

Then he went to the king and informed him of that. He was a pious king and rejoiced on having received good tidings, saying: "If our Lord punishes us, it will be for numerous sins, and if He has mercy on us, it will be through His mercy." After this revelation they continued for three years only increasing their rebelliousness and going to extremes in evildoing. That was when their destruction neared, revelation lessened, and the king called on them to repent, but they would not. So God gave rule over them to Nebuchadnezzar, and he went forth with six hundred thousand banners heading for the people of Jerusalem.

When Nebuchadnezzar went forth, journeying toward the king, news of that reached the king, who said to Jeremiah: "You have claimed that God has inspired you." Jeremiah said: "Verily God does not break a promise, and I trust in Him." When the fixed time drew near and God wished to destroy them, he sent to Jeremiah an angel who appeared to him in the form of an Israelite man who said to him: "Prophet of God, I have sought your counsel about the people of my kinship. I have done good to their folk and did not cease my kindness to them, but my bestowing of increased kindness upon them only made them disdain me, so give me counsel about them." Jeremiah said to him: "Do good in what is between you and God and join them and rejoice in good tidings." So the angel departed.

Only a few days passed until he approached him in the form of that man and sat before him. Jeremiah said to him: "Perhaps their characters have not appeared to you yet?" He replied: "Prophet of God! By Him Who sent you as a prophet with the truth! I know of no kindness that any person shows to his kindred that I have not shown them and more." Jeremiah said to him: "Return to your folk

and be good to them, and ask God, Who makes His virtuous servants prosper, to make them prosper." The angel arose and stayed for a few days while Nebuchadnezzar and his armies—more numerous than locusts—had camped around Jerusalem. The Children of Israel were afraid of them and it troubled them. Their king said to Jeremiah: "Prophet of God, where is what God has promised you?" He replied: "Verily I do have trust in my Lord!"

Then the angel approached Jeremiah while he was sitting on the wall of Jerusalem, laughing and rejoicing in the help of his Lord which He had promised him, and he sat before him and said to him: "I am the one who came to you twice about the matter of my family." Jeremiah said to him: "Is it not time that they cease what they are doing?" He replied: "Prophet of God, everything that has happened to me because of them before today I have suffered patiently, but today I have seen them doing what does not please God." Jeremiah said: "What have you seen them doing?" He said: "A tremendous act displeasing to God, and I became very angry at that and came to you to inform you. I therefore ask you, by God Who has sent you with the truth as a prophet, only with what you have cursed them: that He destroy them." Jeremiah said: "King of the Heavens and the Earth! If they are doing what is true and right, let them be; but if they are displeasing to You and doing what does not please You, then destroy them."

They say that no sooner had the word completely left Jeremiah's mouth than God sent a thunderbolt from Heaven upon Jerusalem and the place of sacrifice flared up and it sank into the ground with seven of its gates. When Jeremiah saw this he cried out and wept, tore his clothing, and heaped ashes on his head, saying: "King of the Heavens and the Earth! Where is the appointed time that You had promised me?" A voice proclaimed: "What has befallen them did so only because of your legal opinion and your prayer." Then Jeremiah knew for certain that it was his legal opinion and that the one who questioned him was a messenger from his Lord. Jeremiah went forth wondering, associating with the wild animals, while Nebuchadnezzar and his troops entered Temple. Then he commanded his troops that each of them should fill his shield with earth and hurl it upon the Temple. They hurled earth upon it until they filled it up, then they departed for Babylon. He carried off with him captives from the Children of Israel, ordering that they gather up all those who were in Jerusalem. They collected all the young and the

old of the Children of Israel, and from them he selected seventy thousand youths.

When he wanted to divide up the spoils among his host, the kings who were with him said: "Oh king! You have all our spoils, so divide up amongst us these youths whom you have selected from among the Children of Israel." He did so, and each of them was allotted four lads. Among those lads were Daniel, Havanish, Azariah, and Mishael; seven thousand from the family of the house of David; eleven thousand from the tribe of Joseph son of Jacob and his brother Benjamin; eight thousand from the tribe of Issachar son of Jacob; four thousand from the tribe of Judah b. Jacob; and four thousand from the tribe of Reuben and Levi son of Jacob. What remained of the Children of Israel, Nebuchadnezzar placed in three divisions: one third he settled in Syria, one third he took as exiles, and one third he killed.

He took the vessels of the Temple to bring them to Babylon, and took the seventy thousand youths and the rest of the exiles to bring them to Babylon. This was the first blow that God visited upon the Children of Israel for their misdeeds and oppression, for that is His word: "*So when the time for the first of the two came, We roused against you Our slaves of great might*" (17:5)—meaning Nebuchadnezzar and his troops.

The beginning of the story of Nebuchadnezzar was as related by Ḥajjāj—Ibn Jurayj—Ya'ālā b. Muslim—Sa'īd b. Jubayr, who said that there was an Israelite man who read the Torah until, when he reached the words "*We roused against you Our slaves of great might,*" (17:5) he wept and his eyes overflowed and he closed the Scripture and went to the place of worship and said: "O Lord! Show me this man through whom You have given the Children of Israel to destruction." He showed in a dream that there was a miserable man in Babylon named Nebuchadnezzar who started out with money and slaves of his and became a wealthy man. He was asked: "What do you want?" He said: "I want to trade." Then he went and settled in a house in Babylon, but detested it for he was alone in it; so he began to invite the poor and treated them kindly so that when a poor man came to him he would give him something. He said: "Are there any poor left besides you?" They replied: "Yes, a poor man in the ravine of the people of so-and-so, a sick man whom they call Nebuchadnezzar." He said to his pages: "Go forth!" And he went forth with them until he reached the man and said to him: "What

is your name?" When he responded: "Nebuchadnezzar," he said to his pages: "Carry him." They did so and brought him to his place. He treated him until he became healthy, and he gave him clothing and maintenance. Then he gave permission to the Israelite to depart, whereupon Nebuchadnezzar wept.

The Israelite asked: "What makes you weep?" He replied: "I weep because of what you did for me, and I possess nothing with which I can repay you." He said: "My repayment is something insignificant." He asked: "What is it?" And he replied: "If you should become king and rule over Jerusalem, would you give me what I ask?" He began to comply with that, but he said to him; "Are you mocking me?" And the only thing that prevented him from giving him what he asked of him was the thought that he was mocking him. They say that the Israelite wept and said: "I know what prevents you from giving me what I asked of you, but God wishes to accomplish His judgment." So he wrote him a letter and time brought events to pass.

One day, Şayhūn the king of Babylon<sup>20</sup> said: "Perhaps I should send a vanguard to Syria." (His retinue) replied: "There is no harm if you were to do that." He said: "Whom do you think I should send?" They responded: "So-and-so," so he sent a man and gave him one hundred thousand. Nebuchadnezzar went out with his kitchen—he would not eat except from his own kitchen. When he came to Syria the chief of the vanguard saw that most of the people of the land were horsemen and mighty, and that distressed him, so he did not go further and did not ask them anything, while Nebuchadnezzar entered Syria and did not cease attending the gatherings of the people and asking them, saying: "What has prevented you from raiding Babylon? For if you were to raid it, you would gather a great deal from it." They said: "We are not proficient in doing battle, so we do not fight," in order that he find fault with the sessions of the people of Syria and become acquainted with their secrets. Then the vanguard returned and informed their king of what they saw. Nebuchadnezzar returned with them and said to the attendant of the king: "If the king were to call upon me, I would tell him something other than what so-and-so and so-and-so told him." That was repeated to the king and he called on him and he reported his account to him. He said: "When so-and-so saw that most of the

<sup>20</sup> A Persian king of Babylon, according to Ṭabarī, p. 656; Perlmann, pp. 52-3.

people of the land were numerous and mighty men, that distressed him, so he did not ask them anything, whereas in my case, no meeting was assembled in Syria that I did not attend, asking its people and saying thus-and-so to its people, while they told me thus-and-so."

Sa'īd b. Jubayr said that the head of the vanguard said to Nebuchadnezzar: "You have shamed me. You can have one hundred thousand dinars if you take back what you said." He replied to him: "if you were to give me the treasury of Babylon, I would not take back what I said." Then time brought events to pass and the king said: "Perhaps I should send a detachment of cavalry to Syria, and if they find it easy of access, they will be permitted it; otherwise, let them take whatever they can." They said: "There is no harm if you want to do that." So he said: "Whom do you recommend?" They replied: "So-and-so." But he said: "No, rather the man who informed me of what he did." So he called Nebuchadnezzar and sent him, then he chose four thousand of his cavalry to go with him and they went forth. They spread around the areas and captured whomever God willed, but they did not destroy, nor did they kill. Then Şayhūn the king died and the people said: "Appoint a king to succeed him." But they said: "Slowly! (Wait) until your companions come, for they are in your cavalry." So they proceeded slowly until Nebuchadnezzar came with the captives and whatever he had and divided it among the people. Then they said: "We see no one more worthy of rule than he." So that is the first story, and they made him king over them.

Al-Suddī said with his chain of authorities that a man of the Israelites saw in a dream that the ruin of the Temple and the destruction of the Children of Israel would be at the hands of an orphan son of a widow of the people of Babylon, called Nebuchadnezzar. They believed, for their dreams were verified, so he went forth to ask about him and he alighted at his (Nebuchadnezzar's) mother's house. He had gone out to gather wood and he returned with a bundle of wood on his head; he threw it down and sat down beside the house, and he spoke to him. Then the Israelite gave him three dirhams and said to him: "Buy food with this and drink." So he bought meat for a *dirham*, bread for a *dirham*, and wine for a *dirham*, and brought it, and they ate and drank. When the second day came, he did the same with him, and he did likewise on the third day. Then the Israelite said to him: "I should like you to write me and assurance of protection if you were to rule one of these days."

Nebuchadnezzar said: "Are you ridiculing me?" He replied: "No, I am not, but it is not of any importance to you if you give me an obligation." His mother spoke to him, saying: "There is no problem if it comes to pass, and if not, you have lost nothing." So he wrote him a guarantee of protection. He said: "What do you think—if I come to you and the people are all around you, intervening between you and me, should you not give me a sign whereby you will recognize me?" He said: "Lift up your document on a stalk, and I shall know you by that." So he wrote him a guarantee and gave it to him.

Then the king of the Children of Israel honored John son of Zachariah,<sup>21</sup> brought him near his place of counsel, sought advice from him, and would not decide any matter without him. The king desired to marry the daughter of one of his wives—this is what al-Suddī said. Others say that she was the daughter of his sister, according to what Sa'īd b. Jubayr related from Ibn 'Abbās, who said that Jesus son of Mary sent John son of Zachariah among twelve of the apostles to teach the people. Among the things he forbade them was marriage with a niece. He said: "Their king had a niece who pleased him and he wished to marry her. Every day she had some desire he would fulfill for her." And he mentioned the story of the slaying of John son of Zachariah.<sup>22</sup>

Let us return to al-Suddī's account: He said that the king asked John about marrying her and he replied: "I am not pleased with her for you." Her mother heard of that and she harbored hatred against John because he had forbidden the king to marry her daughter. She therefore planned for when the king sat down to drink, and she dressed her daughter in a splendid thin red garment, she perfumed her, and put on her priceless ornament. Above all that she placed a black mantle on her and sent her to the king, commanding her to give him wine to drink and to uncover herself to him. If he attempted to seduce her, she should refuse him until he gave her what she asked of him. She was to ask him to give her the head of John son of Zachariah in a basin.

She did all that and began to pour wine for him and to uncover herself to him, and when he took the wine from her hand, he tried

<sup>21</sup> A strange anachronism, as John son of Zachariah is John the Baptist of a much later period.

<sup>22</sup> This is clearly based on the story of King Herod and Salome, which also took place over four centuries later than the time of Nebuchadnezzar.

to seduce her and she said: "I will not do it until you give me what I ask of you." He said: "What is it that you ask of me?" She said: "I ask you to send for John son of Zachariah and that you present me with his head in a basin." He said: "Woe unto you! Ask me for something else!" She replied: "I do not want anything else." When she kept refusing him he sent for John and his head was brought. The head began to speak when it was placed before him, saying: "You will not be absolved (of sin)." When the king awoke in the morning, behold! The blood of John was boiling. He ordered that earth be brought and threw it on the blood, but the blood rose up above the earth and boiled. He threw more on it, but again the blood rose up, and he continued throwing earth on it until it reached the height of the city walls, meanwhile continuing to boil.

Sennacherib, king of Babylon, heard of this and proclaimed that he wanted to send an army against them and to give command over it to a man. Nebuchadnezzar came to him and spoke to him, saying: "The man you sent last time was weak, whereas I entered the city and heard the talk of its inhabitants, so send me." The king sent Nebuchadnezzar, and when they reached that place and its inhabitants saw them, they fortified themselves in their cities and they were unable to overcome them. When their stay became difficult for them and his companions suffered from hunger, they wanted to return home. One of the old women of the Children of Israel came out to them and said: "Where is the commander of the host?" She was brought to him and said to him: "I have heard that you wish to return with your army before you conquer this city." He said: "Yes. My stay has been prolonged and my companions are starving, so I am unable to remain any longer than I have." She said: "I wonder whether, if I show You how to conquer the city, you will give me what I wish and slay whomever I order you to slay and set free whomever I order you to set free?" He replied: "Yes." And she said: "When you arise in the morning, divide your army into four divisions, then divide one fourth at each corner (of the city). Then raise your hands to Heaven and call out: 'Our Lord, guide us to the one who slew John son of Zachariah,' for when they do that, the walls of the city will fall down." They did as she said and the walls fell down, and they entered it from all sides, and she took him to where the blood of John son of Zachariah was and said to him: "Slay over this blood until it settles down." So he slew seventy thousand until it settled down, and when that happened she said to



him: "Hold back, for when a prophet is slain, God is not satisfied until the one who slew him is slain as well as whoever was pleased by his having been slain." Then the man with the document came to him and he withheld his hand from him and his family. He destroyed the Temple and ordered that the corpses be thrown there. It is said that whoever threw a corpse there received the poll tax for that year of that person. The Byzantines<sup>23</sup> helped him destroy it because the Children of Israel had slain John son of Zachariah. When Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it, he took away the leaders of the Children of Israel and their soldiers.

#### THE STORY OF DANIEL (DANIYĀL)<sup>24</sup>

Daniel and a group of the sons of the prophets went and he took with him the head of Goliath. When Nebuchadnezzar reached the land of Babylon, he found that Sennacherib had died,<sup>25</sup> so he reigned in his place and matters were in order for him and he remained thus for a while. Then Nebuchadnezzar saw a strange vision that frightened him. He asked the magicians and the soothsayers about it, but they were unable to explain it. Daniel heard of this while he was in prison with his companions. The keeper of the prison liked him and was pleased by what he saw of his fine manner and his guidance. Daniel said to the keeper of the prison: "You have been good to me. Verily your master has seen a vision, so lead him to me so that I may interpret it for him."

The jailer went and informed Nebuchadnezzar of the story of Daniel, and he said: "Bring him to me! No one stood up before him, but bowed down to him, but when they brought him Daniel stood up before him and did not bow down to him. Nebuchadnezzar said to him: "What keeps you from bowing down to me?" He replied: "Verily, I have a Lord Who gave me knowledge and wisdom and commanded me not to bow down to anyone but Him. I fear that

<sup>23</sup> Arabic *al-Rūm* (Rome). Byzantium/Constantiople was known as "Second Rome" in the Eastern Roman Empire. Hence, the story of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans is here confused with the much earlier destruction by the Babylonians.

<sup>24</sup> The *midrash* on Daniel in Ginzberg, *Legends*, IV:326-28.

<sup>25</sup> See p. 550, n. 5 above. The Babylonian king in the Biblical story of Daniel was Belshazzar see p. 570 below.

if I bow down to any other, He will take away from me the knowledge He has given me and will destroy me.” He was pleased with him and said: “How well you have done and how good it is that you have carried out His covenant and honored His knowledge.” Then he said: “Do you have any knowledge regarding this dream or about its explanation?” Daniel said: “Yes.” So he said: “Tell me,” and he told him about his dream that he had seen before Nebuchadnezzar told him about it, and then he interpreted it.

The dream was what ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid related to us with his chain of authorities from Wahb b. Munabbih, saying that Nebuchadnezzar saw in his sleep an idol whose head was of gold, his chest of silver, his abdomen of copper, his thigh of iron, and his leg of clay. Then he saw a stone fall from Heaven upon it, crushing it. Then the stone grew until it crushed everything between the places of the rising and setting of the Sun. He saw a tree whose root was in the Earth and its branches in Heaven. He then saw a man in whose hand was an ax, and heard a voice call out: “Strike its trunk to scatter the birds in its branches and the domesticated animals and the wild beasts from beneath it, but leave its root standing.”<sup>26</sup>

Daniel interpreted it for him, saying: “As for the idol you saw whose head was of gold, you are the head of gold, for you are the most excellent of kings. As for the chest which you saw of silver, that is your son who will reign after you, and the copper abdomen you saw is the king who will be after your son. The iron thigh that you saw represents the division of Persia into two parties who will be the strongest of rulers. The clay will be the last of their kings who will be below the iron. As for the stone that you saw fall from Heaven and expand to fill whatever is between east and west, that is a prophet whom God will send at the end of time, and he will divide all of their kingdom, and his rule will expand until it fills all that is between east and west. As for the tree you saw, and the birds on it, and the wild beasts and domesticated animals that were beneath it, and what God commanded about cutting it: your rule will depart and God will cause you to return as a bird, a great eagle, and you will rule over the birds; then God will send you back as a bull, and you will rule over the domesticated animals; then He will send you back as a lion, and you will rule over the wild beasts and beasts of

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<sup>26</sup> See the very different visions about the idol and the tree in Daniel 4.

prey. From the time God transforms you as we have mentioned, seven years will pass, but for all of that you your heart will remain a human heart so that you may know that it belongs rule over Heavens and Earth and that He has power over the Earth and all who are upon it. As for what about its root remaining, that means that your rule will persist.”

Wahb b. Munabbih was asked whether Nebuchadnezzar was a believer or not and he said: “I have found that people of the Scriptures differ over that; some say he died a believer, whereas others say he died an infidel because he burned the Temple and the books in it and slew the prophets, so that God became very angry at him and would not accept his penitence at that time.”

They say that when Daniel interpreted Nebuchadnezzar’s dream for him, he honored him and his companions and would come to him seeking his counsel until he became the most honored and beloved person to him. For that reason the Magi became envious of him and denounced him and his companions to Nebuchadnezzar, saying that Daniel and his companions “do not worship your God, nor will they eat of the animals you slaughter.” So he called them and asked them about it and they said: “It is so! We have a Lord whom we worship, and we do not eat of your sacrificial animals.” He therefore ordered that a pit (be dug) and it was dug for them and they were cast into it, they being six in number, and with them he cast a carnivorous lion to eat them. Then he said: “Let us go and eat and drink,” so they went away and ate and drank. Then they returned and found them sitting while the lion had stretched out his paws between them and had not scratched a single one of them, nor had he hurt them in any way. They also found an extra person with them and, on counting them, found them to be seven and said: “What about this seventh one, for they were only six?” The seventh one went out to them, and he was one of the angels, and he slapped Nebuchadnezzar, whereupon he became one of the wild beasts and carnivores, and God transformed him for seven years. Then He returned him to his previous form and returned his rule to him.<sup>27</sup>

Al-Suddī said that when God returned his rule to him, Daniel and his companions were the most honored of people to him, but

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<sup>27</sup> The story of the transformation of Nebuchadnezzar is in Daniel 29–34.

once again the Magi envied them, and for a second time they slandered them and said to Nebuchadnezzar: "When Daniel drinks wine, he cannot control himself from urinating." That was a disgrace among them. Nebuchadnezzar placed food and drink for them and they ate and drank from it. Then he said to the doorkeeper: "Observe the first person who goes out past you to urinate and strike him with a battle-ax; and if he says: 'I am Nebuchadnezzar,' say to him: 'You lie, for Nebuchadnezzar has given me an order.'" God held back the urine of Daniel and his companions, so the first one to rise among the company desiring to urinate was Nebuchadnezzar. He rose up arrogantly. That was at night and he trailed his garments, so when the doorkeeper saw him he bound him. He said to him: "I am Nebuchadnezzar!" But he replied: "You lie; Nebuchadnezzar commanded me to kill the first one to come out." Then he struck him and killed him.

As for Muḥammad b. Ishāq, he says something quite different from al-Suddī about the death of Nebuchadnezzar. He said, with his chain of authorities, that when God desired to kill Nebuchadnezzar, he said to those Israelites who were in his hands: "Do you see this house I have destroyed and these people I have slain? Who are they, and what is this house?" They replied: "This is the house of God and one of His places of worship, and these are His people who were among the offspring of the prophets, but they became unjust, and transgressed and rebelled, so God made their enemy rule over them because of their sins." He said: "Then tell me what will let me ascend to Heaven, and I will go up to it and kill whoever is in it and take it as a possession, for I have finished with the Earth and everything in it." They replied: "No creature is able to do that." He said: "You will certainly do that, or I shall slay you to the very last one." So they complained to God and pleaded with Him, and God sent against him in His might, to show him his weakness, a gnat that entered his nostril and then sank deep into it until it clung to the lining of his brain. He was unable to settle down or be at rest without hitting his brain. When he realized that death was near, he said to his confidants among the people: "When I die, split open my head to see what it was that killed me." When he died, they split open his head and found a gnat biting the lining of his brain, so that God might show mankind His might and power. God saved those of the Children of Israel who remained in his hands, had mercy upon them, and returned them to Jerusalem and Syria. There

they rebuilt, multiplied, and became many, until their condition became better than it had been. Some claim that God revived those of the believers who had been slain and that they joined them.

Then, when they returned to Syria, they found that Nebuchadnezzar had burned the Torah and they possessed no covenant from God. But God renewed their Torah and returned it to them through the tongue of Ezra, the story of whom we shall mention, God willing.

The life span of Nebuchadnezzar, including the period when God transformed him, was some five hundred years and fifty days. When Nebuchadnezzar died, his son Belshazzar succeeded him, and the vessels of the Temple, that Nebuchadnezzar had carried off to Babylon, were in his possession. He defiled them with the flesh of swine and drank wine from them. He dismissed Daniel and would not receive him, so Daniel secluded himself. One day while Belshazzar was sitting, a suspended palm of a hand without a forearm appeared to him and wrote three letters while he witnessed it, and then it disappeared. He was filled with wonder at this and was confused, not knowing what it was. He called Daniel and apologized to him and asked him to read that writing and tell him its interpretation. David said: "In the name of God the Beneficent, the Merciful, He weighed and found slight, He promised and executed, He assembled and scattered. As for His saying: 'He weighed and found slight,' it means He weighed your deeds in the balance and found them slight; 'He promised and executed' means that He promised that your rule would be destroyed and has executed that this day; and 'He brought together and scattered' means that He assembled for you and your father before you a mighty domain which He will scatter this very day, and it will never again be assembled until the Day of Resurrection."<sup>28</sup>

Not long after, God destroyed him and weakened their domain, but Daniel remained in the land of Babylon until he died in al-Sūs,<sup>29</sup> and God is All-knowing.

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<sup>28</sup> See the Biblical story of this vision of Belshazzar in Daniel 5:1-29, with a rather different interpretation.

<sup>29</sup> Also Susa, Biblical Shushan; a city in Khuzistan province in Iran. LeStrange, *Lands*, p. 240.

## AN ACCOUNT OF THE DEATH OF DANIEL

Historians have said that when God gave power over Sūs into the hands of Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī<sup>30</sup> during the reign of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, Abū Mūsā killed its king Sābūr, took possession of the city, and looted everything in it, seizing the wealth of its ruler Sābūr, and took possession of it. He began to go about in the treasure houses, seizing what was in them, until he reached a locked treasury, the lock of which was sealed with lead. Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī said to the people of al-Sūs: “What is in this treasury which I see sealed with lead?” They said to him: “Commander, there is nothing you need in it.” But he said: “I must know what is in it, so open its door that I may see what lies therein.” They broke the lock and opened the door, and Abū Mūsā entered the treasury. He looked, and behold! There was a tall stave in which a trough was dug, within which lay a dead man. He had been buried in shrouds embroidered with gold and his head was uncovered. They say that Abū Mūsā and all of those who were with him wondered at his height. Then they measured his nose and found it to be more than a span in length. Abū Mūsā said to the people of al-Sūs: “Woe unto you! Who is this man?” They said: “This man used to be in Iraq, and the people of Iraq, whenever rain was withheld from them, asked for rain through him and they would be watered. Once there befell us a drought such as had befallen the people of Iraq, so we sent a message to them asking that they turn him over to us so that we might ask for rain through him. They refused, but we left fifty men with them as a pledge and carried him to this land of ours. Then we asked for rain through him and were watered. We had the idea that we should not return him to them, and he continued staying with us until death overtook him and he died. That is the story and the state of affairs with him.”

They report that Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī remained in al-Sūs and wrote to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb informing him of how God had given them victory over the city of al-Sūs and what followed it, and he wrote in that letter about the matter of that dead man. When the

<sup>30</sup> A companion of the Prophet, later served as a military commander under ‘Umar and ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. ca. 614–ca. 642 C.E. *ET*<sup>2</sup>, I:695–6; many references in Ṭabarī.

letter arrived and ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb read it, he called the oldest of the companions of the Messenger of God and asked them about this, but not one of them had any knowledge about him. But ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said that this man was Daniel the Sage, and that he had been a prophet, not a messenger, who had lived in ancient times with Nebuchadnezzar and the rulers after him. And ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib began to recount to ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb the story of Daniel from its beginning to the end, till the time of his death. Then he said: “Write to your companion and tell him to pray over him and bury him in a place where the people of al-Sūs will not find him.” So ‘Umar wrote to Abū Mūsā in that vein. When Abū Mūsā read the letter of ‘Umar, he ordered the people of al-Sūs to divert their river to a different place. Then he gave orders that Daniel be enshrouded in a different shroud than the one he was in, then he prayed over him, he and all the Muslims who were with him. Then he ordered that a grave be dug for him in the midst of the riverbed, and he buried him and had the river flow over him. It is said that Daniel lies in the river of al-Sūs and that its waters flow over him to this very day. And God is All-knowing!

The Master said: What I have mentioned is all of the story of Nebuchadnezzar that was transmitted in the commentary, except that the informant who said that Nebuchadnezzar was the one who attacked the Children of Israel when they slew John was in error in the view of experts in biography and history and scholars of the past of the People of the Book and of the Muslims. That is because they agree that Nebuchadnezzar only attacked the Children of Israel when they slew their prophet Isaiah, during the era of Jeremiah, and it was the first event about which God said: *And when the prophecy of your first transgression came to be fulfilled, We sent against you a formidable army which ravaged your land [and carried out the punishment with which you had been threatened]* (17:5)—referring to Nebuchadnezzar and his armies.

They say that from the era of Jeremiah and Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of the Temple until the birth of John b. Zachariah was four hundred and sixty-one years. That is because they reckon seventy years from the destruction of the Temple by Nebuchadnezzar until the end of his life during the period of Karaban b. Ḥarsū b. Shayr b. Aṣḥīl in Babylon before Bahman Isfandiyar b. Yastāsif;<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Should be *Bahman Isfandiyār b. Yasta’saf*.

then eighty years from after he lived to the appearance of Alexander at Jerusalem and his besieging its king and annexing it to his realm; then three hundred and thirty years from after his reigning over Jerusalem to the birth of John b. Zachariah. The truth of all this is what Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yassār has mentioned: The Children of Israel rebuilt the Temple after they rebuilt Palestine, and rule over it returned to them after Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed it and taken them into captivity from there. They began to perform evil deeds after the death of Ezra, and God sent prophets among them. One group of them they denied and one group of them they killed, until the last of the prophets whom God had sent to them were Zachariah, John, and Jesus, all of them from the family of David. Zachariah died and John was slain because the king had forbidden him to marry that woman. When God raised up Jesus from among them and they had slain John b. Zachariah, God sent against them one of the kings of Babylon called Kardūs.<sup>32</sup> He journeyed towards them with the people of Babylon so that he entered Syria against them, and when he had done that, he commanded one of the chiefs of his troops called Banūrāzādān,<sup>33</sup> the master of slaying, saying to him: "I have sworn by their God that if I come and am victorious over the people of Jerusalem, I will surely slay them until their blood flows into the midst of my army, except if I do not find anyone whom I can kill." So he ordered him to kill them until he attained that of them. Then Banūrāzādān entered Jerusalem and encamped in the site where they offered up their sacrifices, and there he found blood bubbling. He asked them about that and they said: "This is the blood of a sacrifice we have offered which was not accepted from us. Therefore it is bubbling as you see. We have been offering sacrifices for eight hundred years and He has accepted them from us except for this." He said: "You did not tell me a true story." They replied: "If it were the first of our blood, He would have accepted it, but kings, prophets, and revelation have all ceased among us, and therefore he did not accept it."

Banūrāzādān slew over that blood seven hundred and seventy of their chiefs, but the blood did not subside, so he ordered seven thousand of their sons and their wives and slew them upon that blood,

<sup>32</sup> Probably Herod. Khardūs in Ṭabarī, p. 720; Perlmann, p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> In the same story, Ṭabarī (*loc. cit.*) has Nābuzarādhān the executioner, see Perlmann, *loc. cit.*



but it did not subside. When Banūrāzādān saw that the blood did not subside, he said to them: "Woe unto you, Children of Israel! Tell me the truth before I put an end to you, and be steadfast in the command of your Lord! How long have you ruled over the land, doing as you wished in it? Tell me the truth before I leave from among you no living thing, neither man nor woman, but I will slay them all." When they saw his seriousness and terrible slaying, they believed his report and said: "Verily this is the blood of one of our prophets who forbade us to do many things that angered God. If we had obliged him about them, it would have been more sensible for us. He informed us of you, but we would not believe him and we killed him. This is his blood bubbling."

Banūrāzādān said: "What was his name?" they replied: "John b. Zachariah." He said: Now you have told me the truth. Thus will your Lord be avenged of you." And when Banūrāzādān saw that they had told him the truth, he prostrated himself and said to those around him: "Lock the gates of the city. Remove from it whoever his here of the army of Kardūs and leave whoever remains of the Children of Israel." Then he said: "John b. Zachariah, my Lord and your Lord knows what has befallen your people on your account and how many were killed among them on your account, so subside (calm down) by the permission of God lest no one of your people remain." So the blood of John b. Zachariah subsided by the permission of God, and Banūrāzādān ceased the killing among them.

Then he said: "I have faith in that in which the Children of Israel believe; I believe in Him, and am certain that there is no Lord but He." God revealed to one of the chiefs of those prophets who remained that Banūrāzādān was compassionate (*ḥannān*), sincere. In Hebrew *ḥannān* means "speech of faith, belief."

Then Banūrāzādān said to the Children of Israel: "The enemy of God Kardūs commanded me to slay you until your blood flowed into the midst of his army, and I am unable to disobey him." They said: "Do as you were commanded!" So he commanded them and they dug a ditch, he ordered that they bring of their possessions horses, mules, donkeys, camels, cattle, and sheep, and they slaughtered them until their blood flowed into the midst of his army. Then he ordered them to move those who had been slain previously, and they were placed on their beasts who had been killed. They were on top of them so that Kardūs thought that only Israelites were in the ditch. When the blood reached his army he sent to Banūrāzādān:

“Stop killing them, for their blood has reached me.” Then he journeyed away from them to Babylon, having destroyed the Children of Israel—or almost having done so. And that is the last occurrence about which God revealed in His word: *In the Book We solemnly declared to the Israelites: “Twice you will commit evil in the land. [You shall become great transgressors].”* (17:4). The first occurrence was with Nebuchadnezzar and his troops, but then God returned to them once more and they possessed religion and power. The second occurrence was with Kardūs and his troops, and they could raise no resistance thereafter, nor any banner. He then moved from Syria and its vicinity to Rome and Greece so that the Children of Israel multiplied and became many and spread out thereafter. They performed evil deeds, made permissible what was forbidden, and caused the boundaries to disappear. God gave power to Pilate<sup>34</sup> over them and he destroyed their land and drove them from it. God deprived them of rule and power and imposed humiliation upon them. Whatever nation they live among, they are in a minority, in humiliation, and tribute and rule over them belong others. Jerusalem remained in ruins until the days of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb when the Muslims rebuilt it at his command. And God is All-knowing.

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<sup>34</sup> Arabic: *Bilaṭūs b. Isnāyūs*.

## EZRA

### A CHAPTER ABOUT THE ONE WHO PASSED BY A CITY WHICH HAD FALLEN INTO UTTER RUIN. (2:259)

God has said: *The one who, passing by a city which had fallen into utter ruin, [remarked: 'How can God give life to this city, now that it is dead?'] Thereupon God caused him to die, and after a hundred years brought him back to life. 'How long have you stayed away!' asked God. 'A day, 'he replied, 'or part of a day.'*

There was disagreement over who that passerby was, 'Ikrimah, Qatādah, al-Rabī'a b. Anas, al-Daḥḥāk and al-Suddī all saying that it was Ezra son of Seraiah, while Wahn b. Munabbih, 'Abdallāh b. Ḥumayd, and 'Ubayd b. 'Umayr said it was Jeremiah son of Hilkiah who was of the tribe of Aaron son of Amram, and that he was al-Khidr. They also differed about the city by which he had passed, with 'Ikrimah, Wahn, Qatādah, and al-Rabī'a saying that it was Jerusalem. Al-Daḥḥāk said it was the Holy Land; al-Suddī said it was Salamābād, while al-Kalbī said it was Dayr Sāyarābādh which is (also) called Dayr Haraqīl.<sup>1</sup> Some say it was Qaryat 'Anab,<sup>2</sup> which is two *parasangs* from Jerusalem.

Muḥammad b. Ishāq ibn Yasār relates that the reason for this was what Wahn b. Munabbih said, namely, that when Nebuchadnezzar overran Palestine and destroyed Jerusalem, killing the Israelites and taking them captive, Jeremiah fled and mingled with the wild beasts. Then, when Nebuchadnezzar turned away from the people and returned to Babylon, taking the Israelite captives with him, Jeremiah came mounted on his donkey. With him he had a flask of grape juice and a basket of figs, and he came to Jerusalem. When he

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<sup>1</sup> *Lit.*, the monastery of Heracles, possibly named for the Byzantine emperor, Heraclius, but more likely is *Dayr Hizqīl*. See p. 619, n. 6 below.

<sup>2</sup> In Hebrew: *Qiryat 'Anavim*, meaning "town of grapes".

stopped there and viewed its ruins, he said: "*How shall God give this [city] life after its death?*" (2:259). Then Jeremiah tied up his donkey with a new rope, and God cast sleep upon him. While he slept God removed his soul from him for one hundred years. His donkey died, but his juice and figs remained beside him. And God blinded all eyes from observing him and no one saw him; whereas the donkey was visible, but God kept predatory beasts and birds from its flesh. When, after his death, seventy years had passed, God sent an angel to a great king of Persia called Yūshak,<sup>3</sup> and he said to him: "God does indeed command you to hasten with your people and rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem and their land so they will become even more numerous than they had been." The angel appointed a thousand stewards, each of whom had three hundred thousand agents and they began rebuilding it. God killed Nebuchadnezzar with a large gnat that entered his brain, but God saved whoever had remained of the Children of Israel; not one of them died in Babylon, but God returned them to Jerusalem and its environs, and they rebuilt it for thirty years. They multiplied until they were in even better condition than they had been before.

When the one hundred years of Jeremiah's death had passed,<sup>4</sup> God revived his eyes for him but the rest of his body remained dead; then he revived his body while [Jeremiah] watched. Then [Jeremiah] looked at his donkey and behold, its bones were scattered, shining and white, and he heard a voice from heaven, "O you decayed bones! God orders you to gather together!" So they gathered together, and joined themselves one to another. And then [the voice] called out again, "God orders that you be covered with flesh, blood and skin" and it was so. Then it called out, "God orders you to come to life!" And the donkey arose, revived with God's permission. And God preserved Jeremiah alive and he is the one who is found in the wilderness.<sup>5</sup>

Ibn Faḥawayh, the Qur'ān-memorizer, related to me with his chain of authorities, that Wahb, said, "In the Garden there is neither

<sup>3</sup> No identification is definite. Possibly referring to Cyrus who permitted the Jews to return to the land of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Text has Ezra here. There are several problems in this section: the confusion of Jeremiah and Ezra, and the revival of dead bones from the Book of Ezekiel which is already covered in the story of Ezekiel, pp. 415-418.

<sup>5</sup> Reference not clear.

a dog nor donkey, except for the dog of the People of the Cave<sup>6</sup> and the donkey of Jeremiah which God caused to die for one hundred years and then revived.”

Those who claimed that “*the one passing by*” (2:259) was Ezra,<sup>7</sup> say that when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, he slew forty thousand men among the reciters of the Torah and its scholars, among whom were Ezra’s father and grandfather. At that time Ezra was a young man, already reciting the Torah and making progress in learning. He was taken to Babylon along with the other Israelite captives. He was a descendant of Aaron, while there were also seven thousand of the family of David with him. When Ezra was delivered from Babylon, he journeyed on his donkey until he alighted at the monastery of [Dayr] Heracle<sup>8</sup> on the banks of the Tigris. He went about the town but saw no one in it. Most of the trees were bearing fruit so he ate of the fruit and pressed juice from the grapes and drank of it. He placed what was left over of the fruit in a basket and of the juice in a skin. When he saw the ruin of the city and the destruction of its people, he said: *How shall God give this [city] life after its death?* (2:259) He had no doubt about resurrection—but said that out of wonderment. Then he tied up his donkey with a new rope and fell asleep. “*And God made him die a hundred years, then brought him back to life*” (2:259). Then Gabriel came to him, “*He said: How long have you tarried? (The man) said: I have tarried a day or part of a day.*” (ibid.) That was because God had caused him to die at day-break, but when he revived him, [after one hundred years] it was at day’s end, before sunset. Therefore he said: “*I have tarried a day,*” thinking that the sun had set; then he turned and saw the remnant of the sun and said: “. . . *or a part of a day.*” So Gabriel said to him: “*Nay, but you have tarried for a hundred years. Just look at your food—meaning: the figs—and your drink—meaning the grape juice—which had not become spoiled—meaning: they had not altered—and look at your donkey!*” (ibid.)

<sup>6</sup> Known in Western sources as the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. See the chapter on The People of the Cave below.

<sup>7</sup> See n. 2 above.

<sup>8</sup> Very likely for *Dayr Hizqīl*, a monastery between Baghdad and Wāsiṭ, “where mad people were looked after by the monks” according to LeStrange, *Lands*, 37; Yāqūt, *Muḡam*, II, 706, (for Hizqīl) has the story of Ezekiel here. See p. 614, n. 33 above.

Some people have said that was because God had not caused his donkey to die, but kept alive its head for him while the rest of the body was dead. Then He said to him: "*Look at your donkey!*" and he looked and saw his donkey standing in the condition he had left him on the day he had tied him up alive, despite not having eaten or drunk for one hundred years. Then he looked at the halter on its neck and it was still new, and had not changed. This is what al-Ḍaḥḥāk and Qatādah have said. According to what they have said, the implication of the verse is "*Look at your donkey and look at your bones, how We adjust them.*" But others say that He meant the bones of his donkey, as we have mentioned previously, for that is His word: "*That We will make you a sign to mankind*" (ibid.)—namely, as an example, and proof of resurrection after death.

Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that [Ezra] returned to his town and to his children and grandchildren and found them to be old men and women while he still had black hair and beard.

Abū 'Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Ḥāfiẓ—his chain of authorities—Ibn 'Abbās: When God revived Ezra after having caused him to die for one hundred years, he rode on his donkey till he reached his home town, but the people did not recognize him and he did not recognize his dwellings. He followed a guess of his until he came to his dwelling and lo! there was an old woman, who was blind and crippled, having lived for one hundred and twenty years. She had been a servant-girl of his. When Ezra had left them she was twenty years old, and she had known him and understood him. When old age overtook her, illness had befallen her. Ezra said to her, "You there! Is this Ezra's house?" She replied, "Yes, this is the house of Ezra. I have not noticed that anyone has mentioned Ezra for so-and-so many years, for the people have forgotten him." He said, "I am indeed Ezra." She said, "Praise be to God! We have been missing him for one hundred years but we have heard no mention of him." He said, "Truly, I am Ezra; God caused me to die for one hundred years, then He revived me." She said, "Ezra was a man whose prayers were answered. He would pray for the sick and afflicted for health and healing, and God would give them health and healing—so pray to God to return my sight to me so I might see you. For if you are Ezra, I shall recognize you."

They say that he prayed to his Lord and that [Ezra] rubbed her face and eyes with his hand. God answered his prayers and she was cured, and God returned her sight to her. Then [Ezra] took her

hand and said to her, "Arise with God's help!" and God freed her legs, and she arose healthy as though released from her shackles. And she looked at Ezra and recognized him. She said, "I bear witness that you are Ezra." Then she went to the Israelite quarter and they were in their courtyards and assemblies—([by then] Ezra's son was an old man, one hundred and eighteen years of age, and his grandchildren were old men in the assembly,) and she called out, "This is Ezra who has come back to you!"—but they did not believe her. She said, "I am so-and-so your servant-woman. He prayed to his Lord for me and God returned my sight to me and freed my legs. He claims that God caused him to die for one hundred years and then revived him." They say that the people arose then and approached him, and his son said, "My father had a black birthmark like a new moon between his shoulders", and lo! it was there and he knew thereby that he was Ezra.

#### A CHAPTER ABOUT EZRA AND HIS CONDITION AFTER HIS RETURN TO HIS PEOPLE

God has said: "*And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of God*" (9:30).<sup>9</sup> 'Atiyah al-'Awfī narrates from Ibn 'Abbās, who said that they say that Ezra was one of the People of the Book who possessed the Torah and did with it what God had wanted them to do. But then they neglected it and did what was not right, although the Ark was still among them. However, when God saw that they had neglected the Torah and acted according to their own desires, He raised up the Ark from out of their midst, and made them forget the Torah and withdrew it from their hearts. Then God sent an illness upon them that made their bowels move, so that a man would suffer distress,<sup>10</sup> in order that they might forget the Torah though Ezra was among them. Thus they continued as long as God willed after the Torah had been withdrawn from their hearts. Ezra had commanded their sages to pray to God and both they and he prayed to God and implored

<sup>9</sup> This verse has become a basis for Muslim condemnation of the Jews through the centuries, see *SEI*, 617 ('Uzair) and *EJ*, 6:1106–07, where efforts are made to understand how this idea developed. See Ṭabarī, pp. 669–70; Perlmann, pp. 64–65, for a Muslim understanding of this charge.

<sup>10</sup> Unclear usage: *yamassu kabadahu*, *lit.* "he touches his liver".

Him to return to him what He had withdrawn from his heart.<sup>11</sup> While he was praying, supplicating God, lo! a light descended from Heaven and entered his body, and the Torah that had departed from his heart returned to him, and it was heard among his people. He said, "My people, God has brought me the Torah and returned it to me." He set out to teach them. Thus they continued with him teaching them the Torah as long as God willed. Following that, even the Ark descended [back to them] after having departed from them. When they saw the Ark, they examined what was in it against what Ezra had taught them and saw that it was the same as it. So they said, "By God! Ezra would not have been given this were he not the son of God!"

Al-Suddī and Ibn 'Abbās said from the account of 'Ammār: The Jews said this only because the Amalekites approached against them and slew them, and took the Torah. Those scholars who remained fled, and buried the Torah in the mountains and elsewhere. Ezra betook himself to the mountains and the [abode of] wild beasts. He devoted himself to God's service on the mountain top, did not associate with people and would come down only on feast days. He would weep and say, "My Lord, You have left the Children of Israel without a scholar." He kept weeping until his eyelids fell off. Once when he had descended for a festival and returned [to his town], he found that a woman came near him at one of the graves, and she wept and said, "O giver of food! O provider of clothing!" Ezra said to her, "You there! Trust in God, be patient and be content. Do you not know that death is the way of mankind?" Then he said to her: "Woe unto you, who would feed you, give you drink and clothe you before this man [did so]?"—meaning, her husband whom she was lamenting. She replied: "God." He said: "God Almighty lives and will never die." She said, "O Ezra, who taught the scholars previously among the Children of Israel?" He replied, "God." She said, "Therefore do not weep for them, for you have learned that death is real but that God lives and does not die." When Ezra learned that he had been defeated in the argument he was about to leave her, but she said to him, "Ezra, I am not a woman but I am this world. Now then, a spring will flow forth in your prayer ground and a tree will sprout. So eat from that tree and drink the

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<sup>11</sup> The implication here is that Ezra, too, had lost his faith.



water of that spring, wash yourself and pray two *rak'as*, as an old man will come to you and will give you something. Take from him whatever he gives you." When he arose in the morning, a spring was flowing in his prayer ground and a tree had sprouted. He did as he had been ordered and an old man came and said to him, "Open your mouth!" He opened his mouth and he threw something resembling glass flasks into it three times. Then he said to him: "Enter this spring and walk in it until you reach that for which you hope."

They say that he entered it, and no sooner did he lift his foot but he increased in knowledge, and when he returned to them he was the most learned of men in the Torah. Then he said, "Children of Israel, I have brought you the Torah." They said, "Ezra, you would not lie." They tied a pen to each of his fingers and he wrote with all of his fingers until he wrote the entire Torah that was within his heart; thus he revived the Torah and tradition for them. When the scholars returned, they brought forth their books that they had buried and compared them with the Torah of Ezra and found them to be identical.<sup>12</sup> They said, "God gave this to him only because he is His son."

Al-Kalbī said that when Nebuchadnezzar triumphed over the Israelites and destroyed the Temple, killing whoever read the Torah, Ezra was then yet a small boy, so [the king] deemed him to be too small and did not kill him, for he did not know that he was already reading the Torah. When he died for one hundred years and the Israelites returned to Jerusalem, there was no one among them to read the Torah. Therefore God sent Ezra in their midst to renew the Torah for them and to be a sign for them. However, when Ezra came to them and said, "I am Ezra," they refused to believe him. They said, "If you are Ezra, as you claim, then dictate the Torah to us." He wrote it down and said, "This is the Torah." Then a man said, "My father related to me from my grandfather that the Torah was placed in a large jar in so-and-so's vineyard in such-and-such a place." So they went with this man and dug until they uncovered the jar—and the Torah was in it. They took it and compared it with what Ezra had written for them and found that not a verse, nary a letter, differed from it, and they were filled with wonder.

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<sup>12</sup> Similar to the much later Jewish story of the seventy translators of the Septuagint.

They said, "God would not have sent down the Torah into the heart of one of us after it had departed from our hearts, except if he were His son." Whereupon the Jews said that Ezra is the son of God.

NEBUCHADNEZZAR'S RAID AGAINST THE ARABS THE STORY OF  
YUḤANĀ, AND THE DESTRUCTION OF ḤADŪR

God has said: *Many a nation that dealt unjustly we have shattered, and raised up another people in their stead! [And when they felt Our might behold them fleeing from it. They were told: 'Do not run away. Return to your comforts and your dwellings. You shall be questioned all.' 'Woe to us, we have done wrong!' was their reply. And this they kept repeating until] We mowed them down and made them extinct.* (21:11–15). Hishām b. Muḥammad b. al-Kalbī and others have said: The beginning of the Arabs' sojourn in the land of Iraq and their taking al-Ḥīrah and al-Anbār as encampments was that God inspired Yūḥanā b. Barkhiyā b. Razyāyīl b. Sansabīl [Sansabīl being the first man to use *ṭifshīl*<sup>13</sup> and was a descendant of Judah son of Jacob], "Go to Nebuchadnezzar and command him to mount a campaign against the Arabs—they have no locks on their houses nor doors. Let him overrun their land, slay their warriors, and take possession of their property because of their not believing in Me, and their adopting other gods beside Me, their disbelieving my prophets and messengers." That was after the slaying of the people of Ḥadūr which was a town in Yemen<sup>14</sup> to which God had sent a prophet.

Yūḥanā journeyed until he reached Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon and related to him what God had inspired in him and informed him of what He had commanded him. That was in the time of Ma'add b. 'Adnān.<sup>15</sup> God also inspired John saying: "I have given Nebuchadnezzar power over the people of an Arab town that through him I may be avenged against them. But make good use of Ma'add b. 'Adnān, one of whose descendants will be Muḥammad the Prophet

<sup>13</sup> Here *ṭufayshīl*. See the story of Moses above, p. 303, n. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Yāqūt, *Muḥjam*, II:289, a town of Yemen in the district of Zabīd. See Qur'an 25:40; 50:12 for possible references to the destruction of this town.

<sup>15</sup> Ma'add is the collective name for the north Arabian tribes whose reputed ancestor was Ma'add b. 'Adnān, said to have intermarried with Jurhum, hence ancestors of Ishmael and the Prophet. See *EP*<sup>2</sup>, V:894–95.

whom I will bring forth at the end of time and through him put a seal on prophecy. Through him will I raise up whoever obeys him.”

So Yūḥanā went forth to traverse the land for him so that he might arrive there before Nebuchadnezzar. He met ‘Adnān, who received him, and he looked at Ma‘add who was, at that time, twelve years old. Yūḥanā carried Ma‘add on al-Burāq,<sup>16</sup> seating him behind himself, and they reached the land of Najrān.<sup>17</sup> Immediately Nebuchadnezzar pounced upon those Arab merchants who were in his land, and they would present him with merchandise and provisions. Then he assembled those of them he had vanquished and built a cloister for them on a hill and fortified it. He then herded them into it so that they were confined, and he placed over them guards and watchmen. Then he announced the forthcoming campaign among the people and they prepared themselves for it. The report spread among those Arabs who resided near them, and groups of them came forth to him suing for peace and asking for protection. Nebuchadnezzar sought counsel regarding them from Yūḥanā, who said, “Their coming forth to you from their land before your setting out against them is a renunciation by them of what they had been doing; so accept it from them and deal kindly with them.”

They say that Nebuchadnezzar settled them in al-Sawād on the banks of the Euphrates. Then Nebuchadnezzar encountered the [other] Arabs and routed and massacred them and took captives, travelling on until he reached the Hejaz and encountered ‘Adnān with his group of Arabs. Nebuchadnezzar sallied forth in person, and he routed them. Then a voice proclaimed from out of the heavens: “O for the vengeance of the prophets!” and the swords overtook them both from behind and from the fore. They repented of their sins and proclaimed misfortune, for that is His word: *And when they felt Our might, behold them fleeing from it!* (21:12)—meaning, they rushed, fleeing but the swords overtook them—and the angels said to them: *Do not run away. Return to your comforts and your dwellings. [You shall be questioned all.]* (21:13). When they realized that he was attacking them, they confessed their sins. *They cried: ‘Alas for us! Lo! We*

<sup>16</sup> The mythical steed used by Gabriel, that carried the Prophet Muḥammad on his Night Journey from Mecca to Jerusalem.

<sup>17</sup> A major Christian center in the area of ‘Asīr, north of Yemen, before the coming of Islam.

*were wrongdoers.'* (21:14) *And this they kept repeating*—they did not stop crying out about that until they were destroyed, for that is His word: *And this they kept repeating, until We mowed them down and made them extinct.* (21:15)

Then Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon with the Arab prisoners he had taken, and set them down in al-Anbār which was called "Anbār of the Arabs," and those Arabs who had asked for protection joined them. And Nebuchadnezzar freed those people of the cloister after he had completed his raid against the Arabs, and they built two cities for themselves, calling one of them al-Anbār, and the other al-Ḥīrah. The Nabataeans intermingled with them after that, 'Adnān died and the land of the Arabs remained in ruins during the lifetime of Nebuchadnezzar. When he died Ma'add b. 'Adnān returned—the prophets of the Israelites along with him—until he came to Mecca and restored its characteristic symbols and the prophets performed the pilgrimage with him.

## LUQMĀN THE WISE

### LUQMĀN THE WISE, SOME OF HIS ADMONITIONS AND MAXIMS, AND HIS TESTAMENT TO HIS SON<sup>1</sup>

God has said: “*And verily, We gave Luqmān wisdom*”, (31:12) meaning understanding, knowledge and acting upon it as well as doing what is right.

The scholars have differed about his genealogy: Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Yasār said that he was Luqmān son of Ba‘ūr son of Nahor son of Terah—who was Āzar, the father of Abraham; while Wabh said that he was the nephew of Job and Muqātil that he was his maternal cousin. Al-Wāqidī said that he was a judge of the Children of Israel, but others said that he was a slave—for example: Mujāhid said that Luqmān was a black slave with big lips and cleft feet. Al-Awzā‘ī related from ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥarmalah who said, “A black man came to Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab to ask him something. Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab said to him, ‘Do not be sad that you are black, for three black men have been among the best of mankind: Bilāl, Mahja‘ the *mawlā* of ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and Luqmān the Wise, who was black—a Nubian from among the black people of Egypt with long noses.’”<sup>2</sup>

The Imām Abū Maṣṣūr al-Khamshāwī<sup>3</sup> related to us literally, with his chain of transmission from Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab: Luqmān was an Ethiopian slave carpenter.

Ibn Faṭḥawayh informed us with his chain of transmission from Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab, that Luqmān was a tailor. But all the scholars have agreed that he was a wise man but not a prophet, except for ‘Ikrimah who was alone in saying this. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Khamshāwī related to us from [‘Ikrimah] with his chain of authorities, that he said that Luqmān was a prophet. Someone said that he was given a choice between prophecy and wisdom and he chose wisdom.

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<sup>1</sup> The first mention of Luqmān, p. 5, n. 6 above. See also H. Schwarzbaum, *The Mishle Shu‘alim* . . . , many references to Luqmān.

<sup>2</sup> Suggesting the difference between the Nubians and the African peoples farther south.

<sup>3</sup> Also referred to as Abū Bakr al-Khamshāwī.

Nāfi‘ related from ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar, who said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah say, ‘In truth I can say that Luqmān was not a prophet but he was a servant whom God protected, he meditated a great deal, and was of good conviction. He loved God and God loved him, and bestowed wisdom upon him.’” When Luqmān was taking a midday nap, it happened that a proclamation came to him: “Luqmān, would you like God to make you a vice-regent upon earth to judge among men in truth?” He responded to the voice saying: “If my Lord chooses me, I can accept wellbeing, but I cannot accept tribulation. But if He decides upon me, then I am at His command and at His service, for I know that if He does something with me, He will help me and preserve me.” The angels said, “Why, Luqmān?” He replied, “Because the ruler is in the strongest position and also in the most troubled. Injustice will descend upon him from every side if it happens, but I wish him to be saved and if he is mistaken, he is mistaken on the road to the Garden. He who is humble in this world is better off than being an aristocrat. He who chooses This World over the Hereafter, This World rejects him, nor does the Hereafter remain for him.”

The angels wondered at the beauty of his eloquence. While he was asleep, he was given wisdom, and when he awoke he spoke using it. Then [the same] was proclaimed to David after him, but he did not stipulate the conditions that Luqmān did, so he acted wrongly more than once, yet God forgave him. Luqmān aided him with his wisdom. David said to him, “Blessed are you, Luqmān, you were given wisdom, and tribulation was diverted from you.” David was given rule, but was tried with tribulation and unrest.

SOME OF LUQMĀN’S WISDOM THAT WAS HANDED ON,  
AND HIS ADMONITIONS THAT ARE MENTIONED IN THE QUR’ĀN

God has said: *And verily We gave Luqmān wisdom (31:12) and He also has said: Luqmān admonished his son, saying: ‘My dear son, ascribe no partners unto God, for idolatry is a tremendous wrong.’ [We enjoined man to show kindness to his parents, for with much pain his mother bears him, and he is not weaned before he is two years of age. We said: ‘Give thanks to Me and to your parents. To Me shall all things return. But if they press you to serve besides Me deities you know nothing of, do not obey them. Be kind to them in this world, and follow the path of those who turn to Me. To Me you shall return, and I will declare to you all that you have done.’] (31:13–15)*

Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥusayn al-Dīnawārī related to us from ‘Ikrimah, who said: “Luqmān was the most worthless servant to his master. It is said that his master sent him with others to his orchard to bring him some of its fruit. When they returned, they had nothing with them for they had eaten the fruit, so they placed [the blame] on Luqmān. He said to his master: ‘Equivocation is not trustworthy to God, so give both them and me water to drink, then send us to vomit it up.’ His master did that and while they vomited up the fruit, Luqmān vomited clear water, so his master knew of their falsehood.”

He continued: The first evidence he showed of his wisdom was one time, while he was with his master the latter entered the privy and sat there for a long time. Luqmān called to him [saying]: “From too much sitting on the privy, the liver becomes painful, it causes hemorrhoids, and heat rises to the head. So sit for just a little while and then get up!” He continued: His master came out and wrote his maxim on the door of the latrine.

They say that one day his master became drunk and bet some people that he could drink up the water of a lake. But when he sobered up, he realized what had happened to him and he called Luqmān, saying to him: “It was for a day like this that I have hidden you.” He said: “Bring out your chair and your pitcher, then gather [the people] together.” When they had assembled, he said to them: “About what did you bet with me?” They said: “About the water of this lake.” Luqmān said to them, “If it has constant influx then hold back that influx so that he may drink up [the lake].” They said, “How can we stop its influx?” Luqmān responded, “And how can he drink it up when it is constantly increasing?”

Ibn Fathawayh informed us with his chain of transmission from Khālid al-Raba‘ī, who said: Luqmān was an Ethiopian slave carpenter. His master said to him, “Kill a sheep for us!” so he killed a sheep for him. Then he said, “Give me the two tastiest morsels from it,” so he gave him the tongue and the heart. The master asked, “Wasn’t there anything tastier than this?” He said, “No,” so [his master] remained silent. Then he said to him, “Kill another sheep for us,” and said, “Give us the two worst morsels of it.” So he brought him the tongue and the heart. He said to him, “I ordered you to give the tastiest two morsels and you brought me the tongue and the heart, and I ordered you to give me the worst two morsels

and you brought me the tongue and the heart." He responded, "There are none more tasty than those two when they are good, and none worse than those two when they are bad."

‘Abdallāh b. Hāmid related to us, with his chain of authorities from Muḥammad b. ‘Ajlān, who said: "Luqmān the Wise said, 'There is no wealth like health, and no pleasure like feeling happy.'"

‘Abdallāh related to us with his chain of authorities from Abū Hurayrah who said: A man passed by Luqmān while some people were gathered around him. He said to him, "Are you not the black slave who was a shepherd in such-and-such a place?" he said, "Yes, indeed." He asked, "And what brought you to what I see?" he replied, "Believing a conversation, fulfilling a trust, and abandoning what does not concern me."

Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad informed me from his father, who said: Luqmān said, "A father's striking his child is like water to a seed." From ‘Abdallāh b. Dīnār: Luqmān came back from a journey and his son came to meet him on the way, Luqmān said to him, "What is new with my father?" He replied, "He died." He said, "Praise be to God, I am in control of my affairs." He said, "What about my wife?" "She died." He said, "May my bed be renewed."<sup>4</sup> He said, "How is my sister doing?" He said, "She died." Luqmān said, "My shame (*lit.* genitals) is covered up." "And what about my brother?" He said, "He died." and Luqmān said, "I am filled with sadness."

Al-Ḥusayn b. al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad related to us with his chain of authorities from Shaqīq who said: Someone asked Luqmān, "Who is the worst of men?" He replied, "The one who doesn't care if people see him doing evil." Someone said to Luqmān, "How ugly your face is!" He replied, "Do you blame the sculpture or the sculptor for that?"

Al-Muḥāribī—Sufyān al-Thawrī, who said that Luqmān said to his son, "This world is a deep sea in which many people have drowned, so let your ship be fear of God; let that which fills it be your faith in God; and its sail, your reliance upon God—perhaps you will be saved, but I do not think so. My son, how can people not be afraid of what threatens when every day they fall short? My son, take only enough of this world but do not reject it completely,

<sup>4</sup> Namely, "May I find a new wife."



and be dependent on others. Fast enough to reign in your desires, but do not fast so much as to prevent you from praying for, in the eyes of God, prayer is greater than fasting. My son, do not acquire knowledge in order to compete with scholars, or to argue with fools, or to act ostentatiously in society—but do not abandon knowledge by demeaning it and desiring ignorance. My son, choose a community that pleases you—if you see people mentioning God, sit with them, and if you are scholar your knowledge will be useful to you and it will increase you in knowledge; and if you are deserving, they will teach you. And God is likely to look at them in His mercy and include you with them. But if you see people who do not mention God, do not associate with them; for if you are a scholar, your knowledge will be of no use to them, and if you are ignorant, they will increase your ignorance. And God is liable to look at them with punishment and include you.

My son, place responsibility only on its (shepherd) keeper—just as there is no friendship between the lamb and the wolf, so is there no friendship between the libertine and the pious man.

Whoever loves hypocrites will be vilified; he who enters the doorways of wickedness is suspect; whoever associates with an evil companion will not be free of blame; and he who does not control his tongue will be sorry.

My son, be a servant to those who are admirable, and do not be a friend to the wicked. My son, be trustworthy and you will be rich; do not let people think that you fear God, while your heart is a perjurer. My son, keep company with scholars and jostle them with your knees, but do not quarrel with them for they will prevent you from conversing with them. Be polite in questioning them, and if they desire to leave you, do not stand in their way, for they will become tired of you.

My son, do not desire to manage an affair nor refuse to enter into it, for that lessens one's considered opinion and detracts from reason. My son, if you are well disciplined when you are small, you will benefit when you grow older. My son, when you travel do not trust in your riding animal, for it is quick to take flight and it is not the behavior of the wise, except when you are in a place that permits you to stretch out. If you are near a resting-place, get off of your animal and walk, then begin feeding it before yourself. Beware of travelling at nightfall. You should set out from midnight until

night's end. Travel with your sword, your shoes, your turban, your garments, your waterskin, your needle, your thread, and your awl. Take along many medicines that will benefit you and your companions. Be agreeable to them, compliant except in regard to disobedience to God.

My son, beware of concealing your face, for by day it is known, and by night it is suspicion. My son, do not be overbearing to people in piety while forgetting yourself, for you will be like the lamp that gives light to the people and burns itself. My son, do not harbor hatred about minor matters, because what is minor today, becomes major tomorrow.

My son, beware of lying, for it will destroy your faith and diminish your honor among people, and with it your shame, your brilliance, and your dignity will abandon you and you will become despised. You will not be listened to when you speak or be believed when you say something, and life is not good when it is like that.

My son, beware of evil character, anger, and lack of patience. Do not keep as a friend someone with these traits, and stay away from people like that. Force yourself to show friendship in your affairs, and steadfastness in bitter circumstances. Let your character be proper to all people, for he who is of good character and manifests his joy and delight, will enjoy the favor of the pious ones; the best people will love him, and the dissolute will avoid him.

My son, do not devote yourself to worries, and do not busy your heart with sorrows. Beware of greed and be content with fate, submitting to what God has decreed for you. Praise your livelihood and let your soul be glad—enjoy your life. If you wish that the riches of this world be gathered to you, cut off your desire for what people possess, for the trustworthy prophets achieved what they did only through cutting off their longing for the possessions of others.

My son, this world is small, and your span of life in it is even smaller, and all that remains is the smallest of the smaller than small. O my son, show your kindness to the undeserving, lest you forfeit it in this world, and withhold its reward in the Hereafter. Be frugal and not a spendthrift. Do not hold fast to money stingily, nor disburse it wastefully.

My son, hold fast to wisdom—you will be honored by it. Honor it and it will honor you. The chief characteristic of wisdom is the religion of Allah.

My son, there are three signs by which the envious one is defamed: when it disappears, he will be flattered; when he witnesses it, he thereby takes pleasure in (another's) misfortune."

The account of Luqmān the Wise ends here, as well as the blessings he bequeathed to his son. And God is All-knowing.

## BULŪQIYĀ

### THE TALE OF BULŪQIYĀ<sup>1</sup>

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ḥazraqī<sup>2</sup> related to us with his chain of authorities, that ‘Abdallāh b. Salām al-Isrā’īlī<sup>2</sup> said that there was a man among the Israelites named Ūshiyā. He was one of their scholars, was very wealthy, and was a leader of the Israelites. He knew the description of the Prophet and of his Community<sup>3</sup> in the Torah, but he concealed it and kept it a secret from them. Now he had a son named Bulūqiyā, who was his father’s successor among the Israelites, and all this was after Solomon. When his father Ūshiyā died, Bulūqiyā remained, and leadership and administration were in his hand.<sup>4</sup>

One day he explored his father’s treasury and found in it an iron chest, locked with an iron lock. He asked the keepers of the treasury about it and they said, “We don’t know.” He worked on the lock until he broke it open and behold! he found in the chest a teakwood box. He opened it and in it were papers sealed with musk containing the description of the Prophet and his Community. He opened them and read their contents about the Children of Israel, whereupon he said, “Woe to you from God, O father, for what you wrote and hid of the truth regarding the Children of Israel.” Then he brought it back to his people. The Israelites said, “Were it not that you are our leader and powerful one, we would dig up his grave, take him out of it and burn him in fire.” He said, “Do not harm him! He only followed his soul’s destiny, losing his religion and this world. So admit the description of the Prophet and of his Community into the Torah.”

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<sup>1</sup> The tales are found in several versions of *The Thousand and One Nights* in nights 486 to 533.

<sup>2</sup> A Jewish convert to Islam during the lifetime of Muḥammad, who is often quoted on Jewish topics. See *EP*, I:52.

<sup>3</sup> Namely, Muḥammad and the Muslims.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of the connection of the story of Bulūqiyā to the Gilgamesh story and *1001 Nights*, see Stephanie Dalley, “Gilgamesh in the Arabian Nights,” in *JNES*, series 3, vol. 1, pt. 1, April 1991, pp. 1–18. I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Ronald Hendel for his assistance in the Gilgamesh connection.

The narrator said that Bulūqiyā's mother was a modest woman, and he asked her permission to go to the land of Syria, for they were then in the land of Egypt. She said to him, "What will you do in Syria?" and he answered, "I will ask about Muḥammad and his Community and perhaps God will bestow upon me admission into His religion." So she gave him permission and Bulūqiyā set out to enter the land of Syria. While he was travelling, he wound up at one of the islands of the sea where he came upon serpents as big as a camel in size and God knows what height, and they were saying, "There is no god but Allah, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah." When they saw him they said to him, "You creature, who are you and what is your name?" He said, "My name is Bulūqiyā and I am of the Children of Israel." They said, "And what is Israel?" to which he replied, "One of the descendants of Adam". They said, "We have heard the name of Adam but have not heard of the name of Israel."

The narrator continued, saying that Bulūqiyā said to them, "O you serpents, who are you?" and they replied, "We are serpents of Hell and we will punish the unbelievers there on the Day of Resurrection." Bulūqiyā said, "So what are you doing here? And how do you know Muḥammad?" They said, "Twice each year Hell boils over and sends out hot fumes. It sends us here, then we return to it, hence the intensity of its heat in the summer and of its cold in winter. In Hell God has written on all steps, doors, and pavilions, 'There is no god but Allah, and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah.'<sup>5</sup> It is for this reason that we know Muḥammad." Bulūqiyā continued, "O serpents, are there any others like you or even bigger than you in Hell?" They answered, "In Hell there are serpents so large, that one of us could enter its nose and leave by its mouth and it would not sense it at all."

The narrator said that Bulūqiyā took his leave of them and went on until he came to another island and lo, he met serpents the size of tree trunks and columns. On the back of one of them was a small yellow serpent. Whenever it moved, the other serpents gathered around it, and when it gave a blast they went under the ground for fear of it. He said, "When I saw it and it saw me it said, 'O created one, who are you? And what is your name?' I said, 'My name

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<sup>5</sup> The *shahādah*, the Muslim confession of faith, is here already in use before the coming of Muḥammad.

is Bulūqiyā and I am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, the Friend [of God]. But tell us, O serpent, who are you?" It said, "I am the appointed trustee of the serpents and my name is Tamlikhā; were I not trustee over them, they would kill all human beings in one day. But when I whistle one time, they go under the ground. However, Bulūqiyā, if you meet Muḥammad, send my greetings to him for me."

Then Bulūqiyā went to the land of Syria and came to Jerusalem. There he found one of their rabbis named 'Affān the Good, so he came to him and greeted him. He responded, "O Bulūqiyā, this is neither the time of Muḥammad nor of his Community, between you and him there are centuries and years." Then 'Affān the Good said to him, "Bulūqiyā, show me the place of the serpent whose name is Tamlikhā, for if I were able to catch it, I might hope to acquire with you great property, so we would live a comfortable life until God sends Muḥammad and we enter his religion." And because of Bulūqiyā's desire to enter the religion of Muḥammad 'Affān the Good said, "I will show you the place." 'Affān arose, took a chest of iron, within which he placed two bowls he made, in one of which there was wine, in the other, milk. Then they journeyed together until they came to the place of the serpent. They opened the entrance to the chest and moved away. The serpent came desiring the aroma, and entered the chest, drank the milk and the wine, became drunk and fell asleep. 'Affān arose and crept softly to the chest, locking its entrance on the serpent, and made it fast. He took the chest and the two of them went on.

Every tree they passed spoke to them by God's leave. They passed by a tree which they call Qarmal, and it said, "'Affān, whoever takes me, cuts me down, breaks me up, squeezes my water and resin, and smears his two feet with it, will wade through the Seven Seas and his feet will not be affected nor will he drown." 'Affān said, "I sought you for that." Then he cut down that tree, broke it up, squeezed out its water and took its resin out, placing it in an earthen jug. Then he released the serpent and it flew off between Heaven and Earth saying, "O human, how bold you are against your Lord! For you will not attain what you desire."

The narrator said that the serpent departed and 'Affān and Bulūqiyā journeyed to the sea. They smeared their feet, then entered into the sea and walked on the water as though they were walking on land. Then they crossed the first sea and the second when, lo! they came

to a mountain in the midst of the sea, neither high nor low, having soil like musk, with a white cloud over it. In it was a cave and in the cave was a bed of gold. On the bed a young man was lying on his back, the nape of his neck was covered by long hair, his right hand placed on his chest and his left on his stomach, like one asleep. But he was not asleep, for he was dead. At his head was a monster, and his signet ring was on his left hand, for this was Solomon son of David, and his power was in his signet ring. It was made of gold and its stone was a square ruby on which were written four lines, in each line was the Greatest Name of God, and 'Affān knew of it from the Book.

Bulūqiyā asked, "Who is this dead man, 'Affān?" and he replied, "He is Solomon son of David. We want to take his ring and rule over his domain, for we hope to live until God sends Muḥammad." Bulūqiyā said, "Did he not already ask his Lord, 'Grant me dominion not appropriate to anyone after me?" and He gave it to him as he requested; so the domain of Solomon will not be attained until the Day of Resurrection because of his prayer." 'Affān said, "Bulūqiyā, be silent. God is truly with us and we possess the Greatest Name of God, but you Bulūqiyā, read the Torah." 'Affān drew near to remove the signet ring from Solomon's hand from off his finger, but the monster said, "How bold you are against your Lord! You have overcome us with the names of Almighty God, but we will overcome you by His power."

The narrator said that whenever the monster blew, Bulūqiyā would mention a name of God, so the breath of the monster did not affect them at all. Then 'Affān drew near the bed to pull the ring off of his finger, while Bulūqiyā was busied with anticipation of Gabriel's descent from heaven. When [Gabriel] descended, he gave a shout at the two of them because of which the Earth and the mountains shook and quaked, and the waters of the sea became mixed and clashed so that the sweet became salty due to the power of his shout. 'Affān fell down on his face and so did Bulūqiyā. The monster blew and from its belly came forth a flame like sudden lightning which burned 'Affān. His breath went out to the sea and whatever it passed by burned up, nor was there any water that it did not heat up and cause it to boil.

As for Bulūqiyā, indeed, when he saw the punishment, he mentioned the Greatest Name of God, and misadventure did not befall him. Then Gabriel appeared in the form of a man and said to him,

“O human! How bold you are against God!” Bulūqiyā said to him, “Who are you, may God have mercy on you?” He replied, “I am Gabriel, the trusted one of the Lord of All-beings.” Bulūqiyā said, “Gabriel, I came forth only because of love for Muḥammad and his faith, I did not mean to sin nor to use it.” He replied, “Therefore you were saved.” Then Gabriel ascended to heaven and Bulūqiyā went on and smeared his feet with that resin. But he lost the path from which he had come and took a different one. Then he journeyed on passing through six seas, arrived at the seventh and lo! he came to an island of gold, with grass of turmeric and saffron, and olive, date, and pomegranate trees.

Bulūqiyā said, “How this place resembles the description of Paradise!” The narrator continues; Bulūqiyā drew near to one of the trees and reached for its fruit, but the tree said, “O sinner! O son of the sinner! You may not take anything from me!” Suddenly opposite the tree were people racing with drawn swords in their hands, and they were skirmishing with one another with blows and jabs. When they saw Bulūqiyā they surrounded him and enclosed him from behind, intending harm to him. But Bulūqiyā mentioned the name of God and they were amazed by him, and afraid of him and sheathed their swords saying all together, “There is no God but Allah, Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah.” Then they said to him, “Who are you, O worshipper of God?” He replied, “I am a son of Adam.” They said, “What is your name?” He said, “My name is Bulūqiyā and I am an Israelite.” They said, “We know Adam but we do not know Israel. What brought you to us?”

He replied; “I have gone out in search of a prophet who is called Muḥammad and I have already erred in the way that I sought, and have seen such-and-such horrors.” They said; “Bulūqiyā, we are ‘believing *jinn*’ and reside with God’s angels in Heaven, whence we descended to Earth to fight the “unbelieving *jinn*”. We have stayed behind here to fight them and do battle with them until the Day of Resurrection; we will not die until the Day of Resurrection, and you will journey with us.” Bulūqiyā said to the king of the *jinn* whose name was Ṣakhr, “Ṣakhr, tell me about the creation of the *jinn*. How did it come about?” He replied; “When God created Hell He made seven gates for it and seven tongues. Of these, He created two creatures; one creature in His heaven which he named Jabalīt, and one creature on Earth, which He named Tamalīt. As for Jabalīt, he was created in the form of a lion, while Tamalīt had the form of a wolf.



He made the lion male and the wolf female. He made the height of each of the two of them equal [the distance of] a five hundred-year journey. He made the tail of the wolf in the status of that of a scorpion, and the tail of the lion of equal status to that of a snake. He commanded both of them to shake themselves in the Fire, and from the tail of the wolf fell a scorpion, and from the tail of the lion a snake. From them come all the snakes and scorpions of Hell. Then He commanded them to wed each other, and the wolf was impregnated by the lion and gave birth to seven sons and seven daughters. God inspired them that they give the sons in marriage to the daughters as He had commanded Adam, and six of the sons obeyed while one did not and did not marry. So his father cursed him, and he is Iblīs. His name was al-Ḥārith and his by-name Abū Murrah, and this is the beginning of the creation of the *jinn*, Bulūqiyā! Verily our steeds will not stand still for humans, but I will cover my horse and veil him so he will not know who rides him. So ride him in God's name. And when you have reached the farthest of my provinces, you will come upon an old man and a youth and some others with the two of them, and you will meet the two of them and give the horse to them. So go, with God's protection, rightly guarded!"

He had parted from the king of the *jinn* in the morning and reached the two of them by midday, and they said to him, "Bulūqiyā, how long ago did you part from the king?" He replied, "I parted from him in the morning." They said, "How quickly you came! You have mastered our horse." Bulūqiyā said, "I did not reach out a hand to him or move a foot on him, nor did I make him gallop." They said, "Of course, but our horse knew who you are and your station and your weight. So he flew between Heaven and Earth to free himself from you. How far do you think he brought you?" He said, "Five *parasangs* or more." They said, "Not at all. He brought you, during this interval, the distance of [a journey of] one hundred and twenty years, and he flew with you between Heaven and Earth around the world above [the mountain of] Qāf, while you were not aware of it."

The narrator continued: They undid the horse's saddle, bridle, and its covering, and lo! sweat was dripping and flowing from each of his hairs. His two wings had broken and were shattered from so much flying and circling, exhaustion and weariness. Bulūqiyā said, "By God, this is a wonder!" And they responded, "God's wonders never cease." Then he bade them farewell and he sailed away on

the sea. While he was traveling he saw an angel one of whose hands was in the East and the other in the West, and it was saying, "There is no god but God, Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah!" Bulūqiyā greeted him and the angel said to him, "Who are you, O created one?" He said, "I am Bulūqiyā and I am an Israelite, from the offspring of Adam." Then Bulūqiyā said to him, "O angel, what is your name?" He replied, "My name is Yuhāyīl and I am the angel responsible for the darkness of the night and the light of day." He said, "For what reason are your hands stretched out?" He said, "In my right hand is the light of day, and in the left hand is the darkness of night. If the day overtakes the night, then the Heavens and the Earth will become light and there will never be night at all. But if the darkness overtakes the light, it will darken the Heavens and the Earth and there will never be light at all. In front of me there is hung a tablet on which are two lines, one white and one black. If I see the black decreasing, I decrease the darkness and if I see the black increasing, I increase the darkness. If I see the white lines growing, I lengthen the day, and if it gets shorter, I shorten it. Therefore, in winter the night is longer than the day and the day is shorter, while in the summer the day is longer and the night shorter." Then Bulūqiyā took his leave and went on his way.

Presently he met another angel, standing with his right hand in the Heavens and his left hand on Earth and his two feet below the Pleiades, saying, "There is no god but Allah; Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah." Bulūqiyā greeted him, and the angel said to him, "From whom are you, and from which people are you and what is your name?" He replied, "My name is Bulūqiyā and I am an Israelite, and Israel is a descendant of Adam." Then Bulūqiyā said: "O angel, what is your name?" He replied, "Michael." He said: "Why is it that I see your right hand in the Heavens and your left hand in the water?" He replied: "I hold back the wind with my right hand, and the water with my left. If I lifted up my left hand from the water the seas would rise up completely in one hour, and [its waves] collide with one another by God's permission and inundate the world and whoever is on it. With my right hand in the air I hold back the wind from mankind, because in the heavens there is a wind called al-Hā'imah<sup>6</sup> and if I sent it, it would blow away

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<sup>6</sup> May mean "puzzled, confused, or madly in love."

whoever is in Heaven or on Earth.” After he spoke, Bulūqiyā took leave of him and went on his way.

Suddenly he came upon four angels: one of them with a head like that of a bull, another with the head of an eagle, a third with a lion’s head, and the fourth with the head of a human being. As for the one with the bull’s head, he was saying, “My God, have mercy on the cattle and do not punish them. Free them from the cold of winter and the heat of summer, and put into the hearts of humans kindness and mercy towards them so that they will not lay traps for them nor burden them above their capacity. And make me one of those worthy of the intercession of our master Muḥammad on the Day of Resurrection.”

As for the one with the head of an eagle, he was saying, “My God, have mercy on the birds and free them from the cold of winter and the heat of summer, and make me one of those worthy of the intercession of our master Muḥammad on the Day of Resurrection.”

As for the one with the lion’s head, he was saying, “My God, have mercy on the beasts of prey and do not punish them, and defend them from the heat of summer and the cold of winter and make me one of those worthy of the intercession of our master Muḥammad on the Day of Resurrection.”

As for the one with the human head, he was saying, “There is no God but Allah; Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah. My God, have mercy on the Muslims and do not chastise them. Defend them from the Fire, and make me worthy of the intercession of our master Muḥammad on the Day of Resurrection.”

Bulūqiyā went on until he reached Mount Qāf and lo! an angel was standing on Mount Qāf, and Mount Qāf surrounded the world with green corundum, and that is His word: “*Qāf—by the glorious Qur’ān.*” (50:1) Bulūqiyā saluted the angel and the latter said to him: “Who are you?” He said, “I am Bulūqiyā and I am an Israelite of the progeny of Adam.” And the angel said to him, “Where are you heading?” He said, “I went forth in search of a prophet of the Arabs who is called Muḥammad, but I have not seen a trace of him, nor do I know in what land I am.” The angel said to him: “There is no God but Allah and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah; we have been commanded to bless Muḥammad.” Bulūqiyā said, “O angel, what is your name?” He said: “My name is Khazqiyā’īl.” “What are you doing here?” Bulūqiyā said. The angel said, “I am God’s custodian of Mount Qāf.” In his hand was a string cord,

which he tightened at times and loosened at others. All of the veins of the Earth were tied to it, while that string was in his hand. He explained, "If God wishes to oppress His veins of the Earth, then the world becomes oppressive for humanity. But if God wishes to make it easy for them, He commands me to relax the string and open up the veins of the Earth and the world becomes comfortable for humanity. If God wishes to frighten a people, He commands me to move the veins of that land, and on account of that, one place will shake and another will not, one place will quake and another will not."

Bulūqiyā said: "O angel, what is beyond Qāf?" He replied: "Beyond Qāf are forty worlds aside from the one from which you came. In each of these worlds are four hundred thousand gates, and at each gate are four hundred thousand times the likes of the world from which you came. There is no darkness in them, but all of it is light. Their Earth is of gold upon which are curtains of light, and their inhabitants are angels who know Adam but not Iblīs nor Hell. They are saying: "There is no god but Allah and Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah." With this they were inspired, for this they were created, and this were they commanded [to do] until the Day of Resurrection. Bulūqiyā said: "And what is beyond them, O angel?" He replied: "Curtains, and behind the curtains God's knowledge and power." Bulūqiyā said, "Tell me, O angel, upon what is this mountain resting?" He replied, "Between the horns of an ox whose name is Behemoth.<sup>7</sup> He is white, and his head is in the East, while his rear portion is in the West, between his horns is the distance of a thirty-thousand year journey. He is kneeling before his Lord on a white stone." Bulūqiyā said, "O angel, how many Earths are there, and how many seas? And where is Hell?" He replied, "Beneath the seventh Earth." So Bulūqiyā took leave of him, and went on his way.

Then he came upon a barrier, the top of which was in the Heavens, and the bottom in the water, and in it was a locked door, upon the lock of which was a seal of light. At the door were two angels, one of which had the head of an ox and the other, the head of a lamb with a body of an ox. Both of them were saying, "There is no god but Allah; Muḥammad is the messenger of Allah. Bulūqiyā greeted them and they returned his greeting, saying to Bulūqiyā", "Created

<sup>7</sup> Arabic *Bahamūt*, see p. 7, n. 8 above.

one, of whom are you and what is your name?" He replied, "My name is Bulūqiyā, and I am an Israelite of the progeny of Adam." They said, "There is no god but Allah; Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah. These are names we do not know." He said, "How can you know Muḥammad and not know Adam, when Muḥammad is of his stock." They replied: "Thus were we created, and thus were we commanded. We have never heard the name of Adam or of Israel." Bulūqiyā said, "Open the gate for me so that I may pass." They said, "We are unable to open it, but God has an angel in Heaven whose name is Gabriel, who may be able to open it." So Bulūqiyā prayed to his Lord.

The narrator continued: So God commanded Gabriel who came down to him and opened up [the gate] for him, and he said to [Bulūqiyā], "O son of Adam, how daring you are towards God!" Then Bulūqiyā passed through until he came to two seas: one salty, the other of fresh water. Between them he saw a partition. In the salt sea there was a mountain of gold, and in the fresh-water sea, a mountain of silver. Between them was an angel in the shape of an ant, with whom there were angels of the same shape. Bulūqiyā greeted them and they returned his greeting saying, "Who are you?" He related his story to them and then Bulūqiyā said to them, "Who are you?" They said, "We are God's custodians of these two seas, so that they do not meet nor covet [that]." Bulūqiyā said to them, "What is this red mountain?" They replied, "It is God's treasure-house on Earth, all the gold that appears in the Earth is from this red mountain, while all the water in the world, either fresh or salty, is from the water of these two seas whose water came from beneath the Throne before God created the angels. The white mountain is of silver and is a treasure house of God. All the silver in the world and every silver mine come from the roots of this mountain."

Then Bulūqiyā bade them farewell and went on until he reached a great sea in which there were many huge fish who had gathered, and a large fish was judging among the fish. When he saw Bulūqiyā he said, "There is no god but Allah; Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah." The narrator continued: Bulūqiyā greeted him and then he said to him, "Who are you?" He told him of his situation and that he had gone forth seeking the Prophet. He returned his greeting and then said, "Bulūqiyā, if you should meet Muḥammad extend greetings to him from me." Bulūqiyā said, "Yes, God willing." Then he said, "O fishes, I am hungry and thirsty, but the water of this sea is salty and I cannot find anything to eat or drink."

The narrator continued: The largest fish said, "Bulūqiyā, I will give you food to eat after which, if you eat it, will enable you to journey for forty years without becoming weary, without sleeping, without being hungry or thirsty." That fish fed him a white loaf that he ate, and then went on until he reached [human] civilization. But before he reached it, he saw a youth passing over the water as though he were the full moon, and Bulūqiyā said to him, "Who are you?" and he replied, "Ask the One who created me." Bulūqiyā traveled on for a day and a night when he came upon another one whose light passed over the water like the light of the moon, and Bulūqiyā said to him, "Who are you?" He replied, "Ask the one who created me." Bulūqiyā traveled for a day and a night and when he came upon a third one who was like the moon becoming visible at sunset, Bulūqiyā said to him, "I implore you by God to stop for me," and he stopped and said to Bulūqiyā, "Why did you entreat me?" [Bulūqiyā] said, "I was afraid that you would elude me as happened with your companions who passed by." Then he said to him: "Who was the first one?" He replied: "He was Isrāfil, the master of forms; the second was Michael, master of rain and the sustenance of humanity, and the third was Gabriel, God's agent." Bulūqiyā asked him, "What are you doing on this sea?" He said, "One of the beasts of the sea harmed its dwellers and they prayed against it, and God is responding to their prayer. We were commanded to drive it to Hell to punish the unbelievers with it on the Day of Resurrection." Bulūqiyā asked, "What is its height and its width?" He replied, "It is a thirty-year's-journey in height, and a twenty-year's-journey in width." Then Bulūqiyā said, "Will there be in Hell anything like this animal or larger than it?" The angel replied, "Yes. In Hell there is among the animals one, who if this animal entered its nose it would not be aware of it, and it could go out of its mouth and it would not be aware of it, because of its great size." He spoke, and Bulūqiyā took his leave and departed to another island.

There, between two tombs, he met a white beardless lad; Bulūqiyā greeted him and said to him, "Boy, who are you and what is your name?" He said, "My name is Ṣāliḥ." He said, "And what are these two tombs?" He replied, "One of them is the tomb of my father, and the other is the tomb of my mother. They were both pious people and they died here and I will remain at their tombs until I die." Bulūqiyā took leave of him and went off until he reached an island. Suddenly he came upon a huge tree on which stood a bird with a head of gold, eyes of sapphire, a beak of pearl, legs of saffron and

feet of emerald. There was a table placed under the tree upon which was food and a roasted fish. Bulūqiyā greeted the bird, and it returned his greeting, Bulūqiyā said to it, "Who are you, O bird?" He answered, "I am one of the birds of the Garden, verily God had sent me to Adam with this table when he was sent down from the Garden. Indeed, I was with him when he met Eve and God permitted him to eat. I have been here since that time, and every stranger and wayfarer of God's pious servants passes by it and eats from it, and I am God's custodian of it until the Day of Resurrection." Bulūqiyā said, "And it does not alter nor decrease?" He replied, "The food of the Garden neither alters nor decreases." Bulūqiyā asked, "May I eat from it?" He responded, "Eat!" And he ate his fill and then said to him, "O bird, is there anyone with you?" He said, "With me is Abū l-'Abbās who comes to me from time to time." [Bulūqiyā] asked, "And who is Abū l-'Abbās?" He said: "Al-Khiḍr." When he mentioned al-Khiḍr, lo! he approached, wearing white garments, while wherever he stepped grass sprouted beneath his feet.<sup>8</sup> The narrator continued: He greeted Bulūqiyā and asked him about his condition. Bulūqiyā responded, "I have been gone for a long time and [now] I want to return to my mother." Al-Khiḍr said, "Between you and your mother is a journey of five hundred years. But I will return you to her in [just] five hundred months." The bird said, "If between you and her there is a distance of a five-hundred year journey I will return you in five-hundred days." And al-Khiḍr said, "And I will return you to her in one hour." Then [al-Khiḍr] said, "Close your eyes!" And he closed them. Then he said to him, "Open your eyes!" He opened them and lo! he was sitting with his mother. He asked her, "Who brought me to you?" and she replied, "A white bird was flying with you between Heaven and Earth and placed you in front of me."

Then Bulūqiyā related to the Children of Israel the wonders and tales he had seen, and they verified them and have recorded them until our day. And this is the account of Bulūqiyā and the wonders he saw on sea and on land, on the plain and on the mountain. And God is All-knowing!

<sup>8</sup> This is an aspect of the nature of al-Khiḍr, the Green One. See pp. 396ff. above.

## DHŪ L-QARNAYN

### A SESSION ABOUT THE STORY OF DHŪ L-QARNAYN

God has said: *They will ask you about Dhū l-Qarnayn. Say: 'I will give you an account of him.'* (18:84)

### A CHAPTER ABOUT HIS KINSHIP AND HIS BY-NAME

Most of the scholars of biography say that he was Alexander (al-Iskandar) son of Philip [Filībīsh] son of Baṭriyūs son of Hermes (Harmas) son of Hardūs son of Maṭṭūn son of Rūmī son of Laṭīn son of Yūnān<sup>1</sup> son of Japheth. It is said that his genealogy goes back to Esau son of Isaac son of Abraham, the Friend of God. Some of the early ones claimed that Alexander was the brother of Darius son of Darius, that being because Darius the Great, son of Bahman son of Isfandiyyār son of Yastasp had married the mother of Alexander who was the daughter of the king of Rome. Her name was Helena (Halānah) and she became pregnant by her husband Darius the Great. He found her to possess a disgusting stench and he ordered that stratagems be found to remove that from her. The savants agreed on the idea that she be treated by means of a tree called *Sandarūs*.<sup>2</sup> It was cooked for her and she bathed in its water and most of her smell and her sweat were removed thereby. But not all of it was removed, so his soul was finished with her because of her remaining smell and he loathed her and sent her back to her family even though she had become pregnant by him. Whilst with her family she bore him a son and named him after [Darius] and after the tree with whose waters she had washed, [giving him the name] Sakandarūs. And that is the origin of his name. Then [this name]

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<sup>1</sup> Note the names *Rūmī* = Eastern Roman (Byzantine Empire), *Laṭīn* = Western Roman (Empire), *Yūnān* = Greece.

<sup>2</sup> According to Dozy, II: 693, *Sandarūs* is a conifer, French = *genévrier*, or juniper.



was shortened and he was called al-Iskandar, and was nicknamed Dhū l-Qarnayn [the two-horned one].<sup>3</sup>

Opinions differed about the reason for his being called by this [nickname]. Some said that he was given it because he ruled over both his home and Persia, while [others] said that at the front of his head was something similar to two horns of flesh. Another [version] was that it was because he saw in a dream that he had grasped at two rays [*qamayn*] of the sun, and the interpretation of his vision was that he would encompass both the East and the West. Another said that it was because he called his people to monotheism and they beat him on his right horn and he again called them to monotheism and they beat him on his left horn. Another said that he had two beautiful locks of hair—and a lock of hair is called a horn.<sup>4</sup> It is said it was because he came of nobility from both sides, of high-born family from both his father and his mother. It is also said that it was because during his time two generations [*qamān*] of people had died out while he still lived. Another said that it was because when he did battle he fought with both his hands and with his mount together. Others said that it was because he was granted both esoteric and exoteric knowledge, while another said that it was because he entered both the light and the darkness. But God is All-knowing.

#### A CHAPTER ABOUT THE STORY MENTIONING HIM, AND THE REASON FOR THE END OF HIS RULE

God has said: "*Lo! We made him strong in the land and gave him unto everything a road. And he followed a road.*" (18:85–86)

People have said that Philip the Greek, the father of Alexander, was king of the Greeks, and that when he died Alexander ruled after him. Others say that Alexander was the brother of Darius the Lesser, and that Helena's father, Alexander's maternal grandfather, was one of the kings of Greece, and when he died, rule passed to Alexander, his daughter's son.

<sup>3</sup> For discussion on the origin of this name see B. Wheeler, "Moses or Muḥammad," pp. 199–201.

<sup>4</sup> Based on the idea that *qamayn* here meant "horns".

The kings of Rome<sup>5</sup> used to present tribute to the kings of Persia, and the tribute that the father of Alexander would present to the kings of Persia was a golden egg. When Alexander came to the throne as a man of determination, strength, and sovereignty, he attacked the kings of Rome, conquering them, and gained for himself rule over Rome. Then he attacked some of the kings of the Arabs and overcame them and perceived the power he possessed. So he rebelled against Darius the Lesser, king of Persia, and refrained from presenting the taxes and tribute that his father used to present to him for himself and for the king of Rome. Darius son of Darius wrote to him about the cutting off of the taxes and tribute from himself and from the king of Rome. Alexander responded to him: "I have slaughtered the hen that used to lay that egg, and I have eaten its flesh."

When that letter reached him regarding that matter, Darius was angry with him and wrote to him, upbraiding him for his wicked deed in withholding the presentation of the tax. He also sent him a mallet, a ball, and two *qāfiḥ* of sesame, and informed him regarding what he had written to him that "You are a boy and it is necessary for you to play with the mallet and ball that I have sent you. So do not assume sovereignty and do not meddle in it. Do not rebel, or I will send you someone who will bring you in fetters, even if your armies should be as numerous as the sesame seeds that I have sent you."

In response to that Alexander sent him [the following message]: "I have understood what you have written and have observed what you have mentioned in your letter about sending the mallet and the ball. I have joined the ball to the mallet and have compared the ball to the Earth.<sup>6</sup> I am in possession of your realm and will add it to mine, I will attach your land to mine. I have looked at the sesame that you have sent me just as I have looked at the mallet and the ball." Along with his letter he sent to Darius a bag of mustard seed, and informed him in his response that: "I have only sent you this because my armies are like this."

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<sup>5</sup> Here anachronistically meaning Byzantium, the Eastern Roman Empire, see n. 28 above.

<sup>6</sup> This assumes that the Earth is as round as a ball, thus Alexander will be able to 'play' with it.

When this response of Alexander reached Darius son of Darius, he assembled his armies and prepared himself for battle with Alexander. Meanwhile, Alexander prepared himself for the encounter and proclaimed the march to his army. He journeyed to Darius's land and they met in the part of Khorasan<sup>7</sup> that borders the Khazars,<sup>8</sup> and they waged a fierce battle. The troops of Darius suffered calamity and two horsemen of those close to him and trusted cut him off (it is said that one of them was his protégé), and they stabbed him, throwing him off of his mount and cast him down to the ground. They wanted through their stabbing him to curry favor with Alexander and a means to him. But Alexander had proclaimed that Darius should be taken prisoner and not slain. He was informed about Darius and hastened until he reached him and saw him at the point of death. He dismounted [to go] to him, sat at his head and told him that he had not intended at all that he should be killed, and what had happened to him had not been his idea at all, but that [Darius's] own trusted ones had betrayed him. Then he said to him: "Ask of me what ever you wish, and I will grant it to you."

Darius said to him, "I have two requests of you: one is that you avenge me on the two men who attacked me"—and he named them and their towns—"and the second is that you marry my daughter Rūshank (Roxanne)." He agreed to the two requests and ordered the crucifixion of the two men and that it be proclaimed abroad about them: "This is the punishment of one who is emboldened against his king, and deceives the people of his land;" and he married Darius's daughter Roxanne.

Darius had reigned for fourteen years. When he was slain the Byzantines' realm became united, although before Alexander it had been divided up; while the Persian realm became divided, although it had been united before Alexander.

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<sup>7</sup> The north-eastern province of Iran, today bordering Turkmenistan and Afghanistan.

<sup>8</sup> The state of the Khazars, a Turkic people with Jewish rulers at one time, was centered north of the Caspian Sea (called Baḥr al-Khazar), quite far from Khorasan. LeStrange, *Lands*, pp. 22, 179, 180.

A CHAPTER ABOUT THE EVENTS THAT OCCURRED DURING THE DAYS OF DHŪ L-QARNAYN AFTER THE SLAYING OF DARIUS, AND A DESCRIPTION OF HIS JOURNEY TO LANDS AND REMOTE REGIONS

Scholars of ancient [history] have said that when Alexander slew Darius, he ruled over the land and its subjects paid him allegiance. He destroyed the fire-temples that had existed in the lands of the Persians, and the idol temples<sup>9</sup> that were in India. He slew the Mobeds,<sup>10</sup> burned their books, and called the people to Islam and monotheism.

Al-Murtaḍā said concerning the reason for the burning of their books, that the Magians made the letters of their books out of gold hammered with golden nails on skins of oxen, the numbers of which reached twelve thousand; they burned them in order to obtain that gold. [Alexander] built twelve cities, among them three in Khorasan: Herat, Marv and Samarkand; a city in the land of Isfahan built on the model of paradise; a city in the land of the Greeks called Hīlāqūs; a city in the land of Babylon for his wife Roxanne daughter of Darius; and the city of Alexandria. Then he saw in a dream that he seized the two rays (horns) of the sun and he saw in his dream that he would journey to the ends of the Earth, eastward and westward.

Scholars have differed about his prophethood. It has been related that the Prophet said, "I do not know whether or not Dhū l-Qarnayn was a prophet." If that tradition is correct, then dealing with this question is hypocritical. But they still differed over it and people said: He was not a prophet but only a pious servant (of God) and a just and righteous ruler. Others said; on the contrary, he was a prophet not sent with a message. The truth, God willing, is that he was a prophet not sent with a message, according to what Wahb and other people of the scriptures have said: Dhū l-Qarnayn was a man from Byzantium, son of one of their old women who had no other child, and his name was Alexander. It is said that his name was 'Abbās and he was a pious worshipper. When his rule became strong and his command established, God inspired him,

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<sup>9</sup> The two types of temples were known to Muslims, but Alexander was not known to have destroyed places of worship of peoples he conquered.

<sup>10</sup> Fire-temples are the Zoroastrian places of worship and the *mobeds* are the Zoroastrian priests.

“Dhū l-Qarnayn, I have sent you to all the creatures between East and West, and I have made you my argument against them. This is the interpretation of your dream: I am sending you to all the nations of the Earth—they are seven nations with differing languages,—among them are two nations between whom is the width of the Earth, and two nations between whom is the length of the Earth, and three nations in the midst of the Earth. These latter are humankind, *jinn*, and Gog and Magog. As for the two nations between whom is the length of the Earth, one nation is at the setting-place of the sun and it is called Nāsik, and another nation opposite it, called Mansik which is at the rising-place of the sun. As for the two nations between whom is the width of the Earth, one is a nation at the right region of the Earth, called Hāwīl, and the other, opposite it in the left region of the Earth is called Ta’wīl.”

When God said this to him Dhū l-Qarnayn said, “My God, You have entrusted me with a great task which only You can carry out. But tell me about these nations to whom You have sent me: With what power can I contend with them? With what troops or subterfuge can I outnumber them? With what patience can I stand up against them? With what tongue will I speak to them? How will I understand their language and with what hearing will I hear their words? With what sight will I examine them? With what argument will I dispute them, with what intellect will I outwit them, with what heart and wisdom arrange their affair, with what justice will I treat them justly, with what forbearance will I bear them stoutly, with what knowledge will I discriminate between them, with what perception will I confirm their words, with what hand will I have authority over them, with what foot will I tread upon them, with what ability will I number them, with what army will I do battle with them, with what kindness will I unify them when I, my God, have nothing of what I have mentioned which will resist them or strengthen me against them. But You are the One full of pity, the Merciful. You do not task a soul beyond its scope and you do not burden it above its ability, nor do You make it miserable but You have mercy on it.”

God said, “I shall make you able to do what I have burdened you with, and I shall enlarge your hearing and your breast so that you will hear and understand everything. I shall enlarge your perception and you will understand everything. I shall expand your tongue and you will speak of everything, I shall open your sight so

that you will look at everything, and I will mete out your sustenance for you so that nothing will lack for you. I will strengthen your assistance so that nothing will frighten you. I will brace your support so that nothing will overcome you. I will fortify your heart and nothing will terrify you, and I will make your hands powerful so that they will attack everything, and strengthen your tread so that you will destroy everything. I will clothe you with dread and nothing will alarm you. I will make light and darkness subservient to you and make both of them part of your armies—the light will guide you from in front and the darkness protect you from behind.”

When all this was said to him he resolved to journey forth. His people importuned him to remain, but he did not do that, saying, “I must obey God.” Then he commanded them to build him a place of prayer,<sup>11</sup> making its length four hundred cubits and its width two hundred cubits, the width of the foundation of its wall twenty-four cubits and its height in the sky one hundred cubits. He ordered them to set up the enclosure for it. They asked, “How shall we do it?” He replied, “When you have completed the walls, press the soil against them until the compacted [soil] will be even with the wall of the mosque. When you have finished, allocate the (payment) of gold to the wealthy one according to his worth, and to the miserly one according to his worth, and cut it up to (the size of) nail clippings. Then mix that up with the dirt. Place planks of copper, and a peg of copper, and sheets of copper, melt all that while you provide as much work as you wish on smooth level ground. Make the length of every plank one hundred cubits and twenty four cubits and two hundred cubits for what is between the walls—each wall having twelve cubits. Then call the poor people to carry the dirt and they will hasten to do it because of the gold and silver in it. Whoever carries something, it belongs to him.”

They did all this; the poor people taking out all of the dirt, so that the roof became firm with all that was on it, while the poor became wealthy. Their band consisted of forty thousand so he divided them up into four units, each one [numbering] ten thousand. Then he reviewed his troops and found them to be, it is said, one million

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<sup>11</sup> Here the Arabic word *masjid*—usually translated “mosque”—is used. Its literal meaning is “place of prostration”.

four hundred thousand [in number]; his own troops being eight hundred thousand, Darius's troops six hundred thousand, and forty thousand poor people. Then he set out to see the nation that was at the setting-place of the sun, for that is His word: *Till when he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found it setting in a pool of black mud (ḥamʿa)*, (18:86) that is to say, full of mud, while when one reads ḥāmiya with an *alif* without *ḥamza* (ʿ), its meaning is "patroness."

ʿAbdallāh b. Ḥāmid al-İṣfahānī related to us with his authorities from Ibn ʿAbbās, who said, "Ubayy b. Kaʿb taught me its reading as the Messenger of Allah had taught him to read it "in a pool of ḥamʿa." So I said, "We only read it as ḥamʿa." And Muʿāwiya said, "ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar, how do you read it?" He replied, "I read it as you did, Commander of the Faithful." Ibn ʿAbbās said, "Then I prolonged the argument with the two of them, so Muʿāwiya sent for Kaʿb. When he came to him he said to him, "Where do you find the sun setting in the Torah, Kaʿb?" He replied, "As for Arabic, you are all more learned in it than I, but as for the sun, I find in the Torah that it sets in water and mud. I will recite to you something you will reflect on more and more. It is the work of Tubbaʿ:<sup>12</sup>

*Dhū al-Qarnayn was a Muslim before me,  
a king to whom kings professed faith and bowed down.  
He reached the place of dawn and of sunset,  
seeking the causes of a thing from a wise leader  
Then he saw the disappearance of the sun at its setting  
in a spring full of (khulub) and (thaʿt ḥamad).*

Muʿāwiya said, "What is *khulub*, Kaʿb?" "It is 'mud' in their language."<sup>13</sup> he said. "And what is *thaʿt*?" He said, "It is 'mire'." He said, "And what is *ḥamad*?" He said, "Black slime." So he called a man and told him, "Write down what he said."

When he reached the setting-place of the sun, he found there a crowd and numbers that only God could count, and strength and courage that only God could master. He saw differing languages and dubious desires, for that is His word: *He found a people thereabouts*, (18:86)—meaning people. And when he saw that, he fought them with darkness and threw three armies of it around them, surrounding them from all sides until he gathered them in one place. Then

<sup>12</sup> The name of one of the ancient kings of Yemen.

<sup>13</sup> *I.e.*, the South Arabian language of Yemen.

he took fire against them and called them to God and His worship. There were some of them who believed in Him and some that rejected Him. He approached those who rejected Him, causing the darkness to come upon them, and it entered their mouths and noses and ears and bellies. It entered their houses and buildings and it enveloped them from above and below and from every side. When they became frightened they cried out and became confused. When they feared that they would be destroyed in it, they shouted with one voice. He removed (the darkness) from them and he seized them by force and they joined his call. Mighty nations came from the people of the Maghrib (the sun's setting),<sup>14</sup> and he placed them into one troop. Then he departed with them, leading them, while the darkness followed them from behind, guarding them. The light went before him, leading him and guiding him. He was traveling in the direction of the southern land, seeking the nation that was in the southern region of the earth which is called Hāwīl. God made subservient to him his heart and hand, his reason and intelligence and sight, so he did not go wrong when he performed a deed.

He set out, leading those peoples who followed him until, when he reached a river or a ford, he prepared rafts of small boards, like sandals, and joined them together in an hour. Then he carried on them all that he had of those peoples and armies. When they reached seas or rivers, he separated them, giving each man of them a board and he didn't mind carrying it. His perseverance continued until he reached Mansik when the sun was rising. He found it rising over people with whom and with whose army he did as he had done with the two nations before them. Then he turned, advancing in the direction of the northern land, seeking Ta'wīl, which is the people opposite Hāwīl. Between them they bring together the width of the entire earth. When he reached it, he did to it and its army as he had done to those who preceded. For that is His word: *Till when he reached the rising-place of the sun, he found it rising on a people for whom We had appointed no shelter therefrom.* (18:89) That was because they were in a place on which no building lasted so they would take shelter in dens until, when the sun set, they would come out to their cattle and crops.

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<sup>14</sup> *Lit.*, the setting-place of the sun.



Al-Ḥasan said, "Their land was one that could not sustain buildings, so when the sun rose on them they would enter the water, and when it disappeared from them, they went out and grazed as animals graze." Ibu Jurayj said, "Once an army came to them to watch the rising of the sun, and they reached the people and said, 'We will continue until the sun rises and we see it.' Then they said, 'What are these bones?' And they said, 'These are the corpses of a people upon whom the sun rose, and they died here.' He said, 'So they went fleeing in the land.'"

Al-Kalbī said, "They are a nation called Mansik, they are bare-foot, naked, and blind to the truth." He continued, "'Amr b. Mālik b. Umayya related to us saying, 'I found a man in Samarkand talking to people who were gathered together around him listening. I asked someone who had heard his words, and he told me that he had spoken to them about a people upon whom the sun rose. He said, "I went forth until I crossed China, then I asked about them. They told me that 'between you and them is [a journey of] a day and a night." So I hired a man and traveled the rest of the day and a night until I came to them in the morning. One of them covered his ear and wrapped the other. My companion knew their language well and asked them. They said to him, "Then you will see how the sun rises." He continued: "When we did that, we heard a ringing sound, and I fainted and fell down. When I woke up, they were rubbing me with grease. When the sun rose over the water, it was as though oil were on the water and parts of the sky were like the shape of a tent. When [the sun] went down they took me into a den they had—me and my companion—and when day rose, they went to the sea and started fishing for fish. They would throw the fish into the sun and it would be cooked.'" And God is All-knowing.

#### A DESCRIPTION OF THE BARRIER OF DHŪ L-QARNAYN AND EVERYTHING CONNECTED WITH IT

God has said: *Till, when he came between the two barriers, he found upon their farther side a people who could scarcely understand speech.* (18:94)

Scholars of ancient events have said that when Alexander had finished with the people who were at the ends of the earth, and had circled both East and West, he turned from them to the communities in the midst of the earth, among the *jinn*, humankind, Gog and

Magog. When he was on that part of the road that adjoins the remote region of the Turks towards the East, a pious nation of mankind said to him, "Dhū l-Qarnayn, between these two mountains are creatures of God who do not possess any similarity to humankind, but are like animals. They eat grass, and ravage domesticated and wild beasts as lions do. They also eat all crawling things, the insects of the earth, including snakes and scorpions and everything containing a spirit that God has created on Earth. God possesses no other creature that multiplies as they do, nor increases as they. If you were to observe their multiplying and their increasing, you would have no doubt that they would evict its people from the Earth. They would gain victory over it and sow corruption in it. Not a year has passed since we became their neighbors but we expect the first of them to rise against us from between these two mountains. Shall we prepare expenses for you, that is, a reward and wages to place a defensive barrier so they will not get at us?"

Dhū l-Qarnayn said to them, "*The ability my Lord has given me: that is to say, He has given me strength against it, is better: than your tribute. So help me with your labor; I will build a wall between you and them.*" (18:95). They said, "What is that strength?" He said, "Workmen and craftsmen who know how to build and work, as well as tools." They said, "And what are those tools?" He replied, "*Bring me ingots of iron*"—that is, he cut them up, the singular being 'iron'—"and bring me copper." (18:96) They asked, "Where will we get enough iron and copper for the task?" "I shall show you mines of them." They asked, "With what strength shall we cut the iron and the copper?" So he extracted for them another metal called *sāhūn*,<sup>15</sup> which is the whitest thing God has created on Earth. It is what Solomon used for cutting the columns of the Temple, its stones and its jewels. He then measured the distance between the two mountains and lighted a fire for the iron and copper he had collected and made of the pieces like huge rocks. He smelted the copper and made it like clay and mortar for those rocks of iron, and then he built.

The way he built, according to what the biographers have reported, is that when he measured the distance between the two mountains he found it to be one hundred *parasangs*. When he began the work, he dug for a foundation for the wall until he reached water, he

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<sup>15</sup> The identity of this is unknown—perhaps a form of diamond.

made its width fifty *parasangs*. He then placed wood between the two mountains and alternated layers of iron and wood. He continued these layers of iron and wood until he had levelled out the area between the two passes, that is to say, the two mountains. Then he called for fire to be brought, and it was. They blew (the bellows)<sup>16</sup> until they poured out the melted copper into it. The fire consumed the wood layers so that the copper clung to the iron, and it became like a yellow-streaked garment from the yellow and red of the copper and the black and gray of the iron. It became a tall, great, impregnable barrier and He said: “*Thus (Gog and Magog) could neither surmount it—that is to say, climb up—nor dig a hole through it.*” (18:97)

#### DHŪ L-QARNAYN ENTERS AMONG THE SHADOWS THAT ADJOIN THE NORTH POLE, IN SEARCH OF THE SPRING OF LIFE

It is told that ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said that Dhū l-Qarnayn ruled over the East and the West, and that he had a friend among the angels whose name was Raphael. He would come to visit him, and one day while they were conversing, Dhū l-Qarnayn said to him, “Raphael, tell me about your worshipping in heaven.” Raphael wept and said, “Dhū l-Qarnayn, your worship is not to be compared with ours. In heaven there is one sort of angels who stands and never sits down, another who bows down and never raises his head, and they say, ‘Praised be the All-Holy, Lord of the angels and of the Spirit. Our Lord, we have not worshipped You as much as you deserve!’” At that Dhū l-Qarnayn wept greatly and said, “I would like to live to reach the amount of God’s worship that He deserves.” Raphael asked, “Would you really like that, Dhū l-Qarnayn?” He replied that he would, so Raphael told him that God had a spring on the Earth, and what God had ordained was that whoever drank a draught from that spring would never die, unless he himself would ask the Lord for death.<sup>17</sup>

Dhū l-Qarnayn said to him, “Do all of you know where that spring is?” and Raphael replied, “No, but in heaven we speak about God’s having a land of darkness on the Earth, on which neither

<sup>16</sup> See Qur’ān 18:96.

<sup>17</sup> For discussion of the story of the spring of life, see B. Wheeler, “Moses or Alexander”, pp. 204–215.

humans nor demons can set foot. We think that the spring is in that darkness." So Dhū l-Qarnayn assembled the scholars of all the world's peoples, and those who studied books and the traditions of prophecy, and he said to them, "Tell me whether you have found in God's books that you have read, in traditions that have come down to you, and in asking scholars who have preceded you, any mention that God placed on earth a spring that He called 'The Spring of Life'?" And the scholars said that they had not. But one scholar said, "I have read the Testament of Adam and found in it that God created darkness on earth on which no human or demon may set foot, and in it He placed the Spring of Eternity." Dhū l-Qarnayn asked, "Where did you find it located?" and he replied, "I found that it is in the land that is on the first ray of the sun."

Dhū l-Qarnayn sent to it and gathered the jurists, nobles of the people, and the kings. Then he set out to search for the setting-place of the sun. For twelve years he traveled until he reached the edge of darkness and lo! it was like smoke and not like the dark of night. He made camp there and then assembled the scholars with his army, saying: "I want to ask you about this darkness." Whereupon the scholars responded, "O king, those kings and prophets who preceded you never set foot in this land and you will also not do so. For we fear that something will unfold for you that you will not like, which will contain the corruption of the Earth and whoever is on it."

In response, Dhū l-Qarnayn said, "I must travel there," and they said, "O king, stay away from this darkness and do not seek it. For if we knew that by seeking it you would succeed in what you wanted and that God would not be angry with us for following you, (good), but we are afraid that God will bring corruption on the earth and upon all who are on it." But he continued, saying, "I must travel to it." Whereupon the scholars said, "It is your affair." Then Dhū l-Qarnayn asked, "Which animal sees best at night?" "The horse", they replied. "And what sort of horse sees best at night?" "A mare", was the reply. "And what kind of mare?" he asked, "A virgin", was their reply.

Dhū l-Qarnayn sent for and assembled for himself six thousand virgin mares. Then he selected from his troops six thousand men of high endurance and intelligence, to each of whom he sent a horse. He appointed al-Khiḍr to be in charge, and set him up as commander of two thousand men, while Dhū l-Qarnayn remained with

four thousand. He said to the remainder of his army, "Do not leave this camp of yours for twelve years. If we return to you, well and good; if not, return to your lands." Al-Khiḍr said to him, "O king, we will be traveling in the darkness, but do not know the way and will not be able to see each other. What shall we do about straying from the path, if that should happen to us?" So Dhū l-Qarnayn gave al-Khiḍr a red pearl, saying, "If you should happen to stray from the path, throw this down on the ground. If it cries out, the people who have gone astray will return to where it cried out."

Al-Khiḍr journeyed before Dhū l-Qarnayn did, setting out whereas Dhū al-Qarnayn dismounted. While al-Khiḍr was on his way, a ravine appeared before him and he thought that the Spring was in that ravine—he was inspired that it was. He remained standing at the edge of the ravine for a long time, then the pearl responded to him and he sought the place of its sound. He reached it and lo! it was beside the Spring. Al-Khiḍr took off his clothes and entered the Spring, and lo! its water was whiter than milk and sweeter than honey. So he drank and bathed, performed the ablutions and put on his clothes. Then he threw the pearl towards his companions and as it fell down it called out, so al-Khiḍr returned to that spot and to his companions. He mounted and told them, "Journey by the name of God."

Dhū l-Qarnayn, however, missed the ravine, so they journeyed in that darkness for twenty days and then came out to the light. But that light was not like the light of the sun or the moon, and the Earth there was sand, as red as a poppy. Behold, they were at a castle built in that earth, its length being a *parasang* by a *parasang*, and it had a gate. Dhū l-Qarnayn dismounted with his troops, then went on alone and entered the castle. There was a piece of iron, its two ends at the side of the castle from here and here. And there was a black bird, similar to a swallow, tied to the iron by its beak, suspended between heaven and earth. When the bird heard the clanking of Dhū l-Qarnayn it said, "Who is that?" He said, "I am Dhū l-Qarnayn", to which the bird replied, "Dhū l-Qarnayn, aren't there enough things besides me for you, that you come to me?" Then it said, "Dhū l-Qarnayn, speak to me," and he said, "Ask!" The bird said, "Are there many buildings made of gypsum and baked brick on earth?" He answered, "Yes." The bird gave a mighty shudder, then swelled up until it reached a third of the size of the iron, then it said, "Dhū l-Qarnayn, is false testimony prevalent on earth?"—

“Yes.” The bird shuddered, then became so swollen that it filled the iron and blocked the two walls of the castle. When Dhū l-Qarnayn saw that he became very frightened. The bird said, “Do not be frightened, tell me something.” He said, “Ask!” “Have people stopped bearing witness that there is no god but Allah yet?”—“No,” and the bird added a third of its size, then said, “Have people stopped doing ablutions for impurity yet?” He said, “No,” and the bird returned to the size it had been. Then it said, “Dhū l-Qarnayn, climb these stairs, one by one, to the top of the castle.”

Dhū l-Qarnayn climbed them, fearful and afraid, not knowing what he would come upon, until he had mounted the highest point of the staircase and lo! a flat roof stretched out, upon which was the form of a young man, wearing white clothes, raising his face to the heavens, and placing his hand on his mouth. When he heard the noise of Dhū l-Qarnayn, he said, “Who is this?”—“I am Dhū l-Qarnayn”, and he said, “Dhū l-Qarnayn, the Hour is drawing near, and I am awaiting the command of my Lord, ordering me to blow the trumpet.” Then this trumpeter took something like a stone from before him and said, “Dhū l-Qarnayn, take this. If it is satisfied, you will be satisfied, and if it is hungry, you will be hungry.”

Dhū l-Qarnayn took the stone and descended until he came to his companions and told them the story of the bird, and what it said to him and what it brought him to, as well as what the man of the trumpet had said to him. Then he assembled the scholars among his troops and said, “Tell me of what this stone is formed and what its significance is.” They replied, “O king, tell us what the trumpeter said to you.” Dhū l-Qarnayn told them that he had said, “If this is satisfied, you will be satisfied, and if this is hungry, you will be hungry.” The scholars placed the stone in the pan of a balance, took a similar stone and placed it in the other pan. Then they lifted the balance, and what Dhū l-Qarnayn had brought was heavier. They put another one on it and lifted the balance, and lo! what Dhū l-Qarnayn had brought was heavier. They put another with it and lifted the balance and the one he had brought was heavier. They kept adding stone after stone until they had placed one thousand stones. They lifted the balance and it tilted with all the thousand stones together. The scholars said, “Our knowledge stops at this. We do not know whether it is magic or a science that we do not know.”

Al-Khiḍr, who was standing there said, “I know its science,” and

he took the balance in his hand, then took the stone that Dhū l-Qarnayn had brought and placed it in one of the pans. Then he took one of the other stones and placed it on the other pan. Then he took a handful of earth and placed it on the stone that Dhū l-Qarnayn had brought, lifted the balance, and it was equal. Thereupon the scholars fell on their knees, prostrating themselves before God, and said, "Praised be God, this is a knowledge that our knowledge does not reach. By God, we placed one thousand stones with it and it did not raise it up." Al-Khiḍr said, "O king, the might of Allah outdoes His creatures, and His command is carried out among them, His judgment bears down on them. God tests His creatures, one by one, the learned by the learned, the ignorant by the ignorant, the ignorant by the learned, and the learned by the ignorant. He has tested me by you, and tested you by me." Dhū l-Qarnayn said, "You are right. Tell me, what is this stone?"

Al-Khiḍr replied, "O king, what the trumpeter has set for you is a parable. God has given you power on Earth such as He has not given to any of His creatures, and He has made easy for you what He has not made easy for any other of His creatures, but you are not satisfied. Your soul obeyed its greed so that it aquired of God's power what He had not made available to any human or demon. So this is the parable that the trumpeter set for you: 'Man is never satisfied until the Earth is spread over him, nor does anything fill his stomach but the Earth.'<sup>18</sup> Then Dhū l-Qarnayn wept and said, "You are right, al-Khiḍr, there was nothing wrong in setting this parable. After this journey I shall not seek influence on the Earth until I die." Then he set out to return and, when he was in the midst of the darkness, he came upon the ravine in which the chrysolite was. When the men with him heard its clanking under the hooves of their animals, they said, "What is this under us, king?" And he replied, "Take some of it, for whoever takes of it will be sorry, and whoever leaves it will be sorry." Among them were those who took a bit of it, and those who left it. When they emerged from the darkness and looked at it, behold, it was chrysolite. So both those who took and those who didn't were sorry.

The Messenger of Allah said, "May God have mercy on my brother, Dhū l-Qarnayn. If he had taken possession of the Valley

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<sup>18</sup> *I.e.*, until he is buried in his grave.

of Chrysolite at the beginning of his career, he would not have left any of it behind, but would have brought it to the people, because he desired this world, of which he took possession. But (later) he renounced this world, so he had no need of it.” Then he [set out] to return to Iraq and to rule all of the petty kings, but he died on the way, a month before arriving there.

‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said that he returned to Dūmat al-Jandal,<sup>19</sup> which was his dwelling place, and stayed there until he died. Others have said that his age was thirty-six years and his rule lasted seventeen years. It was before Darius, at the beginning of the third year of his reign. When he died, he was carried to his mother in Alexandria, and was buried there.

They say that when Alexander died, his rule was offered to his son Iskandarūs after him, but he refused it and chose asceticism and worship. So the Greeks made rule over them, as it is said, Ptolemy, son of Lagus, and his rule lasted thirty-eight years. The kingdom was during the life of Alexander and after his death, until it was transferred to the Romans, the Medes, and the Greeks. The Israelites possessed Jerusalem and its environs, [and autonomy of] religion and leadership, without real kingship, until the Persians and the Romans destroyed their land and drove them from it after the slaying of John, son of Zachariah.<sup>20</sup> But God is All-knowing.

<sup>19</sup> Also Dūma, a site in Arabia. Yāqūt, *Muḡam*, pp. 635–39.

<sup>20</sup> That is to say, after the reign of Herod. Arabic: *Yahyā b. Ṣakariyā*. See p. 78, n. 35 above.



## ZACHARIAH, JOHN, MARY AND JESUS

### THE STORY OF ZACHARIAH AND HIS SON JOHN, AND OF MARY AND JESUS

It is an account consisting of many chapters. Muḥammad b. Ishāq and other historians have said that the Israelites declined after their return from the land of Babylon to Jerusalem and Syria and the organization of their affairs. Events continued happening but God continued, in His kindness and mercy, to send messengers to them. Some of them they accused of lying and others of them they slew, as God has related. Then, among those who were sent to them, were Zachariah, John and Jesus, and they were of the family of David.

### THE LINEAGE OF ZACHARIAH

He was Zakariyā b. Yūḥanā b. Ādan b. Musallim b. Ṣadūq b. Yaḥsān b. Dā'ūd b. Sulaymān b. Musallim b. Ṣadūqa b. Nākhūr b. Salūm b. Thahfāsāt b. Ababā b. Raḥū'am<sup>1</sup> son of Solomon son of David.

### THE BIRTH OF MARY AND HER DEDICATION TO THE TEMPLE

God has said: *Remember when the wife of 'Imrān prayed: "O Lord, I dedicate to your service what I carry in my womb, [accept it from me, for You alone hear all and know everything]"* (3:35) According to the commentators, this was Ḥannā (Ann), the daughter of Fāqūdh, and the grandmother of Jesus and 'Imrān.<sup>2</sup> As for 'Imrān, Ibn 'Abbās said that he was 'Imrān b. Māthān, and not Amram, the father of Moses, since between them there were one thousand eight hundred years. The sons of Māthān<sup>3</sup> were the chiefs of the Israelites, their rabbis and their kings.

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<sup>1</sup> For Hebrew Rehoboam, see also Rajī'am below.

<sup>2</sup> See Qur'ān, Sūrah 3, *The Family of 'Imrān*, verses 33-63.

<sup>3</sup> See Matt. 1:15, for Matthan, great-grandfather of Mary.

Ibn Ishāq said that he was ‘Imrān b. Sāhim b. Amūr b. Mishān b. Ḥizqīl b. Aḥrīf b. Bu’am b. ‘Azāziyā b. Amaṣiyā b. Nāwus b. Nūthā b. Bāriḍ b. Yahūshāfaṭ b. Rādīm b. Ababā b. Rajī‘am son of Solomon, son of David. The story goes that Zachariah the son of John, and ‘Imrān, the son of Māthān, had married two sisters. The one who went to Zachariah son of Yūhanā was Īshā‘,<sup>4</sup> the daughter of Fāqūdh and the mother of John. The other, who went to ‘Imrān, was Ann (Ḥannā) the daughter of Fāqūdh and the mother of Mary. Ann was unable to bear a child until she had given up hope and had grown old. Theirs was a family with a special status in relation to God.

Once, while she was in the shade of a tree, she saw a bird feeding its young, and it made her yearn for a child. So she prayed to God to give her a son, saying, “O God, I pledge myself to You; if You give me a child, I shall offer him as a gift to the Temple, and he shall be one of its attendants and servants, as a votive offering and a thank offering.” Thereupon she conceived Mary, having dedicated what was in her womb, not knowing what it was, saying: “*O Lord, I dedicate to Your service,—namely, released from this world and its affairs, free for God, as a servant for Your holy Temple—what I carry in my womb. Accept it, for You hear all and know everything.*” (3:35)

They say that when such a child had been dedicated and pledged, he was assigned to the sanctuary, to care for it, sweep it and serve it, and would not leave it until he reached puberty. Then he was given the choice, whether to stay there, or whether he should go wherever he wished. If he wished to depart, he would ask permission of his colleagues and the keepers of the Temple, so that they should be aware that he was going. There was hardly an Israelite, especially of their learned men, who did not have among his offspring someone dedicated to the Temple. However, only boys were dedicated; a girl did not undertake this work, nor was she suited to it, because of menstruation and illness that afflicted her.<sup>5</sup>

So Mary’s mother dedicated what was in her womb. But when she did that, her husband ‘Imrān said to her, “Woe to you! What have you done? Don’t you realize that what is in your womb may

<sup>4</sup> Hebrew: *Elishava*, English: *Elizabeth*.

<sup>5</sup> Part of the laws of ritual purity where menstruation is considered not only a sign of impurity, but also an illness.

be a female? The female is imperfect, unsuitable for such service.” And both of them became anxious.

Now ‘Imrān died while Ann was pregnant with Mary. When she gave birth, lo, it was a girl! Since Ann had hoped that it would be a boy, she said, apologizing to God, “*O Lord, I have delivered but a girl,*”—but God well knew what she had delivered: the male is not like the female—that is to say, in the service of the sanctuary, and in worshipping there because of her impurity and weakness, menstruation and childbirth and illness which afflict her—“*and I have named her Mary,*” (3:36)—which in their language means a worshipper or a servant.<sup>6</sup> Mary became the loveliest and most excellent of all the women of her time.

Al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad related to me—Abū Hurayrah—the Messenger of Allah said: “Four women in the world are sufficient as models for you: Mary, the daughter of ‘Imrān; Āsiyah, the wife of Pharaoh; Khadijah, daughter of Khuwaylid;<sup>7</sup> and Fāṭimah, daughter of Muḥammad.”—that is to say, I grant her asylum and through you I withhold her and her offspring from Satan the Accursed One.

‘Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid and Abū Suhayl Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Harūn both transmitted from Abū Hurayrah that the Prophet said: “With the exception of Mary and her son, there is no human born who is not touched by Satan at the moment of his birth, and who does not begin to cry out because of Satan’s touch.” Then Abū Hurayrah says, “If you wish you may read *‘And I commend her and her offspring to You from Satan the Accursed One.’*” (3:36)

Shu‘ayb b. Muḥammad related to us, transmitting from Qatādah, that Satan has stabbed every human being in his side at birth, except Jesus and his mother, and that in front of these two a screen was placed so that the thrust of the lance struck the screen and did not even graze them. And they have mentioned to us that they were not touched by sins as are the rest of mankind. God said, “*Her Lord accepted her graciously*”—the pronoun ‘her’ refers to the consecration, i.e., God accepted the consecration, that is, of Mary from Ann—“*and made her grow up a goodly child.*” (3:37) This means that He made her creation perfect, with neither too much nor too little. She grew as much in a short time as an ordinary child grows in a long time.

<sup>6</sup> What is meant by “their language” is not clear. If Hebrew is meant, the name Maryam/Miriam may be related to the word *mar*, i.e., “bitter.”

<sup>7</sup> The first wife of Muḥammad, d. 619, before the *hijrah* to Medina.

Ibn Jurayj said that her Lord made her grow through her daily meals, and provided for her as for a beautiful plant, until she became a mature woman.

They say that when Mary was born, her mother Ann wrapped her in swaddling clothes and carried her to the house of prayer, and placed her before the priests, the sons of Aaron. At that time there were thirty of them, taking charge of the Temple, just as the door-keepers served in the Ka'bah. Ann said to them, "Behold this dedicated girl." The priests vied over this child, because she was the daughter of their leader, the one in charge of their sacrifices. Zachariah said to them, "I am more worthy of her than you, because I married her maternal aunt." But the priests said to him, "Don't say that; for indeed, if she were given to the worthiest of all people and her nearest relative, she would be given to the mother who bore her. However, we will cast lots for her, and she shall go to him who wins." They agreed to this and went away, nineteen men, to a flowing river—al-Suddī said that it was the river Jordan—and cast their pens, that is to say, their lots into the water. It was said that these were the very pens with which they used to write the Torah. Ibn Ishāq and other authorities have said that the pen of Zachariah rose up above the water, while the pens of the others sank and were submerged in the water; but al-Suddī said that Zachariah's pen stood up straight above the water as if it were in mud, while the others were carried away by the water's current. So Zachariah, the leader of the priests and their prophet, won the cast and the gamble.

God said "*she was given to the care of Zachariah*". (3:37) He took her to himself and tended to her affairs. Ibn Ishāq has said that when Zachariah assumed responsibility for her, he appointed her maternal aunt, the mother of John, to be her caretaker and her nurse, until, when she had grown up and attained the maturity of womanhood, he built a little niche for her—that is to say, an elevated room—in the house of prayer, and placed a door in its middle, so that no one could get up to it except by a ladder, like the door of the Ka'bah; no one went up to her except him. Every day he used to bring her her food, her drinks and her ointment. And when Zachariah departed, he would lock the door upon her. "*Whenever Zachariah came to see her in the chamber, he found her provided with food*" that is to say, fruit out of season: summer fruit in the winter and winter fruit in the summer. So he would say to her, "*Where has this come from, Mary?*" (3:37) and she would say, "From God, from the

fruit of Paradise." Al-Ḥasan said that it was while she was very young that this provision came to her.

Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq said that the Israelites came upon hard times while she was in this situation, and Zachariah became too feeble to bear responsibility for her. He went out to the Israelites and said, "By God, you know that I have grown too old and weak to care for 'Imrān's daughter. Which of you will relieve me of responsibility for her?" They responded, "By God, we have suffered, and the result of our suffering is what you see." They strove with each other regarding her, and not finding anyone to take care of her, they cast lots with the pens, and the lot fell to an honest man, an Israelite carpenter called Joseph, the son of Jacob son of Māthān. He was the son of Mary's father's brother, and he assumed responsibility for her.

The story goes that Mary saw in his face the intense trouble that it caused him, and she said to him, "Joseph, have faith in God, for He will provide for us." But Joseph set about to provide for her as their relationship demanded, and to bring her every day from his own earnings whatever she needed. But when he brought it to her in the Sanctuary, God added to it and it increased. Then Zachariah would come to her and see that she had an excess of provisions, out of proportion to what Joseph brought her. So he would say to her, "*Where has this come from, O Mary?*" And she said, "*From God Who gives sustenance to whom He pleases without measure.*" (3:37)

'Abdallāh b. Ḥāmid related to us, transmitting from Jābir b. 'Abdallāh that the Messenger of Allah would remain without tasting food for days until it became difficult for him. He would go among his wives' dwellings and was unable to obtain anything from a single one of them. Then he came to Fāṭima and said, "My little daughter, do you have anything I can eat, for I am hungry?" She relied, "No, by God, by my father, by my mother!" When the Messenger of Allah left her, a maid of hers sent her two loaves and a bit of meat. Fāṭimah took it from her, placed it in a bowl, covered it, and said, "May the Messenger of Allah make it easy for me and my family through this." For all of them were in need of enough food. She sent al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn to their grandfather, the Messenger of Allah, and he returned to her. She said, "By you, my father, and by my mother, O Messenger of Allah, God has brought us something and I have concealed it for you." He said, "Then give it to me," and it was brought to him. He uncovered the bowl and behold! it was full of bread and meat. When she saw that she was

astonished and knew that it was a blessing from God. So she praised God and blessed His prophet. He said to her, "Where has this come from to you, my little daughter?" and she replied, "*From God Who gives sustenance to whom He pleases without measure.*" So the Messenger of Allah praised God and said, "Praise be to God Who made you equal to the mistress of the women of Israel, for when God gave her good sustenance and she was asked about it, she said, "*From God Who gives sustenance to whom He pleases without measure.*" (3:37) Then the Messenger of Allah sent for 'Alī and he came, and the Messenger, 'Alī, Fāṭimah, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and all the wives of the Prophet, ate until they were sated, while the bowl remained as full as it had been. Fāṭimah gave orders and bestowed [of its contents] upon all her neighbors, and God granted her blessings and much favor. The origin of what was in the bowl was two loaves and a bit of meat, but all the rest was a blessing from God.

#### THE BIRTH OF JOHN, SON OF ZACHARIAH

God has said: "*Thereupon Zachariah prayed to his Lord, saying: 'Lord grant me upright descendants. For You hear all prayers.'*" (3:38) Men expert in the accounts of the prophets have said that when Zachariah saw that God provided Mary with fruit out of season, he said, "He Who is able to bring Mary fruit out of season without cause or the act of anyone, is certainly able to put my wife in order and to give me a son in old age." He yearned for a son, for the people of his family had died off, and Zachariah had grown old and had despaired of begetting one. Under these circumstances Zachariah called upon his Lord, saying, "*Lord, grant me upright descendants*"—that is to say, give me from You "*offspring, virtuous and good*"—that is, God-fearing posterity, honest and pleasing to God—"for You hear all prayers." (ibid.)

"Then the angels called out to him . . ." namely Gabriel. That is because Zachariah was the High Priest, who used to perform the sacrifice and open the door to the sacrificial altar, and no one entered unless he gave permission. Once when he was in his chamber near the sacrificial altar, standing in prayer, and the people were waiting for him to give them permission to enter, suddenly there came a young man in white garments. Zachariah was afraid of him, but Gabriel—for it was he—called to him, "*Zachariah, God sends you good tidings of John.*" (3:39)

Scholars have differed over why he was called John (Yaḥyā).<sup>8</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās said that it was because God *revived* his mother from her barrenness through him, while Qatādah and others said that it was because God *revived* faith and prophecy in his heart. Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl said that God *revived* obedience in him so that he did not undergo any change nor intend any disobedience; proof of this being what al-Ḥasan b. Faṭḥawayh related to me, in his transmission from ‘Ikrimah from Ibn ‘Abbās. The latter said that the Messenger of Allah said: “No one encounters God unless he had intended to sin or had already done so except John, son of Zachariah, for he had neither intended to sin nor done so.”

The Teacher, namely our Master Abū l-Qāsim al-Junayd said: “He was named that because he died a martyr, and martyrs are *revived* and living with their Lord.” The Prophet said, “A disgrace for this world before God is that a woman killed John, son of Zachariah.” I heard Abū Maṣṣūr al-Khāmshāwī say that ‘Umar b. ‘Abdallāh al-Maqdisī said that God revealed to Abraham the Friend, “Say to Yaṣārah—for that was her name—that I shall bring forth from the two of you a servant who would not think of disobeying me, whose name is Ḥayy (*i.e.*, live), so give him a letter from your name.” She therefore gave him the first letter of her name, the *yā’*, and he became Yaḥyā, while her name became Sārah. This gives credence to a Word from God, namely Jesus, who was named Word, for God said to him, “Without a father, Be!”<sup>9</sup> and he was. So he received the name The Word because through it he existed. John was the first to believe in Jesus and proclaim his truthfulness. That was because while his mother was pregnant with him, Mary met her while she was pregnant with Jesus. John’s mother said to her, ‘Mary, are you pregnant?’ and she answered, ‘Why do you say that?’ She replied, ‘Because I think that what is in my womb is bowing down to what is in your womb.’ And that is his confirmation of him and his faith in him.” John was six months older than Jesus and John was killed before Jesus was raised up to heaven, as we shall mention.

<sup>8</sup> The question here has to do with the meaning of the Arabic name for John, Yaḥyā, namely “to *revive*.”

<sup>9</sup> A reference to Qur’ān 3:47 where God says to Mary when she doubts that she can have a child when no man has touched her, “When He decrees a thing He says, ‘Be!’ and it is.”

Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab said regarding the word “*noble*”, that the noble person is the jurisprudent or scholar. Saʿīd b. Jubayr said that the “*noble*” person is one who obeys his Lord. Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that the “*noble*” person is one of good character, while ʿIkrimah said that he is the one who never becomes angry, and Sufyān said that he never envies. “*And chaste*”—Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn Masʿūd and others have said that he is one who does not come to women or draw near them. The word *ḥusūr* “*chaste*”, is grammatically passive but has an active sense, meaning that he keeps himself chaste of desires. Ibn al-Musayyab and al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that he is the impotent man who has no home. Proof of this interpretation is what Ibn Faḥawayh related to me in his transmission from Abū Šālih who heard Abū Hurayrah say that he heard the Messenger of Allah say, “Every human upon whom God has laid a misdeed which he then performs, He will punish if He wishes or have mercy on him, except for John, son of Zachariah, because he was “*noble, chaste, and a prophet, one of the righteous.*” (3:39) Then the Prophet pointed to a speck of earth, took it, and said, “And his penis was the size of this speck.” Al-Madanī said the chaste one is someone who does not indulge in games or vanities.

When Gabriel announced the good tidings to Zachariah, did the latter say [to him], “My Lord”, that is “My Master”? The statement of most of the interpreters is that he spoke to Gabriel, but al-Ḥasan b. al-Faḍl said that he said “O my Lord” only to God and not to Gabriel. The story goes that when Gabriel summoned Zachariah thus, Zachariah answered, “*How can I have a son, O Lord, for I am old and my wife is barren?*” (3:40) She cannot give birth to children; she is barren.” (Al-Kalbī said that at the time Zachariah was told of a child he was ninety-two; some say ninety-three, while al-Ḍaḥḥāk related from Ibn ʿAbbās, who said that Zachariah was a hundred and twenty years old and his wife was ninety-eight.) The angel answered Zachariah, “*God does as He wills.*” (ibid.)

But it has been objected: why did Zachariah deny the message and ask for a sign, after the angel had given him the good tidings? Was it from doubt of God’s revelation or denial of His power? It is not allowable to attribute such thoughts even to ordinary people of the Faith, so how can they be attributed to the prophets? One answer to this problem is what ʿIkrimah and al-Suddī said, that when Zachariah had heard the angel’s message, Satan came to him and said, “Zachariah, the voice which you have heard is not from God, but is only the voice of Satan scoffing at you. If it had been



from God, He would certainly have revealed it to you in secret, as you have called on Him in secret, and as He has given revelations to you in other affairs." He said it persuasively, whispering to him.

There is another solution, namely that he did not doubt as to the son, but only as to the particulars and how he would come. So he asked, "*How can I have a son . . .*"—that is to say, "How shall I have a son? Will You make me and my wife young, or will You bestow him upon us thus in spite of our old age, or will You bestow him upon me from some woman other than my wife?" He said this seeking information, not in denial. This is according to al-Ḥasan, [Zachariah] said, "*Give me a token, O Lord*", and God said, "*The token will be that you will speak to no man for three days*," but devote yourself entirely to worshipping Me." Not that He prevented his tongue from speaking, but He prohibited him and pointed out His words, "*and remember your Lord much, and pray at evening and sunrise*" (3:41). This is the statement of some of the scholars; others have said that he was struck dumb as a punishment for asking for the token after the angel spoke to him, and that he could not speak for three days except by signs—that is, gestures. Thus most of the commentators, but 'Aṭā' has suggested that by this He indicated a fast of three days, because when they fasted, they used to speak only by signs.

So John the son of Zachariah was born. Some of the accounts say that as soon as he was born he was lifted up to Heaven and was nourished by the rivers of Paradise until he was weaned. Then he came down to his father, and the house was illumined by his light, and by the beauty and comeliness of his face.

#### A CHAPTER DESCRIBING JOHN AND HIS ATTRIBUTES

Ka'b al-Aḥbār said that John had a beautiful face and figure, with supple hands, sparse hair, short fingers, a long nose, joined eyebrows, and a soft voice. He was a prophet of great zeal, strong in obedience to God, excelling all people in worshipping and obeying Him.

#### JOHN'S PROPHETHOOD AND LIFE, HIS ASCETICISM AND ZEAL

God has said, "*O John, hold fast to the Book. And We gave him wisdom while he was yet a child.*" (19:12) It is said that some of John's boyhood

companions would say to him, "John, come play with us." But he would reply, "I was not created to play." Others have said that he was a prophet while still young, and that he used to preach to the people at their festivals and that he assembled them, calling them to God. Then he journeyed and came into Syria, preaching to the people. When God sent him to the Israelites, He ordered him to ordain five virtues to them, for each of which John pounded a parable.

First, he called them to worship God, and not to associate anyone else with Him. He said that associating others with God is like the case of a man who bought slaves with his free money, installed them in one of his houses, and distributed property among them so that they could do business. Each one was to eat as much as he needed, at the master's expense, and give the rest of the profit to him. But the slaves helped themselves to the profit and gave it to their master's enemy.

He also commanded them to pray, saying that the relation of man to prayer is like the case of one who sought an audience with a king. The king having granted this, the man entered and the king turned his face toward him to give him what he wanted. But the man turned to the right and the left without bothering to express his wish. So the king ignored him and did not give him what he wanted.

John commanded them to give alms, saying that it is like the case of a man whom an enemy had taken captive. He redeemed himself from the enemy for a certain price. Then he began to work in the enemy's country and to deliver to them all of his earnings, until he paid his price and was set free.

He also commanded them to mention God, saying that mentioning God is like the case of a group of people who have a fortress and an enemy. When their enemy approaches them they enter their fortress, and he cannot overpower them. So it is with anyone who mentions God; Satan cannot overpower him.

And he commanded them to fast, saying that it was like Paradise which does not let man's enemy reach him and protects him.

Now as to his mode of life: the Prophet Muḥammad once said that John had such ascetic inclinations that he would go to the Temple and watch the rabbis and monks<sup>10</sup> wear their long garments

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<sup>10</sup> A strange statement in view of this being in the Jewish temple in which priests, not rabbis, functioned, nor would there have been monks before the development of Christianity.

of hair and wool, and woolen cowls. Into the protrusions of their collar bones they had inserted chains, and thus bound themselves to the walls of the house of prayer. When John had seen that, he came to his mother and said, "Mother, weave for me a long garment of hair and a cowl of wool, so that I can go to the Temple and worship God with the rabbis and monks." But his mother said to him, "Wait until the prophet Zachariah comes, and I shall consult him about it." When Zachariah came, she told him what John had said and Zachariah said to him, "Little son of mine, what calls you to this? You are only a small boy." But John said to him, "Father, have you not seen one younger than me taste death?" He said, "Certainly." Then John said to his mother, "Weave for us a long garment of hair and a cowl of wool." She did so and he put the long garment of hair on his body, and placed the cowl over his head. Then he went to the Temple and began to worship God with the rabbis and monks, till the long hair garment ate into his flesh. One day John looked at his emaciated body and wept. Then God revealed Himself to him, saying, "John, do you weep because your body is emaciated? By My glory and power, if I had given vent to My fire you would certainly have put on long garments of iron, rather than sackcloth!" Then John wept until the tears consumed the flesh of his cheeks and his molar teeth appeared to all those who beheld him.

His mother heard of this and came to him—so did Zachariah, and the rabbis and monks assembled together. Zachariah said to his son John, "What calls you to do this, my son? I asked my Lord to give you to me only so that I might have delight." John said, "You commanded me to do this, father." Zachariah said, "When?" "Were you not the one who said that between Paradise and Hell-fire there is a steep mountain road, which no one can traverse except those who weep in dread of God?" Zachariah admitted that he had, so John said, "Then hasten and exert yourself." He then arose and shook off his long garment. His mother took it and said, "My dear son, will you let me get two pieces of felt to hide your molar teeth and to dry your tears?" He replied, "That is your affair." So she brought him two pieces of felt to hide his molar teeth and to dry his tears. But he wept until the two pieces were drenched. Then he took the two pieces of felt and squeezed them, and the tears flowed down between his fingers. Zachariah looked at his son and at his tears, and raised his head toward Heaven and said, "O God, this

is my son, and these are his tears, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful ones.”

Now when Zachariah wished to preach to the Israelites, he would turn to the right and the left; and if he saw John, he would not mention Paradise or Hell-fire. One day he sat preaching, and John, having wrapped his head in his cloak, came up and sat in the midst of the crowd. So Zachariah turned to the right and to the left and did not see him. He began by saying, “My beloved Gabriel related to me on God’s authority, that in Hell there is a mountain called The Drunkard, and at the foot of that mountain there is a valley called The Hot-tempered, which was created for the wrath of the Merciful One. In that valley is a well whose depth is a hundred years [journey] and in it are coffins of fire; and in those coffins there are boxes of fire, garments of fire, and manacles of fire.” John raised his head and said, “How heedless I have been of The Drunkard and of the wrath of the All-merciful.” Then he went out, wandering like a madman.

Then Zachariah rose from his seat and went in to John’s mother and said to her, “O mother of John, arise and seek him; for I fear that we shall not see him until he has tasted death.” So she arose and went out in search of him. She passed some Israelite boys who said to her, “O Mother of John, where do you wish to go?” “I seek my son. Hell-fire was mentioned in his presence, and he wandered away like a madman.” So she went on, and the boys went with her, till she came upon a shepherd, to whom she said, “Herdsman, have you seen a youth of such and such a description?” He said, “Are you perhaps seeking John, son of Zachariah?” She said, “Yes, he is my son. Hell-fire was mentioned in his presence and he wandered away like a madman.” Then he said, “I left him this very hour on such-and-such a mountain road, while he was soaking his feet in water, raising his eyes to Heaven and saying, “By Your glory, my Lord, I will not taste the coolness of drinks until I am aware of my status with respect to You.”

So his mother came, and when she saw him she drew near to him, took his head and placed it between her hands, and besought him in God’s name to go home with her. They went home and she said to him, “Should you not take off your long garment of hair and wear your long woolen garment? for indeed, it is softer,” and he did so. Then she cooked lentils for him, and he ate and was sated. Sleep then made off with him, and he did not get up for his prayers.

Then in his dreams there came a voice saying, "John, you have desired a house better than My house, and a neighborhood better than Mine." So he awoke, and arose, and said, "By Your glory, I shall seek shade in no shelter except the Temple." Then he said to his mother, "Bring me the long garment of hair, for now I know that you two will bring me to destruction." His mother came to him and handed over the long garment and clung to him. Zachariah said to her, "O Mother of John, let him alone; for the veil which covered his heedlessness has been lifted, and he will not profit by life." So John arose, clad himself in his long garment, and placed the cowl on his head. Then he went to the Temple, and continued to worship God with the rabbis and monks until his affair turned out as it did. But God is All-knowing.

#### A CHAPTER ABOUT THE MURDER OF JOHN<sup>11</sup>

Learned men have disagreed as to the reason for his being killed. The story seems to be that he lived in the time of a certain Israelite king, whose wife, a daughter of the king of Sidon,<sup>12</sup> was a killer of prophets and pious men. She was also a wanton, exposing herself to the public. Now John used to reprove her for that, saying that she should not appear with her face exposed. He would often say to her, "It is written in the Torah that adulterers shall stand on the Day of Resurrection stinking worse than corpses." So she gave the order, and John was imprisoned.

Now another man, the son of a king, had also been imprisoned, but he went to her repeatedly at night. John knew what was happening and he reproved the man, and the king's wife heard about it. So she beautified a daughter of hers and brought her before her husband. When he asked her why she had done this, she said, "You are obliged to grant her a certain boon." Said he, "Ask for whatever you wish." And the girl said, "I desire the prisoners as a gift from you, to do with as I please." Her father, thinking that she would grant them clemency and give them a respite, said that he would do so. Her mother then ordered the prisoners and they were

<sup>11</sup> Note the somewhat similar story in pp. 612ff.

<sup>12</sup> This would seem to be the story of Herod and his daughter, not the daughter of the king of Sidon. See p. 606, n. 21.

presented to the girl. When John passed before her, she gave an order about him and he was slain and she took his head in a basin. By her mother's command she carried this to her father and said, "O king, I have slain for you one of the greatest victims that I have ever found; and if there had been a thousand like him, I would have slaughtered them for you." "Who is he?" the king asked. "John the son of Zachariah", she replied. "Then you shall perish, for you have destroyed your parents," said the king. And indeed, their fortunes were reversed, God gave the enemy power over them, and the enemy slaughtered the girl and her parents, giving them over to be eaten by dogs and carnivorous beasts.

Sa'īd b. Jubayr narrated from Ibn 'Abbās that Jesus the son of Mary, and John the son of Zachariah, along with twelve disciples, used to teach the people. Among the things that they forbade them was marriage with one's brother's daughter. Now the king had such a niece whom he wished to marry. Every day she had a request for him to grant. When her mother heard that John had forbidden marriage with a brother's daughter, she said to her, "When you have gone to the king, and he has asked you what you want, say to him, 'I want you to slaughter John the son of Zachariah.'" So when she had gone to him and he asked her what she wanted, she said, "I want you to slaughter John the son of Zachariah." He said, "Ask for something else." But she said, "I ask of you nothing but that." So he called for John and for a basin, and cut his throat over it. A drop of his blood continued to boil and it boiled until God sent Nebuchadnezzar to them. An old Israelite woman came and showed that blood to Nebuchadnezzar, and God inspired him in his heart to slay seventy thousand of them,<sup>13</sup> of like age, so that it would subside, So he slew them, whereupon it ceased to boil.

Al-Suddī said, transmitting from his authorities, that a king of the Israelites used to show regard to John, bring him into his council, and ask his advice on his affairs. He would not make any decision without him. Now the king desired to marry the daughter of one of his wives. He asked John about it, and John forbade him to do it, saying, "I do not permit her to you." Her mother heard of it, and she consequently harbored a grudge against John. So she went to her daughter while the king sat at his drink. She dressed her in fine

<sup>13</sup> The meaning is unclear; were Israelite youths meant here?

red clothing, perfumed her, and arrayed her in ornaments, and over all that, she clad her in a black garment and sent her to the king. She commanded her to give him drinks, and to display herself to him, and when he had invited her to sin, she was to refuse him until he gave her what she asked of him. When he had agreed to that, she was to ask him to give her the head of John the son of Zachariah in a basin. So she did all that; began to ply him with drinks and to display herself to him. When the drink had had its effect on him, he invited her to sin, but she said, "I won't do that until you give me what I ask of you." He said, "And what do you ask of me?" She said, "That you have the head of John the son of Zachariah sent to me in this basin." He said, "Woe to you! Ask me for something else." She said, "I ask of you nothing but this." So when she had refused him, he sent for John and had his head brought. Now the head was still speaking when it was placed before him, and it said, "She is not lawful for you." When morning came, lo! his blood was still boiling. So the king ordered some dust to be thrown on it, but the blood rose up over it. It did not cease to boil, though he threw dust upon it, until it reached the wall of the city—but still it went on boiling. The long tradition that is in the story of Sennacharib and Nebuchadnezzar describes what we have previously told in our account of Nebuchadnezzar.

Christian scholars have said that the king of the Israelites who killed John was called Hīradūs,<sup>14</sup> because of his wife who was called Hiradawūya, and who had been the wife of his brother named Fīlīqūs. He desired her and she agreed to fornication. John forbade her and told her that she was not permitted for the king. The woman asked Hīradūs to bring her the head of John, and when he did that it fell into his hands and he suffered great anxiety.

Ka'b al-Aḥbār related that John had one of the most handsome faces and was one of the most beautiful men of his time. The wife of the reigning king loved him passionately, and sent to him to seduce him. But he replied that he had nothing to do with women, and that the king had more right to lie in his own bed. When the messenger had come back to her, she grew violently angry and said, "How can I kill him and not have people learn that I enticed him?" So she plagued the king until he gave her John son of Zachariah.

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<sup>14</sup> Namely Herod.

While John was standing praying in David's chamber in the Temple, she sent someone to him who beheaded him and took his head away. But when they had taken John's head, God caused the Earth to swallow up her and her family, as punishment for the murder.<sup>15</sup>

### THE MURDER OF ZACHARIAH

According to Ka'b al-Aḥbār, when Zachariah heard that his son John had been killed, and that those people had been swallowed up, he fled and entered a garden of the Temple, where there were trees. A tree called out to him, "O Prophet of God, come here to me!" He drew near and the tree opened up and Zachariah entered into it. But Iblīs the Accursed went and caught the hem of his cloak, and pulled it out of the tree, so that they would believe him when he told them. That is why the Jews make fringes on the borders of their cloaks, though they do not know why they were commanded to do so.<sup>16</sup>

The king and his men were out looking for Zachariah when Iblīs the Accursed met them and asked them what they were seeking. They said, "We are seeking Zachariah." So Iblīs said that he had gone into that tree. They said, "We don't believe you." "But if I showed you a sign, would you then believe me?" he asked. They said, "Well then, show it to us." When he had shown them the hem of Zachariah's cloak, they took saws, cut down the tree and sawed it in two. Then the most mischievous of the people of the Earth, a pagan Magian, was given power over them. Through him God punished the Israelites for the blood of John the son of Zachariah, for he took captive a hundred and seventy thousand of them and killed their nobles.<sup>17</sup>

It has been said that the cause of Zachariah's murder was that Iblīs came to the Israelites' council and charged Zachariah with having violated Mary, saying that it was none other than he who had

<sup>15</sup> This is somewhat reminiscent of the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. See pp. 213–20.

<sup>16</sup> For the Biblical commandment of the fringes, Numbers 15:38–39. See also p. 378, n. 23 above.

<sup>17</sup> It is not clear who is meant here since there is no Persian king who took large numbers of Israelites captive.



made her pregnant, for it was he who used to go to her. So they sought Zachariah, and he fled, and the foolish and evil ones among them followed him. While he was passing through a valley full of trees, Satan appeared to him disguised as a herdsman, and said, "Zachariah, they have overtaken you; pray to God to open this tree for you." He did so, and it split open for him, and he entered it, but Iblis pulled out the fringe of his cloak. Then the Israelites came upon Satan and said, "Herdsman, have you seen a man here of such-and-such description?" He said, "Yes, he bewitched this tree, it opened for him and he entered it. This is the fringe of his cloak." So they cut down the tree with Zachariah in it, and cut it in half lengthwise with a saw. Then God sent the angels, and they washed Zachariah, prayed over him, and buried him.

It has been reported that the sun wept over John for forty days, by rising and setting red. It is also related that John will be the chief of witnesses on the Day of Resurrection, and their leader in Paradise. But God is All-knowing.

#### A SESSION ABOUT THE BIRTH OF JESUS, MARY'S PREGNANCY WITH HIM, AND RELATED TOPICS

God said, "*Make mention of Mary in the Book, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East.*" (19:16)

In their accounts of the prophets, scholars have said that when Mary, who was fifteen years old (some say thirteen), had been pregnant with Jesus for three days, with her in the house of prayer, as one consecrated to God's service, was her father's brother's son, Joseph the carpenter. He was a forbearing man, a carpenter who rendered his services for free. Joseph and Mary had charge of caring for the house of prayer. When their water was gone, each of them would take her jar, go to the cave where the water was, and draw from it. Then they would return to the house of prayer.

On the day when Gabriel met her—the longest and hottest day in the year—she had finished all her water, so she said, "Won't you accompany me Joseph, and we will draw water?" But he said, "I have enough water for today and even tomorrow." She said, "But I, by God, have no water." So she took up her jar and went alone. She entered the cave, and there she found Gabriel, whom God made

appear to her as a shapely human.<sup>18</sup> He said to her, "O Mary, God has sent me to you to give you a pure and righteous boy." She said, "*I seek refuge in the Merciful from you, if you fear Him.*" (19:18)—that is to say, are faithful, obedient.

According to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, she knew that a God-fearing man was one of mercy and fear, and she thought that Gabriel was a human being. 'Ikrimah said that Gabriel appeared to her in the form of a beardless young man, with a bright face, curly hair, and regular features. The learned men say that God sent him in human form only so that Mary might stay and listen to him. If he had descended in his own angelic form she would have been frightened, scared away, and would not have listened.

When Mary had besought God to protect her from him, he said, "*I am only a messenger from your Lord [sent] to bestow a good son on you.*" "*How can I have a son,*" she said, "*when no man has touched me, and I am not sinful?*" He said, "*Thus will it be. Your Lord said, 'It is easy for Me,' [and that 'We shall make him a sign for men and a blessing from Us.']*" (19:19–21) When he had said that, she submitted to the decree of God. Then he blew into the pocket of her loose outer garment that she had removed, and when he had left her, she put on this garment and conceived Jesus. She then filled her water-jar and went back to the house of prayer.

Al-Suddī and 'Ikrimah have also related that Mary used to stay in the house of prayer while she was pure, but when she menstruated she went to her mother's sister's house and stayed there until she became pure again. Then she would return to the house of prayer. One day, while she was to wash herself from menstruation, she chose a sunny easterly place—because it was in winter, on the shortest day of the year. Al-Ḥasan said that the Christians have chosen the East as a direction for prayer because Mary retired to an easterly place. And she set up a screen or curtain between herself and the people. Muqātil said that she placed a mountain between herself and her people, and that while she was there in these circumstances, Gabriel appeared to her, gave her the good news of Jesus, and blew into the pocket of her loose outer garment.

<sup>18</sup> *basharam saʿīyan*: 'a well made man; a perfect man; a man without fault.'

Wahb said that when she first felt Jesus, a kinsman of hers called Joseph the carpenter, was near her. The two of them were walking together to the house of prayer that is at Mount Zion. In those days, that building was one of the most important of their places of worship, and Mary and Joseph the carpenter were serving in it. Much grace was attached to this service. They were managing it by themselves, cleansing and purifying it; and in their time there was no one more zealous or pious than those two. Joseph the carpenter, her friend and her own father's brother's son, was the first to disapprove of her pregnancy. When he saw what was the matter with her, he wondered at the enormity of it, and found it shocking, and he did not know what to do about her. Whenever he wished to accuse her, he would remember her righteousness and piety, and her innocence, and that she had not been absent from him for a single hour. When he wished to absolve her, he saw that her pregnancy was obvious. So when it bore down hard upon him, he spoke to her.

First he said, "Something has occurred to me with regard to you, and I have striven to conceal it, but it has overcome me, and I have decided that talking about it would be more healing for my breast." She said to him, "Say something nice." And he said to her, "Tell me, Mary, does a crop grow without seed?" She said, "Yes." "And does a tree grow without abundant rain?"—"Yes." "And can there be a child without a male?" She replied, "Have you not learned that God made a crop to grow on the day it was created without seed, and that [all future] seed was from the crop that He made grow without seed? Have you not learned that God made trees grow without abundant rain, and that the divine decree made abundant rain be the life of the trees after God had created each of them separately? Or do you say that God cannot make trees grow until He has asked the help of water, and if not for that He could not make them grow?" Joseph said to her, "I do not say any of this, rather I say that God can do what He wishes; He says to a thing 'Be!' and it is." Then Mary said, "Have you not learned that God created Adam and his wife without a male and female?" He said, "Certainly." So when she had said that, it occurred to him that what was the matter with her might be something of an affair of God, and that it might not be permissible for him to ask her about it, and that that was the reason for her hiding it. Then Joseph took upon himself all of the work of the house of prayer, and performed in her stead every task which she usually performed, for he saw how thin

and sallow she was, the red spots on her face, the swelling of her belly, and the failing of her strength.

Mount Zion was at the portal of the Temple. I have heard from reliable informants that the tomb of David is on it.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, there was a church overlooking the spring of Siloam. I asked one of the monks and he said, "This is Zion; and the church in which Mary and Joseph served is this; and Jesus celebrated the feast of Passover in it, and called mankind to God. Then he moved from this church to al-Qumāmah,<sup>20</sup> a great church within Jerusalem. They claim that when Jesus had been killed, he was buried in it, and that after three days he was carried up from it to Heaven; and that it will endure forever, and that there is where he will return to earth. But God is All-knowing.

#### THE BIRTH OF JESUS

The story goes that when Mary grew heavy and her delivery-time drew near, God revealed to her that His house of prayer in the Temple had been purified, and had been erected for His name to be remembered therein. "So set off," He said, "for a place where you may take shelter." Then Mary moved to the house of her maternal aunt, Zachariah's wife, the future mother of John. When she came in, John's mother arose and came forward and embraced her. Then she said, "Mary, do you notice that I am pregnant?" Mary said, "And do you also perceive that I am pregnant?" Zachariah's wife said, "But I find that which is in my womb worshipping that which is in yours."<sup>21</sup> For that is God's word, "*(John) confirming a thing from God*", (3:39) and when she appeared at her aunt's house, God revealed to her that "If you give birth in the midst of your people, they will revile you and stone you, and kill you and your child. So depart from among them."—that is to say, "Leave!"

Al-Kalbī said that Joseph, the son of her father's brother, was told, "If Mary has conceived through fornication, the king will kill

<sup>19</sup> A popular Jewish belief, and such a shrine exists there in Jerusalem today.

<sup>20</sup> Arabic for "sweepings, or dunghill". This is a name given to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, today called *al-Qiyāmah*, the Resurrection. See LeStrange, *Palestine*, pp. 202-09, for a discussion of this name.

<sup>21</sup> Namely referring to John and Jesus.

her immediately,” for she had been named for the king to marry. So Joseph fled with her, placing her on a donkey of his, with nothing between her and the pack saddle. Joseph and she proceeded on their way until, when they were near the land of Egypt, on the border of their people, the pangs of childbirth came upon her. Joseph made her take shelter at the foot of a withered palm tree, for it was winter-time.<sup>22</sup>

Al-Kalbī continued: At one point in the journey, Joseph had wanted to kill [Mary], but Gabriel came to him and said, “It is from the Holy Spirit, so do not kill her.” Now scholars have disagreed as to the length of Mary’s pregnancy and as to the time of her giving birth to Jesus. Some say that she was pregnant for nine months, like all other women. But if it was for eight months, as some say, that was another miracle, for Jesus would be the only infant of eight months that has ever survived. Some say six months, and some three hours, and some say a single hour. According to Ibn ‘Abbās, she just conceived and gave birth; and between her conception, delivery, and withdrawal, there was but a single hour, for in the Qur’ān God did not mention any separation between them. God only said, “*When she conceived him she withdrew to a distant place.*” (19:22)—that is to say, far from her people. Muqātil says that (Jesus’) mother conceived him in an hour, he took form in an hour, and she gave birth in an hour—all within the same day at the time of the sun’s decline. She was then twenty years old, and before she conceived Jesus she had menstruated only twice.

The story goes that when the pangs of childbirth came upon her violently, she took shelter under a palm-tree. It was a withered palm-tree, having no boughs, or stumps of branches or roots, but the angels surrounded it, and rank upon rank they encompassed it. That palm-tree was at a place called Bethlehem. And when the pangs came upon her terribly, she said, “*Would that I had died before this, and become a thing forgotten, unremembered*”—that is to say, a cast off corpse—“*Then a voice called to her from below; ‘Grieve not, your Lord has made a rivulet gush forth right below you.’ Shake the trunk of the date-palm tree, and it will drop ripe dates for you.*” (19:23–25) This is the word of God; “. . . a voice called to her from below, ‘Grieve not.’” From the reading of

<sup>22</sup> Was this the “distant place” to which she was to withdraw, or was the house of Zachariah, above? See below Qur’ān 19:22.

this phrase with the vowel *kesrah* (i) on the *mīm* (m) and the *tā* (*min taḥtiḥā*), this person was Gabriel talking to her from the base of the mountain. But if one reads the phrase with the vowel *fathah* (a) on the *mīm* and the *tā* (*man taḥtahā*), it was Jesus who spoke to his mother by the permission of God, as soon as he came out of her womb.

They say that when she gave birth to Jesus, God made a river flow for her: its water was sweet and cold when she drank of it, and warm when she used it for washing. For that is God's word, ". . . *your Lord has made a rivulet gush forth right below you*"—meaning, a small stream. Ibn 'Abbās said that either Jesus or Gabriel struck the ground with his foot, and the water appeared; and that palm tree came to life after having been desiccated. Its branches hung down, and it put forth leaves and fruit and bore fresh dates. For it was said to her, "*Shake the trunk of the date-palm tree, and it will drop ripe dates for you.*" (ibid.)

Al-Rabī' b. Khaytham said that there is nothing better for a woman after childbirth than fresh ripe dates; and for the sick, nothing better than honey. 'Amr b. Maymūn said that he knew of nothing better for a woman when giving birth is difficult for her, than fresh ripe dates, and he read the above Qur'ānic verse. 'Ā'ishah said that the Prophet used to masticate dates and rub them on the palates of the newborn children of his Companions. An eloquent writer has said, in describing the date: "It is the second drink of the young, and the first of the old."

Then Joseph the carpenter went and got some firewood and placed it around her like an enclosure. Since she was very cold, he lighted the fire for her to warm herself. Then he cracked for her seven nuts that were in his saddlebag and fed them to her. That is why Christians light a fire on the night of the Nativity, and play with nuts.<sup>23</sup>

Wahb said that on the morning after Jesus was born, all the idols in every land were turned upside down. The demons became frightened, not knowing the reason for this; so they went hurriedly to Iblīs the Accursed. He was on one of his thrones in a fathomless green sea, in imitation of the divine throne that once was on the water. They reached him after the sixth hour of the day. But when Iblīs saw their assembly, he became frightened; for he had seen them only separately and not all together ever since their dispersion. So

<sup>23</sup> A Jewish custom on the festival of Hanukkah as well.

he questioned them, and they told him that something had happened on earth, that on that morning all the idols were inverted on their heads. There was nothing more useful in destroying the children of Adam than the idols. The devils used to enter their insides, speak to the people, and decide their affairs; and people thought that it was the idol that spoke to them. When this even took place, it lowered the esteem that the people had for idols and demeaned them. The devils said, "We fear that they will not worship idols after this. Know then, that we have come to you only after examining the earth, turning over the seas and all else, and we have only become more ignorant of what we wish to report." Iblīs said, "This is certainly a grave matter, but stay where you are." At that, Iblīs flew away, and remained away for three hours, during which he came to the place where Jesus had been born. When he saw the angels surrounding it, he knew that there is where the event had occurred. Iblīs tried to get at Jesus from above; but lo, the heads and shoulders of the angels reached the sky. He tried to get at him from under the earth; but lo, the feet of the angels were anchored firmly. He tried to enter between them, but they prevented him. Proof of this is the *hadīth* of the Prophet: "Satan stabs every son of Adam between his shoulders with his finger, except for Jesus son of Mary, whom God had shielded from him. He came to stab him, but he stabbed the shield [instead]."

Wahb said that Iblīs then returned to his friends and said, "I come to you after having traversed the entire earth, East and West, dry land and sea, the farthest limits of heaven and earth, and the uppermost atmosphere, all of this in three hours." Then he told them of the birth of Jesus, and said, "Before him, no womb ever enclosed a child without my knowledge, or gave birth to one unless I was present with her. I certainly hope that more people will be led astray by him than will be led to the right path; but there has never been a prophet who was more powerful against me and you, than this one who has just been born."

Then, on that night, a people who believed in him went forth because of a rising star, of which it was said previously that in the book of Daniel<sup>24</sup> its rising was mentioned as one of the signs of a birth. So they departed, seeking Jesus, taking with them gold, myrrh

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<sup>24</sup> This is not found in the Biblical book of Daniel.

and incense. They came upon a king of Syria, and he asked them, "Where are you going?" When they told him about it, he asked, "And why the myrrh, the gold, and the incense? Will you present these things to him?"—"These are symbols of him", they said, "for gold is the chief of all goods—in the same way this prophet is the chief of all the people of his time; and wounds and broken limbs are healed by myrrh—just as God will cure every sickly and diseased person; and the smoke of incense enters heaven as no other smoke—in the same way God will take this prophet up to heaven, as no one else in his time will be taken up." When they had said all this to that king, he thought of killing Jesus, so he said to them, "Go; but if you learn where he is, let me know; for indeed, regarding your eagerness for him, I am just as eager as you."

They went on until they came to Mary and delivered their gifts to her. They wanted to return to that king, to let him know where Jesus was; but an angel met them and said, "Do not return to him, and do not let him know where Jesus is, for he only wishes to kill him." So they went back by another road.

Mujāhid related that Mary said, "When I was alone with Jesus, he conversed with me and I with him; and when someone distracted me from him, he glorified God in my womb, and I heard it." And God is All-knowing.

#### MARY'S RETURN TO HER PEOPLE FROM BETHLEHEM AFTER GIVING BIRTH TO HER SON JESUS

[Mujāhid] said: Then a group of her people, when God had readied the situation of His servant Mary, and had eased the birth for her, He said, "O Mary, *eat*—some fresh ripe dates—*and drink*—some sweet water,—*and take comfort*,—and let your soul be content;—*and if you should see any man*,—if he should ask you about your son or blame you for him,—*say*, 'I have vowed a fast to the All-Merciful'—that is to say, silence.—(This was the reading of Ibn Mas'ūd and Anas because, when the Jews fasted, they refrained from food and drink and speaking.) 'I will not speak to any man this day.' Then she brought the child to her people." (19:26–27)

According to al-Kalbī, Joseph the carpenter carried Mary and Jesus to a cave and placed them in it for forty days, until she recovered from giving birth. Then he brought her out after forty days.



As Mary was carrying Jesus, [the infant] spoke to her along the way, saying, "O mother of mine, rejoice; for I am a worshipper and the Messiah of God." When she took the child to her family, they wept and grieved, for they were a very pious family. They said, "*O Mary, you have done a most astonishing thing*"—that is to say, shocking, distressing—"O sister of Aaron,"<sup>25</sup> (19:27bis–28) Qatādah said that this Aaron was a pious man, one of the trustworthy Israelites, and not Aaron, the brother of Moses, about whom they relate that on the day he died, forty thousand Israelites followed his funeral cortege, all of them named Aaron.

However, Wahb said that Aaron was one of the most sinful and most obviously depraved of [the Israelites], so they compared her to him—"Your father—'Imrān—was not a wicked person, nor your mother unchaste" (19:28)—i.e., a fornicator. "Whence have you this child?" And she made a sign to them, pointing towards Jesus, that they should speak to him. But they grew angry and said, "*How can we speak to one who is only an infant in the cradle?*" (19:29)

According to Wahb, Zachariah came to Mary while the Jews were arguing with her, and he said to Jesus, "Plead your case, if you have been commanded to do so." At that, although he was a child only forty days old, Jesus said, "*I am a servant of God, He has given me a Book, [and made me a prophet].*" (19:30) Thus he acknowledged his servitude as soon as he spoke, giving the lie to what the Christians say, and presenting a cogent argument against their claim.<sup>26</sup>

‘Amr b. Maymūn said that when Mary brought Jesus to her people, they took stones and wanted to stone her. When Jesus spoke, they let her be. It was said that he did not speak any more until he had reached the level of other boys. But God is All-knowing.

#### THE DEPARTURE OF MARY AND JESUS TO EGYPT

God said: "*And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign, and gave them shelter on an elevated ground, sequestered, watered by a spring.*" (23:50)

They say that the birth of Jesus took place in the forty-second year of the reign of Augustus (Aghustūs), and in the fifty-first year

<sup>25</sup> Again mistaking ‘Imrān, the father of Mary for Amram (also ‘Imrān in Arabic) the father of Moses and Aaron.

<sup>26</sup> A polemical approach to the Muslim disclaimer of the divinity of Jesus.

of the Ashkanians,<sup>27</sup> the petty kings, who reigned at that time. Caesar (al-Qayṣar), the king of Rome, had authority over Syria and its environs, though before him Herod was the king of the Israelites. When Herod, king of Israel under the Romans, learned the news of the Messiah, he determined to kill him, because his men saw a rising star that they recognized by computations in one of their books.

But God sent an angel to Joseph the carpenter who told him what Herod wanted, and commanded him to flee to Egypt with the boy and his mother. God also revealed to Mary, "Reach Egypt, for if Herod gets hold of your son, he will kill him. But when Herod dies, return to your land." So Joseph carried Mary and her son on a donkey until he drew near to the land of Egypt, and came to the hill of which God said, "(We) gave them shelter on an elevated ground, sequestered, watered by a spring."

Abū Ishāq al-Tha'labī said in the *Commentary*,<sup>28</sup> regarding "sequestered, watered by a spring", that according to 'Abdallāh b. Salām, it was in Damascus; Abū Hurayrah said it was in Ramlah; and Qatādah and Ka'b said it was Jerusalem. Ka'b said it is the place on earth closest to Heaven. According to Abū Zayd it is Egypt, while al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that it was an open area of Damascus. Abū 'Āliyah said that it is Īliyā (Jerusalem); and al-Qazzāz said, "It was level ground, watered with springs of pure water."

Mary remained in Egypt for twelve years, spinning flax, and glean- ing ears of grain in the footsteps of the reapers. She would collect the ears while carrying the cradle on one shoulder, and the bag for the grain on the other, until Jesus was twelve years old. It is related that Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Baqīr said, "When Jesus was born and was only one day old, he seemed to be a month old. After nine months, his mother took him to the boys' school, and seated him before the teacher. The teacher said, "Say: *In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful.*" So Jesus said that, and the teacher said, "Recite the alphabet in the *abjad*<sup>29</sup> order." And Jesus raised his head

<sup>27</sup> In traditional Muslim historiography, this name was given to one of the dynasties known as the "Petty Kings" or "kings of the territorial divisions" (*mulūk al-Taawā'if*), possibly the Parthians or Arsacids who ruled Iran from the death of Alexander to the rise of the Sasanian dynasty in Iran. The length of their rule differs in the texts from 201 to 455 years. See *EI*<sup>2</sup>, VII:551.

<sup>28</sup> Namely the author of this work who also wrote a *Tafsīr*, a commentary on the Qur'ān.

<sup>29</sup> *I.e.*, the traditional Semitic order rather than the later order of the Arabic alphabet. See 289, n. 8 above.

and said to the teacher: "Do you know what *abjad* is?" The teacher came towards him to strike him, but Jesus said, "Do not strike me if you know, if you do not, then ask me and I shall interpret it for you." The teacher said, "Interpret it for us." Jesus said, "ABJAD—the *alif* stands for "there is no god (*ilāha*) but Allah"; *bā'* is the splendor (*bahjah*) of God; *jīm* is the majesty (*jalālah*) of God; *dāl* is the religion (*dīn*) of God; HaWaZ—the *hā'* is Hell, and it is the bottomless pit (*hāwiyah*); *wāw* stands for woe (*wayl*) to the people of the fire; and *zāy* is for the stench (*zafīr*) of the people of Hell; HaṬaYa—the sinners are lower (*haṭṭat*) than those that ask God's pardon; KaLaMaN—the word (*kalām*) of God is not created and there is no (*lā*) substitute (*mubaddil*) for His word; Sa'aFaṢ—measure for measure (*ṣā'un bi-ṣā'in*), and punishment for punishment; QaRaSHTa—You (God) will take them from here-and-there (*taqrishuhum*) when You harvest, i.e., when You assemble them (on the Day of Judgment)." The teacher then said to [the boy's] mother, "Woman, take your son, for he has learned it all, and has no need for a teacher."

Al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn, the *Commentator*—Abū Sa'īd al-Khudarī—the Messenger of Allah said, "The mother of Jesus sent him to learn, and the teacher told him to say, 'In the name [*bismi*] of God', and Jesus asked, 'What is the name of God?' and the teacher said, 'I don't know.' Jesus said, 'The *bā'* is the splendor (*bahā'*) of God; the *sīn* is the magnificence (*sanā'*) of God; and the *mīm* is His dominion (*mulk*).' But God is All-knowing."<sup>30</sup>

### THE DESCRIPTION OF JESUS AND HIS QUALITIES

According to Ka'b al-Aḥbār, Jesus the son of Mary was a ruddy man, tending towards a white complexion. His head was not anointed at all. He used to walk barefoot, did not choose a house, ornaments, provender, or clothing, or any supplies except his daily ration of food. When night came upon him, he stood with feet together and prayed until morning came. He cured lepers and those who were born blind, and by God's leave, brought the dead to life. He used to tell his people what they should go ahead and eat in their houses

<sup>30</sup> These word games are very similar to the *Alphabet of Ben Sira* in Jewish literature, see p. 276 below.

and what they should store up for the morrow; and he would walk on the water of the sea. He had a dishevelled head and a lean face, and abstained from things of this world, preferring the life to come, and giving care to the worship of God. He travelled about in this world until the Jews sought to kill him. Then God took him up to Heaven. And God is All-knowing.

THE SIGNS AND WONDERS THAT APPEARED IN THE  
CHILDHOOD OF JESUS UNTIL THE TIME WHEN HE  
RECEIVED HIS PROPHETIC MISSION

Wahb said that the first sign that people saw in Jesus was this: His mother was staying in the house of an important Egyptian merchant, where Joseph the carpenter had lodged her when he accompanied her to Egypt. The poor used to take shelter in that house. Now money was stolen from this merchant's strong-room, but he did not accuse the poor. Mary, however, grieved over the merchant's misfortune; and when Jesus saw his mother's grief at the misfortune of her host, he said to her, "Mother, do you wish that I show him where his money is?" She said, "Yes, my son." So he told her to instruct the merchant to assemble the poor people for him in his house, so Mary told the merchant to do so, and he assembled the poor. When they came together, Jesus picked out two men among them, one of them blind and the other a cripple. The cripple was placed on the shoulders of the blind man, and Jesus said to the blind man, "Stand up with him." He replied, "I am too weak for that." Then Jesus said to him, "How were you strong enough for it yesterday?" When the people heard him say that, they beat the blind man until he stood up. As he rose, he raised the cripple to the level of the small upper window of the strong-room, so Jesus said to the merchant, "This is how they got at your money yesterday, for the blind man had the help of the cripple's power of sight." Then the blind man and the cripple said, "It is true, by God!" and restored all of the merchant's property to him and he took it and placed it in his strong-room. He said, "Mary, take half of it," but she said, "That is beneath me."<sup>31</sup> The merchant said, "Then give it to your son." She said, "He is even greater than I am."

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<sup>31</sup> *Lit. "I was not created for that".*

Soon afterward, the merchant gave a wedding dinner for one of his sons, and made a feast for him and gathered all the people of Egypt to his house. He went on feeding them for two months; at the end of that time, a party of Syrians visited him. The merchant did not know about them until they alighted at his place. On that day he was out of drink. When Jesus saw how concerned he was about this, he went into one of the merchant's houses in which there were two rows of large earthenware jars. As he walked along, Jesus placed his hand upon their mouths, and whenever he placed his hand on a jar, it filled up with drink until he reached the last of them. At that time he was twelve years old.

Another miracle, told by al-Suddī was that when Jesus was at school, he used to tell the boys what their parents were doing. He would say to a boy, "Run along, for your family have eaten such-and-such, and they have saved up such-and-such for you, while they are now eating such-and-such." Then the boy would go to his family and weep before them until they gave him whatever it was. They would ask him, "Who told you about this?"—"Jesus," was the response. They made their sons avoid him, saying, "Don't play with this magician," and they assembled them in a house. Jesus came looking for them, but they said to him, "They are not here." So he said to them, "Then what is in this house?" "Swine," they replied, and Jesus said, "So shall they be." When the door was opened upon them, lo, they were swine indeed. News of this spread among the people, and the Israelites were curious about it. When his mother feared for him she mounted him on a donkey and departed, fleeing to Egypt.

Al-Suddī relates another miracle: namely,—when Jesus and his mother were traveling in the land, they left the Israelites and alighted in a village, at a certain man's house. He received them hospitably and treated them well. At that time there ruled a king who was a headstrong tyrant. One day, while Mary was with [the man's] wife, their host came, sad and grieving. Mary said to the wife, "What is the matter with your husband, that he seems so sad?" The wife replied, "Don't ask." But Mary said, "Tell me. Perhaps by means of us God will dispel his anxiety." So the wife said, "We have a king who appoints a time for every one of our men to feed him and his troops, and give them wine to drink. If one does not do this, he punishes him. Today is our day, and we do not have enough." Mary said to her, "Tell your husband not to worry about anything, for he has treated us well. I shall tell my son to pray for him; that

will be sufficient." Mary then told Jesus and he said, "If I do that, something evil will happen." She said, "But let us not mind, for he has treated us well, and entertained us bountifully." Jesus said, "Then tell him, when the occasion draws near, tell him: 'Fill your pots and your jars with water'. Then let me know." The man did so, and Jesus prayed, and the water in the pots was turned to meat and broth, and the water in the jars was turned to wine. People had never seen anything like it.

When the king came, he ate; and when he drank, he asked, "From where is this wine?" The host told him, "From such-and-such a country."—"But my own wine is brought from that country, and it is not anything like this." The man then said, "From another land." The king became perplexed and suspicious and told him to tell the truth. The host said, "Then I shall tell you. There is a boy with me who asks nothing of God that He does not give him. He prayed to God and He turned water into wine."

Now the king had had a son whom he wished to name as his successor, who [this son] had died several days previously, and had been the most beloved of all mankind to the king. So he said, "Indeed, a man who prays to God so that He makes water become wine—will not God answer his prayer to bring my son to life?" He called Jesus and spoke to him about it, but Jesus said, "Do not do it, because if he lives, something evil will happen." But the king responded, "I shall not mind, after I have seen him." Jesus said, "If I bring him to life, will you let me and my mother go wherever we wish?"—"Yes." he responded, so Jesus prayed to God and the boy lived again. But when the people of the kingdom saw that he had come to life, they rose up in arms and said, "This one [i.e., the king] was eating us up, and when his death draws near, he wishes to install his son as his successor over us; he will devour us as his father devoured us." So they [royalists and others] fought one another, and Jesus and his mother went away.

Another miracle related by Wahb was that while Jesus was playing with the boys, one lad suddenly sprang upon another. The latter struck him with his foot and killed him. He threw him down before Jesus and Jesus was smeared with blood. Then the people came upon him suddenly and accused Jesus of it; so they took him and brought him to the judge of Egypt,<sup>32</sup> saying to the judge, "This

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<sup>32</sup> Seemingly an Israelite, see below in this account.

one killed so and so." The judge questioned him, and Jesus said, "I do not know who killed him; I was not an acquaintance of his." They wished to destroy Jesus, but [the judge] said to them, "Bring the [dead] lad to me." They asked, "What do you want of him?"—"I want to ask him who killed him." "But how can he speak to you when he is dead?" they asked. But they took Jesus and brought him to where the boy had been killed. Jesus began to pray and God brought the boy back to life. Jesus asked him, "Who killed you?" "So-and-so killed me", he said, indicating the one who had killed him. Then the Israelites said, "Who is this?" He said, "This is Jesus son of Mary." "And who is this with him?" The lad said, "One of the judges of the Israelites." Then he died forthwith, and Jesus returned to his mother. A great crowd of people followed him, and his mother said to him, "My son, did I not forbid you to do this?" But he replied to her, "Verily God is our Guardian, and He is the most Merciful of the merciful."

‘Aṭā’ told of another miracle: After she had taken him out of school, Mary put Jesus out as an apprentice in various trades. The last of these was that of the dyers, and she sent him to the master-dyer, so that Jesus could learn from him. The dyer had a collection of various kinds of garments, and he proposed to go on a journey, so he said to Jesus, "You have now learned this trade. I am going away on a journey and shall not return for ten days. These garments are to have various colors, and I have marked every one of them according to the color which should be given it. I want you to be finished with them at the time of my return." Then he departed. But Jesus boiled a single vat of dye for a single color, and put all the garments in it, saying to them, "By the permission of God, be as I wish you to be." The dyer returned while the garments were all in a single vat and said, "What have you done, Jesus?" "I have finished with them", he replied. The dyer said, "Where are they?" "In the vat." The dyer asked, "All of them?" "Yes." "How should they all be in one vat? You have indeed spoiled those clothes," the dyer said. "Get up and look," said Jesus. So he arose, and Jesus took out a yellow garment and a green one and a red one, until he had taken them all out in the colors he had wanted. Then the dyer began to marvel, and he knew that this was from All-powerful God. So he said to the people, "Come and look at what Jesus has done." And [the dyer] believed in him, he and his friends, and they were the Apostles. But God is All-knowing.

THE RETURN OF MARY AND JESUS TO THEIR OWN LAND,  
AFTER THE DEATH OF HEROD

Wahb said that when Herod the king died, twelve years after the birth of Jesus, God sent a revelation to Mary informing her of Herod's death, and commanding her to return to Syria with Joseph the carpenter, her paternal uncle's son. So Jesus and his mother returned, and dwelt in the mountain of Hebron (Al-Khalīl) in a town called Nazareth from which the Christians<sup>33</sup> take their name. Jesus learned in one hour a whole day's learning, and in a day a month's learning, and in a month a year's learning.

When he was thirty years old, God revealed to him that he should make himself manifest to the people, call them to God, and propound parables to them; cure the sick, the paralyzed, the blind and the possessed; and subdue devils, exorcise and abase them. The latter would die for fear of him. So he did as God had commanded him, and the people loved him and inclined towards him and felt comforted by him. His following increased and his fame grew. Often as many as fifty thousand sick and paralyzed people gathered around him in a single hour. Whoever of them was able to walk, came to him on foot; if anyone was unable to do so, Jesus came to him. Now he used to cure with prayer, on condition that they believed; and his prayer, by which he healed the sick and brought the dead to life was, "O God, Who is the God of those in Heaven and God of those on Earth, there is no God in either other than You. You are all powerful over those in the Heavens and all powerful over those on Earth; there is no one powerful in them but You. You are King over whoever is in the Heavens and King of whoever is on Earth; there is no king over them but you. You are a judge over whoever is in the Heavens and a judge over whoever is on Earth; there is no judge in them but You. Your power on Earth is like Your power in Heaven, and Your sovereignty on Earth is like Your sovereignty in Heaven. I ask this of You by Your noble names. *Verily You have power over everything.* (3:26; 66:8)

<sup>33</sup> *Al-Nāṣirah* = Nazareth; *Nāṣirānī* = Christian, see p. 396, n. 29 above.



## THE STORY OF THE DISCIPLES

God said, "When Jesus perceived their unbelief he asked: 'Who will help me in the way of God?' The disciples answered, 'We shall be the helpers of God. we believe in God, so bear witness that we submit (lit., are Muslims)'" (3:52) And God said, "And when I inspired the disciples—that is, I revealed to them and made it suitable to them—to believe in Me and My apostle, they said: 'We believe, and you bear witness that we submit (lit., are Muslims).'" (5:111) Know that the disciples were the true friends of Jesus son of Mary; they were his partners, and those with whom he was pleased, his helpers and advisers. They were twelve men, and their names were Simon the Brass-worker, called Peter; his brother Andrew; James the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip; Bartholomew; Thomas; Matthew the Publican; James the son of Alphaeus; Labaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot.<sup>34</sup>

Scholars have differed about why they were called the Disciples [i.e., *Ḥawāriyyūn*]. Ibn 'Abbās said that they were fishermen. Jesus came to them and said, "What are you doing?" They replied, "We are fishing." And he said to them, "Will you not walk with me so that we may fish for people?" They said, "How is that?" He said, "We shall call them to God." "And who are you?" He replied, "I am Jesus son of Mary and [I am] God's servant and messenger." They said, "Is any one of the prophets above you?" He said, "Yes, the Arabian Prophet." So those men followed him, believed in him, and went away with him. Al-Suddī said that they were sailors, but Ibn Arṭah said that they were fullers, who bleached (*yuhawwirūn*) fabrics—that is, made them white.

Ibn Faṭḥawayh related to us, transmitting it from Muṣ'ab, that the Disciples were twelve men who followed Jesus. When they were hungry they would say to him, "O Spirit of God, we are hungry." Then he would strike the ground with his hand—whether it was a plain or a mountain—and two loaves of bread would come forth for every person, and they would eat. When they were thirsty, they would say, "O Spirit of God, we are thirsty." And he would strike the ground with his hand—whether it was a plain or a mountain—and water would gush forth, and they would drink. They said, "O

<sup>34</sup> See Mark 3:16–19.

Spirit of God, who is better off than we? When we wish, you feed us; and when we wish, you give us to drink. We believe in you and follow you." He said, "Better off than you is he who works with his own hands, and eats from his own earnings." The story goes that they then began to make garments to sell.

Ibn 'Awn said that a certain ruler prepared food, and invited the people to eat. Jesus had a [wooden] bowl that was never empty. The king asked him, "Who are you?" and he said, "I am Jesus son of Mary." The king said, "I shall leave behind my dominion and follow you." So he went off along with those people who followed [Jesus], namely the disciples. Some say that he was the Dyer and his companions. Here the story ends.

Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that they were called *ḥawāriyyūn* because of the purity of their hearts. 'Abdallāh b. Mubārak said that they were called *ḥawāriyyūn* because they were luminous with a sign of worship on them with its light, whiteness, and splendor. The root *ḥ-w-r* among the Arabs, means intense whiteness, and from it comes *al-aḥwar* "intense white and deep black", and *al-ḥūr*, the houris, virgins of Paradise. Al-Ḥasan said that the Disciples were the "helpers", while Qatādah said that they were the ones suitable for succession [to Jesus]. According to al-Naṣr b. Shamīl, the *ḥawārī* is the leading personality from whom one seeks help regarding a misfortune that befalls one. Regarding them is the statement of the Prophet, "Every prophet has a disciple [*ḥawārī*], and my disciple is al-Zubayr."

These, then, were the disciples of Jesus son of Mary, but as for the disciples of *this* people [*i.e.*, the Muslims], al-Ḥusayn b. Muḥammad al-Dīnawārī—Sufyān b. Mu'ammār—Qatādah said that all the disciples were from the Quraysh, and they were Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Ḥamzah, Ja'far, Abū 'Ubaydah b. al-Jarrāḥ, 'Uthmān b. Maẓ'un, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. 'Awf, Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās, Ṭalḥah b. 'Abdallāh, and al-Zubayr b. al-'Awwām—may God be pleased with all of them.

JESUS' ATTRIBUTES, AND THE WONDERS THAT APPEARED BY  
HIS HAND, FROM THE TIME HE WAS SENT UNTIL  
HE WAS RAISED ON HIGH

One of the attributes was God's supporting him with the Holy Spirit. All power be to Him Who strengthened him with the Holy Spirit.

The likes of that is in the sūrah of the Table (Sūrah 5): “*O Jesus, son of Mary, remember the favors I bestowed on you and your mother, and strengthened you with the Holy Spirit.*” (5:110) There have been differing views concerning this. Al-Rabīʿ b. Anas said that it is the spirit that He breathed into him; He added it to his soul as an honor and allocation towards the House of God. God’s involvement with the sacred is indicated by His words: “. . . *with His own spirit . . .*” (32:9); “*and We breathed into him of Our spirit.*” (15:29) Others say that by the Holy Spirit He means purity; that is to say, an undefiled spirit, and that Jesus was called “Spirit” because the loins of a lustful man did not contain him, nor does the menstruating womb envelop him<sup>35</sup> rather he was purely a matter of God.

Al-Suddī and Kaʿb have said that the Holy Spirit is Gabriel, and Jesus was strengthened by Gabriel, because he was his intimate and companion, aiding him and travelling with him wherever he travelled, until he rose with him to Heaven. Saʿīd b. Jubayr and ʿUbayd b. ʿUmayr have said that the Holy Spirit was the Mightiest Name of God, by which Jesus brought the dead to life and showed people those wonders. Another attribute is God’s teaching him the Gospel and the Torah. He used to recite them from memory, as God has said: “*I have taught you the Book*” (5:110)—that is, the Scripture. It is said that the Scripture consists of ten chapters, nine of which are for Jesus, together with the Wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel.

Another attribute is his creating a bird from clay. As God has said, quoting Jesus, “*Now I have come to you with a sign from your Lord: Out of clay I will make for you the figure of a bird, and I will breathe into it, and it shall become, by God’s leave, a bird.*” (3:49) And He said, “*Then you will make out of clay the shape of a bird by My permission.*” (5:110) For he used to make from clay the shape of a bird and breathe into it, and it would become a bird, by God’s leave, but he created only bats. He specialized in bats because the bat is the most perfect of all the birds. It has breasts and teeth, gives birth and menstruates, and flies. Wahb said that Jesus’ bird flew only as long as people were looking at it. When it passed out of sight it fell dead, to distinguish the work of mortal man from the work of God, and to teach that perfection belongs only to God.

<sup>35</sup> That is to say, he had neither human father nor human mother.

Another attribute was curing those who had been born blind, and lepers, as God said, "*You will heal the blind and leper, by My leave,*" (5:110)—the leper with white patches on him, and the blind who have been born blind and have never seen light. In Islam there was never anyone born blind except Qatādah. Jesus specialized in these two things because they baffled the physicians. The predominant thing in Jesus' time was medicine, so he showed them miracles of that kind.

It is related that Jesus once came upon a monastery with blind men in it. He asked, "What are these?" Someone answered, "They are a group who were summoned to Judgment, so they destroyed their eyes by their own hands." He said to them, "What made you do this?" "We feared the consequences of Judgment, so we did to ourselves what you see," they replied. Said he, "You are the learned and the wise, the rabbis and most distinguished men. Rub your eyes with your hands and say, 'In the name of God.'" They did so, and lo! they all stood up, seeing.

Still another attribute was his bringing the dead to life by God's leave: "*... and when you put life into the dead, by My leave...*" (5:110) Among those was Lazarus (Al-Ādhar), a true friend of his. His sister had sent for Jesus, saying, "Your brother Lazarus is dying, come to him." Jesus and his companions traveled for three days to reach Lazarus, but found that he had been dead for that length of time. They told his sister to bring them to his tomb, so she brought them to his tomb which was underground. Then Jesus said, "God, Lord of the Seven Heavens and the Seven Worlds, You have sent me to the Children of Israel to call them to Your religion, and You have told them that I, by Your leave, shall bring the dead to life. So bring Lazarus back to life." And Lazarus arose, came out of his tomb, and survived, and children were born to him.

Another [blessing] has to do with the son of the old woman. The story goes that while Jesus was travelling with his Disciples, he came to a certain town. He said, "There is a buried treasure in this town. Who will go and get it out for us?" They said, "O Spirit of God, no stranger enters this village without being killed by them." So Jesus said to them, "Stay where you are until I return to you." He went forth until he entered the town and stood at a door and said, "Peace be upon you, people of this house! Here is a stranger. Give him food." An old woman said to him, "Are you not satisfied that I leave you alone and don't take you to the governor, and yet you come asking for food?"

While Jesus was at the door, the young son of the old woman came, and Jesus said to him, "Take me as a guest tonight." But the youth told him what the old woman had said. Jesus replied, "If you will do what I say, I shall have you married to the king's daughter." The youth said, "You are either insane or you are Jesus, son of Mary." "I am Jesus," he replied. So the youth took him in as a guest, and he spent the night at his house. When morning came, Jesus said to him, "Go and present yourself before the king, and say to him, 'I have come to ask for your daughter in marriage.' Then he will order you to be beaten and thrown out."

So the youth departed and went to the king and said to him, "I have come to ask for your daughter in marriage." The king ordered him to be beaten and thrown out. He then returned to Jesus and recounted the story to him. Jesus said, "When tomorrow comes, go to him and ask for his daughter in marriage and he will do less than before." The youth did as Jesus had ordered him, and the king had him beaten less than the first time. He returned to Jesus and told him. Jesus said, "Return to him, for he shall say to you, 'I will give her to you in marriage on my own terms, which are: a castle of gold and silver, with everything in it of gold, silver and chrysolite.' Then say to him, 'I shall comply.' If anyone is sent with you, go out with him, and you shall find [the castle], but do not do anything to it."

Then the youth returned to the king and made his marriage proposal, and the king said, "You agree to take her on my terms?" "And what are your terms?" And he stipulated the terms that Jesus had named. Said the youth, "Yes, I agree; so send someone with me to get it." The king sent some men with him, and he delivered to them what the king had asked of him and the people were amazed. The king then delivered his daughter to him. The youth was filled with wonder, and said to Jesus, "O Spirit of God, you can do something like this, yet you live in such poverty!" Jesus said to him, "Indeed, I have preferred that which endures to that which passes away." The youth said, "I also shall pray to Him and shall be your companion." So he forsook the world and followed Jesus. Jesus took him by the hand and brought him to his companions and said to them, "This is the treasure that I told you about." And the son of the old woman remained with Jesus until he died. Jesus passed by him while he was lying dead on his bed, and Jesus prayed to God and sat on the bed. The youth came down from (being carried) on

the necks of men and carried the bed on his own neck, returned to his family, remained alive, and had children.

Another attribute had to do with the daughter of the tithe collector, the man who used to take the tithe. They said to Jesus, "Will you bring her to life?" He prayed to God and she lived, remained alive, and children were born to her. And another had to do with Shem, the son of Noah: The disciples said to Jesus while he was describing Noah's ark, "If someone who had seen the ark were sent to us, he could describe it to us." So Jesus arose and went out to a mound, struck it and took up a handful of earth, saying, "This is the grave of Shem, the son of Noah; if you wish me to, I shall bring him to life for you." They said, "Yes", so he invoked God's Mightiest Name, and struck the mound with his staff, saying, "Come to life, by God's leave!" And forth from his grave came Shem, the son of Noah. Half of his head had become white, and he said, "Has the Day of Resurrection come?" Jesus said, "No," but I have summoned you by the Mightiest Name of God." The story goes that people did not go white in those days, for Shem had lived five hundred years and he was still a young man. Then he gave them an account of the ark, and Jesus said to him, "Die." But Shem said, "Only on condition that God protect me from the pangs of death." Jesus prayed to God and He did so. This tale was already mentioned in the story of Noah.

Still another attribute had to do with Ezra. They said to Jesus, "Bring him to life or we will burn you in fire." They gathered much firewood from the wood of grapevines. In those days they used to bury their dead underground in stone caskets. Ezra's grave was found with his name written on top of it. They applied themselves to opening it but they were unable to bring him out of his grave. So they went back to Jesus and told him, and he handed them a vessel containing water, and said to them, "Sprinkle his grave with this water." They did so, and the cover opened and they brought him to Jesus still in his burial shrouds, for the Earth does not consume the bodies of prophets. Jesus removed those garments and began to sprinkle the water on his body and his flesh and hair grew back. Then he said, "Come to life, Ezra, by God's leave!" Behold, he sat up, and their eyes beheld all this. They said, "O Ezra, what do you testify about this man (by this they meant Jesus)?" And he replied, "I bear witness that he is a servant of God and is His messenger." They said, "O Jesus, pray to your Lord for us to leave him alive

among us.” But Jesus said, “Return him to his grave,” and they did so and he became dead once more. Those who were believers believed in Jesus, son of Mary, and those who resisted, did so. Al-Kalbī said that Jesus revived the dead, “O Living One, O Eternal.”

Among his attributes is his telling about what was hidden. God had said about him, “*I will tell you what you eat and what you hoard in your houses.*” (3:49) Al-Kalbī said that when Jesus healed those born blind and the lepers, and revived the dead, they said, “This one is a sorcerer, but he has told us what we eat and what we hoard.” For he would tell a man what he ate in his morning meal and at his evening meal.

Another attribute is Jesus’ walking on the water. It is related that he departed on one of his journeys, and that with him was a friend of his, a short fellow who always clung to Jesus. When Jesus came to the sea, he said, “In the name of God, by truth and certainty!” and walked on the water’s surface. The man was overcome by wonder and said, “This Jesus—the Spirit of God—walks upon the water, so I will walk upon the water.” Thereupon he sank into the water, and cried to Jesus for help. So Jesus pulled him from the water, brought him out and said, “What did you say, short fellow?” And he told him what had passed through his mind. Jesus said to him, “You certainly placed yourself in a position that God had not placed you, and God hates you for what you said. So repent before God for what you said.” Then the man repented, and returned to the rank in which God had placed him. Fear God, and do not envy one another.

The Imām Abū Maṣṣūr al-Khamshāwī, citing Mu‘ādh b. Jabal, has told us in his *Commentary* that the Messenger of Allah said, “If you knew God with true knowledge, you would learn that knowledge after which there is no ignorance, and which no one at all has attained.” They said, “Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “Not even I.” They said, “O Messenger of Allah, we have heard that Jesus son of Mary walked upon the water.” He responded, “Yes, and if he had had more fear of God and more faith, he would have walked upon the air.” They said, “O Messenger of Allah, we never believed that the messengers fall short.” But he said, “God has too high a standard for anyone to reach.”

## A STORY CONTAINED IN THIS CHAPTER

Wahb said that Jesus once set out to travel in the land and a Jew accompanied him. Now that Jew had two loaves and Jesus had only one. Jesus said, "Will you share your food with me?" The Jew agreed, but when he saw that Jesus had only one loaf, he changed his mind. Jesus arose to pray and his companion went and ate a loaf. When Jesus finished his prayers, they began to eat their food and Jesus said to his companion, "Where is the other loaf?" His companion replied, "There was only one loaf." So Jesus ate one loaf and his companion a loaf. Then they went along and came to a tree. Jesus said to his companion, "Why don't we sleep under this tree until morning?" The Jew agreed, so they spent the night.

Then, when morning came, they continued on their way. They met a blind man, and Jesus said to him, "Would you want me to treat you so that your sight will return? Would you thank God?" He said, "Yes", so Jesus touched his eyes and prayed to God for him, and lo, he was cured. Jesus then said to the Jew, "By Him Who has shown you the blind seeing, how many loaves did you have?" But he said, "By God, there was only one loaf." Jesus held his peace and they went on.

Suddenly they came upon a cripple and Jesus said to him, "Do you see fit that I treat you so that God will give you health, and will you thank Him?" He said, "Yes," and the story goes that Jesus invoked God and the cripple stood up on his two feet, cured. Jesus' companion said, "I have never seen anything like this." Jesus said to him, "By Him Who has shown you the blind seeing and the cripple cured, who was the possessor of the third loaf?" But he swore to him that he had only one loaf. So Jesus said no more to him.

They went along until they came to a raging river, and Jesus said, "I see neither a bridge nor a boat, so take hold of my waistband from behind me and step in my footsteps." The Jew did so and they walked upon the water. Jesus then said to him, "By Him Who has shown you the incident of the blind man and the cripple, and has subdued the water for you, who was the possessor of the third loaf?" But again he said, "By God, there was only one loaf." So Jesus held his peace.

Then they went along and chanced upon antelopes grazing. Jesus called one antelope, slaughtered it, roasted a portion of it, and they ate it. Then Jesus struck the rest of the antelope with his staff and



said, "Arise, by the leave of God, to Whom belong power and glory!" And lo! the antelope ran away. The Jew said, "Glory be to God!" and Jesus said, "By Him Who has shown you this miracle, who was the possessor of the other loaf?" But again he said, "There was only one loaf."

They came upon a man with some cattle, and Jesus called out, "O owner of the cattle, slaughter a calf for us from these cattle of yours." The man said, "Send your companion, the Jew, to take it." The Jew went and slaughtered it and roasted it, while the owner of the cattle was watching him. Jesus said, "Eat, but do not break a bone." When they had finished they threw its bones into its hide and Jesus struck it with his staff, saying, "Arise, by God's leave!" and the calf arose, bleating. Jesus then said to the herdsman, "O owner of the cattle, take your calf." The man said, "Woe to you! who are you?" He replied, "I am Jesus, son of Mary." The herdsman said, "Jesus, the great magician!" and fled from him. Jesus said to his companion, "By Him Who brought the calf back to life, how many loaves did you have?" and he replied, "I had only one loaf." So Jesus held his peace.

They went on until they entered a town; Jesus alighted in its lower portion and the Jew in its upper portion. The Jew took Jesus' staff and said, "Now I shall cure the sick and bring the dead to life." The king of that town was sick with a long and heavy illness. The Jew went along calling out, "Who needs a doctor?" till he came to the king's door. There he was informed of his illness, and said, "Bring me to him and I shall cure him; and if you find that he has died, I shall bring him to life." He was told that the king's case had baffled the physicians, and that there was not one who had tended him or given him medicine whom he had not crucified. But he said, "Take me in to him." He entered, struck the king with his staff, and he died. Then he continued striking the king with his staff, although he was dead, saying, "Rise, by God's leave!" But he did not rise, and the Jew was taken to be crucified.

Jesus heard about it and came to him. He had already been raised up on the tree-limbs, so Jesus said to them, "If I brought the king back to life for you, would you see fit to leave my friend to me?" They agreed, so he prayed to God and He revived him, and he arose. The Jew was taken down from the tree, and said to Jesus, "You are the kindest of all people. By God, I will never forsake you." Jesus said to him, "I conjure you by God, Who revived the

antelope and the calf after we had eaten them, and Who revived this man after he had died, and took you down from the tree after your crucifixion, how many loaves did you have?" The story goes that he swore by all this but said, "By God, I had only one loaf." So Jesus said, "Never mind."

They continued on their way until they reached a large ruined town where three gold ingots had been buried, which beasts of prey and other animals had dug up. The Jew said to Jesus, "This wealth is for you." But Jesus said, "Yes, one for me and one for you, and one for him who ate the third loaf." Then the Jew said to Jesus, "I was the one with the third loaf and I ate it while you were praying." Jesus said, "Then they are all yours." Jesus then went off and left him looking (at it) for he was unable to carry even one of them because it was too heavy for him. Jesus said, "Leave it, for there are people who will perish because of it." Though the Jew's soul went on yearning for the wealth, he did not want to disobey Jesus, and he himself could not carry it, so he went off with Jesus.

In the meantime, three men came upon the treasure and took possession of it. Two of them said to their companion, "Go off to one of the villages and bring us some food and drink and some beasts of burden on which to carry these riches." When their companion had gone away, one of them said to the other, "Don't you think that we had better kill him when he returns, and divide the wealth between us?" and he agreed. But the one who had gone off said to himself, "I shall put poison in the food so that when they eat it they will die, and all of the wealth will become mine," and he did so. When he returned and reached them, they killed him. Then they ate the food he had brought them, and died.

Jesus came upon him and the others lying near him slain, and said, "There is no god but Allah! Thus does this world do to those who are its people." Then Jesus brought them back to life, by God's leave. They had learned their lesson and went away without taking any of the wealth. But the soul of the Jew, Jesus' companion, still yearned for it, and he said, "Give the wealth to me." Jesus said, "Take it for your own, and it shall be your portion in this world and the next." But when the Jew went to carry it, the Earth swallowed him up and Jesus departed.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> See versions of this story in H. Schwarzbaum, "A Jewish Moses Legend of Islamic Provenance" in *Fields of Offerings*, pp. 99-110. Here the stories involve both

## THE DESCENT OF THE TABLE

Another attribute is the descent of the Table, as God said, "*When the Disciples said: O Jesus, son of Mary, could your Lord send down for us a table laid with food?*" He said: "*Fear God, if indeed you believe.*" [*They said: "We should like to eat of it to reassure our hearts and to know it's the truth that you have told us and that we should be witness to it."* Said Jesus, son of Mary. "*O God our Lord, send down a table well laid out with food from the skies so that this day may be a day of feast for the first and last of us, and a token from You. Give us our bread, for You are the best of all sustainers.*" And God said: "*I shall send it down to you; but if any of you disbelieve after this, I shall inflict such punishment on him as I never shall inflict on any other creature.*" (5:112-15)

Scholars have disagreed as to the manner of the descent of the Table, and its properties, and what was on it. Qatādah—Jābir—‘Ammār b. Yāsir that the Messenger of Allah said: "The Table descended with bread and meat on it. That was because they had asked Jesus for food which, when they would eat of it, would never be exhausted. Tradition tells us that he replied, 'I shall do that and it shall remain with you as long as you do not conceal it or betray each other. But if you do that, you will be punished.' Before the day was over, however, they were treacherous and secretive. According to some of the traditions, one of them stole from it, saying, 'Perhaps it will not always come down.' So it was taken up again, and they were transformed into apes and swine."<sup>37</sup>

Ibn ‘Abbās said that once Jesus said to the Israelites, "Fast for thirty days; then pray to God for what you wish Him to give you." They fasted for thirty days, and when they had finished they said, "Jesus, if we worked for someone and finished our work, we would be given food to eat; so if we have fasted and hungered, pray to God to send down to us a set table from Heaven." So Jesus dressed in sackcloth and covered himself with ashes. Then he prayed to God saying, "*O God, our Lord, send down to us a Table fully laid out with food from Heaven [so that this day may be a day of feast for the first and last of us, and a token from You. Give us our sustenance, for You are the best of sustainers.]*" (5:114) And the angels came bearing a table with seven

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Moses and Jesus, Moses with a Jew and Jesus with Peter as his companion who, because he denied Jesus three times also denies eating the three loaves, pp. 105-07.

<sup>37</sup> Referring back to the People of the Sabbath, see above pp. 482-84.

loaves and seven fishes upon it and placed it before them. The last of them had as much to eat as the first of them.

‘Aṭā’ b. al-Sā’ib and others have related that when the Table was placed before the Israelites, various hands reached into it, and it contained various kinds of good things, including every kind of food except meat. ‘Aṭiya al-‘Awfī said that fish came down from Heaven which had the flavor of everything. Qatādah said that when the Table descended from Heaven bearing fruit from among those of the Garden, it would come down to them in the morning and in the evening, since it was like the manna and quail for the Children of Israel. Wahb said that God sent down flat loaves made of barley, and fish. Someone said to Wahb, “Did that not deprive them of anything?” He answered, “Certainly, but God even doubled the blessing for them. One group would eat and leave, and others would come and eat, until all of them had eaten and some was left.”

Ka’b al-Aḥbār said that a table descended from heaven upside down, the angels flying with it between Heaven and Earth and on it were all foods except meat. Muqātil and al-Kalbī said that God answered the prayer of Jesus saying, “I am sending it down to you as you have asked. Whoever eats of that food and then does not believe, I shall make him an example and a curse, and a warning to future generations.” They said, “We consent.” So Jesus called Simon the Brass-worker, the best of the disciples, and said, “Have you any food?” He said, “I have two small fish and six loaves.” Jesus told him to bring them to him, and Jesus cut them into small pieces and said, “Sit down in a meadow.” So they went in groups, ten in each one. Then Jesus arose, and prayed to God; and He answered his prayer and sent down His blessing on it, and the pieces became so many loaves of bread and so many fishes. Then Jesus arose and walked around, throwing into every group what his fingers carried. Then he said, “Eat, in the name of God.” And the food began to increase until it reached their knees. They ate as much as God wished, and there was still some left over, though there were five thousand people and more. All the people then said, “We bear witness that you are the servant and messenger of God.” Then they asked him once again, and God sent down five loaves and two fishes, and he did with them as he had done the first time.

But then, when they returned to their villages and spread this news around, those who had not witnessed it laughed and said, “Woe to you! He has only bewitched your eyes.” God strengthened the

foresight of those for whom He wished good; but as for those whom He wished to chastise, they returned to their unbelief, and were transformed into apes and swine, down to every last boy and woman of them. They remained so for three days; then they perished. They did not reproduce, they did not eat, nor drink; thus it was with every one who had been transformed.

It was related from 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ that Salmān al-Fārisī said that Jesus was not succeeded by an equal; he did not drive an orphan away, nor burst out laughing, nor drive away flies from his face, nor take anything against his pride twice, and he did not jest at all. So when the Disciples asked him to bring down to them tables of various kinds, he said, "*O God, send down a table well laid out from the skies—and on it provide some food for us to eat—for You are the best of all providers of sustenance.*" (5:114)

Then a red table, set with food, came down from heaven between two wraiths of clouds, one wraith above it and one wraith beneath it, while they were looking on; and it swooped down till it alighted before them. Then Jesus wept and said, "Make me grateful, O God, make it a mercy, do not make it an exemplary punishment."

Meanwhile they were looking at it and saw something the likes of which had never been seen. They had never known an aroma more agreeable than the aromas of that table. And Jesus said to them, "The best of you in deeds will uncover it, and mention the name of God, and eat from it." Simon, the Brass-worker, the leader of the Disciples, said, "You are more worthy of that than we." So Jesus arose, performed his ablutions, prayed a long prayer, and wept much. Then he removed the cloth from it and said, "In the name of God, the Best of Providers." And lo! there was a broiled fish with no scales on it, flowing with streams of grease, with salt at its head and vinegar at its tail, and around it various kinds of greens, but no leeks. And there were five loaves; on one of them olives; on the second, honey; on the third, clarified butter; on the fourth, cheese; and on the fifth, thin slices of dried meat.

Simon said, "O Spirit of God, is this worldly food or heavenly food?" And Jesus said, "What you see is neither worldly food nor heavenly food; but God, with triumphant power, has brought it into being. Eat of that for which you asked, and He will supply you and give you increase from His abundance." They said, "O Spirit of God, if only you would show us another miracle out of this miracle." So Jesus said, "Fish, by God's leave, come to life." The fish trembled,

its scales and bones came back to it, and the [people] were frightened. Jesus said, "What ails you, that you ask for things which you dislike when I have given them to you?" Then he said, "And what I fear for you is that you will be punished. O fish, by God's leave, become again as you were." And the fish became broiled again, as it had been.

They said, "O Spirit of God, be the first to eat of it; then we ourselves will eat." Jesus said, "God forbid that I should eat of it, but whoever asked for it shall eat of it." But they were afraid to eat, so Jesus invited to [the Table] the poor and the diseased, those with leprosy and with elephantiasis, and the afflicted, and said, "Eat of the provision of God, and you shall have good enjoyment, while others shall have misfortune." They ate of it, and one thousand and three hundred men and women were provided for—the poor, and the paralyzed, the sick and the afflicted, all of them were satisfied and belching. Then Jesus looked at the fish, and lo, it was as it had been when it came down from Heaven. Then the Table flew upward as they were looking at it, till it was hidden from view. No sick man ate from it that day, but he was cured; and no cripple, but he was healed; no afflicted one, but he was given health; and no pauper, but he became rich and remained rich until he died. So the disciples, and whoever else had not eaten, regretted it.

When [the Table] would come down, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, men and women, used to crowd around it. It continued thus for forty mornings, descending in the late morning, and remaining set to be eaten from, and then, when the afternoon shadow fell, it flew upward while they were looking at it, till it was lost to their view. Then it would come down from time to time, on one day and not another, like *Thamūd's* female camel.<sup>38</sup>

God revealed to Jesus that he should "make My table and My provision for the poor, not the rich." That became so distressing to the rich that they doubted, and spread doubt concerning it among the people, saying, "Do you, in truth, see the Table descending from Heaven?" But Jesus said to them, "You shall perish, so prepare for the punishment of God." And God revealed to Jesus, "I have imposed two conditions on those who doubt: that whoever does not believe after its descent, I shall inflict such torture on him as I have not

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<sup>38</sup> See the story of *Thamūd*, pp. 122–32 above.

inflicted on any other creature." But Jesus said, "If You punish them, indeed they are Your creatures; if You pardon them, indeed You are mighty and wise."

Three hundred and thirty men of them were transformed, who went to bed in their houses that night with their wives, and in the morning they were swine, running on the roads and in the muck, and eating filth in the privies. When people saw this, they sought refuge with Jesus, the son of Mary, in fear, and they wept, and the families of those who were transformed wept for them. And when the swine saw Jesus they wept, and went walking around him, and Jesus began to call them by name, one after the other; and they wept and made signs with their heads but were unable to speak. They lived for three more days, and then perished.

Among his wonders was that Jesus once came upon a man sitting by a grave, and he passed by him often. Every time he would find him sitting there. So Jesus said, "O servant of God, I constantly see you sitting by this grave." The man said, "O Spirit of God, this was my wife. Her beauty and congeniality were mine in such and such ways, and I had confidence in her." Jesus said, "Do you want me to pray to God to bring her to life for you?"—"Yes." So Jesus performed his ablutions and prayed two prostrations, invoking God. Suddenly something black, as if it were burnt onyx, came out of the grave, and Jesus said to it, "Who are you?" It said, "O Messenger of God, I am a man in torment for the last forty years, and this very moment I was told, 'Answer!' and I answered." Then he said, "O Messenger of God, I have passed through the most painful torment, such that if God returned me to the world I would make a promise to Him that I would never disobey Him; so pray to God for me." Jesus pitied him and invoked God, then said to him, "Go away," and he went away.

But the man by the grave said, "O Messenger of God, I had the wrong grave. Her grave is *this* one." So Jesus prayed to God; and out of the grave came a young and beautiful woman. Jesus said to the man, "Do you know her?" He said, "Yes, this is my wife." Jesus prayed that God return her to him. Then the man led her by the hand till they came to a tree, and he slept beneath it, placing his head on her bosom. Now the son of the king passed by and looked at her, and she looked at him, and each of them was pleased with the other. He made a sign to her, and she removed her husband's head from her bosom and followed the youth. Her husband awoke

and missed her, and could not find her and sought after her. When he was shown the way to her, he clung to her saying, "My wife!" But the youth said, "She is my slave girl." At that point Jesus came up, and the [husband] said, "This is Jesus." Then he told him the story, and Jesus said to her, "What do you say?" "I am the slave girl of this man, and I do not know this other man." So Jesus said to her, "Return to us what we have given you." She said, "I shall do so," and fell down dead where she stood. And Jesus said, "Have you ever seen anything more marvelous than that man? God put him to death as an unbeliever, then raised him to life, and he believed. But have you ever seen a woman whom God put to death as a true believer, and who, after He had brought her back to life, disbelieved?"

Another wonder was his being raised up to Heaven. As God said, "*O Jesus, I will cause you to die, then raise you to Myself, and rid you of the infidels [and hold those who follow you above those who disbelieve till the Day of Resurrection; then shall you all return to Me, and I will judge between you of the matters in which you dispute.]*" (3:55) And their saying: "*We killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of God, but they neither killed nor crucified him, though it so appeared to them. [Those who disagree in the matter are only lost in doubt. They have no knowledge about it other than conjecture, for surely they did not kill him.] but God raised him up to Himself; and God is all-mighty and all-wise.*" (4:157-8)

Al-Kalbī—Abū Ṣāliḥ—Ibn 'Abbās said that Jesus confronted a group of Jews, and when they saw him they said, "Here comes the sorcerer, son of the soocress; the perpetrator, son of the perpetrator," and they slandered him and his mother. When Jesus heard that, he prayed to God, saying, "O God, You are my Lord, and I am from Your Spirit. I was created by Your word, and I did not come to them of my own accord. O God, curse him who has slandered me and my mother." God answered his prayer, and transformed the slanderers into swine. When the chief and ruler of the Jews saw this, he became frightened, and feared Jesus' prayers. The decision of the Jews was unanimous for killing Jesus, and gathered against him that day and began asking him questions. He said, "Assembly of Jews, God loathes you." His words angered them greatly and they were aroused against him to kill him. But God sent Gabriel to him, who concealed him in a crevice in a wall. Then the chief of the Jews ordered one of his friends, called Pilate (Philatiānūs), to enter the crevice and kill him. But when Pilate entered, he did not



see Jesus. He delayed in coming out to them so they thought that he was fighting him in there. Then God cast the likeness of Jesus upon him, and when he came out they thought that he was Jesus, so they killed him and crucified him.<sup>39</sup>

Wahb said that when God made it known to Jesus that he was leaving this world, he worried about death, and it distressed him. He summoned the Disciples and prepared a meal for them, and said, "Be present with me tonight, for I have need of you." At night, when they had assembled, he gave them supper, and arose to serve them. When they had finished the meal, he began to wash their hands, admonished them, and wiped their hands with his garments. They thought this was too much and expressed their disapproval, so he said, "Unless one does for me what I have done, he is not mine and I am not his." So they let him act as he wished until, when he had finished, he said to them, "I have done this for you tonight, serving you at the meal and washing your hands with my hands, only that you may have an example from me. You see, indeed, that I am the best of you. Let not some of you hold themselves more important than others, but you should devote yourselves to each other as I have devoted myself to you. Now as for the need in which I have asked for your help, pray to God for me, and be diligent in prayer, that my death may be delayed." But when they concentrated on praying, and wished to be diligent, God put them to sleep so that they were not able to pray. Jesus then woke them up, saying, "Glory to God! Can't you have patience and help me for a single night?" But they replied, "By God, we don't know what is the matter with us. We have certainly been used to spend the night awake, and to be very wakeful, but tonight we are unable to stay awake. When we desire to pray, we are prevented." Then Jesus said, "The shepherd goes away and the sheep remain." And he began to utter remarks like that, referring to himself. Then he said, "One of you surely shall deny me before the cock crows thrice,<sup>40</sup> and one of you shall sell me for a few silver pieces and shall eat up my price." Then they departed and dispersed.

Now the Jews were seeking him. So they took Simon,<sup>41</sup> one of

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<sup>39</sup> See Qur'ān 4:157, where the Islamic concept that Jesus was not slain or crucified is expressed.

<sup>40</sup> A reference to Matthew 26:34, 74.

<sup>41</sup> *I.e.*, Peter, as in the various Gospels.

the Disciples, and said, "This is one of his friends." But he denied it, saying, "I am not one of his friends." And they left him. Then once again, and he denied him in the same way. Then he heard the sound of the cock, and he wept, for it grieved him. When it was morning, one of the disciples came to those Jews and said to them, "What would you agree to give me if I led you to him?" They stipulated thirty silver coins, so he took that and led them to him.<sup>42</sup> Before that he had been only a likeness to them. They took him and secured him and bound him with a rope, leading him with a halter and saying, "If you used to bring the dead to life, to heal the blind and the leper, can't you loosen yourself from this rope?" And they spat upon him and threw thorns at him. Then they set up a piece of wood on which to crucify him.

When they brought him to the wood to crucify him, the Earth became dark and God sent the angels, and they came between them and Jesus. The likeness of Jesus was cast on the one who had led him to them, his name was Judas, and they crucified him in his place, thinking that he was Jesus.<sup>43</sup> God caused Jesus to die for three hours, then He raised him up to Heaven. And that is the word of God, "*I will cause you to die, then raise you up to Myself, and rid you of those who do not believe.*" (3:55)

When he who was like Jesus was crucified, there came Mary, the mother of Jesus, and a woman for whom he had prayed and whom he had cured of devils,<sup>44</sup> weeping over the crucified one. But Jesus came to them and said, "For whom are you weeping?" "For you," they answered. "But God has raised me up, and nothing but good has befallen me. This person was but a likeness for them."

Qatādah said that the Jews entrusted Jesus to a man who was to be his guard, to go with him wherever he went. Jesus went up into the mountains, and the angel came to him and raised him up to heaven; and God cast the likeness of Jesus on the guard. So the Jews thought he was Jesus and they took him, though he went on saying to them, "Truly, I am not Jesus, truly I am so-and-so, the son of so-and-so." But they did not believe him, so they killed him and crucified him.

Qatādah said that it has been related that Jesus asked his friends,

<sup>42</sup> See Matthew 26:14-16.

<sup>43</sup> Again in keeping with the Muslim concept that Jesus did not die on the cross.

<sup>44</sup> Possibly referring to Mary Magdalene. But see p. 672.

“Which one of you will have my likeness cast upon him, though he be killed?” One man of the group said, “I, prophet of God.” That man was killed, but God protected Jesus and took him up to Himself. It is said that the one who had the likeness of Jesus and was crucified in his place was an Israelite named Ashyūf b. Qandayrā. But God is All-knowing.

THE DESCENT OF JESUS FROM HEAVEN,  
SEVEN DAYS AFTER HIS ASCENSION

Wahb and other scholars of the People of the Book have said that when God raised Jesus up he remained in Heaven for seven days. Then God said to him, “Your enemies the Jews, have prevented you from fulfilling your promise to your friends, so go down to them and counsel them. Go down also to Mary Magdalene, for no one has wept for you as she has wept, and no one has sorrowed for you as she has sorrowed. Go down to her and tell her that she will be the first to join you, and order her to assemble the disciples for you, and you will scatter them over the Earth to summon people to God.”

Now the story of Mary Magdalene (Maryam al-Majdalāniyah) was that she was a very righteous Israelite woman from a village of Antioch called Majdalān.<sup>45</sup> She was a pious woman, but she used to menstruate continually without being purified. Various Israelite nobles asked her in marriage, but she refused, so they thought that she was too proud for them. It was not a feeling of superiority, but only that she wished to conceal her illness. So when she heard of the coming of Jesus, and of how, by his hands, God cured the sick and the crippled, she came to him in hope of recovery. But when she saw Jesus, and the awesome countenance with which God had endowed him, she became shy, and retired behind him, and put her hand on his back. Jesus said, “Someone diseased has touched me with good intent; and God has given him what he hoped for, and has purified him by my purity.” Then God removed from her what had been in her, and she was healed and purified.

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<sup>45</sup> The name Magdalene may have nothing to do with Antioch, but may be connected with one of several villages with Arabic names based on Hebrew *Migdal*, such as Majdal near Ascalon (Ashkelon) in Israel, Majdalen in southern Jordan, El Majdel or Majdal Zun in south Lebanon, or Majdal Shams in the Golan Heights.

When God commanded Jesus to descend to her after seven days because of his compassion, he went down to her swiftly. When he descended, the mountain blazed with light; and Mary Magdalene assembled the Disciples for him, and he scattered them over the Earth as missionaries for God. Then God took him up, and clad him with feathers and dressed him in light, and cut off from him the desire for food and drink, and he flew around the Throne with the angels, though he was human, angelic, earthly, heavenly.

The Disciples spread out to wherever he had commanded them. That night on which he descended to them, is the night on which the Christians adorn themselves. According to the narrators, Peter turned to Rome; Andrew (Andrāwus) and Matthew to the land whose people eat humans; Thomas and Labbaeus (Thaddaeus)<sup>46</sup> to the land of the East; Philip and Judas to Qayrawān and Ifrīqīya;<sup>47</sup> John to Ephesus, the city of the People of the Cave; the two Jameses to Jerusalem, which is Aelia [Īliyā], the city of the Temple; Bartholemew (Bartūmāwus) to Arabia, which is the land of Hejaz; and Simon to the land of the Berbers. Each one of the Disciples whom Jesus sent out, spoke the language of those to whom he sent them.

Ibn Ishāq said that then the Jews planned for the Disciples, the companions of Jesus, that they would expose them to the sun, torture them, and parade them publicly. The king of Byzantium, who possessed idols, heard of this. He was told, "Among the Israelite people who are under your rule, there was a man on whom they had kept a close watch and had killed him. He had told them that he was a messenger of God, and had revived the dead for them, had healed the sick for them, and had created for them out of clay the likeness of a bird, had breathed into it, and it began to fly, by God's leave. He had told them of hidden things and showed them wonders." The king of Byzantium said, "What kept you from mentioning his case to me? By God, had I known I would have hidden him from them." Then he sent for the Disciples and wrested them from the hands [of the Jews]. When they came to him, he asked them about the religion of Jesus, and they told the king his story. Then he pledged his faith to them in [Jesus'] religion, made the

<sup>46</sup> One Qīṣaṣ text has Liyā.

<sup>47</sup> Qayrawān (Qairouan) is a city in Tunisia, and Ifrīqīyā is the early Arabic name for part of North Africa, especially present-day Tunisia.

likeness of Jesus descend, as well as the tree on which he was crucified. He paid homage to it, and preserved it for whoever was not aware of Jesus. He attacked the Israelites and killed a great number of them. From this came the origin of Christianity in Byzantium.<sup>48</sup>

The people of the Torah said that Mary became pregnant with Jesus when she was thirteen years old, that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the land of Jerusalem, sixty-five years after Alexander's conquest of Babylon, and fifty-one years after the rule of the Askānīyūn. God inspired him at the beginning of his thirtieth year and raised him up to Him from the Temple on the Night of Power in the month of Ramadan,<sup>49</sup> when he was thirty-three years old. His prophesying lasted three years, and his mother, Mary, lived for six years after his Ascension. But God is All-knowing.

#### THE DEATH OF MARY, DAUGHTER OF 'IMRĀN

Wahb said that when God wanted to raise Jesus up to Him, Jesus went among the disciples, and ordered two of them, one called Simon the Brass-worker, and the other John, to stay close to his mother and not to desert her. So they went forth with Mary to Mārūt, king of Byzantium, calling him to [the worship of] God. Before that, God had already sent Jonah, so when they came to him, he ordered that Simon and Andrew be killed, and they were crucified upside down, and Mary and John fled. When they were on part of their way, a pursuer overtook them and they were afraid. The Earth split open for them and they disappeared into it. Mārūt, the king of Byzantium, and his companions came and dug in that place, but found nothing. So they put the earth back as it had been, and knew that this was a Divine matter. The king of Byzantium asked about the story of Jesus. They related it to him and he became a Muslim, as we have mentioned. But God is All-knowing.

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<sup>48</sup> This seems to be a strange recounting of the story of the Emperor Constantine.

<sup>49</sup> The night when Allah began His revelations to Muḥammad.

THE SECOND DESCENT OF JESUS FROM  
HEAVEN AT THE END OF TIME

God said, “*He is certainly a sign of the Hour, so have no doubt about it [and listen to Me. This is the straight path.]*.” (43:61) Ḥusayn b. al-Faḡl was asked whether the descent of Jesus could be found in the Qurʾān, he said that it was found in the God’s word “[*Who will speak to the people when in the cradle] and when middle-aged.*” (3:46) He was not “middle-aged” while in this world, so the meaning of “*when middle-aged*” could only refer to [him] after his descent from Heaven.

Abū Ṣāliḥ Shuʿayb b. Muḥammad al-Bayhaqī—Abū Hurayrah—the Messenger of Allah said, “The prophets are all brothers from different mothers—their mothers are various but their religion is one. I am the person most entitled to Jesus, son of Mary, because between me and him there was no prophet, and the son of Mary is about to come down among you with command and justice. He is descending over my people and is my successor over them. When you see him you will recognize him, for he is a man of medium build, tending towards ruddiness and paleness, with lank hair, as if something had been dripped on it, not that moisture was poured on it. He will descend between two sceptres and will break the cross, slay the pig, establish the head-tax, and make wealth abundant. He will appear from al-Rūḥā<sup>50</sup> performing the major pilgrimage,<sup>51</sup> performing the minor pilgrimage,<sup>52</sup> or following the call *labbayka*, to both of them together.

He will do battle with people about Islam until he destroys all the sects of his time except Islam, and prostration will be made to Allah alone, the Lord of all beings. In his time, God will destroy the messiah of error, of lying, al-Dajjāl.<sup>53</sup> Security will spread in the Earth so that lions will graze with cattle, wolves with sheep. Boys will play with animals and they will not harm one another.<sup>54</sup> Then he will remain on Earth for forty years. He will marry and have children, then he will die, and the Muslims will pray over him and

<sup>50</sup> A town in Syria; called Urfa in present-day Turkey. See LeStrange, *Lands*, p. 104; Yāqūt, *Muʿjam*, II: pp. 231, 591.

<sup>51</sup> Namely the *Hajj*.

<sup>52</sup> Called the *ʿumrah*.

<sup>53</sup> The Anti-Christ, see p. 145, n. 14.

<sup>54</sup> Compare with Isaiah 11:6 and 65:25.

bury him in Medina next to 'Umar. If you wish, read "*There is not one among the people of the Book who will not believe in him before his death; and he will be a witness over them on the Day of Resurrection.*" (4:159)—that is to say, before the death of Jesus. Abū Hurayrah will repeat this three times.

Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Fārisī, also transmitting from Abū Hurayrah, related to us that the Messenger of Allah said, "When God sends down the Messiah Jesus, he will live among this people for a time, then he will die in this city of mine and will be buried next to 'Umar. Blessed are Abū Bakr and 'Umar to be assembled [at Resurrection] between two prophets."

My father related to me that Ḥusayn b. Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. 'Alī—Ibn 'Abbās—the Messenger of Allah said, "How will God destroy a people when I come at its beginning, Jesus at its end, and the Mahdī<sup>55</sup> at its midpoint?"

#### THE TALE OF THREE MESSENGERS WHOM JESUS SENT TO ANTIOCH DURING THE REIGN OF THE PETTY KINGS

God said, "*Narrate to them the example of the people of the city when the messengers came to it.—meaning the messengers of Jesus—when We sent two of them.*" There were differences of opinion about the names of these two messengers. According to Ibn Ishāq, they were Fārūḍ and Rūmāḍ, but Wahb said: Yahyā (John) and Yūnus (Jonah). Muqātil said Yūmān and Mālūs, while Ka'b said Ṣādiq and Ṣudūq. "*[they called them liars; so We sent a third to strengthen them.]*" (36:13–14)—that means that we strengthened them with a third messenger, namely Simon the Brass-worker, the leader of the Disciples according to most of the commentators. However Ka'b said that his name was Shalūm, but Muqātil said that it was Sam'ān.

Scholars of the lives of the prophets have related that Jesus sent two of the Disciples as messengers to the city of Antioch. When they neared the city they came upon an old man pasturing his herds,

<sup>55</sup> The one who will appear at the end of time to restore religion and justice on Earth and establish the rule of Islam; will rule before the end of the world. See *EP*, V:1230–1238.

who was a dear friend of the companions of Yā Sīn.<sup>56</sup> They greeted him and he asked who they were. "Messengers of Jesus," they replied, "come to call you from the worship of idols to the worship of the Merciful One." He said, "Do you perform miracles?"—"Yes, we heal the sick, and cure those born blind and lepers, by God's leave." The old man said, "I have a sick son, who has been bedridden for years." They said, "Take us to your dwelling and we will observe his condition." He took them to his dwelling, and when they saw the son of the old man in that condition, they drew near him, prayed for him, and rubbed him with their hands. He stood up immediately, by God's leave, healthy. Word spread in the city and God healed many sick people by their hands.

In the city of Antioch there was a tyrant who worshipped idols, who was called Salāhīn. Wahb said that his name was Abṭīhīs, who was a king of Byzantium. The scholars say that the news reached the king and he invited them to his presence and asked them who they were. "Messengers of Jesus," they replied. "What miracles do you have?" he asked, and they said, "We cure those blind from birth, and lepers, and heal the sick, by God's leave." He asked them for what purpose they had come, and they answered that they had come to call him away from the worship of what cannot hear or see, to the worship of One Who hears and sees all. The king asked, "Is there a god other than our gods?" They said "Yes," and he asked who it was. They said, "The One Who created you after your non-existence and created your gods." He said, "Get up and I will look into your matter." The people followed them, seized them, and beat them in the street.

Wahb said that Jesus sent these two messengers to Antioch, but when they came there they did not reach the king, and their stay was long. One day the king came out while they were glorifying and mentioning God, whereupon he became angry and ordered that they be imprisoned, each one of them to receive one hundred strokes of the lash. They say that when the messengers were rejected and beaten, Jesus sent the leader of the disciples, Simon the Brass-worker, immediately thereafter to help them. Simon entered the town incognito and began to associate with the entourage of the king so that

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<sup>56</sup> These two "mysterious letters" heading Sūrah 36 have become both a personal and family name.



they would become friendly with him. They brought word of him to the king who invited him, enjoyed his company and became friendly with him and honored him. Then, one day, Simon said to him, "O king, I have heard that you have imprisoned two men and have beaten them because they called you to a religion other than yours. Did you speak to them and hear their words?" "My anger intervened between me and them," he said, and Simon said, "Perhaps the king could hear their call, so that we might understand what they are about." The king sent for the two of them, and when they appeared before him, he said to Simon, "Find out from them," and Simon asked them who had sent them here. "The One Who created all things," they replied. Simon spoke to them and they were calm and succinct and said, "He does what He wishes and decides what He wants." Simon asked them what their miracles were, and they answered, "Whatever you want. We cure those born blind and lepers, and heal the sick and the chronically ill, by God's leave." The king gave an order and a young man was brought whose eyes were gone, their place being like his forehead. They kept on praying to God until the place of his sight split open and they took two nut-sized pieces of clay and put them in his pupils and they became organs with which they could see. The king wondered at this, and Simon said to the king, "If you asked your god so that he might perform a deed like this, you as well as your god would have glory." The king said, "I have no secret from you, so know that our god, whom we worship, does not hear or see, cannot be of harm or benefit."

Now when the king went in to his idol, Simon would enter with him and would pray and entreat God so much that people thought that he was of their faith. The king said to the two messengers, "Can your God, whom you worship, revive the dead?" They replied, "Our God is able to do anything." So the king said, "Here is a man who died seven days ago, who was the son of a prominent man. I delayed his burial until his father returned, for he is away." They brought the dead man, who had already decayed and stank, but the two began to call upon their Lord openly, while Simon did so in secret, and the dead man arose and said to them, "Seven days ago I died as a polytheist, then I was led through seven ravines of fire, and I warn you about what you are doing, so believe in Allah." Then he said, "The gates of Heaven opened for me and I saw a

young man with a handsome face intercede for these three men." The king asked, "And who are the three men?" He replied, "Simon and these two," pointing to Simon's two friends. The king wondered greatly, and when Simon knew that their words had influenced the king, he reported it immediately, he called upon him and the people to believe. The king was among those who believed while others did not.

Ka'b and Wahb said that, on the contrary, the king did not believe, and that he and his people assembled to kill the messengers. This was reported to Ḥabīb b. Murrā, a companion of YāSīn. Ibn 'Abbās and Muqātil said, "His name was Ḥabīb b. Isrā'īl the carpenter." Wahb said that he was ill, afflicted by leprosy. His house was near the furthest gate of the city of Antioch, and he was a believer, and charitable. He would gather his earnings, and when he finished, he would divide it into two halves: he would feed his family with one half and give alms with the other. When he heard that his people intended to kill the messengers, he went to them. Before that he had concealed his belief and worshipped the Lord in a cave. When news of the messengers reached him, he made his religion public and spoke to his people calling upon them to obey the messengers as God had said in His Book, for this is His word, "*Then a man came running from the other side of the city, [O my people, he said, follow the messengers. Follow those who do not ask for any recompense of you,] and are rightly guided.*" (36:20–21) His people said to him, "Are you one who contradicts our religion and is a follower of these messengers and a believer in their god?" He replied, "*Why should I not worship Him Who brought me into being, to Whom you will be brought back at the end? [Should I take other gods apart from Him, who would neither be able to intercede for me nor save me if the Merciful brings me harm? In that case I would surely be in clear error.] I believe in your Lord, so listen to me.*" (36:22–25)

When he said that to them, they fell upon him as one man and killed him; there was not one of them who defended him. 'Abdallāh b. Mas'ūd said that they trampled him with their feet until his wind-pipe came out of his rectum. Al-Suddī said that they stoned him with rocks while he was saying, "O God, guide my people," until they tore him apart and killed him. Al-Ḥasan said, "They tore a hole in his throat and hanged him on the walls of the city, then buried him in the market-place of Antioch. God made Paradise obligatory for him, for that is His saying, "*It was said to him, Enter Paradise.*"

When he reached the Garden of Allah and its esteem, He said, *"If only my people knew how my Lord has forgiven me and made me one of those who are honored!"* (36:26-7)

They have said that when Ḥabīb was slain, God became angry at them and brought vengeance on them quickly. He ordered Gabriel, who gave them one shout and they died, all of them, for that is His word, *"We did not send down any army against his people from heaven, nor did We have to send one.—upon others among the unbelievers of the nations—There was just one blast, and they were extinguished"* (36:28-9)—that is to say, dead.

Abū Bakr al-Khamshāwī—Ibn Abī Laylā—his father—the Messenger of Allah said, "He sent to the nations three who did not disbelieve in Allah for one instant: Ḥizqīl, the believer among Pharaoh's people; Ḥabīb the carpenter, of the community of Yā Sīn; and 'Alī b. Abū Ṭālib, and he was the best of them".

## JONAH, SON OF AMITTAI

### THE STORY OF JONAH, SON OF AMITTAI<sup>1</sup>

It is said that Amittai was his mother, and the ancestry of none of the prophets is ascribed to his mother except Jesus, son of Mary, and Jonah, son of Amittai. He is the one regarding whom the Messenger of Allah said "It is not proper for anyone to say 'I am better than Jonah, son of Amittai.'" God said, "*And remember Dhū l-Nūn, when he departed in wrath, [and imagined that We will not test him. Then he called out from the darkness: 'There is no god other than You. All glory to You; surely I was a sinner']*." (21:87) Scholars of the lives of the ancients have said that Jonah was a pious man who devoted himself to the service of God on a mountain in a town of Mosul called Nineveh. His people used to worship idols, so God sent Jonah, son of Amittai, to forbid unbelief and to command monotheism. Jonah was a pious man who could not endure the people, so he stayed on the mountain to worship God there. He recited beautifully and the wild beasts listened to him as they had listened to David in his time. But anger would take hold of him and therefore the Messenger of God forbade anyone to be like him in the haste and unsteadiness that appeared from him. God said, "*So bear with patience, as the apostles who were constant bore*;" (46:35) And God also said, "*. . . and do not be like the one of the fish . . .*", (68:48)<sup>2</sup> because he had little patience with his people and little sociability with them. The Messenger of Allah said, "Jonah, son of Amittai, was hasty and unsteady, and when he took the burden of prophecy on himself, he fell apart under it, and his people fell apart under the heavy burden, and therefore for that reason he left them in anger."

The sages differ in describing the cause and time of his anger, one group saying that he went to his people in anger—which is the account of al-Ḍaḥḥāk and al-ʿAwfī from Ibn ʿAbbās who said that

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic: *Yūnus ibn Mattā*. See the Biblical Book of Jonah; Ṭabarī, 782–89; Perlmann, 160–66; Kisāʿī, 296–301; Thackston, 321–26; Tottoli, *Storie*, pp. 125–35.

<sup>2</sup> Namely, Jonah, whose name is associated with the story of his being swallowed by a fish. Dhū l-Nūn means literally "the one of the fish".

Jonah, son of Amittai and his people lived in Palestine. A king conquered them and led nine and a half tribes into captivity, while two and a half tribes remained, there having been twelve tribes who possessed prophecy and rule. God revealed to the prophet Isaiah, "Go to Hezekiah the king and tell him to turn to a strong, faithful prophet; for I shall cast fear into the hearts of those tribes so that they will send out the Israelites with him." The king said to him, "Of whom are you thinking?", for there were five prophets in his kingdom. Isaiah said, "Jonah, for he is strong and faithful." So the king summoned Jonah and ordered him to set out, but Jonah said to him, "Has God ordered you to send me out?" The king said that He had not, so Jonah said that there were other prophets who were strong and faithful. They reviled him and he departed in anger towards the prophet, the king, and his people. He came to the Mediterranean Sea and certain things happened to him there.

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said that he was angry at his Lord because He had ordered him to journey to his people to warn them of His power and to summon them to Him. He asked his Lord to grant him a delay, that he might be prepared to appear to them, but God told him that the matter must be quicker than that. He did not grant Jonah a delay even when he asked for time to grab his sandal and put it on. Something similar to His first words was said to him, but being a man in whose character there was anger, he said, "My Lord has hurried me so that I cannot grab my sandal," and he went in anger.

Shahr b. Ḥawshab related that Ibn 'Abbās said that Gabriel came to Jonah and said to him, "Hurry to the people of Nineveh, and warn them that punishment has already reached them if they will not repent." Jonah said, "I should like to seek a riding animal," but Gabriel said, "The matter must be faster than that." So Jonah became angry and departed for the sea. He boarded a ship and certain events took place with him.

According to these previous statements, Jonah's mission took place after his escape from the belly of the fish, for Ibn 'Abbās said that the mission of Jonah was after the fish had cast him up. The proof of that statement is that God mentioned the story of Jonah in the Sūrah of al-Ṣāffāt (Sūrah 37),<sup>3</sup> and followed that with His words,

<sup>3</sup> See Qur'ān 37:139-146.

*"We sent him to one hundred thousand men or more . . ." (37:147)* But others have said that the story of the fish was after the summons to his people and his being informed of his mission. But he departed from his people in anger towards his Lord, when He removed the punishment from them, after having promised it to them. This was because [Jonah] hated being among people who tried to prove the falsehood and false predictions regarding what He had promised them. He did not know the reason for God's having removed punishment and destruction from them, so he went out in anger, saying, "By God, I will never go back to them as a liar. I promised them punishment on a certain day and it did not come." In some accounts it is said that his people had the custom of killing those against whom they proved falsehood, so when the punishment that he had promised them did not come at the appointed time, he feared that they would kill him, and that is why he became angry. He said, "How can I return to my people when You failed to keep the promise to them?", not knowing the reason why punishment was diverted from them, having already departed from their midst because of the impending punishment.

‘Alī b. Abū Ṭālib said that God sent Jonah, son of Amittai, to his people when he was thirty years old, and that he dwelt among them for thirty-three years, summoning them to God. No one believed him except two men, one of whom was Rūbīl, a wise scholar, and the other, Tanūkhā, who was a pious ascetic.

Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn Mas‘ūd, and others have said that when Jonah despaired of the faith of his people, he cursed them and was told, "Before long, that with which you cursed your people will befall them. Return to them and summon them for forty more nights; if they respond, good, and if not, I will dispatch punishment upon them." So he returned and summoned them for thirty-seven nights and they did not respond. Then he arose among them, preaching, and said, "I surely caution you that the time of your punishment is in three days if you will not believe." Then he said to them, "The sign of this [punishment] is that your color will change," and when they awoke, their color had changed, and they said to one another, "What Jonah said has happened to you. We did not try to prove him false, so watch him closely. If he spends the night among you, feel safe from punishment. But if he does not spend the night, then know that in the morning punishment is yours." When the fortieth night came and Jonah saw that their color had changed, he knew

that the punishment was descending upon them, so he departed from them. When they awoke, the punishment had covered them.

Saʿīd b. Jubayr said that it was like the earth that covers the grave when the one to be buried enters it. But Muqātil said that the punishment was a mile distant, over their heads, while Ibn ʿAbbās said the range was three miles. Wahb's description was that the sky became cloudy with a fearful black cloud, smoking greatly, which descended until it enveloped their city and their exteriors became black. When they saw this, they were convinced of the destruction and the punishment. They looked for their prophet Jonah, but they could not find him, and God cast repentance into their hearts and inspired them to return to Him. They went out to the highlands, they, with their women, children and their riding-animals, They donned sackcloth and showed faith and repentance to God. They had good intentions and they separated mothers from their young, whether humans, riding-animals, or livestock, and each had pity on the others. Their voices were raised, and their entreaties became intermingled. They cried for help and implored God, saying, "We believe in what Jonah brought to us!" So their Lord had mercy on them, answered their supplication, received their repentance, and removed the punishment from them after He had darkened them. This happened on the day of ʿAshūrā, it was said that it was a Wednesday of the middle of Shawwāl. Ibn Masʿūd said that the repentance of the people of Nineveh reached the point that they rescinded all the injustices among themselves, so that if a man came to a stone upon which he had placed the foundation of his building, he would remove it and return it.

Ṣāliḥ al-Murrī—Imrān al-Jūnī—Abū Khālid said that when the punishment enveloped the people of Jonah, they went to an old man who had remained from among their sages, and said to him, "The punishment has come down upon us, what do you think?" He said, "Say: O Living One, when nothing lives, O Living One, when You will revive the dead, there is no god but You." They said this, and God removed the punishment from them and they prospered for a time, as God said, "*Why has there been no town that believed . . .*"—that is to say, a town that had placed arousal in place of disavowal, for therein is a sort of disbelief—"*and profited by their belief. . .*"—at a time of despair when they saw the punishment—"*like the people of Jonah when they came to believe?*"—their believing profited them at that time when God learned of their piety—"*We removed from them the affliction*

*of shame in the life of this world and made them prosperous for a time.*" (10:98) They say that Jonah had already left them and was waiting for the punishment and destruction of his people. But he did not see a thing, as if it had been a lie, for there was no killing for him among them. Jonah said, "How can I return to my people when I have lied to them?" So he burst out with rebuke of his Lord, and anger against his people, and he went to the sea. As God said, "*And (remember) Dhū al-Nūn when he went away in anger and imagined We will not test him (with distress).*" (21:87)—that is to say, that We would not sentence him to punishment. The Arabs say, "God decrees a thing that He decrees by predestination, and determines His decree by power." Both of these are read in His words, "*We have decreed death among you,*" (56:60) and in His words, "*Who detremines and directs.*" (87:3) This is the understanding of most of the exegetes. 'Aṭā' said that its meaning is that Jonah thought that We would not straiten repression upon him, from God's words, "*God increases sustenance to His creatures as He wills and decrees.*" (13:26) and He straitens, as in His word, "*... and whoever has his means of subsistence straitened to him . . .*" (65:7)

Ibn Zayd said that it is a question of its meaning; did he think that We would not decree against him? And al-Ḥasan said that the meaning of "he thought" is that his Lord was incapable and unable to do it. Further, he said that he heard that when Jonah did wrong, he went off in anger towards his Lord, but it was Satan who made him err, so that he thought that God would not be able to act against him. But because he had worthy ancestors, and worship of the Lord, God refused to leave him to Satan; so when Jonah came to the sea, there were people boarding a ship, and they took him on without payment. When he entered the ship, it was halted and stood still, while other ships were moving to the right and to the left. Therefore the sailors said that there must be a slave fleeing from his master on board—for that is what happened to a ship; when a runaway was on it, it would not move. They proceeded to cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah, and he said, "I am the runaway," and they said, "You will be thrown into the water." So they cast the lots a second and a third time, and each time the lots returned to Jonah, so he threw himself into the water, for these are the words of God, "*So he drew lots and was of those rejected.*" (37:141)

When Jonah fell into the water, God appointed a fish for him that swallowed him, and God revealed to the fish, "I have certainly not granted him to you for your sustenance, but We have granted



you to him as a refuge and dwelling. So take him and do not break a bone of his, and do not tear his flesh." Another fish swallowed this fish and dropped down to his dwelling-place in the sea. Then another fish swallowed that one, and took him from this place until he passed by al-Ubullah,<sup>4</sup> then moved up the Tigris, then took him to Nineveh. It is said that God made the skin of the fish transparent so that Jonah could see everything that was in the sea. When he ended up at the bottom of the sea with him in the lowest part of the sea, Jonah heard a sound and asked himself what it might be. God revealed to him, while he was in the belly of the fish, that it was the glorification of God by the animals of the sea. So Jonah praised God while he was in the belly of the fish. The angels heard him glorifying God and said, "Our Lord, do we hear a weak, well-known voice in an unknown land?" God said, "This is my servant Jonah who has rebelled against Me, so I have confined him in the belly of a fish in the sea." The angels said, "The pious servant from whom a pious deed used to ascend to You every day and night?"—"Yes."—Therewith they pleaded on his behalf, for this is His word, *Then he called out from the darknesses; "There is no god other than You."*—Ibn 'Abbās said, "(The darknesses are) the darkness of the night, the darkness of the sea, and the darkness of the belly of the fish."—"All glory to You; surely I was a sinner." (21:87)

Sa'īd b. al-Musayyab related, on the authority of Sa'd b. Mālik, who said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah say, 'When the name of God is invoked, He answers; and when something is requested by His name, He gives the prayer of Jonah, son of Amittai.' So I asked, 'Messenger of Allah, is it the exclusive possession of Jonah, son of Amittai, or does it belong to the community of Muslims?' He responded, 'It is the special possession of Jonah and of the community of Muslims as a group when they invoke His name. Did you not hear the words of God—*Then he called out from the darknesses: [There is no god other than You, all glory to You; surely I was a sinner. We heard his cry, and saved him from anguish.] That is how We deliver those who believe.* (21:87–8)—When Jonah invoked it, the angels pleaded that God command the fish, so He cast him up on the shore of Nineveh, as

<sup>4</sup> *Al-Ubullah* (Greek: *Apologus*) was an ancient town dating back to Sassanian times, near the Arab city of Basra on a river flowing into the Tigris. See LeStrange, *Lands*, 47.

God has said, *So We cast him on a barren shore*—that is, on the face of the earth—*while he was emaciated*, (37:145)—that is, ailing and frail, like a young, featherless bird.”

Scholars have differed over the duration of Jonah’s stay in the belly of the fish: Muqātil said three days; ‘Aṭā’ said seven days; al-Ḍaḥḥāk, twenty days; and al-Suddī and al-Kalbī, forty days. When God brought him out of the belly of the fish, He caused a gourd-tree to sprout for him, which is a vegetable marrow, and he began to be in its shade. And God sent him a she-goat whose milk he drank, for that is His word, “*And We made a gourd-tree grow over him.*” (27:146)—namely, near him. They say that the tree dried up, and he wept over it. So God revealed to him, “Do you weep over the dry tree, and do not weep over one hundred thousand or more people whom you wanted Me to destroy?”

Then Jonah departed and came upon a boy watching sheep. “From where do you come, my lad?” he said. “I am from the people of Jonah.” So he said to the boy, “When you return to them, tell them that you have met Jonah.” “If you are Jonah, then you know that if I do not have proof, I will be killed. So who can bear witness to that for me?” Jonah said, “This valley, this tree, and this sheep will bear witness for you,” and he motioned towards a ewe from among his sheep. The boy told him to command them, and Jonah said to them, “When this boy comes to you, bear witness for him,” they agreed and the boy returned to his people. Then he told the king, “I have indeed met Jonah and he sends you greetings of peace.” But the king ordered that he be killed, saying that he lied. So he said, “I have evidence! Send someone with me as a witness,” and they sent some men with him. They came to the valley, the tree, and the ewe, and he said, “I beg you, by God, did Jonah make you swear?” “Yes,” they answered, and the people returned frightened. They said to the king, “The tree, the earth, and the ewe have borne witness for him.” The king then took the boy’s hand and seated him on his throne, saying, “You are more worthy of this place than I.” He remained with them, and that boy put their affairs in order for forty years. In the meantime, they had gone out and searched for Jonah. They found him, rejoiced in him, and believed in him and he put their affairs in order.

It is told that Jonah departed from them one night and stopped in a village, where a man received him hospitably. This man had made much pottery, so God revealed to Jonah to order the potter

to destroy these pots. Jonah told him to do so, and when he heard this from him, the man insulted him, saying, "I live from the thing that I make with my hands. I enjoy its price, I and my household, and you order me to break it!" And Jonah wept. So God revealed to him, "This man made pottery from clay and would not agree to break it, yet you were agreeable and used to the idea of destroying one hundred thousand or more of my servants." Jonah departed and went down into a wadi.

It is said that when the tree, the Earth, and the ewe bore witness for the boy, it was the ewe that was with the boy and said to them, "If you want Jonah, go down into the wadi." They went and, lo, there was Jonah. They dropped to his feet, kissing them, and asked him whether he would enter the city with them. He replied, "There is no need for me to be in your city." But they cried and implored him, so he consented to go with them. He was brought a wagon of silver and was seated on it, but Gabriel appeared to him, biting his fingers, proclaiming, "This is the seat of oppressors," and Jonah jumped off the wagon and began to walk, until he entered the city with them. He remained with his family and his children for forty nights. Then he departed, journeying, and the king departed with him, and the shepherd boy became the king of this city, as we have related. The two travelers continued worshipping God until they died. The prophethood of Jonah was in the time of the petty kings. But God is All-knowing.

## THE PEOPLE OF THE CAVE

### THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE OF THE CAVE<sup>1</sup>

God has said, “*Or do you think that the People of the Cave and the Inscription (al-Raqīm) were of our wonderful signs?*” (18:9) Scholars have differed about the Inscription. Al-Nu‘mān b. Bashīr al-Anṣārī said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah mention the Inscription in the following: Three men went forth for their families, and while they were walking, the skies poured down on them and they took refuge in a cave. A boulder from the mountain fell down upon them covering the opening of the cave and sealing it on them.

One of them spoke saying, ‘Let each of you mention the best deed he has performed and perhaps God will have mercy on us.’ So one of them began and said, ‘I once performed a good deed. I had some hired workers doing some work for me. I had hired each of them for a fixed sum. One day one of them arrived at midday and I hired him for half the wage of his companions, but he did as much work during the remainder of the day as others did in the whole day, so I thought it would show regard on my part if I did not diminish his pay from what I paid his companions because of the effort he put into his work. One of the others said to me, “Will you give this one the same amount you gave me when he worked for only half a day?” I said to him, “Abdallāh, I did not wrong you at all regarding the conditions of your hire, but it is my money and I shall decide to do with it as I wish.’ He became angry and went away, leaving his wages behind and I placed it somewhere in the house. Sometime after that, a cow came my way which I bought and cared for until it reached a certain size. After that a frail old man whom I did not know passed by and said, “You owe me something.” I said, “Tell me about it so I may know what it is.’ He told me and I said to him, ‘I have been wanting to see you for this is

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic: *ashāb al-kahf*, the Muslim name for the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus in Christian lore. See Qur’an 18:13–22. See Ṭabarī, pp. 775–82; Perlmann, pp. 155–59; LeStrange, *Palestine*, pp. 274–86; F. Jourdan, *La tradition des sept dormants*, and the works of L. Massignon with extensive bibliography.

your due' and I gave the cow to him. He said, "O servant of God, don't mock me, nor give me any alms, just give me my due."—"By God, I am not mocking you, this is your due and I own nothing of it," I said, and gave it to him. O God, if I did this for Your noble sake, deliver us!" The mountain split so they could see some light.

Another one said, 'I did a good deed once. I had a surplus of money at a time when distress befell people. A woman came to me seeking a favor of me and I said to her, 'Not without yourself (in payment).' She spurned me and left, then returned and mentioned it to me again in God's name, but I refused her, saying, 'By God, not without yourself.' Again she spurned me and told her husband about it who said to her, "Give yourself to him and save your family." So she returned to me beseeching me by God, but I refused, saying, 'By God, not without yourself!' When she saw that she surrendered herself to me, and when I had uncovered her and intended to take her, she trembled beneath me, and I said to her, 'What is the matter with you?' "I fear God, the Lord of humankind," she said. I said to her, 'You feared Him in distress and I did not fear him in comfort.' So I left her and gave her what she wanted for having uncovered her. My God, if I did this for Your noble sake, deliver us!" The mountain split asunder so that we could recognize one another.

The other one said, 'I once did a good deed. I had two aged parents and I owned flocks. I used to feed my parents and give them to drink, and then return to my flocks. One day a cloudburst overtook me and delayed me until it was evening when I came to my family, took my milking-pail and milked my flock. I left them where they were and went to my parents, but I found that they had gone to sleep. It distressed me to awaken them and it also distressed me to leave my flock, but I remained sitting there with my milking-pail until the dawn awakened them, and I gave them to drink. My God, if I did this for Your noble sake, deliver us from the state we are in.'" Al-Nu'mān said, "It was as if I heard the Messenger of Allah say that it was as though the mountain had covered them, but then God delivered them, and they went forth."

Ibn 'Abbās said that al-Raqīm<sup>2</sup> is a valley between Ghaṭafān and Aylah (Eilat) near Palestine, and it was the valley in which the People

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<sup>2</sup> Note the various meanings given to this word, including the name of the dog, usually named Qītmīr. See below p. 696.

of the Cave were. Ka'b said that it was the name of their town, whereas Sa'īd ibn Jubayr and other leading historians have said that al-Raqīm was a stone tablet—some say it was of lead—on which they wrote the names of the People of the Cave and their story, which they then placed in a chest which they set at the opening of the cave. God mentioned the account of the People of the Cave, saying, “*When those young men took shelter in the cave, and prayed: ‘O Lord, grant us your favor.’*” (18:10) Exegetes and historians have said that the affair of the People of the Cave took place during the days of the petty kings between Jesus and Muḥammad.

As for their story, it is said that when the Commander of the Faithful, ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb was caliph, a group of rabbis of the Jews came to him and said, “O ‘Umar, you are in command of affairs after Muḥammad and his companion, so we want to ask you about some peculiarities and if you tell us about them, we will acknowledge that Islam is true and that Muḥammad was a prophet, but if you do not tell us, we will proclaim that Islam is falsehood, and that Muḥammad was not a prophet.” ‘Umar said, “Ask whatever seems fit to you.”

They said, “Tell us what the locks of Heaven are, and what are the keys of Heaven? Tell us what the tomb is that travels with its occupants, and tell us about the one who warned his folk who was neither *jinnī* nor human. Tell us about five things that walk about on the earth but were not formed in wombs, and what the heathcock says when it cries out, what the rooster says when it crows, what the horse says when it neighs, the frog when it croaks, the donkey when it brays, and what the lark says when it whistles.”

‘Umar bowed his head to the ground and then he said, “There is no fault in ‘Umar if, when he was asked about something he did not know, said, ‘I don’t know’ and that he was asked something he does not know.” The Jews arose and said, “We bear witness that Muḥammad was not a prophet and that Islam is a falsehood.” But Salmān al-Fārisī arose and said to the Jews, “Wait a bit.” He then betook himself to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, went in to him and said, “Abū l-Ḥasan, help Islam!” ‘Alī asked him what was the matter, he told him the problem, and ‘Alī came, trailing the mantle of the Messenger of Allah. When ‘Umar saw him, he jumped up, stood and embraced him, saying, “Abū l-Ḥasan, you are called at every misfortune and distress.” ‘Alī called to the Jews and said, “Ask whatever you see fit, because the Prophet taught me one thousand chapters of knowledge,

and one thousand chapters separated off from each chapter.” So they asked him and ‘Alī replied, “I have a condition for you: if I inform you according to what is in your Torah, you will enter our religion and become believers.” They replied that they would, and he said, “Then ask about each peculiarity.”

“What are the locks of Heaven?” and he answered, “The locks of Heaven consist of polytheism, for if an individual or the community are polytheists, no evil deed will be remitted for them.” They continued, “Then tell us what the keys of Heaven are.” “The witnessing that there is no god but Allah, and Muḥammad is His servant and Messenger.” The narrator says that they began to look at each other saying, “The young man is right.”—“Then tell us about the tomb which moves with its occupant.” He said that it was the fish which swallowed Jonah, son of Amittai, and traveled in the Seven Seas with him. Then they said, “Tell us about the one who warned his folk who was neither *jinnī* nor human.” He said, “That is the ant of Solomon, son of David, who said, ‘*O ants, go into your dwellings lest Solomon and his hordes should crush you unawares.*’” (28:18)

They asked, “Who were the five who walked on the earth who were not formed in wombs.” He said, “Those are Adam and Eve, the she-camel of Ṣāliḥ, the ram of Abraham, and the staff of Moses.” “Then tell us what the heathcock says in its cry.” “It says, ‘The Merciful, Who is established on His throne.’”—“And the rooster when it crows?” “It says, ‘Remember God, forgetful ones.’” “Tell us what the horse says when it neighs.” He said, “When the believers move against the infidels in Holy War it says, ‘O God, help Your faithful servants against the infidels.’” “Then what does the donkey say when it brays?” He replied, “It says, ‘May God curse the tax farmer’ and it brays in the eyes of the demons.” They said, “Then tell us what the frog says when it croaks.” “It says ‘Praise be to my Lord Who is worshipped and praised in the depths of the seas.’” They said, “Tell us what the lark says when it whistles.” He said, “It says, ‘My God, curse those who hate Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad.’”

The Jews were three in number, and two of them said, “We bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allah.” The third rabbi arose and said, “O ‘Alī, some faith and belief have entered the hearts of my companions, but there remains a gap about which I should like to ask you.” ‘Alī said, “Ask as you see fit.” The rabbi said, “Tell me about a folk in ancient

times who were dead for three hundred and nine years and then God revived them, and what happened in their tale.” ‘Alī said, “O Jew, those are the People of the Cave. God has revealed to our Prophet a Qur’ān in which their story occurs. If you wish, I shall read their story to you.” The rabbi said, “How often have we heard your reading! If you are learned, then tell me their names, their fathers’ names, the names of their city, of their king, of their dog, of their mountain, their cave, and tell us their story from beginning to end.”

‘Alī wrapped himself in the mantle of the Messenger of Allah, then he said, “O brother of the Arabs, my beloved Muḥammad told me that in the land of Byzantium there was a city called Ephesus—some say Tarsus, but during the age of Jāhiliya its name was Ephesus, and when Islam came they called it Tarsus.” He went on, “They had a righteous king but their king died and their situation became known and a king of Persia named Duqyānūs<sup>3</sup> heard of them. He was a tyrant and an infidel, and brought his army, so that he entered Ephesus, made it the seat of his rule, and built a palace within it.”

The Jew arose and said, “If you are a learned man, describe that palace and its chambers.” ‘Alī said, “O brother of the Jews, he built there a palace of marble, a *parasang* in length and a *parasang* in width, in which he placed four thousand columns of gold, and one thousand lamps of gold with silver chains which were lighted each night with aromatic oils. On the east side of the chamber he placed one hundred and eighty windows, and the same number on the west one. The sun would make the rounds of the chamber from where it rose to where it set as it went round. In it he placed a throne of gold, eighty cubits long and forty cubits wide, inlaid with gems. To the right of the throne he placed eighty golden seats upon which he sat his patriarchs, and also placed eighty golden seats to the left of the throne, upon which sat his emperors. Then he sat upon his throne and placed the crown on his head.”

The Jew arose and said, “O ‘Alī, if you are a learned man, tell me of what the crown was made.” He replied, “O brother of the Jews, his crown was of molten gold with nine points, on each of which was a pearl which shone like a lamp on a dark night. He took fifty youths from the sons of the patriarchs and girded them

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<sup>3</sup> Usually understood to have been Decius, reigned 249–51 CE.



with belts of red brocade, dressed them in trousers of green silk, adorned them with crowns, armlets and anklets, and gave them maces of gold and stationed them at his head. He chose six youths, sons of scholars, and made them his ministers and would not decide anything without them. Three of them he placed at his right, and three at his left.”

The Jew jumped up and said, “O ‘Alī, if you are truthful, tell me the names of the six.” ‘Alī said, “My beloved Muḥammad told me that the names of those on his right hand were Tamlikhā, Maksalmīnā, and Muḥsilmīnā, while those on his left were Marṭaliyūs, Kashṭūs, and Sādaniyūs, and he would seek their counsel in all of his affairs. When he would sit each day in the courtyard of his palace where the people would be gathered before him, three youths would enter from the gate of the palace. One of them had in his hand a gold cup filled with musk, the second had in his hand a silver cup filled with rose water, while in the hand of the third was a bird. He would shout at it and the bird would fly until it would descend into the cup of rose water. He would wallow in it and dry up its contents with his feathers and wings. Then the second youth would shout at it, and he would fly and descend into the cup of musk, in which he would wallow, drying it up with his feathers and wings. Then the third youth would shout at him and he would fly and descend on the crown of the king and empty his feathers and wings on the head of the king with all the musk and rose water in them.

The king continued to rule for thirty years without any headache, pain, fever, nor drivel, spittle, or mucus. When he noticed that in himself, he became haughty, tyrannical, and pitiless, claiming lordship in place of God. The prominent men of his people called on them to worship [the king], and whoever responded he would grant his wishes, give him gifts, clothe him and grant him a robe of honor; whereas whoever did not respond and follow him, he would kill. Most people responded to him and remained under his rule for a time, worshipping him instead of Allāh. One day, while he was seated on his throne at a festival of his, with the crown on his head, one of the patriarchs came to him with information that Persian troops were approaching to fight him. He became so sad at the news that the crown fell from his head and he fell from off the throne.

One of the three youths who were at his right side saw this. He was intelligent, and was the one called Tamlikhā. He pondered and called to mind and said, “If this Duqyānūs were a god, as he claims,

he would not be sad, he would not sleep, he would not urinate or defecate, nor are these doings among the qualities of divinity." All six of the youths would spend each day at the place of one of them, and that day was the turn of Tamlikhā, so they gathered there and ate and drank but Tamlikhā did not eat or drink. They said, "Tamlikhā, what is the matter with you? Why don't you eat or drink?" He said, "Brothers, something has come to my heart that prevents me from food, drink, and sleep." "What is it, Tamlikhā?", they asked. "I thought long about the sky, and I thought One who has made the heaven a guarded canopy with nothing holding from above, nor any support from below, and about the One Who set in motion its sun and its moon, and Who adorned it with stars. Then I thought for a long time about this earth, from its being spread out on the surface of the overflowing sea to its being enclosed by the high mountains and attached to them lest it be moved. Then I thought long about myself and said, "The One Who brought me forth as an embryo from my mother's womb, Who nourished me and reared me, is a Creator and a Ruler other than Duqyānūs the king." The young men threw themselves at his feet to kiss them, and said, "Tamlikhā, there has occurred to our hearts what has occurred to yours, so advise us." He said, "Brothers, I find no way out for myself and for you but to flee from this tyrant to the King of Heaven and Earth." They responded that the idea was just as he had thought.

Tamlikhā got up and bought dates for three *dirhams* and put them in his robe. They mounted their horses and went forth. When they had traveled a distance of three miles from the city, Tamlikhā said to them, "Brothers, the king of this world has left us and his command over us has ceased; so get off of your horses and go on foot so that God will give you a way out of your situation." So they dismounted from their horses and went on foot for seven *parasangs* until their feet were dripping blood because they were not used to going on foot.

Then a shepherd met them and they asked him whether he had a drink of water or milk for them. He replied that he had what they wanted and added, "I think that your faces are those of royalty. I can only think that you are fugitives, so tell me your story," They said, "Sir, we have adopted a religion that does not permit us to lie. Will the truth save us?" He said that it would, so they told him their story and the shepherd threw himself at their feet, kissing

them, and said, "What has occurred to your hearts has occurred to mine as well, so stay here until I return the flocks to their owners, and I will come back to you." They waited for him and he returned and approached them, hurrying, with his dog. The Jew jumped up and said, "O 'Alī, if you are a scholar, tell me what the color of the dog was and what was its name?" He said, "O brother of the Jews, Muḥammad, my beloved one, told me that the dog was piebald with black, and his name was Qiṭmīr."

The Master said that scholars have differed about the color of the dog of the People of the Cave. Ibn 'Abbās said that it was spotted; Muqātil said that it was yellow; Muḥammad b. Ka'b that because of its deep redness and yellowness it shaded into red; al-Kalbī said that its color was like snow. Some said, the color of a cat; others, the color of heaven. They also differed about its name. It has been related from 'Alī that its name was Rayyān, but Ibn 'Abbās said it was Qiṭmīr, and that is one of the tales from 'Alī. Shu'ayb al-Jubā'ī said that its name was Ḥamrā, and al-Awzā'ī that it was Natwā. Ibn Faḥawayh has informed us, on the authority of Abū Ḥanīfa, that the name of their dog was Qiṭmūr, others say Qiṭfir. Abū 'Alī al-Zuhrī told me, transmitting it from Ibn 'Abbās regarding His word, "*It is but few that know,*" (18:22) saying, "I am one of those few. They were Maklamīnā, Tamlīkhā, Martaliyūs, Baynūs, Sāwamūs, Dāwanūs, and Kashṭūs,<sup>†</sup> who was the shepherd, while the dog's name was Qiṭmīr, a spotted dog, bigger than a Qalaṭī, and smaller than a Karakī. Muḥammad b. Ishāq said that a Qalaṭī is a little dog, and he said, "Not a single traditionist remained in Nīsābūr but wrote transmitting this tradition from me; and Abū 'Amr al-Jabarī wrote it transmitting from me."

Let us return to the tale. When the youths saw the dog they said to one another that they were afraid that the dog would betray their presence by its barking, so they cursed him and drove him away with stones. When the dog saw them cursing him and driving him away with stones, he got up on his feet and walked proudly, saying

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<sup>†</sup> See the various attempts at the names both here and above, p. 694. Ṭabarī, p. 777 has 9 men: *Yamlīkha*, *Maksimilīnā*, *Mahsimilīnā*, *Martūs*, *Kaṣṭūṭinas*, *Bīrūnas*, *Rasmūnas*, *Baṭūnas*, *Qālūs*. In LeStrange, *Lands*, p. 285, according to Roman *Acta Sanctorum*, they are *Maximianus*, *Constantinus*, *Malchus*, *Serapion*, *Martinianus*, *Dionysius*, *Johannes*. Another list gives *Maximilianus*, *Jamblichus*, *Serapion*, *Martinianus*, *Johannes*, *Exustadianus*, *Dionysius*, *Antoninus*.

in fluent, eloquent speech, "O people, do not drive me away, for I bear witness that there is no god but Allah alone, Who has no partner. Let me protect you from your enemy and I will gain favor with God." So they let him be and went on. The shepherd climbed a mountain with them and descended to a cave. The Jew jumped up and said, "O 'Alī, what is the name of that mountain and of that cave?" The Prince of the Believers replied, "O brother of the Jews, the name of the mountain is Nājalūs, and the name of the cave is al-Waṣīd, some say it was Khayram."

Let us return to our tale. Lo, at the opening of the cave were fruit-bearing trees and a copious spring, so they ate of the fruit and drank of the water, and night fell on them. The dog lay down at the entrance to the cave, stretching out his paws before it. God ordered the Angel of Death to take their souls and appointed two angels for each of the men to turn him over from the right side to the left and from the left side to the right. Ibn 'Abbās said that they would be turned once each year so that the earth would not consume their flesh. And it is said that the Day of 'Ashūrā' was the day on which they were turned. Abū Hurayrah said that they were turned twice each year.

Let us return to our tale. God told the sun that it would be "*when it came up it moved away to the right of the cave, and when it went down it turned away to the left . . .*" (18:17) When King Duqyānūs returned from his festival, he asked about the youths and he was told that "They have taken a god other than you, and have left, fleeing from you." So he mounted with eighty thousand horsemen and began following their footprints until he ascended the mountain, looked down at the cave, and saw them lying down. He thought that they were asleep and said to his companions, "If I wanted to punish them somehow, I could not punish them worse than what they have done to themselves. Bring me some masons." They were brought to him, and they filled up the entrance to the cave with plaster and stones. Then he said to his companions, "Tell them to say to their god who is in heaven, that if he were telling the truth, he would bring them forth from this place."

The youths remained thus for three hundred and nine years until God breathed the Spirit into them and they arose from their sleep when the sun rose. They said to each other, "We have been neglectful of our worship of God this past night, let us go up to the spring." But lo! the spring had dried up and the trees had become dry. They

said to each other, "We are amazed that the spring became dry in one night and that these trees have dried up in one night." God sent hunger upon them and they said, "One of you should take this money of yours to the city and bring us some food from there, but let him watch that the food not be soaked in pig's fat," for that is His word, "*Send one of you to the town with this money of yours to look for the purest food,*" (18:19) that is, the most permissible, best, and tastiest.

Tamlīkhā said to them, "My brothers, no one but I will bring you food, but you, shepherd, give me your clothes and take mine." He put on the shepherd's clothing and went off. He passed by places he did not know and paths he did not recognize until he came to the gate of the city, and behold, on it was a green banner on which was written, "There is no god but Allah, Jesus is the Spirit of Allah, may God bless our prophet and him, and give him peace." The youth began to look at it and rub his eyes, saying, "I think that I am sleeping." When this had become too long for him, he entered the city and passed by people reading the Gospels, and he encountered people he did not know. Finally he came to the market and found a baker. He asked him, "O baker, what is the name of your city?" "Ephesus," he replied. "And what is the name of your king?" "Abd al-Raḥmān," and Tamlīkhā said, "If you are telling the truth, then my situation is very strange. Give me food for these *dirhams*." Now the *dirhams* of that early time were very heavy and large, so the baker was amazed at them. The Jew jumped up and said, "O 'Alī, if you know, tell me how much one of those *dirhams* weighed." He said, "O brother of the Jews, my beloved Muḥammad told me that the weight of each of those *dirhams* was ten and a third *dirhams* (of today)."

The baker said to him, "O you, you have come upon a treasure, give me some of it or else I will take you to the king." Tamlīkhā replied, "I did not come upon a treasure. This is the price of dates that I sold for three *dirhams* three days ago when I went out of the city while they were worshipping Duqyānūs the king." The baker became angry and said, "Aren't you satisfied that you came upon a treasure, so that you might give a bit of it, but you have to mention a tyrannical man who claimed lordship and died three hundred years ago. You are making fun of me." The baker seized him and people gathered around, and they took him to the king who was wise and just. He asked them for the story of the youth and they told him that he had come upon a treasure. The king said to him,

“Do not be afraid. Jesus, our prophet, commanded us to take only a fifth of any treasure, so give me a fifth of this treasure and go in safety.” Tamlīkhā replied, “O king, you can confirm my situation. I did not come upon a treasure. I am one of the people of this city.” “You are one of its people?” “Yes,” he replied. “Do you know anyone in it?”—“Yes.”—“Then name them for us,” the king said. So he named a number of men for him, but they did not know a single one of them, and said to him, “O you, we don’t know any of these names. They are not names of people of our time. Do you have a house in this city?” He replied, “Yes. O king, send someone with me.” The king sent a group of people with him, and when they came to a dwelling, the highest one in the city, he said, “This is my house.” He knocked at the door and an old man came out to them, whose eyebrows drooped over his eyes from his old age. He was surprised, frightened, even terrified, and said, “O you people, what is wrong?” The messenger of the king said that this young man claimed that this house is his dwelling. The old man grew angry, turned to Tamlīkhā and peered at him, then said to him, “What is your name?” “Tamlīkhā, son of Filastīn,”<sup>5</sup> he replied and the old man said, “Repeat it for me,” and he did so. Then the old man fell down on Tamlīkhā’s hands and feet, kissing them, and said, “This is my grandfather, by the Lord of the Ka’bah, and he was one of the youths who fled from Duqyānūs, the tyrannical king, to the Powerful One of Heaven and Earth. Jesus told us their story and that they would return to life.” When the king was informed of this he mounted and came to them and presented himself to them. When the king saw Tamlīkhā, he dismounted from his horse and carried Tamlīkhā on his shoulders, while the people began kissing his hands and feet and saying to him, “O Tamlīkhā, what did he do to your companions?” and he told them that they were in the cave.

Now two men governed the city, a Muslim king and a Christian king, and both of them rode forth with their retainers and took Tamlīkhā along. When they came near the cave, Tamlīkhā said to them, “People, I am afraid that my brothers will become aware of the pounding of the hooves of the horses and other animals, and of the resounding of the bridles and the swords, and they will think

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<sup>5</sup> I.e., “son of Palestine.”

that Duqyānūs has come upon them and they will all die. So wait a little until I go in to them and inform them." The people halted and Tamlīkhā went in to them. The youths jumped upon him and hugged him saying, "Praise be to God Who saved you from Duqyānūs." He said, "Enough of me and of Duqyānūs. *How long have you stayed here?*" "They said, 'A day or less than a day.'" (18:19) "No, you have stayed here three hundred and nine years, Duqyānūs has died, and century after century has elapsed. The people of the city believe in Almighty God and they have come to you." They said to him, "Tamlīkhā, do you want to make us a trial for humankind?" "Then what do you want," he asked. "Lift up your hands and we will lift up ours." They did so and said, "O God, by the truth of the wonders that You have shown us in ourselves, take our souls, so that no one may look at us." Then God ordered the Angel of Death and he took their souls, and God covered up the opening of the cave.

The two kings drew near, circled the cave for seven days and did not find an entrance to it, nor any opening or path, and thus confirmed the kindness of the deed of All-generous God, that their situation was an example which God showed the people. The Muslim said, "They died in my religion. I shall build a mosque at the entrance to the cave." The Christian said, "No. On the contrary, they died in my religion, and I shall build a monastery at the entrance to the cave." So the two kings fought each other and the Muslim overcame the Christian, and built a mosque at the entrance to the cave, for that is His word, "*Those who prevailed said, 'We shall build a mosque over their sepulchre.'*" (18:21) "And that, O Jew, is what happened in their tale." Then 'Alī said to the Jew, "I ask you by God, Jew, does this correspond to what is in your Torah?" and the Jew said, "You did not add one letter or omit one letter, Abū l-Ḥasan. Do not call me a Jew, for I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger, and that you are the wisest of this community."

'Ubayd b. 'Umayr said, "The People of the Cave were young men who wore necklaces and bracelets and had trailing turban ends, and had their hunting dog. They would go out on their great festival in cortege, with special uniforms, and took out with them their gods whom they worshipped instead of Allah. Then Allah cast faith into their hearts, though one of them was the king's vizier. They believed, but each of them hid his belief from his companion. They

said to themselves, without divulging this to one another, "Let us leave these people, lest punishment befall us for their wrongdoings." One lad among them went out until he reached the shade of a tree and sat down in it. Then another went out and saw him sitting alone, and hoping that he would be of like mind without it being apparent, he sat down near him. Then the others went out and came, sitting down near them, and they consulted together. Each one asked the other what had brought him, each of them hiding his beliefs from his companion, fearing for his life. Finally they said to one another, "Let each two of you go out and be by yourselves, and let each one of you reveal his concerns to his friend." So two lads among them went out and suited one another, they spoke and each told his concerns to his friend. So they came back, happy with the news, to their companions and said, "We have agreed on one thing," and lo! they were all believers.

There was a cave in the mountain near them and they said to one another, ". . . *it is better to take refuge in the cave. Your Lord may bestow of His mercy on you, and facilitate your affair,*" (18:16) so they entered the cave, their hunting dog with them. They slept for three hundred and nine years. Their people missed them and sought them, but God made them blind to their trail and to their cave. When they could not find them they wrote their names and their lineage on a tablet: "So-and-so, and So-and-so, sons of our kings. We lost them on such-and-such a day on such-and-such a month in such-and-such a year in the reign of So-and-so, son of So-and-So" and they placed the tablet in the royal treasury, saying, "This is indeed a momentous matter." That king died and one century followed another. Al-Ḥasan b. al-Ḥusayn al-Thaqafī informed us in his transmission, that Abū Jaʿfar al-Bāqir said that the People of the Cave were money-changers.

Wahb b. Munabbih said that a disciple, one of the friends of Jesus, came to the city of the People of the Cave and wanted to enter it, but he was told that over its gate there was an idol and no one could enter without kneeling before it. He was unwilling to enter and went to a bath-house near the city, hired himself out to the keeper of the bath-house and worked for him. The owner of the bath-house saw blessing in his bath and accrued wealth. A lad from the townspeople began to attend him and become attached to him, so the disciple would relate the story to them about Heaven and Earth, and about the Hereafter, so they believed him and considered him



truthful, and were like his situation in a good state. He set one condition to the owner of the bath-house, that the night was his, "Let no one interfere between it and me," and he would pray. He was doing so when the son of the king came to the bath-house with a woman and entered the bath with her. The disciple reproached him about her and said to him, "You are the son of a king and you have come here with this one?" The son of the king became ashamed and left. Then he returned another time and he said the same to him, cursed him, and drove him away. But he paid no attention to them and the two of them then entered together and both of them died in the bath. The king came and was told that the owner of the bath-house had killed his son. He was sought, but could not be found, so the king said, "Who was in his company?" and they named the lad, so they both were sought and left the city. They passed a friend of theirs in a field, and lo! he was of the same faith as theirs, and they told him that they were being sought. So he took them away and his dog was with him, and he gave them shelter for the night in a cave. They entered and said, "We will spend the night here, then we will arise in the morning, if God wills, and get your suggestion," and God struck on their ears.

The king took his companions to search for them and found that they had entered the cave, but whenever one of them wanted to enter the cave, he would become terrified, and not one of them was able to enter. Someone said to the king, "Is it not so that if you were able to get them, you would kill them?" He replied, "Yes, certainly." So he said, "Then build up the entrance to the cave and leave them in it to die of thirst and hunger," so he did that. He departed after they had sealed the door of the cave on them. A long time passed, and then there was a shepherd whom rain had overtaken at the door of the cave, and he said, "If I open the door of the cave I would bring my flocks into it out of the rain." So he kept on working at the door to the cave until he opened it, and God returned their souls to them the next day when they woke up.

Muḥammad b. Ishāq said that the people of the Gospel became disordered, sins increased among them and kings oppressed them, so that they worshipped idols and sacrificed to false gods. Among them there were remnants who followed the religion of the Messiah, holding fast to the worship of God and to His unity. But among those who did otherwise among their kings was a king of Byzantium called Duqyānūs, who worshipped the idols, sacrificed to false gods,

and slew those who disagreed with him about that, among those who persisted in the religion of the Messiah. He would stay in towns of Byzantium and in any one of them he would not leave anyone who followed the religion of the Messiah but would kill him. Then he stopped in the city of the People of the Cave, which is Ephesus, and when he stopped there, it became intolerable for those who believed, so they tried to hide from him and fled in every direction. Now since he had entered the city, Duqyānūs had given orders to pursue the believers. Then he assembled to himself the unbelievers of the city and took an agreement from them, and they began to hunt for the believers in their places and bring them out to Duqyānūs. He would take them to the place of prayer where they sacrificed to the false gods, and would let them choose between being killed or worshipping the idols and sacrificing to the false gods. Among the people were those who refused to worship anything other than God, and were killed. When those who were strongest in belief in God saw that, they began to submit themselves to torture and slaughter, and they were killed. Then they were cut up, and what was cut off their bodies was tied to the walls of the city on all sides and on every one of its gates, so that the trial of those who had faith became more intense. Among them were some who agreed and were let off, and others who were crucified because of their religion and were killed. When they saw this trial they became very sad, whereupon they arose and prayed, busied themselves in praise, the sanctification of God, and supplication. They were among the nobles of Byzantium, some eighty persons. They wept and implored, saying, "*Our Lord is the Lord of Heaven and Earth. We shall invoke no god beside Him, for then we shall have uttered blasphemy.*" (18:14) Our Lord, remove the trial from your believing worshippers, lift up this test from them, and be gracious to those of Your worshippers who believe in You."

While they were engaged in this, the guards came to them when they had entered their place of worship. They found them prostrating themselves on their faces, weeping and imploring God, asking him to rescue them from Duqyānūs and his torture. When these unbelievers saw them they said, "What has turned you away from the command of the king? Go to him." Then they left them and reported them to Duqyānūs, saying, "We will assemble all of them, together with these youths from among your courtiers who are scoffing and rebelling against you." When he heard that, he had them brought, their eyes brimming with tears, their faces covered with the dust of

the earth, and said, "What keeps you from witnessing a sacrifice to the gods whom we worship on earth, and from making yourselves like the others?" Then they had to choose either to scarifice to their gods as the others did, or the king would kill them. Then Maksilmīnā, who was the oldest of them, said, "Verily, ours is a God Who fills Heaven and Earth with power. We shall never pray to any god other than Him, nor shall we ever acknowledge the one to whom you pray. But we shall worship our Lord to Whom are due sincere gratitude, magnification, glorification, and sanctification forever. From Him shall we ask for rescue and well-being. As for the false gods, we shall never worship them, do with us as you see fit." Then the companions of Maksilmīnā said to Duqyānūs what he had said. When they did so, he gave orders to remove the garments which were on them, the garments of important men, from them and said, "Since you have acted as you have, I shall dismiss you and busy myself with you and mete out to you the punishment I promised you. But there is no need for me to hurry with this, for I consider you to be immature lads and I would not like to kill you, so that I may give you a respite during which you will regain your senses." Thereupon he ordered that the necklaces of gold and silver that were on them be taken from them, and he gave orders and they were taken away while Duqyānūs went off to a different city, but near them, to carry on his business.

When the youths learned that Duqyānūs had left their city and mentioned no time for his return, they feared that when he arrived back at their city he would remember them. So they conspired together that each one of them would take money from his father's house, from which they would give alms and from the remainder, supply themselves with provisions. Then they went out to a cave near the city in a mountain called Bājalūs. They would live in it and worship God until, when Duqyānūs came back, they would go to him and stand before him that he might do with them as he wished. When they had said that to one another, each lad among them went to his father's house and took some money. They gave alms from it and took what remained of it with them. A dog that belonged to one of them followed them until they came to that cave and stayed there.

Ibn 'Abbās said that they fled by night from Duqyānūs and that they were seven. They passed by a shepherd who was of their religion who had a dog. Ka'b said that they passed by a dog who fol-

lowed them. They drove him off but he barked at them. They did that several times, but the dog said to them, "What do you want of me? Do not be afraid of my presence for I love those beloved of God. So sleep, and I shall guard you."

Let us return to the account of Ibn Ishāq. They remained in that cave, doing nothing but praying, fasting, and praising God. They would give their money to one youth among them named Tamlikhā, and he would buy their food for them in the city secretly. He was one of the most steadfast and most handsome of them. Tamlikhā would do that, and when he entered the city he would take off the beautiful clothes he had on, and would take clothing like that of the poor people who would beg for food in them. Then he would take a *dirham* and go to the city to buy food and drink, to eavesdrop and try to find out information for them as to whether people mentioned anything about them; then he would return to his companions. They continued like that for a time, then Duqyānūs returned to the city. He would give orders to the powerful men and they would sacrifice to the false gods. So the believers became afraid because of this. Tamlikhā was in the city buying food, and when he returned to his companions he was weeping, although he had food with him. He told them that Duqyānūs had entered the city and that they had been mentioned and sought after, together with the important men of the city, to sacrifice to the false gods. When he had informed them of that, they became frightened and fell down, prostrating themselves, praying to God and beseeching Him, asking His help in this misfortune. Then Tamlikhā said to them, "Brothers, lift up your heads and eat of the food and put your trust in your Lord." So they lifted up their heads, their eyes flowing with tears, grieving for themselves. They ate the food, and it was at the setting of the sun. Then they sat, talking to one another, studying together, each one relating to the other. While they were so engaged, God struck their ears in the cave while their dog was stretching out his forelegs at the threshold of the door to the cave, when this happened to them.

On the next day Duqyānūs missed them and looked for them but did not find them. He said to one of his people, "The affair of these lads troubles me. They have gone off assuming that I am angry with them, in their ignorance of not knowing my command. But I will not be angry at them if they return and worship my god." The important men of the city said, "You are not justified in having mercy on recalcitrant, rebellious people who persist in their wrong-

doing and rebellion. You have given them a respite and had they wanted, they would have returned during that period, but they have not repented.” When they said that to him, he became extremely angry, sent for their fathers, and asked them about the lads, saying, “Tell me about your recalcitrant sons who have rebelled against me.” They replied, “Verily, we have not rebelled against you, so do not kill us together with the rebels, for they have disobeyed us and have gone off to a mountain called Nājalūs.”<sup>6</sup> When they said that to him he let them go and did not know what to do with the youths, so God gave him the idea to order that the cave be sealed up. For God wanted to honor them, and make them a sign for a community that He would appoint as successors after them, and He would explain to them, “*The Hour will come without a doubt, and God will raise up those who are in the graves.*” (22:7)

Duqyānūs gave orders to seal the cave upon them, saying, “Leave them in the cave as they are. They will die of hunger and thirst, and let the cave that they have chosen be a grave for them.” He was thinking that they were awake, aware of what was being done to them, but God had taken their spirits in the death of sleep while their dog was stretching his forelegs on the threshold of the cave. But He had made him unconscious as He had done to them, turning to the right and left.

There were two believers in the court of Duqyānūs who hid their faith: one was named Tandarūs and the other, Rubās. They decided together to write about the lads; their lineage, their names, their story, on a tablet of lead, and place that in a chest of copper, and the chest in a structure, saying, “Perhaps God will disclose about the lads to a believing people before the Day of Resurrection, and this will inform the one whom God has given victory, about their story when they read this tablet.” So they did that and built over it. Duqyānūs remained for a while, then his people died and many generations after him died, and kings followed kings. Then a pious king, who was called Tandūsīs,<sup>7</sup> ruled the people of that land. When he ruled, he remained in his reign for eighty-eight years. During his reign the people split into sects, among them those who believed in Almighty God and learned that the Hour was true, and others who

<sup>6</sup> *Bājalūs*, above.

<sup>7</sup> Thought to have been the Byzantine Emperor, Theodosius II, 408–50 C.E.

denied it. That distressed the pious king and he complained to God, imploring Him, for he was greatly saddened as he saw the people of falsehood outnumbering and triumphing over the people of truth. For they were saying that there is no life other than the life of this world, and that only the souls were resurrected but not the bodies. As for the body, the earth consumed it, and they forgot what is in the Book.

King Tandūsīs sent to those whom he thought possessed goodness, for they were leaders in the truth, but they began to deny the Hour, so that they almost turned the people away from the truth and the religion of the disciples. When the pious king saw that, he entered his house and locked it after himself, dressed in a hairshirt and put ashes under himself. He devoted himself by day and by night to imploring God and weeping because of what he saw the people doing, saying, "What Lord would consider these different?" But He sent them a sign, for the Compassionate, the Merciful, Mighty and Powerful, Who dislikes disputes among His servants, wanted to reveal to them the youths, the People of the Cave, to show their situation to the people and make them a sign and argument against them to let them know that there is no doubt that the Hour is coming. And He would pay attention to His pious servant, Tandūsīs, and complete His kindness to him, and not remove from him his dominion or his faith which He had given him, that he would worship God alone and not associate anything with Him; that He would gather the believers who were dispersed.

God inspired the soul of a man of the land in which the cave was—the man's name was Īlyās—to tear down the building that was at the mouth of the cave and build in it a shed for his flocks, and he hired two workers. They began to remove those stones and to build the shed in it. They removed what was at the mouth of the cave and opened the door of the cave for themselves, and God hid them from the people. They claim that the bravest of those who wanted to look at them should enter by the door of the cave, then proceed until he saw all of them sleeping. When the stones were removed and the door of the cave was opened, God, Possessor of omnipotence, majesty, and dominion, Reviver of the dead, permitted the youths to sit up between the two sides of the cave. They sat up, rejoicing, their faces gleaming, their souls cheerful. They greeted each other as though they had just woken up, as they would wake up in the morning from the night in which they had been sleeping.

Then they arose to pray; and they prayed as they were used to doing, not seeing in their faces or flesh or color anything that they might disapprove, only that they were of the same appearance since they had fallen asleep, thinking that their king Duqyānūs was seeking them. When they finished their prayer, they said to Tamlikhā, who was in charge of their money, "Find out what the people said about us yesterday evening to that tyrant," thinking that they had slept as long as they had slept on the night when they woke up asking one another "*How long have you stayed here?*" They said, "*We have stayed a day or less than a day.*" They said, "*Your Lord knows best how long you have stayed,*" (18:19) and all that was simple in their souls. Tamlikhā said to them, "You were asked in the city to sacrifice to the false gods or you would be killed." They said, "Whatever God wills after that, do." Maksilmīnā said, "Brothers, know that you are suffering for God, so do not disbelieve in your faith if he calls you tomorrow." Then they said, "Tamlikhā, go to the city and listen to what is said about us there. Be friendly and do not give information about yourself to anyone, but buy food for us and bring it to us. But bring us more food than you brought us yesterday, for it was very little, and we woke up hungry." Tamlikhā did as he usually did; took off his clothes and put on the clothes in which he disguised himself. Then he took papers from the money they had, which were stamped with the seal of Duqyānūs, and they were like the light quarter (a *dirham*).

So Tamlikhā left them to go forth, and when he passed through the entrance to the cave, he saw a stone moved away from it and wondered at it. He continued on, coming to the gate of the city in concealment, far from the main road, for fear that someone of its people would see him, recognize him and take him to Duqyānūs the tyrant. The pious servant was not aware that Duqyānūs and his people had died more than three hundred years earlier. When Tamlikhā saw the gate of the city, he raised his glance and above the top of the gate he saw a banner of the believing people. He wondered when he saw it, looked at it surreptitiously, glancing to the right and left. Then he left the gate and turned to another of the city's gates, (where) he looked and saw the same thing. And he began to imagine that the city was not the one that he knew. Then he saw many people talking who were not there before, and he walked on, wondering, and it appeared to him that he was con-

fused. Then he returned to the gate by which he entered and began to wonder to himself saying, "I wish I knew how it is that yesterday evening the Muslims were concealing this banner and hiding from it, whereas today it is in the open. Perhaps I am dreaming." Then he became aware that he was not sleeping and he took his garment and put it over his head. He entered the city and walked among the people in the market, hearing people swear by the name of Jesus, son of Mary, and it increased his fear, and he thought that he was confused and stood, leaning against a wall of the city, saying to himself, "By God, I don't know what this is! Wasn't it so that yesterday evening no one on Earth could mention Jesus but would be killed, while today I hear everyone mention Jesus and not be afraid? But, by God, I don't know of any other city near our city." Then he stood like one confused and did not turn in any direction. Then he met a boy from the local people and asked him, "What is the name of this city, lad?" and he responded that it was Ephesus, and he said to himself, "Perhaps there is some madness in me or something that took my senses. By God, I had better hurry and leave here before some evil befalls me and I will perish. This is what Tamlikhā will relate to his companions when he explains to them what situation they are in." Then he regained his composure and said, "By God, if I hurry to leave the city before I am noticed, it would be smarter for me."

He approached those who sold food and took out the paper he had with him and said to a man among them, "O servant of Allah, sell me some food for this." The man took it and looked at the imprint on the paper and its inscription and wondered at it, then he threw it to one of his companions, and he looked at it. Then they passed it among themselves, from man to man, wondering at it, and took counsel and said to one another, "This man has come across a treasure in the ground from long ago." When he saw them taking counsel about him he became very frightened, trembling and thinking that they recognized him and knew him, and only wanted to take him to their king, Duqyānūs. Other people began coming to him and examining him, and he said to them, in great fear, "Go away, you have taken my paper and are holding it, I have no need of your food." They said, "Young man, who are you and what is your story? By God, you have found one of the treasures of the ancients and you want to hide it from us. Come with us and show



us where it is and make us partners in it, it will make what you have found lighter for you. If you don't do that, we will go to the ruler and hand you over to him."

When he heard their words he was astonished and said, "I have fallen into everything that I was guarding against." Then they said, "By God, young man, you cannot conceal what you have found, and don't think to yourself that we will keep your secret." He was confused and didn't know what to say to them or how to respond; he became terrified, so he did not tell them anything. When they saw that he wouldn't speak, they took his garment, wrapped it around his neck, then led him through the alleys of the city fettered, so that whoever was there heard about him, and people said that a man who had a treasure had been seized. So the people of the city assembled around him—great and small—and were looking at him and saying, "By God, this young man is not of the people of this city. We have never seen him here and we don't know him." Tamlikhā didn't know what to say when he heard that from them. For when the people assembled around him he was terrified and did not speak, and if he had said that he was one of the townsfolk, he would not have been believed. But he was certain that his father and brothers were in the city and that his status was among its powerful people, and that they would come to him if they heard. But he was also sure that on the previous evening he knew many of the townspeople, while today he didn't recognize anyone. When he was standing there like one perplexed, waiting until one of his family would come and release him from their hands; while he was thus, they took him forcibly and brought him to the two heads of the city and its leaders. They were two pious men; the name of one of them was Armūs, and the name of the other, Aṣṭiyūs.

When they took him, Tamlikhā thought that they were taking him to Duqyānūs the king, and he began to turn to the right and left, while the people jeered him as they would a madman and confused person. Tamlikhā began to cry and raised his head to heaven and said, "O God, God of the Heavens and Earth, pour down upon me steadfastness, and put on me a spirit from You through which You will help me against this tyrant." And he wept and said to himself, "Spread it about between me and my brothers, perhaps if they knew what I have encountered they would come to me and we would stand together before this tyrant. For if we are aided, we will be together, never denying God, and we will never be separated, in

death or in life. Would that I knew what he will do to me. Will he kill me or not?" This is what Tamlikhā told his companions about himself when he returned to them.

He was brought before the two pious men, Armūs and Aṣṭiyūs, and when Tamlikhā learned that he was not going to Duqyānūs, he recovered and his feelings became calm. Armūs and Aṣṭiyūs took the papers and looked at them, and were perplexed by them. Then one of them said, "Where is the treasure that you found, young man?" He replied, "I did not find a treasure. These coins are my parents' coins, with the engraving of this city and its minting. But, by God, I don't know what my problem is and I don't know what to say to you." One of them asked, "Who are you?" and Tamlikhā told them his name. "And who is your father? and who here knows you?" So he told them his father's name, but they found no one who knew him. One of them said to him, "You are a liar and have not told us the truth," and Tamlikhā did not know what to say, but he lowered his glance to the ground, and one of those present said that he was a madman. And another said, "He is not mad, but he is making himself act foolish, intending to escape from you." But one of the two looked at him very intently and said to him, "Do you think that we will send you away and believe you that this money is your father's? For the minting of these coins and their engraving is more than three hundred years old but you, a young lad, think that you can lie to us and mock us, whereas we are gray-haired as you see, and around you are the elite of this city and governors of its affairs. The treasuries of this land are in our hands but we do not have a *dirham* or a *dinar* of this minting. I shall punish you severely, then fetter you until you inform me about this treasure you found." When he had said this, Tamlikhā responded by saying, "Tell me about something that I shall ask you, and if you do so, I shall believe you as to what concerns me." They said, "Ask, we will conceal nothing from you." He asked what had happened to King Duqyānūs, and they said, "We don't know of any king on the face of the Earth today who is called Duqyānūs, only that he was a king who died ages ago and that many generations have perished after him." So Tamlikhā said to him, "Then, by God, I can't find anyone who will believe me about what I say. We were lads whom King Duqyānūs was forcing (everyone) to worship idols and sacrifice to false gods, so we fled from here yesterday evening and spent the night. When we had finished, I came out to buy food

for my companions and to get information. Since I am as you see, go to the cave with me which is in Mount Nājalūs, and I will show you my companions.”

When Armūs heard Tamlīkhā's words, he said, “People, this may be one of the signs of God, which God has given as a precept through this young man. So come, let us go with him, that he may show us his companions.” Then Armūs and Astīyūs went with him together with the people of the city, great and small, to the Companions of the Cave, to look at them. Meanwhile the youths, the Companions of the Cave, thought that Tamlīkhā had been held back from them, because he had not brought them their food or drink in the amount he used to bring them. and they thought that he had been seized and taken to Duqyānūs. While they were thinking that, suddenly they heard voices and the clamor of horses ascending towards them and thought that they were messengers of the tyrant sent to them to bring them. When they heard that they arose to go out to the wilderness and wished each other peace, and said, “Let us go out and bring our brother Tamlīkhā, for now he is before Duqyānūs waiting for us to come to him.” While they were saying this, sitting between the two sides of the cave, unaware, Armūs and his companions were standing at the entrance to the cave. But Tamlīkhā preceded them and came to them weeping. When they saw him weep, they too wept with him, then asked him what had happened to him. He told them his account and related all of his story. Thereupon they knew that they had been sleeping, by God's command, for all of that time, and were awakened only to be a sign to the people and a verification of the Resurrection, and that they should know that the Hour was coming—there was no doubt about it.

Then Armūs entered, right after Tamlīkhā, and he saw a chest of copper, sealed with a silver seal. He stood at the entrance to the cave, then called men among the elite of the city, and they opened the chest. In it they found two tablets of lead on which were written “Maksalmīnā, and Tamlīkhā, Marṭūnis, Kasṭūnash, Dāsiyūs, Takrīyūs, and Baṭūnis were youths who fled from King Duqyānūs the tyrant, fearing that he would torture them, and they entered the cave. And when their king learned where they were, he ordered that the cave be sealed with stones, and we wrote their events and their story so that those after them who happened upon them would know.” When they read this they were amazed and praised God who had shown them a sign of the Resurrection through them. Then

they raised their voices in praise and adoration of God, and entered to the youths in the cave and found them sitting up, their faces shining, their clothes not worn out. Armūs and his companions fell down, prostrating themselves, and praising God Who showed them one of His signs. Then they spoke to one another and the youths told them what had happened to them from their King Duqyānūs. Then Armūs and his companions sent to their pious king Tandūsīs, "Hurry, so that you may see a sign of God that He has shown us during your reign." So he hurried to the youths whom God had revived, for He had taken them for more than three hundred years. When the news reached him, he arose from the seat on which he had been and said, "I praise You, my God, Lord of the Heavens and Earth, You have extended my life and have had mercy on me in Your mercy. You have not extinguished the light that You placed for my forebears and the pious servant Qustītūs<sup>8</sup> the king." When he informed the people of the city of this, they mounted and traveled with him until they came to the cave. When the youths saw Tandūsīs the king and those with him, they rejoiced in him and fell down in prostration to God on their faces. Tandūsīs stood before them, then he embraced them and wept, and they sat on the ground before him, praising and adoring God. Then the youths said to Tandūsīs, "God be with you. We will call out greetings to you. May God keep you and your kingship and protect you from the evil of *jinn* and men."

While the king was standing there, they returned to their beds and went to sleep and God took their spirits. The king stood by them and placed his garments over them and ordered that they make for each of them a golden coffin. In the morning they came to him in his dream and said, "We were not created of gold or silver but from dust, and dust we will become. So leave us in the cave as we were on the dust until God raises us up from it." The king then gave orders for coffins of teak and they were placed in them. When the company left them, God covered them with fear and no one could go in to them. The king gave orders and they made a prayer-place at the entrance to the cave in which he would pray. He made a great festival for them and ordered that it be done every year. It is said that when they came to the entrance to the cave, Tamlīkhā said, "Let me enter to my companions and tell them the

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<sup>8</sup> Possibly Constantine I, 280-337.

tidings,” and he entered and God took his spirit and their spirits and obscured their place from them. They were not led to it, as ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib mentioned. And this is the account of the Companions of the Cave.

It is related that the Prophet asked his Lord that he might see them, and He said, “You will surely not see them in the Abode of this World, but send to them four of the best of your companions to meet them with your mission and to call on them to believe in you.” The Messenger of Allah asked Gabriel how he would send them, and he said, “Spread out your cloak, and on one edge seat Abū Bakr, on the second ‘Umar, on the third ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, and on the fourth, Abū Dharr. Then call the gentle wind that served Solomon, son of David, for God has ordered it to obey you.” So the Prophet did what he ordered him to do and the wind carried them until it brought them to the entrance to the cave. They entered and said, “Peace be upon you, and God’s mercy and blessing.” God restored their spirits to them, and all of them arose and said, “And upon you be peace and God’s mercy and blessing.”—“The Prophet, Muḥammad son of ‘Abdāllah, greets you with peace.”—“And greet Muḥammad, the Messenger of Allah, as long as the Heavens and Earth exist, and you, for what you have informed us.” Then they sat down conversing, and they believed in Muḥammad and accepted the religion of Islam, saying, “Greet Muḥammad with peace from us.” Then they took to their beds and went to sleep until the end of time with the coming of the Mahdī. It is said that the Mahdī will greet them and God will revive them for him, then they will return to their sleep and will not arise until the Day of Resurrection.

Then each of Muḥammad’s companions sat in his place and the gentle wind carried them. Then Gabriel descended and told the Prophet what had happened, so when they came to the Prophet he said, “How did you find them? And what was their response to you?” They said, “Messenger of Allah, we entered to them and greeted them and they arose and all of them returned the greeting. We informed them of your mission and they responded, and bore witness that you are truly the Messenger of Allah. They praised God for having honored them with their coming out and directing your message to them, and they greet you with peace.” He said, “O God, do not separate me from my relatives, my beloved ones, and forgive those who love me, love my family, love my community, and love my companions.”

## JIRJĪS (SAINT GEORGE)

### THE STORY OF JIRJĪS (SAINT GEORGE)<sup>1</sup>

Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abdallāh al-Ḍabbī—a chain of authorities—Wahb b. Munabbih the Yemenite said that in Mosul there was a king called Zādānah. He had ruled all of Syria and subjected all of its people to him. He was a haughty tyrant who worshipped an idol called Afalūn.

Jirjīs was a pious servant of God of the people of Palestine who had met the last of the disciples of Jesus, son of Mary. He was a very wealthy merchant and very charitable, who did not feel safe under the rule of idolators over him fearing that they might divert him from his religion. One day he went out to see the king of Mosul with money that he wanted to give him so that he would not let any of those kings rule over him but him. He came to the king but found that he had gone out to a meeting of his, and had ordered that his idol Afalūn be brought. He set it up and the people passed before it. Whoever disobeyed him was punished with various punishments. He lit a great fire and whoever did not bow down to Afalūn, he had thrown into that fire.

When Jirjīs saw what he was doing, he was afraid of him. He struck fear in him and overawed him. Jirjīs resolved to struggle against him, and God sent loathing for the king into Jirjīs, and resolve to fight him. Then he took the money that he had intended to give [the king] and divided it among the people of his religion until nothing was left of it, for he disliked fighting him with money, and preferred to be in control of it by himself. So he went to the king and said to him, “Know that you are an enslaved servant and do not rule over anything for yourself or for anyone else—for there is a Lord Who rules you and others. He is the One Who created

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<sup>1</sup> Arabic: *Jirjīs*, said to have been from Palestine, widely honored in the Christian and Muslim worlds as a symbol of resurrection and salvation; his festival marks the return of Spring. In Islam, said to have been martyred in Mosul under Diocletian, died and resurrected four times; frequently confused with al-Khiḍr and Elijah. See *ET*<sup>2</sup> II:553; Ṭabarī, pp. 795–811; Perlmann, pp. 173–86.

you and sustained you; Who gave you life and will bring you death; Who can harm you and be of use to you. If He says to something 'Be!' it is. Whereas you only be take yourself to a deaf creature from His creation, who can neither hear nor see nor speak, and is of no use to you against God." The king's response to him was to ask him how he was, what his business was, who he was and from where. Jirjīs said, "I am a servant of God, a son of His Servant and Maid-servant; the lowest of His servants and the poorest of them to Him. From dust was I created and to it will I return." The king said, "If your lord were what you claim and as you say, then his effect on you as mine does on those around me and whoever obeys me would be seen."

Jirjīs responded to him by praising God and exalting His power, and then he said to him, "Do you equate Afalūn the deaf and dumb who is of no use to you, with the Lord of all being, at whose command the Heavens and Earth arose? Or will you equate Ṭūfaliyā, who is the greatest of your people, and what he acheived during your rule with what Elijah acheived under God's dominion? For at the beginning, Elijah was human, eating food, walking in the streets, but God honored him so that he grew feathers and fire encompassed him and he became a human angel, Heavenly and Earthly, flying with the angels. Will you equate Makhlaṭīs and what he acheived in your reign, he being one of the great men of your people, with the Messiah, son of Mary, and what he acheived through God's guardianship? For God favored him over men of humankind and made of him and his mother a sign who those who will consider. Or do you equate this pleasant spirit that God chose as His Word, and preferred her above His handmaidens, and what she acheived under God's guardianship, with Arabīl,<sup>2</sup> with what she acheived under your rule? For she was of your party and your religion, but God abandoned her with her great kingdom, so that the dogs rushed at her in her house, tore her flesh to pieces, and tasted her blood, while the hyenas tore her limbs apart."

The king said to him, "You have related to us things of which we have no knowledge, so bring us the two men whom you mentioned so that I may look at them, for I deny that this has to do

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<sup>2</sup> Probably referring to Jezebel (Arabic: *Arabīl*) in light of the events mentioned about her. See the story of Jezebel p. 449, n. 7.

with a human matter." Jirjīs said to him, "Your denial precedes your heedlessness of God. As for the two men, you will not see them nor will they appear to you until you do as they do and come down to their level." The king responded to him, "On our part, we have excused you, so explain your lie to us, for you have boasted about things of which you are incapable and which you cannot verify." He then gave Jirjīs the choice of punishment or of prostrating himself before Afalūn, but Jirjīs said to him, "If Afalūn were the one who raised up the Heavens and set the Earth in its place, then you have won and have shown good faith to me; if not, then I shall drive away that accursed filth."

Upon hearing this, the king became angry, reviling him and insulting his God. He ordered a tree brought and had it set up for him. He had metal combs placed on it with which his flesh was torn to pieces so that it cut into his flesh, his skin, and his veins. While this was being done, he splashed vinegar and mustard on him, but God preserved him from that suffering and death. When the king saw that this did not kill him, he ordered six iron nails brought and had them heated until they became fiery. He hammered them into his head so that his brains flowed out, but he was protected from suffering and death. When the king saw that he had not killed him, he ordered a brass basin be brought and had fire set under it, and when it became fiery he ordered Jirjīs placed into it and had it closed over him. He remained in it until the heat had cooled down. When he saw that this did not kill him, the king summoned him and said, "Jirjīs, did you not feel the pain of the punishment you suffered?" He replied, "Verily, my Lord, about Whom I have told you, kept the punishment from me and gave me the steadfastness to remonstrate against you."

When Jirjīs said that to him, the king began to fear him, both for himself and his rule, and decided to keep him in prison. But the notables of his people said to him, "If you leave him free in prison, he will speak to the people to dispose them against you. Make the punishment in prison bitter for him and it will keep him too busy to talk to the people." So the king gave orders and Jirjīs was thrown down on his face, and his hands and feet were nailed down with four iron pegs, and he ordered that a marble column be placed on his back. Then he had eighteen men placed on that column and that day became dark for Jirjīs, rammed under that weight. When night fell, God sent an angel to him—and that was the first time



that God helped him by means of an angel, and the first time that revelation came to him. The angel took the marble off of him and pulled the pegs out of his hands and feet; he fed him and gave him drink, and brought him tidings of victory. When morning dawned, he took him out of the prison and then said to him, "The right is with your enemy, so fight a rightful fight against him for God. For verily, God says to you, 'Be steadfast and be happy, for I have tested you with My enemy.' These seven years he will punish you and kill you four times, but during all of that He will restore your soul. And when the fourth battle occurs, I will remove your spirit and I will fulfill your reward."

They did not notice, but Jirjīs stood at their head calling them to God. The king said to him, "Who brought you out of the prison?" "The One whose rule is above your rule brought me forth." When he said that to him, the king became filled with rage and ordered various punishments until none of them were left. When Jirjīs saw them, he was filled with fear and anguish. Then he turned to his soul, reproaching it at the top of his voice while they heard him. When he finished this reproach, the king said to them, "Stretch him between two boards," and they did so, then placed a sword at the nape of his head and sawed it until it fell at his feet and he was cut into two parts. Then they turned to the two parts and cut them into pieces; then sent for six rapacious black animals which the king had in a pit—they being one of the types of his torture, and tossed his body to them. When they pounced on the pieces, God commanded them, and they bowed their heads and necks and stood on their claws, for fear of his suffering. He remained dead all that day, and that was the first of the deaths he died.

When night fell, God assembled the body they had cut up, attached one part to another, until He had put them in order. Then God restored his spirit to him and sent an angel to him who took him out of the depths of the pit, fed him, gave him to drink, and gave him promise of victory. When morning came, the angel said to him, "Jirjīs!", and he replied, "Here I am." "Know that the power with which God created Adam is that which brought you out of the depths of the pit. Go out, approach the enemy, and fight him for God in a true struggle, and die the death of those who persevere."

The king and his other companions were unaware that Jirjīs had drawn near while they were busied with a festival of theirs which they had initiated for rejoicing in his death. When they saw him

approaching, the king said, "How similar this man is to Jirjīs!" and others said, "It is as though it is he." The king said, "But it isn't true. Didn't you see his breathing cease and his dread diminish?" Jirjīs said, "No! it is I. What an evil people! You have killed and mutilated [me], but God brought me back to life by His power. So arise for the mighty Lord Who has shown you what you see!" When he had said that, they turned to one another and said, "A sorcerer has enchanted your eyes." They assembled all of the sorcerers in the king's country, and when they came, the king said to their leader, "Present to me the greatest sorcery that will please me." He said to the king, "Have a bull brought to me from the cattle." When they brought it to him, he spat in one of its ears and it split in two. Then he blew into the other ear, and lo! he became two bulls. Then he called for seeds to be brought. He plowed and sowed and the seeds grew. Then he reaped, then threshed, winnowed, ground, kneaded and baked—all of this during one hour while they were watching.

The king said to him, "Can you transform Jirjīs into a beast for me?" "Yes. Any animal you wish. Shall I transform him into a dog for you?" Then he said, "Bring me a jug of water." When they brought him the jug, the sorcerer spat into it and then said to the king, "I shall enchant him to drink from it." Jirjīs drank of it until he had finished all of it. The sorcerer said to him, "What do you feel?" He replied. "I feel only good. I was thirsty and God showed affection to me with this drink, and with it he strengthened me against you." When he said that, the sorcerer approached the king and said to him, "Know, O king, if you were measuring yourself to a man like yourself I would have overcome him. But you have measured yourself against the Almighty One of the heavens, and He is the King Who cannot be moved."

Now there was a poor woman among the people of Syria who had heard of Jirjīs and of the wonders he had performed, so she came to him while he was in the worst distress. She said to him, "Jirjīs, I am a poor woman and I had no property but two oxen with which I plowed. They have both died, so I come to you to have pity on me and pray to God to revive my two oxen for me." When he heard her words, tears filled his eyes and he prayed to God to revive her two oxen for her. He then gave her a staff and said to her, "Go to your two oxen, touch them with this staff, and say to them, 'Come to life, with God's permission'." She said to

him, "Jirjīs, my oxen have been dead for seven days and lions have torn them apart and four days journey lie between me and them." He said to her, "Even if you find only small pieces of them, touch them with the staff and they will arise, with God's permission." So the woman went off to the place where they died and the first thing that appeared of her two oxen were the chin of one of them and the hair of the ear of the other. She joined the one to the other and touched them with the staff and said what he had ordered her. The two oxen stood up, with God's permission, and she worked with them until the report of that came to them.

When the sorcerer had told the king his words, a man who was one of the most important of his companions to the king, said, "You have already become aware of this man's way with sorcery. You have tortured him but the torture did not affect him; you killed him but he did not die. Have you ever seen a sorcerer who could ward off death from himself, or who could bring anything to life?" They said to him, "Your words are those of a man who inclines towards him. Perhaps he has charmed you to follow him." He replied, "I believe in God, and I bear witness that I am innocent of what you believe."

The king and his companions came at him with daggers and killed him. When the people saw that, four thousand followed Jirjīs in believing, and the king turned on them and kept torturing them with various tortures until he annihilated them. When he had finished with them he said to Jirjīs, "Why do you not pray to your Lord so that He will bring to life these companions of yours who were killed because of you?" Jirjīs said, "I have no free hand with them until their appointed times come." One of their powerful sorcerers who was called Makhliṭas said to him, "You claimed, O Jirjīs, that your God is the One who begins creation and then makes it return. So I am asking of you a thing which, if you do it, I will believe in you, say that you are truthful and will protect you. We are a group of people around whom there are fourteen chairs, and this table is between us, upon which are drinking bowls and bowls of different foods. Pray to your Lord to bring these chairs and vessels as He had originally created them—to become green again, and that each piece of their wood will know its joints, and leaves and blossoms." Jirjīs said to him, "You have asked a thing that is tremendous for me and for you, but for God it is easy." He prayed to God and while they were still in their places all those chairs and vessels turned

green, their stems became soft and were covered with flesh, branched out, became leafy, flowered and bore fruit.

When they looked at that, Makhliṭas turned to them, having attained what he had sought, and said, "I will punish you together with this sorcerer in a way that will frustrate his guile." He then took some brass and made a statue of an ox with it, one with a wide belly, Then he stuffed it with naphtha, lead, sulfur and arsenic and put Jirjīs into the belly with the stuffing. He lit the statue until it caught fire and everything in it melted while Jirjīs was mixed in the belly. When Jirjīs died, God sent a violent wind and the heavens filled with black clouds in which there were thunder, lightning and thunderbolts. And God sent a whirlwind which filled their land with smoke and black dust so that everything between Heaven and Earth became black to the extent that for several days they remained confused, in darkness, unable to distinguish between night and day. God sent the angel Michael and he carried the statue in which Jirjīs was. When he lifted it up, he struck the earth with it and the people of Syria became terrified by its frightfulness and ran away headlong, yelling. The statue broke up and Jirjīs came out of it alive. When he stood up, speaking to them, the darkness disappeared, everything between Heaven and Earth became light, and their souls returned to them.

A man named Tūfayliyā said to him, "We do not know, O Jirjīs, whether you performed all of these wonders, or your Lord. If it was your Lord who did all that, pray to Him for us to revive our dead who are in these graves—for there are dead people in them whom we know, and others whom we do not know." Jirjīs said to him, "I have learned that God will forgive you this fault and will show you these wonders only so that they may be a proof to you, for you deserve His anger for it." Then he gave orders to the graves and they were laid open and were only decayed bones. Then Jirjīs began to pray while they were still in their place when they saw seventeen persons—nine men, five women, and three children. Among them was a very old man and he asked him his name. He replied, "O Jirjīs, my name is Tūbīl." "When did you die?" "At such and such a time." They made a reckoning and he had died four hundred years ago.

When the king and his companions saw what he had done, they said that no other kind of torture was left with which to punish him except starvation and thirst, so they tortured him with both. They

came to the house of a very old woman who had a son who was blind, deaf, dumb and lame. They confined Jirjīs in her house and no food or drink was brought to him by anyone. When he became hungry he asked the old woman whether she had any food or drink. She said, "No, and by Him by Whom we swear, we have not known food since such and such a time. Let me go out and search for some for you." Jirjīs asked her whether she knew God and she replied that she did. "Do you serve Him?" "No", then he called her to God and she believed in Him. Then she went out in search of something for herself. In the house there was a pillar of dry wood that carried the boards of the house. He began to pray and that pillar became green and brought forth for him every fruit that is eaten or known, so that among that which grew were beans, almonds—which is like the Baradā<sup>3</sup> that is in Syria. The pillar put forth branches over the house, shading it from above. The old lady returned while he was eating comfortably. When she saw what had happened to her house after she had gone, she said, "I believe in Whoever fed you in this house of hunger. So pray to the Great Lord to heal my son." He said to her, "Bring him near to me." So she brought him close and he spat on his eyes and he saw, he breathed into his ears and he heard. Then she said to him, "Set his tongue and legs free, may God have mercy on you." Then he said to her, "Get behind him, for this is a great day for him."

The king went out one day traveling in his realm, when his glance fell on the tree, and he said, "I see a tree in a place where I was not aware of it." They told him that the tree had grown for that very sorcerer whom he had wanted to torture with hunger, whereas he is eating as much as he wants, is sated thereby, satisfies the poor old woman, and cured her son for her. The king gave orders that the house be destroyed and the tree be cut down. When they tried to cut the tree, God caused it to dry up and returned it to its former state, so they abandoned it. He gave orders regarding Jirjīs and he was thrown to the ground and they drove in four stakes. He ordered a wheel and loaded a cylinder and at the bottom of the wheel he placed daggers and blades. Then he had forty oxen brought and they lifted the wheel once while Jirjīs was under it and he was cut into three pieces. The king then ordered that the pieces be

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<sup>3</sup> The river of Damascus watering a very fruitful area around the city.

burned and they were thrown into the fire so that they became ashes. He then sent these ashes with some men who scattered them on the sea. While there, they heard a voice from heaven say, "O sea, God commands you to guard the good body that is in you for I wish to return him as he was."

Then God sent winds and they brought him out of the sea and gathered him together until the ashes became one heap in the shape that they were before they were scattered. Jirjīs emerged from that, covered with dust, shaking his head. The [people] returned, as did Jirjīs, and informed the king about the voice they had heard and the wind that had gathered him together. The king said to him, "Jirjīs, do you have something that is good for both of us in this matter we are in, lest people say that you have overcome me, have been victorious over me, and that I believe in you. Just bow down to Afalūn once and sacrifice one sheep to him, and I will do what will make things easy for you." Jirjīs replied, "Fine. I will do whatever you want, just bring me to your idol." The king rejoiced at his words, rose up for him and kissed his hands and feet and head and said to him, "I have decided about you that you will be protected today and will spend the night nowhere else but in my house, in my bed, in my esteem, so that you may find rest and the affliction of torture leaves you and the people will see your esteem for me." He cleared his house for him, and Jirjīs remained in it until, when night came, he arose to pray and to recite the Psalms, having the most beautiful voice among men. When the king's wife heard him she listened, and before he knew it she was behind him weeping. Jirjīs called upon her to believe and she had faith in him, and he told her to conceal her faith.

When morning came, he went to the house of the idols to bow down to them. When the old woman heard that she went out, carrying her son on her shoulders, reproaching Jirjīs while the people were distracted from her. When he entered the house of the idols and the people entered with him, they looked and there was the old woman, with her son on her shoulders, standing closest to him of all the people. When Jirjīs saw her, the son of the old woman called him by name, then he spoke and answered him, although he had not spoken at all before that. Then he jumped off of his mother's shoulders, walking on his two legs, although his feet had not stepped on the ground before that. When he stood before Jirjīs, the latter said to him, "Go and pray to those idols for me". At that time,

there were seventy idols on platforms of gold and people worshipped them together with the sun and the moon. The lad said to him, "How shall I pray to these idols?" "Tell them that Jirjīs asks you and calls upon you by Him Who created you, but you did not respond to him." When the lad said that to them they came rolling towards Jirjīs, and when they reached him, he stamped the earth with his foot, causing them and their platforms to be swallowed up. Accursed Iblīs came out of the belly of one of the idols, fleeing, fearing to be swallowed up. When he passed by him, Jirjīs seized him by his forelock and he submitted to him. Then Jirjīs spoke to him, "Tell me, unclean spirit and cursed creature, what brought you to destroy yourself and the people with you? For you know that you and your troop will be in Hell." Accursed Iblīs said to him, "If I were to choose between that upon which the sun rises or that upon which the night darkens, and between the destruction of a single human and misleading him, I would choose the destruction of all that. Because lust for that and pleasure in it befell me as much as all that in which creatures take pleasure. Don't you know, Jirjīs, that God made all the angels bow down to your father Adam, and that all of them did so, but I refused to bow down, saying that I was better than he?" When he said that, Jirjīs released him, and from that day on, Iblīs did not enter the belly of an idol nor did he enter it after that ever again, according to what they say.

The king said, "Jirjīs, you have deceived me and circumvented me and destroyed my gods." "I did that only so that you would take warning and know that, had they been gods, they would have prevented me. How can you have faith—woe to you—in your gods who could not protect themselves from me when I am only a weak creature, having power only over what my Lord gives me control?" When he said this, the wife of the king approached and spoke to them, revealing her faith to them, recounting the deeds of Jirjīs and the warnings God had shown them, and said, "Do not expect from this man anything but a prayer, for he will cause the Earth to swallow you up as it swallowed up your idols. God, God, O people, is in your souls." The king said to her, "Woe to you, Alexandra, how quickly this sorcerer has led you astray in one night, while I have been treating him harshly for seven years, and he has gained no mastery over me in anything." She replied to him, "Have you not seen how God has given him mastery over you? has given him rule over you, and success and evidence over you in every place?"

When he heard her words, the king immediately gave orders to have her placed on the board on which Jirjīs had been suspended, and ordered the metal combs that had been used on him. When they caused her to suffer, she said, "Pray to your Lord, Jirjīs, that He make it easier for me for the torture is causing me pain." He told her to look up above her, and when she did, she laughed. The king asked her what had made her laugh, and she said, "I saw two angels above me with a crown of ornaments of Paradise, waiting with it for the departure of my soul." When her soul departed, they adorned her with that crown, then took her up to Paradise. Then, after God took her soul, Jirjīs came forth with prayer, saying, "My God, You have honored me with this trial to give me the dwelling place of martyrs, and this is the last of the days in which You promised me rest from the trials of this world. My God, I ask You not to take my soul until You bring down on these haughty ones Your might and vengeance that has not yet come upon them. That will heal my breast and will refresh my eyes, for they have oppressed me and tortured me for You, my God. And I request of You that to anyone who prays to You in distress and sadness and mentions me and beseeches You in my name You will grant relief, have mercy on him, respond to him, grant me intercession regarding him." When he had finished this prayer, God rained down fire on them, and when they saw that they went to Jirjīs and beat him with swords, enraged by the heat of the flames, in order that God might grant him the fourth slaying that He had promised him. Then the city burned with everything in it and became ashes. God removed it from the face of the Earth, turning it upside down. It remained so for a long period of time, fire and smoke coming out from below it with a stench that made anyone who smelled it ill. Everyone who believed in Jirjīs was slain with him, thirty-four thousand people and the wife of the king.

The Master said that the story of Jirjīs took place during the days of the petty kings. And God is All-knowing.



## SAMSON

### THE STORY OF SAMSON THE PROPHET<sup>1</sup>

God has said: *Lo, We revealed this message on the Night of Power [and what will explain to you the Night of Power? The Night of Power is] better than a thousand months.* (97:1-3)

Following his chain of authorities, Abū ‘Amr al-‘Irāqī said that Ibn Abī Najīḥ related that the Prophet mentioned a man among the Israelites who wore armor, [fighting] in the way of God for one thousand months. The Muslims marvelled at that, so God revealed: *Lo, We revealed it on the Night of Power. And what will explain to you the Night of Power? The Night of Power is better than one thousand months—*during which that man wore armor on the path of God.

According to ‘Abdallāh al-Dabbī’s authorities, Wahb b. Munabbih said that a man from the people of a Byzantine village, whose name was Samson b. Manoaḥ, was a Believer among them, one of the people of the Gospel, whose mother had made him a Nazirite.<sup>2</sup> His people were idolaters, worshipping idols instead of God, and his house was five miles from them. He would raid them by himself, do battle with them for God, kill some of them, take captives, and seize their wealth. When he fought them, a torrent struck them unlike any other that had struck them. When he was fighting them and became tired and thirsty, sweet water would spring forth from a rock, and he would drink from it until he was sated. He was given power in assault, and neither iron nor anything else would bind him. He struggled with [the idolaters] for God for a thousand months, attaining what he wanted from them, while they were unable to do anything to him. So they resorted to stratagems against him, saying, “We will not get to him except through his wife.” So they offered her a reward for that and she accepted it from them saying that

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrew: *Shimshon b. Manoaḥ*, here Arabic Shamsūn. In the Bible, his story is in the book of Judges. See Judges 13-16. Tabarī, pp. 793-5; Perlmann, pp. 171-2.

<sup>2</sup> Confusion with Nazareth or the Arabic word for Christian, may be the reason for placing Samson after the story of Jesus. For the Nazīr, Nazirite in Judaism, see Num. 6:1-21, and *Ej* 12:905-07. The Nazirites took vows of asceticism.

she would tie him up for them. So they gave her strong rope and told her that when he was asleep, she should tie his hands to his neck so that they might come and seize him. When he was asleep, she tied his hands to his neck with that rope.

When Samson awoke from his sleep, he pulled the rope with his hand. It fell from his neck, and he said to her, "Why did you do this?" "I was testing your strength," she said, "for I have never seen anyone like you." Then she sent to the people telling them that she had tied him up with the rope but it was of no use against him. So they sent her links of iron and told her that when he was asleep, to put it around his neck. When he was asleep, she put it on his neck and made it tight. When he started to pull it, it fell off his neck and hand, and he asked her why she had done that. She said, "I was testing your strength. I have never seen anyone like you. Is there anything on earth that can overcome you?" He said, "No, except for one thing." She asked what it was but he said that he would not tell her, but she did not leave off asking him about that. Now he had very long hair, and he told her, "Woe be to you. My mother told me that nothing will ever overcome me or vex me except for my hair." So when he was asleep, she tied his hands to his neck with the hair of his head and that held him fast. She sent for the people, who came and seized him, cut off his nose and ears and gouged out his eyes. They made him stand among the people of the city. It was a city of many pillars from which their king looked down—he and his people—to watch Samson and what was being done to him.

Samson prayed to God when they brought him before them and made him stand before them, that He would give him power over them. So God commanded him to seize two of the pillars of the city upon which were the king and the people with him, and to pull them together. So he pulled them and the city was demolished with those in it and they were destroyed in it. His wife also perished with them. God restored his sight to him and made whole the parts of his body that they had afflicted, and he returned as he had been. The story of Samson took place during the days of the petty kings, and God is All-knowing.

## THE PEOPLE OF THE TRENCH

### THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE OF THE TRENCH,<sup>1</sup> NAMESLY, THE MARTYRS OF NAJRĀN

God said, “*Accursed are the men of the Trench full of fire fed by faggots, [as they sat around it witnessing what they had done to the believers.]*” (85:4–7) ‘Aṭā’ related from Ibn ‘Abbās that in Najrān there had been a Ḥimyarite king named Joseph Dhū Nuwās b. Shuraḥbīl<sup>2</sup> during the period of seventy years before the birth of the Prophet. He had a skillful sorcerer who, when he became old, said to the king, “I have become old, so send me a youth whom I can instruct in sorcery.” So he sent him a lad named ‘Abdallāh b. al-Sāmīr to teach him sorcery. The lad disliked that but found no way out of obeying the king and obeying his father. But he began to be absent from the sorcerer. On his way there was a monk who recited well with a beautiful voice. The lad would sit with him and listen to his words, which pleased him, so he would linger with the monk. When the teacher came he would beat the lad and ask him what had detained him, then when he returned to his father, after sitting with the monk, his father beat him, asking what had made him linger. The lad complained to the monk about this and the latter said to him, “When you come to the teacher, tell him ‘my father detained me’, and when you come to your father, say ‘the teacher detained me’.”

Now in that land there was a huge serpent that blocked the roads for people. The lad passed near it, threw stones at it, and said, “My God, if You prefer the monk’s words to those of the sorcerer, kill the snake.” When he next stoned it, he killed it. He went to the monk and told him about the snake, and the monk asked him whether he had killed it. He answered that he had, and the monk said, “Indeed, you have something to do with this and have reached

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<sup>1</sup> What is meant by “the Trench” is not known for certain, but see *EI*<sup>2</sup> I:692 for a discussion of the name.

<sup>2</sup> A historical Ḥimyarite ruler, ca. 523 CE, who took the name of Joseph on conversion to Judaism, and fought the Christians of Yemen. See *Dhū Nuwās* in *EI*<sup>2</sup> II:243–45; Ṭabarī, pp. 922–25.

a state that I see. You will be put to the test, and when you are, do not point to me."

The lad healed lepers and those born blind, and cured the sick. The king had a nephew who was blind and had heard about the lad and his killing the serpent. He came to the lad with a guide and asked him whether he had killed the serpent. He answered, "No."—"Then who killed it?"—"God did."—"And who is God?" The lad answered, "He is the Lord of Heavens and Earth and all that is between them, Lord of the Sun and the Moon, Night and Day, this world and the hereafter."—"Then, if you are telling the truth, pray to God to return my sight to me." The lad said to him, "If God restored your sight, would you believe in God?"—"Yes, I would." So the lad said, "My God, if he is telling the truth, restore his sight." He was able to return to his home without a guide and he went to the king. When the latter saw him, he was astounded and said, "Who did this for you?"—"God did."—"And who is God?"—"The Lord of the Heavens and Earth." Then the king said to him, "Tell me, who taught you this?", But he refused to say. So he kept on torturing him until he directed him to the lad. The king came to the lad and said, "My son, has your sorcery led to this?" "I do not cure anyone," the lad replied, "only God cures." They kept torturing him until he directed them to the monk. The king had the monk brought and was told to abandon his faith, but he refused. So the king called for a saw, placed it on his neck and split it with the saw so that he fell in two parts. Then the king's nephew was brought and was told to abandon his faith, but he refused, so the saw was brought and split him as he had the other one. Then the king turned to the lad and said to him, "Abandon your religion!" But he refused, so he turned him over to some of his companions and said, "Take him to such-and-such mountain and climb to its peak with him. If he abandons his religion, good; if not, then throw him down." They took him to the mountain, and he said, "My God, enshroud them as You wish." The mountain shook with them and they fell down and were destroyed.

The lad then came on foot to the king who said to him, "What happened to your companions?"—"God has buried them." This depressed the king so he turned the lad over to other of his companions and told them to take him to a *quqūr*, which is a ship, throw him into [it], and enter the deep sea with him. "If he abandons his faith, good; otherwise throw him into the sea and drown

him." They took him to the sea and the youth said, "My God, requite them as You wish," and the ship turned upside down with them and they drowned. The lad came to the king who asked him what his companions had done and the lad told him that God had requited them. The king gave orders that they kill him with a sword, but the sword glanced off of him. Word about him spread through the land and people knew of him, admired him, and learned that he and his companions were right.

The lad then said to the king, "You will be unable to kill me unless you do what I tell you to do."—"And what is that?"—"Gather all the people of your realm while you are on your throne and crucify me on a tree trunk, shoot arrows at me, and say, "In the name of God, Lord of the young man." The king did that, shot at him saying "In the name of God" and hit him in his temple. Then he put his hand on him and he died.

The people said, "There is no god but Allah. We believe in the faith of 'Abdallāh b. al-Sāmirī. There is no religion but his religion." When the people believed in the Lord of Humankind, the Lord of the young man, the king was told that what he had been warned against had come to pass. He became enraged and locked the gates of the city. He took the openings of wells, had trenches dug, and filled them all with fire. Then he arrayed the people before him, one by one. Whoever abandoned Islam, he let live, but whoever did not, he threw into the trenches and was burned. There was a woman who had accepted Islam, among those who had done so, and she had three children, one of them still nursing. The king said to her, "Will you abandon your religion? If not, I will throw you and your children into the fire." But she refused and he took her oldest son and threw him into the fire. Then he took the middle one and said to her, "Abandon your religion!" But she refused and he threw her, too, into the fire. Then he seized the nursing infant and told her mother to abandon Islam, but she refused, so he ordered him to be thrown in. The woman intended to recant, but the youngest boy said to her, "Mother, do not abandon Islam, for you are doing the right thing and should not be ashamed." So the king cast the boy into the fire and his mother after him. This was related as we have mentioned, transmitted from the Messenger of Allah.

Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn b. Ja'far, who is mentioned among his authorities by Ṣuhayb, had a proverb from the Messenger of Allah, which is: Six spoke in the cradle bearing

witness: Joseph the truthful; the son of Māshiṭa, the daughter of Pharaoh; John b. Zachariah; Jesus, son of Mary; the monk friend of Jirjīs; and the one of the Trench.

Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab said, "We were with ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb when he received a letter saying that they had found that lad in Najrān. He had his hand on his temple. Whenever he stretched out his hand, it came back to his temple. ʿUmar wrote to them, "Bury him where you found him." Muqātil said that the People of the Trench were three: one in Najrān of Yemen; another in Syria; and another in Persia—they were burned in fire. The one in Syria was when Antiochus the Greek burned a group of believers; in Persia, it was done by Nebuchadnezzar.

His story was told to us by ʿAbdallāh b. Ḥāmid—Ibn ʿUrwa, who said that when the Muslims routed the people of Isfandahār and they left, news of ʿUmar's death arrived. They assembled and said, "What sentence shall we carry out regarding the Majūs, for they are not People of the Book, nor are they among the polytheists of the Arabs." Alī said to them, "On the contrary, they are People of the Book and hold on to their Book." Now wine was permissible to them and one of their kings drank some and it overcame his reason. He took his sister and had intercourse with her. When his intoxication left him, he was sorry and said to her, "Woe to you! what have I done and what is the way out?" She said, "The way out is that you speak to the people and say, 'O people, God permits you to marry your sisters.' When this spreads among the people, they will forget its being prohibited to them." So he arose and spoke to them, saying, "O people, God has permitted your marriage with your sisters." All the people said, "God forbid that we believe this. No prophet brought this to us, nor was it revealed to us in a book."

He returned to his sister and told her, "Woe to you! the people have rejected me." She told him to flog them with the whip, but they refused to agree. He told her that the people refused, and she said that he should unsheath his sword among them, but they still refused to agree. She then said, "Then dig a trench for them and place them by it. Let whoever follows you go free, but whoever refuses, cast him into the fire." So he dug the trench, lit fires in it, and arrayed the people of his realm by it. Whoever refused, he threw into the fire, but whoever responded, he let go. Then God revealed to them, "*Accursed are the men of the Trench [full of fire fed by faggots, as they sat around it witnessing what they had done to the believers!]*"

*They had no other reason for hating them except that they believed in God the Mighty, Worthy of praise, Whose kingdom spreads over heaven and earth. God is witness over everything. Surely for those who persecute believers, men and women, and do not repent afterwards, is the punishment of Hell] and the punishment of burning.” (85:4–10)*

The one in Yemen was Joseph Dhū Nuwās b. Sharaḥbīl b. Tubba‘ b. Yashrahk the Ḥimyarite, whose story we have already related. Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Bashshār transmitted from Wahb b. Munabbih that a man who continued in the faith of Jesus came to Najrān. He preached to the people and they listened to him. So Dhū Nuwās let them choose between the fire or becoming Jews, and they rejected the latter so he burned twelve thousand among them. Muqātil said that only seventy-seven people were cast into the fire that day. Al-Kalbī said that the people of the Trench numbered seventy thousand and when they cast the believers into the fire, it rose up to the edges of the trench and burned them. The fire rose up above them for twelve cubits and Dhū Nuwās fled. God gave power over them to Aryāṭ the Ethiopian so that he conquered Yemen and Dhū Nuwās left, fleeing. He rushed blindly into the sea and God drowned him in it. It was about him that ‘Amr b. Ma‘dī Karib said:

*Do you threaten me as though you were the light of the sun  
or Dhū Nuwās in the best of life?*

*Many a man prospered before you, ruling firmly among the people.  
Whose age was older than that of ‘Ad, powerful overcoming  
tyranny, fierce.*

*But yesterday his people perished and he became a wanderer  
among the people.*

## THE PEOPLE OF THE ELEPHANT

### THE STORY OF THE PEOPLE OF THE ELEPHANT<sup>1</sup> AND AN EXPLANATION OF THE SUPERIOR HONOR IN IT FOR OUR PROPHET MUḤAMMAD

God said: *Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the people of the Elephant? [Did He not make their plan go awry, and loose upon them birds in flight, hurling against them stones of baked clay, hordes of chargers flying against them, while you were pelting them with stones of lava, and He made them like green blades devoured and turned them into pastured fields of corn.]* (105:1-5)

Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Bashshār said that the story of the people of the Elephant contained what some scholars related from Saʿīd b. Jubayr and ʿIkrimah from Ibn ʿAbbās and those of the scholars of Yemen who remained, as well as others. It was that one of the kings of Ḥimyar called Zurʿah Dhū Nuwās converted to Judaism and the Ḥimyarites followed him in that except for those people of Najrān who were of the Christian faith on the authority of the Gospels. They had a chief named ʿAbdallāh b. al-Sāmīr who called them to Judaism, but they refused. He gave them a choice and they chose battle. He dug a Trench for them and invented different kinds of battle. Among them were some who fought bravely, and others whom he threw into the fire, all except for a man from Sheba named Daws b. Thaʿlabān. He mounted a horse and rode so that he disabled them in the sand. He came to the (Byzantine) Emperor and told him what had happened among them and asked for his assistance. The Emperor said to him, “Your lands are far from us, but I shall write on your behalf to the king of Abyssinia, for he is of our faith and he will help you.” So he wrote to the Negus on his behalf, ordering him to assist him. When Daws went to the Negus, the Emperor sent with him an Ethiopian called Aryāt.<sup>2</sup> When he

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Qurʾān 105 where the “Army of the Elephant” is mentioned. This year—presumed to be 570 CE—is the traditional date of the birth of Muḥammad. See *ET*<sup>2</sup>, II:895, *s.v.* al-Fil.

<sup>2</sup> The story of Daws, the Negus of Ethiopia, and the Byzantine Emperor are all



sent him off, he said to him: "When you enter Yemen, kill a third of its people, destroy a third of its towns, and send a third of its captives to me." When he entered Yemen, he engaged them in battle and they became separated from Dhū Nuwās. He rushed at him with his horse and proceeded with it into the sea. The two of them perished and it was the end of his era. Aryāṭ entered Yemen and did there what the Negus had commanded. Dhū Jadar al-Ḥimyārī said, regarding what had befallen the people of Yemen:

*Let me be! I'll pay you no heed. You cannot—  
 May God revile you—exhaust my spittle.  
 Thereby the songstress sang when we became intoxicated,  
 when we poured the exquisite wine.  
 And drinking wine is not a shame for me  
 If my best friend would not blame me for it.  
 For no man can ever hold back death  
 though he drink the potion of perfume,  
 Nor if he became a monk in a cell  
 butting his skin with a vulture's eggs.  
 Nor Ghumdān, of which you have heard  
 in a tempest clinging to a summit.  
 And its low point, a plowed field  
 a fearful cave of slippery mud.  
 Oil-lamps of the strong one sang within it  
 when it became lean like flashes of lightning.  
 This once-new castle became ashes  
 as did its beauty through the burning flames.  
 And its palm trees, which were planted there—  
 stones almost pulled down the clusters of dates.  
 And Dhū Nuwās surrendered, understanding well,  
 and warned his people of the distress of their straits.*

Aryāṭ remained in Yemen, and the Negus wrote to him, "Remain with your troops with whoever is with you, and stay a while." Then Abraha b. al-Ṣabāḥ became angry with him regarding the Ethiopians, and they split into two factions. One of them remained with Aryāṭ and the other one with Abraha and then they both marched forth. When they drew near each other, Abraha sent to Aryāṭ, saying: "Do not do anything. Let us not throw the Ethiopians at one another, rather let an adversary (and) his companion go out to our two par-

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part of the Islamic tale of the unsuccessful attempt to conquer Mecca. See Abraha, *EF*, I:102-03.

ties, to whom the troops will attach themselves." He replied, "You are being fair." Then the two of them went out. Aryāṭ was bulky, tall, and handsome, and held in his hand a spear. Abraha was short, thick, and fleshy, and held the Christian faith. Behind Abraha was an adviser named 'Atawda. When they drew near, Aryāṭ raised his spear and struck Abraha's head with it and he fell on his face. His eye, face, nose, and lip were all split, and for that reason he was called Abraha al-Ashram (Split face). When 'Atawda saw that, he attacked Aryāṭ and killed him, and the troops joined Abraha. The Negus learned what Abraha had done and became angry at him, swearing that he would not leave him alone until he had cut off his forelock and had trodden his land. Then he wrote to Abraha saying, "You attacked my prince without orders from me." Now, though Abraha was a rebellious person, when the words of the Negus reached him, he shaved his head, filled a bag with some soil from his land, and wrote to the Negus, "O king, Aryāṭ was only your slave, and I am your slave. We disputed about your orders, but I knew more about Ethiopian matters and was more skillful in them. I wanted him to withdraw, but he refused, so I killed him. I have learned that the king swore regarding him, so I shaved my head and sent the hair to you; I filled a bag with the soil of my land and sent it to you for the king to tread upon it so that he might keep his oath." When that reached him, the king was pleased with it, confirmed him in his position, and wrote to him, "Remain with those of your troops who are with you."

Then Abraha built a church in Ṣana'ā' called al-Qullays<sup>3</sup> and wrote to the Negus, saying, "I have built a church for you in Ṣana'ā', the like of which the king has never built, and I will not be finished until I turn the pilgrimage of the Arabs away to it." A man of the Banū Mālik b. Kinānah heard of this and set out for al-Qullays. He entered it one night and defiled it, defensing the Ka'bah. Word of this reached Abraha, and it is said that he went to look at it. He entered and found the filth there, and said, "Who was so bold as to do this?" He was told, "An Arab, one of the people of the House to which they make pilgrimage, heard about what you had said and did this." Thereupon Abraha swore an oath to journey to the Ka'bah

<sup>3</sup> Probably for Greek *ekklesia*, i.e., church.

in order to destroy it. He left, journeying from Ethiopia to Mecca, and took the elephants with him. The Arabs heard about this and found it distressing, but considered it their duty to fight against him. A king of Ḥimyār, called Dhū Nafr, went forth with those of his people who were loyal to him. Abraha fought him and defeated him, and Dhū Nafr was taken and brought to Abraha. Dhū Nafr said to him, "O king, do not kill me. Letting me live will be better for you than killing me." So he let him live, but kept him in fetters, for Abraha was a merciful man.

He then went forth until, when he reached the locality of Khath'am, Nufayl b. Ḥabīb al-Khath'amī went out against him with two tribes of Khath'am—Shahrān and Nāhis—and those tribes of Yemen that joined him. They fought Abraha but he overcame them and took Nufayl prisoner. Nufayl said, "O king, I will be your guide in the land of the Arabs, so don't kill me. Look! I will call upon my people to be at your service." So Abraha spared him and Nufayl went out with him, guiding him until, when they reached Ṭā'if, Mas'ūd b. Mughīth al-Thaqafī<sup>1</sup> came out to him with men of Thaqīf and said to him, "O king, we are your servants and you have no quarrel with us. We do not have what you are seeking [meaning by that the Sanctuary of Allah]. What you seek is the Sanctuary in Mecca, and we will send a man with you to guide you to it." They sent Abū Righāl, their client, then set out, and when they were in al-Mughammis, Abū Righāl died. He is the one whose grave the Arabs stone.

From al-Mughammas, Abraha sent an Ethiopian man called al-Aswad b. Maf'sūd over the vanguard of his troops. He gathered property for himself, and acquired from 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib,<sup>2</sup> the grandfather of the Messenger of Allah, two hundred camels. Then Abraha sent Ḥunāṭah the Himyarite as an envoy to the people of Mecca and said to him, "Inquire about their chief notable, then inform him that I did not come to give battle but came only to destroy this House." Ḥunāṭah set out and entered Mecca, where he met 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib b. Hishām, and said to him, "The king has sent me to tell you that he does not come to give battle unless you fight him. He comes only to destroy this House, and then will depart from you." 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib said, "We will clear between it and whoever comes to

<sup>1</sup> See Guillaume, p. 22: *b. Mu'attib*.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 154, n. 22 above, also Guillaume and Watt.

it. If this is the Sacred House of God and the House of His Friend Abraham, if He defends it, then it is His House and Sanctuary, but if He lets him have it, then so be it, for by God, we do not have the strength to do it." Ḥunāṭah said, "Come to the king with me."

Certain scholars claim that he seated him on a mule of his that he used to ride, and one of his sons rode with him until they reached the camp. Now Dhū Nafr was a friend of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, so the latter went to him and said, "Dhū Nafr, can you act in what has happened to us?" "What use is a man who is a prisoner, not safe from being killed tomorrow morning or evening?" he answered, "But I will send for you to Unays, the keeper of the elephant, for he is a friend of mine, and I shall ask him to do for you whatever good he is able to do, and to strengthen your status and fortune with him." He sent for Unays, who came to him, and he told him, "This is the Chief of Quraysh and Master of the caravan<sup>6</sup> of Mecca, who gives and feeds the people of the plain and the mountain, the wild beasts and fowl at the mountain-top. The king has taken two hundred camels from him. If you are able to help him with the king, do so, for he is a friend to me, and I would like good to come to him." Then Unays entered to Abraha, together with 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, and said to the king, "O king, this is the Chief of Quraysh and the Master of the Well of Mecca who feeds the people of the plain and the mountain, the fowl and the wild beasts on the mountain top. He has come to us, not to trouble you with battle, nor to clash with you, asking permission to see you, and I should like you to permit him and he will speak to you." So the king gave him permission. Now 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib was an impressive, handsome man, and when he entered to the king, he sat down in front of him, but the king made him sit beside him on the throne. Then he said to his interpreter, "Ask him what he wants," and the interpreter told him that 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib had said to him, "What I want is that he return to me the two hundred camels that he took from me." Abraha told the interpreter to tell him, "When I saw you, you pleased me, but now I am very displeased with you." "Why?" "Because I came to a House which is your religion and that of your forefathers in order to destroy it, but you speak to me about two hundred camels I had taken." 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib said to him, "Tell him that I am the owner

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<sup>6</sup> Guillaume, p. 25 has "the well".

of these camels, but the House has a Lord Who will defend it against you." The king said, "Let Him defend it against me." "We shall see." Then the king ordered the camels be returned to him.

Muḥammad b. Ishāq said that it was, as one of the scholars claimed, that 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib went to Abraha with 'Amr b. Ma'dī Kārib b. al-Du'īl b. Bakr b. 'Abd Manāf b. Kinānah, who was at that time Chief of the Banū Kinānah, and Khuwaylid b. Wāthilah al-Hudhalī, Chief of Hudhayl, and offered Abraha a third of the goods of Tihāmah if he would withdraw from them and not destroy the House. But he refused to withdraw. Ibn Ishāq said that when the camels were returned to 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, he went and told Quraysh the news and ordered them to disperse themselves among the ravines and be on guard on the mountain tops, fearing for them from the shameful excesses of the troops, if they came. They did so, and 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib went to the Ka'bah, took hold of the metal knocker and said:

*O Lord, for them I want only You. O Lord, keep Your protection away from them.*

*For the enemy of the House shows enmity towards You,  
so prevent them from destroying Your city.*

And he also said:

*It is of no importance if one defends his dwelling, but protect Your dwelling  
and give aid against the people of the Cross and its worshippers to Your  
people.*

*Let not their Cross and their craft ever overcome Your strategy.*

*The troops of their land with the elephant plotted how to capture those dependent on You.*

*They aimed at Your Sanctuary with their plot, in their ignorance  
and heedlessness of You.*

*If You were their heritage along with our Ka'bah, then  
instruct them with what seems good to You.*

Then 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib let go of the metal knocker and went off with some of the leaders together with his people. In the morning, Abraha was in al-Mughammas, preparing for his entry to Mecca, so he arrayed his troops and made his elephant ready. The elephant's name was Maḥmūd, and the Negus had sent him before that to Abraha. He was an elephant whose like had not been seen in the land, for size, strength, and bulk. Al-Kalbī said that they had only this elephant, and that is why God said, "*Have you seen what*

*your Lord did with the people of the Elephant?*" (105:1) Al-Ḍaḥḥāk said that there were many elephants, while others have said that he had twelve elephants, but only one according to this interpretation, to conform with the main parts of the [Qur'ānic] verses. It is also said that it referred only to the largest elephant.

Nufayl came up to the largest elephant, took hold of his ear, and said, "Kneel down, Maḥmūd, or go straight back whence you came, for you are in the sacred land of God." The elephant knelt, they incited him, but he refused to move; they beat him on his head with an iron bar, but he refused; they stuck hooks into his belly and penetrated it, so he would get up, but he refused. Then they turned his face towards Yemen, and he arose in a hurry; then they made him face Syria, and he did the same thing; then towards the East, and he did the same. When they turned him towards the Sacred Precinct, he knelt down and refused to rise. Then Nufayl left them and climbed up the mountain.

God sent birds from the sea in the likeness of a kind of sparrow, each of which had three stones the size of chickpeas and lentils: two stones in its claws, and one in its beak. When the people slept, they were sent against them, and everyone hit by a stone died, but not all the people were hit, for that is His word, "*birds in flight*", (105:3) meaning, separated here and there. Ibn 'Abbās said, "They had beaks like those of birds, but claws like the paws of dogs." 'Ikrimah said, "Their heads were like those of wild beasts, never seen before that or after." Rabī' said that they had fangs like those of wild beasts, while Sa'īd b. Jubayr said that a green bird had a yellow bill, and Abū al-Jawzā' said that God brought them into being in the air at that moment—"*hurling against them stones of baked clay*"—meaning *sank kul*, a Persian expression meaning Arabic *sijjīl*. Ibn Mas'ūd said that the birds cried out and threw stones at them; God sent a wind which struck the stones, increasing their power. Each of those stones that hit a man's back, came out on the other side; if it hit a man's head, it came out of his posterior, "*and He made them like green blades devoured*"—meaning, like a green crop of which the kernels were eaten and the straw remained.

When the Ethiopians saw that, they left, fleeing, hastening on the way from which they had come, asking Nufayl to guide them on the way. But Nufayl b. Ḥabīb said, when he saw the punishment God had brought upon them:

*Where can one flee, when God is the pursuer,  
and al-Ashram is the conquered, not the conqueror?*

He also said about that:

*Indeed, O Rudayna, did we not give you a happy morning?  
If you had seen, but did not see, beside al-Muhassab what  
we saw  
Then you would have forgiven me, and praised my deed,  
and not be vexed about what passed between us.  
I praised God when I saw birds, and I feared stones that  
might be thrown at us.  
Everyone was asking for Nufayl, as though I owed the  
Ethiopians a debt.*

Ziyād related from ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar, that the swallows came from the direction of the sea to the men of India, throwing stones down at them, the smallest of which were the size of men’s heads, and the largest the size of camels cutting their first teeth. Whatever was thrown, hit, and whatever hit, killed. Nufayl was watching them from one of those mountains, while the people went out, screamed to one another, and were falling by the roadside and dying at every water-hole. God sent an illness to Abraha’s body, and his finger-tips fell off—one finger-tip followed by another, with pus and blood. He reached Ṣana‘ā’ like a fledgling bird among what remained of his companions. His body split from his heart, and then he died.

Muqātil b. Sulaymān claimed that what caused the story of the people of the elephant was that a party of Quraysh went out as merchants to the land of the Negus, travelling until they reached the shore of the sea. In the back of one of its long stretches of sand was a church of the Christians, which Quraysh called the Temple, while the Negus and the people of his land called it al-Māsarkhasān. The people settled down in its rear, gathered wood, kindled a fire and roasted meat. When they journeyed on, they left the fire as it was on a warm day. The winds blew and set the Temple on fire. A crier went out to the Negus and they informed him, and he was afflicted with anger about the Temple, and sent Abraha to destroy the Ka‘bah. In Mecca, at that time, was Abū Mas‘ūd al-Thaqafī, who was blind. He would spend his summers in al-Ṭā’if and winter in Mecca. He was judicious, high-born, wise, and a friend of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib. The latter said to him, “Abū Mas‘ūd, today is a day when I cannot do without your opinion. What do you think?” Abū Mas‘ūd said to ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, “Select one hundred of your

camels and make them a gift to God, and shoe them and place them in the Sanctuary, lest one of those blacks slaughter some of them. Then the Lord of this House would become angry and seize them." 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib did that, and the people turned to those camels, mounted them, and marked some of them, while 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib began to pray. Abū Mas'ūd said, "This House has a Lord Who will defend it, for Tubba' had slighted this House in the desert and wanted to destroy it, but God prevented him, afflicted and harmed him for three days. When Tubba' saw that, he covered himself with white linen, extolled Him, and slaughtered camels for Him."

Then Abū Mas'ūd said to 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, "Look at the Sea of Yemen, do you see anything?" "I see white birds rising up from the sea, and circling over our heads." "Do you recognize them?" "By God, I do not recognize them among the Najdīs, the Tihāmīs, the Arabs, nor the Syrians, for they are flying in our land unobserved." "What are they like?" "Their likeness is that of drone bees with pebbles in their beaks like slingshot pebbles, approaching like a darkening night, following one another. In front of each group of them is a bird leading them, with a red beak, a black head, and a long neck. They came until when the army of the people was urged on, they stopped over their heads, and when all of the men appeared before them, the birds poured what was in their beaks on whomever was under them, on each stone was written the name of the one for whom it was intended. Then they returned from whence they had come."

When Abū Mas'ūd and 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib arose in the morning, they went down from the top of the mountain and walked to a hill and could make out no one. They continued walking and heard no sound, and they said to each other, "The people spent the night in diversion, and the morning sleeping." Then when they drew near the camp of the elephant, behold, they were dead, the stones having fallen on the helmet of one of them and cut it, splitting his skull; they pierced the elephant and the beasts of burden, but the stones disappeared into the earth from the force of their fall.

'Abd al-Muṭṭalib then took an axe and dug until he was deep in the ground, and filled the hole with red gold and precious gems; then he dug a hole for his companion, and filled it, and then said to Abū Mas'ūd, "Bring your seal and choose. If you wish, take my hole, and if you wish, I will take yours, and if you want both, they are entirely yours." Then each of them sat on his hole, and 'Abd



al-Muṭṭalib called the people, and they returned and took from what remained until they had difficulty measuring how much. In this way ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib became the Chief of Quraysh who gave him the leadership. Abū Mas‘ūd and ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib remained wealthy from those riches until both of them died.

Al-Wāqidi, citing his authorities, said, “The Negus sent Aryāt to Yemen with four thousand men and conquered it, he coerced the kings and despised the poor. So a man of the Ethiopians, called Abraha al-Ashram Abū Yaksūm arose, called on the people to obey him, and they responded to him. So he killed Aryāt and conquered Yemen. He saw the people preparing themselves for pilgrimage during the festive season and he asked, “Where are the people going?” He was told that they were making pilgrimage to the House of God in Mecca. He asked, “And what is it?” They said, “It is made of stone.” “And with what is it covered?” “With whatever cloths are brought from here.” He said, “By the Messiah! I will build something better than it.” So he built for them a temple of white, black, red, and yellow marble, adorned with gold and silver, bordered it with jewels, and made doors for it with panels of gold and golden nails. He inlaid them with jewels, and placed a ruby in them, putting a screen over it. He would burn fragrant wood in it and splash its enclosures with musk till the jewels would be hidden. He ordered the people to make pilgrimage to it, and many from the tribes of Arabs did so for years. There were people who stayed in it devoting themselves to the service of God, and adorning it.

Nufayl al-Khath‘amī went stealthily one night and, when he saw no one moving, he brought excrement to it, splashing its *qibla* with it, and threw corpses into it. He informed Abraha of this, who became very angry and said, “Surely the Arabs did this out of anger because of their temple.” Then he said, “We will take that apart stone by stone.” He wrote to the Negus to inform him of this and asking him to send him his elephant, Maḥmūd. No one on earth had seen the like of his elephant in strength, size, and power, and he sent it to him. He made a raid against the House, as we have mentioned, until he said that birds came from the sea, each one had three stones, two stones in its claws, and one stone in its beak. They threw down the stones on them, which destroyed everything they struck. God sent a flood that came upon them and carried them to the sea and cast them into it. Abraha and those with him turned, fleeing. Abraha began to sink, limb by limb, until he died. As for

Maḥmūd, the elephant of the Negus, he lay down and did not show bravery against the Sanctuary and was saved, while the other elephants attacked it, were struck by the stones and died. It was the first time that smallpox and measles were seen.

Umayya b. Abī Ṣalt<sup>7</sup> said about that:

*The signs of our Lord are clear, none but infidels doubt them.*

*He imprisoned the elephant in al-Mughmmas to the ground as though hanstrung.*

*Around it were the men of al-Kīdah, warriors, active men, hawks in war.*

*They abandoned it and ran away headlong, their shoulder-bones broken.*

Al-Kalbī said, "When God destroyed them with stones, only Abraha al-Ashram b. Yaksūm escaped among them. When he journeyed, a bird flew over him, of which he was unaware, until he had entered to the Negus and informed him of what had befallen them. Hardly had he finished his report, than the bird threw a stone down upon him and he fell down dead. Thus God showed the Negus how the destruction of his people had taken place.

Al-Wāqīdī said that Abraha was the grandson of the Negus who lived in the days of the Prophet and believed in him.

Scholars debated about the date of the Year of the Elephant: Muqātil said that the Year of the Elephant was forty years before the birth of the Prophet, while 'Ubayd b. 'Umayr and al-Kalbī said that it was twenty-three years before his birth. Others said that the story of the Elephant occurred during the year of the birth of the Messenger of Allah. That is the version of most scholars and it is correct, which is proven by what Abū Bakr al-Jawzaqī said, "'Abd al-'Azīz b. Abi Thābit al-Zubayr related to us from Ibn Mūsā from Abū l-Jawza', who said that he heard 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān say to Ghiyāth b. Usaḥm al-Kinānī, "O Ghiyāth, are you older than the Messenger of Allah or was he?" He replied, "The Messenger of Allah is greater than I, but I am older than he. The Messenger of Allah was born in the Year of the Elephant, when my mother stood with me on the elephant droppings." This is also proven by what is related from 'Ā'ishah, who said, "I saw the elephant's leader and its groom in Mecca, both of them blind and infirm, begging for food."

<sup>7</sup> Guillaume. p. 28: *Abū l-Ṣalt b. Abī Rabī'a al-Thaqafi.*

When God completed the affair of the people of the Elephant, the Arabs glorified Quraysh and said that they are the people of God; God fought for them and saved them the trouble of their enemies. God is All-knowing, All-judging, and He is sufficient for us. How goodly is the One in Whom we trust. Amen.

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