Jewish Anecdotes in Qur'ānic Exegesis:

Prophetology and the Employment of Controversial Narratives in Tafsīr

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

This thesis is a critical study of the hermeneutical approach used in classical *tafsīr* concerning the employment of controversial narratives found in Qur'ānic Exegesis. It examines the discourses related to Qur'ānic narratives regarding select prophets and provides an understanding of their employment in *tafsīr* as a whole, through comparative analysis of some of the major *tafsīr* representing the three major schools of Islam, the Sunni, Shī'a and Mu'tazila, namely al-Ṭabarī, al-Suyūtī, al-Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabarsī, al-Ṭūsī, and al-Zamakhsharī.

The thesis posits that Qur'ānic exegeses have historically been polyvalent, with the presence of monovalent exegeses, yet this has changed, especially among certain schools, such as the Mu'tazila and certain Sunni and Shī'a exegetes. The works of these individuals resonated with those who succeeded them, leading to the exclusion of Jewish anecdotes from their works. The analysis shows that the term *Isrā'īliyyāt*, used for Jewish anecdotes, has had a volatile reception, resulting in mixed attitudes that continue to this day.

It is often presumed that the source of these narratives is the Jewish and Christian Bibles; which has never been definitively proven, whereas focus on other Biblical and para-Biblical sources is scarce at best. Furthermore, there are been a mixed response from different schools to these narratives and an assumption regarding certain groups and their hermeneutical and theological approaches. The research critically examines the factors that influenced these schools and exegetes in their approach to dealing with the controversial narratives found within the Biblical texts, how they employed them and what value they assigned to them.

Key to this is the discussion on the role of prophetology, previously undervalued and relatively unexplored in terms of its impact on the attitude towards these narratives. Included within this is the doctrine of infallibility featuring differently in each of the faiths and arguably within the schools within the faiths, which ultimately influenced their approach. Embedded within that is the categorisation of narratives and the role this plays in the acceptance and rejection of stories. This aspect of research and critical exploration does not receive the appropriate attention I believe it should.

A major aspect of the thesis focuses on the evolution of *tafsīr*, where I also examine the exegetical tool *Isrā'īliyyāt*, which have received a mixed reception from Muslim exegetes, yet features heavily in stories used to explain Qur'ānic narratives. The objective behind this is to

challenge the notion held by some people, especially those of seem to oppose polyvalence in *tafsīr*, that *Isrā'īliyyāt* are rejected based on their origin, as opposed to their authenticity. Three case studies from the Qur'ān, focusing on the tribulations faced by the prophet kings Joseph, David and Solomon are selected to highlight the differences between the three Abrahamic faiths towards prophets and prophetic infallibility and identify the differences and similarities between the three major schools in Islam, the Sunni, Shī'a and Mu'tazila.

Note on Writing Conventions

Dates

Where two different dates are used with a forward slash, the first refers to the Hijri year in the Islamic calendar while the second refers to the year in the Gregorian calendar, for example, 10 / 632. This combined date format is mostly used for events and individuals chronologically close to the early period of Islam.

The prefix ‘d.’ refers to date of death.

The Qur’ān

The translation of the Qur’ān by Abdullah Yusuf Ali has been used throughout this thesis, unless specified otherwise. Translation and transliteration of Qur’ānic terms and grammatical notes have been taken from the online database corpus.quran.com. Citation format used Q Chapter: Verse

The Ḥadīth

Translations from the online database sunnah.com have been used throughout this thesis, unless specified otherwise.

The Bible

All references have been taken from the *New Revised Standard Version of the Bible* (*NRSV*).

Transliteration of Arabic Words

The Library of Congress ALA-LC system of Romanisation of Arabic has been used for transliteration.

Letter	**Name**	**ALA-LC symbol**
ء	Hamzah	’
ا	Alif	ā
ب	bā’	b
ت	tā’	t
ث	thā’	th
ج	Jīm	j
ح	ḥā’	ḥ
خ	khā’	kh
د	Dāl	d

ذ	Dhāl	dh
ر	rā’	r
ز	Zāy	z
س	Sīn	s
ش	Shīn	sh
ص	ṣād	ṣ
ض	ḍād	ḍ
ط	ṭā’	ṭ
ظ	ẓā’	ẓ
‘ ayn	ع	‘
غ	Ghayn	gh
ف	fā’	f
ق	Qāf	q
ك	Kāf	k
ل	Lām	l
م	Mīm	m
ن	nu̱ n	n
ه	hā’	h
و	Wāw	ū
ي	yā’	ī
آ	alif maddah	’ā
ة	tā’ marbūṭah (in iḍāfa)	h at
ال	alif lām	al-
ى	alif maqṣūrah	Á
(اي diphthong)	ay	ay
ا و	aw	aw

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Introduction

The centrality of the Qur'ān to Islam and Muslims is an undisputed fact and its sacredness to more than two billion Muslims throughout the world for fourteen centuries is unquestionable. Since its revelation, the Qur'ān has been the pre-eminent text and source of guidance in all aspects of Muslim life, be it theological, socio-political, legal, spiritual or cultural. All Muslims consider this the standard to which they are obliged to adhere, to attain success in both worlds.

The Qur'ān enjoys the status as one of the most researched texts in history, with a multitude of works produced by scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim. For Muslims, it is the unaltered word of God and His final revelation to the prophet Muḥammad. Therefore, Muslims consider it as the validator of its predecessors, the Old Testament and the New Testament. God states "And We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a criterion over it."[1]

With God acknowledged as the author of the text, Muslims do not entertain discussion of an alternative author, considering it strictly forbidden for the believers to delve into this. God states "And if you are in doubt concerning what We have sent down upon our Bondman, bring forth a single Surah equal to it; and call upon all your supporters, other than Allah, if you are truthful."[2]

Despite this, the Qur'ān has been the subject of great scrutiny and the focus of research since its revelation, from Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Discussion ranges from its revelation to its content, historiography to moral issues, and people have examined it extensively, with research producing a large corpus of information. One significant area of research in Qur'ānic studies is *tafsīr* (Qur'ānic exegesis), whose principal function is to assist the reader in understanding the Qur'ān, primarily addressing Muslims, granting all access to what has been communicated by God.

Arguably, scholars trace the first example of Qur'ānic exegesis to the prophet Muḥammad, whose role was not restricted to merely being the recipient of the Qur'ān, but to communicating it, elucidating issues of a theological, judicial, moral, and ethical nature for his companions that needed

[1] Q5:48.

[2] Q2:23, Q2:99, Q4:105, Q6:92, Q12:2, Q15:9.

clarification.[3][4] Since then, the prophet Muḥammad's companions, their successors, and those who succeeded them took it upon themselves to carry on this tradition, approaching this Qur'ānic exegesis from various perspectives.

In truth, the divine nature of the Qur'ān makes it difficult for all believers to access it in its entirety, therefore, certain aspects require interpretation and explanation before comprehension occurs and Qur'ānic exegesis is the means to achieve this. Muslims believe God is eternal as are his attributes, including the attribute of speech, which incorporates the Qur'ān. Due to the divine nature of God, humankind will never be able to understand God; therefore will never understand His speech.

Probably the simplest representation scholars express of this is in the Qur'ān's division as *ẓāhir* (outer/exoteric) and *bāṭin* (inner/esoteric). Al-Ghazālī makes a clear distinction that speech is one of God's eternal attributes and thus composed of letters and sounds that cannot be fully comprehended. He argues there are multiple levels to the speech and there is more that we can understand, beyond the letters and sounds.[5] Statements from both 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) have supported the fact that the Qur'ān is multi-layered and thus needs interpretation.[6]

Hence, Qur'ānic exegesis has gradually developed over time, becoming an independent science with its principles and guidelines, allowing all manners of readers to access and understand the word of God and enabling them to make the teachings of the Qur'ān a daily part of their life. Qur'ānic exegesis covers a vast area ranging from theology to history, politics to philosophy, science to cosmology, and much more. Furthermore, exegetes have employed different sources for Qur'ānic interpretation, principally the Qur'ān itself, then *Ḥadīth*, followed by opinions of the scholars i.e. their opinions formulated using resources outside the Qur'ān and *Hadith* (used in rational exegesis) and finally

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[3] McAuliffe, Jane Dammen, 'Text and Tafsīr', in *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 13–36.

[4] Fudge, Bruce, 'Qur'ānic Exegesis in Medieval Islam and Modern Orientalism', *Welt Des Islams*, 46.2 (2006) 115-147. 10.1163/157006006777896858.

[5] Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid Muhammad ibn Muḥammad, *Iḥyā Ulūm al-Dīn*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār Ibn Hazm, 2005), pp. 341-342.

[6] Al-Sulamī, Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn, *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2001), pp. 22-23.

Elias, Jamal J. 'Ṣūfī Tafsīr Reconsidered; Exploring the Development of a Genre', in *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur'ān*, ed. by Mustafa Shah (London: Routledge, 2013), iii, pp. 349–62.

Heer, Nicholas, 'Abū Hāmid Al-Ghazālī's Esoteric Exegesis of the Koran', in *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur'ān*, ed. by Mustafa Shah (London: Routledge, 2013), iii, pp. 349–62.

Isrā'īliyyāt (Jewish Anecdotes). Ibn Taymiyyah claimed this to be the best method of exegesis.[7] Coincidentally, *Isrā'īliyyāt* have attracted attention and debate regarding their place in Qur'ānic exegesis, particularly in terms of their value and authenticity.[8] There is no doubt that *Isrā'īliyyāt* has been employed in Qur'ānic exegesis to gain an understanding of certain verses, especially those that are related to incidents concerning prophets and their nations.

Muslim exegetes have principally employed *Isrā'īliyyāt* in *tafsīr bil ma'thūr* (traditional exegesis), acknowledging it as one of the main sources of exegesis, varying in the degree of usage, some more dependent upon them than others. Arguably, the main reason for their usage is to plug gaps and provide details that the Qur'ān or *Ḥadīth* have been unable to provide for whatever reason. Western scholarship, Jewish and Christian, has focused extensively on examining the appropriation of narratives allegedly from Islam's antecedent scriptures, whereas Muslim scholarship has had a mixed attitude towards the employment of the Judeo-Christian traditions, often accused of eagerly dismissing any traditions that they deem controversial due to their supposed conflict with Islamic theological beliefs. Hence, the presence of the narratives varies from few to many, which I will discuss later on.[9]

Isrā'īliyyāt constitute stories or traditions that provide additional explanation or interpretation where required in Islamic scriptures.[10] The companions of the prophet Muḥammad were the first to employ them, paving the way for those succeeding them to employ them to a greater degree. Furthermore, it is arguable these narratives were not subject to the same degree of scrutiny as prophetic traditions, resulting in an increased acceptance over time.

Within the Qur'ānic text itself, narratives are an intrinsic part, often acting as reports of historical incidents, past nations and earlier prophets, but very few appear as detailed narratives, often leaving the reader in a state of uncertainty. Muslim exegetes have attempted to plug the gaps present in the stories by consulting related texts, primarily from the Qur'ān itself, then *Ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions), followed by sources external to Islam such as traditions mentioned in the Old Testament, the New Testament, apocryphal and pseudepigraphical works. Arguably, it is Islam's relationship to the other

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[7] Ibn Taymiyyah, Taqī al-Din Ahmad, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, , ed. by Dr Adnan Zarzur, (Damascus, Syria, University of Damascus, 1972) pp. 93-105.

[8] Ibid, pp. 100-101

[9] Razali, Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi, Aḥmad Noor, and Jaffary Awang. 2018. 'The Fourth Source: Isrā'īliyyāt and the Use of the Bible in Muslim Scholarship', in *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context*, ed. by Daniel J. Crowther, Shirin Shafaie, Ida Glaser, and Shabbir Akhtar (London: Routledge), pp. 103–15.

[10] Vajda. G, 'Isrā'īlīyāt', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition*, iv, ed. P.J. Bearman, (Leiden, Brill, 1997), pp. 211-212.

Abrahamic faiths, as highlighted in the Qur'ān, which permits or encourages Muslim scholarship to draw upon the antecedent texts in matters of belief, particularly where it concerns issues such as faith, prophets, previous nations, their sacred books the Torah and Bible.[11] This alone shows that there was an encouragement towards polyvalence where Qur'ānic exegesis is concerned and there is scope for this.

Consequently, exegetes have resorted to employing narratives found in these antecedent texts, but this raises a question, why they would do so? Does Islam not have the answers within its tradition? This has led to scholars examining the stories employed within Qur'ānic exegesis, but the scale of their approach varies. Furthermore, the main cause for the employment of these traditions that some scholars identify lies in the attitude of certain Muslim scholars towards the credibility and acceptability of these narrations. However, since the last century, the level of interest in the Qur'ān and all related material has increased, resulting in greater interest in these narratives with added claims from some people that a great deal of borrowing has taken place.

Scholars such as Roberto Tottoli[12], Brannon Wheeler[13], Reuven Firestone[14] and Ismail Albayrak have conducted research in this field, each of whom has made significant contributions towards understanding these narratives and their origins, but their focus has been mainly concentrated on the stories from the perspective of their validity, origin or concerning a particular prophet or particular verses. [15]

Another interesting observation is a large number of these stories include Biblical prophets and do not always depict them in a manner deemed acceptable to a person of faith because they portray prophets as individuals of dubious nature, who would not shy away from surrendering to their baser human qualities, thus arguably bringing their role into disrepute.[16]

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[11] Q4:163-165, Q46:9, Q42:15.

[12] Tottoli, Roberto. 1999. 'Origin and Use of the Term Isrā'īliyyāt in Muslim Literature', *Arabica*, 46: 193–210.

[13] Wheeler, Brannon. 'Isrā'īliyyāt', in *The Qur'an an Encyclopaedia*, ed. by Oliver Leaman (Routledge, London, 2006).

[14] Firestone, Reuven, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, NY, USA: State University of New York Press, 1990).

[15] Albayrak, I. 2002. 'Isra'iliyyat and Classical Exegetes' Comments on the Calf with a Hollow Sound Q.20: 83-98/ 7: 147-155 with Special Reference to Ibn 'Atiyya', Journal of Semitic Studies, 47.1: 39–65 https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/47.1.39.

[16] Mohammed, Khaleel. *David in the Muslim Tradition: The Bathsheba Affair* (London: Lexington Books, 2015).

Verheyden, Joseph. *Solomon in History and Tradition, The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage, and Architect* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

This leads us to the concept of Prophethood or *nubuwwah* which is a requisite doctrine of Islam, which dictates Muslims show reverence to all prophets, irrespective of any mention in the Qur'ān or not. Therefore, most Muslims have always maintained a reverential attitude towards all prophets and held the belief that all are innocent, free from sin and under the protection of God, meaning they could not commit any sin or do any harm deliberately. In essence, they are afforded *'iṣmah* or prophetic infallibility, because, after all, they are representatives of God and the highest-ranking virtuous humans.[17] The Qur'ān teaches Muslims to believe that all the prophets are innocent spokespersons of God, sent to His people for their guidance; therefore, they should not act in an unfaithful manner.[18]

In truth, Muslim scholars differ in their opinions regarding the level of prophetic infallibility afforded to prophets but overall acknowledge their infallibility. Walker contests this belief arguing the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* paint a picture contrary to what Muslims believe as they attest to prophetic sins freely if a person understands them literally.[19] On the other hand, al-Farhārī asserts the majority of Muslim scholars believe prophets are protected from *kufr* (disbelief) before revelation and after, based on *ijmā'* (scholarly consensus). Furthermore, the majority of scholars believe God also protects them from major sins committed intentionally.[20]

Muslim scholars believe God sent approximately one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets to different nations, beginning with Adam and ending with Muḥammad, the last and final messenger in Muslim tradition.[21] The details concerning the lives of these prophets are limited and only tend to deal with selected incidents God deemed necessary for the prophet Muḥammad to be aware of and by extension humankind. Arguably, the focus for Muslims was and should always be their prophet Muḥammad and the role of other prophets should be secondary to his. In light of this, providing detailed narratives for other prophets was never God's primary intention, their primary function was to communicate God's guidance and commandments, therefore if any details are found elsewhere, their role is to help people understand their prophet better. Subsequently, God provides details of certain aspects of their lives to support the prophet Muḥammad in his prophethood and nothing more.

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[17] Q4:69.

[18] Rubin, Uri, 'Prophets and Prophethood', in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), iv, pp. 289–306.

[19] Walker, Paul E. 'Impeccability', in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden. Brill, 2004), ii, pp. 505-507.

[20] Al-Farhārī, 'Abd al-'Azīz, *Al-Nibrās Sharh Sharh al-'Aqāid al-Nasafi'*, Âstiâne Kitabevi, Üsküdar Sialkoti, 'Abd al-Ḥakīm. '*Al-Khayālī*', (Peshawar, Pakistan, Al-Maktaba al-Ḥaqqāniyyah), p. 283.

[21] Al-Haythamī, 'Alī Ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Sulaymān Nūr al-Dīn, *Majma' al-Zawāid wa Manba' al-Fawāid*, (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Dār al-Minhaj, 2015), Ḥadīth 734, ii, pp. 198-199.
Narrated by Abū Dharr "I asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) "O Prophet of God! How many prophets are there? He replied "One hundred and twenty four thousand".

This is evident because the prophet Muḥammad's life has received greater coverage in comparison to other prophets and Muslim scholars have attempted to document all aspects of it, primarily through the Qur'ān, followed by *Ḥadīth* and *Sīra*. Arguably, there is very little if anything unknown about his life. *Ḥadīth* transmitted from the ṣaḥābah and *Sīra* literature recorded as early as the first century by historians such as Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767) and Ibn Hishām (d. 213/828) serve to provide ample detail about him. Raven suggests the function of the *Sīra* literature as linking the Qur'ānic passages to moments in the prophet Muḥammad's life, whereby within the narrative plots the Qur'ān may convey God's commands to human kind.[22]

The Qur'ān only mentions twenty-four other prophets by name, providing little, if any detail regarding them. The degree of information associated with them varies with the only complete story of a prophet being that of Joseph and even that is replete with gaps and ambiguities. To compensate for the lack of information Muslims have resorted to other sources to assist them, including *Isrā'īliyyāt*.

Additionally, the argument has always existed that polyvalence has always been a notable characteristic of pre-modern *tafsīr*. Calder vigorously argues that polyvalence has been a structural characteristic of *tafīsr*, 'constitutive of the genre'.[23] He argues that despite the existence of 'firmly monovalent' *tafsīr* throughout Islamic history, overall the main body of the tradition embraced diversity.[24] When it comes to a need for details to clarify various aspects of Qur'ānic verses, especially its stories, polyvalence is arguably an important feature of *tafsīr*, providing the framework for Muslim exegetes to employ the necessary narratives and plug the gaps.

Consequently, polyvalence in *tafsīr* has led to the use of *Isrā'īliyyāt*, a practise that can trace its roots to the time of the prophet Muḥammad where he permitted the companions to employ *Isrā'īliyyāt*. He allowed this to assist their understanding of details of Qur'ānic narratives and his permission upon similarities that existed between both sources.[25] This meant that *Isrā'īliyyāt* were acceptable as long as they conformed to stringent conditions, mainly that they did not contradict the teachings of Islam. This has led to Muslim scholarship reacting to the appropriation of these narratives differently. Some

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[22] Raven, Wim. 2004. 'Sīra and the Qur'ān', in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill), v, pp. 29–53.

[23] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham*, ed. by G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London, 1993), pp. 101-140.

[24] ———. 2021b. 'Did Modernity End Polyvalence? Some Observations on Tolerance for Ambiguity in Sunni *Tafsīr*', *Journal of Quranic Studies*, 23.1: 36–70 https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2021.0450.

[25] Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad Ibn Ismā'īl, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Translated by Dr Muḥammad Muhsin Khan, (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Darussalam Publishers and Distributers) Ḥadīth 3461, iv, p. 417.

scholars elected to avoid them completely, whilst others were conservative in their use and finally, some used them liberally, seemingly without any consideration for their authenticity and validity.

One major reason for avoiding them is the controversial details contained within them that challenge Muslim doctrine. We find an example of this within the narrative depicting the alleged affair of David and Bathsheba, which notable exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī appropriate in their respective works.[26] These narratives are blasphemous as they challenge the positive portrayal of prophets within the Islamic tradition, which directly affects the level of narratives appropriated. This caused a gradual decrease in their inclusion since scholars viewed *Isrā'īliyyāt* as a threat to the true understanding of Islam and a greater dependency was being shown towards them. In the eyes of these scholars, these narratives compromise the primacy of Islam and its texts.

The primary focus of this study is to examine the attitude of Muslims exegetes towards controversial narratives found in Qur'ānic exegesis relating to prophets that cast aspersions upon their status from the perspective of prophetic infallibility, challenging Muslim doctrine. Coupled with this is an examination of the debate between polyvalence versus monovalence in *tafsīr* that examines both approaches and their suitability when dealing with aforementioned dynamics. Subsequently, this will also include a study of the doctrines of the three Abrahamic faiths and the three major schools in Islam to establish the evolution of their attitudes towards these narratives and influencing factors.

This will involve a study that aims to investigate the inclusion and exclusion of Jewish anecdotes in Qur'ānic exegesis, with a particular focus on the controversial stories of the Prophets. The Jewish and Biblical texts have provided detailed and chronological narratives of the prophets, which Muslim exegetes have employed some and rejected others, but more importantly, what was the underlying reason for this? Many theories have been posited to explain this, for example, the relationship of *Isrā'īliyyāt* to Muslim theology, the differing methodologies of the exegetes, the notion of polyvalence and monovalence and more. An example of this phenomenon is the story of Lot and his offering of his daughters to the people who came seeking his guests. The Qur'ān states that he was indicating to them that they should seek partners of the opposite gender, but some Biblical scholars more recently have claimed that he was prostituting them, a claim that Muslim exegetes deny vehemently.[27] Another detail from the same Biblical narrative is Lot's daughters allegedly getting

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[26] Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āya al-Qur'ān,* (Egypt, Markaz al-Buḥūth wal Dirāsāt al-'Arabiyyah wal Islāmiyyah, 2001), xx, p. 64.

[27] Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āya al-Qur'ān,* xii, pp. 449-507.

him intoxicated and committing incest with him (Genesis 19:32-35); a narration Muslim exegetes categorically deny. Concerning the latter detail, the Qur'ān is silent and no reference exists to this

Comparative prophetology between the three major faiths is an area that has received relatively little attention in the past but recently has become an area of greater regard. The role of prophets is central to all three Abrahamic faiths but comparatively the coverage that the antecedent texts afford prophets is controversial and dissimilar to Islam. Prophets in Islam are portrayed as the perfect humans, representatives of God, free from sin, corruption and human faults, whilst in the antecedent scriptures, despite having often been portrayed as figures of authority and honour, they have been depicted as individuals who frequently allowed their base human qualities to overwhelm their judgement, resulting in sin. Despite such portrayal, Muslim exegetes have not shied away from employing these narratives in their works because they provide insight into the lives and achievements of these individuals not found within the Qur'ān.

One probable cause for this is the role of the exegetes in elucidating ambiguity found in certain Qur'ānic verses, attempting to make them accessible to ordinary believers. This requires a consideration of all possible sources such as the Qur'ān itself, *Ḥadīth*, opinions of the companions and their successors and traditions of the People of the Books. This approach advocates for polyvalence in *tafsīr*, a point Calder argues in favour of because it is an integral trait of classical *tafsīr*.[28] In essence, polyvalence has provided a platform for the exegetes to provide greater meaning for the Qur'ān and allows them to keep the Qur'ān relevant to all eras, but it is arguable whether it has had a positive or negative impact on the genre.

This thesis aims to examine the inclusion in *tafsīr* of controversial narratives regarding prophets found in *Isrā'īliyyāt*, which are allegedly taken from the People of the Books. This examination will consist mainly of comparative critical textual analysis with an assessment of the relevant traditions to provide insight into why the exegetes felt the need to utilise them and an attempted explanation for the inclusion of this detail. It will also examine the impact of polyvalence and monovalence on *tafsīr*, particularly *Isrā'īliyyāt* and prophetic infallibility.

The central focus of this thesis lies in attempting to explain the appropriation of controversial narratives by focusing on the narratives present in Qur'ānic exegesis, which seemingly conflict with the general Islamic doctrine of prophetic infallibility. To achieve this I will examine the three most influential theological schools in Islam and utilise the works of their leading scholars to assist this study. I will attempt to show how the attitude toward *Isrā'īliyyāt* evolved between acceptance and

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[28] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr*, pp. 101-140.

rejection and the impact this had on the way prophets are viewed. Furthermore, I will endeavour to identify whether there were any challenges to the theological positions of the different schools by other factors such as pedagogy and polyvalence in justifying the inclusion of these narratives. I will also attempt to explain whether the categorisation of these narratives as myths may also have affected their appropriation.

My study focuses on three Qur'ānic narratives associated with three different prophets, investigating how they are depicted in the Qur'ān, the level and manner of detail contained in their respective narratives, where there are gaps that needed addressing and how exegetes have attempted to use these narratives. I will follow this up with an examination of the exegetical works belonging to select scholars from the three main theological schools, which Muslims view as the main representatives of mainstream Islam and how they attempt to reconcile the detail they provided in the narratives and Islamic prophetology. To achieve this my study will also examine the prophetology of the three Abrahamic faiths as a contributory factor because proponents for both employment and exclusion of the narratives claim this point as a central issue to their arguments. I do not believe it is simply a case of doctrine as some scholars claim, that the exclusion of these narratives or their inclusion is simply due to their compliance or conflict with someone's beliefs, the issue is more complex.

In truth, this is an oversimplified view because this approach stems from the belief that the Qur'ān, *Ḥadīth* and exegetical contributions of the companions were the main exegetical tools; *Isrā'īliyyāt*, despite their early acceptance, were an object of suspicion and mistrust. In my thesis, I will attempt to show how exegetes utilise the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* but supplement the details that are absent through *Isrā'īliyyāt*, even though they may challenge their theological positions. Furthermore, It examines the development of attitudes toward *Isrā'īliyyāt* and attempts to look beyond their stigmatisation to see if there is greater value to them beyond their inclusion as fillers for gaps in Islamic tradition. I will attempt to show that there is possibly an influence of polyvalence upon the genre and to preserve polyvalence in *tafsīr* it is essential to consider the attitude towards them.

For my research, I have selected three case studies that consist of three controversial narratives. The narratives focus on three prophet kings whom the Qur'ān cites as exemplars for the prophet Muḥammad, how their lives are guidance for him and his followers. The narratives selected are the story of Joseph and the Potiphar's wife, David and Bathsheba, and the tribulation of Solomon, all of whom have enjoyed a detailed portrayal in the Qur'ān. The exegetical narratives ascribed to them challenge the Muslim belief of prophetic infallibility, whilst raising questions concerning Jewish and Christian attitudes and beliefs concerning them. Amongst the most important questions raised will be "Why Muslim scholars would resort to utilising such narratives if they were controversial?"

Upon examination, we find Qur'ānic passages mostly contain very little detail about prophets in general, usually focusing on their name; their inclusion in particular groups of prophets, the interactions of the prophets with their people, and certain incidents that serve as lessons for the reader. One explanation offered for the lack of detail is that believers are not essentially required to possess detailed accounts of prophets because the narratives are only supposed to serve as lessons for them, especially incidents in the prophets' lives that apply to people's own lives, therefore detailed and lengthy narratives are not required as such. The objective is the lesson and commandments contained within, anything else is secondary.

In particular, ancient knowledge within Islamic history has been a concern for Western scholars who claim there are many inconsistencies in the Qur'ānic narrative details. Muslim scholars have placed greater emphasis on the authenticity of the transmission and origin of the narratives, thus often ignoring the content. Western scholars further accuse Muslim scholars of dismissing narratives that they have believed to be of Jewish origin, purely on the belief that Jewish people fabricated these narratives to cause harm to Islam and Muslims.

In light of these facts, my thesis will attempt to identify whether the narratives are *Isrā'īliyyāt* and exist in the Bible or extra-Biblical sources. This will in turn lead to examining the reason for the inclusion or exclusion of such narratives. Is it possible the underlying reason can be identified as theological, socio-political, cultural, and pedagogical, all of the aforementioned or something else entirely? It is important to remember the principal aim of the thesis is not to identify the primacy of text, but to help better understand the role of prophets in the Abrahamic three faiths and whether polyvalence is a necessary characteristic of *tafsīr* or a problem.

1.1.1 Sources

The study will include nine commentaries belonging to three different theological schools that represent mainstream Islam at their particular times and largely the beliefs of Muslims today. The number reflects my belief that a polyvalent approach to *tafsīr* provides a broader understanding and a greater representation of its rich tradition, even though a monovalent approach has always existed and arguably has its own merits. In the case of prophetic infallibility and controversial narratives, I believe a polyvalent approach is better as it will provide a greater depth to a subject that is delicate and requires a broader view.

The Qur'ānic exegesis I have selected represents a broad selection of exegetes from the three major schools of thought I previously identified. The exegesis selected to represent the Sunni school comprises of;

1. *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr Ibn Yazīd Ibn Kathīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922)
2. *Tafsīr al-Rāzī (Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb)* by Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad Ibn 'Umar Ibn al-Husayn at-Taymī al-Bakrī at-Tabaristanī Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 544/1210 AH)
3. *Al-Durr Al-Manthūr fī Tafsīr Bil-Ma'thūr* by Abū al-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)
4. *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm* by Abū al-Fiḍā 'Imād al-Din Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr Al-Damishqī (d. 774/1373)
5. *Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al Qur'ān* by Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Abū Bakr al-Qurṭubī.

The lone *tafsīr* representing the Mu'tazila will be;

6. *Al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq al-Tanzīl* by Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd Ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144).

The two *tafsīr* representing the Shī'ī school are;

7. *Majma' al-Bayān li-'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* by Abū 'Ali Faḍl Ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭabarsī (d. 548/1153)
8. *Al-Ṭibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1066)

I will compare the narratives in these exegeses to those present in the Old Testament and New Testament to determine whether the aforementioned exegetes appropriated them and if their personal views influenced their interpretations. The analysis will also highlight the difficulty in determining the origins of the narratives.

The exegeses selected for this thesis represent the foremost schools of their eras and as expected highlight their differences, but unsurprisingly also reveal the influence of some schools upon others, showing elements of borrowing and to some extent even certain surprises in their respective approaches. For example, in some cases, the Sunnis seem to be far more relaxed than their counterparts the Shī'ī and Mu'tazila, whereas in other cases it is the reverse. One common factor identified in all their approaches is their employment of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in their respective works, which is interesting as the exegetes do not belong to one school of *tafsīr* and are regarded as theological authorities within their respective schools. This shows that in certain respects they can converge upon a common approach, possibly due to the need for polyvalence.

1.1.2 Methods

To achieve my objective the methodological approach will involve mainly comparative textual analysis, assessment and criticism. A historical description is required to look at the approach of

Muslims and Western Qur'ānic scholars towards the exegesis of the Qur'ān and the use of narratives in the Qur'ān with a brief analysis. The research will explore the role of myths and their influence to create an understanding of how and why exegetes include such narratives. The evolution of *tafsīr*, its major sources, influencers, and hermeneutical approaches all influenced the attitude towards the narratives. In addition, I will examine the role of polyvalence to determine to what extent, if any, this affects the attitude of exegetes of different schools and possibly eras in which they wrote them.

I will present an analysis of how the Biblical and para-Biblical texts depict the prophets and the theological beliefs of both faiths regarding them. Additionally, I will examine the approaches of different schools of thought to show their behaviour towards the inclusion or exclusion of these anecdotes. I will assess the case studies and provide my insight into them.

The material used will be mainly historical and textual consisting of exegeses from Muslim scholars and relevant theological, and historical texts, including other relevant Arabic sources, for which I have used my translation. I will include the Old Testament and other pseudepigraphical works and research available on Jewish anecdotes.

The eight exegeses from the Sunni, Shī'ī, and Mu'tazila schools will provide valuable insight into the development of appropriation, fluctuating between acceptance and rejection, which in itself alternates from complete rejection, and complete acceptance, to a balanced approach. It moves beyond the belief of many exegetes, from all three schools, that the underlying reasons for their attitude were merely theological. This questions the traditional assumption that those who contributed to *tafsīr bil ma'thūr* are responsible for the employment of *Isrā'īliyyāt*, rather it remains to be determined whether they were predominantly from one particular school of thought or whether this was general.

A major problem I have faced is providing a fair representation of all three schools. The Mu'tazila presence in *tafsīr* is scarce due to a lack of works that have survived. The pre-eminent Mu'tazila *tafsīr* has always been al-Kashshāf, but aside from this, only four others have been transferred from manuscript to book form, and they contain very little detail or discussion.[29] This forces me to rely mainly on al-Kashshāf and on other exegetes, where they have cited a Mu'tazila reference.

1.1.3 Exegetes and their Works

Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr Ibn Yazīd al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) is considered the first exegete after the formative period and is pre-eminent amongst the exegetes. Noted for his compilation of an

[29] Nabha, Khidr Muḥammad, *Mausū'āt al-Tafāsīr al-Mu'tazila*, ed. by Dr Khidr Muḥammad Nabha, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2009).

encyclopaedic exegesis, it is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest Qur'ānic commentaries to have been produced. Yet, in terms of details about his life, very little is known, except what is recorded in his compilations. He is recognised for placing great emphasis on *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) and in his scholarly approach, he was known to quote multiple narrations, but in the end, would always offer his view of what he deemed to be the most authentic. Al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, is an excellent example of a polyvalent approach that allows the reader to enjoy a variation of narrations, representing a broader view of the issue discussed.

Bosworth states that al-Ṭabarī's own dogmatic beliefs seem to be within the framework of 'orthodox Islam', according to those presented by Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, who was before him and also al-Ash'arī, who came after him.[30] This is evident in his dogmatic writings such as *Sharḥ al-Sunnah*. Bosworth claims that al-Ṭabarī has been accused of *Shī'a* tendencies, however, ill-founded, chiefly by contemporary Ḥanbalī scholars, but this was due to his stance in his *Ikhtilāf al-Fuqahā* where he disregarded Aḥmad Ibn Hanbal as a jurist, simply acknowledging him only as a *Ḥadīth* scholar. Otherwise, there is no real evidence to suggest that he had any inclinations towards Shī'ism, other than admiration for the fourth caliph 'Ali, a common position, even amongst the staunchest Sunnis.[31]

Bosworth also adds that he was initially a Shāfi'ī, but as he grew in scholarship and his views developed, he and his followers became adherents of the *Jarīriyyah* school (ascribed to his father). However, his school did not survive after his death, as it was unable to compete against the other established schools. In his adoption of *ijtihād,* al-Ṭabarī shows similarities and maybe some influence from the *Ḥanafī* School.[32]

According to evidence provided by the likes of the notable *Ḥadīth* scholar al-'Asqalānī[33], and historian Ibn al-Athīr[34], he was a part of the *Ahl al-Sunnah* school. Al-'Asqalānī claims that accusations of Shī'ism are completely false and he is an imam of the *Ahl al-Sunnah*.[35] Ibn al-Athīr further adds that if those who accused him of Shī'ism were asked to define what Shī'ism constituted, they would struggle to explain themselves. The animosity directed towards al-Ṭabarī is ascribed to the Ḥanbalī scholars and due to his exclusion of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal from his corpus *Ikhtilāf al-*

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[30] Bosworth, C.E., 'Al-Ṭabarī', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), x, pp. 11-15.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Al-'Asqalānī, Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥajar Ibn Ḥajar, *Lisān al-Mīzān*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Bashār al-Islāmiyyah, 2000), vii, pp. 25-26.

[34] Ibn al-Athīr, Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn Abī al-Karam al-Shaybānī, *Al-Kāmil fi al-Tārīkh*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1987), vii, pp. 8-11.

[35] Al-Asqalānī, Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥajar, *Lisān al-Mīzān*, (Maktabah Maṭbū'āt al-Islāmiyyah, 2002), vii, pp. 25-26.

Fuqahā. The evidence suggests that he was a Sunni exegete and his exegesis is recognised as one of the earliest, a representation of the formative period and the first major corpus in Qur'ānic exegesis in two and a half centuries. He did not hesitate to include a large number of prophetic traditions as well as Biblical narratives. It can be said that his main intention was to collect related traditions and as a result, he was not too concerned with vetting them.

The next Sunni exegete is the renowned polymath Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad Ibn 'Umar Ibn al-Husayn at-Taymī al-Bakrī at-Tabaristanī, popularly known as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 544/1210 AH) and his *tafsīr* is titled *Tafsīr al-Rāzī (Tafsīr al-Kabīr/Mafatīḥ al-Ghayb)*. His staunch defence of Sunni Islam earned him enemies amongst the Mu'tazila, who drove him out of Khawārzim, and the Karāmiyyah, who vehemently accused him of corrupting Islam. Goldziher accuses al-Rāzī of being influenced by the Mu'tazila in issues such as the *'iṣmah* of prophets and the validity of *āḥād* traditions in matters of theology.[36] Al-Rāzī was a prolific writer with many encyclopaedic works to his name, primarily on theology, but his work of *tafsīr* is by far his most famous work in the category of *tafsīr bil ra'y* and philosophical *tafsīr*.[37]

The next exegete is the notable luminary, Abū al-Faḍl 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Muḥammad Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) and his *tafsīr Al-Durr Al-Manthūr fī Tafsīr Bil-Ma'thūr*.[38] Recognised as probably the most prolific author in Islamic history, al-Suyūtī is acknowledged as authoring approximately nine hundred and eighty-one texts and possessed a prodigious memory, having memorised two hundred thousand *Ḥadīth*. Chief amongst his works is his voluminous work on *tafīsr*, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr*, where he heavily relies upon *Ḥadīth* and the sayings of the earlier scholars. His *tafsīr* is a prime example of a polyvalent *tafsīr* that covers a wide scope of views on all matters related to Qur'ānic exegesis.[39]

The next *tafsīr* is *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, a scholar of great acclaim and prodigious knowledge, Abū al-Fiḍā 'Imād al-Din Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar Ibn Kathīr Al-Damishqī (d. 774/1373) is one of the most notable and influential scholars in Islamic history. [40] A renowned historian, *Ḥadīth* specialist and exegete, Ibn Kathīr is noted for his *Magnus Opus* on Islamic history *al-Bidāyah wal Nihāyah* and his

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[36] Anwati, G.C, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, The Encyclopaedia of Islam, (Leiden, Brill, 2004), ii, pp. 751-755.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Geoffroy, E, Peri Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, Edmund Bosworth, and E. J. Van Donzel, , 'Al-Suyūtī', *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), ix, pp. 913-916.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Laoust, H, 'Ibn Kathīr', *in The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (Leiden: Brill, 2004), iii, pp. 817-818.

tafsīr of the Qur'ān. His *tafsīr* has displayed the influence Ibn Taymiyyah had upon him and is identified as having a predominantly monovalent approach by Calder.[41]

Al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al Qur'ān is the next *tafsīr* written by Abū 'Abdullah Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Abū Bakr al-Qurṭubī.[42] The illustrious Maliki jurisconsult, exegete, *Ḥadīth* scholar is an Andalusian Sunni Muslim polymath, who is acknowledged as an authority of his time and a leading figure in Qur'ānic exegesis. His *tafsīr* focused on providing a linguistic approach, explaining difficult words, deducing juristic rulings, as suggested by the Qur'ān and more.

Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl is the major work of the sole representative of the Mu'tazila school, Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd Ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), the lonely figure who shoulders the responsibility of not only representing but defending his school. His pre-eminent *tafsīr Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq al-Tanzīl* is enough to hold its own against the other schools, and its influence will be shown later on when the case studies are examined. Recognised as an authority in Qur'ānic exegesis, *Ḥadīth*, Arabic language, Arabic grammar, Arabic rhetoric and other sciences; his authority is accepted by scholars of other denominations, despite his theological differences. His exegesis has found great acceptance and is a benchmark for later exegetes.

According to Madelung, al-Zamakhsharī completed his *tafsīr* in 528/1138. He spared no effort in explaining the Qur'ān, presenting grammatical, lexicographical, and rhetorical discussions, variant readings, and miraculous readings. However, his rationalistic approach earned him criticism among traditionalist Sunnis.[43]

The next set of exegetes represents the Shī'ī school of thought. The first *tafsīr* to represent this school is *Majma' al-Bayān li-'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* produced by the eminent Shī'ī scholar Abū 'Ali Faḍl Ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153). He is responsible for authoring texts in numerous sciences including doctrine, theology, ethics and grammar He was a notable authority amongst the Shī'a and his exegesis is held in high regard and is a good example of a tradition-based theory.[44]

Al-Tibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1066). The principal disciple of al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, whom he succeeded upon his death. By this time he had

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[41] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham*, pp. 101-140.

[42] Ebied, R. Y., and M. J. L. Young, 'Al-Ḳurṭubī', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, ed. by C. E. Bosworth, E. Van Donzel, B. Lewis, and Ch Pellat, (Leiden: Brill, 1986), v, p. 512.

[43] Madelung, W, 'Al-Zamakhsharī', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, xii, pp. 840-841.

[44] MacEoin, D, 'Al-Ṭabrisī', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, x, pp. 40-41.

amassed an impressive bibliography and had gained the support and backing of the Caliph, who appointed him to the principal chair of Theology. A prolific writer, al-Ṭūsī composed over fifty texts and modified the works of al-Mufīd and al-Murtaḍā, granting a structure to Imāmī law that granted it a certain freedom from the Imām. His *tafsīr* is considered the first rationalist Imāmī *tafsīr* and a reference for future scholarship.[45]

These exegeses will be the bedrock of the research, alongside the Biblical texts, further supported by any other pseudepigraphical works that may prove useful. Due to having no experience with Hebrew, Greek or any other language the earlier texts have been written in, other than Arabic and Urdu, I decided to use the Jewish Study Bible, a text that Biblical scholars and Rabbis from Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Judaism movements have produced, numbering nearly forty scholars from around the globe. The text is very popular due to ease of navigation and the additional information has allowed the reader to better understand the text. Many consider it to be the best Jewish Biblical scholarship today.

I have excluded the Christian Bible from this thesis as it does not contain any narratives that concern my research and the three case studies do not feature in it in any capacity.

1.1.4 Thesis Structure

The research will comprise seven chapters, divided into sub-sections.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the thesis where I will present the sources employed, the methods utilised, the exegetes, and their works.

Chapter 2 will present the literature review where I will analyse the existing works that have engaged with *Isrā'īliyyāt* and the extent of their study. I will highlight the gaps in their research and duly present my own area of study.

Chapter 3 will deal with the study of prophetology. I will examine the Jewish, Christian and Islamic theological beliefs to lay the groundwork for the research. I will aim to show that this is a contributory factor to the inclusion or exclusion of these narratives because theological beliefs may have played an integral part, or it will eliminate this possibility and point in another direction. In addition, I will also examine the other major point of discussion, the issue of polyvalence versus monovalence and its impact on the appropriation of narratives on prophetic infallibility.

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[45] Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad 'Alī, 'Al-Ṭūsī', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, iii, pp. 745-746.

Chapter 4 will analyse the types of narratives that exist, the definition of myth and its use concerning religious texts, the role of myths and legends in Islam, Qur'ānic terminology for narratives and their acceptability, Biblical and Qur'ānic prophetology, examining the role of prophets and their history in the respective faiths. It will also examine prophetic narratives in the Qur'ān.

Chapter 5 will study the evolution of *tafsīr* beginning with the prophet Muḥammad's era until the modern day, the sources of *tafsīr*, prominent exegetes, the schools of Qur'ānic exegesis and their influence, the hermeneutical approach of the three major representatives of Islam, the Sunni, Shī'a and Mu'tazila, and polyvalence as an important factor in all of these aspects.

Chapter 6 examines prophetic infallibility and polyvalence in *tafsīr* and will analyse the case studies of the three prophet kings, presenting the Jewish, Christian and Islamic versions of the stories and look at the scope of inclusion within the selected exegeses, who included or excluded the controversial narratives and to what degree they were polyvalent or monovalent in their approach.

Chapter 7 will present the findings of the research and identify future areas of study.

The study is a step towards understanding the role of Jewish anecdotes and the extent of their inclusion in Qur'ānic exegesis. It will help to understand the role and importance of prophets in the three Abrahamic faiths, the role of polyvalence and its importance in the genre of *tafīsr*, and how it may have influenced exegetes and their attitudes towards controversial narratives regarding Prophets.

Literature Review

Modern interest from Western Scholars in Islamic studies, particularly Qur'ānic studies, can be traced back to Abraham Geiger (d. 1874), who is considered the initiator of the shift from a polemic-based approach to the current theoretical scientific approach. Geiger's book *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* ("What did Mohammed take from Judaism?") challenges the Muslim belief concerning the divine origin of the Qur'ān, clearly arguing that it was a product of human beings and derived from the scriptures of its earlier predecessors, Christianity and Judaism. As a result, his work went on to inspire a whole generation of Western scholars who adopted his approach and tried to understand Islam's Holy Book through his approach. Geiger's work inspired the likes of Joseph Horovitz (d. 1931), Heinrich Speyer (d.1935) and Richard Bell (d. 1952), who many consider the next most influential person after Geiger. Bell takes on the mammoth task of attempting to date Qur'ānic revelations and shows that Muḥammad took from other faiths, rearranging the Qur'ān to what he believes is the chronological revelation.[46] Despite his failure to achieve this, his contribution paved the way for others such as Torrey, Jeffrey, Watt, Tisdell and others.

The next person many consider the most influential in Islamic studies is John Wansbrough (d. 2002) and his contribution is identified as the major influence in the new direction of Qur'ānic studies. Wansbrough examined Qur'ānic reading from a purely literary perspective, avoiding the historical context that had been the major theme since Geiger.[47] Wansbrough did not want to prove that the Qur'ān took directly from its predecessors, but that it was developed at a time when a lot of Biblical/Rabbinic material existed and influenced its compilation.

Over the last three decades, Western Scholars have taken a different approach to Qur'ānic study placing it within the same discourse environment as its predecessors, as an equal, moving away from the reductionist approach that gave prominence to their predecessors. They have tried to display parallels between the texts to show that there was a link between the three sacred texts, beyond one of rivalry. Often Western Scholars have tried to ignore looking at the Qur'ān and its related sciences from a Muslim perspective and as a result have not been able to appreciate what it has to offer.

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[46] Bell, Richard, *The Qur'an. Translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs*, (Edinburgh University Press, 1937–39), 2 vols.
[47] Wansbrough, John, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation*, (Prometheus Books, New York, 2004).

Since Qur'ānic exegesis is a major source of guidance for Muslims it has to be of a high standard and accessible to its readers for them to benefit from it. The four major contributory sources that have been identified for Qur'ānic exegesis are the Qur'ān itself, prophetic traditions, the opinions of the companions and successors and the narrations of the People of the Books, also identified as *Isrā'īliyyāt*. The Qur'ān, according to Muslim epistemology affords us *a priori* information and is therefore above any type of scrutiny and off-limits to everyone because it is divine revelation and the eternal word of God. *Ḥadīth* enjoy a slightly less reverential status but are still an important source for Muslims as long as they meet the stringent conditions formulated by *Ḥadīth* scholars. If they fail to meet the criteria then they are unacceptable. The third category consists of opinions of the companions (Ṣ*aḥābah*) and successors (*Tābi'ūn*), with the former accepted generally, while the latter is treated with caution and only allowed through rigorous vetting, if they conform to the first two. This is due to their lack of rigorous vetting when employing narratives identified later as questionable. The Kūfans exercised great caution when narrating prophetic traditions, preferring to cite companions because they would rather say 'the companion said' as opposed to 'the Prophet said', as it is better to make a mistake regarding the saying of a companion than a prophetic saying that might be fabricated.[48] This leaves the last source, *Isrā'īliyyāt*, one that has enjoyed certain notoriety and been the object of discussion amongst scholars of all backgrounds.

The first of the Qur'ānic commentaries to appear after the formative period belonged to Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and paved the way for future scholarship. In his approach, he included prophetic traditions, personal interpretations, as well as the Judeo-Christian narratives known as *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Traditionally, Qur'ānic commentaries were polyvalent, comprehensively covering numerous topics and providing an array of narrations to give the reader a wider understanding of the verse, but throughout the ages, more specialised works appeared that concentrated on specific subjects such as language, traditions, legal issues, and so forth. The scholarship became more specialised and works produced focused on particular issues related to specific aspects of the Qur'ān, such as verses concerning legal issues, the language and stories of the prophets. Coupled with these was the growing influence of theology that led to a gradual more monovalent approach.

A significant component of *tafsīr* is stories of the prophets that constitute a major part of the Qur'ān and are integral to its understanding and Muslim beliefs. Scholars as early as Ibn Isḥāq (d. 151/762)

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[48] Al-Shaybānī, Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan, *'Kitāb al-Āthār lil Imām Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī'*, (Damascus, Syria, Dār al-Nawādir, 2008).

displayed an acceptance of polyvalence and included stories of the prophets in their works[49] and this was developed further by others such as al-Ṭabarī[50], al-Tha'labī[51] and Ibn Kathīr[52]. In doing so, they believed that they were allowing people to understand their faith and preserve their heritage.

The Muslim doctrine concerning prophets includes the belief that God sent approximately one hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets to humankind, but of those, only three hundred and thirteen are messengers sent with books or scriptures.[53] Western academics show reservations about this figure, mainly because there is no detail of who they are and there are differences amongst scholars of all backgrounds.[54] The primary cause of this is there is no mention of this detail in the Qur'ān, it is only present in some prophetic traditions, and there is a difference of opinion regarding the level of authenticity. The Qur'ān only mentions twenty-five prophets by name, with only one detailed account belonging to Joseph. The Jewish and Christian Bible mention some of these twenty-five prophets and we find many theories from Muslim and Western Scholars explaining the parallels between the Qur'ān and the antecedent texts. Muslims claim these parallels exist due to the source of all three holy books being the same and any difference found is due to the alteration of these antecedent texts. Western Scholars counter this belief with theories ranging from the Qur'ān borrowing from Biblical and Jewish traditions, later Jewish and Christian traditions borrowing from Muslim exegesis to the variations being a part of a larger myth that transcends any specific belonging.

Over the last century, there has been a growing interest in *Isrā'īliyyāt* amongst both Muslim and Western Qur'ānic scholars. Despite the controversy surrounding them, *Isrā'īliyyāt* receive a mixed reception from Muslim as well as non-Muslim scholars. The direction surrounding these traditions has changed over the centuries from one of general acceptance to more recently one of general rejection. This has influenced the attitude towards these narratives that were once supposedly a necessary tool for understating certain aspects of the Qur'ān, but more recently a dangerous element that could corrupt pure understanding of divine scripture. The acceptance of these narratives was once

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[49] Ibn Isḥāq, Muḥammad Ibn Yasār, *The Life of Muhammad, Translation of Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, With Introduction and Notes by A. Guillaume*, ed. by A. Guillaume (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[50] Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr, *Tarīkh al-Umam wal Mulūk: Tarīkh al-Ṭabarī*, (Saudi Arabia, Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, 2009).

[51] Al-Tha'labī, Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Ibrāhīm, '*Arais Al-Majalis Fi Qisas Al-Anbiya/Lives of the Prophets: Lives of the Prophets'*, Translated and Annotated by William M.Brinner, (Leiden, Brill, Netherlands, 2002).

[52] Ibn Kathīr, 'Imād al-Dīn Abul Fidā Ismā'īl, *'Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Darussalam, 1997).

[53] Al-Haythamī, 'Alī Ibn Abī Bakr Ibn Sulaymān Nūr al-Dīn, *Majma' al-Zawāid wa Manba' al-Fawāid*, (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Dār al-Minhaj, 2015), Ḥadīth 734, ii, pp. 198-199.

[54] Scott B.Noegel, Wheeler, Brannon M, *'The A to Z of Prophets in Islam and Judaism'*, (Plymouth, UK, The Scarecrow Press Inc. 2002), p. 365.

a part of acceptance of a polyvalent approach and as Calder has pointed out, this has diminished over time due to a change in attitude, but the question lingers, has this compromised the freedom in acceptance of such narratives, thus closing access to an understanding of their role in Islamic scholarship.[55]

One of the recent leading works is that of Roberto Tottoli who traced the evolution of the term *Isrā'īliyyāt* from the time of the prophet Muḥammad to modern times. He analysed how it developed from a term that reflected traditions of Jewish and Christian origin, the name of a specific book ascribed to Wahb Ibn Munabbih, a collection of books regarding traditions of the aforementioned origin, suspect traditions, and finally, a corpus of rejected traditions.[56]

Stories of the prophets also come under the category of *Isrā'īliyyāt* and have been subject to scrutiny by scholars. One of the earliest texts to mention these stories is Ibn Isḥāq, the famous historian, but they were a part of his *Sīra* and not a separate text. [57] Others followed suit and it was not until the exegete and historian al-Ṭabarī that they gained significant prominence.[58] In addition to his substantial exegesis, he is also responsible for a large compendium on universal history that includes a significant portion of the stories of the prophets. Calder believes polyvalence has been a characteristic of the earlier *tafsīr*, which al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* exemplifies to a degree.[59]

Al-Ṭabarī's contribution influenced others to produce multiple works such as al-Tha'labī,[60] whose work has been described by Tottoli[61] as more exegetical than historical and Ibn Kathīr[62]. The latter is viewed alongside Ibn Taymiyyah as someone largely responsible for the change in attitude towards *Isrā'īliyyāt* and thus his work can be regarded as a major turn in the reading and understanding of these traditions. [63]

The role of prophets is central to all three major Abrahamic faiths, despite being an area of difference that has led to diverse views regarding their role, nature and even the sanctity of prophets. The Qur'ān

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[55] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr*, pp. 101-140.
[56] Tottoli, Roberto, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature*, (New York: Routledge, 2002).

[57] Ibn Isḥāq, *The Life of Muhammad, Translation of Sīrat Rasūl Allāh, With Introduction and Notes by A. Guillaume*.

[58] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tarīkh al-Umam wal Mulūk*, (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Bayt al-Afkār al-Dawliyyah, 2009).

[59] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr*, pp. 101-140.

[60] Al-Tha'labī, *Arāis Al-Majālis Fī Qaṣaṣ Al-Anbiyā/Lives of the Prophets: Lives of the Prophets*.

[61] Tottoli, Roberto, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature*, p. 147.

[62] Ibn Kathīr, *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā*.

[63] Ohlander, Erik S, *Essays in Arabic Literary Biography: 1350-1850*, ed. by Joseph Edmind Lowry and Devin J. Stewart (Weisbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), pp. 147-158.

portrays the prophets as one family and thus propagators of one mission. All of them were of different status, with some portrayed as more prominent than others.[64]

From an Islamic perspective, the Qur'ān, *Ḥadīth*, *Sīra* and other forms of Islamic literature have portrayed prophets in different ways and have provided the reader with some form of explanation regarding their identity, role and lives generally. However, the principal fact is that to gain acknowledgement by Muslims, all extra-canonical traditions have to conform to the Qur'ān to receive any form of acceptance. Explanations can be provided and supplementary traditions can be used to provide additional information, but nothing can conflict with the divine words.

Belief in prophets cannot be underestimated as it is one of the fundamental beliefs of Islam and a Muslim cannot be true to his faith until he professes this. Muslims believe prophets are individuals sent by God to act as intermediaries between God and his creation, to guide and lead them. They have not been mentioned in the Qur'ān in chronological order and as is the case with the Qur'ānic revelation generally, they are only mentioned where necessary and with only enough detail that God requires mankind to know. A chronological order can be determined through the prophetic traditions and with supplementary detail from Judeo-Christian narratives, providing a fuller picture, and allowing the reader access to further detail.

The interest of Western Scholars in the role of the stories of prophets has brought to light many revelations. It has questioned the reasons behind the exclusion of the Qur'ān in understanding Jewish and Christian texts as well as the theory that the Qur'ān merely borrowed from them and has no originality.

Wheeler examines the relationship between the Bible and the Qur'ān, exploring why Muslims use Judeo-Christian references to explain the prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān.[65] He examines the stories of the prophets through Muslim views and questions why Western scholars have underestimated the significance of Muslim exegesis in understanding the relationship of the Qur'ān with Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Bible. His book is divided into 31 chapters, each one containing selections from the Qur'ān and Muslim exegesis relating to a specific prophet. He presents selected verses of the Qur'ān with their classical Arabic commentaries. Wheeler's work aims to highlight the conjunction and disjunction between the Qur'ān interpreted from the Muslim perspective and the Bible as it is interpreted by Jews and Christians.

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[64] Q16:36.

[65] Wheeler, Brannon M, '*Prophets in the Qur'ān An introduction to the Qur'ān and Muslim exegesis'*, (London, Continuum, Bloomsbury Publication, 2002).

Regarding the order of prophets, it follows the sequence found in several commentaries and stories of the prophets. The main works consulted are the Qur'ān and several known commentaries representing the main theological schools of Islam; the Sunni, Shī'ī, and Mu'tazila, histories and stories of the prophets.[66]

Wheeler acknowledges that his work is not a complete representation of the traditions relating to the prophets, but only a fragment to show the link between the Qur'ān and the Bible and also to show some of the parallels between the Qur'ān and its interpretation and the Bible and its interpretations. He does not proceed beyond this point to explore what this shows about the origin of these traditions or examine whether all traditions were acceptable to Muslims or whether other influences dictated the process of narration.[67]

Despite wanting to show parallels, it is interesting that he does not cite any Jewish or Christian texts regarding the prophets. There seems to be an underlying assumption that there is reader familiarity with the stories. Furthermore, he does not address the differences between exegeses based on the era, place or sect. Another noticeable fact is that mainly Sunni exegeses are consulted; there is a minimal contribution from Shī'ī school and none from anyone else. Wheeler's work shows an absence of polyvalence, therefore excluding a wider representation and understanding, which is key to creating a balanced view and understanding of how prophets were portrayed.

Despite this, Wheeler's work is a significant place to start if a person intends to familiarise themselves with Biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān and the extent to which they are discussed or mentioned. It helps provide relevant traditions to help supplement the verses that mention them by presenting the opinions of various commentators representing the three main theological schools, but it is restricted to mentioning only a few traditions and leaves out traditions of a controversial nature that challenge Muslim theological beliefs. He also mentions that his intention is not to uncover the origin of the traditions or examine the influences of the Qur'ān and Bible upon one another, but rather show the reader the Qur'ān and traditions relating to prophets through the eyes of Muslims, helping to foster a better understanding of the faiths towards each other.

Tottoli's work plays a greater role in examining the stories of the prophets.[68] He analyses Biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān and Muslim literature, attempting to highlight the difference in importance between the Qur'ān and extra-canonical traditions. He examines the particularities of the

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[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Tottoli, Roberto, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature*, p. 18.

stories mentioned in the Qur'ān and draws similarities and differences between them and Jewish and Christian traditions. He also looks at the history of these traditions, as they were when they first appeared when they became prominent, the types of genres that employed them and the capacity in which they were used.[69]

To avoid any sectarian, mystical, and philosophical concepts Tottoli only employs Sunni traditions. He asserts the belief that the stories mentioned aim to support and encourage Muḥammad and prove that he is a legitimate inheritor of the prophetic mantle. Therefore, Jews and Christians have to follow him to attain salvation. The stories vary in their detail, some very little and others a substantial amount, and are usually scattered throughout the Qur'ān due to the nature of revelation.

Tottoli's approach is similar to Wheeler's and avoids making direct reference to any form of borrowing or influence, although he believes in some places that it is undeniable. He compares the prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān to those mentioned in the Bible and concludes that apart from Hūd, Ṣāliḥ and Shu'ayb, all the others have direct parallels. Idris is identified as Enoch and Dhul Kifl as an Israelite indirectly through exegetical tradition. Just like Wheeler, polyvalence is not a part of Tottoli's approach and therefore he excludes a significant contribution from the other sects.[70]

Tottoli argues that a lack of ancient sources and contradictions in later ones prevents an accurate reconstruction of the history and development of Muslim literature, especially regarding prophets. He examines the genres that deal with these stories and concludes that there are three genres with a fourth connected to all of them and that they mention the traditions for different reasons. Additionally, Tottoli identifies that the traditions transmitted by the converts from Judaism and Christianity were major contributors to disputes and polemics of a sectarian nature. He claims that tracing the origin of these traditions is difficult because it is extremely complicated to show whether they were from specified sources or later fabrications.

Tottoli's work moves beyond Wheeler's which merely mentioned the prophets in the Qur'ān and a commentary presented from several prominent exegetes. He analyses the actual stories mentioned and the concept of prophetology mentioning how it is related to Muḥammad's mission. However, he does not present a complete corpus of traditions related to each prophet, only concentrating on the parallels between the Qur'ānic version and the Biblical version. Furthermore, Tottoli analyses Muslim literature and its contribution to stories of the prophets, assessing the impact of each genre. He provides an in-depth insight into the genres that dealt with these stories and their main

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[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.

contributors, influences, and impact. He traces the development of *Isrā'īliyyāt* and provides a detailed account of how they rose and fell from grace in the eyes of Muslims. However, Tottoli does not delve deeper into prophetology to examine the controversial narratives that are found in the Bible and Jewish and Christian exegetical literature.[71]

Overall, Tottoli presents a historical description of the traditions in the Qur'ān and Muslim literature, tracing its development and presenting a comparative analysis supported by assessment and criticism. He avoids controversial traditions and only concentrates on those contained in Sunni literature that have parallels, to avoid theological polemics. His work would have been more influential if it had included Shī'ī, and Mu'tazila sources and added controversial narratives that would have presented a deeper insight.

Reuven Firestone is another scholar who examines the narratives that have found their way into Qur'ānic exegeses, labelling them as legends, with a focus on the evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael legends.[72] Firestone does not engage in a discussion upon the categorisation of these narratives as legends and neither does he attempt to show any familiarity with the discussion surrounding the controversy of using such a term due to its negative connotation.

Firestone argues that Jews and Christians tended to assume that the Qur'ān borrowed from their texts due to being antecedent and that the Qur'ān contained mistakes. This results in the denial of the viability of Islamic revelation. Firestone further adds that the Muslims claimed the texts were heavenly and originated from the same source, but if there was any difference between them it was due to the distortion of the predecessors and to conceal Muḥammad's prophecy. He argues Muslims were initially encouraged to learn about Biblical and extra-Biblical narratives, but were seemingly forbidden to study or transmit them due to still familiarising themselves with the Qur'ān. He brings to attention the Qur'ān mentioning the stories without detail and if any detail exists concerning them, it is from discussions and comments regarding them, which became a part of exegetical literature.[73]

Firestone identifies the latter half of the eighth century as the time of their exclusion from Islamic literature and attributes this to Muslims wanting their independent traditions. He excludes anti-Jewish and anti-Christian sentiments as being the cause for this. Firestone's comment endorses the mainstream view that the basis of these narratives being Jewish or Christian has no bearing on their validity; their content determines that.

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[71] Ibid.

[72] Firestone, Reuven, *Journeys in Holy Lands*, (Albany, NY, USA, State University of New York Press, 1990).

[73] Ibid.

Firestone discusses the definition of *Isrā'īliyyāt* and believes it is better defined as traditions 'of Israelite origins', traditions that were thought to be of Jewish origin adopted into Islamic literature by those who had converted or Muslims who were familiar with them. He acknowledges most of the traditions regarding prophets would be considered Israelite tales based upon their form and content, but contests not all of them could be dismissed, otherwise there would be no detail left to supplement the Qur'ān. He believes that Islam has to own its traditions; therefore, it is dismissive of them. In admitting this he argues for polyvalence in *tafsīr* and proves what some exegetes believe, these narratives play a part in understanding prophets and their roles.[74]

Firestone's methodology constituted inter-textual studies acknowledging the influence of other sources. He identifies legends in Islamic sources as not being borrowed, but rather being independent creations and only comprehensible in the light of prior stories or legends. He also accepts that Islamic legends provide details that explain numerous contexts better than Jewish or Christian legends. He chooses twenty medieval works representing some of the major genres and approaches to medieval Qur'ānic exegesis. By including a wide-ranging theological representation that includes Sunni, Shī'ī, Mu'tazila, and mystics he allows himself to express the most common Islamic worldviews. Firestone's work endorses polyvalence, despite not formally recognising nor discussing it.

His approach compels him to treat all sources equally, despite a clear greater influence of some upon contemporary Islamic thinking or customs. His sources represent their historical periods and not necessarily current thinking. In addition, comparatively, he analyses more Jewish than Christian literature.[75]

Despite this, Firestone believes all literature has influence therefore, he attempts to analyse the narratives in the context of their narration and out of their context to eliminate any meaning imposed upon them by authors and others. He claims that there is no original narrative; all of them differ based on dialect and culture. Thus, Islamic traditions cannot merely be reduced to inaccurate reproductions of those in the Bible. Firestone claims that the Biblical legends existed in the Arabian Peninsula before Islam but had no relevance until the Qur'ān gave them meaning.[76]

He reiterates the point raised by Tottoli that Qur'ānic legends were consecrated and beyond any criticism. Anything outside this scope was ignored and soon forgotten. This was supported by the attitude that anything belonging to the period of ignorance was to be eradicated.

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[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid, pp. 17-21.

In summary, Firestone's work is thorough, presenting a deep insight into the traditions of Abraham and Ishmael. He presents a balanced and detailed discussion on the origin and nature of the tradition, moving away from the theory of borrowing and granting Islamic traditions an equal status to Biblical traditions. His work is beneficial when analysing traditions specific to his chosen subjects, but it is only limited to two prophets and tends to restrict the focus to a few major aspects of their lives. Despite this, it helps provide a framework to allow future work to be carried out if a specific prophet is to be analysed. His intent is not to determine the origin of the narratives, but rather trace their presence and movement in *tafsīr*. Some of the criticisms that may be levelled against Firestone are that in reality, it is near impossible to prove the evolution of the narratives common between the three Abrahamic faiths, as there is no definitive way of proving this. At best, a common theme of reverence for Abraham and his seniority in religion could be established between them, helping to foster an understanding of them.

Albayrak follows a similar methodological framework and examines the historical description of the Western scholars' approach to the Qur'ān and its narratives by providing a brief analysis of this.[77] He follows this with a detailed examination of the definition and use of *Isrā'īliyyāt*, providing a description and analysis. Moreover, he inspects how the Qur'ān presents stories and the response of classical Muslim commentaries to the Qur'ānic narrations.

Initially, he critically examines the theory of the Qur'ān borrowing from the Bible and claims that those who assert this have clouded judgements because their approach is influenced by pre-determined beliefs that borrowing has taken place and there is Jewish and Christian influence. He also analyses the development of the notion of *Isrā'īliyyāt* and focuses on two particular cases: the golden calf and the heavenly table.[78]

Albayrak uses literary analysis with occasional reference to Biblical narratives related to the two stories selected. He acknowledges that this could result in criticism because the Qur'ān is primarily a religious and theological text and only after accepting this can any narrative analysis be permitted. He also uses analysis by way of comparison for the latter part of the study with assessment and criticism.

His study serves to introduce the beginner to the Qur'ān and the criticism that it has to face concerning its place amongst its predecessors. It helps to understand *Isrā'īliyyāt* and their evolution and uses two

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[77] Albayrak, Ismail. 2000. '*Qur'anic Narrative and Isra'iliyyat in Western Scholarship and in Classical Exegesis*' (University of Leeds, 2002), https://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/507/, [accessed 15 October 2015].

[78] Ibid.

cases that have parallels in the Bible. Albayrak's work however is only introductory and although it helps understand that the *Isrā'īliyyāt* have been employed in the Qur'ānic commentaries to explain Qur'ānic narratives it does not extend to other prophets that have questionable traditions regarding them.

The next group of scholars adopts a different approach to those mentioned earlier, focusing on proving the inter-dependency of Judaism and Islam as opposed to merely following the traditional dismissive approach. Bernard Lewis furthers the understanding of *Isrā'īliyyāt* and initially analyses the history of the Jews, tracing their progress until their independence in the Nineteenth-Twentieth century which allowed them to develop and introduce Western impact on the Islamic world. [79] He argues that Western scholars have only used the term Judeo-Christian and that neither the Jews nor Muslims see their relationship in this light in the Islamic lands. Presently it is a term of purely historical relevance since Judeo-Christian traditions no longer exist as a living force.[80]

Lewis analyses the history of the Jews and relates that to the development of Judeo-Christian narratives. He credits Geiger as being the first significant contributor and the main influence regarding the studies conducted after him. Besides, he believes that this resulted in Christians claiming that Islam had borrowed from them.

Lewis asserts there is a whole body of early Islamic material that is neither the Qur'ān nor *Ḥadīth* which supplements both. It consists of stories of the prophets and other similar narratives, many of them of Midrashic origin known as *Isrā'īliyyāt* and he identifies Jewish converts to Islam as the main cause for this, regardless of whether they were justifying their new belief or any other reason.[81]

He also analyses the term *Isrā'īliyyāt* and claims that its usage was purely descriptive and neutral initially, gradually becoming negative. In recent times, it has become synonymous with superstitious nonsense and used dismissively to condemn stories and interpretations not belonging to authentic Islam. If any Jewish element is identified, it is so that it can be rejected and if it conforms to Islamic belief then this is due to it having a divine origin and that the Jews were formerly recipients of divine scripture.

Lewis believes it is difficult to date the early traditions and later stories in Jewish texts that were influenced by Islamic versions. He claims that borrowing is symbiotic and that both have taken from

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[79] Bernard, Lewis. *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 70.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid.

each other, which is evident in cases of Sharia law being influenced by Rabbinic law, Jewish legal terminology being influenced by Islamic legal terminology, etc.

He also supports Firestone's claim that any hostility towards Jews was not based on theological beliefs and that it could have been due to Christian converts to Islam. He believes that ancient Jewish heroes and prophets were allowed entry into Islam and some Muslim scholars went as far as seeking further information regarding them from external sources.[82]

Lewis's methodological approach has been to present a historical analysis of Jewish history relating it to *Isrā'īliyyāt* and examines the development of the term focusing on modern Western scholarship since Geiger. He attempts to analyse and present some criticism of the theories related to the term. His work does not include any narratives regarding prophets, therefore ignoring anything of a controversial nature and does not present any case studies from Qur'ānic commentaries, past or present.

Shari L. Lowin is another scholar who examines the traditions regarding Abraham in Islamic and Jewish exegetical narratives, particularly concerning his early years.[83] Her study aims to investigate the relationship between Jewish and Islamic textual traditions and analyse the results. Lowin believes that traditions regarding the founding forefathers have been largely overlooked by scholars. In terms of comparative studies of Islamic and Jewish exegetical narratives regarding scriptural figures, scholars have briefly looked at them, instead of concentrating on proving the primacy of their traditions.

Lowin asserts that the study of the primacy of these traditions is important but in some aspects, it ignores a deeper relationship between the two faiths and their creativity. She attempts to challenge the theory of Islam's dependence on Judaism and attempts to prove inter-dependency. At the same time, Lowin examines how they adopted traditions from each other and how they used them, dismissing the idea of copying as there would have been no difference between them, the facts prove otherwise. She presents the argument that they both purposely manipulated and adjusted the texts of the other to emphasise their unique religious values.[84]

Lowin also examines the definition of *Isrā'īliyyāt* and how they were introduced to the Islamic corpus, presenting the opinions and definitions of Western scholars such as Goldziher, Kister,

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[82] Ibid.

[83] Shari, Lowin. 'The Making of a Forefather Abraham in Jewish and Islamic Exegetical Narratives', in *The Islamic History and Civilization Studies and Texts*, ed. by Wadad Kadi and Rotraud Wielandt (Leiden: Brill, 2006), lxv.

[84] Ibid.

Wasserstrom and Abbot. She traces the rise and downfall of *Isrā'īliyyāt* and identifies the main contributors to this as Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathīr. Lowin believes that although the origin might be different, a story considered by Islam to be Israelite is a unique Islamic product. Without intending, she identifies the monovalent approach of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathīr as a contributory factor to the criticism of *Isrā'īliyyāt* and the decline in their employment.[85]

Her methodological approach is a combination of close reading of the text and a modified version of Boyarin's theory of intertextuality that every text operates within a literary system and as a result, it receives the stamp of those texts that precede it. She also uses Kugel's nine theses of early Biblical interpretation as methodological inspiration. Therefore Midrash, *Isrā'īliyyāt* and *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā* can be viewed as colleagues in a shared literary system resulting in information being transferred back and forth.

Lowin also attempts to date exegetical literature and concludes that it is based on the authors of the texts. In contrast, she believes that the dating of Midrashic texts is more difficult because they are often anonymous. She only examines accounts that appeared in the later texts. Some of the Midrashic texts are not strictly part of the Midrashic corpus, but apocryphal and pseudepigraphical. They are included because they are narrative expansions.

Lowin is part of a modern group of scholars that break away from the traditional approach towards Muslim literature based on its supposed dependency upon its predecessors, arguing that often it is proven that there is a level of independence overlooked.

Despite this, she does not seem to have achieved this claim because in Chapter Three she proves first that the narrations regarding Abraham's early life in the cave and his miracles are not found in early Jewish literature. Rather, they only exist in Muslim literature and appear in later Jewish literature. Nevertheless, she believes that they appropriated from Talmudic tradition concerning the protection given to the Israelite children in Egypt when the Pharaoh persecuted them. She believes Muslims adopted these traditions.[86]

Lowin does not stop here and goes on to mention in Chapter Five that the narratives regarding Muḥammad's early childhood and birth are not original and have been taken from an account regarding Moses in Talmudic sources. Her position is confusing because, on the one hand, she seems to display a desire to prove that there are Muslim narratives that are independent of Jewish sources, yet she seems to want to show that they are not truly dependent as they have some basis in Talmudic

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[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.

sources. Unfortunately, her bias towards proving that Muslim narratives are ultimately Jewish overshadows her work. There is an evident lack of any discussion of early accounts regarding Abraham in the Qur'ān, despite undisputed relevance to the discussion.

Sami Helewa[87] analyses the stories of the prophets written by Muslims and their function as advisory tales within the religio-political contexts in Baghdad and Nishapūr. He examines the tales of the prophets Joseph, David and Solomon and how their stories convey the message of fair leadership, friendship, and enmity, based on narrations from the works on history produced by al-Ṭabarī and al-Th'alabī.

His thesis aims to approach the *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā* as literature with a social function of myth and with the potential to advise rulers in political leadership. However, he is not concerned with conducting a theological enquiry into the themes of the Qur'ān. Similar to Tottoli, Helewa does not examine the categorisation of the stories as myths, the implications of such categorisation of Qur'ānic narratives, and finally whether they were a part of polyvalent reading.[88]

However, Helewa examines *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā* with a focus on the elements that were associated with them, such as myths and legends, excluding *Ḥadīth*. He highlights two challenges; firstly, what genre do they belong to, religious writing or adab? Secondly, to find a suitable definition of *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā* concerning their social function. He believes that the compliers contextualised the stories in an Islamic milieu through editing and adding, resulting in each author producing an authentic piece of work.

Helewa's methodology involves a two-fold approach, textual and contextual. The text concentrates on three prophets: Joseph, David and Solomon. Helewa believes al-Tha'labi's work is more exegetical; therefore, there is textual affinity because it portrays some Biblical persons. The contextual side of the works looks at the intentions and spiritual needs of the audience addressed and involves two perspectives, one from the political centre of the caliphate, Baghdad and the other from the provincial regions.[89]

His work helps us understand that stories of the prophets can be read outside their religious context and attempts to show that there was social-political influence involved in their production. However,

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[87] Helewa, Sami S.J, *The advisory function of the Tales of the Prophets (Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā')*, (Doctoral Thesis University of Edinburgh, 2012), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/292437035.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

he has not focused on their religious significance and has not shown any interest in those narratives that could pose problems for the reader which do not represent qualities deemed worthy of leaders.

Peter G. Riddell in his study looks at the Islamic variation of the Biblical story of David and Bathsheba's infidelity leading to the murder of her husband Uriah.[90] He declares that the Biblical version is more detailed than the Islamic version, thus making the Islamic version seem incomplete. He highlights that the Biblical version seems to have been composed during the tenth century BC, whilst the Islamic version appeared during the seventh century. Despite that, they both emerged during the formative periods of their communities to provide a model of Godly behaviour. His observation is interesting as it challenges the primacy of the Biblical narrative, questioning the claims of borrowing asserted by earlier Western scholars.[91]

Riddell believes the depiction of David differently in the two faiths has ramifications on the shaping of the narratives. The Bible describes David's sin in detail, whilst the Qur'ān has no mention at all. He compares the two accounts and presents his analysis which is that Qur'ānic commentators such as al-Ṭabarī explained the account, but they were lacking in detail, which was bridged by al-Tha'labī who mentioned details down to the name of Uriah. Furthermore, he believes that throughout history there has been standardisation and sanitisation of religious teachings, thus allowing much information to fade away. Without direct reference, Riddell also alludes to the decline of polyvalence as a contributory factor to the absence of many narratives, indicating theological differences being a contributory factor.

Riddell's methodology involves a technique of interpretation in which the scriptural text is allocated integrity and treated as an independent entity. He adopts the approach highlighted by Walter Brueggemann that the right of the primacy of respect should be given to the integrity of the scriptural text in its own right. His approach works well with the Biblical account but has left many questions unanswered regarding the Qur'ānic account leading Muslims to resort to commentaries being consulted to provide the missing details.

His work, though brief, shows that this area of scholarship has lacked attention from scholars, more focused on proving the authenticity and primacy of their texts, rather than attempting to understand the works as independent entities. He presents a balanced work, providing a gateway for others to

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[90] Riddell, Peter G, *Islamic Variations on a Biblical Theme as Seen in the David and Bathsheba Saga*, xxvii, 'Biblicalstudies.org.uk: Vox Evangelica Vols 1 - 27 (1962-1997)'. [n.d.]. Org.uk, https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_vox_evangelica.php, [accessed 27 April 2021].

[91] Ibid.

pursue this line of research with more confidence in producing a better understanding of the narratives.[92]

The analysis of the literature discussed has shown that significant work concerning *Isrā'īliyyāt* has been undertaken, in particular over the last few decades and that insightful and helpful progress has been made to help understand better the origin, role and significance of these narratives overall. However, as far as the stories of the prophets are concerned as an exegetical tool to help understand the Qur'ān and Islam, progress has only been made in identifying certain aspects of this genre such as the main individuals involved, their influence on the literature from a religious or socio-political aspect and their role in Islamic literature.

In terms of the validity of the narratives and the influence of the Biblical texts on the narratives, their adoption by certain groups within Islam and the significance of these narratives concerning the beliefs regarding prophets and their roles, work has also been done, but there are still gaps that need addressing. The questions that arise are: how do the three faiths differ regarding the infallibility of prophets? Are there differences within the faiths themselves? How have Muslims reacted to these narratives? Have they chosen to accept them or reject them? What are their reasons for their actions? My thesis attempts to address some of the issues mentioned.

The methodological approaches have varied among the research conducted regarding *Isrā'īliyyāt*. The initial approach was of comparative analysis with the intent of identifying the pre-eminence of the respective traditions to a shift away from that particular approach to one of creative appropriation where Islam has taken elements from its predecessors but has reconstructed them in the light of Islamic teachings. More recently, the approach has become one where they are recognised as having independent integrity and varying based on having creative differences.

For my research, I will attempt to build on the aforementioned studies by addressing those elements that have not been discussed. Tottoli, Albayrak, and Lowin all examined the term *Isrā'īliyyāt* and its evolution, definition, rise and fall, etc. My work will analyse one area that they did not address, prophetic infallibility and controversial narratives. I will attempt to examine the term with particular reference to the three main sects in Islam: Sunni, Shī'ī and Mu'tazila, something greatly overlooked. The selection of these three sects is based on the fact they have represented and to some degree still represent the major body of Islam. Moreover, I will examine the impact of polyvalence versus monovalence, and how the decrease of narratives regarding prophets may have affected the understanding of prophetic infallibility.

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[92] Ibid.

Furthermore, Tottoli only references Sunni sources, whereas Wheeler references other groups, but mainly utilises Sunni sources. Firestone is another person who shows inclination towards a particular source, namely Jewish, therefore limiting his work. I will build on this by attempting to give equal representation to all parties involved. Another common element overlooked by the studies is the exegetical methodologies of the three main Muslim schools. I will attempt to address this issue by including this discussion to present a better understanding of controversial narratives and their inclusion or exclusion.

Most of the studies suggest borrowing and the dependency of Islamic materials on resources of their scriptural predecessors, despite attempts by the likes of Lowin, who claim some independence, yet are unable to verify that. I will attempt to address this issue in light of the controversial narratives and the concept of infallibility. I will not limit my analysis to the Jewish and Christian Bibles but will attempt to look at supplementary texts and commentaries to further help understand the narrative in question. Unlike Helewa's attempt to place them in a religio-political context and limit them to context, I will attempt to keep them general. I may have to involve a theological context once it becomes clear what the opinions regarding prophetic infallibility are.

Only one study by Riddell mentions controversial narratives when examining the study of David and Bathsheba, which shows there has been an oversight of this particular field regarding these particular narratives that are essential to understanding the role of prophets in the Abrahamic faiths. The studies mainly focus on assessing and proving the primacy of the narratives, and I will address this, but it will not be the focus of the research.

One thing that is clear from the review of the studies is that controversial narratives have been mainly overlooked and even though *Isrā'īliyyāt* have been studied, this particular area could contribute to a better understanding of the position that prophets hold in all three faiths, helping to bridge understanding between them.

Prophetology in the Abrahamic Faiths

The Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, share many common beliefs, identifying them as one family and enforcing the belief that their origin is the same, but at the same time, they possess many distinctive individual differences that set them apart and highlight their uniqueness, placing them on separate podiums. One area where they have shown such distinctiveness is Prophetology.

Prophetology is an essential part of the theology of each of the three monotheistic religions. It deals with the unique nature, relevance, and credibility of the prophets as such, but also highlights the similar as well as distinguishing features belonging to them. Even though prophets have played major roles in the development of each respective faith, the beliefs related to them are far from universal.

Prophethood in Islam plays a major role in the theological beliefs of Muslims, variant as they may be, and anyone denying any prophet is considered outside the folds of Islam.[93] This is evident in the declaration of faith (*Shahādah*) which is an integral part of a Muslim's faith and comprises primarily of belief in God and then belief in the prophet Muḥammad as messenger and prophet. Muslim scholars identify this as the concept of '*Tawḥīd*' and '*Risālah*'. Its importance is highlighted in the fact that a person is not considered a Muslim until he truly, with firm conviction, believes in these two tenets of faith.

Subsequently, after God, Muslims consider the prophets, especially the prophet Muḥammad to be the next great authority for themselves. Consequently, this requires the perception regarding them to be worthy of the prominence and status granted to them. This particular belief is not universally held by the other Abrahamic faiths, which view the institute of prophethood and prophets differently.

The Qur'ān portrays prophets as human beings who are distinguished from the rest of humanity due to their special appointment by God. According to the Hebrew faith, prophethood is an institution and prophets are separate from the rest of society, almost isolated, while the New Testament portrays the institution of prophethood as comprising of prophets and apostles.[94]

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[93] Q2:285, Q3:84.

Al-Sābiq, al-Sayyid, *al-'Aqāid al-Islāmiyyah*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dar al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1964), pp. 173-175.

Ibn Taymiyyah, Tāqī al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-Nubuwwāt*, (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Maktaba Aḍwā al-Salaf, 2000), pp. 37-38.

Karam Shāh, Muhammad, *Ḍiyā al-Qur'ān*, (Lahore, Ḍiyā al-Qur'ān Publications, 1982), i, pp. 411-412.

[94] https://www.britannica.com/topic/prophecy/Origins-and-development-of-Hebrew-prophecy.

To understand who prophets are and in the case of Christianity who they will continue to be, we first need to look at the Qur'ān and its portrayal of prophethood and then compare this with its predecessors. Concerning the nature of prophethood and its history, the verses of the Qur'ān can be placed into two different categories. The first category of verses present prophethood as an institution formed from a select group of chosen people, who could be described as the most perfect human beings who are contracted by God to promote his cause.[95] The Qur'ān describes a meeting between God and his messengers, where the agreement is to accept a book and knowledge that is being provided to them and support the final messenger if he was to appear in their lifetime. Moreover, their role was to promote the word of God and guide the people, whilst the people were addressed and commanded to obey them and believe in all that was revealed to them.[96] God describes the primary causes for this as man's weakness[97], hastiness[98], ungratefulness[99], and miserliness[100], amongst other weaknesses, therefore, a constant reminder is required to maintain humankind's connection to his Lord. Yet, despite man's covenant with God, his inherent inclination towards sin resulted in God sending prophets to guide him, initiating the institution of prophethood. Its role would be to assist man in leading a good and fruitful life in this world and to create for himself a place in paradise that has been promised to him. This is based on God's mercy and compassion for his creation, without forcing it upon humankind.

The second Qur'ānic aspect of prophets is their history. The Qur'ān highlights that the first person to be created was Adam and to honour him the angels were ordered to prostrate to him.[101] This introduced the institution of prophethood that has continued until its culmination with Muḥammad.[102] Each prophet fulfilled the duty they were charged with, whilst facing trials and tribulations from their

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[95] Q33:7.

[96] Q3:81-84.

Ipgrave, Michael, *Bearing the Word Prophecy in Biblical and Qur'ānic Perspective*, (Church House Publishing, 2005), Ch.3, p. 46.

[97] Q4:28.

[98] Q17:11.

[99] Q17:67.

[100] Q17:100.

[101] Q2:30-34.

[102] Q33:40.

people, invited the people to God and warned them against turning away from him[103]. Some accepted and others rejected.[104]

Ultimately, prophets are human beings[105] that occupy the highest status possible[106] after God and due to their human nature; they can appeal to other humans. If they were celestial beings then it would be impossible to execute their roles as guides.[107] Yet, prophetic lives became ambivalent, in terms of their institution. Attitudes towards them were mixed; some people accepted them and their message, whereas others were less welcoming and actively opposed to them, going as far as killing them.[108]

To enable us to gain a better understanding of prophetology it is necessary to analyse this concept from all perspectives, Jewish, Christian and Muslim. The Muslim view will be presented first.

3.1 Types of Prophetology

The origin of prophetology primarily is the Qur'ān. Muslims believe alongside the earlier scriptures and books, it is divine revelation that was communicated through chosen individuals known as prophets. The Qur'ān uses the term '*Nubuwwah*' for prophecy and it refers to the institution of prophethood. Renard, whilst discussing Rumi's work on prophets and revelation, postulates that prophetology can be divided into numerous types, Qur'ānic, historical, philosophical, theological, theosophical and mystical. I will attempt to define these so we can understand prophethood better.

1. Qur'ānic prophetology - The Qur'ān teaches us that revelation is a divine message initiated by God and relayed through his prophets. Without this, there is no salvation for humanity. In addition, all prophets are equal in their position as prophets, but there is a distinction in their ranks based on what God bestows upon them.[109] One distinct fact mentioned by God is that the 'seal of all prophets' is Muḥammad; with him, prophecy and prophethood conclude. Moreover, the role of prophets is to instruct people to perform good deeds and refrain from evil, to worship God

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[103] Q3:21.

[104] Q14:10.

[105] Q3:79-80, Q26:154.

[106] Q4:69.

[107] Q14:9.

[108] Wuthnow, Robert, *Christianity in the Twenty First Century: Reflections on the Challenges Ahead*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 84.

[109] Q2:253, Q17:55.

Al-Tamīmī, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2002), p. 176.

alone, amongst many other things. Renard concludes that since the Qur'ān is not a systematic document, there is no coherent theory or system of prophetology, except in the case of Joseph.[110]

2. Historical prophetology – This examines the Qur'ān from a historical approach with a view to the continuity and sequence that constitute a prophet's life. This approach is largely concerned with the chronological order and the anecdotal details, primarily found in Muslim histories such as the works of al-Ṭabarī, al-Tha'labī, etc.[111]

3. Philosophical prophetology – Arguably a result of Muslim encounter with Greek works. The focus of the philosophers is prophetic epistemology and the role of the prophet as a lawgiver. They viewed prophets as an elite body of humans blessed with unique powers. Renard states that although they did not use the Qur'ān as their source, they were careful to ensure that their works reflected the Qur'ānic position. The main proponents of this category are the philosophers al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd.[112]

4. Theological prophetology – This is seen as a counter-opinion to the views of the philosophers. Renard claims that the theologians were interested in protecting the mysterious and inexplicable character of God. They chose to view the prophet as an instrument of God and focused their attention primarily on prophetic epistemology and miracles. Foremost amongst this school is al-Ash'arī, a former Mu'tazilī, al-Bāqilānī, al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyyah.[113]

5. Theosophical prophetology – Renard identifies it as emerging in the latter part of the twelfth century. He describes it as a 'highly personal, subjectivist religious philosophy amalgamated with mysticism'.[114] Its main representatives are Ibn al-'Arabī, Shah Walī Allah and Sadr al-Din Shirāzī, known as Mulla Ṣadra. They do not consider the prophet as an individual personality, but rather a manifestation of some divine attribute.[115]

6. Mystical prophetology – Renard considers Rumi's achievements to be the best in this category. Its adherents include the likes of al-Ḥallāj and al-'Attār up to Iqbal. He associates this type with mystical poetry and claims that its proponents usually ignore the storyline in the Qur'ān; rather they allow their poetic abilities to create imagery to explain beliefs. They consider the prophet

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[110] Renard, John, *All the king's falcons: Rumi on Prophets and Revelation*, (Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1994), p2.
[111] Ibid, pp.2-5.
[112] Ibid, pp.5-8.
[113] Ibid, pp.8-11.
[114] Ibid pp. 11-13.

[115] Ibid.

'the paradigm of the relationship between the creature and the creator'.[116] In their minds, a prophet is neither a historical figure nor a manifestation of some divine attribute. Rather, he is an example for people so that they can use his influence to influence their own lives.[117]

Each of these categories represents a distinct approach towards the study of prophethood, but for the sake of relevance, I will only be looking at the first two due to their direct influence on my work.

3.2 Orthodox Sunni Prophetology

According to Gibbs,[118] the term 'Orthodox' in Islam refers to 'Sunni' Muslims and is usually used in contrast to the minority Shī'a, representative of the Muslim majority.[119] The Sunnis or *'Ahl as-Sunnah'* were given their name due to Abul Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, who left the Mu'tazila school and formed his own, which adhered to *Ḥadīth* (prophetic traditions) and the teachings of the *Ṣaḥābah* (companions) and the *Salaf al-Ṣaliḥīn* (pious predecessors). The term is identified with Abul Ḥasan al-Ash'arī and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī.[120] They represent the majority of Muslims today.

In Arabic, as in Hebrew, the word for prophet is '*nabī*' (pl. *nabiyyūn/anbiyā*).[121]It appears seventy-five times in the Qur'ān, whereas the term *nubuwwah*, which means prophethood, appears five times, but more prominent is the term '*rasūl'* (pl. *rusul*) which denotes a messenger or apostle. This is mentioned three hundred times in the Qur'ān.[122]

The term *nabī* has several possibilities concerning the origin of the word, based on its origin. If it is derived from '*al-nabu*' (*na-ba-a*)[123] with a '*hamza*' then it appears in the meaning of '*al-khabr*',

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[116] Ibid, pp. 13-16.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Netton, Ian Richard, *Islam, Christianity and Tradition: A Comparative Exploration*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), pp. 45-46.

[119] Esposito, John L, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. by John L.Esposito, (New York: Oxford University of Islam, 1999).

[120] Al-Farhārī, *Al-Nibrās Sharh Sharh al-'Aqāid al-Nasafi*, p. 22.

[121] Al-Muqri, Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn 'Ali al-Fayyūmī, '*Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*', (Cairo, Egypt, Dār al Hadīth, 2000), p. 351.

Ibn Manẓūr, Jamāl al-Dīn, *Lisān al-'Arab*, (Cairo, Egypt, Dar al-Ma'ārif, 2002), vii, P. 4315.

[122] Rubin, Uri, '*Prophets and Prophethood',* iv, pp. 289-306.

[123] Q78:1-2.

Ibn Manẓūr, iii, p1644.

Muṭahharī, Shahid al-Murtaḍā, *'Al-Nubuwwah: Mu'allafātal-Shaheed Mutahhiry'*, translated in to Arabic by Jawad Ali Kassar, (Dar al-Hawra, 2012), p48.

Rizvi, Sayyid Saeed Akhtar, 'Prophethood'. 2012. Al-islam.org <https://www.al-islam.org/prophethood-sayyid-saeed-akhtar-rizvi> [accessed 12 June 2017]

which refers to information. Therefore, a prophet informs about God or is informed by God, i.e. God informs his prophet and sends him revelations and in turn, he informs the people. If it is a non-*hamza* word then it is derived from the word '*al-Nabwu* (*na-ba-wa*)', which refers to 'something raised above the earth'. In this context a prophet is someone 'who is elevated in this world and the hereafter'.[124]

If it is taken in the meaning of active participle (*ism al-fā'il*) it means 'informer of the '*ghayb*' (unseen), which he received through revelation, or he elevates himself above others because God sent him with revelation. If it is taken in the meaning of passive participle (*ism al-maf'ūl*) it refers to one informed of the unseen and elevated above others because of his appointment by God.[125]

Whereas, the term '*rasūl*' is derived from the tri-literal root '*ra-sa-la*' meaning 'to direct'. If you directed someone with an important matter, he would be your messenger.[126] In this context, a prophet is someone who is sent by God and entrusted to preach what was revealed to him and he persists with the message he was sent with. The terms '*Isṭifā*' and '*Ijtibā*' also appear in the Qur'ān and refer to divine selection.[127]

This then ignites the discussion of whether *nabī* and *rasūl* are the same or if there is a difference between the two. The majority of scholars are of the latter opinion, that there is a difference. The difference cited between the two is that a *nabī* is more generic than a *rasūl*. A *nabī* receives revelations from God through the medium of an angel, whereas a *rasūl* additionally receives a new book and sometimes a new set of laws or abrogation of certain aspects of the previous laws.

The term '*rasūl*' is not exclusive to human beings, it is also used for angels.[128] Amongst their duties was the role of acting as messengers from God to his prophets as mentioned in the Qur'ān when they gave Abraham good tidings on the forthcoming birth of Isaac and the destruction of the people of

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[124] Ibid, p. 48.

Al-Ashqar, Dr Umar Sulayman, *Al-Aqidah fi Dhawil Kitab wa al-Sunnah: Al-Rusul wal Risalat*, (Kuwait, Maktaba al Falah, 1983), pp. 13-16.

[125] Lane, E.W and Lane-Poole, *Arabic-English, Lexicon*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1968), Book1, Part 5

[126] Q27:35

Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, iii, p1644.

[127] Q22:75, Q16:121.

[128] Q35:1.

Lot.[129] Due to their celestial status, they are not sent as messengers to people, who would be incapable of relating to them.[130]

This implies that it is incorrect to assume that the terms '*nabī*' and '*rasūl*' are synonymous and have the same meaning. The difference is highlighted in the Qur'ān[131] where two terms are used in different contexts and in ḥadīth where it states the number of *nabī* as being one hundred and twenty-four thousand and *rasūl* as being three hundred and thirteen.[132] Occasionally the terms have been used synonymously. The Qur'ān refers to Moses as a '*rasūl*' and '*nabī*'.[133]

Summarising the possibilities, Ibn al-Hummām states that there are three opinions regarding the terms *nabī* and *rasūl*.

1. The difference between them lies in the command to propagate or not.
2. The difference is that a *rasūl* is given a new set of laws and book, or abrogates certain previous laws, whereas a *nabī* does not.
3. They are both synonymous and this requires combining prophets and messengers.

The *Hanafi* jurist, *Ḥadīth* master, and Qur'ānic exegete 'Alī al-Qārī (d. 1014/1605) asserts that the mentioning of *nubuwwah* before *risālah* is an indication of the truth, that there is an established difference between them.[134] A *nabī* is more common than a *rasūl* because a *rasūl* is commanded to propagate the teachings, whereas a *nabī* is not.[135]

According to the prominent Sunni Theologian al-Taftāzānī,[136] a *nabī* is an individual who has been sent by God to propagate his revelations to the creation, and a *rasūl* is the same except he has been appointed with a set of laws. A *rasūl* is more distinguished than a *nabī* as he is sent with a book or scriptures and either receives a new set of laws or is instructed with certain abrogation(s) of the previous set of laws. A *nabī* on the other hand does not share all these qualities.

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[129] Q11:69-81.

[130] Q17:95.

[131] Q22:52.

[132] Ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad, *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dar Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1994), ḥadīth no. 21785, vi, p. 356.

[133] Q19:51.

[134] Considered amongst the major authorities his era amongst the Ḥanafīs, a master of ḥadīth, an Imam of fiqh, Qur'anic commentary, Arabic language, history and Sufism.

[135] 'Ali al-Qārī, *Sharh Fiqh al-Akbar*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmyyah, 1995), p. 106.

[136] Al-Taftāzānī, Sa'd al-Dīn Mas'ūd Ibn 'Umar, *Sharh al-Maqāṣid*, (Dar 'Alam al-Kutub, 1998), Vol.5, pp. 5-10

These opinions by leading authorities show that there is a significant difference between the terms and their roles. They are not completely synonymous as some believe, rather different in their usage, although occasionally they have been used synonymously.

3.2.1 The Belief Regarding Prophets

Prophets have played an integral part in various faiths throughout history and are primarily identified with the Abrahamic faiths. They are considered by some to be the mouthpiece of God and divine agents who were given the responsibility for the guidance of humanity.[137] Their presence amongst the people is described as 'God's benefaction' to the people.[138]

The need for prophets arose when humankind drifted away from the worship of its Lord towards evil. As a means of their salvation, prophets were sent to lead them back to righteousness.[139] Thus began the system of prophethood, where prophets were sent successively whenever humanity was going astray.[140]

Al-Taftāzānī declares that prophethood is a sublime favour of God (*luṭf*) and His mercy upon the universe as it assists a human intellect in understanding the existence of the Creator, His knowledge and power. It also helps humans comprehend true obedience and disobedience to the Creator, helping to avoid sin and perform good deeds.

He asserts the Mu'tazila claim due to the benefits of sending prophets it is *wājib* (mandatory) upon God to send them. The philosophers disagree with this, arguing to protect the universe and for the greater good of everything it is obligatory upon God to send prophets, therefore God cannot avoid this responsibility. Scholars from the Transoxiana (*Mā Warā al-Nahr*) region also endorse this view.

The Indian Sub-continent theologian Faḍl al-Rasūl al-Badāyūnī (d.1289/1872) discusses the role prophets play and asserts they are an intermediary between God and his creation. They occupy a station that lies between the angelic and human status and are capable of experiencing certain human characteristics such as pain, illness etc., but spiritually they are free from all defects that would contradict their angelic qualities.[141] If prophets possessed questionable qualities, it would cause

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[137] Al-Tamīmī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, pp. 174-176.

[138] Q5:20.

[139] Q2:213.

[140] Q23:44.

[141] Al-Badāyūnī, Faḍl al-Rasūl, *Al-Mu'taqad al-Muntaqad ma Sharhihī al-Mustanad al-Mu'tamad*, commentary by Aḥmad Riḍā Khān al-Qādrī al-Barelwī, (Mumbai, Raza Academy, 1999), Chapter 2, p. 95.

people to rebel against them. Al-Badāyūnī adds the appointment of prophets is not an impossibility as the *Barāhima* claim and not compulsory as the philosophers believe to protect the universal order. With the *Barāhima,* there is a difference of opinion regarding who they were. According to some Muslim scholars, they are deists from India who worshipped a deity called *'Barhām'*, but according to others, they follow a philosopher called *'Barhām'*. Zouggar promotes the idea that there are two hypotheses. According to the first theory, *Barāhima* are a mere invention and the second theory is that they were an actual group, with a theology later ascribed to them to prove their denial of prophethood.[142] Stroumsa believes Jewish authors also mention them but adds that according to modern scholarship, they were a myth created by Muslim theologians to justify the need for prophets.[143] As a result, of being in the best interest of humankind, it is impossible to withhold the sending of prophets. Additionally, al-Badāyūnī declares the station of prophethood is not attainable through human effort, contradictory to what philosophers believe in.[144]

Philosophers' beliefs regarding prophets are contradictory to those of the *Ahl al-Haq* (People of the Truth), yet Al-Farhārī describes them as the *Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jama'ah* (the Orthodox Sunni Muslims, as opposed to the Shī'ī and Mu'tazila).[145] The philosophers believe that prophethood is not divine bestowment upon those chosen by God; rather it is attainable through human effort and necessary, thus rejecting the divine allocation of chosen people. They also deny the view that an angel descends from the heavens with revelations for them.[146]

Turning his attention to the Mu'tazila, Al-Farhārī claims Mu'tazila believe it is compulsory (*wājib*) upon God to send prophets and their reasoning is based upon the flawed principle that it is '*aṣlaḥ*' (in the best interest of humankind) and therefore compulsory. [147] He adds that a group of scholars from

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[142] Zouggar, Nadjet, *The Philosophers in Sunni Prophetology*, Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem [En ligne], 23 | 2012, mis en ligne le 20 février 2013, Consulté le 13 octobre 2015), https://journals.openedition.org/bcrfj/7279.

[143] Stroumsa, Sarah, *The Barāhima in Early Kalam,* Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam, 6 (1985), pp. 229-241, [N.d.]. Academia.edu <https://www.academia.edu/37023578/Sarah_Stroumsa_The_Bar%C4%81hima_in_Early_Kalam_Jerusalem_Studies_in_Arabic_and_Islam_6_1985_229_241> [accessed 12 August 2019].

[144] Al-Badāyūnī, *Al-Mu'taqad al-Muntaqad ma Sharhihī al-Mustanad al-Mu'tamad*, Chapter 2, p. 95.

[145] Al-Farhārī, p. 25.

[146] Ibid, p. 97, p. 107.

[147] The theory of '*aṣlaḥ*' refers to the Mu'tazilī belief that God caters for man with that which is best for him.

the Transoxiana region agree with this principle, but they are wrong. He also criticizes Abul Barakāt al-Nasafī and those who agree with him for having the same beliefs as the Mu'tazila.[148]

In light of prophets knowing their rank, the notable theologian 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī remarks that a prophet (*nabī*) is aware of his prophethood (*nubuwwah*).[149] He has to justify to the people that he is what he claims to be and to do this God makes him aware through the following means. God addresses him directly and creates certainty within his heart, which results in him believing it to be from the creator. The case of Adam when God created him and infused him with knowledge of created things highlights this. The second method is also without an intermediary, where God provides indisputable evidence (*Dalāil Qat'iyyah*) to the prophet that makes it clear that the one addressing him is God. The prophet achieves this by providing unique evidence such as miracles to support the claim of prophethood, represented in the case of Moses and Pharaoh.[150] The third method is by sending an intermediary in the form of an angel, who instructs him and convinces him that he is an angel and not a devil by way of performing a miracle. The fourth method in identifying his prophethood is through one of the aforementioned means, supported by the testimony of another prophet. This is shown in Abraham's testimony supporting Lot's claim to prophethood.[151]

3.2.2 The Need for Prophets

The primary role designated for prophets is to act as a medium between the Creator and His creation to guide the creation to the path chosen for them. God created humans with free will and if left to their own devices they would deviate from what is his primary function i.e. to worship his Creator and end up becoming susceptible to the evils of the world. If he did not appoint messengers to act as guides, to warn and give good tidings, humans would develop an excuse when they finally met their Lord. Moreover, people would only be capable of achieving their true potential if these individuals were able to guide them. The argument also exists that messengers guide to enable human advancement because human beings cannot fully perceive things through conventional methods, such as heaven and hell, angels and devils, etc. Therefore, prophets are needed to verify these through miracles and serve as role models for the people because they are individuals in possession of impeccable characters and most of all are infallible.[152]

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[148] Ibid, p. 98.

[149] Al-Tamīmī, *Uṣūl al Dīn*, pp. 176-177.

[150] Q72:8-27.

[151] Al-Tamīmī, *Uṣūl al Dīn*, pp. 176-177.

[152] Ibid.

To fulfil the task appointed to them, prophets would have to have specific obligations and duties to accomplish. The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* highlight these. A prophet is required to propagate the divine law[153], to expound the revelations[154], to guide people towards good and distance them from evil[155], and to lead the people in terms of religious and worldly affairs.[156] Muslims believe God sends prophets to particular nations[157] and except for the prophet Muḥammad, whom God sent to all nations, they did not play a universal role.[158]

3.2.3 Characteristics of Prophets

As previously mentioned, the role of a prophet requires the perfect person to occupy it. Therefore, the individual chosen for this role must possess unique qualities and traits. Scholars have unanimously agreed that prophets and messengers are worthy of praise throughout their entire lives, before, during and after the declaration of their office. The rationality behind this is that if any of them had committed an act in violation of their office, this would weaken, if not invalidate their claim to that office. When God appointed them to their office, He bestowed five characteristics upon them, the opposite of which they cannot possess. The five qualities are; infallibility (*'iṣmah*), honesty (*ṣidq*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), propagation (*tablīgh*) and superior intelligence (*faṭānah*).[159]

As bearers of divine guidance, prophets have to demonstrate immaculate qualities and characteristics to enable them to perform their appointed role.

Q57:65.

Ibn Taymiyyah, *Kitāb al Nubuwwāt*, p. 22.

[153] Q5:67, Q33:38-39.

[154] Q16:44.

[155] Ṣābūnī, Muḥammad 'Alī, *Al-Nubuwwah wal Anbiyā*, (Damascus, Syria, Maktaba al-Ghazālī, 1985), pp. 31-50.

[156] Q4:59,64, Q5:49.

[157] Q10:47, Q16:36.

[158] Q4:79.

Al-Badāyūnī, Faḍl al-Rasūl, *Al-Mu'taqad al-Muntaqad*, Chapter 2, pp. 118-119.

Sa'īdī, Ghulām Rasūl, *Tibyān al-Qur'ān*, (Lahore, Rumi Publications and Printers, 2000), iv, pp. 395-96.

Bennet, Clinton, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: A Guide for the Uninitiated*, Continuum International Publishing Group, London, 2010), p. 31.

Akhtar, Shabbir, *Islam as a Political Religion: The Future of an Imperial Faith*, (New York, Routledge, 2011), p. 32.

[159] Al-Jurjānī, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad, *Sharh al-Mawāqif*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1988), viii, pp. 288.

Al-Badāyūnī, *Al-Mu'taqad al-Muntaqad*, Chapter 2, pp. 110-114.

1. Chief among the attributes that they have to possess is infallibility (‘*iṣmah*). This constitutes infallibility from ignorance of the Creator and His attributes, from being in such a state that contradicts knowing such things before prophethood and after prophethood, and from lying and contradiction because God informs them of their appointment. More importantly, they have to be free of all forms of sin, and from continuous mistakes and ignorance.[160]

2. They have to possess the highest level of honesty due to the nature of the message they are bringing. If they report something contrary to that revealed by God, this will be detrimental to the revelation they receive.[161]

3. Prophets have to be entirely trustworthy; meaning there has to be conformity between their inner and outer aspect. They should be the first to implement the divine commandments upon themselves and then instruct others. As a result, they cannot transgress the commandments. God appoints prophets as the ultimate role models for humanity, thus any transgression would be a contradiction of this status. This can also be seen as infallibility, as they are protected from such acts.[162]

4. God primarily appoints prophets to propagate the divine teachings of the Lord and not to do so would result in contravention of his wisdom. Consequently, verses exist that seem to show reproach and censuring, but in reality, are instruction and indication towards better decisions.[163]

5. When God instructs a prophet to propagate the divine message, the prophet has to address people of all levels of intellect. Therefore, he has to possess the highest form of intelligence, superior to any scholar, orator, philosopher etc. If he is unable to address the doubts and concerns of such people, then he is unsuitable for his position.[164]

6. Prophets are to be males only. This opinion is contrary to the *Ẓāhiriyyah* (literalists) who believe in the prophethood of Mary, taking this from the literal meaning of the Qur’ānic verses. Orthodox Muslims oppose them arguing that she did not receive *waḥy* (revelation) in the same context as prophets, merely inspiration that is revealed to selected humans, other than prophets. There is no evidence to support that this is a prophetic revelation and al-Rāzī and al-Bayḍāwī report consensus

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[160] Ibid, p. 110.

[161] Ibid, p. 111.

[162] Ibid, p. 113.

[163] Ibid, p. 113-114.

[164] Ibid, p. 114.

Q2:87, Q2:253.

upon this. A similar view is held regarding other instances mentioned in the Qur'ān such as the mother of Moses, Āsiyah, the Pharaoh's wife etc.[165] Stowasser notes that all of God's prophets and messengers were men and that women did not feature in God's blueprint as messengers. [166] She identifies that the *Ẓāhirī* (literalists) believe some women mentioned in the Qur'ān were prophets, but not messengers.[167] Mary, the mother of Jesus and Sara, the mother of Isaac, were both deemed female prophets because of the revelations they received from angels. She points out that this doctrine is rejected by 'consensus-based' Sunni doctrine, which labels it 'heretical innovation' (*bid'ah*), citing verses Q12:109 and Q16:43. Stowasser asserts that the main issue is the concept of purity, according to the orthodox definition of *'iṣmah*, especially physical purity, because purity is one of the main features of prophethood. Prophets have to be physically and spiritually pure. A woman cannot achieve physical purity due to menstruation.[168] Day argues that the doctrine of all three Abrahamic faiths contains very scarce information regarding female prophets or their acceptance.[169] In all three faiths, there is some representation of this doctrine, but it is declared heretical and dismissed.[170]

7. Protection from occupying roles deemed lowly by people.[171]
8. Protection from physical defects such as blindness and leprosy etc. the stutter of Moses was removed after the announcement of prophethood and the blindness of Jacob is disputed.[172]
9. They have to have good conduct and manners, refraining from acts deemed indecent.[173]

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[165] Al-Badāyūnī, *Al-Mu'taqad al-Muntaqad*, Chapter 2, pp. 114-115.

[166] Stowasser, Barbara Freyer, *Women in the Qur'ān, Traditions and Interpretations*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 20.

[167] Ibid, p. 77.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Stökl, Jonathan, *Female Prophets in the Ancient Near East, Prophecy and Prophets in the Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. by John Day and Clark International (New York, 2012), p.47.

[170] Williamson, H.G.M Jonathan, *Female Prophets in the Ancient Near East*, Prophecy and Prophets in the Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar, ed. by John Day, (T and T Clark International, New York, 2010), p. 65.

Noegel, Scott B., and Brannon M. Wheeler, *Historical Dictionary of Prophets in Islam and Judaism*, (Lanham, MD, USA: Scarecrow Press, 2002), p. 142.

[171] Al-Badāyūnī, *Al-Mu'taqad al-Muntaqad*, Chapter 2, p. 115.

[172] Ibid, p. 115-116.

[173] Ibid, p. 116.

10. They have to be descendants of a good lineage that is free from any criticism. There is a discussion regarding whether Āzar was the father or uncle of Abraham. Orthodox Muslims take the latter position arguing that the word 'father' is metaphorically used by Arabs for uncle.[174]

In conclusion, these are considered to be the main qualities that a messenger is required to possess to fulfil his role and help people achieve their true potential. Anything contradictory to these is unacceptable.

3.2.4 Number of Prophets

The identification of the exact number of prophets and messengers is something that the Qur'ān does not address directly; only twenty-five prophets are mentioned by name. Muslim scholars and historians have generally agreed that the number of prophets (*nabī*) sent to humankind is one hundred and twenty-four thousand, as is recorded in the books of *Ḥadīth*, the first amongst them being Adam and the last being Muḥammad.[175] They also agree that the number of messengers (*rusul*) is three hundred and thirteen.

Belief in prophets is not universal and certain faiths reject it outright. The *Barāhima* deny this, claiming outright that there were no prophets, though some amongst them choose to accept Adam and Abraham but reject the rest. The Sabians accept the prophethood of Adam and Seth, believing that Seth also received a divine book, but reject all the other prophets.[176] According to the medieval Jewish Rabbi Rashi, there were forty-seven male prophets and seven female prophets who were prophesied to lead Israel, as is recorded in the Talmud.[177] Similarly, Christians believe in the Biblical prophets, dividing them into major and minor prophets, without a definitive number.

The most senior among the prophets were five; Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. Out of the entire family of prophets, only five were considered to have been Arabs, Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Ishmael, Shu'ayb and Muḥammad.

3.3 Mu'tazila and Prophethood

The second most influential group is the Mu'tazila who are described as heterodox and rationalistic theologians. Some Muslim historians and heresiographers have branded them disbelievers, due to

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[174] Ibid.

[175] Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawāid wa Manba' al-Fawāid*, Ḥadīth 734, ii, pp. 198-199.
[176] Al-Jurjānī, *Sharh al-Mawāqif*, viii, p. 259.

Al-Tamīmī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, p. 177.

[177] Scherman, Nosson, *The Stone Edition Tanach*, (Mesorah Publications, Limited), p. 2038.

their belief that the Qur'ān was created and that we have free will and the ability to act upon it, amongst other controversial beliefs.[178] The school developed and flourished for about two and a half centuries between 800-1050 AD during the Abbasid caliphate and was eventually brought to a halt by the orthodox Muslims, the Ash'arites and Maturidites, who defended their beliefs through '*Ilm al-Kalām* (Science of Discourse).[179] The Mu'tazila *kalām* was conserved in the curriculum of the Zaydī and Imāmī Shī'a, but more recently it has seen a resurgence amongst moderate and modernist Sunnis.[180]

Granting prominence to rationality has led people to accuse the Mu'tazila of numerous things, including the denial of the need for revelation. The underlying cause of this is the accusation of believing people can understand everything through reason. Martin, Woodward and Atmaja claim that the writings of the Mu'tazila represent the opposite: according to the Mu'tazila, human reason is not sufficient to know everything; therefore, we need revelation to deduce what is good and bad for humans. They believe that a person can determine the necessity of showing gratitude to God through rationality, but the ritual manner in how to perform this is beyond human understanding, the responsibility of explaining how humans can achieve this falls upon the prophet. Therefore, the prophet's word must be the truth. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār argues that whilst reason can help unveil the broad outlines of religious duty, the details cannot be understood without revelation and gives the example of the Day of Judgement, saying it is comprehensible that this day will eventually arrive, but the nature of punishments and reward, alongside other finer details cannot be understood without revelation. Abū Hāshim supports his position.[181]

This explanation presented by leading Mu'tazila thinkers confirms the understanding that we cannot know everything through reason; some information has to be provided through revelation, therefore a prophet is required to fulfil this necessity. Abū Hāshim asserts prophets came to validate our knowledge acquired through reason. In conclusion, the Mu'tazila do not place reason higher than revelation, rather they believe that for revelation to have any religious validity it has to be supported by divine revelation.

In the text '*Sharh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah* (Commentary on the Book of the Five Fundamentals) by the renowned Mu'tazila scholar Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, he explains the reason for placing the discussion

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[178] Martin, Richard C., Mark Woodward, Dwi Surya Atmaja, and Dwi S. Atmaja. 1997. Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazililism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol (London: Oneworld Publications, 1997), p. 10.

[179] Ibid.

[180] Ibid.

[181] Ibid, pp. 187-188.

on prophethood immediately after the chapter on '*al-'Adl*' (justice). He explains the primary reason for God to send prophets is God knows that our benefit lies with *Sharī'ah* (Islamic law) therefore he must inform us to avoid depriving us of something compulsory upon him to teach us. His justice requires that he does not deprive us of that which is of benefit to us.[182]

Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār explains the *Barāhima* acknowledge the monotheism of a Creator and His justice, but they deny prophethood. The reasoning for their rejection is that the intellect rejects everything the prophets brought to the people such as prayer, hajj etc. and all these are considered '*qabīḥ*' (morally unacceptable). What prophets deliver to the people falls into two categories; either it is according to reason, therefore there is no need for it, or it is contradictory to intellect and thus becomes rejected. Their proposition is rejected on the basis that we do not intellectually conclude an action is good or bad definitively, therefore God sends prophets who identify for us with certainty the nature of the acts. [183]

Moving on Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār agrees with the literal definition of *nabī*[184] and goes as far as mentioning that there is technically no difference between a *nabī* and a *rasūl*, but acknowledges that there is opposition to this as it would create confusion regarding a verse where both appear simultaneously.[185] He continues to explain the belief stating that if God sent a messenger to us, then he must declare and reveal his prophethood through absolute knowledge that would verify his claim. He further mentions that sending prophets is God's grace (*luṭf*) upon his creation, if there is benefit in sending one prophet, he will send one; and if there is a need for more, he will send more. [186] This constitutes God's grace. Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār then discusses the status of the prophet claiming it is not necessary to commission the best of people if the person appointed and others are of a similar rank. Rather the appointed person will automatically become greater after he is appointed as a result of his carrying prophecy.[187]

'Abd al-Sattār Mayhūb writes that as a result of Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's acknowledging *nabī* and *rasūl* as being synonymous, it stands to reason that *nubuwwah* is a reward for actions as opposed to

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[182] Al-Hamdāni, Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharh al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, ed. by Dr 'Abd al-Karīm 'Uthman, (Cairo, Egypt, Maktaba Wahba, 1996), p. 563.

[183] Ibid, pp. 563-564.

[184] Ibid, p. 567.

[185] Ibid, p. 568.

[186] Ibid.

[187] Ibid, p. 576.

risālah.[188] He further adds that there is a difference in the status of the prophets. Some of them are sent to certain nations, like all the prophets in comparison to Muḥammad, who was sent to all humanity.[189]

In terms of prophetic characteristics, the most important characteristic is a prophet must be free from anything that causes rejection because the purpose of sending God's grace upon his people is for their benefit. If prophets displayed characteristics that repelled people, it would defeat the purpose of sending them. They have to be free of major sins, before and after prophethood. Furthermore, prophets must be human and not angels, living a life like those around them, displaying qualities and traits similar to them such as happiness, sorrow, hunger, thirst, anger, etc.[190]

In conclusion, the Mu'tazila stipulate prophets are exemplary human beings who we cannot portray as individuals who surrender to their baser human instincts. God bestows upon them responsibilities that demand they hold themselves to the highest level of accountability to God.

3.4 Shī'ism and Prophetology

The third most influential group is the Shī'a. According to Shī'a prophetology, the word *nabī* is derived from *nubuwwah* meaning 'to be elevated', thus a *nabī* is an 'elevated person'. The other possibility is it is derived from '*nubū'ah*' and means 'to prophesy', thus a *nabī* is 'one who prophesies'. The word *rasūl* is derived from '*Risālah*' which means to send and a *rasūl* is sent from Allah. According to Islamic terminology, *nabī* means a man sent directly to humankind to lead them to the straight path. The word 'man' excludes angels who were sent by God for various purposes, who are not called *nabī* or *rasūl*. Additionally, it also excludes women who cannot be prophets. The phrase 'directly to humankind' clearly states that a *nabī* does not get his inspiration or revelation through any other means except God.

A *nabī* and *rasūl* must be human since an angel would not be able to lead humankind, people would simply be incapable of following it. The Shī'ī scholar Muḥammad Ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī narrates from the Shī'ī Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq that there are four categories of prophets and messengers. The first type of prophet achieves awareness of his prophethood personally: no angel comes to inform him. The second type of prophet receives visions in his sleep and hears a voice in his dreams; he does

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[188] Mayhūb, Dr 'Abd al-Sattār, *'Al-Qur'ān wal Nubuwwah 'inda al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār'*, (Dar al-Hidāyah, 1996), p. 200.

[189] Ibid.

[190] Ibid, p. 205.

not see the angel whilst awake and God does not send him to any particular nation. He is a prophet but subject to a prophet who is an Imām as Lot is subject to Abraham.[191]

The objective behind this assertion is the projection of *Imāmah* onto the prophets, which in turn validates the position of the infallibility of their Imāms. The third type of prophet possesses all the qualities of the previous type, but God sends him to a particular nation, large or small, such as Jonah and he is also subject to an Imām. The fourth type of prophet possesses the qualities of the third type and is an Imām. Initially, he is only a prophet but is later elevated to the position of prophet and Imām. The '*Ūlul'Azm*' (arch-prophets) prophets such as Abraham are granted this honour. In conclusion, none are guilty of transgression, sin or any other form of immorality, therefore they are granted the position of Imām.[192]

The Shī'a also differentiate between the terms *nabī*, and *rasūl* and add the term '*muḥaddith*'. Al-Kulaynī mentions Muḥammad Bāqir was questioned about the verse where both terms *nabī* and *rasūl* appear and the difference between them. He replied that a *nabī* was someone who saw an angel in his dream and heard its voice but did not see it whilst awake. A *rasūl* possesses the previous qualities but differs in the sense that he sees the angel whilst awake. By *muḥaddith,* Bāqir referred to one who conversed with angels, but neither saw them in his dream nor awake.[193]

In summary, the Shī'ī school has its division of prophets, that bears similarities to the other two schools but is unique in the sense that it supports the concept of *Imāmah* (Imāms who function as heirs of the prophet Muḥammad)

3.4.1 Reasons and Benefits of Prophethood

The Shī'a provide two reasons for the need for prophethood;

1. People would complain on the Day of Judgement that God did not send anyone to them to guide them when God rewards or punishes them.
2. Prophethood is God's grace for humankind. Therefore, it is incumbent upon God to send prophets to help people on the right path.[194] In this sense, they agree with the Mu'tazila that this act is obligatory on God.

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[191] Al-Kulaynī , Muhammad Ibn Ya'qūb, *Al-Shafi*, translation Uṣūl al Kāfī, (Karachi, Zafar Salim Publications Trust, 2004), ii, Ibid, Ch.2, p. 22.

[192] Ibid.

[193] Ibid, Ch.3, p. 22-23.

[194] Al-Mutahhari, *Al-Nubuwwah: Muallafat al-Shahīd Mutahhiry*, pp. 49-54,

The two reasons given for the benefit of prophethood are;

1. To bring the laws of God to humankind, to ensure impartial justice, safety and progress of society.
2. To help people attain perfection spiritually and closeness to God.[195]

3.4.2 Qualifications of a *Nabī*

According to Shī'ī belief *anbiyā* (s.*nabī*) or *rusul* (s.*rasūl*) need to possess certain qualifications for their roles. They have to be the most perfect people of their time in all aspects such as knowledge, bravery, generosity, piety etc. Secondly, they have to avoid anything that will cause disgrace or disrepute, meaning they cannot suffer any ailment or deficiency that will result in revulsion from the people. Thirdly, they should be infallible. Fourthly, they should perform miracles to prove their claim to prophethood.[196]

3.4.3 Prophecy in General

Shī'ī scholars believe there is a higher purpose behind the creation of humans, which God highlights in the Qur'ān as his worship.[197] God has chosen certain exalted people to guide humankind, entrusting them with his messages for all people. This responsibility falls to the messengers and prophets through whom the grace and guidance flow from the heavens to the earth. It is necessary to understand that each message a prophet brought was the most complete message of that time, and without it, humankind would be unable to attain perfection.[198]

3.4.4 Reasons for the necessity of prophethood

God's creation of humankind signifies a higher purpose, and humankind being the only intellectual creature, the purpose must be comprehensible to them. Unfortunately, this intellect is not perfect and requires assistance, to enable man to fulfil his potential. Human origin, his ultimate destination, the universe and its mysteries, all are things that the human intellect desires answers to and his intellect alone cannot provide the answers to this.[199] Therefore, those who believe in human intellect and wisdom, rejecting divine guidance must respond to the following issues.

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[195] Rizvi, *Prophethood*, pp. 7-8.

[196] Ibid, p. 8.

[197] Q51:56.

[198] Sobhani, Ayatollah Ja'far, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam*, translated, ed. by Reza Shah-Kazemi, (London, New York, I.B. Publishers, in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies London, 2001), p. 63.

[199] Ibid.

1. Human intelligence and learning are incomplete when it comes to unravelling the mysteries of the past and future, only divine guidance can only provide this.
2. Humans are inherently compelled to look out for their interests and advancement, very rarely taking into consideration the benefit to humanity. Prophetic guidance transcends personal interest and is for humanity as a whole, because of its divine nature. These two reasons highlight the need for prophets.[200]

3.4.5 The Qur'ān and Aims of Prophecy

Qur'ānic prophetology highlights the following reasons for the need for prophets.

1. Propagation of *tawḥīd* (promoting oneness of God) and opposition to other forms of deviation.[201] Imam 'Ali stated that they were appointed "to teach (God's) slaves about their Lord of which they were ignorant".
2. To teach humankind the sciences of religion, and divine messages and show them the straight path and the way of purification.[202]
3. Establishing justice in human society.[203]
4. Providing authoritative judgement in diverse matters.[204]
5. To silence any arguments against God and his slaves.[205]

3.4.6 Ways of Identifying Prophets

Human nature demands all claims are supported by proof; therefore, any person who claims to be a prophet has to provide definitive and concrete evidence to support their claim. This can be determined in the following three ways

1. The previous prophet provides testimony after the current prophet establishes his prophethood.

Al-Ṭabaṭabāī, Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn, *Shi'ite Islam*, translated from Persian and edited by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed. by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, (New York, State University of New York Press, 1975), p.123-124.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Q16:36.

[202] Q62:2.

[203] Q57:25.

[204] Q11:213.

[205] Q4:165.

Al-Ṭabaṭabāī, *Shi'ite Islam*, pp. 127-128.

2. Portents and signs must bear testimony. These can be the way of life of the prophet, the content of his religious call, etc.
3. Performance of prophetic miracles (*mu'jizah*). The prophet will be able to perform miraculous feats to convince those who deny his claim.[206]

Sobhani asserts the first two are not universally applicable, but the third has become the conventional means of proving a prophet's claim. This should not be confused with 'saintly miracles' (*karāmah*), also an extraordinary act that can be performed by 'righteous' servants of God. The Qur'ān mentions examples of such people and the acts they perform, such as the Virgin Mary[207] receiving out-of-season fruits, and the transportation of the Queen of Sheba's throne in the blink of an eye[208] from Yemen to Palestine by Āṣif Ibn Barkhiyya.

3.4.7 Revelation and Prophecy

Prophets communicate with God through revelation. This is not a product of human intellect or ability, but rather something God bestows upon his prophets to enable them to become recipients of divine communication. The Qur'ān shows that revelation has nothing to do with any outward influence. Rather an angel brings it, something that cannot be understood by conventional means.[209] Sobhani lists a few groups and their theories that attempt to explain revelation. One group claims that prophets are geniuses and revelations are a result of their meditation. According to this, the 'faithful spirit' is nothing more than the 'purified spirit and soul' of a genius and the revelations are nothing more than the formal expression of sublime ideas.[210] Sobhani dismisses any attempt to explain prophetic revelation by empirical means, explaining it is something linked to the unseen and, therefore not confined to material methods. Such empirical means contradict what the prophets of God have said, that their message is divine.

Next Sobhani identifies another group with the same motive as the above, who believe revelation to be the 'consummation of the spiritual states of the prophets'. The prophet attains 'a degree of realisation' due to the strength of his faith and intense devotion and many profound truths are revealed

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[206] Ibid.

pp. 128-130.

[207] Q3:37.

[208] Q27:40.

[209] Q26:192-194.

[210] Sobhani, *Doctrines of Shi'i Islam*, p. 69.

Al-Ṭabaṭabāī, *Shi'ite Islam*, pp. 125-126.

in his innermost being. He then imagines that these truths have been cast into his heart from the unseen, whereas in reality, they are from his soul. The adherents of such a view claim they do not dismiss the sincerity of the prophets and believe that they have witnessed the truth, but do doubt the origins of them. Sobhani says that this is nothing new, as this opinion existed in the period of ignorance (*Jāhiliyyah*), by those who called revelation 'muddled dreams'.[211] The Qur'ān refutes any notion of angels delivering revelations as being a figment of the imagination.[212]

3.4.8 Number of Prophets

Al-Ṭabaṭabāī argues a great number of prophets were sent and this is known through the Qur'ān and tradition. Some are mentioned by name whilst others are not, but an exact number has not been determined. Only one *Ḥadīth* narrated from Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī confirms there were one hundred and twenty-four thousand. Similar to other schools of thought, Al-Tabtabā'ī asserts that not all prophets brought a new set of laws, to be exact there were only five of them: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muḥammad. Others simply followed their laws (*Sharī'ah*).[213]

3.5 Analysis of Prophethood According to the Orthodox Sunni, Shī'a and Mu'tazila

When comparing the three schools of thought it is evident, that there are similarities and differences in their prophetology. Concerning the definition, all three schools agree upon the origin of the terms *nabī* and *rasūl*, but in terms of what they represent, there is a minor difference of opinion. The orthodox Sunni and Shī'ī scholars agree upon the definition and difference between the terms, but according to the Mu'tazila, the terms are synonymous, although they do register this opinion is disputed.

Concerning the reasons for the appointment of prophets and the need for them, all three agree prophets are the most exalted people of their time, with the Mu'tazila differing, interestingly asserting prophets do not need to be the most superior beings. Prophets could have equals, but this would be true before their appointment, immediately ceasing to be true after. This view is objectionable because it would question the appointment of an individual technically not the most qualified person for that position;

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[211] Q21:5.

[212] Q11:17.

[213] Al-Ṭabaṭabāī, *Shi'ite Islam*, p. 130.

something that goes against their principles. After all, God would be forsaking what is best for his creation. It contradicts the Qur'ānic prophetology of a prophet being the best example.[214]

The Mu'tazila view regarding the characteristics of prophets is similar but varies concerning infallibility. Orthodox Sunni scholars believe that prophets are infallible and free from error, but permit certain discrepancies that cause a difference of opinion amongst themselves. The Shī'a and Mu'tazila categorically reject any possibility of sin and error stating that this contradicts the prophets' responsibilities of guiding people towards God and protects them from rejection. A more detailed discussion will take place in the next section.

In conclusion, the views regarding prophetology amongst the three main schools of Islam show that overall, there is an agreement about beliefs regarding prophets, but there are differences we cannot overlook and must take into consideration.

3.6 Prophethood in Christianity and Judaism

David E Aune mentions the Hebrew term for individuals who are inspired by God and transmit divine communication is 'seer' ('*hozeh*' '*ro'eh*') meaning 'one who sees' what is hidden in others, 'man of God' and 'man of spirit'. The most common word used for prophet is *nabī*, which etymologically means 'one who is called', but later became 'speaker or spokesman' of God. The latter replaced the former to a greater degree, even though they are all used interchangeably.[215] Aune claims the term 'prophet' (Hebrew: *nabī*, Greek: *prophḗtēs*) was originally reserved for ancient Israelite prophets or eschatological prophets, and also highlights that divination is one form of accepted prophetic speech, hence diviners could be deemed prophets. He draws up a division of prophets and categorises each one based on the particular characteristics they possess.

Aune claims the first Israelite prophets to appear in Jewish sources are the 'Shamanistic Prophets' in 11 B.C. Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha were examples of this type. They were a culmination of holy man, sage, miracle worker and soothsayer. According to him, they were intimately associated with holy places and religious rituals, combining the role of priest and prophet, a distinction not found within Islam. These individuals moved around freely and lived off gifts and offerings from those who served them. Both Samuel and Elisha presided over prophetic associations and prophets would often

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[214] Q33:21.

[215] Aune, David E, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, (Grand Rapids, MI, USA, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), p. 83

prophesy in groups. They even had a distinctive dress code of hairy sheepskin or goatskin. In addition, there may have been a prophetic succession on occasions.[216]

The second type identified by Aune were the cult and temple prophets. In ancient Israel, various groups of prophets carried out prophetic duties, the temple prophets, the cult prophets, and the court prophets, with the possibility of the former being older.[217] These were priests primarily attached to the temple cult in Jerusalem temple (the temple prophets were associated with the temple of Solomon. Prophetic guilds were often associated with their centres) and there is a strong presumption that they were cult functionaries. The likes of Isaiah and Judah were deemed to be from amongst them. Some prophets were stipended members of the temple staff and under priests, although priests considered them recipients of divine revelation.[218]

The third type is court prophets, who conveyed divine revelations to kings and monarchs. They provided prophecies for monarchs before wars but were predominantly employed by monarchs to inform them of what God desired. Both Stipended prophets and permanent court prophets such as Gad and Nathan were kept by the ruling power. In essence, they were employees of the kings, providing them with the information required for personal and public needs.[219]

The fourth type is free prophets. According to Aune, this phenomenon developed dramatically in the middle of the eighth century B.C. through the likes of Amos and Hosea in Israel and Micah and Isaiah in Judah, though they were not stipended members of the court. The roles of the court and temple prophets differed from those of the free prophets. Court and temple prophets ensured the preservation of the traditional, religious and social customs and values of Israel, whereas free prophets were responsible for provoking social and religious change. They were deemed to be reformers and not innovators, acting outside the established authority. They claimed to be more worthy of rule than the kings and monarchs.[220]

These definitions and portrayals of prophecy have very little if any similarities to Qur'ānic prophethood. As discussed, prophets in the Qur'ān were individuals who were recipients of divine communication, whose only role was to deliver the communication. The idea of a prophetic association in the Biblical sense did not exist, nor did collective prophecy. Prophets appeared in

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[216] Ibid.

[217] Newsome Jr, James D, *The Hebrew Prophets*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984), p. 7.

[218] Ibid.

[219] Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World*, p. 85.

[220] Ibid.

succession, but only by appointment from God, and there was no particular dress code or restrictions to appointed places. This categorisation shows an interesting division that delegated certain responsibilities to each group, with only one thing in common, divine revelation. The Qur'ānic display of prophethood highlights an association of prophets, but only in the sense of a collective shared message and responsibility, Islamic literature does not recognise such divisions.[221]

The role of prophets described by Aune is interesting but has little bearing on Qur'ānic prophethood. He explains that their role was to deliver oracles upon request. They were consulted to locate lost property, learn the outcome of any illness, appease an angry deity etc. They were even associated with warring activities, rousing kings to war. Furthermore, their inspiration is the result of a 'revelatory trance', where the prophets receive divine instructions through a trance. This is different from a 'possession trance' where the person is possessed by an entity. Aune writes musical instruments and hallucinogens may induce this state, and they display behaviour resembling drunkenness or madness. Qur'ānic prophethood does not indicate anything remotely resembling such trances or possessions. All of the above has no mention in the Qur'ān nor *Ḥadīth* or stories of the prophets. Moreover, it contradicts the prophetology of all three major schools of Islam.

Furthermore, prophetic conflict is an element of Biblical prophetology that does not exist in Islam and would contradict the very nature and need for prophets. Aune highlights prophetic conflict and believes there was rivalry amongst the different groups. Court prophets and temple prophets were often in an alliance, but free prophets were often in conflict with temple prophets, which is a conflict between free prophets and kings. He believes that it is impossible to distinguish between true prophets and false prophets based upon 'objective historical criteria'.[222] Aune continues by discussing prophecy in early Christianity and claims that prophets and revelations remained important within early Christianity until the beginning of the second century when 'the forces of institutionalisation' diminished its importance. Aune's acknowledgement highlights a significant difference with Islamic prophetology, the fact that prophets and revelations lost their significance in Christianity could explain why Christians may not view prophets as infallible and the resultant acceptance of narratives of questionable behaviour attributed to them. Moreover, this would automatically result in the rejection of any relationship between these prophets and Islamic prophets as there would be very little, if any, common ground between them.

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[221] Ibid, pp. 84-85.

[222] Ibid, pp. 84-87.

Aune's work shows a significant difference between Muslim and early Jewish prophecy. The division of prophethood, the status, roles and other elements discussed are different from that of Islam. There seems to be little focus on what prophecy was and more focus on the institution of prophets and who they were. Prophets are presented as diviners, soothsayers etc. and portrayed as representatives of God, despite being dependent on others to support them and give them recognition, almost portrayed as subjects of men rather than God.

Hvidt takes the discussion in a different direction and argues against the cessation of prophecy that ended with the closure of the canon, the rise of '*Montanism*'[223] or Islam. He believes prophecy continued after Jesus, citing Thomas of Aquinas who declared prophecy that is directed at the amendment of morals has not ceased and will never cease.[224] Contemporary Christian theologians endorse this view and believe in the continuation of Christian prophecy. According to them, normal people can become the spokespeople of God, something that Muslim orthodoxy unequivocally rejects.

Hvidt divides prophecy into Old Testament and Christian Prophecy. Their traits are similar, but there exists a distinct difference. He argues that Old Testament prophecy has a distinct portrayal of the characteristics and tasks of prophets. Characteristics such as revelation, calling, resistance to the call, and more are all present in many prophets. Their primary job is delivering God's message to the people, though many of them show reluctance, arguing that they were unworthy of their tasks or afraid. Christian prophecy does not share the same qualities.[225]

The Old Testament depicts Moses as the primary prophet because he is the only one who sees God without dying and is the role model for all prophets, the prophet of all prophets. This may be in contrast to the prophet Muḥammad who Muslims acknowledge as the leader of all prophets. Therefore, Moses is the archetype who reminds the faithful of their covenant to God, but the promised Messiah will eclipse him and people should await his arrival. Muslims would argue this is the prophet Muḥammad.

As far as the cessation of prophecy is concerned, it is a popular belief that later scholars dismissed, arguing it has not ended, rather it has undergone change and Aune is one of its biggest proponents[226],

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[223] The term "Montanism" derives from the name of its founder Montanus and describes a Christian movement of prophesying and reform which began in second century CE Roman Phrygia.

Trevett, Christine, *Montanism*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[224] Hvidt, Niels Christian, *Christian prophecy The post Biblical tradition*, (London, Oxford University Press, 2007), p43.

[225] Ibid.

[226] Ibid, p. 43.

supported by the likes of Witherington.[227] Hvidt argues that Christian prophecy is a mutated continuation of its Old Testament and Judean counterparts.[228] Therefore, prophecy in the strictest sense does not apply here. The majority of Muslims vehemently disagree, arguing the prophet Muḥammad is the seal of all prophets and prophecy ended with him.[229] God's message to humankind has reached its culmination and there is no further need for more prophets.[230] Muslims have the guidance they need and the scholars are responsible for the guidance of people.[231]

In summary, according to Christianity a Christian who believes in receiving revelation and sharing it with others in a written or oral form is a prophet. Boring argues with this and contests that prophecy is delivered to the community and not to individuals, therefore a difference of opinion exists regarding the definition of a Christian prophet, but overall the belief is similar.[232]

Ipgrave adds a new dimension to this discussion claiming the most important issue raised by anyone claiming to be a prophet is the authenticity of the message he delivers.[233] He states that there is still a continuing struggle to discern true prophets from false ones in ancient Israel and the most important test for prophecy is the outcome, if the message comes true it means it is genuinely from God. He adds that even those charged with the responsibility of delivering God's message are not immune to the possibility of moral fault and self-deception. Hebrew Scriptures several times criticise individual prophets, therefore the issue of discerning true prophets from false has always been and continues to be a problem for the antecedent faiths. This is also an issue amongst Muslims, where individuals like Musaylma 'the liar'[234] have appeared and claimed prophethood, to recent claimants like Mirza Ghulam Aḥmad.[235] Muslims have rejected all who have made claims of prophethood after the prophet Muḥammad.

The Qur'ān highlights the importance of authenticating prophecy, though in an entirely different manner. People challenged the prophet Muḥammad about his revelations, but the Qur'ān responded

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[227] Witherington III, Ben, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy*, (Fortress Press, 1999), p. 381.

[228] Hvidt, *Christian prophecy The post Biblical tradition*, p. 51.

[229] Q33:40.

[230] Q5:3.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid, pp. 53-58.

[233] Ipgrave, Michael, *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Biblical and Qur'anic Perspective by Michael Ipgrave*, (Church House Publishing, 2001), p.54-55.

[234] Musaylimah Ibn Habib (d. 11/632).

[235] Mirza Ghulam Aḥmad (d. 1908).

to this with its text validating itself and highlighting historical figures who were also messengers to help further validate the prophet Muḥammad's claim. The Christian church believes the saving of revelation occurs through the presence and work of Jesus and no more addition to the revelation is required. Instead, Jesus's promise of the Holy Spirit pointed to a continuity of guidance for his disciples. Subsequently, Christians developed criteria for assessing prophecy; those who met the criteria were not actual prophets but heralds of a new life flowing from Jesus. Therefore, the continuity of prophecy does not refer to new prophets, but rather to individuals who receive inspiration and are a continuity of the prophecy of Jesus.

Both the Bible and the Qur'ān identify a pattern of behaviour preceding a prophet's reception of the divine word. Activities such as seclusion, meditation, etc. are practised and when the divine message is received, the prophet has to acknowledge it within himself first before delivering it. This reception separates the prophet from the rest of society placing him on a higher platform. It takes him out of the surroundings he was in and, places him in a new situation where he suffers alienation and isolation, having to come to terms with this new environment where he has to administer the divine word and law.[236]

In the concluding chapter of his book, Ipgrave writes about the relationship between God and his representatives, focusing on the issue of intimacy and respect between God and his prophets.[237] He argues that the Hebrew, Christian and Muslim accounts regarding this relationship between God and his prophet differ. The Hebrew Scriptures often portray the prophets involved in a dialogue with God and at times, it is very free, varying from bargaining to complaining, amongst all other types of emotions. The servants of God show all types of behaviour from pleading to reproving to disillusionment, but this does not lessen their bond or their worship. In the Christian understanding of these scriptures, the relationship is portrayed as one between a father and son. The relationship of Jesus with God is portrayed as a father-son relationship, hence all those connected with Jesus, such as his disciples, are made children of God. This is portrayed as unique because it surpasses that of Moses, who only spoke with God and that of Muḥammad, who despite claims of meeting God on his

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[236] Karam shah, Pir Muḥammad, *Ḍiyā al-Nabī* , (Lahore, Ḍiyā al-Qur'ān Publications, 1999), ii, p. 196.

Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, i, p. 46.

Sa'īdī, Ghulām Rasūl, *Tibyān al-Qur'ān*, (Lahore, Rumi Publications and Printers, 2000), i, pp. 649-651.

Ibn Hishām, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Malik, *Al-Sīrat al-Nabawiyyah li Ibn Hishām*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Jīl, Beirut, 1975), i, p. 222.

Schneidau, Herbert. N, *Sacred Discontent: The Bible and Western Tradition*, (Berkley and Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1976), p. 17.

[237] Ipgrave, Michael, *Bearing the Word: Prophecy in Biblical and Qur'anic Perspective*, p.116-140.

celestial journey did not portray his relationship on such a scale. Thus, the relationship of Jesus is deemed as a model for those associated with him and cannot be replicated by anyone. Ipgrave's opinion on prophecy only represents a Christian perspective and does not claim to represent any other faith.[238]

Islamic spirituality is very different, in the sense that drawing near to God is possible, but at the same time, *adab* (etiquette) must be observed at all times, as if one is in the presence of great authority. This distance must always be present and it draws a distinct line between God and his servants and shows a great difference in the way the relationship between the Creator and His creation is perceived by the three faiths.

Ipgrave's work highlights many similarities between the three faiths regarding prophecy and its components, but at the same time displays significant differences. Muslim belief draws a distinct line between God and his servants, a line that cannot be crossed at any time. Prophets are shown as people who do not have much choice in the task they are appointed and are expected to fulfil their duties, despite the hardships they will face for which they will receive rewards. They are bearers of particular qualities that separate them from the rest of society and have to portray themselves as the best of their communities. In the Christian and Hebrew scriptures, they are shown as allowing their personal feelings and emotions to overwhelm them, resulting in a display of characteristics that would defy their status.

My research will be only conducted from a theological approach, as the study of prophetic infallibility is primarily associated with theology. The role of prophets could be analysed from numerous perspectives such as philosophical, social, psychological, and jurisprudential, but their bearing on the issue of infallibility is not as relevant as the theological position.

The focus of the research is an appraisal of those narratives that are directly associated with prophets, divine representatives of a higher agency and subject to no one but God. I will be examining who they were and what is understood concerning them can only truly be achieved through the sacred canonical texts, the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*, alongside acceptable supporting material. The framework through which this field must be explored must be theology.

3.7 Infallibility

The first issue that I need to address is prophetic infallibility. The term *infallible* is defined as one of three possible things. It could refer to 'being incapable of error' i.e. unerring, 'not liable to mislead,

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[238] Ibid.

deceive, or disappoint', or it could denote 'incapable of error' in defining doctrines touching faith or morals.[239] The term centres on one particular fact, the 'inability to err', and is the third issue which relates to our discussion at hand.

Arguably, the concept of infallibility (also known as impeccability)[240] is a belief that transcends time and faith and a person cannot presume it to be exclusive to any one faith or being. It is present in the beliefs and teachings of many groups, who often strive to great lengths to prove this, facing questions regarding this from those outside the sphere of their faith, and sometimes from within.

In terms of existence, arguably the concept of infallibility has been present since humankind's arrival on this earth. Regardless of religious, political, social or financial reasons, man has always sought a perfect ideal to assist him in achieving his goal. Furthermore, this concept can be applied to individuals, groups, systems, and almost anything that needs to be perfect. It could be claimed that infallibility is not exclusive, but inclusive, as it applies to almost anything that requires a unique position, which elevates it above any rivalry or competition.

Religion has played an integral part in the development of world history and people of religion have always endeavoured to prove the veracity of their beliefs, often incorporating the notion of infallibility to help further them. They have advocated for an authority to transmit the message from a divine being to its intended recipients, without whom the teachings and beliefs of that faith are not above question from their adherents, let alone others. All three major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam have incorporated infallibility into their teachings, in some form or other, to ensure the word of God is properly transmitted and to prove the accuracy of their teachings.

Therefore, in the step to determine where infallibility exists and in what capacity, it is essential to examine Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and identify areas that would further help us understand what each faith contributes to this discussion that would enhance our understanding of the common and diverse articles of faith.

3.7.1 Infallibility in Christianity

The doctrine of infallibility is an important aspect of the Christian faith but varies amongst Christians. The Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church endorse the doctrine of infallibility but differ in terms of who is infallible and to what extent. In 'The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church',

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[239] 'Definition of INFALLIBLE'. [n.d.]. Merriam-webster.com <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/infallible> [accessed 3 January 2016].

[240] Walker, '*Impeccability*', ii, pp. 505-507.

infallibility is defined as "Inability to err in teaching revealed truth".[241] Therefore, according to the doctrines of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Church, the church is infallible, but their agreement ends here as they differ about exactly where it lies, whether it is in church doctrine or scripture of authority. Protestants and non-denominational churches, on the other hand, reject this, highlighting that Christ's sacrifice took place to expatiate the sins of the world and the Church. They stress that only God's word enjoys this privilege and nobody or nothing else is privy. Subsequently, they refute Papal infallibility on the basis that history is witness to their mistakes and indiscretions.[242]

Roman Catholic teachings incorporate papal infallibility, but this only occurs when the pope is speaking *ex cathedra* (literally translates as 'from the chair') on issues of faith or morals, otherwise, he is fallible. The first Vatican Council (1869-71) established this and the second council in 1962-65 re-affirmed it. This belief is based on the notion the pope is seen to occupy 'the chair of Peter' who was the disciple of Jesus and whom Jesus gave the responsibility to propagate his teachings.[243] The Catholic Church believes that Jesus appointed Peter to protect his faith and this signified his authority in the church. In Mathew 16:18 Christ declared that he would build his church on Peter's faith. In 16:19 Jesus promises Peter the power of the keys signifying his authority to govern the Lord's house. This doctrine was later adapted to the primacy of the Roman Bishops, which has undergone change and development, initially being vague, but over time becoming clearer.[244]

The teachings of the church mention that the pope is protected from committing errors because of the declaration of Jesus to Peter that he would be the uniting force in his church, signifying his authority to make binding decisions.[245] Although this belief had already existed, the First Vatican Council in 1869-70 dogmatically defined it.[246] Subsequently, Papal teachings are considered a part of the Sacred Magisterium, a concept amongst others (Sacred Scripture, and Sacred Tradition) essential to the understanding of infallible divine revelation. Therefore, Papal infallibility is considered to be one of the channels of the infallibility of the church, therefore cannot contradict Sacred Scripture or Sacred Tradition.

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[241] Cross, F.L, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Church*, third edition, ed. by E.A.Livingston, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 831.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Council Fathers. 1868. 'Decrees of the First Vatican Council', Papal Encyclicals, <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum20.htm> [accessed 27 July 2018].

[244] Chapman, Geoffrey, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (London, London Geoffrey Chapman, 1999), pp. 552-53.

[245] http://community.worldheritage.org/articles/Papal_Infallibility#cite_note-96, [N.d.-b]. Worldheritage.org <http://community.worldheritage.org/articles/Papal_Infallibility#cite_note-96> [accessed 28 October 2015].

[246] Ibid.

This doctrine is seen as dependent upon one of the major facets of the Catholic Church, the Petrine Supremacy (the pope as the representative of Christ has supreme power in the church), which is highlighted as the pope speaking *ex cathedra*.[247] For the teaching to be recognised as infallible it has to meet certain criteria:

1. It has to be a decision made by the supreme teaching authority of the church.
2. It has to be a doctrine of faith or morals
3. It has to bind the universal church
4. It has to be something that has to be held onto resolutely

It is clear from the discussion surrounding the issue of infallibility that it is difficult to ascertain the exact era of the introduction of infallibility or the person responsible for this, although Brian Tierney argues that it was the thirteenth-century Franciscan priest Peter Olivi who attributed infallibility to the pope.[248] His theory is supported by August Bernhard and Hasler and Gregory Lee Jackson.[249]

James Heft, [250] John V. Kruse[251] and the Catholic theologian and church historian Klaus Schatz,[252] who published a study in 1985 regarding *ex cathedra*, reject Papal infallibility, along with those who agree with him. Schatz dates Papal infallibility to the early days of Christianity and argues that the church does not claim the pope was entirely infallible, anything contrary to that decreed by the First Vatican Council has been denied by everyone. In 1829 Delahogue believed the notion of the pope,

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[247] Erwin Fahlbusch et al, *The Encyclopaedia of Christianity*, (Leiden, Netherlands, Eradman Books, E.J.Brill, 2005).

[248] Tierney, Brian, *Origins of Papal Infallibility 1150-1350*, (Leiden, Netherlands, E.J.Brill, 1972), p. 93.

[249] Jackson, Gregory L, *Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant: A Doctrinal Comparison of Three Christian Confessions*, (Martin Chemnitz Press, Glendale, Arizona, 2007), p. 185.

http://community.worldheritage.org/articles/Papal_Infallibility#cite_note-96 [accessed 28 October 2015]

[250] Heft, James, *John* Xxii *and Papal Teaching Authority: An Historical and Theological Commentary on Quia Quorundum Mentes (1324) with Special Attention to Brian Tierney's Origins of Papal Infallibility*, (University of St. Michael's College, 1977).

[251] Kruse, John V, *Re-Evaluating the Origins of Papal Infallibility: Understanding Papal Authority in the Bulls of the Franciscan Poverty Controversy (1230-1329)*, St Louis University (Published Doctoral Dissertation), 2005), p. 2.

[252] Klaus Schatz, S.J, *Papal Primacy: From its origins to the present*, Translated from German by John A.Otto and Linda M.Maloney, (Collegeville, Minnesota, The Liturgical Press, 1996), pp. 117-118.

even during *ex cathedra*, possessing the gift of infallibility could be denied without loss of faith. The Galatians denied this. [253]

Following the First Vatican Council dissent appeared amongst some Catholics regarding the issue of papal infallibility, they were prepared to accept church infallibility but refused to acknowledge papal infallibility. Those who opposed it such as Geisler and McKenzie reject it on the basis that it contradicts scripture and early church teachings.[254] Therefore, the doctrine mentioned is particular to the Catholic Church; other churches do not accept the notion of infallibility. Eastern Orthodoxy rejects papal infallibility on the belief that the Holy Spirit will not allow the whole body of Orthodox Christians to fall into error.[255] They assert that the first seven ecumenical councils were infallible, but only as accurate witnesses to the truth of the Gospel. They dismiss papal infallibility arguing early Christianity never taught this and that it does not extend to bishops.[256]

The Church of England and its sister churches in the Anglican Communion also reject papal infallibility; this is expressed in the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1571). John Wesley (Methodist) altered the Anglican Articles of Religion for the Methodists, especially those in America. The articles regarding the errors of the Church of Rome and the authority of the councils were dismissed, but article V regarding papal infallibility was retained.

Reformed and Presbyterian churches rejected papal infallibility, based upon the Westminster Confession of Faith, which was intended to replace the Thirty-Nine Articles in 1646. They went to the extremes of labelling the pope the 'antichrist'. The Evangelical churches also reject papal infallibility with reasons similar to the Methodists and Reformists.[257] According to their doctrine, only the Bible is infallible or inerrant. Millet claims that Mormons do not acknowledge apostolic or

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[253] Finch. G, *Romano pontifici sub hoc ultimo respectu considerato, et ubi loquitur, ut dicunt, ex cathedra, infallibilitatem attribuunt Ultramontani theologi, quibus alii, et Galli speciatim, contradicun*, The Romish Controversy (British Society for Promoting the Religious Principles of the Reformation, London, 1850), ii, p. 846.

[254] Geisler and Mckenzie (Fall 1994) What Think Ye of Rome? Part Four: The Catholic-Protestant Debate on Papal Infallibility, Christian Research Journal, p.24. <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/cri/cri-jrnl/web/crj0185a.html> [accessed 28 October 2015].

Treat, John Harvey; Butler, G. H. Houghton, *The Catholic faith, or, Doctrines of the Church of Rome contrary to Scripture and the teaching of the primitive church*, (Bishop Welles Brotherhood, 1888). (Rarebooksclub.com).

[255] Cleenewerck, Laurent, *His Broken Body: Understanding and Healing the Schism between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches*, (Washington, D.C., DC, USA: Euclid University Consortium Press, 2007), pp. 301–330.

[256] http://community.worldheritage.org/articles/Papal_Infallibility#cite_note-96 [accessed 28 October 2015].

[257] Larson, Timothy Trier, Daniel. J, *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.38.

prophetic infallibility stating that Moses made mistakes, but despite that, he is still loved and his teachings are accepted. The same applies to Peter, Paul and others.

In conclusion, it is undeniable the concept of infallibility is a part of the Christian tradition and has been ever since early Christianity, but there is controversy surrounding certain aspects. Christianity advocates prophetic infallibility on some level but also confirms individual infallibility, such as that ascribed to the pope. This is due to the validation by Jesus of Peter, which validates the infallibility of the church and by extension validation of the pope. Opponents of this argue that papal infallibility has never been validated, only Bible infallibility. Papal indiscretions and contradictions are also cited as a cause for rejection.

3.7.2 Infallibility in Judaism

Infallibility plays an important part in the Jewish faith but varies from the Christian faith despite sharing the belief in textual and individual infallibility. In the Jewish faith, infallibility exists in connection to the *Tannaim*, *Amoraim*, *Rishonim*, *Acharonim*, *Gedolim*, and *Geonim*, who were rabbinic sages that existed throughout Jewish history.

The *Tannaim*[258] and the *Amoraim*[259] believed in the infallibility of the Torah and its teachings in the broadest sense. Nahmanides emphasised the importance of tradition and based this on the belief that the ancient sages known as *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* were infallible.[260]

The aforementioned Rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud are considered to possess the authority to make decisions that will become binding on future generations, based on the special innate characteristics they possessed, which have since disappeared from human beings. God blessed them with a special insight into the Torah and human nature, rendering them infallible. In essence, they were unable to err in any area of human life or thought.[261] This concept is similar to that of Biblical and papal infallibility, whereby both the text and the individual are deemed beyond error.

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[258] The Tannaim were Rabbinic sages whose views are recorded in the Mishna from approximately 10-220BC, in an age known as the Mishnaic period which lasted about 210 years.

[259] The Amoraim ('those who say' or 'those who speak over the people'), they propagated the teachings of the Oral Torah from approximately 200-500CE. They successively appeared after the Tannaim.

[260] Huges, Aaron W, *Jewish Concepts of Scripture: A Comparative Introduction*, ed. by Benjamin D.Sommer, (New York, New York University Press, 2012), p. 142.

[261] Kellner, Menachem, *Maimonides on the "Decline of the Generations" and the Nature of Rabbinic Authority*, (Albany, NY, USA: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 1.

Kellner associates the belief with traditionalist Jews and argues that it is problematic because the disputes between the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* are well known.[262] He highlights two notions of the rabbinic nature, the 'essentialist approach' and the 'formalist approach'. According to the first, the rabbis possess an essential characteristic that differentiates them from the rest of humanity and on this basis, they are authorised by God to make decisions that will become binding on society. According to the second view, both groups will still possess the authority to make binding decisions, but they do not bear any special characteristics, rather their authority comes from their role.[263]

Lawee mentions that Isaac Abarbanel's work *Yeshu'ot meshiḥo*, from beginning to end, contains the claim, that the sages were the bearers of infallible non-legal tradition, and refers to them as 'ancients' (*Rishonim*)[264]. He states that the work depicts them as "those who received all truth from the prophets" and "in whom the spirit of the Lord spoke". Abarbanel also criticises Nahmanides for questioning this.[265] Lawee goes on to state that in some places Abarbanel ascribes almost prophetic qualities to the rabbis.[266] His work is seen to have expressed the doctrine of absolute acceptance of their word. This belief is similar to that of the Shī'a who ascribe infallibility to the Imams.

Regarding the Gedolim[267] sages, he advocates of the concept '*da'as Torah'* endorse the opinion that the *'Gedoli Yisrael'* have exclusive interpretive power, attributing an almost prophetic power to the sages. Everyone, including those who are versed in the Torah, must relinquish their authority. This belief has been compared to the notion of 'papal infallibility' and is traced back to the *Hassidic*[268] movement that began in the eighteenth century.[269]

Moreover, there are differences among the Jewish people regarding religious authority, which identifies their attitudes towards infallibility and to whom it is ascribed. The reformists claim that the religious authority lies in the ethical and universalistic teachings of the prophets. They are the only

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[262] Ibid.

[263] Ibid, p. 2.

[264] The Rishonim ('the first ones') existed between the 11th and 15th century and were the leading Rabbis of their time.

[265] Lawee, Eric, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defence, Dissent, and Dialogue*, (New York, State University of New York Press, 2001), p. 164.

[266] Ibid.

[267] The Gedolim refers to the leading Rabbis since the First World War.

[268] In the Hassidic tradition (a branch of Orthodox Judaism which promotes spirituality founded in the eighteenth century in Eastern Europe by Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov).

[269] Angel, Rabbi Marc, *Maimonides, Spinoza, and Us: Toward an Intetellectually Vibrant Judaism*, (Woodstock, Vermont, Jewish Lights Publishing, 2009), p. 90.

group to claim this and bear some similarity to the Muslims.[270] Conservative Jews dispute this and believe that it lies with the people. Their culture, customs, and practices throughout that age are their ultimate source of authority. They hold the belief that Judaism includes the religious texts, Hebrew Bible, Talmud, the codes as well as the people's practices.[271]

Orthodox Jews hold the *Halakhah* to be the ultimate source of authority. They assert that it is obligatory to conform to the norms decided by the majority of scholars in the past, codified into religious law. This is very similar to the Muslim concept of *ijmā*. Despite this, there are differences in orthodoxy due to the disputes regarding the identification of interpreters.[272] Hasidic Jews claim it is the *rebbe*, the saint-scholar, who is the ultimate authority, whereas opponents of this, the *mitnaggedim*, founders of the European *yeshivot*, insist it is the *Halakhah* and the technical *halakhic* expertise of the pious person.[273] Modern *yeshivot*[274] claim that even in matters of *Halakhah* the *Gedolim* are not infallible, also if there is room for legitimate differences of opinion in *halachic* matters, where the *Gedolim* have no expertise, then they are not infallible. He mentions that traditionalists, over the past three decades have gone as far as saying that the concept of *da'as Torah* must also be included with the aforementioned.[275]

After the *Amoraic* period, the *Savoraim* (expounders) emerged and were considered to be their direct successors. They were credited with making many additions to the Talmud and existed as two schools in Babylon. The heads of these schools were known as *Geonim* and their primary qualification was that they had to know the entire Talmud by heart. As a result of their expertise, they were recognised as authorities and their words were final.[276]

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[270] Danzger, M.Herbert, *Returning to Tradition: The Contemporary Revival of Orthodox Judaism*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1989), p. 166.

[271] Ibid.

[272] Ibid.

[273] Ibid, p. 167.

Glustrom, Simon, *The Language of Judaism*, (Oxford, Rowman and Littlefield publishers Inc., 2004), p. 97.

Ben-Chaim, Rabbi Moshe, *Religion of Reason*, (North Charleston, SC, USA: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2011), p. 12.

[274] A Jewish institution that focuses on the study of traditional religious texts, primarily the Talmud and Torah.

[275] Ben-Chaim, Rabbi Moshe, *Religion of Reason*, p. 12.

[276] Jacobs, Louis, *The Book of Jewish Beliefs*, (New Jersey, USA, Behrman House Inc., 1984), pp. 63-65.

Zucker claims that whilst the early rabbinic exegetes rejected any form of absolute prophetic sinlessness, the *geonic* exegetes reflected the stance of the Mu'tazila on the matter. Both believed that whilst there was no such thing as *'iṣmah* per se, prophets were nonetheless sinless.[277] Zucker's research is the only work that looks at the concept of prophetic infallibility in Judaism and Islam, highlighting a minor similarity between the two. Overall, it is evident that, unlike the majority of Muslims, there is a rejection of the concept, only accepting the notion of the Torah and to an extent the rabbis. The infallibility of these Rabbis is questionable. Those who reject the infallibility of the Rabbis reference from the Talmud, Pesachim 94b to prove their doctrine. Yehuda Levi argues that the Geonim and the Rambam believed that the sages of the Talmud erred in matters of science, particularly astronomy, so how could they be considered infallible?

In summary, the doctrine of infallibility amongst the predecessors of Islam was analysed first to identify the main proponents of this belief and to highlight the major aspects of this doctrine. It has become evident that it exists to a greater degree in the Christian faith as opposed to the Jewish, where it has a presence and its opponents compare it to the Christian doctrine of papal infallibility. The next step would be to study the concept in Islamic teachings and attempt to recognise areas where they overlap and where they differ.

3.7.3 Infallibility in Islam

The word *'iṣmah* is derived from the tri-literal root *'A-ṣa-ma* which comes in the meaning of *ma-na-'a* (prevent), *wa-qā* (protect) and *ḥa-fi-za* (safeguard). In the Arabic language, *'iṣmah* is derived from the meaning of *al-manu'* (prevention), therefore God's *'iṣmah* is his protection (preventing) a person from harm.

Muslims have understood the term as referring to 'God's protection' from committing sin and disobedience. It bears similarity to the definition provided earlier under the section examining infallibility in Christianity. *'Iṣmah* is ascribed to prophets and messengers and is one of the many characteristics bestowed upon them by God, and according to orthodox belief, no one else shares this privilege with them, based on the rationality that God has ordered us to obey and follow them, to walk in their steps. They are the ultimate role models for human beings, therefore if we permit sin for them the result would be disastrous because sin, disobedience etc. are moral impurities and therefore

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[277] משה ,צוקר, and Moshe Zucker. *"The Problem of 'Iṣma — Prophetic Immunity to Sin and Error in Islamic and Jewish Literatures / (על בעית 'עצמה אלאנביא' באיסלם וביהדות) האפשר שנביא יחטא?."*, Tarbiz / תרביץ, vol. לה, no. 1965 ,ב, pp. 149–73. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23591736. Accessed 15 October, 2015.

we cannot ascribe this to people associated with God. If a prophet's character becomes questionable, it renders him inadequate.

3.7.4 Doctrine of Infallibility

'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) claims Sunni scholarship unanimously agrees upon the necessity of prophetic infallibility after the declaration of prophethood, adding it does not consider mistakes (*khata*) and forgetfulness (*sahw*) as sin. He provides an example to support his claim that the prophet Muḥammad forgot in his prayer and performed the 'prostration of forgetfulness' (*sajdah al-sahw*).[278] However, al-Baghdādī adds that Sunni scholars permit sin before the declaration of prophethood as long as it does not reach the level of immorality or necessitate punishment. This could be due to the justification of certain narratives of questionable repute.

Al-Baghdādī identifies the Qadariyyah as a group who believe that sins committed by prophets are not actual sins, but rather mistakes in interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). They deny intentional disobedience and highlight the case of Adam, stating when God orders him to not eat from the tree, he believes it to refer to that particular tree itself, not any other tree belonging to that same species; therefore, he ate from another tree. Al-Baghdādī further adds that this was also the opinion of the Mu'tazila scholar al-Jubbāī (d. 303/915-16), whereas his son Abū Hāshim (d. 321/933) believes that it was a sin and claims that prophets could commit minor sins that would deter people from them. The Mu'tazila theologian Al-Naẓẓām (d. 231/845) also advocates that it was a sin, but committed based on forgetfulness and error. Al-Baghdādī rejects the Qadariyyah belief concerning *'iṣmah* arguing it does not make sense and is unacceptable. On one hand, the Qadariyyah claim that the prophets protect themselves from sin and that God is involved, yet they also believe that prophets sin, but it is due to misinterpretation.

Another Sunni theologian Al-Badāyūnī (d. 1289/1897) lists *'iṣmah* amongst many requirements for prophets and expresses that according to the Sunni scholars, it is a prerequisite of prophethood. He associates the extent of infallibility with the following things. Prophets have to be immune to ignorance of God and his attributes, including any state that makes them ignorant of the aforementioned, logically (*'aqlan*) and by consensus (*ijmā'an*) after prophethood, and before prophethood (*naqlan*) and (*shar'an*).[279] They are also immune from lying and contradiction since

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[278] Al-Tamīmī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, pp. 188-189.

[279] Al-Badāyūnī, *Al-Mu'taqad al-Muntaqad*, pp. 110-125.

they have been informed and appointed by God, and are immune from major sins (*ijmā'an*) and minor sins (*taḥqīqan*), including consistent mistakes and ignorance.

The recent Sunni scholar Al-Kāẓmī (d. 1986) believes Islam's' predecessors reject prophetic infallibility and asserts the doctrine of *'iṣmah* is unique to Islam, which has defended the integrity of prophets from all forms of defects attributed to them, whereas no other faith has any such concept. He mentions many offensive stories regarding prophets as the cause of his claim and labels them fabricated, particularly referencing the story of Lot's incestuous behaviour.[280] Al-Kaẓmī's observation primarily identifies this as a major difference between the three Abrahamic faiths and he openly claims exclusivity of the concept to Islam. He asserts that this exclusive faith is the underlying cause for the controversial narratives existing in the Old and New Testaments.

Al-Kāẓmī further dismisses the Christian response that the Lot narrative was added unknowingly, arguing this excuse is unacceptable. Such actions are in contravention of the rank of the prophet because immorality is disgraceful for a normal person, how can it be acceptable for a prophet? If you implicate a prophet in such an act, then God would immediately remove the prophet from his position and relieve him of prophethood, an impossibility within itself because a prophet can never be subjected to such humiliation. Al-Kāẓmī dismisses the possibility of ascribing minor acts of forgetfulness because God's decree needs to be fulfilled and this would compromise it. According to him, any transgressions are a result of the naivety of certain historians and are contradictory to the rank of prophethood.

Al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), along with other notable scholars, categorically rejects controversial narratives, dismissing them as lies and fabrication, but his opinion isn't shared by all scholars, some have ignored this position, choosing to accept them.[281] Furthermore, these scholars provide evidence in support of the narratives they employ, based on their assumption that the Biblical texts are heavenly and were not exposed to alteration, a privilege that Muslims believe to be reserved for the Qur'ān.

The Sunni polymath, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/934) presents a slightly different view to that of al-Ash'arī. He advocates the term *'iṣmah* means 'prevention' (*al-Man'u*) and proponents of this school claim an infallible person is incapable of sin, whereas others believe it is due to God's grace (*tawfīq*).[282] He argues infallibility is bestowed by God and not due to worthiness (*istiḥqāq*) as the

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[280] Kāẓmī, Aḥmad Sa'īd, *Maqālāt e Kāẓmī*, (Multan, Pakistan, Bazm e Sa'īd, Madrassa Islāmiyyah 'Arabiyyah Anwār al-'Ulūm, 1995), iii, pp. 57-80.

[281] Ibid, p. 59.

[282] Al-Maghrabī, 'Ali 'Abd al-Fattāḥ, *Imam Ahl al-Sunnah Wal Jama'ah Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī wa Ārāuhū al-Kalāmiyyah*, (Cairo, Egypt, Maktaba Wahbah, 1985), pp. 51-350.

Mu'tazila believe. Moreover, trials and tribulations do not affect it, neither is a prophet compelled to obey or disobey; it is merely the grace of God. He mentions Abū Isḥāq (d. 418/1027) and others as having rejected its possibility inadvertently (*sahw*) or mistakenly (*khata*) due to miracles opposing this.

According to al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1417, author of a prolific commentary on al-Ījī's (d. 756/1357) al-Mawāqif, the Ash'arī scholars unanimously decree the necessity of infallibility for prophets, and reject any sin associated with them, particularly lying because it compromises the integrity of the declaration of prophethood and invalidates evidence presented by them such as miracles.[283] Excluding lying, all other sins fall into two categories, disbelief (*kufr*) or otherwise. Regarding the first, there is a unanimous agreement by all scholars that prophets are immune to this before and after prophethood, except for the Azāriqah, who permit sin and believe that sin amounts to disbelief, therefore permitting disbelief. Al-Jurjānī adds that the Shī'ī scholars also permit lying based on *taqiyyah*, a core tenant of their faith as it allows this practice to extend to the Imams.[284] Sunni doctrine firmly rejects this doctrine because it would allude to dereliction of duty by abandoning the propagation of the divine message and the optimum time for performing their duty. Al-Jurjānī dismisses the belief of *taqiyyah* adding the prophets Abraham and Moses did not practise *taqiyyah* when facing Nimrod and Pharaoh, how can you argue for others.[285]

Excluding disbelief, this only leaves major and minor sins, these occur either intentionally or accidentally. He further adds that the Mu'tazila claim it is forbidden logically (*'aqlan*) because prophets committing major sins would result in the absence of *'haybah'* (fear/awe) from their hearts, lower them in the eyes of people and result in rejection from the people. This opposes the very reasoning behind their appointment.[286]

The majority of scholars permit the occurrence of major sins unintentionally or due to inaccuracy in interpretation, claiming this is the accepted opinion. Regarding minor sins (that do not amount to immorality), the majority permit this intentionally except for al-Jubbāī. The condition here is this is restricted pre-revelation, something that the large body of the Ash'arī and Mu'tazila schools agree upon because there is no proof of miracles taking place at that time. By asserting this, the Mu'tazila

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[283] Al-Jurjānī, *Sharh al-Mawāqif*, viii, p. 288.

[284] A form of religious dissimulation, or a legal dispensation whereby a believing individual can deny his faith or commit otherwise illegal or blasphemous acts, especially while they are in fear or at risk of significant persecution.

[285] Al-Jurjānī, *Sharh al-Mawāqif*, viii, p. 288.

[286] Ibid.

appear to link infallibility to the declaration of prophethood (supported by miracles). The Shī'ī scholars reject this, claiming outright infallibility at all times.

Al-Jurjānī addresses the claim of those who allow unintentional major and minor sins after the declaration of prophethood arguing these are based on narratives derived from 'Stories of the Prophets (*Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā*) and not any reliable source.[287] He insists on rejecting anything narrated from singular (*āḥād*) narratives because it is safer to assign a mistake to a narrator, claiming they are in error than ascribing a sin to a prophet. If the indiscretion appears in a consecutively transmitted (*mutawāṭir*) narration then it is then it has to be evaluated. If it can be explained in any other context, then it is acceptable, otherwise, it will be treated as something that occurred before prophethood. On the other hand, if it is *Khilāf al-Awlā* (non-preferable) or a minor sin which was done unintentionally, it will still be considered a sin, based upon the Q48:2, Adam's sin and forgiveness etc. Al-Jurjānī explains their seeking forgiveness using the concept of *'ḥasanāt al-abrār, sayyiāt al-muqarrabīn'* (The good deeds of the righteous ones are considered as bad by the proximate ones) that things considered acceptable for the layperson are considered transgression for the chosen ones of God. Even though it is not a sin, they feel the need to seek forgiveness. Al-Jurjānī's opinion demonstrates acceptance of polyvalence in Sunni theology to accommodate questionable narratives.[288]

Al-Jurjānī's analysis recognises the term infallibility generally refers to 'absence of error' and 'inability to err'. As a theological term, it refers to 'immunity from error or sin'. In the Sunni doctrine, it is only ascribed to prophets and in Shī'ī doctrine, it extends to the Imāms.[289]

In reality, the term *'iṣmah* in the Arabic language is multivalent and can refer to 'infallibility', 'impeccability', or 'inerrancy'. Walker[290] translates the term *'iṣmah* as 'impeccability', meaning the inability to sin and the immunity from fault and error. He mentions it also refers to infallibility (inability to err) and links the term to prophets and identifies it with the concept of being free from sin.

However, Walker believes neither the term nor its concept exists in the Qur'ān, yet despite this, he believes it is still critical to prove that prophets could not lie. He argues if you take a literal approach to Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*, both prove that prophets did sin and lie, something accepted by some earlier

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[287] Ibid, p.289.
[288] Ibid, 289-291.
[289] Ibid.
[290] Walker, *Impeccability*, ii, pp. 505-507.

Muslims. Inadvertently, Walker alludes to the need for polyvalence and highlights the limitation of monovalence.[291]

Regarding the development of this concept and term, Walker identifies the Shī'a as the first people who developed it in its absolute form to attain absolute authority for their Imāms. He claims that one early Shī'ī theologian asserted that they (Imāms) were infallible, even though Muḥammad was not, a fact highlighted in the Qur'ān where his sins have been mentioned.[292] This argument was refuted by later Shī'ī theologians who stated the prophets were completely immune from sin and error. Shī'a scholars decidedly move towards a monovalent approach, dismissing anything controversial to defend the infallibility of the Imāms.

Next, Walker turns his attention to the remaining two groups who also advocate the impeccability of prophets, the Mu'tazila and the Sunni. Both groups state the majority of Muslims believe that prophets were never involved in polytheism; this is the single unforgivable sin. In contrast, if prophets committed lesser sins and errors and if the verses are to be taken literally, prophets would be considered sinners, before or after their declarations. Most Muslims oppose this, arguing such verses or texts are subject to interpretation and we can only ascribe something worthy of the prophet's stature. Otherwise, if they were prone to errors and sins then their disobedience would result in their alienation from God.[293]

Walker mentions anything done intentionally would constitute a grave sin, whereas an inadvertent lapse due to momentary forgetfulness will not constitute sin.[294] Consequently, this would exonerate all prophets, including Adam from the accusations of open disobedience.[295] He mentions that due to their human nature, it is impossible to eliminate sin from them, as it is man's inherent nature to sin; in fact, this is a gift or grace (*lutf*) from God.

Walker's observations allude to a few cases in the Qur'ān including the controversial narrative of Joseph and the Potiphar's wife, a minefield of possible interpretations of sin and salvation. In the Qur'ān, the Potiphar's wife sexually propositions Joseph with the Qur'ānic text stating they desired each other.[296] The verb used to denote desire is the same for both, therefore if she is guilty so is he. Walker adds that the matter becomes complicated with the involvement of intention and motive. The

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[291] Ibid, pp. 506.

[292] Ibid.

[293] Ibid.

[294] Ibid.

[295] Q20:121.

[296] Q12:24.

verse continues with "If he had not seen the proof of his lord" suggesting that there may have been a motive there due to his human aspect, but the lord's command prevented it from occurring.

Depending on the interpretation of the 'proof of his lord" there is the possibility of him coming very close to succumbing to his desires, according to some scholars he had removed items of his clothing. The other possibility is the exoneration of Joseph. The possibility of succumbing to his desires raises questions about 'perfect infallibility' if he was if he was infallible why would he need the 'lord's proof' to protect him from acceding to her request? Walker also highlights the case of Moses and his request to see God, stating that it shows he is unaware of God's attributes and the concept of anthropomorphism because God is 'utterly immaterial' and 'non-corporeal'.[297] Walker's observations present the possibility of a type of infallibility that permits a certain amount of discretion for prophets.

Madelung follows on from Walker, charting the shift in the Shī'ī theology concerning *'iṣmah*. He supports Walker's claim that the term and concept of *'iṣmah* does not occur in the Qur'ān or *Ḥadīth*, and was first introduced by the Shī'ī scholars, who presented this view to legitimising their claim that the Imām had to be infallible.[298] Madelung asserts during the early period of Islam, the errors and failings of Muḥammad were freely mentioned, although there was an attempt to cover up these, even deny them. This statement is both bold and unsubstantiated as there has been no evidence to support his errors and failings. On the contrary, there is ample evidence to prove his morally upstanding and impeccable character.

Madelung asserts it was the Shī'ī scholars of the first half of the second/eighth century who initially introduced the concept of *'iṣmah* to support their beliefs regarding the infallibility of their Imams, which has remained central to their theological beliefs. He identifies the early Shī'a theologian Hishām Ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795-96) as the originator of the belief of infallibility being particular to Imāms and not to prophets, unlike Walker who left him indefinite. Hishām claims prophets were rebuked by God for disobeying his commands, but this opinion is rejected by later Shī'ī scholars such as Ibn Babūya (d. 381/991) who claim both groups were protected from major and minor sins, except for *sahw* (inadvertence), which they were required to show as their human side.[299]

The Shī'ī scholar al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) echoes this sentiment, rejecting this belief and asserting prophets were immune from all of the aforementioned with the addition of *nisyān* (forgetfulness), especially after their appointment. He went as far as saying that excluding the prophet Muḥammad

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[297] Walker, *Impeccability*, vii, pp. 507.

[298] Madelung. W, 'Iṣmah', in *the Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition*, (Leiden. Brill, 1997), iv, pp. 182-184.

[299] Ibid, p. 182.

all the other prophets may have committed minor sins that would not be considered disgraceful (*ghayr mustakhaffah*) before their appointment. However, his student al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā shifts from his position slightly; advocating they were immune before and after their appointment and his position has become the accepted doctrine of his school. Madelung adds the Imāms may choose less commendable alternatives or neglect commendable supererogatory acts.[300]

Madelung continues to explain that '*iṣmah* is defined as *lutf* (kindness) bestowed by God according to Shī'ī doctrine and not a natural quality found in people (Sunni doctrine also supports this), therefore it does not negate the ability to disobey and earn rewards. He attributes this belief to the *Ismā'īliyyah* but highlights that the *Zaydiyyah* do not consider *'iṣmah* to be a qualification of the Imām, even though later authorities attributed it to 'Ali, al-Hasan and al-Ḥusayn.

Moving on from the Shī'ī school Madelung next identifies the concept of *'iṣmah* with the Mu'tazila, claiming they upheld this belief consistently. This was due to the Mu'tazila scholar al-Naẓẓām (d. 231/845) and his teaching of the infallibility of prophets, the belief that prophets were immune from sins completely (although there was some discussion about sinning consciously), before and after the declaration of prophethood. This belief became synonymous with the Mu'tazila despite the emergence of the 'Ash'arī School'.[301]

Whilst addressing prophets sinning, al- Naẓẓām claimed incidents reported in the Qur'ān could only be attributed to inattention or inaccurate interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of God's commands. According to the Mu'tazila, immunity meant all sins and it was a result of a premise that prophecy was an act of kindness incumbent upon God for the guidance of humankind and God must protect them.

Abū 'Alī al-Jubbāī (d. 303/915-16) dismisses anything that could remotely be considered as causing 'aversion' (*munāffarah*) and agrees with al- Naẓẓām that any sin attributed to prophets has to be due to inattention or inaccurate interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of God's commands. The majority of later scholars such as Abū Hāshim (d. 321/933) denied that sins caused 'aversion', but maintained they had immunity from all sins before and after the declaration of prophethood.[302]

Finally, Madelung moves to the third major group connected to the discussion on *'iṣmah*, the Ash'arī. He believes their doctrine initially was negative, but later shifted towards a more accepting attitude over time. He identifies scholars with traditional learnings as being more reserved in terms of

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[300] Ibid, p. 183.

[301] Ibid.

[302] Ibid.

accepting prophetic sins because it would cause conflict with literal acceptance of Qur'ānic verses and *Hadith*.[303]

According to Madelung, the position that prophets were immune to sin after prophethood and not before that is later ascribed to al-Ash'arī is probably not authentic. Yet, this opinion later became the common doctrine except for disbelief. Consequently, this view excuses certain acts ascribed to prophets but does not affect their position. Al-Bāqilānī (d. 403/1012) opposes the Mu'tazila doctrine of a rational basis for *'iṣmah* beyond intentional lying but accepted the possibility of error by inadvertence or forgetfulness. The latter was rejected by his contemporary Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāīnī (d. 418/1027), but this doctrine later became commonly accepted doctrine (major sins were excluded due to conflict with revealed text or consensus).[304]

Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) moves away from the traditional belief, claiming prophets may commit minor sins intentionally, but he still denied the possibility of major sins. Yet, 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037) went so far as claiming there is a consensus regarding complete immunity from sin, the opposite of Ibn Fūrak. On the other hand, Al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) expressed that prophets could commit major sins, which his student al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1111) agreed with because prophets were also obliged to ask for forgiveness. Even Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) who argued extensively to prove *'iṣmah* was forced to admit that they could commit unintentional minor sins after declaration of their prophethood and major sins before. Against this position, Qāḍī Iyāḍ (d. 522/1149) and al-Subkī (d. 771/1370) argued that prophets were immune to sins. These views support the argument the Sunni school is more accepting of the human side of prophets but compromises prophetic infallibility.[305]

Madelung argues, in comparison, Māturīdī doctrine displays a strict approach, although some scholars from this school also accepted minor sins of prophets. The scholars of Samarkand categorically deny everything, including 'slips' (*dhallah*), a position they hold consistently and the importance of this doctrine is recognised by the fact that it is included in its doctrinal texts. This is probably the strictest view amongst the Sunni school because it permits very little and highlights not all Sunni scholars accepted a polyvalent approach.

Shifting from the Sunni scholars, amongst those who accept prophets may sin are the early Karāmiyyah, whose founder Ibn Karām (d. 255/840) explicitly states prophets could sin without

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[303] Ibid.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Ibid.

compromising their status. Later representatives of this school excluded sins that required legal punishment. This demonstrates that amongst other sects the doctrine of prophetic infallibility evolved.

Madelung returns to the Sunni school and turns his focus to the Ḥanbalī School, who reject the doctrine of *'iṣmah*. Ibn Batta (d. 387/997) quotes passages from the Qur'ān to support his claim. However, prominent figures such as Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350) shift from this stance stressing that *'iṣmah* was only connected to Qur'ānic revelation, but did not extend to immunity from other sin.[306]

Madelung's research provides a crucial insight into the development of the concept of *'iṣmah* amongst the various Muslim schools and credits the Shī'ī school for being the first to adopt this doctrine, with the Mu'tazila and Sunni developing it later. His research shows that the doctrine developed over time, with people from all the schools initially accepting prophets could sin, to varying degrees, but later some amending their positions to allow minor sins and others completely denying the possibility.

Despite the development in the doctrine of infallibility, recent studies, for example, Ahmed's work identifies that Muslim scholars still face challenges. Ahmed investigates the concept of infallibility and the dilemma faced by the scholars of medieval times in reconciling between infallibility and claims that the prophet Muḥammad had disobeyed direct commands from God. The majority of Muslim scholars believed that the prophet Muḥammad could not disobey God's explicit command at any time, his absolute obedience was unquestionable. [307]

The problem facing scholars is the notion of prophetic disobedience creates the dilemma of either the Qur'ānic command being incorrect or the prophet. This results in questions arising regarding the universal applicability of God's command or the accuracy of *Ḥadīth*. Deliberate disobedience would send shockwaves through the entire foundations of Islam. How can Muslims trust anything from their entire corpus if the prophet Muḥammad is prone to disobedience? This dilemma helps us to understand why certain scholars refused to entertain polyvalence, strictly adopting monovalence.

Ahmed mentions that Muslim scholars strenuously argued that Qur'ānic commands were always intended for enactment and since the prophet Muḥammad never failed to act upon them he was never errant in his ways. Ahmed believes most Sunni scholars permitted the formulation of incorrect legal opinions (*Khata fil Ijtihād*) and that manuals of Islamic legal theory contain debates regarding the

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[306] Ibid.

[307] Ahmed, Rumee. [n.d.]. 'The Ethics of Prophetic Disobedience Quran8:67 at the Crossroads of Islamic Sciences', Journal of Religious Ethics, 39: 440–57, Issue 3, September 2011. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-9795.2011.00488.x.

extent of errors permitted on that basis. He argues the acceptable opinion lies in between two positions. The first opinion was that the prophet could only err in issues not addressed in revelation, such as strategies of war. If he had continued to make mistakes there would have been an intervention. The second position is that he could only err in secular matters, where there was no need for correction, his error was due to the absence of revelation. Both positions reject deliberate disobedience.[308]

Complications arise when some narrations portray implicit disobedience of a prophet in certain matters, hence forcing scholars to come to his rescue, saving him from seeming 'immoral' and disobeying God. This has forced Muslim scholars to alter their positions slightly to retain conformity between the Islamic sciences and prophetic integrity. Ahmed also suggests different methodologies were used to rescue the prophet, ranging from the Islamic sciences of theology, legal theory and jurisprudence. In suggesting the prophet Muḥammad needed rescuing Ahmed implies scholars were desperate to defend the Prophet's honour and exonerate him from what they felt was damaging to his position.[309]

Ahmed presents the Battle of Badr as an example focusing on the Qur'ānic verse Q2:191 as his case study. The verse orders the Muslims to 'kill' the Meccans who had driven them out of their homes, with emphasis on the word 'kill' that is an explicit instruction. In the aftermath of the war, the Muslims were in a unique position and rather than act upon the command to 'kill' there was counsel and the Muslims were presented with another alternative. 'Umar Ibn al-Khattāb asked for the Qur'ānic injunction to be carried out, whereas Abū Bakr suggested that they be ransomed.[310]

The prophet Muḥammad's response was to compare Abū Bakr to Abraham who prayed for his nation's guidance and 'Umar to Noah and Moses, who prayed for the admonishment of their nations. He acknowledged the validity of both positions but decided to ransom the prisoners. God revealed the verse Q8:67-68 and the prophet Muḥammad showed remorse over his decision. This incident provided the Muslim scholars with a dilemma because it seems that he disobeyed a direct command, yet he could not disobey God. The matter is explained using Q8:69-71, which eventually allowed the ransoming of prisoners.[311]

The difficulty presented by this and other similar cases is not lost on exegetes, with the likes of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) presenting eleven logical reasons for a prophet sinning

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[308] Ibid, pp. 441.

[309] Ibid.

[310] Ibid.

[311] Ibid.

(*dhanb*) and then proceeded to refute them, by redefining the problem and absolving the prophet Muḥammad of any sin. The majority of the exegetes exonerated him by providing four new readings.

1. He was not disobedient due to no clear ruling from God, this absolved him but contradicted the unanimous exegesis of Q2:191
2. Exegetes questioned the context of revelation and argued that there was only consideration of ransoming, but nothing transpired. It was an incorrect legal opinion (*Khata fil Ijtihād*).
3. This view gained popularity amongst exegetes after the eighth/fourteenth century and the blame lay mainly on the shoulders of the companions for forcing him and not Muḥammad.
4. Almost exclusive to legal manuals the verses are actual commentaries of the situation after Badr. The verses allude to ransoming after 'making great slaughter', but since 'great slaughter' had already taken place ransoming was permissible. This ignores all literature related to the context of the verses.[312]

Not all scholars are content in changing their position and seeking to permit disobedience but in a different light. Ahmed identifies one group of Sunni scholars who entertained the idea of disobedience. He claims that fourth/tenth-century scholars from Baghdad and Samarkand believed the prophet Muḥammad had deliberately breached a divine command, irrespective of how it transpired (deliberately or otherwise).

He credits Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/934) with bringing clarity to the issue. The law of warfare was clear, but an alternative decision was taken and by freeing the prisoners there was a collective failure of everyone, including the prophet Muḥammad. He did not exonerate the prophet, but elsewhere claimed he was forgiven.[313] Al-Māturīdī's opinion is supported by Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) and Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981). The latter provided a gradation of disobedience and claims it was a case of choosing an alternative and not disobedience, in fact, exploitation of a legal loophole resulting in minor disobedience.[314]

Ahmed believes the position of these scholars arises from their refusal to consider disobedience problematic and having any impact on law and theology, rather these scholars focus on the prophet Muḥammad's forgiveness. Their approach highlights a willingness to provide an alternative reading

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[312] Ibid.
[313] Ibid pp. 445.
[314] Ibid.

of the situation and a polyvalent approach that assisted the reading of the Qur'ānic verses regarding other prophets.

However, this position changed after the fourth/tenth century. The prophet's action was seen as a jurist's error and its acceptance due to it being unintentional, a position ascribed to Abū Hanīfah where a jurist is rewarded even if he makes a mistake, leading to the ransoming of the captives in Badr. Therefore, the prophet is blameless.[315]

From the fifth/eleventh century, the prominent representatives of the Hanafi school were Abū Zayd al-Dabūsī (d. 430/1039), Abū Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad al-Sarakhsī (d. 483/1090) and Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī (493/1099) represented the shift from the earlier position in terms of law and theology. They avoided calling the prophet Muḥammad disobedient and spurned any such interpretation. Al-Dabūsī presents an alternative reading, arguing the verse was rebuking Abū Bakr for encouraging the prophet to ignore the divine command and insists that it was merely a decision that was not implemented. The latter two were of the position that there was no text-based command (*naṣṣ*) to ransom, therefore he decided in the absence of divine guidance. This dismisses disobedience completely.

Ahmed believes the issue of ransoming was a clear matter amongst the earlier Ḥanafīs, that prisoners could not be ransomed. The latter Ḥanafīs based their judgement on a narration found in al-Qudūrī's (d. 428/1036) '*Mukhtaṣar*' from Abū Ḥanīfah's student's al-Shaybānī and Abū Yūsuf allowing ransoming of prisoners, but only when the opposition would not be strengthened by such an act. These Transoxiana scholars argue that whilst the prophet made an incorrect independent judgement (*ijtihād*) resulting in divine intervention, this was not problematic because it is a juristic mistake and the jurist is always correct, even when wrong. Al-Dabūsī added that if the jurist makes a mistake he has to make amends. Al-Sarakhsī disagreed with him and said even if he was right initially, in the end, he would be wrong because only one position can be right.[316]

Ḥanafīs after the fifth/eleventh century shifted further away from the initial position. The majority of these scholars shifted away from Abū Ḥanīfah's position and claimed that there was nothing wrong with ransoming when it furthers the Muslim cause. This became a mainstream opinion. It resulted in a popular opinion that Abū Ḥanīfah only indicated towards the companions, and did not apply to any other generation. Some scholars went as far as saying that the opinion of the jurist being correct never belonged to Abū Ḥanīfah, rather it was a conspiracy of the Mu'tazila, who claimed Abū Ḥanīfah as

[315] Ibid.
[316] Ibid, pp. 449-450.

their own and ascribed their doctrines to him. The later Hanafi's position was to maintain the integrity of the prophet.[317]

Ahmed concludes throughout this period the Hanafi doctrinal position regarding *'iṣmah* did not change, theological treatises from all eras agreed that the prophet could err in matters of *ijtihad*, however, in terms of Qur'ānic exegesis, he was infallible and completed his mission of conveying the Qur'ān and his message. Later Hanafi scholars claimed though the prophet may have erred, he never disobeyed God in any way; he could not commit any type of sin.

Ahmed's work provides valuable insight into Hanafi doctrine from the Sunni perspective and shows the doctrine of infallibility has mostly remained the same; however, there was a slight shift from the original position that allowed sin on the basis it was an error, to one that completely dismisses it. This position advocates the prophet based his decision at Badr on his judgement and therefore there was an error in his *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) and not disobedience, thus upholding the mainstream belief of prophetic infallibility. It does however indicate this position may have changed due to influence from geographical location and regional politics. Prophetic error in judgment is accepted to a certain degree amongst the Sunni as opposed to the other two positions.[318]

Ahmad Hasan believes infallibility is a universal phenomenon and not particular to any group or religion, something I have highlighted earlier whilst discussing the Jewish and Christian ideas of infallibility. He claims infallibility manifests itself 'most powerfully' in the religious sphere[319] and demonstrates with examples of its application to all areas of life, Hasan asserts humankind's innate nature of erring, which the Qur'ān highlights, results in them seeking an infallible authority to guide them and all religions have this. The infallible authority receives revelations from a divine authority and then conveys them to its respective followers. [320]

Hasan stresses this belief exists in Islam and after the death of the prophet there was no new authority to continue this tradition, and with the expansion of the Muslim empire, there was an urgency to safeguard the teachings. Consequently, the concept of infallibility of Muḥammad, of all the prophets, and this *Ummah*, for the Sunni school is based on *'ijmā'* and *īmān* according to the Shī'ī school.[321]

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[317] Ibid.

[318] Ibid.

[319] Hasan, Aḥmad, *The Concept of Infallibility in Islam*, (Islamic Studies, vol. 11, no. 1, 1972, pp. 1–11. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20833049. Accessed 30 September 2016.

[320] Q4:28.

[321] Hasan, Ahmad, *The Concept of Infallibility in Islam*, xi, pp.1-11 Issue 1, March 1972.

Hasan further argues it is difficult to ascertain the exact time of its appearance in Islam, believing the concept of 'infallibility of the community' must have come first. Prophetic infallibility surfaced much later as there is no record in early literature. He attributes its appearance to debates with the Shī'ī school, and again due to a lack of early Shī'ī literature, it is impossible to identify the exact time of its appearance.

Hasan's opinion is similar to scholars who claim there is no way of determining the exact period of the appearance of *'iṣmah*, and according to him, it appears first in the works of al-Kulaynī (d. 329/930). Yet, he determines the appearance of 'infallibility of the community' to the time of the Khawārij, who accused the community at large of the error of selecting 'Ali as the Caliph, whereas the Shī'a disagreed arguing those who did not elect 'Ali had erred. Hasan concludes that the concept of 'infallibility of the community was a result of the political scene.[322]

Christianity has a similar belief to this, the 'infallibility of the church', but this infallibility does not belong to the church, rather it stems from the infallibility of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. In essence, the church is infallible because it is perceived as the body of Christ and its infallibility is agreed upon by the Ecumenical Councils, whose decisions are supposed to be free from error.[323]

Subsequently, Hasan moves on to examine the work of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, which he feels helps shed light on this issue. He narrows the dispute regarding infallibility down to four points, error occurs in belief, in missionary work, in issuing legal verdicts relating to religious matters and in personal character. In terms of error in faith, they are immune from disbelief (*kufr*) and heresy (*bid'ah*) and only the *Fuḍayliyyah*, a sect of the Khawārij, attribute disbelief to them because any sin amounts to disbelief. Concerning error in missionary work, prophets cannot err because this would render them unreliable and error in verdicts of religious matters are not possible intentionally, only inadvertently. There is debate concerning the fourth type.[324]

Ḥasan claims there are five groups in total, who hold various opinions on prophets committing sins. The first is the Hashawiyyah who believe prophets are capable of both major and minor sins, whereas most Mu'tazila only attribute minor sins to them, not major sins. The Mu'tazila scholar al-Jubbāī conflicts with his school arguing they cannot commit major or minor sin; rather they can err in their interpretation. He mentions a fourth opinion, ascribed to al-Naẓẓām, which states that they cannot commit any form of sin, deliberate or not, but they can slip into error. However, God still reprimands

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[322] Ibid.
[323] Ibid, pp. 4.
[324] Ibid.

them because of their status. The fifth group and final that overrules all of the above are the Shī'a. The other important issue is how far infallibility extends, are prophets sinless throughout their entire life, or does infallibility only apply after their appointment? Some believe throughout their lives, but the majority believe it is necessary after vocation. Al-Rāzī concludes by saying the orthodox position is prophets are immune from committing all forms of sin deliberately, but they may inadvertently make mistakes.Ibid.

Hasan then speculates the earliest possible date for the emergence of prophetic infallibility for the Sunni school is the second century, identifying al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/818) as the earliest scholar who divides revelation into patent and assumed. Hasan believes this created a parallel with the Qur'ān, the Sunnah (identified as *Ḥadīth*) and was thought to be as infallible. The Qur'ān portrays the prophet as a human being, albeit a unique one, due to the reception of revelation. In his opinion, he believes that the question regarding why he should be followed if he is a mere mortal is the beginning point for the introduction of the concept of impeccability. Subsequently, it was determined that a prophet could potentially sin and slip, but this does not practically translate into sin. Therefore, he was protected from disobedience by God's grace and could not disobey intentionally.

Hasan supports his opinion with evidence from al-Māturīdī (d. 333/934) who believes impeccability does not discount the ability to err in a prophet. An error would be considered as a slip (*dhallah*). He believes that due to their portrayal as beings of virtue, they were elevated to near divinity, but this was problematic because the Qur'ān displays a different side. It shows them as beings of human nature who were susceptible to error. The development of the doctrine enabled verses that indicated their fallibility.[325]

The Sunni polymath, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1106), is not as forgiving as others of this doctrine and asserts no one is immune from disobedience, not even the prophets and their crying and seeking forgiveness is evidence of this.[326] He carries on to say that despite this it is necessary to avoid having such erroneous beliefs concerning prophets because of divine prohibition. He still believes that they are not immune to minor sins.

After the extensive comparative analysis, Hasan returns to the Shī'a doctrine and concludes they are more consistent and cautious compared to the Sunnis because they need to prove the infallibility of their *Imāms* and proceeds to mention numerous reasons for infallibility provided by Muḥammad

[325] Ibid.
[326] Ibid, pp. 6-7.

Bāqir al-Majlisi (d. 1111/1712). He concludes that the Old Testament mentions the errors and sins of prophets in many places, but the New Testament, on the other hand, attributes the concept of infallibility to Christ solely, disregarding the apostles and disciples. The notion of infallibility extending to the Pope, the church and its clergy was a later addition. Even though the concept of wise men being infallible could be traced back to Rome, the current doctrine was in no way borrowed from them.[327]

Hasan's article is in agreement with the previous authors that the concept seemed to originate with the Shī'ī school and was later adopted by others. All believed it evolved amongst all of the schools, particularly the Sunni Ḥanafīs, with each having particular reasons for doing this. They ultimately recognised that infallibility is a necessity that has to be established at all costs, otherwise, there would be a direct contravention of divine commands rendering anyone who upheld that as outside the folds of Islam.

This extensive research into Infallibility has recognised it is not exclusive to one particular religion or group. It exists in the doctrine of all three faiths but varies with Judaism and Christianity, which accept infallibility, but only regarding their respective divine books and according to some of their adherents, their religious authorities. However, it does not extend to prophets, creating a difference between the Islamic doctrine and themselves. Muslims accept the infallibility of their book and to an extent, the infallibility of the former divine books, stating the integrity of those books a compromised. The extent of the notion of infallibility in Islam includes the prophets, who were marked as infallible for multiple reasons.

I believe this difference is crucial to the attitude towards controversial narratives that depict prophets in a less than favourable light. The fact that the doctrine of infallibility is limited in Judaism and Christianity, except for major figures of the respective faiths, Moses and Jesus, permits prophets to be depicted in any manner, without any reservations. This signifies the difference in the prophetology of these faiths, setting them aside from Islam. Overall Islam extends infallibility to all prophets, although there are some exceptions to this, however, they are overlooked, as they do not represent the overwhelming belief.

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[327] Ibid, pp. 8-9.

Despite the differences in the level of infallibility and who it extends to, in general, Muslims do not permit anything immoral or of questionable nature to prophets as they believe that this impacts their status, subsequently leading to objections regarding the accuracy of God's divine message.

Narratives in Religious Texts

Narratives or story telling have been a part of social life since time immemorial and have helped to shape and define the lives of people, their beliefs, societies etc. and as such are a historical link to their past. They have existed in cultures as a form of entertainment, education, preservation of culture and heritage, and moral values. Grassie states that for generations humans have gathered round the hearth and fire to tell stories, conveying their feelings, history, culture, faith and other essential information through the mode of telling stories and re-telling them.[328]

Thus, narratives exist in all cultures, faiths and societies, but due to their different natures, it is difficult to generalise about them. For example, there are diverse ranges of literary or narrative genres in Western culture that relate in different ways to myths for instance fables, fairy tales, folktales, sagas, epics, and legends. In addition, there is no agreed definition and some scholars question whether there is any benefit at all to dividing this category.[329]

According to Smith, "narrative is a form of communication that arranges human actions and events into organized wholes in a manner that bestows meaning on the actions and events by specifying their interactive or cause-and-effect relations to the whole." [330] As a result, they are not chronicles but rather attempt to convey a greater meaning of the events they detail by allowing the interactor to understand their influences and impacts on those they connect with, mainly humans. They usually comprise characters and plots and convey a lesson or significant point.[331]

As such, narratives are a form of communication, defined as reports of events, real or imaginary, conveyed through a written, oral or in some cases illustrative form. Based upon their nature (thematic/formal) these narratives are divided into categories such as fiction, non-fiction, biographies, historiographies, poetry etc. Historically narratives have been transmitted orally, something that persists today, as the primary mode of information transmission for children and in some cases adults who cannot read, and serve as a means of educating them, instilling good behaviour, and informing them of their identity, religious or otherwise. The traditional method of storytelling that existed in oral form later developed into written and artistic forms, allowing communication not only in different

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[328] Grassie, William, *The New Sciences of Religion: Exploring Spirituality from the Outside In and Bottom Up*, (New York, USA, Pallgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.139.

[329] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/Christian-myth-and-legend.

[330] Smith, Christian, *Moral, Believing Animals Human Personhood and Culture*, (New York, USA, Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 65.

[331] Ibid, p. 66.

forms but also to a greater global audience. Thus, the role of narratives extends beyond just a means of preserving history, transmitting culture, politics and religious teachings to often entertainment and other forms of education.

Religions also experienced the influence of narratives and have relied on their use to help communicate their particular beliefs and teachings, often using them as a tool to help people understand the fundamental aspects of their faith. In light of this, narratives form a significant part of religious texts, assisting in propagating the teachings of the faith, and helping to understand the divine communication and its implementation in the lives of the adherents.[332]

The Qur'ān, like the Bible and Torah and other religious texts, contains narratives of past nations, prophets, and other religiously significant individuals (e.g. Luqman the Wise[333] and Khiḍr[334]) and of various themes, ranging from the transgression of divine laws to issues of morality and more. Many of the characters mentioned are Biblical characters who also play significant roles in the teachings of Judaism and Christianity and help to project their teachings upon the adherents of the respective faiths. Central figures in these texts are the prophets who are often representatives of the greater good. Moreover, many narratives relate to particular individuals, often detailing and displaying multiple aspects of their lives to provide a blueprint and a framework for the proposed audience.

Furthermore, narratives do not belong to one category and scholars identify them as comprising of inter alia myths, legends, fables, and folklore. I would like to examine this division to enable a better understanding of the narratives that exist in religious texts, consider the nature of each type, and then determine which types exist in religious scriptures. This will ultimately help influence our decision of the types of narratives we can accept and reject for the Qur'ān and other Islamic texts.

Grassie declares religious scriptures do not only contain narratives but also codes of moral conduct that can be analysed independently of their mythological context, for their wisdom and practicality.[335] He argues humans require stories to understand the commands of God and to assist in understanding his creation.[336] This highlights one significant fact; human beings need simplification of things for the narratives to become relatable to their personal lives, and for the respective divinity/divinities to become accessible to their followers. Eliade agrees with Grassie that narratives are important for

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[332] Ibid, p. 137.

[333] Q31:12.

[334] Q18:65.

[335] Grassie, *The New Sciences of Religion: Exploring Spirituality from the Outside In and Bottom Up*, p.139.

[336] Ibid.

every religion as they act as a means of making religious teachings more accessible. He notes that in traditional societies, myth represents the absolute truth in primordial time.[337]

According to Eliade, many religions contain narratives that are considered mythological and historical, containing beliefs that help guide the people they are aimed at. On occasions, these narratives may not be considered religious, merely stories or historical facts regarding cultures and societies. Yet, in the context of religion, narratives play a fundamental role in the unique identity of that religion, helping shape its specific identity amongst the plethora of religions. Despite this, they often show universal themes that indicate common grounds between them, such as the concept of God and his role, heaven and hell, religious figures such as prophets etc. Amongst the Abrahamic faiths, an example exists in the story of creation involving Adam and Eve, Moses and the Exodus, etc. Therefore, religious narratives are a means to further our understanding of the common themes shared by the Abrahamic faiths and to enable bridging of gaps that exist.[338]

As previously stated, religions contain narratives, and mythical and historical stories, much of which contain theological beliefs. Yet depending on the individual interacting with them, these narratives may or may not always be considered religious, but may contain mere stories or actual historical facts regarding cultures or societies, in other words, secular narratives. Secular narratives do not portray religious tradition in the same light and with the same attitude as religious narratives, purely on the basis that religion does not have the same significance to them as it does to religious societies.[339]

Furthermore, amongst the religious narratives that share universal themes transcending boundaries, you have narratives of God's representatives, prophets and others, and their stories. Instances of this exist in the story of Adam's creation, the sin attributed to him, Jesus as a saviour, the story of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt, and the receiving of the Ten Commandments amongst many others. All of them identify the common element of the establishment of civilisation and God's mandate for man.

In light of the above, narratives within Islam also have their own distinctive identity, despite their similarities to those of the antecedent faiths. Islamic narratives focus on the prophet Muḥammad and his struggles with his people, although a common theme shared by previous prophets, but unique as they are designed to exemplify how he is the ideal for all believers.[340] Despite this shared struggle,

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[337] Eliade, Mircea, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, (HarperCollins Distribution Services, 1968), p. 23.

[338] Ibid

[339] Dillard-Wright, David, 'The Nature of Religious Narratives'. [n.d.]. Sophia <https://www.sophia.org/tutorials/the-nature-of-religious-narratives--3> [accessed 27 April 2024].

[340] Q33:21.

these narratives possess their distinctiveness that highlights the prophet Muḥammad's struggle differing from those of the earlier scriptures. They depict the abrogation of earlier laws and religions through the Qur'ān, the struggle with acceptance from the antecedent faiths as well as the polytheists and more. Despite this, religious narratives, more than ever, now are a means of further understanding the common grounds shared by the Abrahamic faiths and a means of bridging gaps of understanding. Redefining their role can allow an exploration of common ground between faiths, possibly creating a new method of scriptural reading.

Furthermore, the narratives were previously inaccessible for various reasons, but greater access has allowed people to learn about them and gain new appreciation for what they represent.[341] Grassie argues that in the modern era, globalisation and communication through technologies have enabled these narratives to enter our lives with far more ease than before and thus permitted comparisons between them, something that may not have been as easy in the past. However, he believes that this has also led to people waging culture wars within their people and against others, even though they do not accept these stories. He questions what intellectual tools can be used to mediate between these people because their differences lead them to reject and demonise the stories of others.[342] The narratives serve to help understand histories, religions and cultures, but at the same time, they also result in disputes and divisions.[343]

4.1 Types of Narratives

Scholars of narratology have identified variant forms of narratives that consist of fables, folktales, legends, myths, parables, and more. My research in this area is not on all the variant types but on the main categories found in religious texts, which are identified as some of the aforementioned. I will endeavour to define some of these terms to show any connections between these terms and those used by scholars of the Abrahamic faiths, in particular Islam.

4.1.1 Legend

Legend is a term used to identify a type of folklore consisting of human actions, alleged or accepted by people, to have occurred in history.[344] These narratives portray human values in a manner that bestows lifelike qualities on them and may even include miracles. Despite this, many legends possess

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[341] This could be due to language, lack of familiarity, being under-researched etc.

[342] Grassie, *The New Sciences of Religion: Exploring Spirituality from the Outside In and Bottom Up*, p.139.

[343] Comstock, Gary.L, *The Truth of Religious Narratives*, (Netherlands, Kulwer Academic Publishers, 1993), p. 135.

[344] Georges, Robert; Owens, Michael, *Folkloristics*, (Bloomington, MN, USA: Indiana University Press 1995), p. 7.

an air of uncertainty whereby they are not entirely believed or doubted.[345] Initially, the word represented 'a tale about a saint', but later resembled folktales that included elements of mythology.[346] English-speaking Protestants began using the term to describe events or narratives that were fictitious. Thus, it became synonymous with undocumented and spurious.[347]

David Leeming claims Islam is more concerned with social order than religious rituals or myths. He argues there are Islamic myths and proceeds to identify creation myths, afterlife myths, and eschatological myths, similar to those found in the other Abrahamic faiths.[348] Therefore, Islamic mythology may refer to the body of traditional narratives associated with Islam viewed by some from a mythological perspective. Muslims would regard these narratives as revelation, sacred and historical truths, something undisputable, drawing away from the negative connotations of the term. Alternatively, some may use the term 'legend' to refer to some of these narratives, in an attempt to distance the negativity surrounding myths. According to Knappart[349] and Schwarzbaum[350], the body of narratives contained in Islamic texts can be identified as legends. Knappart identifies them as 'tales of saints and heroes, some of whom were prophets.[351] He claims that those outside the faith and a small minority of scholars believed them to be a product of creative imagination, as outsiders would view them, but the majority of Muslims would believe them to be sacred and true.[352] Furthermore, not all narratives are accepted, and scholars have disputed their authenticity, placing strict rules in place for vetting.

Gaster focuses his attention on legends in the Hebrew Bible and claims they often serve the purpose of relating elaborate accounts of national heroes with the usual standard themes connected to them

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[345] Ibid.

'Definition of LEGEND'. [n.d.]. Merriam-webster.com <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/legend> [accessed 22 October 2018]

[346] Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Legend". Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2 Feb. 2024, https://www.britannica.com/art/legend-literature. Accessed 27 April 2024.

[347] Collinson, Patrick, *Elizabethans, Truth and Legend: The Veracity of John Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, (London and New York, Hambledon and London, 2003), pp. 151-77.

[348] David Leeming, *Islamic Mythology*, The Oxford Companion to World Mythology, (Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 207–211.

[349] Knappart, Jan, *Islamic Legends: Histories of the Heroes, Saints, and Prophets of Islam*, (Leiden, Brill, 1985).

[350] Schwarzbaum, Haim, *Biblical and Extra-Biblical Legends in Islamic Folk-literature*, (Dortmund, Germany: Verlag für Orientkunde, Dr. H. Vorndran, 1982).

[351] Knappart, Jan, *Islamic Legends: Histories of the Heroes, Saints, and Prophets of Islam*, i, p. 1.

[352] Ibid.

(bravery etc.).[353] He explains the story of Joseph and the Potiphar's wife is found recorded in an Egyptian papyrus, albeit with different characters, dated 13BC. Similarly, the account of Moses being placed into the river is found to resemble that of the king of Akkad, Saragon in a Babylonian tale. The tale of King David's orchestration of Uriah's death has similarities to Homer's tale of Bellerophon, as well as many other examples. However, it should be noted that the similarities between the narratives might be a result of other faiths adopting Biblical narratives and not necessarily vice versa. It can be argued that whilst there are similarities, there is no definitive evidence to prove actual borrowing or assimilation of any form.[354]

4.1.2 Folklore

Another term people have used in conjunction with narratives is 'folklore'. Dundes claims William Thoms first coined the term in 1846 and its definition has been subject to great debate.[355] Toelken acknowledges scholarly discussion on the term has been taking place for over two centuries amongst different scholars, who have approached it from particular perspectives related to their disciplines such as anthropology, religion, literature and history.[356] Dundes argues that 'folklore' includes the likes of myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, insults, and more.

Despite the broad spectrum of meanings, this has not stopped people from attempting to provide a definition. According to Bascom, the term 'folklore', in its anthropological usage, refers to myths, legends, folktales, riddles, and other forms of artistic expression.[357] Gaster believes that folklore has a deep connection with people's culture that is preserved, consciously or otherwise, in beliefs and practices, in myths and legends of common acceptance.[358]

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[353] Ibid.

[354] Ibid.

[355] Dundes, Alan, *The Study of Folklore*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, USA, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 1.

[356] Toelken, Barre, *Dynamics of Folklore*, Utah State University Press, USA, 1996), pp. 1-2.

[357] Bascom, William R, *Definitions of Folklore*, Journal of Folklore Research Vol.33; pp.256 Issue 3, Spring-December 1996.

[358] Gaster, Theodor H, *Definitions of Folklore*, Journal of Folklore Research Vol.33; pp.258 Issue 3, Spring-December 1996.

4.1.3 Definition and Origin of Myth

The term 'myth' is also used to categorise narratives and it is fair to say that there is no agreed-upon definition.[359] Lewis-Anthony claims several attempts have been made by numerous scholars including Friedrich Max Muller (1823-1900), anthropologist Edward Taylor (1832-1917), psychological interpreters Freud and Jung, to sociologists Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009) and Mircea Eliade (1097-86). All of them, including many others, were unable to provide a definitive definition for myth, each producing their research and conclusion, but inevitably lacking the conviction to convince everyone.[360]

Myths are seen as narratives that relate to sacred history, where a primordial event took place at the beginning of time. Therefore, the term mythology refers to a collection of myths belonging to a particular group of people or the study of myths. Subsequently, the role of myths is to help us understand rituals and practises, religious symbolism and iconography. It is fair to say myths have had a presence in all societies, viewed as mere stories by some and fictitious by others. Many religions are noted to have myths imbued deeply in their teachings, theological beliefs and lives, such as the Native American Indians, Hindus, and Buddhists, yet despite enjoying existence in many societies, it has been difficult to define them, simply due to the differences in attitude towards them.

Eliade argues it is difficult to find a definition acceptable to all scholars and at the same time acceptable to non-specialists.[361] Non-western cultures have their view regarding myths that differs from those of the West and on occasion from each other, yet most however make a distinction by distinguishing between true and fictitious narratives.[362]

According to the Oxford dictionary, the term myth is a noun defined in several different ways, each reflecting the multiple possibilities associated with its variant context. The first definition is 'a traditional story, particularly one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon and typically involving supernatural beings or events. An example of this is 'ancient Celtic myths'. The second definition presented is 'a widely held, but false belief or idea e.g. primrose oil helps eczema according to dermatologists'. Other definitions given are 'a misrepresentation of the truth', a fictitious or imaginary person or thing', and 'an exaggerated or

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[359] Lewis-Anthony, Justin, *You are the Messiah and I should know: Why Leadership is a Myth (and probably a Heresy)*, London, UK, Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 57.

[360] Ibid, p. 58.

[361] Eliade, Mircea, *Myth & Reality*, p.5.

[362] Ibid, pp. 9-10.

idealised conception of a person or thing'.[363] Excluding the first definition, the remainder have one common factor; they present an undesirable understanding of myth, as something fictitious, negative and idealised.

The Encyclopaedia Britannica mentions the origin of the word as Greek, from 'mythos' that has a range of meanings, from 'word' and 'saying' to 'story and fiction'. The unquestioned validity of the word is contrasted with 'logos', whose validity, on the other hand, is questionable. Furthermore, due to the nature of myths portraying strange events without any attempt to prove their authenticity, the general assumption is that they are mere stories, without any grounding in reality, resulting in the word being synonymous with falsehood, or at the very least misconception.[364]

On the other hand, Coupe discusses the broad spectrum of the term's usage. He claims the word 'myth' is so frequently used, that it is no longer restricted to books, it relates to 'literal or cultural studies' and has now become a part of popular entertainment. In literal and cultural studies, myth is frequently synonymous with 'ideology, as in 'the myth of progress or 'the myth of the free individual', whereas in entertainment it is used synonymously with 'fantasy' e.g. the mythical world of Narnia'.[365] Regardless of the context, it is clear that the word is used to highlight illusion, regardless of whether a scholar attempting to expose something in literal or cultural texts or a moviemaker trying to generate interest in his works.

Neuwirth further adds that myths are narratives that serve to explain and describe the experienced world, often found in a cosmic or supernatural framework to highlight binding truths, generate meaning and provide guidance.[366] She adds that legends may be considered narratives of pious imagination celebrating exemplary individuals, but this is not a universal understanding, making it clear that their authenticity and factual status are not validated.[367]

Equally, some scholars vehemently oppose the acceptance of the term and display open reservations regarding its usage, particularly for religious narratives. Lyden directs the focus to the fact that the term 'myth' is so burdened with negative connotations that it is practically unserviceable for the study

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[363] "Myth, n.", "mythos, n." OED Online, Oxford University Press, July 2018. Accessed 12 September 2018.

https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100220460

[364] Richard G.A. Buxton, Kees W. Bolle, Jonathan Z. Smith, https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., Access Date: January 16, 2017.

[365] Coupe, Laurence, *Myth*, Second Edition, (London, Routledge, 2009).

[366] Neuwirth, Angelika, 'Myths and Legends in the Qur'ān', in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, (Leiden, Brill, 2003), iii, pp. 477-497.

[367] Ibid.

of religion.[368] He believes the definition is a construction of the scholar's imagination and as such cannot provide total objectivity. Furthermore, he argues that the very definitions of myth are themselves myths, so their application cannot be accurate. From its inception to the present day, the term has often been understood to mean 'an untrue story'. Greek philosophers sought to find hidden meanings beneath the false details in their narratives, once they began to doubt that they provided facts of their gods. They often believed that the stories were in reality stories regarding natural phenomena or euhemeristic views that had been exaggerated. Consequently, they applied the term 'myth' to stories that were no longer believed to be history, or they invented new myths, which they did not believe, as Plato did.[369]

However, in modern Western usage, the term has usually been reserved for stories belonging to religions other than one's own, as few wanted to allow the connotation of falsehood to the stories of their religion.[370] This attitude explains the reluctance of Muslim scholars to use this term for Qur'ānic narratives. According to the Merriam-Webster Encyclopaedia of Literature, the word 'myth' is a folklore genre consisting of ostensibly historical narratives, though often supernatural, explaining the origins of a cultural practice or natural phenomenon.[371] Both positions indicate the fact that the term was held in suspicion and deemed unworthy of any association with one's faith in any capacity.

Kirk takes the discussion in a different direction arguing that the term 'mythology' refers to the study of myths or a body or collection of myths.[372] All faiths and cultures have myths imbued deeply in their teachings, theological beliefs and lives, such as the Native American Indians, Hindus, and Buddhists. Whilst, Anderson examines the origin of the term and claims 'mythos' appeared first in the era of Homer, appearing in his works and the works of other poets of that era.[373] The term has several meanings; conservative narrative, speech, story, tale, and word. He further adds that the term lacks an explicit distinction between true and false narratives.[374]

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[368] Lyden, John, *Film as Religion*, (New York and London, New York University Press, 2003), p. 65.

[369] O' Flaherty, Wendy Doniger, *Other People's Myths*, (New York, Macmillan, 1988), pp. 26-27.

[370] Buxton, https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth, , Access Date: January 16, 2017.

[371] Merriam Webster, (Merriam Webster, Quarto edition, US, 1995), p. 794.

[372] Kirk, Geoffrey, *Myth: Its Meaning and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*, (Cambridge University Press, 1970)

https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth, Access Date: January 16, 2017.

[373] Anderson, A. A. (2004). FIVE 'Mythos, Logos, and Telos: How to Regain the Love of Wisdom'. In *Mythos and Logos*, Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. Available From: Brill https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004493377_009 [Accessed 23 April 2024].

[374] Ibid.

In the context of 'Theatre in ancient Greece', the term 'mythos' refers to the myth, the narrative, the plot, and the story of a theatrical play. Wiles states the Greek term 'mythos' in this era covered an entire spectrum of different meanings, from undeniable falsehoods to stories with religious and symbolic significance.[375] He points out that the traditional 'mythos' of ancient Greece was primarily a part of its oral tradition. The Greeks of this era produced no sacred texts. There were no definitive or authoritative versions of myths recorded in texts and preserved forever in an unchanging form.[376]

Lincoln brings to attention the meaning of the apparent meanings of 'mythos' and 'logos' in Hesiod's work.[377] He highlights that one of the terms used for proclaiming the truth is 'mythesasthai', a form of the verb 'mytheomai' (to speak, to tell) which is etymologically associated with 'mythos'. When Hesiod described his dispute with his brother Perses, he used the verb 'mythesaimen' to announce his intention, to tell the truth (another form of mytheomai).[378] Lincoln concludes that Hesiod associated the 'speech of mythos' with telling the truth. This is one instance where the term has been used to denote the truth, but may not warrant the term reflecting this meaning on a larger scale.

Cupitt, on the other hand, states a myth is typically a traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypal, or universal significance which is recounted in a certain community, often to a ritual. It tells of the deeds of superhuman beings such as gods, demi-gods, heroes etc. and it is considered outside historical time, i.e. primal or eschatological time or in the supernatural world, that human beings are imagined in anthropomorphic ways, although their powers are more than human and the story is not naturalistic but is disorderly and fractured.[379] Cupitt defines the term but does not attempt to explain how it links with the Abrahamic faiths and whether their reception of it is favourable or otherwise.

Vernant explains that the concept of myth inherited from the Greeks, based on its origin and history, as a tradition distinctive to Western Civilisation in which myth is defined in terms of things that are not a myth, things that oppose reality (myth is a fiction) and secondly to the rational (the myth is

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[375] Wiles, David, *Myth Greek Theatre Performance: An Introduction*, (London, Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 5-6.

[376] Ibid, p. 12.

[377] Lincoln, Bruce, *The Pre-History of Myths & Logos*, (USA, University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 3-5.

[378] Ibid.

[379] Cupitt, Don, *The World to Come*, (Trinity Press International, 1982), p. 29.

Coupe, Laurence, *Kenneth Burke on Myth*, (Routledge, New York, 2005), p. 6.

absurd).[380] If the modern study of myth is to be developed, it needs to be considered in the context of the aforementioned.

According to Coupe 'myth' originally meant 'speech' or 'word', but in time what the Greeks called 'mythos' was separated from and defined inferior to 'logos'. The former came to signify 'fantasy' and the latter 'rational argument'.[381] Coupe argues that this does not mean that the wholescale demythologization took place in late antiquity. The need for myth was evident in the 'higher' religions. Any attempt by classical Greek philosophy to distinguish from myth was ambivalent.[382]

During the Enlightenment period, a systematic attempt was made to explain away 'mythology', but it re-emerged in the twentieth century through the likes of the German theologian Rudolph Bultmann, who wanted to rescue the Christian Bible. Bultmann does not simply repudiate 'myth, rather he attempts to update it so that 'logos' is not obscured, and attempts to translate the mythological content of the Gospel into modern existential meaning.[383] He feels the term needs to be placed in a context that is agreeable with modern society and interpretation, the mythical landscape of the past is no longer a viable vehicle for them to be understood.[384]

According to Eliade, who displayed a more sympathetic attitude towards myths, the latter half of the nineteenth century saw scholars display a different approach towards 'myths' from that of their predecessors in the earlier part of the century.[385] Their predecessors treated myths as fables, inventions and mere fiction. Latter scholars, unlike their predecessors, accepted them to be true stories and even a story that is precious because it is sacred. Today the word is used both in the sense of fiction and illusion and specifically to sociologists and historians of religion, as primordial revelation. Eliade felt that it would be unjust to remove myths from religion as they played an important part in determining the human psyche.[386] His argument indicates the shift in attitude concerning myths in

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[380] Vernant, Jean Pierre, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, (London, Methuen & Co Ltd, 1990), p. 203.

Coupe, Laurence, *Kenneth Burke on Myth*, (New York, Routledge, 2005), p. 9.

[381] Ibid, p. 10.

[382] Ibid.

[383] Ibid, p. 11.

[384] Ibid.

Bultmann, R. and Ogden, S.M., *New Testament and mythology and other basic writings*, (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989).

[385] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p. 1.

[386] Eliade, Mircea, *The Sacred and the Profane*, Translated by William R. Trask, (Harcourt, Brace & World. Inc., 1957) p. 100.

religious texts and possibly identifies why certain scholars subscribing to his position do not hesitate to label the narratives myths and accept them.

Eliade's re-defining of the term allows religious narratives to be identified as myths and allows their acceptance, but is predicated on the fact that the re-defining of the term is accepted. Despite his efforts, the term cannot shake off the negative connotations associated with it and this is problematic and from a Muslim perspective unacceptable for Qur'ānic narratives and those present in Prophetic traditions that have met with the tacit approval of the Scholars of *Ḥadīth*.

From the time of Xenophanes (565-470), the first to criticise and reflect the 'mythological' expressions of the divinity employed by Homer and Hesiod, the Greeks steadily continued to empty 'mythos' of all religious and metaphysical value. In contrast with 'logos' and later 'historia', mythos came to represent 'what cannot exist'. Eliade states that the Judeo-Christian faiths put the stamp of falsehood and illusion on whatever was not justified by the two testaments.[387] His analysis reflects how many Biblical scholars have treated the term and still do.

Callender states that the term is ordinarily and historically associated with narratives concerning deities and other superhuman beings, as such 'myth' has markedly divergent connotations. it denotes a narrative that is unsusceptible of proof, which connotates fiction if not falsehood. Also, it refers to a narrative that expresses a religious community's deepest convictions and assumptions, which connotate a kind of truth.[388] Haye uses the term clearly in the negative context as something unacceptable.[389] Knight and Levine adhere to the second meaning and claim that 'myth' refers to a story usually set in the distant past when the normal rules of physics did not apply, i.e. it is not the real world.[390]

The common factor in all the different definitions and understandings of 'myth' displays a significant difference in attitude towards their association with Biblical literature. On the one hand, they are presented in the meaning of 'falsehood', leading to an understanding that 'myth' does not exist in scripture, wheres on the other hand if it is taken as the expression of religious fundamental

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[387] Ibid, p. 2.

[388] Callender, Dexter E., *Myth and Scripture*, Edited by Dexter E. Callender Jr, (Atlanta, GA, USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), p. 3.

[389] Hayes, Christine, *Introduction to the Bible*, (USA, Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 5-9.

[390] Knight and Levine, *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old-Testament can teach us*, (New York, HarperCollins, 2011), pp. 66-67.

convictions, 'myth' can create a new context for understanding Biblical texts, and maybe Qur'ānic narratives.[391]

Callender believes that myth and scripture intrude on one another when scholars attempt to study Biblical texts as religious writings (meaning that if they were studied as something else they would present no issue).

Rogerson also differentiates between the terms 'myths', 'mythological elements', and 'myth'.[392] He contends that 'myths' are literary phenomena, which can be transmitted through various means, orally or written and are recognisable according to their content. They often depict stories of gods or narratives about the origin of the world or the fate of humanity etc. 'Mythological elements' are themes or motifs or personalities found in myths, adopted in literature or drama. The most difficult term to define is 'myth', which represents many things, often contradictory.[393] He uses the term in his research to highlight the uncertainty of the term.

In everyday English and possibly German the word is used in the context of a lie or something false. If a person uses the word in the context of the church there is a danger of being accused of a lack of faith.[394]

One theory regarding myths is that they were a pre-scientific way of understanding the world, without knowledge of the sciences, attempting to find evidence of supernatural causes, which essentially reduced it to the pre-scientific age. Another theory is that myths are originally magical stories or sayings to prevent catastrophes or ensure good fortune, they were linked to rituals that were regularly performed and this theory had an influence on Biblical scholarship in the twentieth century.[395] The uncertainty is clear in all of the above explanations and definitions, explaining reservations from religious scholars upon its usage.

More importantly, people raise the question of the presence of myths in the Old Testament. The answer is both positive and negative. Some have claimed that there are no myths in the Old Testament

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[391] Callender, *Myth and Scripture*, p. 4.

[392] Rogerson, J.W, *Myth in Old Testament Interpretation*, (De Gruyter; Reprint 2018 edition 1974), p. 15. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110811469.

[393] Ibid.

Strenski, Ivan, *Four Theories of Myth in Twentieth-Century History: Cassirer, Eliade, Levi Strauss and Malinowski*, (University of Iowa Pr; First Edition 1987), pp. 1-2.

[394] Ibid, p. 16.

[395] Ibid.

as it is the true word of God and cannot be mythical.[396] The most one can assume is that it contains mythical elements, which do not amount to the same outcome. An example of this is Genesis 6: 1-4, which talks about the multiplication of humans on the earth and the 'Sons of God' who took daughters of men as wives. According to some people, this seems to be Greek mythology entering the Old Testament.

Groenewald specifically examines myth and mythmaking in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalter.[397] He argues Jews and Christians have always viewed myth as an antithesis of revelation, believing it to belong to pagan religion and false belief. He asserts a change in attitude started in the 1970's resulting in myth being recognised as an important theological medium and part of the Biblical tradition. He attributes this to a newfound appreciation for the ancient genres in which the Biblical authors wrote.[398]

Groenewald's work identifies the suspicion that has always been directed towards myths and the attempt to possibly reconcile between them to enable acceptance of certain narratives of the Biblical texts. The use of the myths for Qur'ānic narratives, including all religious narratives should be considered carefully, especially when the faiths hold the narratives to be sacred and divine.

Groenewald highlights the difficulty of defining the term and bemoans the 'impossible' task of ever providing one. His understanding of the term myth is predicated on the belief that the Old Testament is composed by writers, who throughout history have used and reused the term to assist their religious and socio-political agendas.[399] Groenewald does not accept the divine nature of the Old Testament and argues instead of reading the term out of the Old Testament it should be acknowledged that myth exists in every level of the Biblical tradition. From an Islamic perspective, the term is unacceptable as it requires dismissal of the Qur'ān's divine nature, accepting it as a product of humans and the categorisation of Qur'ānic narratives as mere stories of human experiences or worse, human imagination.

Additionally, Groenewald's admission does not help the acceptance of myth when he asserts a great deal of material in the Hebrew Bible is mythic. He argues that texts from all periods and almost every genre indicate towards Biblical writers borrowing old myths and presented their meanings in creative ways to express new theological insights. He believes they are more predominant in Genesis as

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[396] Ibid, p. 17.

[397] Groenewald, Alphonso (2006). Mythology, poetry and theology. _Hts Theological Studies_ 62 (3). https://journals.co.za/doi/epdf/10.10520/EJC36077.

[398] Ibid.

[399] Ibid, p.917.

opposed to the Old Testament. He goes as far as asserting the ancient Israelites were happy to appropriate Near Eastern mythology when it suited their cause.[400]

Opponents have rejected this claim and have asserted there are no myths in the Old Testament as it is the true word of God and cannot be mythical.[401] The argument of most faiths regarding their scripture will focus on the infallible nature of their text and its divine origin, therefore it is incumbent they defend it from anything that will compromise this status. As stated earlier, the most one can assume is that it contains mythical elements, which are not the same.

On the other hand cultural influence from the Near East in which myths and rituals were regularly performed for good fortune were possibly adopted by Israel. Yet again, the presence of myths in the Old Testament is dependent upon the definition of myth, for this four things are required, a charter of myths, the mythologising of myths, the origin of myths, and the 'truth' of myths.[402]

Callander concludes that 'myth' despite its elusiveness in terms of definition, must continue to fulfil its role as a mediating concept for examining language use as it engages truth, imagination, and imagery, plays, a part in the genetic code of scripture that allows it to reflect upon itself as language.[403]

Unquestionably, there is a clear dispute in the definition of myth, one that has not been resolved until now, despite the attempts of numerous individuals from different scientific backgrounds. This highlights the difficulty of the task and the fragility of the term, with most people of religious backgrounds pointedly refusing to allow any association with their respective faiths, although some individuals have slightly relented and asked for its inclusion.

4.1.4 Myths in Religious Texts

Most religions contain a body of sacred stories or traditions that are believed to express absolute truths, divinely revealed and historically true, therefore adherents of those respective faiths are careful to identify this body of narratives in a manner that reflects this belief. Identifying the traditions as 'myths, folktales or legends' is deemed by many as disrespectful towards their special status and terms such as 'sacred history or revelation' are welcome as opposed to 'religious fables' or 'myths'.

The presence of entities such as jinn, eschatological and cosmological themes are present in both the Abrahamic texts as well as other worldly belief systems and cultures. Religions such as Hinduism,

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[400] Ibid, p.918-19.

[401] Strenski, Four theories of myth in twentieth-century history, p.17.

[402] Ibid, p20.

[403] Ibid, p46.

Buddhism, the Native Americans and others are more tolerant of myths and heavily incorporate them in their beliefs and practises. The Gods and deities are depicted humanly and stories related to them from creation to interacting with their believers are presented with mythological accounts of their feats.[404] Arguably, the Abrahamic faiths seem to appear united in their approach to narratives identified as myths, denying their presence in their respective texts, but at the same time appearing to contain what others believed to be mythical qualities.

Judaism is the earliest of the Abrahamic faiths; therefore, some consider its narratives as the foundation for its successors. Jewish myths and legends are a body of stories transmitted over the past three millennia that have formed an important part of Jewish history and the Jewish faith.[405] They are deemed important for three reasons, firstly because of their integration into the Jewish Bible and thus are considered a part of its heritage and culture, having a significant influence on world mythology. Secondly, because Jewish people are responsible for the transmission of mythology in the West in the middle ages, and thirdly because they provide an important corpus of material to help understand the evolution and transmittance of this body of literature.[406]

Interestingly, some scholars believe the origin of these narratives is not entirely Jewish; they have many similarities with other mythologies. The stories function to portray religious and moral instruction and are taught to children from an early age, thus they are accepted to be more than mere fancy. Biblical characters and events are mentioned more in connection with legends as opposed to the Biblical text.[407]

The Hebrew Bible is viewed as containing material that scholars would consider as consisting of mythical themes, similar to those of older civilisations, Greeks etc. This is strange because Judaism was critical of myths (non-canonical narratives) and rejected the notion of the depiction of God in a physical form, but scholars such as Schwartz accept that Judaism contains mythology.[408] He adds that those who reject the use of the term argue that it contradicts the idea of one God, alluding to the existence of many deities; also, it conveys the belief that the narratives are not true.[409] The Christian New Testament rejects myths, in some instances describing them as 'godless and silly'. Islam also

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[404] Buxton, https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth, , Access Date: January 16, 2017.

[405] Gaster, Theodor H., https://www.britannica.com/topic/Judaism/Basic-beliefs-and-doctrines.

[406] Ibid.

[407] Ibid.

[408] Schwartz, Howard, *The Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004), p.xliv.

[409] Ibid, p.xliv-xlv.

holds a similar view, completely dismissing mythological stories from the Qur'ān due to the strict view that God transcends everything, restricting any views unsubstantiated by the canonical texts. Elements such as jinn, eschatological and cosmological themes are accepted, despite being recorded in mythological texts such as 'A Thousand and one Nights'. Other religions such as Hinduism are more tolerant of myths and heavily incorporate them in their beliefs and practises. The Gods are depicted in a human manner and from creation to interacting with their believers, the stories present mythological accounts of their accounts.[410]

Eliade argues that one of the foremost functions is to provide model behaviour and that myths could provide religious experience. Their re-telling or re-enactment could bring people closer to the divine[411]. He states that there are similarities between myth and religion due to the common elements that they share such as God, paradise and hell, life after death, the global flood etc.[412]

The relationship between religion and myth depends on whose definition of myth you take. According to Segal, all religious stories fall under the label of 'myths', simply because they are all stories and all stories are myths.[413] According to folklorist definition, all myths are religious (sacred) stories, but not all religious stories are myths. Religious stories that explain the creation are myths, but other stories such as hagiography, which do not discuss creation, are not myths.[414]

Eliade believes that myth often refers to stories whose cultures regard them as true. Many scholars will call this body of stories 'mythology', raising questions about their authenticity.[415] He believed that the term 'myth' used for these stories did not hold the religion back.[416]

Most religions contain a body of sacred stories or traditions that are believed to express absolute truths, some believe that they are the truth, divinely revealed and historically true, therefore labelling them as 'myths' is disrespect towards their special status. They prefer to use the term 'sacred history or revelation' as opposed to 'religious fables' or 'myths'. Father John A Hardon, a catholic, fiercely defends Christian narratives stating, "Christianity was not mythology and did not believe in religious

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[410] Buxton, https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth, , Access Date: January 16, 2017.

[411] Eliade, *Myth & Reality*, pp. 19-23.

Honko, Lauri, *'The Problem of Defining Myth'*, (Finnish Society for the Study of Comparative Religion, 1972).

[412] Eliade, Mircea, *Myths, Rites, Symbols: A Mircea Eliade Reader*, (New York, HarperCollins, 1976), pp. 372-75.

[413] Segal, Robert, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, (London, Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 5.

[414] ———. 1996b. ''Definitions of Folklore', Journal of Folklore Research, 33.

[415] Eliade, *Myth & Reality*, pp. 1, 8-10.

[416] Ibid, pp. 181-93.

fantasies."[417] The evangelical scholar, Carl Henry, who insisted that revelation in the Judeo-Christian faith had nothing in common with myths, endorsed this view.[418]

As previously established in the discussion on the definition of myth we have shown the uncertainty surrounding it, and the generally negative attitude myths elicit. This is supported by Eliade's view, which argues that the opposition to the term 'myth' is due to its historical usage in the Greco-Roman societies, who used it for 'fables, fictions, lies.[419] In its current usage, the term still implies a similar meaning, which is seen as a hostile attitude towards the narratives.

Those who do not have an issue with the term believe there is no other appropriate term to encapsulate the body of literature. Father Andrew Greely, also a catholic, believes that people should stop showing hostility towards the term and accept it, as historians do not have an alternative term for myth.[420]

According to Buxton, myths are usually described as a symbolic narrative and at least partly traditional.[421] They are described as specific accounts of gods or superhuman beings who were involved in extraordinary events or circumstances in an unspecified era but are understood as existing apart from ordinary human experiences. As with all religious symbolism, there is no attempt to justify narratives or even render them plausible. Every myth presents itself as an authoritative, factual account.[422]

Some Jewish scholars including Dov Noy, the leading scholar on Jewish mythology, and Howard Schwartz have come to terms with the categorisation of Jewish stories as 'mythology'. Schwartz, who was influenced by Noy after meeting him in Israel, believes that the Jewish people continue to elaborate and make additions to their traditional mythology.[423] However, he clearly explains in the introduction of the book that the usage of the term in the book does not refer to the corpus being untrue, as is popularly believed.[424] He refuses to accept the term has any negative connotations.

Gaster states that there is a distinction between myth and legend in common terms. A myth is a story about gods and other mythical beings; therefore, original Jewish myths cannot exist due to the

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[417] Hunter, John P, *Evaluating the Circumstances*, (Washington DC, USA, Library of Congress, 2011), p. 107.

[418] Ibid.

[419] Eliade, *Myth & Reality*, pp. 162.

[420] Greely, Andrew M, *Myths of Religion*, (Grand Central Publishing, 1989), pp. 304-305.

[421] Buxton, https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth, , Access Date: January 16, 2017.

[422] Ibid.

[423] Schwartz, *The Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism*, p.lxxv.

[424] Ibid, p.lxxviii.

monotheistic nature of the religion. The very definition opposes the monotheistic nature of the religion. However, this has not stopped the Jews from borrowing myths from pagan faiths and adapting them to their own needs.[425] Gaster believes that Biblical myths are mainly found in the first eleven chapters of Genesis and are related to issues such as the creation of the world, the first humans to be created etc. He believes that there are similarities with other pagan beliefs of the Middle East, for example, the existence of paradise is similar to beliefs held by the Mesopotamians, the belief in angels held by the Canaanites, and the belief humans are created from clay is similar to the Babylonians. Bernard Batto refutes Gaster's claim in his 'Myth in the Hebrew Bible'.

Gaster further adds that there are allusions to other myths in 'The Prophets' and 'Holy Writings', the latter parts of the Hebrew Bible and that these myths were used to portray God's involvement in everything and to support the prophecies.[426]

Eliade argues against this notion, stating that one of the foremost functions is to provide model behaviour and that myths could provide a religious experience. Their re-telling or re-enactment could bring people closer to the divine.[427] Scholars such as Segal claim all religious stories are myths, simply because all stories are myths.[428] Segal does not entertain any distinction between narratives. According to folklorist's definition, all myths are religious (or sacred) stories, but not all religious stories are myths. Religious stories that explain the creation of the world are myths, but others such as hagiographies that do not explain how things came into existence are not considered myths.[429]

Eliade also points out as others have done that the myths of different religions share common elements and themes; they mention God, Heaven Hell etc.[430] He believes myth often refers to stories whose culture regards them as true, many a scholar will call a body of stories 'mythology', leaving the question of their authenticity.[431] He argues that myths did not hold religions back and they were an essential part of the foundation of religion.[432]

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[425] Ibid.

[426] Ibid.

[427] Eliade, *Myth & Reality*, pp. 19-23.

Lauri, *The Problem of Defining Myth*.

[428] Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction*, p.5.

[429] Ibid.

[430] Eliade, *Myths, rites, symbols, A Mircea Eliade reader*, pp. 372-375.

[431] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, pp. 1-10.

[432] Ibid, pp. 181-193.

As mentioned earlier Jewish scholars, Dov Noy and Howard Schwartz have discussed Jewish stories as 'mythology'. Schwartz authored the book 'Tree of Souls: The Mythology of Judaism' regarding stories of Biblical and non-Biblical texts. He believes that the Jewish people continue to elaborate on and compare additions to their traditions of mythology.[433] However, Schwartz does explain that its usage in his book does not refer to it being untrue as is popularly believed, differing from the position of Segal and others who consider all stories myths, therefore untrue.[434]

Another aspect of this discussion is the claim of borrowing from other traditions. Dennis claims Jewish people borrowed mythology during the Midrashic and Talmudic periods, when Jewish mysticism, Kabbala, emerged.[435] One example given for this is the myth of a giant deer and giant lion that emerged from a mythical forest. The Roman emperor Hadrian asked a Rabbi to show him this lion and refused to listen when the rabbi asked him not to pursue this. The lion roared from a distance once and the walls of Rome collapsed, and a second roar caused the front teeth and molars of the Romans to fall out.[436]

A distinct feature of Jewish folktales is they usually contain stories of superhuman characters that were widespread amongst the people, either by traditions from their elders or through communication with strangers. They contained characters such as dwarfs, giants, fairies etc. and other unnatural incidents such as the individuals sleeping a hundred years etc. Several haggadic stories bear folktale characteristics, especially those relating to Og, the King of Bashan. These are identified as indications these tales were appropriated by Rabbis, either from Greek sources or indirectly from Persian and Indian sources.[437]

Furthermore, there is considerable evidence to show that Jewish people helped spread Eastern folk-tales in Europe in the Middle Ages, and in addition, they collected and composed others, but it is difficult to label many of them as folktales because they do not conform to the description given above.[438] The Jewish attitude towards narrative supports polyvalence in their texts, despite the questions surrounding the definition.

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[433] Schwartz, The Tree of Souls: The mythology of Judaism, p.lxxv.

[434] Ibid, p.lxxviii.

[435] Dennis, W. Geoffrey, *Demons and Demonology*, *The Encyclopaedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism*, (Woodbury, Minnesota, Llewelyn Publications, 2006) p. 141.

[436] Ibid.

[437] Dennis, *Demons and Demonology*, p. 401.

[438] 'FOLK-TALES - Jewishencyclopedia.com'. [n.d.]. Jewishencyclopedia.com <https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/5981-fairy-tales> [accessed 27 April 2024]

Eliade further explain why the narratives found their way into Jewish texts. He claimed the ancient Hebrews were polytheists who worshipped other gods alongside their own, highlighting the case of a woman in the time of Ezekiel who worshipped Tammuz, the Babylonian god of fertility.[439] Eliade argues that Near Eastern paganism expressed itself in rich and dramatic mythologies.[440] Armstrong also adds that the Biblical prophets' concept of the divine differed from other religions and according to Biblical mythology, their lives were full of miracles, signs and visions that kept Jewish mythology growing and distinct from other mythologies.[441] They saw their God as the god of all civilisations and not exclusive to them and condemned the Hebrews' participation in the worship of other deities (characterised as nature worship as they were linked intrinsically to nature, their birth and death were based on nature).[442] This produced mythology that was more difficult compared to that of their neighbours because their God was infinitely more complex than those of other faiths and demanded more. This shows that there was a degree of acceptance for narratives, despite the controversial elements represented by them. No doubt, there was an element of resistance from certain areas of the faith, but it seems others were inclined to allow them to exist and be incorporated. It seems as though these narratives were deemed to play a necessary part in the understanding of the faith, possibly allowing certain aspects of the faith to be understood, which may not be accessible otherwise. The struggle between the Hebrew prophets and the nature gods has been captured in Jewish mythology; some even claim that Jewish mythology was designed to reflect the contest between paganism and monotheism.[443]

Some scholars of comparative mythology have given examples of where they believe Jewish Mythology incorporated elements from pagan mythology, such as the great flood, and this is despite the avoidance of pagan worship. Regardless of whether that is true, there is no doubt that there are similarities.[444]

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[439] Armstrong, Karen, A Short History of Myth: Edinburgh, Canongate Books Ltd, 2005), p. 93.

Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, p. 136.

[440] Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, p. 141.

[441] Armstrong, A Short History of Myth, p. 93.

Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, p. 93.

[442] Ibid.

[443] Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, and Mysteries*, p. 142.

Armstrong, A Short History of Myth, p. 94.

[444] Armstrong, A Short History of Myth, p. 96.

The comparisons drawn with the mythologies of other faiths suggest that there is a possibility that their myths were maybe influenced by them, but it is difficult to ascertain the exact extent. Certainly, it can be argued that Biblical and Islamic narratives will contain many differences that will show a distinction particular to them, suggesting that they existed in their own right, without any external influence. However, it is possible to argue that these narratives influence one another, but often extremely difficult, if not impossible to ascertain their origin.

Concerning the origin of Jewish myths, arguably they can be traced back to Jewish scholars' interpretation of the Hebrew Bible to assist their people in the study of the Hebrew Bible. This interpretation is known as Midrash and produced the 'Haggadah' (storytelling). The original mode of transmission of these narratives was verbal and later evolved to writing, becoming a part of the Talmud. Gaster examines some of these stories, but due to the extensive nature of the Talmud, he only selects a few. He mentions Moses and David's circumcision, the twin sister of Cain, Solomon speaking the language of the animals and other such narratives. Gaster claims that the Haggadah goes as far as taking stories from the Greeks and Romans and draws comparisons between the tales of Moses speaking at birth and Apollo's speaking. A similarity is also drawn between Solomon's ring being thrown in the river and its retrieval by a fish and that of Polycrates, as narrated in the story told by Herodotus, and the Queen of Sheba having the feet of an Ass, to the myth of the witch Onoskelis from Greek folklore.[445] It is plausible that Muslim scholars were unaware of this early on in their history due to having no access to the literature of the Greeks, Persians and others. This may explain why they initially took an interest in appropriating *Isrā'īliyyāt* and why later they turned on them. Their attitude towards *Isrā'īliyyāt* will be examined in the next chapter.

Additionally, Gaster claims some stories from Haggadic literature were adapted by Christian writers for example the story of Adam's creation from virgin soil that heralded the virgin birth of the second Adam i.e. Jesus. Gaster credits Peter Alfonsi (d. 1122), a former Jew, as being the first and the author of *Disciplina clericalis*, the primary source for the text *Gesta Romanorum* (Deeds of the Romans) that became the source for storytellers, poets and helped spread folktales in the medieval period.[446] Additionally, Gaster claims the Qur'ān borrowed from Haggadic legends, such as the stories of

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[445] Gaster, Theodor H, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Judaism/The-Judaic-tradition. https://www.britannica.com/contributor/Theodor-H-Gaster/1038.

[446] Ibid.

Joseph, Moses, David and Solomon, amongst others.[447] He believes Haggadic material forms the basis for texts such as *'A Thousand and One Nights'*.

Gaster's claims warrant discussion and further examination to determine the extent of their validity. Undeniably some Muslim scholars recognise the exegetical function of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in explaining particular Qur'ānic verses, finding themselves comfortable with certain aspects of Gaster's claims. However, concerning his accusations levelled against the Qur'ān borrowing from Haggadic literature, Muslim scholars outright reject human influence firmly establishing its divine origin. *Ḥadīth* enjoys a mixed reception, as long as they conform to the strict conditions of acceptance, they also enjoy an inviolable status,[448] but others do not agree with this, believing there is Jewish influence.[449] Al-Shāfi'ī cites Qur'ānic verses to clarify the prophet Muḥammad's authority bestowed by God, therefore his *Ḥadīth* deserves to be treated with similar reverence as the Qur'ān.[450] For lesser texts, they certainly entertain the possibility of appropriating *Isrā'īliyyāt* in works including books of *Sīra*, Islamic history and stories of the prophets and other tales such as *'A thousand and one Nights'*. This confirms the willingness of some scholars to allow their inclusion in their respective works purely because these narratives are not directly associated with the Qur'ān.

Despite these opinions, Rogerson claims the question has always remained whether there are myths in the Old Testament or not and this question has been answered both positively and negatively. Some have claimed there are no myths in the Old Testament because they contain stories of Gods and there is only one true God. Furthermore, the Old Testament is the word of God and cannot be mythical. In this aspect, this group of scholars holds similar beliefs to Muslim scholars.[451] He cites one passage where he believes concession can be made for mythical content, Gen 6:1-4, where it mentions "The sons of God", the only thing similar to narratives in Greek mythology. He continues by saying this indicates a fragment of mythology somehow entered the Old Testament.[452] Rogerson identifies the probable cause for this as the definition of myth and the consequences of that.

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[447] Ibid.

[448] Ayoub, Mahmoud, *The Qur'ān and its Interpreters*, (Albany, NY, USA, State University of New York, 1984), p. 1.

Al-Shāfi'ī, Muḥammad Ibn Idrīs, *Al-Shafi'i's Risala: Treatise on the Foundations of Islamic Jurisprudence*, Translated by Majid Khadduri, Second Edition, (The Islamic Texts Society, 1987).

[449] Pregill, Michael, *Isra'Iliyyat, Myth, and Pseudepigraphy: Wahb b. Munabbih and the Early Islamic Versions of the Fall of Adam and Eve*, Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam, 2008.

[450] Q33:36, Q4;62.

[451] Rogerson, J.W, *Myth in the Old Testament*, pp. 17-19.

[452] Ibid.

With this in mind, it is evident why Islam's insistence on the transcendence of God, as attested by the Qur'ān, categorically excludes the possibility that there can be mythological stories related to God. Alternatively, themes such as Jinn, eschatology, cosmogony, etc. that exist within the Qur'ān also exist in mythological texts such as 'A Thousand and One Arabian Nights'.

Furthermore, due to the controversial nature of myths, primarily the definition and role they play, the argument has existed for a long time that the 'de-mythologization'[453] of religious texts should take place to purify them and their teachings.[454] This became the position of all those who demanded a purist approach to narratives, including some Muslim scholars such as Maroof and Roslan Abdul Rahim, even though their position is lenient compared to Bultmann.[455] The proponent of this theory is Rudolf Bultmann[456] who argues it is no longer plausible for Christians to read the New Testament in the 'mythical world' it was set in. He advocates for stripping the text of all mythical elements and their cosmological expressions, replacing them with anthropological terms. Opponents of this approach, such as James D.G. Dunn, argue there are too many issues to deal with, the definition of myth being the first and the possibility of miraculous events or persons being reduced to mere historical figures, ultimately reducing God to a normal being. [457]

From the Christian perspective, Sullivan claims the initial attitude of Christian theology towards myths and legends was of rejection, due to influence from Greek philosophy; early Christians suppressed or excluded myth and legend in favour of philosophy, history and law. The first letter of Paul to Timothy mentions this when it expressly states, "Have nothing to do with Godless silly myths".[458] He adds that Christian doctrine from its origin to the present day testify to the systematic exclusion of legends and myths from Christian orthodoxy.[459] This shows the similarity between

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[453] Major proponents of this theory are Immanuel Kant (Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone), Hans Jonas (*Gnosis and the spirit of late antiquity I: The Mythological Gnosis* and *From Mythology to Mystic Philosophy*) and Bultmann (New Testament and Mythology).

[454] Buxton, https://www.britannica.com/topic/myth, , Access Date: January 16, 2017.

[455] Shah, M.M. (2009), "Iqbal's Interpretation of the Legend of the Fall: A Critique". *Intellectual Discourse*, xvii, no. 2, Dec. 2009, doi:10.31436/id.v17i2.78.

Abdul-Rahim, Roslan. (2017). Demythologizing the Qur'an Rethinking Revelation Through Naskh al-Qur'an. Global Journal Al Thaqafah. 7. 51-78. 10.7187/GJAT122017-2.

[456] Bultmann, R. and Ogden, S.M, *New Testament and mythology and other basic writings*. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989).

[457] Dunn, J.D, *Demythologizing - The problem of myth in the New Testament. New Testament interpretation. Essays in principles and methods*, ed. I.H. Marshall, (The Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 1977), pp. 285-307.

[458] Sullivan, Lawrence E, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Christianity/Characteristics-of-Christian-myth-and-legend. [accessed 27 April 2024]

[459] Ibid.

Orthodox Christianity's stance towards narratives is closer to that of Islam, as opposed to Judaism. This is probably a strong indication as to why the narratives Muslim scholars incorporated within their exegesis were of Jewish origin and not Christian. Moreover, it is plausible that Muslim scholars could not find what they sought in Christian texts due to the open rejection of myths, coupled with the prophetic instruction "And relate from the Children of Israel, there is no harm in that."

Additionally, some Christians have taken offence to the historical narratives (truths) of their faith being labelled as 'myths', leading us back to the dispute surrounding the definition of myth. They distinguish between religious fables or myths and sacred narrations identified by them as sacred history and revelation. Father John A Hadon, a catholic, insisted, "Christianity was not mythological and did not believe in religious fantasies.[460] Eliade supports his statement adding the Judeo-Christianity faith put the stamp of falsehood on anything that is not justified or validated by the two Testaments.[461]

Evangelical theologian Carl F.H. Henry claims that Judeo-Christian revelation had nothing in common with the genre 'myth', because myth is not God sending revelation to man, rather, "myth is the product of man's religious imagination".[462] The objection to the word myth stems from a historical basis, due to its usage in the Greco-Roman period in the context of 'fable', fiction' lie etc. and early Christian theologians used the word in this particular context.[463] Grassie also believes that this is the reason the term is considered derogatory.[464] The term in its modern usage still implies 'idle fancy, fiction or falsehood', which could be perceived as an attack on the narratives in question.[465]

Others such as Father Andrew Greely (catholic) freely apply the term in Christianity advising others to stop being terrified of it and to accept it. He argues, there is no other word to convey what the scholars such as historians of religion, literary critics, and social scientists mean when they refer to myth.[466] His argument primarily focuses on the fact that he believes there is no real term to capture the nature of religious narratives, even though the historical connotations of the term contradict his position. In truth, the probability is there will always be two groups when it comes to 'myths' and

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[460] Hunter, John P, *Evaluating the Circumstances*, (D.C., USA, Library of Congress, Washington, 2011), p. 107.

[461] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p. 2.

[462]Henry, Carl F.H, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 1, Chapter 3, (Crossway; 2nd edition, 1999), pp. 44-69.

[463] Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, p162.

[464] Grassie, William (1998), *The New Sciences of Religion: Exploring Spirituality from the Outside In and Bottom Up*, 2019th edition, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Ch. 9, pp. 257-289.

[465] Ibid.

[466] Greely, *Myths of Religion*, , pp. 304-305.

their existence in religious texts, a consequence of the continuous and unresolved discussion on the definition of myth. Until a universal definition does not exist there cannot be any progress in the identification of religious narratives. They may contain mythical elements, such as jinn, angels, heaven and hell etc. but the text they appear in cannot be categorically defined as mythologies.

4.2 Islam, Myths and Legends

Islam's stringent attitude towards myths and legends does not permit the same level and type of development shared by its predecessors, primarily due to its strict monotheistic approach to myths. I would argue there was an initial absence of a strong vetting system governing traditions and due to the growing nature of Islam, scholars as well as preachers were responsible for the adoption of many narratives from their Abrahamic predecessors, mainly Judaism. Schimmel claims Islam permitted the appropriation of narratives from Christianity and Judaism in the first three centuries, a practise partially sanctioned by theologians, thus advocating for a polyvalent approach.[467] In addition, Schimmel believes this allowed legends to be created concerning the prophet Muḥammad and his family, and despite their inconsistency, they became a major source of inspiration for the masses.

Despite Schimmel's claim, Muslim scholars have largely displayed a strict attitude towards narratives that did not conform to the orthodox teachings of Islam. They have always viewed narratives containing similarities to Jewish and Christian teachings with caution and filtered them to select only those that were following Islamic teachings. Schimmel claims that Muslim theologians have attempted to distance themselves from such narratives, therefore storytellers and mystics are responsible for propagating them, under the pretence of making the Qur'ānic teachings accessible to the masses. They provided details absent in the Qur'ānic stories, whilst arguably attempting to maintain its scriptural integrity.[468]

Schimmel further believes the primary source of Islamic mythology is the Qur'ān itself because, in the eyes of Muslims, it is the uncreated text and, therefore the truth.[469] She bases her premise on the definition of myth comprising of the truth, different to how Muslim scholars view it. She claims that the inclusion of myths became a practise of Qur'ānic commentators, who included Persian, oriental lore and Jewish tradition into their commentaries. Furthermore, Schimmel believes Ka'b al-Aḥbār introduced the influx of *Isrā'īliyyāt* into Islamic tradition, and coupled with later commentaries

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[467] Schimmel, Annemarie (2016), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Islam/Islamic-thought.

[468] Ibid.

[469] Ibid.

produced by mystics that portrayed Hellenistic and gnostic concepts, the aim was to portray the perfect man, found in Muḥammad, to gain prominence for him. Some question the motive behind such a move, was this to differentiate the prophet Muḥammad's status amongst other prophets? Was it in direct competition with Jesus and Moses? Another contributory factor that scholars identify is commentators began to accept some local traditions present in their societies, but this was during the formative period. The growth and prominence of traditions regarding the life and sayings of the prophet Muḥammad restricted their inclusion.[470]

Schimmel believes Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā (Stories of the Prophets) are a valuable source of classical Islamic legends produced by the scholars al-Tha'labī (d.427/1035/36) Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), and al-Kisā'ī (d.493/1100), texts which included a large volume of information not at the disposal of the general populace that contained narratives regarding prophets form Adam until the prophet Muḥammad. Additionally, legends regarding the miracles of saints and religious figures also exist in texts such as *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā* of al-'Aṭṭār (d.1220), *Mathnavi Ma'navi* of al-Rumi (d.1273), which are deemed an important source of guidance for Muslims.

Schimmel identifies the content of Islamic myths and legends relating to a large part of the Islamic beliefs contained within the aforementioned genres, ranging from God, prophets, angles and the devil, to Cosmogony and Eschatology. The very first issue covered by these narratives is the creation of the universe and its earliest inhabitants, the angels and the jinn, followed by the creation of Adam, the Devil's rejection of Adam to the expulsion of all those involved in the incident regarding the forbidden tree. The narratives further discuss the signs of the Day of Judgement, which involve the return of Jesus, the advent of the Mahdi (messiah), the Gog and Magog and the destruction of everything. They then shift to the resurrection of everything and the judgement of all beings in the court of God. From Schimmel's usage of the term, she is comfortable with identifying these areas as mythological and legendary because they all deal with the supernatural. She seems to be distancing the terms from their negative connotations.

Yet, Schimmel believes that the idea of the scales weighing the books of deeds is one taken from the Egyptian belief of the afterlife and the idea of the bridge that all people have to cross (Bridge of Sirāt) is taken from Iranian beliefs.[471] She argues that almost all Qur'ānic figures are surrounded by legends, whether it is Joseph and his extreme beauty, or Jesus and his bringing the dead back to life. Al-Khiḍr is another example of a figure shrouded in mystery (there is a dispute regarding his status as a prophet

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[470] Ibid.

[471] Ibid.

or saint), regarded as the patron of all saints and according to some as the Biblical counterpart of Elijah.[472]

Neuwirth acknowledges there is difficulty in the usage of the term 'myth' and acceptance of 'myths and legends' in the Qur'ān, mainly because it is considered contradictory to revelation.[473] Neuwirth believes Stetkeyvch highlights the cause for this in his seminal work.[474] Ironically, Neuwirth's definition should have been a clear indication as to why there is resentment towards the term myth. She defines myth, in a narrow sense, as a narrative about 'personified or demonised supernatural powers working in individual or collective human life'. This contradicts the scriptural concept of one divine agent in nature and history.[475] Regarding the nature of myths, she highlights that they are not strictly regarding supernatural powers, but include extraordinary human beings who excel in certain qualities such as bravery, courage, piety etc.[476] Individuals such as David, Moses, and to a lesser degree Abraham, and Joseph are portrayed as heroes who withstood tests and showed exemplary conduct, although they are not chronologically mentioned in the Qur'ān and depth. Except for Joseph, who has an entire chapter dedicated to him, the only other prophets mentioned in some significant detail are Moses and Abraham. Other prophets have sporadic and sparse details presented regarding them.

Neuwirth makes an interesting observation that some figures are presented as heroic, whereas others appear as individuals who were mere instruments of divine will and did nothing more, such as Noah and Hūd.[477] She highlights a significant fact regarding the Qur'ān's attitude towards narratives; scriptural demythification is strong in it. Therefore, its narratives are considered a continuum of previous narratives, with some addition of detail. Some scholars have considered the existence of the 'Qur'ānic narrative', a standalone category, although Fred Donner disagrees with this and believes that the Qur'ān simply has no interest in history, therefore this does not exist. This belief is supported

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[472] Ibid.

[473] Neuwirth, 'Myths and Legends in the Qur'ān', iii, pp. 477-497.

[474] Ibid.

Stetkeyvch, Jaroslav, *Muḥammad and the golden bough, Reconstructing Arabian myth*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996).

[475] Ibid.

[476] Ibid, pp. 479-480.

[477] Ibid.

by the attitude of most scholars toward the Qur'ān; that its main interest was in guiding people and the narratives served as examples of people who had attained guidance or become lost. [478]

On this note, the purpose of the characters in the Qur'ān is to show the model believer in a manner of different situations, and moral paradigms, whereas in the Bible it is to provide details of certain elements of the history of Israel.

This raises the question as to the categorisation of Qur'ānic narratives, particularly in light of the belief that the Qur'ān was a 'time-transcending divine word transmitted by Muḥammad, who possessed an impeccable character'. This alone is sufficient to deter anyone from identifying the narratives with anything that would raise questions about their authenticity.

Neuwirth argues that the 'concrete, a-historical and anti-mythical doctrinal stance of the Qur'ān relegated mythical materials to anecdotal and 'catechistic' functions'. Hence, any narratives that were found in the Qur'ān are subject to the rhetoric of salvation or damnation.[479] This shows that the Qur'ān's stance regarding narratives is very restricted and does not permit anything that would conflict with the 'divine' status of the complete text.

Neuwirth follows this discussion by presenting a comparison of Biblical and Qur'ānic narratives. She begins with the story of Noah with an observation that the narrative reporting the aftermath of the flood in the Qur'ān does not appear in a mythical-historical setting. It appears after the stories of punishment during the first Makkan period and both the Ark and flood are devoid of mythical dimensions, their sole function is to portray individual punishment and salvation, which becomes the identity of the narratives after that.[480] Neuwirth also identifies that Noah's initial position is as a 'warner', which changes to 'messenger' in light of his success, which further changes in the Qur'ān after Muḥammad declares prophethood.[481] She believes that a restructuring of prophetic history has taken place to enhance Muḥammad's position.[482] This raises the question of whether Muslims treat their prophet differently to the Biblical prophets, something that Muslims would vehemently deny. Neuwirth concludes that the story lacks essentially mythical characteristics of the Biblical story, as

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[478] Ibid, P. 480.

[479] Ibid, p.481.

[480] Ibid, p.486-487.

[481] Ibid.

[482] Q19:58.

the function of Qur'ānic stories is different to that of Biblical stories and those of later Islamic historiographies.[483]

Neuwirth, according to her definition of myth, believes the only story that could be viewed as myth is the 'exodus of Moses' because in Jewish tradition it signifies deliverance of the Israelites from servitude, but acts as a prototype for taking refuge from tyrants for the Muslims. The narration served to help the prophet Muḥammad and Muslims during their migration, but it is only mentioned briefly in the Qur'ān, without any details.[484] Neuwirth again highlights the belief that the Qur'ān only narrates stories that support the prophethood of the prophet Muḥammad and act as evidence of his status. Neuwirth's claim is based upon her belief that the leading reason for the inclusion of any narratives and by extension, exclusion of narratives from the Qur'ān is tied to how the prophet Muḥammad is presented and seen by his followers and compared to others. She seems to dismiss any other primary function of the narratives as secondary at best in the role they play.

The usage of the two terms 'legend' and 'folklore' for religious narratives, particularly those in the canonical texts reduces their validity and authority due to the vagueness surrounding their definitions. It challenges their sacredness and in some cases dismisses it entirely; therefore, a more suitable term is required to recognise their status within their faiths as the truth and historical facts. The diversity of such meanings portrays the difficulty in using the term for religious texts and its unsuitability as it could refer to a whole host of meanings, all of which are dubious. In comparison, the term myth is deemed relative and possibly applicable to the aforementioned narratives. To this end I feel the term 'sacred narrative' is more appropriate and accords them the status they deserve, regardless of whether everyone believes them to be or not.

4.3 Qur'ānic Terminology for Narratives

Narratives form an integral part of the Qur'ān, serving to help contextualise the divine message and offer a practical guide for people in how to apply its teachings to their lives. The Qur'ān does not provide a single term for narratives; rather it uses multiple terms, which provide different meanings. The Qur'ān uses the terms *ḥadīth*, *qaṣaṣ*, *naba*, and *usṭūrah* when it refers to the stories it relates.

According to Tottoli, there is no clear term identified for stories in the Qur'ān, therefore a search for a definition of the technical term is fruitless. The Qur'ān does not consider them a precise genre that

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[483] Neuwirth, 'Myths and Legends in the Qur'ān', in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, iii, pp. 487.

[484] Ibid, p. 487.

requires distinguishing from revelation.[485] He believes that a distinction is required to help us understand the nature of the stories and their impact.[486]

The term *ḥadīth* is widely employed in Islam and is primarily associated with prophetic traditions, but also appears in the Qur'ān twenty-three times, alongside its plural form *aḥādīth* (mentioned five times). In all the verses, the term refers to 'narrative, speech, story or news'. For example, the Qur'ān describes the story of Moses as 'the best of *ḥadīth* (stories)' and the '*ḥadīth* of Moses'.[487] The plural form of the term is used in the meaning of destruction in the verse 'We have made them *aḥādīth*' describing previous nations that were destroyed.[488] The variation of the word in the form of *ḥaddith* is used directly for Muḥammad in the meaning of 'speak to the disbelievers'.[489] It later evolved to become the de facto term used for prophetic narratives.[490] Yet in the usage of each of these terms, there is no relation to false or questionable narratives.

Another term used is *qaṣaṣ*, which is broadly interpreted as 'stories'. The word *qaṣaṣ* is mentioned ten times in the Qur'ān, in this particular form and its variants. It appears in the form of *qaṣaṣ* in the chapter of Joseph and is translated as the 'fairest of all stories' and is mentioned later on in the same chapter, verse 110 in the form *qaṣaṣihim* i.e. 'their stories. Ibn Manẓūr mentions that the term appears in the Qur'ān multiple times and is derived from the verb *qaṣṣa*, *yaquṣṣu*, which means *khabr* i.e. story.[491] It appears in the form of *qaṣaṣ* in the meaning of 'written story', without any religious connotations. Amongst other meanings attributed to it are '*ḥadīth*, footprints and signs'.[492] Al-Sha'rāwī presents a completely non-conventional meaning claiming the word *qaṣaṣ* in the chapter of Joseph, verse 3, refers to *ittibā'* (following) because each letter of the word follows another. The meaning is taken from the expression *qaṣṣa al-athar* (following in footsteps). Furthermore, in the Qur'ānic chapter al-Qaṣaṣ (stories) verse 11, the term appears in the meaning of, 'verifying what occurred', a meaning supported by verse 64 of the chapter of the 'cave', i.e. stories identified through

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[485] Tottoli, Roberto, *Biblical prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature*, pp. 11-13.

[486] Ibid.

[487] Q39:23, Q20:9.

[488] Q23:44.

[489] Q2:76.

[490] Jyunboll, G.H.A, 'Hadith and the Quran', in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, (Leiden, Brill, 2003), ii, pp 376-396.

[491] Q12:3.

[492] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-Arab*, vii, p. 388.

research and investigation'.[493] The second definition is critical as it stresses that the narratives are vetted and there is no confusion concerning them, unlike later Islamic historiographies that contained embellishments added by *quṣṣāṣ* (storytellers). Therefore, categorisation as myths and legends from a divine perspective is unacceptable.

In light of the variant meanings, particularly the last, al-Maẓharī argues the status of both *qaṣaṣ al-Qur'ān* and *Ḥadīth* is different from any other narrative. Each Qur'ānic story is based on an actual event, which serves as a lesson for all it addresses. In this respect, it is considered a type of history. The *qaṣaṣ* sometimes depict actual events that act as a support for the prophet in question, with relatively little detail, and for Muḥammad, with only one prophet (Joseph) who enjoys an entire chapter dedicated to him.[494] The term *Naba* also appears in the Qur'ān in the meaning of a story, but there is relatively little discussion regarding this term.[495]

The common factor in all of the aforementioned terms, '*hadith*, *qaṣaṣ*, and *naba*', despite appearing in the Qur'ān in various meanings, is they refer to mere stories, devoid of any label or ruling and without giving a definitive position of acceptance or rejection. They are not considered negative when used without any adjectives and cannot be viewed as referring to specific narratives. This shows a stark contrast to the Western terms that are loaded with connotations before their usage in a particular context.

Probably the most controversial term used for stories in the Qur'ān is the fourth term *asāṭīr*, which appears in the form of *asāṭīr al-awwalīn* (stories of the ancients), automatically projecting an entirely different meaning from the aforementioned terms. Al-Zubaydī mentions the term *asāṭīr* is a plural of *usṭūrah* and refers to 'stories that have no clear source and are lies', simply appearing in the meaning of *akādhīb* (lies) and *abāṭīl* (falsehood).[496] In this manner, it reflects the negative meaning associated with myth, legend and folklore Al-Zaki argues that the word *asāṭīr* is probably the oldest term used for human knowledge, and according to him refers to 'myth', which he believes has been associated with humans since the very beginning of humankind's existence.[497] Zaki divides *asāṭīr* into multiple types ranging from ritual myths, and eschatological myths, to legend myths and considers all of them

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[493] Al-Isfahānī, Al-Rāghib, *Al-Mufradāt fi Gharīb al-Qur'ān*, (Makkah, Saudi Arabia, Maktabah Nazar Mustafa), ii, pp. 523-526.

[494] Panipatti, Qāḍī Thanaullah, *Tafsīr Maẓharī*, (Lahore, Pakistan, Ḍiyā al-Qur'ān Publications, 2002), vi, p. 75.

[495] Q12:102.

[496] Al-Zubaydī, Murtaḍā al-Ḥusaynī, *Tāj al-'Arūs*, (Kuwait, Maṭba'ah Ḥukūmat al-Kuwait, 1973), xii, p. 25.

[497] Al-Zaki, Ahmad Kamal, *Al-Asāṭīr Dirasatun Hāḍaraiyyatun Muqārinatun*, (Cairo, Egypt, Maktabah Shabāb, 2000), p. 42.

to be falsehoods.[498] He advocates for the dismissal of the term for Qur'ānic narratives and an alternative term to be used instead.

The term *asāṭīr* appears in nine places throughout the Qur'ān and never in a positive manner. Wherever it has appeared exegetes have unanimously agreed that it refers to falsehoods, stories with no actual foundation or origin in truth. In terms of its negative connotation, it could be argued that 'myth' could be treated as its equivalent. The term appears in the chapter of al-Anfāl, verses 31-32 'When our verses were recited to them, they said, "We have heard this (before), if we desire we can say something similar to this, this is nothing except stories of the ancients'.

Exegetes including al-Rāzī, al-Ṭabarī have unanimously agreed that the verse was revealed regarding Naḍr Ibn al-Hārith, one of the chiefs of Makkah and a fierce opponent of the prophet Muḥammad. He was a businessperson who had extensive dealings in Hira, Persia, where he purchased books containing tales of Persian kings and historical figures. When the prophet Muḥammad was preaching to the people and the Makkan chieftains Abū Sufyān, and Abū Jahl were listening, they asked Naḍr about the prophet Muḥammad's message, he replied his messages were 'stories of the ancients', meaning lies and stories of no origin. He stood up and said to the people "I am more proficient than Muḥammad in telling stories".

God revealed the verse in response to his claim and thus projected the negative connotation surrounding it. All the other chapters where the term is used, excluding al-Anfāl (whose verse in question is considered Madinan) are revealed in Makkah and show that the term was predominant there in that particular context. Despite this, it was not restricted to the pre-migration era and remained negative during the Madinan period. In al-Anfāl, it is used in the context of eschatology in response to those who denied divine punishment, the hereafter and heaven and hell.[499] Concerning applicability, the terms *qiṣṣah*, *naba* and *ḥadīth* may be used for Qur'ānic narratives as they are devoid of any negative connotations, but the only term definitively rejected is *usṭūrah*, which would be considered as the Qur'ānic term for myth. As stated earlier, the term myth has had a mixed response from the other faiths, largely facing rejection because of its association with the depiction of other deities and as Neuwirth points out, is sometimes 'irreconcilable with the concept of revelation'.[500] She continues to express the distrust surrounding them stating myth/legend and revelation were once indicators of the opposite spectrum of truth, myths representing falsehood and revelation of the

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[498] Q8:21, Q25:5, Q23:83.

[499] Q8:31-32.

[500] Neuwirth, 'Myths and Legends in the Quran', in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ii, p. 487.

truth.[501] Consequently, anything identified as revelation cannot be categorised as myth or legend as it would cast doubt over the veracity of revelation.

4.4 Prophetology and Controversial Narratives of Prophets

Qur'ānic prophetology is an essential requirement when it comes to understanding who and what the prophets are and what beliefs Muslims are required to hold regarding them. It enables us to gain a better understanding of how the Qur'ān portrays prophets and more importantly, what the narratives may contain in terms of details of these prophets. Subsequently, this understanding will provide a clear indication of the type of narratives Islam permits concerning them and their categorisation. The term prophetology refers to the study of the prophets to identify their roles and responsibilities, their characters, traits, and their position bestowed upon them by God in the grand scheme of things. To understand the teachings of the Abrahamic faiths it is imperative to understand the role of prophetology and determine how it influences each faith, as it differs in its nature and importance between them.

Claims of prophethood have existed in many cultures throughout history, from as far back as Ancient Greeks, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism to present-day modern faiths, including Christianity which believes prophecy continues after Jesus.

Traditionally, the role of prophets in society is to promote change based on the nature of their messages and actions, often conveying God's pleasure or displeasure with the people's behaviour. Primarily, prophecy is identified as the main feature of prophets in the non-Abrahamic faith, their ability to predict events, which in turn acted as their reference and authentication. The prophets of Baal are one group identified in the Biblical scriptures whom Elijah killed after they refused to worship the true God and invited people to the worship of Baal.[502] The prophetic documents of Mari and Nineveh, though disputed, are evidence of this.

The Abrahamic faiths share much in common including the belief in prophets. To understand this better and the role it plays, I will present an analysis of the prophetology of both the Biblical and Islamic faiths.

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[501] Ibid.

[502] 1 Kings 1. 18.

4.5 Qur'ānic and Biblical Prophetology

The central theme of the Qur'ān is the belief in one God, closely followed by the belief in prophets. The Qur'ān presents all the prophets as a brotherhood linked to each other before creation.[503] Their primary function is to propagate the word of God to the respective people God sends them to, but it maintains that in reality, their mission is to prepare the way for the culmination of prophethood that will manifest in the form of Muḥammad. Subsequently, their message is limited whereas the prophet Muḥammad's message was universal. Muslim prophetology states all prophets are equal in the sense of belonging to one institute, yet there are differences in terms of individual responsibilities. Despite this, Islam demands Muslims believe in all of them, as identified in the Qur'ān or *Ḥadīth*, despite providing relatively little information regarding them.

Akhtar mentions although the Qur'ānic narratives share similarities with Biblical narratives, Qur'ānic prophetology and rationale are distinct because prophetology is the second most important theme in the Qur'ān (after *Tawḥīd*), whereas, Jews and Christians identify their prophetology from their mature theology and only incidentally from their scriptures. He further states that the chronology and purposes of Qur'ānic prophetology diverge from Biblical traditions.[504] The Qur'ān paints a different picture of individuals such as Lot, David etc. and vindicates them against outrageous charges found in the Bible. The Qur'ān identifies some figures as kings as well as prophets, whereas the Biblical texts have no such distinction. In addition, the Bible divides the prophets into various categories such as suffering prophets, literary prophets etc. whereas there is no such categorisation in the Qur'ān.[505] This detail distinguishes Qur'ānic prophetology from its Biblical counterparts and on this basis, it sets narratives of prophets aside based on the distinctions identified.

Griffith's work analyses Qur'ānic and Biblical prophetology based on the similarities and dissimilarities between the narratives. He believes that Islam's distinctive prophetology contains Biblical and para-Biblical narratives about patriarchs and prophets.[506] The Qur'ānic prophetology details a series of messengers and prophets sent by God to deliver his warnings to humankind and according to Griffith, the Qur'ān only recalls those that fit the paradigm of its prophetology and edits

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[503] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 3442, iv, p. 409.

[504] Akhtar, Shabbir, *Islam as Political Religion: The Future of an Imperial Faith*, (London, Routledge, 2010), p. 33.

Q4:163-165, Q72:26-28.

[505] Ibid.

[506] Griffith, Sidney H, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*, (Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 3.

them where it sees fit. Unsurprisingly, like those who preceded him, Griffith supports the common belief that the Christian and Jewish texts existed in Arabic and influenced Muslim belief.

Griffith argues there are only a few instances where a case can be made for actual quotations from the Bible in the Qur'ān; otherwise, there are many other places where they differ from the Biblical narratives.[507] He claims the Qur'ān presents the narratives in such a manner where there is an assumption of the reader's familiarity with narratives in the Jewish and Christian texts, canonical and non-canonical, therefore there is no need to tell a narrative, only to recall it.[508]

Griffith is not wrong in this sense because the Qur'ān openly acknowledges the antecedent texts and their mention of prophets, proclaiming it acts as a verifier for them.[509] Though it claims there is an alteration in those texts,[510] it informs there are many areas of similarity and it endorses those details.[511] Griffith highlights how the Qur'ān recalls earlier Biblical stories of prophets and patriarchs and mentions the previous books by name. He claims that the Qur'ān is selective in what it mentions, on occasions completely ignoring entire sections that are important to Jews and Christians such as the Pauline epistles of the New Testament and large portions of the latter and former prophets in the Hebrew Bible.[512]

Griffith answers his query by making an interesting observation that the Qur'ān is not interested in the Bible *per se*, but in the narratives regarding the prophets. He claims that it interweaves recollections of these stories into its distinctive prophetology, culminating with the identification of the prophet Muḥammad as the final prophet, the seal of all prophets. He argues the Qur'ān does not directly quote from the antecedent texts; it mostly paraphrases and alludes to the prophets and their stories. This is the Qur'ān's way of showing it has its place amongst the divine texts and if there is any reference to its predecessors, it is out of respect for them and verification of the facts that it shares similarities with. The Qur'ān does not reference them because it is unsure of or requires authentication of Qur'ānic prophetology.

Following this, Griffith identifies that in the past Western scholars challenged the Qur'ān's authenticity by questioning the narratology of the Qur'ān, assuming and claiming the Qur'ān was a

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[507] Ibid, p. 63.

[508] Ibid.

[509] Q2:41, Q4:47.

[510] Q3:78, Q4:46.

[511] Q3:64.

[512] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*, p. 3.

confused and garbled version of the previous texts.[513] Modern scholars have distanced themselves from that and taken a different approach claiming there was only oral intermingling of traditions, motifs and histories.[514]

It is true that in most places within the Qur'ān where narratives of Biblical patriarchs and prophets appear, God has mentioned their names, providing an undertone that the reader is familiar with these figures. The Qur'ān instructs the reader to recall the mention of people, places or nations in earlier books, but this is not aimed at everyone, it is particular to the 'Children of Israel' or the 'People of the Book'. Furthermore, Griffith examines the Qur'ān's prophetology and the mention of prophets before Muḥammad and provides a narrative framework for the Qur'ān's recollection of Biblical stories in a selection of well-known passages. His research shows according to Muslim scholarship the Qur'ānic narratives were revealed not only to show the primacy of certain narratives, correcting misconceptions existing in previous texts, but also to support pre-existing narratives whose details matched those already present in biblical narratives. Therefore, in one aspect they have their primacy when they provide information introducing or correcting certain details, and on the other hand, act as support for other details that are recognised as true.

4.6 The Qur'ān's View on the Role of Prophets and their History

The Qur'ān mentions prophets as a series of individuals sent in succession, sometimes one individual, other times a few together, until their culmination with the seal of all prophets, Muḥammad. Their role is to act as God's spokespeople, act as humankind's saviours and are divided into two categories *nabī* and *rasūl*. The Jewish and Christian doctrine is fundamentally similar (without distinction between the two terms), prophet's roles are to speak God's word in particular historical situations and summon His people to salvation, which culminated with the coming of Jesus, the Messiah (according to Christians).

Despite this there is a clear difference between them whereby in Qur'ānic prophetology prophets are responsible for transmitting God's word verbatim, therefore the prophet has to relay revelation exactly as he received it, but in Biblical prophetology prophets are chosen people who relay God's message in their own words, usually speaking to specific people on specific occasions.[515]

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[513] For example, Geiger, Nöldeke, William St. Clair Tisdall, Friedrich Schwally and John Wansbrough.

[514] For example, John Burton, Gabriel Said Reynolds, Toshiko Izutsu.

[515] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*, p.63.

A second distinction identified is not all of the people who preach God's word are considered prophets or messengers, they are divided into numerous groups based on different criteria. There are those who the Old or New Testament mentions explicitly alongside the Biblical reference of their office, for example, David, Isaac, Daniel, and Deborah. Then some are unidentified for example "An old prophet from Bethel" mentioned in 1 Kings 13:11, followed by those who prophesised but were not declared as prophets, such as Solomon[516], whom the Qur'ān recognises as an outright prophet, and post-Biblical prophets that include Quadratus of Athens.[517]

According to Griffith, a third distinction between them is in the Qur'ān's view prophets and messengers who were major figures in scriptural salvation all propagated the same message and teachings, which their people ultimately distorted. They presented God's message to the people in God's words, signifying the divine status of the words.[518] Alternatively, in the Biblical account, not all prophets were sent for salvation therefore not prophets and messengers according to the Qur'ān's criteria, this meant their message was influenced by their current events and left to them to deliver in their manner.[519] This distinction shows the difference between the prophetic role and how they deliver God's message.

Griffith proposes Qur'ānic prophetology is well 'schematized' with a repeated pattern of recall similar to the one found in Surah al-Shūrā.[520] God addresses the prophet Muḥammad's concern about how his message would be received and provides a framework in which previous prophets are mentioned to offer guidance. In this manner, it shows how particular details are selected from Biblical narratives to fulfil the objective of their inclusion. In simple words, their recollection is designed to help the prophet Muḥammad and his followers, nothing more.

Following on from this, Griffith goes on to list Biblical prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān with a brief narrative attached to them, finally culminating with Muḥammad. He claims that the presence of non-Biblical prophets, such as Hūd, in Surah Shūrā, indicates that prophethood is not exclusively a Biblical phenomenon, even though the ratio of such non-Biblical prophets is far less. In essence, the

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[516] 1 Kings 3:5.

[517] From the second century and occasionally considered one of the seventy apostles.

Walker, Williston; Norris, Richard; Lotz, David; Handy, Robert, *The History of the Christian Church*, 4th ed., (New York, Simon & Schuster 1985), p. 53.

[518] Q16:36. "We surely sent a messenger to every community, saying, "Worship Allah and shun false gods." But some of them were guided by Allah, while others were destined to stray. So travel throughout the land and see the fate of the deniers!"

[519] Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam*, p.63.

[520] Ibid, p. 64.

focus is on how the prophetology structures the mention of Biblical prophets. Another interesting observation is some prophets that are mentioned in the Qur'ān are not considered prophets in the Bible. There is no real cause identified by Griffith or any other scholar previously mentioned for this phenomenon, other than what some may believe to be a result of trying to create a unique status for the Qur'ān in comparison to the antecedent texts.

In short, the Qur'ān's prophetology may be described as universal (messengers have come to everyone), recurrent (prophet after prophet), dialogical (they interacted), singular (in the message), and triumphant (they succeeded). Moreover, Biblical and non-Biblical narratives may arguably support Qur'ānic prophetology, but as Muslim scholars have stated the role of the Qur'ān is to recall narratives, not to retell them.

Although Qur'ānic and Biblical prophetology, in essence, deal with the same thing, they are two different approaches to the same subject matter. Qur'ānic prophetology focuses on presenting the prophets as people of great character and distinction, individuals who were the embodiment of the divine message and therefore the truth, occasionally displaying signs of their humanity. Conversely, Biblical prophetology depicts prophets as individuals who had a degree of familiarity with Jesus but overall were no different to normal humans when it came to committing sins and suffering lapses. This distinction highlights the fundamental difference between the two prophetology, whereby the Qur'ān views prophets are near perfect individuals and the Bible views them as ordinary beings, who are granted an elevated status, but on more than one occasion they have let their human side prevail.

Another point of contention often discussed is the idea that Qur'ānic prophetology is fundamentally geared towards proving the prophet Muḥammad's claim and his primacy amongst the prophetic family. Numerous chapters in the Qur'ān establish his superiority, especially where God comforts prophet Muḥammad in the face of adversity stating that others before him had been subject to a similar thing and not to worry. Furthermore, verses such as Q3:81 openly state that the prophets were to acknowledge the prophet Muḥammad and secede from their roles if he was to appear in their time and to support him unequivocally. If he did not appear in their time, they were to inform their nations that he could appear in later times and to acknowledge him fully, as is stated in Q61:6. All prophets were sent as a precursor for the arrival of the prophet Muḥammad, a shared aspect of Biblical prophetology where Biblical prophets were individuals who were prophets but their prophethood was leading up to the arrival of Jesus.

A similar argument may be offered that Biblical prophetology is geared towards a similar position where the superiority of Jesus is the focus of the Bible and all contained within. Any mention of other prophets is to validate the position and role of Jesus and his portrayal far exceeds that of any other

prophet in the Bible. This explains why other prophets are portrayed in a manner in the Bible whereby they are humanised and why it differs from that of the Qur'ān. Yet in Qur'ānic prophetology it does not compromise the prophethood of other prophets, they are humanised, but without compromising their integrity. In the Bible the prophets are admonished by other humans, allowing them to be humanised to a greater degree, whereas in the Qur'ān only God admonishes them.

Additionally, Qur'ānic prophetology focuses on proving God is supreme and prophets are sent following his wisdom, therefore they are not to be elevated to his position or any role of divinity, including Muḥammad who is the most superior of all humans and is the 'seal' of all prophets.

The last distinct feature of Qur'ānic prophetology is that Qur'ānic narratives do not go beyond presenting minor details of prophets and their lives. As previously explained, the objective is to portray prophets as exemplary figures of guidance. The Qur'ān only presents the story of Joseph in detail and even then it contains less detail than its Biblical counterpart. On the contrary, Biblical prophetology provides detailed accounts of prophets in the form of extensive narratives charting their entire lives, providing detailed encounters they experienced, as the reader is treated as having no familiarity with them. The function of Qur'ānic prophetology was to act as the single method of instruction to humankind through God's prophets, who communicated the divine will because God's will and nature are inaccessible to man. They were men of noble character and honour who appeared at intervals throughout history to act as God's vicegerents on earth.

The comparison between Qur'ānic and Biblical prophetology allows us to understand Biblical prophetology supports a polyvalent approach concerning narratives detailing the lives of prophets, whereas Islamic prophetology in comparison seems to support a monovalent approach in the Qur'ān. This requires further study of Qur'ānic narratives and to determine through *tafsīr* which approach is supported and better for Muslims seeking an understanding of the Qur'ān.

The analysis of prophetology so far has focused on how the Qur'ān mentions the institute of prophethood in both the Qur'ān and the Biblical texts from the perspective of their telling or recalling. Another perspective we can view Qur'ānic prophetology from is infallibility, which will lead us in a different direction. First, we must examine in detail how the prophets have been presented in the Qur'ān.

4.7 Prophetic Narratives in the Qur'ān

Similar to the antecedent scriptures, narratives form a sizable portion of the Qur'ān and cover numerous entities and issues. Many nations and people, prophets and non-prophets alike, have featured in the text and the detail regarding them has not been consistent, sometimes a mere mention

of the name with a few verses exists, sometimes multiple mentions and occasionally a whole chapter dedicated to one individual. The Qur'ān contains references to over fifty people and events that exist within the Bible, but often the theme of these narratives is morality and spirituality, rather than a historical and factual account. Even though they exist in Biblical texts, these figures have received a better representation in the Qur'ān, but occasionally issues have arisen when their portrayal in the Qur'ān is not as righteous as is generally assumed.

Portrayals of prophets in the Qur'ān appear in a unique manner whereby they are mentioned periodically and in very diverse contexts, without truly capturing their persona. Their primary role is that of the protagonist and hero such as Abraham and Jesus, but occasionally could be mistaken as antagonists. Prophets are portrayed as individuals of high standards who are sent to deliver God's message to his creation and are depicted as righteous beings who admonish those who oppose the divine will and support those who accept it. Occasionally, they have been presented in a manner that raises objections regarding their qualification as divine messengers. Though they are few, they still exist and it is important to study them.

As previously discussed, the Qur'ān does not mention lengthy and detailed narratives regarding the individuals included within it, choosing often to merely mention a few verses due to the message being the moral aspect that God desires his servants to understand, rather than the historical details. This leaves the reader to formulate his or her understanding regarding what has been read. Moreover, Muslim views regarding prophets mainly consist of the belief that they are infallible individuals incapable of acts that would contravene their status as divine representatives, but certain verses have raised questions challenging this belief. A brief look at the verses in question will shed some light on which controversial narratives are referred to in Qur'ānic narratives.

The first to be mentioned in the Qur'ān is Adam, who has been mentioned in the Qur'ān several times and with a varying degree of detail. Yet, the verses regarding his discharge from paradise are frequently mentioned and have raised questions concerning his rank. The Qur'ān states "Satan caused them to deflect" Q2:36-37, "Then Satan whispered to them that he might manifest unto them" Q7:20-25, "This is an enemy unto thee and thy wife, so let him not drive you both out of the Garden Q20:117-123. These verses discuss God's warning to Adam and his wife regarding the enmity of the devil and to beware of his deception. Though the verses do not discuss in detail the background to the incident regarding his departure from paradise, partial detail of this can be found in other verses in different chapters, allowing a person to piece together some form of narrative. The term used to portray his act of eating from the tree is *'Aṣā* (Q26:38) which infers disobedience of divine command followed by him seeking forgiveness for his actions.

The second prophet mentioned is Noah who is portrayed as a protagonist in many Qur'ānic passages, but a selection of verses depict him as a man who shows impatience towards his people and ignores divine law to try and convince his son who was a disbeliever to board the Ark. The Qur'ān states “He said: If ye ridicule us now, we (in our turn) can look down on you with ridicule likewise!” Q11:38-39, “Noah called out to his son, who had separated himself (from the rest): “O my son! Embark with us, and be not with the unbelievers!” Q11:42-48, And Noah, said: “O my Lord! Leave not of the Unbelievers, a single one on earth!” Q71:26. Each of these verses raises questions about the character of Noah as a prophet, especially since the role of the prophet is to follow divine law to the letter, yet here that is not the case. He shows anger and defeat when facing his people who refuse to acknowledge his position, in turn ridiculing him, therefore he asks God to punish them. In addition, he attempts to convince his son, who is a disbeliever and is admonished “Noah said: “O my Lord! I do seek refuge with Thee, lest I ask Thee for that of which I do not know. And unless thou forgive me and have Mercy on me, I should indeed be lost!” Q11:47.

The third prominent prophet in the Qur'ān is Abraham, who is mentioned frequently and portrayed as a champion against idolatry and a ‘friend’ of God. He is the father of prophets and the forefather of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, despite the Qur'ān stating that he was a Muslim and not a Jew or Christian. Although there are a few stories related to him, the focus is on his conflict with his people and Āzar, constantly questioning why they worship such things that cannot benefit or harm them. The verse “When he saw the moon rising in splendour, he said: “This is my Lord." But when the moon set, He said: “Unless my Lord guide me, I shall surely be among those who go astray.” Q6:77 and the following verses portray him as confused due to his uncertainty about who he should worship, a trait unsuitable for someone deemed for greatness. The second narrative concerning him presented appears in the verse “So he broke them to pieces, (all) but the biggest of them, that they might turn (and address themselves) to it.”. Abraham destroys the idols the people worship to show them the error of their ways, but in turn, when they ask him if he was responsible he tells them it was the largest idol. He deliberately conceals the truth, which raises questions about his integrity. He also contravenes the principle that it is not permissible to seek forgiveness for a non-believer by attempting to gain forgiveness for Āzar in verse Q60:4.

The fourth prophet mentioned is Lot, the nephew of Abraham. The story of the prophet Lot has raised eyebrows and questioned his principles and morality. The Qur'ān states “O my people! Here are my daughters: they are purer for you (if ye marry)! Now fear Allah, and cover me not with shame about my guests! Is there not among you a single right-minded man?” Q11:78 He is accused of showing a willingness to allow his daughters to be prostituted, an act deemed highly unworthy of one who is God’s representative. Although there is no other mention of this incident nor any other explanation,

Muslim scholars defend him against accusations of prostituting his daughter and committing incest with him, which is not reflected in the Bible.

The fifth prophet is Joseph, who enjoys the most detailed narrative of a prophet in the Qur'ān, chronologically detailing his journey from the attempt on his life to his rise as ruler of Egypt. One particular incident that has proved problematic is the situation that arose between the Potiphar's wife and Joseph when she tried to seduce him. His reaction to her attempts is highlighted in the verse "And (with passion) did she desire him, and he would have desired her, but that he saw the evidence of his Lord: thus (did We order) that We might turn away from him (all) evil and shameful deeds: for he was one of Our servants, sincere and purified." Q12:24. The verse portrays that he would have succumbed to her attempts if he had not seen a sign from his lord. This verse raises questions about his actions and his qualifications as a prophet because he should be immune to such thoughts and indiscretions.

The sixth prophet is the prophet of Judaism and Islam, Moses, who is a pivotal figure in the Abrahamic faiths and the most often mentioned prophet in the Qur'ān. Even though there is no chapter specially dedicated to him, he is mentioned in numerous places with particular regard to his nation. A detailed account of his life is given, alongside his encounter with the Pharaoh and his dealings with his nation whom he rescued from the clutches of the Pharaoh. Two cases from the Qur'ānic narrative regarding him are presented, one relating to his encounter with God and the other with a Copt. The Qur'ān states "When Moses came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord addressed him, He said: "O my Lord! show (Thyself) to me, that I may look upon thee." Allah said: "By no means canst thou see Me (direct); But look upon the mount; if it abide in its place, then shalt thou see Me." When his Lord manifested His glory on the Mount, He made it as dust. And Moses fell in a swoon. When he recovered his senses he said: "Glory be to Thee! To Thee, I turn in repentance, and I am the first to believe." Q7:143. This verse seems to question the understanding of Moses concerning what should be known about God because his question led to his seeking forgiveness.

The second mention of Moses takes place in the verse "Now the man of his religion appealed to him against his foe, and Moses struck him with his fist and made an end of him. He said: "This is a work of Evil (Satan): for he is an enemy that manifestly misleads! He prayed: "O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul! Do Thou then forgive me!" So (Allah) forgave him: for He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." Q28:15-16. Moses is accused of killing the Copt and his seeking forgiveness is deemed an indication of his sin. Action on this scale cannot be ignored for a prophet, especially one who is counted amongst the arch-prophets and raises serious questions about what these individuals can and cannot do.

Following Moses the seventh prophet to be mentioned in the Qur'ān is David mentioned on a few different occasions. The Qur'ān states "And David gathered that We had tried him: he asked forgiveness of his Lord, fell, bowing (in prostration), and turned (to Allah in repentance)" Q38:24. David is accused of committing a crime and reminded by God and repents for his mistake and is granted forgiveness. Again, such actions that warrant forgiveness are contrary to a prophet's status and occupation and raise questions about their suitability as divine representatives.

David is succeeded by his son Solomon, the eighth prophet to face tribulation, and shares a similar predicament to those mentioned before him. The Qur'ān narrates "And We did try Solomon: We placed on his throne a body (without life), but he did turn (to Us in true devotion). He said, "O my Lord! Forgive me, and grant me a kingdom which, (it may be), suits not another after me: for Thou art the Grantor of Bounties (without measure)." Once again, there is no mention of the deed that has been committed, yet forgiveness is sought and granted. The magnitude of the deed can be gauged by Solomon's replacement by another on his throne until he is granted forgiveness. It is contrary to the position of a prophet and again raises questions about prophetic responsibilities.

Less frequently mentioned prophets are also described in a similar light. Amongst them is Jonah about whom the Qur'ān says, "Then the big fish did swallow him, and he had done acts worthy of blame. Had it not been that he (repented and) glorified Allah, He would certainly have remained inside the Fish till the Day of Resurrection." Jonah is admonished for abandoning his responsibilities as a divine messenger and then subsequently punished, another example of questionable actions from an individual responsible for the guidance of people and a divine representative.

All of the aforementioned cases have highlighted one particular point, the Qur'ān does not contain detailed narratives regarding prophets, except in the case of Joseph and Moses, yet the Qur'ān contains narratives that question the positions of prophets and are often lacking in detail leaving the reader wondering what act they were responsible for that led to their admonishment and repentance. This indicates a need for further clarification regarding the missing detail to help better understand the individuals in question and their deeds.

The discussion so far has shown that Qur'ānic narratives contain sparse detail, insufficient for Muslims to take guidance from; therefore, Muslims are forced to resort to other sources to plug the gaps in their understanding and ultimately comprehend divine commandments. This has led Muslim scholars to resort to *Isrā'īliyyāt* and other Biblical material due to the shortage of information in their texts such as *Ḥadīth*. Consequently, the next chapter will focus on the historicity of *tafsīr* to determine how Muslims overcame this difficulty and what approach they adopted to deal with missing details.

Evolution of *Tafsīr* and its Impact on Polyvalence in Narratives Regarding Prophetology

Throughout Islamic history, Muslim exegetes have enjoyed the luxury of employing different sources for Qur'ānic interpretation allowing the tradition to showcase a rich diversity of opinion and understanding. Earlier exegetical works including that of al-Ṭabarī are a reflection of how polyvalence was considered the norm and narratives were treated as a necessity for greater understanding of the divine text, even though monovalence was also a feature of Qur'ānic exegesis. Norman Calder has argued that both monovalence and polyvalence have been a part of the *tafsīr* tradition, but polyvalence has been 'A structural characteristic of *tafsīr*'. Yet, he argues that this has suffered over time and has led to a greater presence of '*Ḥadīth* and *āthār*-oriented *tafsīr* and in particular he cites the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr as the main proponent of this.[521]

Notwithstanding the seminal contribution of Calder[522] and Bauer[523], with the former's work being the more significant of the two, according to Coppens both have made far-reaching conclusions based on the limited scope and sources employed by them.[524] Despite this, I believe their work is a significant place for me to show how polyvalence is integral to prophetology and how polyvalence remained important throughout the different ages of *tafsīr* development.

My work aims to build upon the work of Calder and show that polyvalence is required to understand prophetology and that the Qur'ān's *tafsīr* is mainly polyvalent, a characteristic that has to be preserved. It is unacceptable for the complete Qur'ān's meaning to be monovalent as this would imply the Qur'ān has been understood in its entirety and there is nothing further to add. Furthermore, to understand the role of narratives in prophetology and prophetic infallibility we have to examine the historicity of *tafsīr* and its sources.[525]

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[521] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr*, pp. 101-140.

[522] Hawting, G. R, and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef, *Approaches to the Qur'an*, (London, Routledge, 2005).

[523] Bauer, Thomas, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011).

[524] Coppens, P. (2021), *Did Modernity End Polyvalence? Some Observations on Tolerance for Ambiguity in Sunni tafsīr*, Journal of Qur'anic Studies, 23(1), 36-70. https://doi.org/10.3366/JQS.2021.0450.

[525] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr*, pp. 101-140.

The term polyvalence is an amalgamation of two Latin words, *polys* meaning 'many', much, multi, etc. and the term *valence* from the Latin word *Valentia* meaning 'power/strength' and 'capacity' or if it is derived from *Valentum* it refers to strong, stout, vigorous, etc.[526] In the scientific context, it refers to compounds with a large number of atoms or molecules connected and from a scientific perspective in chemistry it refers to the compounding capacity of elements with other atoms. In the field of linguistics polyvalence has a different meaning.[527]

Linguistically, polyvalence signifies a slightly different meaning, referring to a word or phrase that has multiple meanings or can be used in different contexts, with each one offering its unique connotation and significance. For example the word 'ascend' can refer to physically climbing, rising in position in an organisation, spiritual awakening etc. Polyvalence in this situation allows a language to display its richness and depth, permitting nuanced expression. It must be noted that polyvalence depends upon context and the intended meaning of the speaker and cannot be entirely projected from the reader.

In exegetical terms, polyvalence allows an exegete to explore and utilise different approaches.[528] From a Biblical viewpoint, Thomaskutty claims an exegete of the New Testament (or any Biblical writings) who utilises polyvalent hermeneutics can use multiple methods, analyse text in multiple layers and synthesise the interpretive paradigm in horizontal and vertical dimensions.[529] His study focuses on John 2:13-25 which he uses as a case study to show how polyvalence can keep text relevant where a contemporary reader can ensure historical text can project a meaning for the reader that may vary from the historical context it was revealed for. Thomaskutty identifies different 5 different methods of polyvalent readings and shows how each one provides a different aspect of understanding the text in question.

Consequently, the importance of polyvalent reading cannot be downplayed nor relegated to a minimal position, simply because it provides the reader with an understanding that may not be accessible through a monovalent reading. Polyvalent reading can only be accomplished through various exegetical tools that allow the exploration of various meanings, all permitted within an accepted framework. Thomaskutty concludes that any text read from a polyvalent perspective is analysed within the confines of a few exegetical tools and the text is understood from both a heteroglossic and

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[526] https://www.etymonline.com/word/polyvalent.

[527] https://thecontentauthority.com/blog/how-to-use-polyvalent-in-a-sentence.

[528] Thomaskutty, J., 2023, 'A polyvalent hermeneutic of John 2:13-25: Theoretical and exegetical considerations', HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies 79(1), a8157. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8157.

[529] Ibid, p. 2.

polyphonic perspective.[530] It is only through polyvalent readings that the text can be truly appreciated by people throughout the different eras and contexts. The tools identified by Thomaskutty are form, source, redaction, textual and other forms of analysis that enable the reader to capture the world of the historical author.[531] Each of these tools permits a person to peek into the world of the exegete and provide vital insight into why the exegete chose to include certain narratives and exclude others. More importantly, it allows others to understand variant readings play a vital part in keeping followers connected to sacred texts, which would be impossible otherwise.

Anderson examines the term *valence* from a different angle, arguing in literature it refers to ways a narrative connects with audiences and themes and the term *polyvalence in literature* specifically refers to the multiple layers of meaning embedded within the text and beyond that transcend time, space and beyond.[532] He further claims literature, particularly narrative literature is rarely monovalent, even simple types such as nursery rhymes are multileveled.[533] However, this does not mean a carte blanche license to interpret however a person may deem fit, it must be discipline-based as different readings will provide different understandings and are not necessarily equal in standing. The understanding of polyvalence presented will allow us to view the different phases of *tafsīr's* evolution more clearly and gauge how it impacted exegetes in all eras, influencing their position towards *Isrā'īliyyāt*.

5.1 Formative Period

5.1.1 *Tafsīr* in the Prophet's Era

It is perhaps a truism to state that the prophet Muḥammad's understanding of the Qur'ān was complete and comprehensive, that his capacity to understand the Qur'an was bestowed upon him just as the revelation of the Qur'an itself was bestowed upon him. This is a central tenet of belief among Muslims. The Qur'ān confirms this fact: "Indeed upon us is the collection (in your heart) and its recitation. So when we have recited it (through Gabriel) then follow its recitation. Then upon Us is its clarification" (Q75:17).

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[530] Ibid, p. 8.

[531] Ibid.

[532] Anderson, Paul N., *"From One Dialogue to Another: Johannine Polyvalence from Origins to Receptions"* (2008). Faculty Publications - George Fox School of Theology. 369. https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/ccs/369.

[533] Ibid.

McAuliffe examines the origin of *tafsīr* and claims: "If one accepts Muḥammad (d. 11/632) as the Qur'ān's first interpreter, then the formative period may extend from his lifetime to the early years of the tenth century, the era that saw both the appearance of Abu Ja'far Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī's commentary and the consensual establishment of an accepted range of Qur'ānic textual variation". She creates the impression it may be a possibility that *tafsīr* can be dated to as early as the life of the prophet Muḥammad, even though she does appear to fully advocate this herself.[534] According to her, if this is accepted, then a re-dating of the formative period is necessary, as it would extend on this basis from his lifetime to the early years of the tenth century.[535]

Al-Dhahabī reflects the dominant Islamic position when he claims the Qur'ān was explained to the prophet Muḥammad simultaneously as it was revealed.[536] He further adds it is fundamental to the Muslim belief that the companions understood the Qur'ān not merely based on their understanding of the Arabic language, but rather through reflection and research, supported by guidance from the prophet Muḥammad, his position reflecting a polyvalent approach and understanding of Qur'ānic exegesis. Al-Dhahabī hereby disagrees with Ibn Khaldūn,[537] who advocated that the Qur'ān was revealed in Arabic, according to the principles of the Arabic language (grammar, morphology and rhetoric), and as a result, the Arabs understood the entirety of its meanings.[538] Ibn Khaldūn asserts the companions understood the entire Qur'ān declaring the Qur'ān was revealed sentence by sentence, verse by verse, to explain *tawḥīd*, religious obligations in accordance to their incidents of revelation, doctrinal matters and matters of abrogation, amongst countless other issues. Therefore, the prophet Muḥammad was explaining *mujmal* (general) verses, identifying *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* (abrogation), and other aspects of Qur'ānic sciences, all the while educating the companions about these concepts, instructing them on *asbāb al-nuzūl* (reasons for revelation), and ensuring that they understood the entirety of its meanings.[539] Ibn Khaldūn's position may be misconstrued, leading one to believe the companions adopted the approach of monovalence primarily and may have resorted to polyvalence

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[534] McAuliffe, J.D, *Qur'ānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 13.

[535] Ibid.

[536] Al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, (Cairo, Egypt, Maktabah Wahbah, 2000), i, p. 16.

[537] Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Muḥammad, *Muqaddimah b. Khaldūn*, ed. by 'Abd Allah Ibn Muḥammad al-Darawaysh (Damascus: Dār al-Balkh, Maktabah al-Hidāyah, 2004), p. 174.

[538] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 29.

Ma'rifah, Muḥammad Hādī, *Al-Tafsīr Wal-Mufassirūn*, Mashhad al-Jāmi'ah al-Raḍwiyyah lil 'Ulūm al-Islāmiyyah, 1964), i, p. 157.

[539] Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah b. Khaldūn*, ii, p. 175.

on occasions. This could lead people to assume the companions were content with the prophet Muḥammad's explanation and unwilling to part ways with it, which would be true whilst the prophet Muḥammad was alive but difficult to acknowledge after his death.

Al-Dhahabī's position is predicated on the idea that the understanding of the Arabic language does not automatically qualify a person to understand the Qur'ān, and the evidence is clear from the need for *tafsīr*. If the entirety of its meanings had been established, then why was there a further need for elucidation and why was it permitted? The fact that *tafsīr* was accepted and practised in the companion's era and beyond is clear evidence that understanding of the language and the elucidation of the prophet Muḥammad were not intended to confine *tafsīr* to one single era or group, as the Qur'ān is a book for all eras and all people, thus its comprehension has to reflect that for all people and eras respectively.

Hence, when comparing the *tafsīr* of the companions with the elucidation of the prophet Muḥammad, we can see the extent of variation both in terms of scope and content, as the needs and requirements of the post-prophetic era differed from the period of revelation. This observation is sufficient as an argument for polyvalence to be considered an intrinsic and inherent part of *tafsīr* as monovalence would limit it.

Al-Dhahabī further argues when we examine the post-prophetic era of the companions, we observe that there was a clear difference in their understanding of the Qur'ān, not only in comparison to the prophet Muḥammad but also in comparison to each other. To support this observation he relates an incident where 'Umar recited Q80:31[540] and expressed he had understood the word *fakiha* as fruit, but had not initially understood the word *abba*; however, when he reflected for a moment, he was able to discern its meaning, based on his *ijtihād* (independent reasoning). In another incident presented by al-Dhahabī, 'Umar recited Q16:47[541] and enquired from the audience what the word *takhawwuf* meant. A man belonging to the tribe *Huzayl* stood and responded that according to his people, it meant *al-tanaqqus* (defect) and 'Umar accepted this. A similar incident is related regarding Ibn 'Abbās where he struggled with the word *fāṭir*[542] until two Bedouins came to him arguing about a well, and one used argued *ana fatartuhā* (I completed it) and his companion responded *ana ibtada'tuha* (I started it).[543] These incidents reflect that on occasions the companions, even those

[540] "And fruit and grass".

[541] "Or that he would not seize them (gradually) in a state of dread.

[542] Q35:1.

[543] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 29.

considered to be exegetical authorities, required assistance from others to elucidate Qur'ānic meanings, therefore Ibn Khaldūn's claim cannot be accepted. Furthermore, it supports Calder's claim that despite monovalent *tafsīr* existing, the 'structural characteristic of *tafsīr*' is polyvalence. The prophet Muḥammad personally never restricted the companions to his opinions alone, he merely provided the elucidation required of him and allowed them to realise the Qur'ān was greater than being restricted to one set of meanings, and his elucidation was merely a blueprint.[544]

Following on from this, another issue that has attracted attention is the extent of the prophet Muḥammad's elucidation of the Qur'ān. The traditional view held by Muslims is that the explanations provided by the prophet Muḥammad, his companions, and their successors were part of a living tradition, which had been codified and preserved for future generations through the available frameworks required to disseminate knowledge.[545] The *tafsīr* provided by these individuals acts as a blueprint for future scholarship, but at the same time allows room for exegetes to develop their approaches to *tafsīr*, all the while working within the boundaries established by their predecessors.[546]

Muslims from all schools of thought, Sunni, Shī'ī and Mu'tazila, believe the first elucidator of the Qur'ān is the prophet Muḥammad[547] and his explanation is identified as *tafsīr al-Nabī* (prophetic elucidation.)[548] As the sole recipient of the revelation, he was the conduit between the creation and God. This is confirmed by the verse "We revealed to you the message (the Qur'ān) so that you can make it clear to the people …"[549] where his *tafsīr* is presented as the foundation and precedent upon which later *tafsīr* should be established and developed.

In his *Magnum opus*, *al-Risālah*, al-Shāfi'ī discusses the authority bestowed upon the prophet Muḥammad by God and propounds that the prophet was an *'alāmah* (sign) of God's religion and His prophet's obedience was obligatory and disobedience was forbidden, therefore his voice was the voice of God in all matters.[550] Furthermore, his *tafsīr* has been identified through his *Ḥadīth* and *Sunnah* in light of verses Q59:7 "Whatever the messenger grants you, take and whatever he forbids from, refrain." and Q33:36 "It is not for a male or female believer if God and His Messenger decree something, to have any choice concerning it. Whoever disobeys God and His Messenger has

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[544] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr*, pp. 101-140.
[545] Shah, *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur'ān*, i, pp. 1-157 (p. 3)

[546] Ibid.

[547] Q16:44.

[548] Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, pp. 112-113.

[549] Q16:44.

[550] Muḥammad Ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, *Al-Risālah*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah), p. 73.

manifestly gone astray. ” and Q4:59 “O you who believe: Obey God and the Messenger and those in positions of authority among you.”[551]Al-Shāfi’ī further notes that true faith comprises belief in both God and His Messenger and this establishes evidence that faith in the prophet Muḥammad entails obedience to him.[552] Lowry postulates that in al-Shāfi’ī’s opinion, the two revealed sources of divine law complemented each other, as a result of divinely intended structuring, therefore each could refer to the other.[553]

Al-Shāfi’ī proposes that the word *Sunnah* has appeared approximately sixteen times in the Qur’ān, with its usage limited to two things, *Sunnat Allah* (God’s Sunnah), and *Sunnat al-awwalīn* (Sunnah of those who came before), and both terms appear together in Q35:42-43. Therefore, the term does not appear in the context of *Sunnah* that al-Shāfi’ī is proposing and Lowry claims it appears to have negative connotations as it appears in the context of divine retribution, as suggested in the aforementioned verse, opposite to what al-Shāfi’ī is proposing.[554]

Al-Shāfi’ī adduces several Qur’ānic verses where the terms *Kitāb* (the Book) and *ḥikmah* (wisdom) are mentioned and paired together and attempts to explain his claim.[555] In total, he lists six verses and divides them into three categories to highlight the difference in syntax and vocabulary, to exemplify how they prove that *ḥikmah* refers to *Sunnah*. The first four verses contain the expression ‘*rasūlun yu’allimhum’ al-kitāb wal ḥikmah* “a messenger who will teach the book and wisdom”, the *Kitāb* and *ḥikmah*. In the following two verses, the context is *anzala Allah* (God revealed), that God revealed the Book and Wisdom. In both instances, the word *kitāb* can easily be identified as referring to the Qur’ān and *ḥikmah* can be identified as something taught by the Prophet, but more importantly, something sent down by God. In conclusion, al-Shāfi’ī opines that the latter (*ḥikmah*) refers to the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, ultimately establishing his authority as the elucidator of God’s word and that his word is considered revelation, albeit not the actual word of God.[556] In light of the al-Shāfi’ī’s deductions, it is clear that the Prophet’s role is to provide *tafsīr*, but the question remains as to its extent and what it incorporates.

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[551] Lowry, Joseph E, *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risāla of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi’ī*, ed. Ruud Peters and Kevin Reinhart, (Leiden, Brill, 2007), p. 171.

[552] Al-Shāfi’ī, *Al-Risālah*, p. 76.

[553] Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risāla of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi’ī*, p. 176.

[554] Ibid, p. 175.

[555] Verses sequentially listed: Q2:129, Q2:151, Q3:164, Q62:2, Q2:231, and Q4:113.

[556] Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory: The Risāla of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi’ī*, p. 172.

When we examine the function of the Prophet's *tafsīr*, we can identify it as an elucidation of the Qur'ān that performs several functions, most notably the following aspects. Firstly, *bayān lil mujmal* i.e. explaining a general meaning or theological issue or matter of practice. For example, he explained how prayer was performed, zakat is to be collected, distributed, etc., and how to perform the hajj, amongst various other issues. Secondly, *tawḍīḥ lil mushkil* i.e. he explained ambiguous issues, verses that had unclear meanings, for example, Q2:187, where the companions showed confusion regarding the meaning of 'white thread' and 'black thread'. Thirdly, *takhṣīṣ al-'āmm* i.e. specifying the generic. This is highlighted by the example of Ibn 'Abbās enquiring about the meaning of *ẓulm*, literally understood to mean injustice, aggression, and oppression, mentioned in Q6:82[557] as *shirk*.[558] For the Muslim scholars, this verifies their claim that he performed elucidation of the Qur'ān, but simultaneously it raises another contentious issue; can the Prophet be identified as the first *mufassir* (exegete) of the Qur'ān? Or for that matter is the term *mufassir* applicable to him at all?

According to some Muslim scholars, it is implausible that the Prophet can be identified as a *mufassir* due to the theological implications created. If he is considered a *mufassir*, it would entail accepting that he would be subject to similar conditions identified by scholars, such as the correct creedal position, and a profound understanding of the Arabic language, to mention a few. To ascertain the issue surrounding the term we need to further examine the terms *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* and identify why it would cause issues.

Whilst discussing the difference between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, Ayoub mentions that *tafsīr* may be described as the general elucidation of a verse with the view to discovering its exoteric (outer/apparent) meaning and application. This would include elucidation of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, placement of the verses in their respective chapters, and explanation of its historical reference. The science of meaning (*ma'ānī*) is related to this. On the other hand, *ta'wīl* is the science of elucidating the general, as well as particular meanings of the Qur'ānic words and is concerned with their exoteric (inner) meaning.[559] Ayoub further adds that the true inner meaning of the Qur'ān is only known to God, but its commentary is required because it was revealed as a book of guidance, therefore it has to be understood.[560]

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[557] "Those who believe and do not mix their beliefs with injustice."

[558] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 4776, vi, p. 260.

[559] Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its interpreters*, i, p. 21.

[560] Ibíd, p. 22.

In light of the difference between the aforementioned terms, it can be argued that the Prophet was neither a *mufassir* nor a *mu'awwil*, simply because he did not truly conform to either of the two terms as the difference between them, according to some commentators, is that *tafsīr* is primarily concerned with the *riwāyah* (transmission) of the tradition, whereas *ta'wīl* is concerned with the *dirāyah* (deeper comprehension) of the inner meaning of the Qur'ān. In light of this distinction, it is probable to assume that the Prophet was simply a *mubayyin* (elucidator) and not a *mufassir* nor *mu'awwil*, as he did not fit the criteria of either.[561] The criteria identified by scholars regarding the qualification of a *mufassir*, from a theological position, does not permit its association with the prophet Muḥammad, as he did not require the qualification prescribed to exegetes of all denominations. Equally, this is important because it shows the prophet did not want to restrict the Qur'ān to one particular meaning, a polyvalent approach was better for the believers as the Qur'ān is required to remain relevant to all times and people.

To understand the role of the prophet Muḥammad as an elucidator and not a *mufassir* or *mu'awwil* it is important to examine the analysis of Muslim scholars regarding *tafsīr* and its proponents. Muslim scholars have always endeavoured to understand and unlock the secrets of the Qur'ān through various means available to them. To achieve this they have to resort to multiple sources, with the first and most important source for interpretation being the Qur'ān itself when its usage is possible. In such a situation no other source is required nor permitted as the Qur'ān's authority is final. Outside the Qur'ān, the second foremost source for *tafsīr* is the prophet Muḥammad himself, whose *Sunnah* is considered to be the living commentary for the Qur'ān. Scholars have agreed that it has provided the framework for future *tafsīr*. They have identified this as *tafsīr bil ma'thūr*, which is transmitted through ḥadīth and deals primarily with *aḥkām*.

In light of this al-Ṭabarī establishes that knowledge of *aḥkām* cannot be reached without prophetic elucidation, as there is no possibility of understanding them. There is a clear prohibition from the prophet Muḥammad concerning this, narrated by Ibn 'Abbās "Whoever speaks about matters of the Qur'ān based upon his own opinion, let him make his abode the fire."[562]

This tradition and others similar to it highlight a conflict between the desires of people to use an unfettered imagination when interpreting the Qur'ān and the desire to say nothing. The close companion of the prophet Muḥammad, Abu Bakr, displayed this conflict in his statement "What earth

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[561] Ibíd, p. 21.

[562] Ibid, p. 22.

shall bear me and what heaven shall shelter me if I utter something concerning the Book of God of which I do not know!"[563]

In comparison to this reluctance, other notable companions such as 'Alī and Ibn Mas'ūd openly invited people to question them about the Qur'ān. In one of his sermons 'Alī encouraged the congregation to ask him about the Qur'ān as there was no verse of the Qur'ān about which he did not know whether it was revealed in the day or at night. Ibn Mas'ūd also made a similar claim regarding his understanding of the Qur'ān, claiming if he knew of anyone more knowledgeable regarding the Qur'ān, he would travel on horseback to learn from that person.[564] In truth, the prophet Muḥammad did not require adherence to these standards nor did he adhere to them, his word was law, and therefore he had no need. Again, this is a clear indication that a monovalent and polyvalent approach both existed amongst the companions. Those like Abū Bakr were wary of the polyvalent approach, preferring caution and strictly adhering to the prophetic explanation. Whereas, others ignored the monovalent approach and were confident they could provide alternative explanations, when required and within the parameters defined by the prophet Muḥammad.

Furthermore, in light of what has been discussed, the desire to interpret the Qur'ān could be traced to an attitude displayed towards the Qur'ān itself. Initially, the discipline of *tafsīr* was considered as the amalgamation of theory and practice, and the companions displayed this through their practice of learning ten verses and not proceeding further until they had learned all they were required to about those verses and had acted upon their teachings.[565] This concept is in line with the directives of the Qur'ān itself, where the believers are instructed to read the Qur'ān and understand its meanings.[566] It is this very same instruction to understand the Qur'ān that led to a difference in *tafsīr* and reliance upon *tafsīr bil ra'y*.

Added to this, the influx of non-Arabs meant that individual interpretation became more widespread and accepted amongst the different cultures.[567] At this point, I would suggest that another underlying cause for the tension could have been the emergence of *tafsīr* that was based upon doubtful and

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[563] Ibid.

[564] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 15.

[565] Al-Suyūtī, Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Abī Bakr, A*l-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Saudí Arabia: *Wazārat al-Sh'ūn al-Islāmiyyah wal Awqāf wal Da'wah wal Irshād al-Amānah al-'Āmah Mujammah al-Malik Fahd lil -Ṭaba'ah*, 2005), vi, p. 2277.

[566] (Q38:29) "A blessed Book which we have revealed to you, that they may reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded".

[567] Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its interpreters*, i, p. 23.

inauthentic traditions. This would have caused conflict and differences that could not be dealt with by mere dismissal. It may have created a stronger case amongst some companions for a monovalent *tafsīr*, yet history does not support an abandonment of the polyvalent position.

Concerning the employment of personal opinions in *tafsīr*, al-Zarkashī mentions the prophetic warning against this, as it is conjectural and nothing more. In the prophet Muḥammad's words: "Whoever speaks about the Qur'ān from his own opinion and is correct, he is still in error!"[568] Al-Bayhaqī asserts if this narration is true, then (and God knows better) this refers to *ra'y*, which is unsupported with evidence, the likes of which are not permissible to interpret the Qur'ān. On the other hand, if it is supported by evidence, then it is acceptable. This is what Abū Bakr intended in his statement. [569] The evidence in question refers to consulting the opinions of the linguists, possessing the understanding of *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* (abrogation), the knowledge of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (causes of revelation), and consultation of the companion's opinions. Without such evidence, a person's opinions will not be accepted.[570] Consequently, the prohibition in this context refers to the ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses of the Qur'ān and not the entire text as the Qur'ān is revealed as evidence (*ḥujjah*) against the creation, and could not be such if *tafsīr* was not possible. In addition, the Qur'ān was revealed to be relevant to all times, ages and people. It should always be possible for scholars to connect the Qur'ān to its intended audience.

Al-Zarkashī presents another *Ḥadīth* in support of this standpoint where the prophet commands "The Qur'ān is malleable, capable of many interpretations, therefore interpret it according to the best possible interpretation."[571] In light of the evidence above, for Muslim scholars, it identifies not just the need for *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) in *tafsīr*, but the need for qualified people to exercise it, as anyone unqualified will be in error even if they were to arrive at the correct interpretation. so far, this is the clearest indication of polyvalence in *tafsīr*, supporting the argument presented by Calder[572], Bauer[573] and others that polyvalence was the traditional approach and was common from early Islam. Understandably, the criteria for polyvalence are strict and as long as exegetes adhere to that there is no issue.

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[568] Al-Zarkashī, Burhān al-Dīn, *Al-Burhān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1990), ii, p. 303.

[569] Ibid, p. 304.

[570] Ibid, p. 305.

[571] Ibid.

[572] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr*, pp. 101-140.

[573] Bauer, Thomas, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011).

Again it is important to remember that the prophet Muḥammad did not need to exercise personal judgement to elucidate the Qur'ān and according to Muslim scholars, frankly, he never did because whatever he offered was through divine instruction as stated in the verse "Nor does he speak from his inclination".[574] Another question related to the definition of a *mufassir* and a *mu'awwil* is that if a *mufassir* is an exoteric commentator, then what is a *mu'awwil*? According to Ayoub, a *mu'awwil* is an esoteric commentator, someone who is a discoverer or deducer.[575] The latter (*mu'awwil*) enjoys freedom in his scope of imagination, even though he is prone to error and generally suspect in what he says, whereas, the former (*mufassir*) is restricted by the subject matter. In light of this distinction, Qur'ānic scholars have insisted that *tafsīr* must ultimately depend upon the prophetic Sunnah, the deductions of the companions and successors, whereas *ta'wīl* has slightly more room to operate, as personal opinion is included. Al-Zarkashī reinforces this opinion and argues that an exegete must possess particular qualifications such as knowledge of the religious sciences, sincerity and piety, correct beliefs, and be a practising person, amongst others.[576]

In light of Ayoub's categorisation of *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* it is clear that the prophet cannot be accurately described as a *mufassir* or a *mu'awwil* as he does not strictly conform to either of the descriptions as identified by al-Zarkashī, al-Suyūtī, Ayoub or others. A more apt description of the prophet is a clarifier or elucidator (*mubayyin*), as described by al-Shāfi'ī.

Ayoub reiterates that the Muslims believe that the prophet was the first interpreter of the Qur'ān and was charged with being both the interpreter and transmitter as mentioned in (Q16:44). In light of the above discussion, it is more accurate to identify him as an interpreter, elucidator, and clarifier.[577]

5.2 Sources of *Tafsīr*

The evolution of *tafsīr* is integral to the historiography of *tafsīr* and an essential element in understanding the sources employed by the relevant authorities that helped shape it. Shah contends that eventually all forms of *tafsīr* are presented as being formulated around the simple elucidation of the Qur'ānic language and narratives, utilising the available materials sourced from the prophetic era

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[574] Q53:3.

[575] Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 308.

[576] Al-Suyūtī, a*l-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vi, pp. 2275-77.

Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 306.

[577] Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its interpreters*, i, p. 25.

and soon after.[578] Simply put, *tafsīr* fundamentally deals with the linguistic and narrative elements of the Qur'ān, all the while incorporating other aspects of *tafsīr*, for example, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, *nāsikh and mansūkh*, and so forth.

Shah proposes that the legacy of the *tābi'ūn* (pious predecessors) is portrayed as being the explanation of the Qur'ānic content i.e. illustrating the narratives and projecting their morality, all the while setting a standard for *tafsīr*. Despite this it accommodates development for other forms of *tafsīr*, incorporating legal, theological, grammatical, *Sufi*, and periphrastic, amongst others. Shah further adds that once *tafsīr* developed as an independent discipline, it became appealing to many, to the extent that it accommodated traditional as well as rational approaches, allowing literary, theological, sectarian, esoteric and philosophical aspects to emerge. Shah's argument clearly shows that polyvalence was not just permitted, it was a much-needed and approved element of *tafsīr* that allowed it to cater for each era.

Al-Dhahabī echoes the prevalent Islamic position, that three categories for *tafsīr* have been determined, *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bil Qur'ān* (Qur'ān via the Qur'ān), *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bil Sunnah* (Qur'ān via prophetic tradition), and the *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi ijtihad al-ṣaḥābah wal tāb'īn* (Qur'ān via the companions and successors).

Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bil Qur'ān involves the elucidation of difficult verses of the Qur'ān through other Qur'ānic verses. This is considered the foremost method of elucidation as the Qur'ān's inimitable nature is unchallengeable for *tafsīr*, leaving no room to contest its explanation, yet this is restricted to verses that can be subject to Qur'ānic elucidation. An example of this is found in Q2:37[579], which is elucidated by Q7:23[580], which explains the words received by the prophet Adam and dispels the need to resort to other exegetical sources.[581] Al-Dhahabī identifies the various ambiguous verses of the Qur'ān and their explanatory verses as comprising of *mujmal* (general), explained by *mubayyin* (specific), *muṭlaq* (unrestricted) explained by *muqayyad* (restricted) and *'āmm* (common) explained by *khāṣṣ* (particular).[582] He asserts that this is the primary method of *tafsīr*, for a person must first

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[578] Shah, *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur'ān*, i, pp. 1-157 (p. 3)

[579] Then Adam was inspired with words ⌜of prayer⌝ by his Lord, so He accepted his repentance. Surely, He is the Accepter of Repentance, Most Merciful.

[580] They replied, "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will certainly be losers."

[581] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 31.

[582] Ibid, pp. 31-36.

gather Qur'ānic verses of the above categories and interpret them from other Qur'ānic verses, as there is no better and unquestionable source for the Qur'ān than the Qur'ān itself.[583]

The second category identified is *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān performed by the prophet Muḥammad known as *tafsīr al-Nabī* (prophetic elucidation), and according to 'Abd al-Raof is also known as *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān bil Sunnah*.[584] In light of the earlier discussion regarding the term *mufassir* and its usage for the Prophet, I feel this term is incorrect as the Prophet did not perform *tafsīr* through his Sunnah, rather he explained, elucidated and clarified ambiguous issues of the Qur'ān. This type of *tafsīr* allowed subsequent generations of scholars to harness his Sunnah to perform their *tafsīr*. Al-Dhahabī further remarks the Prophet's explanation is one of the foundations of *tafsīr* according to the Qur'ān itself as stated in Q59:7 "Whatever the Prophet grants you, take it, and whatever he forbids you, leave it." To support his claim he presents several *Ḥadīth* which show that whenever a companion struggled with a verse, the Prophet would be consulted for its elucidation.[585] After all the Prophet was the living embodiment of the Qur'ān[586] for both the Sunni and Shi'i and his word was the best source of *tafsīr*. This type of *tafsīr* is considered a part of *tafsīr bil-ma'thūr*, where *Ḥadīth* is employed as one of its methods.

Abdul-Raof identifies the main explanatory techniques of the prophet Muḥammad as consisting of the following;

1. He clarified general meanings or theological matters Q2:42.
2. He elucidated semantic ambiguity Q2:187.
3. He specified the generic Q6:82.

In addition, the key features of the Prophetic elucidation are;

1. Non-holistic – his *tafsīr* did not incorporate the entire Qur'ān, only specific verses and with a brief explanation, as and when the occasion required.

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[583] Ibid.

[584] Abdul-Raof, Hussein, *Schools of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, (London, Routledge, 2010), pp. 112-113.

[585] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 31.

[586] Esposito, John L, *The Future of Islam,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 43.

2. Qur'ānic intertextuality – *tafsīr* based on the Qur'ān itself, as God's word is the primary explanation of his divine text.
3. The prophet's elucidation did not incorporate Jewish Anecdotes, he received revelation when he required guidance.
4. Oral transmission – the transmission was mainly oral, unlike Abdul-Raof's claim that it was due to the prohibition of recording for fear of confusion with the Qur'ān. Sufficient evidence exists where the Prophet is known to have prohibited due to particular reasons, and his prohibition was conditional. In addition, the companions were mainly illiterate and writing materials were scarce.[587]

Discussion on what the Prophet's *tafsīr* incorporated provides a framework for future *tafsīr* and raises the vital question of how much *tafsīr* he provided. Sections of the Qur'ān or the entire Qur'ān? Ibn Taymiyyah believes the prophet Muḥammad provided a *tafsīr* of the entire Qur'ān for his companions.[588] He cites Q16:44 as evidence, supported by a *Ḥadīth* narrated from al-Sulamī the companions would learn ten verses and would not proceed further until they had understood their meanings and acted upon them.[589] He also presents a narration of Malik Ibn Anas (d.179/795) that Ibn Umar spent eight years memorising al-Baqarah, which he did not just memorise, but understood its meanings and acted upon the commandments contained therein. Ibn Taymiyyah further insists that the objective behind any form of speech is to grasp its understanding, and this applies especially to the Qur'ān. Moreover, it is inconceivable for people to study any text without commenting on it, especially the Qur'ān for Muslims.[590]

Ibn Taymiyyah's opinion is problematic, especially if a *tafsīr* of the entire Qur'ān had been provided by the Prophet, then on what grounds are all other *tafsīr* acceptable? In light of the verses mentioned, it would be strictly forbidden for people to interpret the Qur'ān in any other way and provide an alternative reading. The Qur'ān would be explicitly labelled as monovalent and anyone doing otherwise would be flagrantly violating the commandment of verse Q59:7 "Whatever the Prophet grants you, take it, and whatever he forbids you, leave it." Therefore, it is necessary from a theological position to question Ibn Taymiyyah's stance and to reject his position due to the implications of his findings. The dominant Islamic view is that the Qur'ān, due to its position as the book final book (as

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[587] Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, p. 116.

[588] Ibn Taymiyyah, Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad, *Muqaddimah fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, pp. 35-37.

[589] Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, p. 116.

[590] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, p. 37.

Islam is the final religion), has to be relevant to all eras and all people as highlighted by al-Zarkashī.[591] Additionally, Ibn Kathīr's monovalent approach can be traced back to this opinion of Ibn Taymiyyah, even though he does not openly declare this.

In contrast, al-Suyūtī and numerous other exegetes assert the prophet Muḥammad only provided *tafsīr* for certain sections of the Qur'ān, concerning difficulty experienced by the companions.[592] To support his claim al-Qurṭubī[593] cites a narration from 'Aisha that the Prophet only provided *tafsīr* for certain verses of the Qur'ān, for which the angel Jibrīl relayed instructions to him, although the authenticity of the *Ḥadīth* is questioned by some.[594] Abu Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) re-enforces al-Ṭabarī's stance arguing the impossibility of the Prophet Muḥammad provided the entire *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān and neither was it a requirement imposed by God upon him to perform this task.[595] If the entire *tafsīr* had been provided by the prophet Muḥammad, then there would be no permission or scope for an alternate *tafsīr*. In conclusion, it becomes evident from the prophet Muḥammad's actions that a polyvalent approach must be retained, within certain parameters, even though there may be a desire by some to have a complete *tafsīr* from him, as this would be highly problematic for Muslim scholarship as it would create extreme difficulty in making the Qur'ān accessible to people and relevant across all eras. A complete prophetic *tafsīr* would result in everything immediately after the Prophet would be declared invalid and obsolete as it would be deemed in direct contravention of divine law.

5.2.1 Tafsīr in the Companion's Era

Al-Dhahabī identifies the third category of *tafsīr* as belonging to the companions and the successors. When faced with challenges concerning *tafsīr* in which the companions experienced difficulty understanding a verse and were unable to perform *tafsīr* utilising the first two methods, they would resort to *ijtihād* (independent reasoning), thus adding their interpretation to *tafsīr*. Abdul-Raof believes an important contributory factor to this was the expansion of the Muslim state and the influx of non-Arab Muslims that increased the need for *tafsīr*, which in turn required a new method of

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[591] Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, p. 305.

[592] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 40.

[593] Al-Qurṭubī, Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad, *Al-Jām'i li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Mu'assisah al-Risālah, 2006), i, p. 16.

[594] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 41.

[595] Al-Māturīdī, Abu Manṣūr, *Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah- Tafsīr al- Māturīdī*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2005), i, p. 204.

approach.[596] However, the level of the companion's *tafsīr* varied due to various factors for example the level of time spent in the company of the prophet Muḥammad, the level of knowledge regarding circumstances of revelation, Islamic legal knowledge and their general knowledge.[597]

The notable successor Masrūq Ibn al-Ajda' (d.63/682) described the differing levels of the companions' knowledge as *ikhāḍ*, i.e. streams, just as a stream varies in proportions the companions varied in their abilities.[598] Al-Bukhārī relates an incident where a companion named 'Adī took a white rope (or thread) and a black one to the prophet Muhammad and asked him about the interpretation of Q2:187, which the prophet explained to him as the whiteness of dawn and the darkness of the night.[599] The companion had misunderstood the meaning of the phrases *Khayt al-Abyaḍ* (whiteness of dawn) and *Khayt al-Aswad* (blackness of night), interpreting them as 'black thread' and 'white thread'.

This additional source of *tafsīr* employed by the successors strengthens the argument for polyvalence in *tafsīr*, contributing to the successors employing narratives of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book). There were instances where the Qur'ān and the Torah agreed upon certain elements, specifically stories of the prophets, past nations and from the New Testament the stories of Jesus and Mary. The companions sought answers from those who were formerly of the *Ahl al-Kitāb*, such as 'Abd Allah Ibn Salām (d. 43/663), Ka'b al-Aḥbār (d.32-35/652-56) and others.

The difference in the scope of *tafsīr* provided by the companions also highlights another important aspect of *tafsīr*, namely the difference in the level of influence demonstrated by them. Not every companion of the Prophet enjoyed the status of *mufassir* as they all possessed varying degrees of understanding of *tafsīr*. To understand the scope of their contribution and the methodology they employed, an analysis of the major individuals will help gain an insight into their attitude to polyvalence and in particular the employment of Isrā'īliyyāt in *tafsīr*.

Shah believes all forms of *tafsīr* are inherently identified as an explanation of the linguistic and narrative elements of the Qur'ān, whilst utilising the available corpus of material from the immediate and following generation to inform of the explanation provided. He adds that the pious ancestors (*Salaf al-Ṣāliḥūn*) are identified as having a conventional approach, where the content was provided with context. This was highlighted to reflect that whilst these individuals reflected upon the narratives

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[596] Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, p. 116.

[597] Ibid.

[598] Ibid.

[599] Al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, vi, ḥadīth 4510, p. 43.

of the Qur'ān for instruction and other immediate needs, there was still room for other forms of *tafsīr*, such as legal, theological and so forth.[600] Therefore, the traditional approach was considered as a blueprint for the future, with scope for development, but within the boundaries of the established scholarship. Once the discipline was established within its right, it incorporated both traditional and rational approaches, which further permitted other aspects of *tafsīr* such as literary, theological, sectarian, philosophical etc.[601]

5.2.2 Prominent Exegetes from the Companions

As previously mentioned according to traditional Islamic understanding, the genesis of *tafsīr* can be traced to the prophet Muḥammad (in the context of elucidation), but Gilliot[602] contends this has been an object of vigorous debate, with two opposing views, the traditional view, that *tafsīr* was built upon the foundations laid by the Prophet, his companions and their successors, upon which future generations built their works and the orientalist view where the former is suspect as it contains questionable *isnād*, which meant the origin can only be authentically identified from the late second and early third century.[603]

From the traditional perspective, al-Suyūtī[604] and others identify ten prominent exegetes amongst the companions; the four caliphs; Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq (d. 13/634), 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 23/644), 'Uthmān Ibn 'Affān (d. 35/656), 'Ali Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/660), 'Abd Allah Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/652), 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687), Ubay Ibn Ka'b (d. 20/640), Zayd Ibn Thābit (d. 45/665), Abu Mūsā al-Ash'arī (d. 44/664), and Abd Allah Ibn al-Zubayr (d. 73/692). He adds that other individuals provided *tafsīr*, but very little was transmitted from them and they did not enjoy the same prominence as the aforementioned due to circumstances.[605]

Despite their recognition as the leading authorities, only a select few of them have enjoyed greater influence and have been identified as the game changers in Qur'ānic exegesis, most notably 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib (d.40/660), 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbās (d.68/687), 'Abd Allah Ibn Mas'ūd (d.32/652), Ubay Ibn Ka'b (d.20/640).

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[600] Shah, *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur'ān*, i, pp. 1-157 (p. 3)

[601] Ibid.

[602] Gilliot, Claude, '*Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval*', Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ii, (Leiden, Brill, 2002), pp. 99-124, (p. 102).

[603] Ibid, p. 103.

[604] Al-Suyūtī, a*l-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vi, p. 2325.

[605] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p49.

5.2.2.1 ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib

A distinguished companion, fourth of the four rightly guided caliphs, cousin to the prophet Muḥammad and his son-in-law. He is noted for his knowledge of jurisprudence, receiving an appointment as a *qādī* for the people of Yemen and the prophet Muḥammad’s prayer[606] “*allāhumma thabbit lisānahū wahdi qalbahū*”.[607] Ibn ‘Abbās narrates that he took *tafsīr* from ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib and Abū Nu’aym states that ‘Alī claimed “By Allah, no verse has been revealed about which I am unaware of why it was revealed and where it was revealed. My lord granted me an intelligent heart and an inquisitive tongue.”[608] Abu Nu’aym also reports that Ibn Mas’ūd claimed “The Qur’ān was revealed in seven modes and there was no mode except that it had an apparent and inner aspect. Indeed ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib possessed knowledge of both.”[609] A large volume of narrations attributed to ‘Ali, many of them are fabricated, with few deemed to be acceptable.[610] It is difficult to discern whether he employed traditions from the *Ahl al-Kitāb*, without a thorough investigation into the traditions that are accepted. In truth, his contributions are considered secondary to Ibn ‘Abbās.

5.2.2.2 Ibn ‘Abbās

‘Abd Allah Ibn ‘Abbās Ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, cousin to the prophet Muḥammad and the foremost exegete amongst the companions. He was aged thirteen, or according to some fifteen, when the prophet Muḥammad passed away and had attended to him from an early age. He enjoyed unfettered access to the prophet Muḥammad’s home as his aunt was the prophet Muḥammad’s wife, Maymūnah Bint al-Ḥārith al-Hilālīyah (d. 53/673), so he was ever-present there. Furthermore, he attended to his senior companions, enjoying their company and knowledge, and passed away at the late age of seventy.[611] He was awarded the titles *ḥabr al-Ummah* (The learned one of the nation) and *al-baḥr* (Sea of Knowledge) due to his superior intellect and knowledge and as recognition as one of the foremost authorities in Qur’ānic exegesis and Islamic legal edicts. Shah mentions that in traditional sources it is the cousin of the prophet Muḥammad ‘Abd Allah Ibn ‘Abbās who is identified as the

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[606] Ibn al-Athīr, ‘Izz al-Dīn ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jazarī, *Usd al-Ghābah fī Ma’rifah al-Ṣaḥābah*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār ibn Ḥazm, 2012), p. 875.

[607] “O Allah grant steadfastness to his tongue and guidance to his heart.”

[608] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 67.

[609] Ibid, p. 68.

[610] Ibid.

[611] Ibid, p. 50.

figurehead for the development of *tafsīr*.[612] He is described by ‘Abd Allah Ibn Mas’ūd as *tarjumān al-Qur’ān* (explicator of the Qur’ān).[613]

Gilliot questions the uncontested authority of Ibn ‘Abbās as the ‘father of *tafsīr*’, citing Alois Sprenger, who openly called him a liar due to a significant number of traditions attributed to him, with a large amount classified as inconsistent.[614] The commentary credited to him by some Muslim scholars *‘Tanwīr al-Miqbās* has attracted much criticism, primarily that it is not his, but rather that of his students. Al-Dhahabī supports this criticism and condemns those who accept it as his *tafsīr* quoting al-Shāfi’ī who declares “No *tafsīr* has been established for Ibn ‘Abbās, except approximately a hundred *Ḥadīth*.”[615]

Despite this criticism, Muslim scholars mention the accolades attributed to him did not prevent an initial hesitation from his companions to endorse his authority. Originally, there was an objection to his inclusion in gatherings reserved for senior companions because he was the solitary adolescent allowed to attend. Muslim scholars predicate his inclusion as a sign of recognition for his exceptional abilities by the second caliph ‘Umar, who allowed him to sit in the gatherings of the elders, and when others objected that their children were not permitted, ‘Umar silenced them by highlighting his deep understanding of Qur’ānic *tafsīr*.[616]

Arguably, Ibn ‘Abbās is amongst the earliest notable individuals who supported and employed polyvalence in *tafsīr*, which made him a target of certain accusations that need addressing. When discussing the companions’ hermeneutical approach, al-Dhahabī mentions that Ibn ‘Abbās, including other exegetes amongst the companions, is the first to utilise the Qur’ān for *tafsīr*, followed by *Ḥadīth* and *ijtihad*. In addition, they also employed the narrations of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book), guided by former scholars of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* for example ‘Abd Allah b. Salām (d. 43/663) and Ka’b al-Aḥbār (d.32-35/652-56). In defence of Ibn ‘Abbās, it has been argued that he employed the narrations of the Jewish people, following the prophetic dictate, “*ḥaddithū ‘an banī Isrā’īla*”[617], as long as they complied with Islamic teachings. Anything mentioned in the Qur’ān concisely could be

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[612] Shah, *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur’ān*, i, pp. 1-157 (p. 4).

[613] Al-Suyūtī, a*l-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vi, p. 2327.

[614] Gilliot, Claude, ‘*The Beginnings of Qur’ānic Exegesis’*, The Qur’ān: Formative Interpretation, ed. Andrew Rippin, (Ashgate, 1999), pp. 1-26 (p. 9).

[615] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 62.

[616] Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah fī Ma’rifah al-Ṣaḥābah*, p. 692.

Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 51-55.

[617] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 3461, p. 857.

explained through narratives found in the Torah and Bible. His authority was recognised amongst his peers and he was afforded privileges not granted to others.

Goldziher[618] and Ahmad Amin[619] challenge the position conferred upon Ibn ‘Abbās, and by default, other companions too, accusing them, especially Ibn ‘Abbās of an unhealthy obsession with *Isrā’īliyyāt* and objecting to their polyvalent approach. This is based on the volume of narrations taken from the *Ahl al-Kitāb* and the fact that this practice dismissed the prophet Muḥammad’s command of exercising caution towards them.[620] He instructed the people to neither believe nor disbelieve the Jews, but instead to say that they believed in what Allah had revealed.[621] A second narration is presented to reinforce the claim, narrated from Jābir Ibn ‘Abd Allah, who states that ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb acquired a book form the Jews and would take great interest in reading it, resulting in the prophet Muḥammad angrily telling ‘Umar to neither believe nor disbelieve its contents, but rather to stick to the Qur’ān, which was more recent and authoritative.[622]

In light of this Goldziher argues a large volume of *Isrā’īliyyāt* was accepted, resulting in an undeniable influence in the early schools of *tafsīr*, especially the school of Ibn ‘Abbās. He asserts that Ibn ‘Abbās would consult a man, by the name of Ghaylān Ibn Farwah al-Azdī, and his daughter, who were both reputed to possess knowledge of *Ahl al-Kitāb* books. In addition, he would also consult individuals like ‘Abd Allah Ibn Salām and Ka’b al-Aḥbār, who were formerly of the *Ahl al-Kitāb*, and other Jewish people, about whom people had expressed concern. In other words, he ignored the prophetic warnings.[623] Ahmad Amin echoed Goldziher’s views similarly accusing Ibn ‘Abbās of the same things.[624]

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[618] Goldziher, Ignaz, *Al-Maḍāhib al-Islāmiyyah fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, translated by Alī Ḥasan ‘Abd al-Qādir, (Shāri’ al-Khalīj, Matba’a al-Ulūm, 1944), pp. 65-67.

[619] Amin, Aḥmad, *Fajr al-Islam*, (Cairo, Egypt, Mu’assisah Hindāwī, 2012), pp. 220-225.

[620] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 4485, p. 1099.

Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 54.

Narration of Abū Hurairah where the People of the Book would recite the Torah in Hebrew and explain it in Arabic to the Muslims.

[621] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 4485, p. 808, ḥadīth 2685, p. 489.

[622] Ibn Ḥanbal, Abū 'Abd Allah Ahmad, *Musnad Ahmad Ibn Hanbal*, (Cairo, Egypt, Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1995), xii, ḥadīth 15094, p. 85.

[623] Ibid.

[624] Amin, *Fajr al-Islam*, p. 220-225.

In truth, these accusations are harsh in light of the evidence presented by traditional Muslim scholars challenging the notion of recklessness in the employment of *Isrā'īliyyāt*. They argue the companions rigorously avoided investigations related to issues of faith, creed and other sensitive matters concerned with fundamental issues of Islam; restricting their enquiries to details of narratives regarding prophets, previous nations and historical incidents. Any narrations encountered by them would be subject to stringent testing; examining their conformity to the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*, and subsequently rejecting anything that fell short. This shows us they were prepared to adopt the polyvalent approach and saw benefits in them, particularly those that were concerned with details related to prophets, previous nations and historical incidents.

In fairness, the framework they adopted centres around two particular *Ḥadīth*, namely "*lā tuṣaddiqū Ahl al-Kitābi wa lā tukadhībūhum*"[625] and "*wa ḥaddithū 'an banī Isrāīla*".[626] Therefore, any claim of negligence displayed by the companions, especially Ibn 'Abbās is questionable since he could have openly rejected the prohibition, which would have resulted in senior companions such as 'Umar reprimanding him as he had done in the case of Sabīgh Ibn 'Asl[627], yet no such evidence is found. Furthermore, al-Bukhārī offers a narration characterising Ibn 'Abbās's attitude towards narrations of the *Ahl al-Kitāb*, where Ibn 'Abbās admonished people on narrating from the People of the Book whilst they had the Qur'ān, as the Jews had altered their text.[628] Ibn 'Abbās's influence cannot be overlooked, he was the foremost exegete of the companions, therefore many flocked to him to learn. Due to this recognition, Ibn 'Abbās is credited with establishing the Makkan School of *tafsīr*, and this shows despite adopting a polyvalent approach Ibn 'Abbās demonstrates rules need to be observed when adopting polyvalence.

5.2.2.3 'Abd Allah Ibn Mas'ūd

'Abd Allah Ibn Mas'ūd is the second notable authority in *tafsīr* and credited to be the sixth individual to embrace Islam after a meeting with the prophet Muḥammad and Abu Bakr, where he witnessed the prophet Muḥammad perform a miracle. He is recognised as the first individual to recite the Qur'ān publicly, resulting in being severely beaten by the people of Makkah. He is acknowledged as one of the leading authorities on the Qur'ān and its sciences amongst the companions and the prophet

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[625] "Do not believe the People of the Book nor disbelieve them".

[626] "Narrate from the People of the Book".

[627] Al-Dārimī , 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Faḍl, *Sunan Al-Dārimī*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyyah, 2013), ḥadīth 154, p. 131.

[628] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 2685, p. 497.

Muḥammad would personally request to hear his recitation of the Qur'ān.[629] Similar to Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Mas'ūd is credited for the establishment of the Kūfan School of *tafsīr*, which largely focused on *Ḥadīth* and jurisprudence, with less focus on exegesis.[630]

Ibn Mas'ūd's exegetical approach is underlined by the extreme caution he exercised in *tafsīr* attributed to him. He declared whenever the companions memorised ten verses of the Qur'ān, they did not proceed until they had learnt their meanings and had acted upon them. Concerning his status Masrūq Ibn al-Ajda' (d. 63/682) claimed that there was no verse of the Qur'ān Ibn Mas'ūd did not know where and why it was revealed, or that there was anyone more knowledgeable than him in this respect. Ibn Mas'ūd's authority was accepted by the companions, resulting in the people of Kūfa adopting his *tafsīr* based upon the authority granted to him. Amongst the prominent students who narrated from Ibn Mas'ūd are Masrūq, 'Alqamah, al-Aswad and others.[631] Although his approach is not clear whether he adopted a monovalent or polyvalent approach, he would probably have preferred the latter when he settled in Kūfa, due to the influence of his surroundings.

5.2.2.4 Ubay Ibn Ka'b

The third exegetical authority is Ubay Ibn Ka'b, known as the first scribe of the Qur'ān, the master of the Qur'ān reciters and a prominent memoriser of the divine text. More importantly, he is recognised for his extensive knowledge of the Old and New Testaments, due to his Jewish background. Ubay Ibn Ka'b is credited with establishing the Madinah School of *tafsīr*.[632]

Additionally, he is recognised for influencing prominent scholars including Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. He was also considered an authority amongst the companions in *tafsīr* and regarded as an authority on the Abrahamic faiths, the ancient texts, reasons of revelation, abrogation and other Qur'ānic sciences.[633] His position in *tafsīr* involved a polyvalent approach due to his authority in the Abrahamic texts. A large volume of *tafsīr* is also attributed to him, subjecting him to criticism, as he was considered a target for fabricated narratives. Arguably a hallmark of this era is *tafsīr* embracing new sources and introducing approaches previously not incorporated in the prophetic

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[629] Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-Ghābah fī Ma'rifah al-Ṣaḥābah*, p. 737.

[630] Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, p. 119.

[631] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 65.

[632] Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, p. 119.

[633] Ibid.

elucidation, namely *ijtihād* and narratives of the *Ahl al-Kitāb*. *Tafsīr* in this era incorporated certain qualities that distinguished it from the previous era. The following are chief among them.

1. The Qur'ān was not elucidated in its entirety, only what was required for the people.
2. There was a lesser degree of difference among the companions with their successors.
3. Elucidations required by the people were not detailed, people were happy with literal explanations.
4. There was no formal existence of *tafsīr*.

5.3 Schools of *Tafsīr*

The aforementioned companions of the prophet Muḥammad established their authority amongst the Muslims and in recognition are credited with founding major schools of *tafsīr* with the expansion of Islam, throughout Arabia and especially beyond. People they connected with embraced their teachings leading to the establishment of three major schools (sometimes considered as four schools) were established, whose teachings survived and prospered, Makkah, Madinah, and Iraq (sometimes divided into Kūfa and Baṣra). Differences of opinion amongst the companions were relatively limited and historians reported very little, as Ibn Taymiyyah claims, but this changed over time and in the era of the successors greater differences emerged, resulting in a need for detailed *tafsīr* to address new issues.[634] The successors took their *tafsīr* from the companions, to a degree continuing their legacy, but simultaneously carving out their legacy. A brief examination will highlight the impact of the different schools and their influence on the future of this genre.

5.3.1 School of Makkah

Established by the companion 'Abd Allah Ibn 'Abbās its prominent students were the following individuals.

1. Sa'īd Ibn Jubayr al-Asadī (d. 95/713)

Reported to be the first person to compile a small treaty on *tafsīr*, upon the request of the caliph 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Marwān (d. 86/705). He learned *tafsīr* from Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd.

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[634] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, p. 37.

Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 77.

2. Mujāhid Ibn Jabr al-Makhzūmī al-Makkī (d. 104/722)

A prominent jurist who completed his *tafsīr* three times under the tutelage of Ibn ‘Abbās, but he was known for not always narrating from him.

3. ‘Ikramah al-Barbarī (d. 105/723)

The client of Ibn ‘Abbās who narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib and Abū Hurairah. There is a difference of opinion among the scholars regarding his veracity, with accusations of lying against him concerning claiming to know the entire *tafsīr* of the Qur’ān, resulting in accusations being levelled against his former master Ibn ‘Abbās. Furthermore, his reputation is brought into question for holding Khawārij beliefs. Despite this, al-Dhahabī mentions that scholars defended his veracity, with the likes of al-Bukhārī and Muslims citing his narrations in their books.[635]

4. Ṭāwūs Ibn Kaysān al-Yamānī (d. 106/723)

Hailing from Yemen he was known for his piety and association with the senior companions, approximately fifty, with Ibn ‘Abbās is reported to have said that he believed Ṭāwūs was from paradise due to his excessive piety. He was well versed in the Qur’ānic *tafsīr*.[636]

5. ‘Aṭā Ibn Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114/732)

Recognised for his knowledge of jurisprudence and *tafsīr* and also for his piety. He is also recognised for narrating from the likes of Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn ‘Umar, Ibn ‘Amr Ibn al-Āṣṣ and is claimed to have met over a hundred companions. He did not narrate excessively from Ibn ‘Abbās and this is one of the qualities which granted him an accepted status amongst exegetes.[637]

5.3.2 School of Madinah

This school was established by Ubay Ibn Ka’b and its prominent students were the following individuals.

1. Abu al-Āliyah Rāfi’ Ibn Mahrān al-Riyāhī (d. 93/711)

Known for his knowledge of the various modes of recitation, he embraced Islam two years after the Prophet’s death and narrated from the likes of ‘Alī, Ibn Mas’ūd, Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn ‘Umar and others. He is known for being amongst the most reliable successors and exegetes.[638]

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[635] Al-Ḍahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 82.

[636] Ibid, p. 85.

[637] Ibid.

[638] Ibid, p. 87.

2. Muḥammad Ibn Ka'b al-Quraẓī (d. 118/736)

He was known for his knowledge in *Ḥadīth* and jurisprudence, a reliable, honest and moral person. He narrated from 'Alī, Ibn Mas'ūd, Ibn 'Abbās and others.[639] Al-'Ajalī mentions that he was an authority on the Qur'ān, with Ibn 'Aun claiming that he had not seen anyone more knowledgeable regarding the interpretation of the Qur'ān.

3. Zaid Ibn Aslam al-'Adawī (d. 136/753)

He was the client of the second caliph 'Umar and counted among the senior successors, praised by the likes of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal. He was known for interpreting the Qur'ān according to his understanding, but this cannot be misconstrued as criticism by prominent scholars such as Mālik Ibn Anas (d. 179/795).

5.3.3 School of Iraq

This school was established by 'Abd Allah Ibn Mas'ūd, who was appointed by 'Umar to act as the teacher and minister of Kūfa and identified by some as the progenitor of *tafsīr bil ra'y*. Its prominent students include the following individuals.

1. 'Alqamah Ibn Qays (d. 61/680)

Born in the time of the prophet Muḥammad, he is known for narrating from 'Umar, Uthmān, 'Alī, Ibn Mas'ūd and others. He is recognised for being the foremost narrator from Ibn Mas'ūd and for his memory and piety. He was considered a reliable narrator and leading authority.[640]

2. Masrūq Ibn al-Ajda' al-Hamadānī (d. 63/682)

He is known for narrating from the four caliphs, Ubay Ibn Ka'b and others. He is recognised as one of the main narrators from Ibn Mas'ūd for his knowledge of the *tafsīr* and Qur'ānic expressions.[641]

3. Al-Aswad Ibn Yazīd Ibn Qays al-Nakh'ī (d. 74/693)

A notable jurist who narrated from Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Alī, Bilāl, Ibn Mas'ūd, 'Ā'isha, Ibn 'Abbās and others.

4. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣri (d. 110/728)

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[639] Ibid.

[640] Ibid, p. 89.

[641] Ibid, p. 90.

Known to have established the School of Baṣra, his mother was a servant to the prophet Muḥammad's wife Umm Salamah. He narrated from 'Alī, Ibn 'Umar, Anas and others. Known for his piety, jurisprudence, *Ḥadīth*, and *tafsīr*.[642]

5. Qatadah Ibn Di'āmah al-Sudūsi (d. 115-6/735-36)

He narrated from Anas, Ibn Sīrīn, 'Ikramah, 'Aṭā and others. Known for his strong memorisation, and extensive knowledge of Arabic poetry and other sciences. He was also known for his extensive knowledge of the Qur'ān and its interpretation.

5.3.4 Major Features of *Tafsīr* in the Successor's Era

Tafsīr in this era included many aspects and the following are some of them.

1. Exegesis was still not an independent science as it was coupled with *Ḥadīth*, therefore a lack of structure existed. There was no verse-by-verse exegesis.
2. There was a limited recording of the *tafsīr* and for that matter any other sciences. There is a discussion about the *tafsīr* ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās, with some people rejecting its association.
3. Scholars of exegesis emerged and began their schools. *Tafsīr* became polarised.
4. Jewish anecdotes were not a major part of *tafsīr*, even if they were employed and companions were known for utilising them. They were largely taken from Jewish and Christian converts.
5. The companions performed *tafsīr* mainly through the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*.[643]

5.4 The Hermeneutical Approaches of the Sunni, Shi'a and Mu'tazila

The division of *tafsīr* into *bil ma'thūr* and *bil ra'y* has created a clear distinction between the traditional and non-traditional hermeneutical approach to *tafsīr*. After the death of the prophet Muḥammad, there was a definitive shift in the structure of the political landscape for the Muslims, resulting in the emergence of the caliphate, as there was no longer appointment through divine means. The companions were now required to undertake the responsibility of guiding the *Ummah* and consequently required a clear approach to achieve this, primarily through the teachings of the Qur'ān.

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[642] Ibid, p. 93.

[643] Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Genesis and Development*, pp. 122-26.

The companions remained faithful to the traditional approach and provided *tafsīr* corresponding to the prophetic practice, principally utilising the Qur'ān, then the *Sunnah*, but required to introduce new sources, *ijtihād* (independent reasoning) and *Isrā'īliyyāt* (Jewish narratives). In truth, *tafsīr* in the time of the prophet Muḥammad was arguably an uncomplicated practice because the companions were able to question the prophet Muḥammad directly whenever they required answers, but since his death, the burden of responsibility was theirs to shoulder. Additionally, the migration of the companions led to the emergence of different schools of *tafīsr*, leading to a difference in hermeneutical approaches.

Al-Dhahabī advocates this was the dominant position regarding *tafsīr's* development post-prophetic era, claiming it continued from the time of the Prophet until the time of the successors in the same format, transmitted by way of *riwāyah* and *simā'*. But as the gap between the prophetic era and each subsequent generation grew, *tafsīr* adopted a different form as a result of numerous influences. Chief amongst them was the generational distance, followed by the emergence of doubts and misconceptions that crept into people's understanding, and political turmoil, resulting in sectarianism. The need for greater transparency demanded greater detail in *tafsīr*.[644]

Consequently, this detail appeared in the form of *ijtihād* provided by those qualified to do so, individuals whose opinions were deemed to have stayed within the requirements and restrictions of the language, and the boundaries of Shariah. In short, they did not exceed the limits of *ra'y al-maḥmūd*. This format persisted until divisions amongst the *Ummah*, due to political and theological differences, resulted in the emergence of different sects who were accompanied by the need for self-preservation through the defence of their beliefs, employing whatever means possible to further their causes. This inevitably resulted in the deviation from *ra'y al-maḥmūd* towards *ra'y al-maḍmūm*, with the desire to interpret the Qur'ān following their cause.

Al-Dhahabī mentions that the Prophet foretold the division of his *Ummah* into various sects, stating that the Jews had split into seventy-one sects and that his nation would split into seventy-three sects, and only one would go to heaven.[645] This separation did not reveal the true extent of the damage until the time of the 'Abbasid caliphate. Previously, the Muslims were united, sharing one creed if we exclude the activities of the hypocrites. Al-Dhahabī's opinion is very generous as it overlooks the emergence and existence of divisions that existed towards the end of the Prophet's life, such as

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[644] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 258.

[645] Ibn Mājah, Muḥammad Ibn Yazīd al-Qazwaynī, *Sunan ibn Mājah*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2008), p. 643

Musaylimah al-Kadhābb (d. 11/632)[646] who announced his claim to prophethood, the Khawārij[647] who caused the infighting between the companions and showed hostility towards the *Ahl al-Bayt* (the prophet Muḥammad's family) and the Shī'a[648] who emerged as supporters of 'Alī, amongst a whole host of others.[649] This highlights the existence of differences amongst the early Muslims, from the last days of the prophet Muḥammad, indicating a difference in *tafsīr*, possibly the existence of *ra'y al-maḍmūm*. Therefore, al-Dhahabī's opinion is debatable in terms of the emergence of *ra'y al-maḍmūm*.

Despite avoiding mentioning these groups, al-Dhahabī acknowledges the emergence of other groups towards the end of the companions' era, identifying the Qadariyyah as the first group to appear, who openly rejected the authority of the surviving companions such as Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn 'Umar, Abū Hurairah and others. They are considered an offshoot of the Khawārij, whose main difference with the mainstream Muslims concerns the doctrine of destiny. Following them, in the time of Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Wāṣil Ibn 'Aṭā is credited by most for founding the Mu'tazila, who challenged mainstream Sunni doctrine by establishing doctrine such as *manzilatun bayn al-manzilatayn* (a place between two places) and rejection of others. In conclusion, the major sects at that time were the Ahl as-Sunnah, Murji'ah, Shi'a, and the Khawārij. Only the Ahl as-Sunnah, Shi'a and Mu'tazila will be discussed here as they were the leading schools of their time.

5.5 Mu'tazila

Mu'tazila contribution to *tafsīr* has been a point of contention amongst scholars of all schools, especially since very little material survives. Mu'tazila history in itself is something that has not been satisfactorily resolved to date and is at best vague and contentious. Stroumsa argues that despite the claim of the Zaydī scholar Ibn al-Murtaḍā (d. 840/) that their history is 'brighter than daylight', it is far from that.[650] She argues that early sources relating to Mu'tazila are scarce and inadequate and the information conveyed through them is argumentative and contradictory, therefore, portrayals by

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[646] F. Muge Goeck, '*Musaylima'*, in The Encyclopaedia of Islam, (Leiden, Netherlands, Brill, 1997), vii, pp. 664-665 (p. 664).

[647] G.Levi Della Vida, *Khāridjites,* in The Encyclopaedia of Islam, (Leiden, Brill, Netherlands, 1997), iv, pp. 1074-1077 (p. 1074).

[648] T. Fahd, 'Shī'a', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, (Leiden, Netherlands, Brill, 1997), ix, pp. 420-424 (p. 424).

[649] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 260.

[650] Stroumsa, Sarah, *The Beginnings of the Mu'tazila Reconsidered*, (The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam, 1990).

modern scholars, at best, are only speculative.[651] Stroumsa's point is understandable as the information regarding Mu'tazila mainly comes from Sunni sources and it could be argued that their perspective may be clouded by personal prejudice, although the study of their surviving works indicates otherwise. Despite her claim, it is evident from both sources that the only way forward is to combine both sets of references and attempt to piece together a complete picture.

Interestingly Ibn 'Asākir alleges the first individuals to utilise the term Mu'tazila are Abū Hishām Ibn 'Abd Allah and al-Ḥasan, the sons of Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥanafiyyah, who claimed they were 'Mu'tazila' (those who turned their backs) due to rejecting allegiance to Mu'āwiya Ibn Abī Sufyān (d. 680/) when he took charge, but this claim is not widely supported and the majority assert it was Wāṣil Ibn 'Aṭā (d. 131/749).[652]

Al-Dhahabī identifies their origin and founder as Wāṣil Ibn 'Aṭā, who was an attendee of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728). He is accused of turning his back (*i'tazala*) on al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī when the latter corrected him for his belief in the establishment of a position between belief and disbelief (*manzilatun bayn al-manzilatayn*). Al-Ḥasan declared that he had turned his back on the Ahl as-Sunnah *(qad i'tazala 'annā)* and Wāṣil sought to establish his school.[653] Consequently, Mu'tazilism spread in Basra and soon throughout Iraq, to the extent that it became endorsed by the Umayyad caliphs, with Yazīd Ibn Walīd (d. 125/744) and Marwān Ibn Muḥammad (d. 132/750), expanding it further in the 'Abbasid era. This led to the establishment of the schools of Basra and Baghdad, headed by Wāṣil Ibn 'Aṭā and Bishr Ibn Mu'tamir (d. 219/825).[654]

To identify the hermeneutical approach of the Mu'tazila, first, we must examine the principles upon which their teachings are based, to discern whether they are similar or different to those of the Sunni.

5.5.1 Mu'tazila Principles

The Mu'tazila based their teachings on five basic tenets, principles common to all aspects of their belief. Campanini claims they can be traced as far back as Abul Huḍhayl al-'Allāf (d. 243/849), but

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[651] Ibid.

[652] Ibn 'Asākir, 'Ali Ibn al-Ḥasan, *Tabyīn Kizb al-Muftarī fī ma Nusiba ila al-Imām al- Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*, (Damascus, Syria, Dār al-Fikr, 1978), p. 10.

[653] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 263.

[654] Abu Zahra, Muḥammad, *Tārīkh al-Jadl*, (Cairo, Egypt, Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1980), p. 207.

are generally credited to ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) when the Mu’tazila became more organised and systematic.[655]

The five principles are *Tawḥīd*, *‘Adl*, *Wa’d wal Wa’īd*, *Manzilatun bayn al-Manzilatayn*, and *Amr bil Ma’rūf al-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar*.

1. *Tawḥīd* – this is the foundation of their beliefs and stemming from this are the beliefs that the Qur’ān is created, God’s attributes are not his, and people will not see God on the Day of Judgement, amongst many others.
2. *Al-‘Adl* – God did not create all the universe or everything within it. Stemming from this is the belief that people created their deeds.
3. *Al-Wa’d wal Wa’īd* – God rewards those who do good and punishes those who do bad. He will not forgive those who commit major sins and there will be no intercession on the Day of Judgement.
4. *Al- Manzilatu bayn al-Manzilatayn* – they established the belief that a person may be neither a believer nor a disbeliever.
5. *Amr bil Ma’rūf al-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar* – to command good and prohibit evil is obligatory upon all believers, but they oppose the mainstream belief that has to be practical also, stating that it is enough to believe so in the heart.[656]

5.5.2 Mu’tazila and *Tafsīr*

The hermeneutical approach of the Mu’tazila can best be described as overwhelmingly monovalent as it is fundamentally influenced by the five principles that govern it. As discussed in the previous section, the Mu’tazila base their belief on five principles that conflict with the mainstream belief of the Ahl as-Sunnah. Their surviving *tafsīr* show that any verse whose meaning visibly conflicted with their beliefs would be interpreted following rationality, without the employment of *Ḥadīth* or other exegetical tools. This approach differed from that of their rivals the Ahl as-Sunnah and Shī’a, who employed additional exegetical tools including the opinions of the companions, their successors (Sunni approach) and Imāms (Shī’ī approach) to provide context to their interpretation. Consequently,

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[655] Campanini, Massimo, *The Mu'tazila in Islamic History and Thought*, (University of Trento, Religion Compass, 2012), p. 44.

[656] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 264.

the five principles led to the rejection of *Ṣaḥīḥ Aḥādīth*[657], resulting in the rejection of mainstream beliefs, such as punishment in the grave and intercession for sinners.[658]

Exegetes from all schools, Sunni, Shī'ī, and Mu'tazila consider *tafsīr* to be the noblest of all sciences, with Mu'tazila exegetes considering it to be a religious obligation upon their scholars to produce *tafsīr*. They share the same belief as all the mainstream schools that the greatest source for the believer is the Qur'ān, thus a proper understanding of the Qur'ān is required to enable them to fulfil their religious obligations. From al-Jishūmī to al-Zamakhsharī, the Mu'tazila believe that scholars are obligated to master the science of *tafsīr*. Al-Jishūmī considers it to be obligatory, whereas al-Zamakhsharī does not and initially showed reluctance when asked to compile a *tafsīr*.[659] Yet, it is arguably undeniable that the duty to provide *tafsīr* is obligatory, if not *farḍ 'ayn* (individual obligation), then at least *farḍ kifāyah* (communal obligation).

From the Sunni perspective, al-Dhahabī displays a level of sympathy towards the Mu'tazila, claiming that we cannot assume they deliberately rejected the mainstream beliefs until we take into consideration the opinions of the prominent Mu'tazila scholar Naẓẓām (d. 229/835). The grammarian al-Jāhiz (d.262/868) narrates from Naẓẓām; who was adamant that people must avoid narrating from narrators who are eager to answer every question posed to them because many will respond with answers that are not founded on narrations based upon the truth; the stranger the narrative the better for them. He identifies 'Ikramah, al-Kalbī, al-Suddī, al-Ḍahhāk, and Muqātil, amongst many others accused of such practice.[660]

Naẓẓām's opinion displays his mistrust of Sunni narrators and identifies a certain prejudice, which influences his judgement regarding the aforementioned narrators. Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889) launched a scathing attack upon the Mu'tazila, heavily criticising them, claiming they interpreted the Qur'ān with the strangest of interpretations. Concerning verse Q2:255 regarding the throne, he claims that one group of Mu'tazila interpreted the word *kursī* as knowledge, opting for an allegorical rather than literal meaning.[661] Regarding verse Q12:24, another group of Mu'tazila show discrepancy whilst interpreting the word *hammat* for the Potiphar's wife as 'lewd' and for Joseph as 'running and

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[657] Highest category of prophetic tradition.

[658] Ibid.

[659] Mourad, Suleiman A, *Why Do We Weed Tafsīr? The Mu'tazila Perspective*, (Melanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph) , (Beyrouth, Liban, Dar el-Macharek), Volume LXVI – 2015-2016, pp. 121-133, (p. 122.).

[660] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 266-67.

[661] Ibid, p. 269.

striking'. Ibn Qutaybah vehemently argues this is a clear violation of the linguistic rules, where it is prohibited to subvert meanings in situations where no alternative meaning is required.[662]

This revelation discloses a notable difference in the hermeneutical approach of the Mu'tazila, clearly showing a difference in interpretation and the employment of exegetical tools. They showed glimpses of polyvalence, strictly linked to linguistic discussion and interpretations, but limited it to such particular cases as they refused to acknowledge anything contravening their five principles. Al-Dhahabī further adds that in addition to the linguistic discrepancies they are also accused of altering any and every religious tenet that conflicted with their five principles. An example of this conflict is exhibited in the Ahl as-Sunnah's acknowledgement of *siḥr* (magic) and its ability to influence people, accompanied by the belief that the prophet Muḥammad may have suffered from the effect of magic perpetrated by the Jewish magician *Labīd b. 'Āṣim*, the subject of Q113. The Ahl al-Sunnah believe he may have suffered the physical effects, without any interference to his prophetic duty. Yet the Mu'tazila deny this, subsequently denying authentic *Ḥadīth*, as Zamakhsharī rejects this, opting for alternative interpretations. Their denial is a clear indication that narratives concerning prophets, particularly prophetic infallibility are rejected by them.[663]

Equally, it can be argued that the Mu'tazila deny such narratives, regardless of their authenticity, because they feel that they are compromising belief of prophethood and in turn the integrity and infallibility of prophets.[664] Perhaps their approach is governed by their strong sense of protection they deem necessary for prophets and by extension God.

The Sunni polymath Abul Ḥasan al-Ash'arī declared Mu'tazilī *tafsīr* to be heretical and misguidance, launching a scathing attack on the Mu'tazila in the prolegomenon of his *tafsīr*. He accuses them of interpreting the Qur'ān according to their own opinions and desires, which conflict with what God revealed and what the Prophet, the companions and successors narrated.[665] Ibn Taymiyyah also denounces the views of the Mu'tazila claiming they conflict with those held by the companions, their successors, and the righteous scholars.[666] Both opinions show the intense criticism of the Mu'tazila, primarily due to their conflict with the principles of the companions and the successors and of their five principles, which did not incorporate anything other than the Qur'ān and *ijtihad*.

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[662] Ibid, p. 270.

[663] Ibid.

[664] Ibid, p. 272.

[665] Ibn 'Asākir, *Tabyīn Kizb al-Muftarī fī ma Nusiba ila al-Imām al- Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*, p. 127-29.

[666] Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fi Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, p. 82, 85-86.

5.5.3 Prominent Mu'tazila Exegetes

The historiography of *tafsīr* shows that the contribution of the Mu'tazila to the field of *tafsīr* cannot be ascertained, purely due to the scarcity of surviving works. After consulting *Ṭabaqāt al-Mufassirūn* (biographies of the exegetes) al-Dhahabī identifies the first Mu'tazila exegete as Abu Bakr 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Kaysān al-Aṣamm (d. 240/846), reputed to have compiled a *tafsīr* that unfortunately did not survive.[667] The second prominent exegete is identified as Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb Ibn Salām, famously known as Abu 'Ali al-Jubbāī (d. 303), was the notable Mu'tazila theologian and scholar, the stepfather and mentor of Abul Ḥasan al-Ash'arī. His *tafsīr* too has not survived. The third exegete is al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār Ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadānī (d. 415), compiled a partial *tafsīr*, only dealing with select verses. The fourth exegete, interestingly, is al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436), who was a Shi'a scholar, who complied with his exegesis per the Mu'tazila doctrine. Some of his work has survived, but not enough to determine their hermeneutical approach. Finally, the most recognised scholar of this school is Abul Qāsim Maḥmūd Ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538), whose *tafsīr* not only survived, but is the most recognised of the Mu'tazila *tafsīr*, and enjoys general acceptance amongst the Ahl as-Sunnah. A recent attempt has been made to reproduce some of the Mu'tazila exegeses that were lost, but this is limited to examining texts belonging to scholars of other schools, primarily the exegeses of al-Ṭūsī, al-Ṭabrisī and al-Rāzī.[668]

Mourad's work provides valuable insight into Mu'tazila hermeneutical approach and from the outset he disagrees with al-Dhahabī's opinion there are only three *tafsīr*, identifying a fourth *tafsīr*, belonging to al-Ḥākim al-Jishūmī (d. 494) known as *Tahdhīb fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*. He mentions the other surviving *tafsīr* as *Tanzīh al-Qur'ān 'an al-matā'in* by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Amālī* by al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā and *al- Al-Kashshāf 'an Haqā'iq at-Tanzīl* by al-Zamakhsharī.

Despite this, Mourad agrees with the Ahl as-Sunnah's consensus that very little of the Mu'tazila works had survived, advocating that the Mu'tazilite scholar al-Jishūmī's *tafsīr* is the best source to date for understanding Mu'tazilite hermeneutical approach to *tafsīr*. He advocates it is impossible to verify if all the Mu'tazila exegetes used this hermeneutical system.[669] Mourad claims that al-Jishūmī compiled a *tafsīr* comprising nine volumes, but unfortunately, it is only available in manuscript form.

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[667] Ibid, p. 275.

[668] Nabha, Khiḍr Muḥammad, *Mawsūat al-Tafāsīr al-Mu'tazila, Tafsīr Abu Bakr al-Aṣamm*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2007), pp.ii-iii.

[669] Mourad, Suleiman A, *The Mu'tazila and Their Tafsīr Tradition*, (Routledge, London, 2013), p. 267.

Surprisingly Mourad is critical of probably the most prominent *tafsīr* of the Mu'tazila, *al-Kashshāf*, arguing that al-Zamakhsharī displays negligence in this respect by not providing a clear hermeneutical approach, even though it can be argued after a detailed study of *al-Kashshāf* it is possible to identify certain elements which can be considered as a hermeneutical approach and methodology.[670]

Mourad further argues that in comparison to al-Zamakhsharī, al-Jishūmī identifies a clear hermeneutical approach and believes that *tafsīr* assumes a dynamism in the understanding of the text, hence a distinction can be made between the works of the early and later scholars. The earlier scholars essentially started the process, leaving behind a foundation to build upon and later scholars must assume the responsibility and complement their works by carrying on with *tafsīr* and further refining it.[671] In fairness, al-Zamakhsharī's work represents an advanced stage of Mu'tazila hermeneutics, as he appeared at an advanced stage in Islamic history. Therefore, understandably, less refined approaches must have existed, but this cannot be unequivocally determined as their respective works have not survived, or the little that has survived is insufficient in determining that.

Al-Jishūmī's hermeneutical approach consists of the following eight categories of Qur'ānic hermeneutics; reading *(al-Qirā'a*), lexicology (*al-Lugha*), grammatical syntax (*al-I'rāb*), compositional structure (*al-Naẓm*), meaning, (*al-Ma'nā*), Occasions of revelation (*Asbāb al-Nuzūl*), evidence and decrees (*al-Adillah wa'l Aḥkām*) and messages and narratives (*al-Akhbār wa'l Qiṣaṣ*).[672] Al-Jishūmī then proceeds to arrange the eight categories into three groups; verification of the text (first, fourth, and sixth), the meaning of the text (fifth), and implication of the text (seventh and eighth).[673] This is in contrast to al-Rummānī (d. 384/994) who incorporates five categories as opposed to eight in his *al-Jāmi' al-Kabīr*; meaning (al-Fahm), reading (*Wujuh al-Qirā'a*), grammatical syntax (*al-I'rāb*), evidence (*al-Dalālāt*), and decrees (*al-Aḥkām*). This further highlights the difficulty in determining the actual hermeneutics employed by Mu'tazila.[674]

In the article following his initial examination of the Mu'tazila *tafsīr* authored by al-Jishūmī, Mourad identifies a fifth exegetical tool, absurdity. He explains that al-Khallāl, al-Rummānī, 'Abd al-Jabbār, including al-Jishūmī, all cite verse Q28:8 "Pharaoh's household picked him up to be for them an

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[670] Mourad, Suleiman A, '*Towards a reconstruction of the Mu'tazilī Tradition of Qur'ānic Exegesis: Reading the Introduction to the Tahdhīb of al-Ḥākim al-Jishūmī (d. 494/110) and its* application', Aims, methods, and Concepts of Qur'ānic Exegesis – ed. by Karen Bauer, (London, Institute of Ismaili Studies, Oxford University Press, 2013), p101.

[671] Ibid, p102-105.

[672] Ibid, p. 105.

[673] Ibid, p. 107.

[674] Mourad, *The Mu'tazila and Their Tafsīr Tradition*, p. 273.

enemy and a source of grief." Mourad argues that it would be irrational to argue that Pharaoh and his family picked up Moses from the Nile and raised him so that he could ultimately be a source of grief for them. Therefore, the particle *li* is used to indicate consequences. He uses this to highlight another exegetical category, rational principles, which govern *tafsīr* and determine how verses of the Qur'ān are to be interpreted.[675]

Verification of the text entails the establishment of how the Qur'ān appears, and the chronology of the verses, which requires the involvement of the first five categories, reading, lexicology, grammatical syntax, compositional structure and occasions of revelation. These fundamental steps determine the options the exegete has to establish meanings for the Qur'ān and the diktats of its verses. The first category establishes that al-Jishūmī does not tolerate any innovation or originality from an exegete, and considers verification of the text not to be the realm of the exegete, whose sole function here is to adopt what has already been established.[676] Al-Jishūmī's position identifies his prejudice towards polyvalence and his strict adherence to monovalence. It gives us insight into his and possibly the Mu'tazilite hermeneutical position of his time and his predecessors. Narratives did not interest him as they would impede upon the true understanding of the Qur'ān and as suggested, were not the realm of the exegete. Therefore *Isrā'īliyyāt* would be truly out of the question.

The text suggests that the exegete has to demonstrate certain abilities to qualify for *tafsīr*. Yet, Al-Jishūmī advances that every word in the Qur'ān must have at least one meaning associated with it, but if more than one can be determined, then it is the responsibility of the exegete to establish the nature and extent of acceptable meanings, hinting at the permissibility of limited polyvalence, restricted to linguistic explanations. This stipulates the responsibility upon the exegete to adhere to the literal (*ḥaqīqī*) and legal (*shar'ī*) meanings, which supersede the metaphorical (*majāzī*) and lexical (*lughawī*) unless there is a compelling reason to do otherwise. Furthermore, the meaning of the verse is not restricted to the occasion of revelation, unless the Qur'ān specifically stipulates that.[677]

The implication of the text is seen as the most important aspect of *tafsīr*, possibly the culmination of the previous two types. It incorporates categories seven and eight that deal with how a person should live their life in compliance with God's word and also recounts stories of the past that illustrate the consequences of obedience or disobedience to God. Al-Jishūmī declares that the evidence and decrees

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[675] Ibid.

[676] Ibid, p. 109.

[677] Ibid.

determine what a person has to believe and what they have to act upon, showing little interest in narratives.[678]

Furthermore, whilst dealing with evident (*muḥkam*) and ambiguous (*mutashābih*) verses, al-Jishūmī argues the need for independent reasoning (*ijtihād*), based upon the fundamental principles of religion, noticeably referring to the theological system of the Mu'tazila (*al-Uṣūl al-Khamsah*). This clearly shows that there cannot be any compromise in the Mu'tazila hermeneutical approach to *tafsīr* that may allow the inclusion or acceptance of any other view. Hence, an amalgamation of other approaches is ruled out completely according to al-Jishūmī.

Mourad argues the dynamic relationship between evident and ambiguous verses reflects a major aspect of the Mu'tazila approach to *tafsīr* and claims that this could be identified as *tafsīr al-Qur'ān bil Qur'ān*, but may not be entirely correct because there are numerous examples of other aspects employed, such as poetry, language, syntax and rhetoric, within al-Jishūmī's *tafsīr* as well as others.[679] He further adds that linking the ambiguous verses to the five principles has enormous implications as if it is implying that the veracity of the five principles of religion requires constant enquiry into the meaning of a set of Qur'ānic verses, without which the Qur'ān is not completely understood, resulting in a person's belief remaining defective.

Mourad believes this is the underlying reason why the Mu'tazila, more than any other group, were attracted to the genre of *mutashābihāt*, as they believed they were able to offer a true interpretation.[680] Moreover, categories five, seven, and eight do not confine the range of the exegete to the opinions of their predecessors, allowing them their contribution, supported by the belief that the verses were revealed in evident and ambiguous forms indicating God's desire for an understanding of the verses based upon rationality and not mere imitation.[681]

The final aspect of al-Jishūmī's approach is he described *tafsīr* as a battlefield, highlighting the polemical role of *tafsīr*, where exegetes fight others over the misinterpretation of Qur'ānic verses, therefore they cannot act passively by presenting simple meanings. Rather they were expected to reinforce their beliefs and highlight the fallacies in others. No doubt this is a reflection of his and the entire school's approach to *tafsīr*, as also reflected by al-Rummānī in *Jām'i al-Kabīr* and al-

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[678] Ibid.

[679] Ibid, p. 111.

[680] Ibid.

[681] Ibid, p. 112.

Zamakhsharī in al-Kashshāf. They never missed an opportunity to accuse their opponents of misinterpretation.[682]

In conclusion, al-Jishūmī conceptualises that *tafsīr* revolves around eight hermeneutical categories, something not original to him, but he is the first exegete to structure his *tafsīr* in meticulous order according to his hermeneutical system.[683] His legacy is supported by others in his school where first and foremost *tafsīr* has to coincide with the theological system of the Mu'tazila, if it is opposed then it cannot be accepted as rational and correct.

5.6 Shī'a and *Tafsīr*

Shī'ī history has experienced a fate similar to that of the Mu'tazila in terms of coverage, particularly in light of the controversy surrounding the development of Shī'ī exegesis. The central argument surrounding Shī'ī history concerns their origin, whether it was religious or political. Western scholarship argues the Shī'ī school began as a political uprising against the tyrannical Umayyad dynasty, which Jafri strongly dismisses, claiming, "Such an interpretation grossly oversimplifies a very complex situation. Those who thus emphasize the political nature of Shi'ism are perhaps too eager to project the modern Western notion of the separation of church and state back into seventh-century Arabian society, where such a notion would be not only foreign but completely unintelligible."[684] His comments project a mistrust of Islamic historiography by Western scholarship and identify there is a real need to address the issue of Shi'i historicity, before delving into other areas.

Momen[685] and Rippin[686], like many other scholars, bemoan the fact that Shī'ī Islam, similar to the Mu'tazila, received very little attention in comparison to traditional Sunni Islam, therefore leading to the situation mentioned above. However, in the last few decades, a greater focus has been directed towards Shī'ī Islam and a greater understanding has developed, leading to a clearer picture of Shī'ī

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[682] Ibid, p. 120.

[683] Ibid.

[684] Jafri, Syed Husain Mohammad, *The Origins and Early Development of Sheea'h Islam*, (Beirut, Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 6.

[685] Momen, Moojan, *An Introduction to Shi'ī Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1985), p. 61.

[686] Rippin, Andrew, *The Present Status of Tafsīr*, (Calgary, Alberta, Canada, University of Calgary, New Muslim World, 1982), pp. 224-238, (p. 235).

historicity. Momen argues that the problem lies with Western scholars being unable to discern the historicity of the sources, confusing between Sunni and Shī'ī traditions.

Accusations are levelled against Shī'ī history as being incomplete, and more importantly, not entirely from a Shī'ī perspective, raising the question, can Shī'ī exegetical approaches be conclusively proven to be Shī'ī? Momen[687] highlights the issue of inconsistency, contending it is important with Shī'ī history that you first differentiate between what was written by the Shī'ī writers and what was presented by others, especially modern critical scholarship. Discussion of this will allow us to lay the foundation for identifying what is considered Shī'ī and what is not. Momen argues that although numerous works have been compiled on Shī'ī history by Shī'ī scholars, the reality is that they are of little use in establishing their history, especially the biographies of the Imāms, due to being largely apologetic and anecdotal, attempting to paint them in a light where they were portrayed as quasi-legendary figures.[688] From the outset, it becomes evident that the historicity of Shī'ī exegesis is looking difficult to establish. This inevitably suggests that Sunni sources are an essential requirement to allow a clearer picture of their history, especially when there is little surviving work from early Islamic history.

Momen[689] contends traditional Shī'ī history is mostly an account of the various sects that emerged from the main body of the Shī'ī beginning with the era of 'Alī, and that the true extent of these sects is difficult to establish, largely due to it possibly being the invention of later Shī'a. He contends with the idea there were multiple Shī'ī sects and suggests if a split had taken place, then most had disappeared within the first century and very few survived. The Sunni heresiographers al-Shahrastānī identify five main groups within the Shī'ī and allude to other offshoots.[690] In truth, the absence of a definitive Shī'ī history leaves scholars in a difficult situation because this signifies difficulty in establishing a *bona fide* history and by extension a hermeneutical approach that could be truly Shī'ī, furthermore Shī'ī dependency upon Sunni historiography.

Al-Dhahabī believes the Shī'ī school experienced the same fate as their counterparts, advocating they could not avoid division due to internal differences and as a result numerous factions emerged. He describes them as dividing into those who displayed extreme tendencies by elevating 'Alī to divinity and those at the other end of the spectrum, who saw 'Alī as pre-eminent among the companions.

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[687] Momen, *An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism*, p. 23.

[688] Ibid, p. 23.

[689] Ibid, p. 45.

[690] Al-Shahrastānī, Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Karīm, *Al-Milal wal Nihal*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār a l-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1992) p. 145.

Some hovered between both positions, denying him divinity, but at the same time proclaiming him to be *ma'sūm* (innocent), someone who could not sin, and was a vicegerent of the Prophet, even though this position was usurped from him.[691]

His opinion supports the theory that their dispute with the Sunnis arose from religious views as opposed to political ones, supporting Momen's claim that the split was not political. He claims the Shī'ī groups, particularly the Imāmīyyah, decreed the majority of the companions heretics, accusing Abū Bakr and 'Umar of usurping the caliphate, subsequently oppressing 'Alī. This view is prominent in the pre-Būyid era where it was central to the Imāmī doctrine, but later considerably of less importance, though not entirely disappearing.

Al-Ṭabrisī explains that the Imāmī believe, 'Alī was the appointed Imām who passed his Imāmah on to his son al-Ḥasan, who passed it on to his brother al-Ḥusayn, by *waṣiyyah* (appointment). This appointment of successor Imāms continued until al-Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, after which division appeared and the Shī'ī split into Imāmīyyah Ithnā 'Ashariyyah (also known as Twelver) and Imāmīyyah Ismā'īliyyah (known as Seveners). The former believed that Imāmah was passed on from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq to his son Mūsā al-Kāẓim to 'Alī al-Riḍā to Muḥammad al-Jawwād, to 'Alī al-Hādī to Ḥasan al-'Askarī, to his son Muḥammad al-Mahdī, the awaited twelfth Imām.[692] To this extent the Shī'ī doctrine differs extensively in exegetical tools employed by them, dismissing prophetic traditions narrated by the companions and sourced in Sunni texts. At this point it is safe to state that both the Sunni and Shī'ī scholarship established hermeneutical exegetical tools, both agreeing upon the primacy of the Qur'ān, but subsequently splitting after that. Where Sunni scholarship focused on *Ḥadīth*, Shī'ī scholarship focused on the Imāms and their primacy, upon which their polyvalent approach relied almost exclusively.

The role of the Imām plays a vital part in the shaping of Imāmī doctrine and by extension, their exegetical approach. Imāmī Shī'ī believes the Imāms have a divine connection with God, similar to that of the prophets, and belief in the Imāms is integral to their faith, whoever dies without believing in them is a disbeliever. Moreover, Ithnā 'Ashariyyah doctrine incorporates four distinctive elements; belief in the Imām's *'iṣmah* (infallibility), the awaited Imām *mahdiyyah*, the *raj'ah* (return) of the Prophet, 'Alī, al-Ḥasan, al-Ḥusayn, all the Imāms, who would return along with their enemies, particularly Abū Bakr and 'Umar, and the Imāms will exercise their justice upon them, then all will die and judgement will take place. Lastly, concealment to avoid prosecution *taqiyyah*, which is key

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[691] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, i, p. 10.

[692] Ibid, p. 8.

in their faith. They claim to follow their Imām secretly and conceal this practise, pretending to follow whoever is in charge.[693] This doctrine not only dismisses the need for any inclusion of the companions in reference to Qur'ānic *tafsīr*, it clearly shows there was never any need for them as the Imāms superseded the need for any other source, the Imāms were divinely inspired and there had never been a break in divine revelation. In turn, this raises another question why did the Imāmīyyah counter their own ideology of the Imāms being the only authority authorised to interpret the Qur'ān? They should have removed themselves from discharging this duty. Despite this, they almost afford exclusivity of *tafsīr* to those who hold the position of Imām and any other authority is secondarily acknowledged.

Bar-Asher and Steigerwald discuss the origin of the Shī'ī proposing they first made an appearance in the days following the death of the prophet Muḥammad, alongside those who supported his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī, whilst opposing the election of Abu Bakr. They secretly formed their faction and became known as the *Shī'ān 'Alī* (partisans of 'Alī).[694] Bar-Asher alleges that from a Western perspective, the Shī'ī did not initially display any religious tendencies towards the Sunnis, concealing their beliefs under the pretence of *taqiyyah*, thus their stance that it was political, rather than a religious foundation for their opposition.[695] I believe it was a combination of both religious and political differences existed, which caused the schism between them. It appears from the outset that Shī'ī presence existed in the time of the companions, even though documentation of that may be disputed by some. Critics argued that it is due to the lack of attention received by Shī'ī Islam that has resulted in the uncertainty of their origin.

Bar-Asher further postulates it was the rebellion of al-Ḥusayn against the Umayyad dynasty, which deepened the divide, something that both the Sunni and Shī'ī denounce. This opinion is suspect at best as both Sunni and Shī'ī scholars do not accept that al-Ḥusayn rebelled, this is the view of a minority who felt allegiance to Yazīd Ibn Mu'āwiya. Furthermore, both Sunni and Shī'ī scholarship advocates that events before the aforementioned incident, such as the battles of 'al-Jamal' and 'Siffīn' played a significantly greater part in the divide. Bar-Asher believes that the two events he highlighted can be identified as the turning point in Shī'ī history.[696]

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[693] Ibid, p. 8-9.

[694] Bar-Asher, Meir M, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, (Leiden, Brill, 1999), p. 1.

Steigerwald, Diana, *Twelver Shī'ī Ta'wīl*, The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān, ed. by Andrew Rippin, (Oxford, UK, Blackwell Publishing, 2006), p. 374.

[695] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p. 1.

[696] Ibid.

Sunni scholarship considers the prophetic era as the golden age for Muslims, where the prophet Muḥammad led his community with divine guidance, whereas the Shī'ī scholars believed its period extended to the age of the fourth caliph 'Alī. This era is what all Muslims attempt to replicate as it is the ideal which all Muslims seek to emulate. The underlying reason for this is that this age represented little change and development in all areas affecting Islam, such as theology, jurisprudence and constitutional theory. This showed a stability that allowed growth and development for Muslims, whilst retaining their connection to the divine. Most Muslims would argue that there was little theological difference from the orthodox position.[697]

Western scholarship challenges this notion and advocates that there is constant change and development, therefore differences will always exist and nothing remains static, consequently, the notion of a static Islam is challenged. The outcome of this conceptualisation is that when Shī'ī writers attempt to write their history, focusing on the early period, especially the time of the Prophet and Imāms, they are accused of imposing their views, subconsciously or retrospectively. According to Western scholarship, this identifies Shī'ī works as merely a reflection of the times they had been written in as opposed to a reliable portrayal of the earlier period. Furthermore, there are very few Shī'ī works surviving from the 4th/10th century, making it difficult to determine their claims and requiring examination of the earliest period, thus requiring dependence upon the Sunni works to allow this.

Momen advocates that modern historians have rejected the image painted by the Muslim historical works, that the Shī'a were the only Muslims who followed the Imāms, and at various times in history they divided into different sects, separating from the main body of Shī'a, regardless of whether the source stating this was Sunni, Shī'a or Mu'tazila.[698] Modern scholars believe this claim had been retrospectively imposed over the facts presented by the early historians. Momen believes this makes it difficult to determine what the Imāms and their followers said creating difficulty in using the works attributed to the Imāms as an exegetical source due to the in authenticating their authenticity.

Regarding Shī'ī history, according to both Sunni and Shī'ī heresiographical literature, the Shī'ī suffered persecution at the hands of the Umayyad dynasty resulting in the formation of many sub-sects due to their anti-Shī'ī policies. This did not change with the arrival of the Abbasid dynasty, who despite being closely related to the Umayyad, were equally ruthless as their predecessors.[699] Bar-Asher identifies, as others have done, that the Shī'ī underwent various changes with some adopting a

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[697] Momen, *An Introduction to Shī'ī Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shī'īsm*, p. 61.

[698] Ibid.

[699] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p. 2.

militaristic approach, whilst some of the followers of Imām Bāqir adopted a passive method of protest, as opposed to arms, which became their hallmark. They became the kernel of the Imāmī sect.[700] The harsh treatment at the hands of Sunni dynasties will have played an integral part in the shaping of Shī'ī attitudes towards Sunni tradition, particularly concerning doctrinal matters.

The Būyid era is identified as the 'golden era' of Shī'ī history and although the Būyid were initially associated with the Zaydī Shī'ī, they adopted the Imāmī beliefs allowing the Imāmī to flourish under their rule. The hallmark of their dynasty was their tolerance of everyone living under their rule, allowing not only Muslims but non-Muslims to thrive under them. Bar-Asher believes it was this era that allowed the Mu'tazila theology to influence the Imāmī Shī'ī. He believes that there are similarities between the Imāmī theology and pre-Mu'tazila and pre-Ash'arī theology, but Imāmī theology separated itself from the outset, by the authority placed in the Imāms.[701] Despite the influence of others, Imāmī scholarship has maintained its freedom from any influence, which has been contested by others, as I will identify soon.

It was in Qumm that the Imāmī branch of the Shī'ī settled and established themselves, making Qumm their stronghold during the eighth century, as opposed to Kūfa where they migrated from, which remained a place of further sectarian division for the Shī'ī.[702] This was the period in which the major part of the Imāmī works appeared, between the mid-ninth and mid-tenth century.[703] This period approximately coincides with the two major Occultations (*al-ghaybah*) of the twelfth Imām, the minor Occultation that took place between 260/874 and the major Occultation between 329/941.

Shī'ī doctrine states during the minor Occultation, the twelfth Imām is supposed to have led his people through four individuals, whom the Imām met secretly and through whom he was able to instruct the people. When the fourth individual finally dies the Imām completely disappears and he will finally re-appear as the Mahdī towards the end of time. Bar-Asher argues that the religious and literary scholarship of the Imāmī Shī'ī can be traced to this period since the Imāms themselves left no writings. This raises concern amongst other Muslim scholarship as it identifies a gap within their tradition, which cannot be significantly accounted for and places a major question mark on their contributions to Qur'ānic *tafsīr*.

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[700] Ibid.

[701] Ibid, p. 11.

[702] Ibid, p. 4.

[703] Ibid, p. 6.

Bar-Asher believes the works ascribed to the Imāms are pseudepigraphical, regardless of whether one believed they were written by the Imāms or by others. He even ventures that some works are completely unknown, except for their alleged titles, and others have been composed by the Imāms such as the *tafsīr* of al-Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and Ḥasan al-'Askarī.[704] Thus, the scholarly compilations between the two Occultations are almost entirely based on traditions attributed to the Imāms, especially Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, to whom most Imāmī exegetical traditions are ascribed.[705]

Bar-Asher points to the early Imāmī traditions claiming them to be edited and amended, with many containing concepts and doctrine that could only have developed during later periods. He provides an example of this in a tradition where the prophet Muḥammad declared 'Alī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn and nine other descendants to be immune from error and sin. Bar-Asher argues this tradition and others like it could only have existed after the introduction of the concept of the Twelfth Imām, and this took place after the fourth/tenth century. This suggests that their historicity cannot be definitively proven from their sources. His evidence indicates that a large portion of Imāmī literature was produced by the school of Qumm in between the two Occultations. The pre-eminent authorities responsible for this have been identified as al-Saffār al-Qummī (d. 290/903), author of one of the earliest compilations titled *Baṣā'ir al-Darajāt*, al-Barqī (d. 274/887 or 280/893), author of *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin*, and 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 307/919).[706]

Bar-Asher finally indicates to influence of Mu'tazila theology claiming Imāmī Shī'ī began to show interest in it during the period between the two Occultations and like the Zaydiyyah they adopted two major aspects of Mu'tazila theology regarding two prominent religious themes, the divine attributes and the divine justice.[707] This effect came into fruition during the Būyid era via prominent figures such as al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022), Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), and Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī (d. 459/1067).

5.6.1 Differences Between the Shī'a and the Sunni

A major area of distinction between the Shī'a and Sunni Muslims is the post-prophetic phenomenon of Imāmah. Contention surrounding this issue does not affect just Shī'a and Sunni people, amongst the Shī'ī themselves there is a great difference. Zaydī Shī'a are described by some as a moderate

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[704] Ibid, p. 7.

[705] Ibid, p. 8.

[706] Ibid, p. 9.

[707] Ibid, p. 12.

branch of Shī'ī Islam, who differed from other Shī'ī groups concerning the post-prophetic succession concerning the office of Imāmah. Zaydīs favoured the grandson of Ḥusayn, Zayd ibn 'Alī, as the fifth Imām, primarily due to his pacifistic position towards their opponents, specifically the Umayyad dynasty. They were the closest of all Shī'ī factions to Sunnis, due to their acceptance of Abu Bakr and 'Umar as caliphs, with reluctant acceptance of 'Uthmān and had their fiqh, which differed from other Shī'ī groups. They refused to acknowledge the Imāms as beings who were supernaturally endowed to represent God on earth. The Zaydīs own criteria for the Imām were that he be a descendant of Ali and Fatimah, absence of physical imperfections, and personal piety. They also believed the Imām must take up arms offensively or defensively, and ruled out the notion of hidden Imāms.

Other Shī'ī groups, for example, the Imāmī, differ from the Zaydī claiming the Imāms possessed two features that distinguished them from all other people, firstly they were superior beings with supernatural qualities and secondly as leaders of the believers, they were appointed by their predecessors, putting them at odds with the Sunnis and the Zaydīs. The Saba'iyyah and the Khaṭṭābiyyah went further, taking an extreme theological view believing the Imāms to be divine beings, denying the concept of punishment and reward, and accepting the transmigration of souls, amongst other extreme beliefs. Furthermore, they attempted to anchor these beliefs in Qur'ānic verses through exegetical attempts by ascribing traditions to the Prophet and Imāms. These views were later declared as heretical by their people. Bar-Asher asserts that the corpus of Imāmī traditions is replete with extreme (*ghluww*) characteristics.[708]

The largest representation of the Shī'ī lies with the Imāmī, who initially opposed the Mu'tazila and Sunnis, but later changed their stance, by incorporating their opponents' opinions into their *tafsīr*. The earlier Imāmī scholarship disputed the validity of the Uthmānic codex of the Qur'ān, alleging partisanship in the editing of the Qur'ān by the first three caliphs, particularly Uthmān. They levelled claims of falsification against them through the practise of omission of Qur'ānic text or addition. The Imāmī asserted the Qur'ānic codex with 'Alī is the true unaltered version, and the Qur'ān with the Sunnis is altered. Their accusation is premised on the claim that there has been a clear removal of explicit verses regarding the *Ahl al-Bayt* and their enemies, arguing the traditions regarding *taḥrīf* are *mutawāṭir* amongst the Shī'ī.[709] This approach lasted until the Būyid era when it subsequently changed due to the Imāmī embracing a moderate position and authorities such as Al-Mufīd and al-

[708] Ibid, p. 13.

[709] Ibid, p. 27.

Murtaḍā silencing criticism aimed at others. The Imāmī moved on from their predecessors' position and now asserted the Qur'ānic text was still incomplete but did not contain falsification.[710] Subsequently, the Imāmī Shī'ī acknowledged the Qur'ān as the word of God, but unlike the Sunnis, they believed it to be incomplete. Moreover, their position towards the *Ḥadīth* and companions is also apparent, very simply anything that opposed the Shī'ī teachings was rejected, and only their Shī'a traditions were acceptable.[711] The shift in the position of Shī'ī Imāmī tradition towards others paved the way for a degree of polyvalence that did not exist amongst them, which had restricted them previously. Their predecessors were inclined towards a monovalent approach to support and preserve their identity, but their successors moved away from this approach, feeling the need to accept other schools to continue their survival as identified previously.

5.6.2 Development of Shī'ī *Tafsīr*

The historicity of Shī'ī *tafsīr* suffered the same fate as general Shī'ī history: there is a significant gap in literature that needs to be addressed. My aim isn't to provide a detailed historical account of Shī'ī hermeneutics, but rather an overview of its development to understand the role polyvalence or monovalence played. The fact that Shī'ī *tafsīr* can only be accepted through their own recognised authorities, namely the Imāms, restricts its scope. Scholars have divided Shī'ī *tafsīr* into the Pre-Būyid and Post-Būyid eras (344-447) to provide a map of understanding. The post-Būyid era is considered as golden period for the expansion of Shī'ī Islam, and especially for the influence and contribution of the Shī'ī Imāms. The scholars of the Būyid era moved away from the sectarian-driven exegesis and because of newfound stability, they became influenced by other theological, philosophical and political developments. It could be argued they moved away from a monovalent approach towards a polyvalent approach that permitted the use of non-Shī'ī sources. Before this even if they had a polyvalent approach, it was limited to their sources, which we have shown as limited at best.

The main features of the pre-Būyid school of *tafsīr* are their dependency upon their Shī'ī traditions that they identified as *Ḥadīth*, their dealings with selective *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān, their extreme anti-Sunni polemics, their hostility towards the companions, especially the likes of the first three caliphs, the wives of the Prophet 'Ā'isha, Ḥafṣa and others, with little concern about Imāmah. Their main methods consisted of textual and allegorical interpretation, focused on reconciling Qur'ānic text with their theology, to identify Shī'ī concepts in the Qur'ān.

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[710] Ibid, p. 16.

[711] Ibid, p. 29, p. 17.

Most of the commentaries were written around the third/fourth century, between the minor and major Occultation (260/264) and (329). The post-Būyid period was deemed by some to be a prolongation of the pre-Būyid period. Gleave claims that from an Imāmī orthodoxy perspective after the fifth/eleventh century there would appear to be no need for the Imāms to provide any justification for their interpretations as they were the *de facto* authorities. Moreover, dogmatically there would be little need to identify an exegetical theory for explaining a verse because from a doctrinal position, the Imāms were infallible and their status was cemented through text and rational arguments.[712] This alludes to there not being a systematic approach towards *tafsīr* for the Imāmī Shī'ī, as the authority of the Imāms was the exegetical approach, and nothing superseded it, nor supported it. It can be argued that from this position there was no comparison between them and their counterparts. Although traditional Shī'ī scholars believe in the complete authority of the Imāms however they disagree with Gleave's position, arguing that the Shī'ī had *ḥadīth* traditions to support *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān. They foster the belief there was polyvalence in the time of the Imāms, though limited by the notion of infallibility being ascribed to them and the unchallengeable authority afforded to them. Yet, their notion of polyvalence seems to be restricted in comparison to that of Sunni scholarship.

Ayoub's work grants valuable insight into the working of Shī'ī *tafsīr*. He claims the first generation of Shī'ī exegetes were the disciples of the Imāms themselves. They included the likes of Zurārah Ibn A'yan (d. 151/768), Muḥammad Ibn Muslim (d. 150/767) and others who were close to the disciples of the fifth and sixth Imāms. They were considered the first authorities of *tafsīr* and other sciences. Unfortunately, their works have not survived, although *tafsīr* attributed to them is claimed to exist and preserved in the works of the second generation.[713]

The most important individuals of the second generation are Furāt Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī (d.325 /937), Muḥammad Ibn Mas'ūd al-'Ayyāshī al-Samarqandī (d. 320/932), 'Alī Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Nu'mānī (d. 360/971). Furāt is considered one of the foremost authorities on Shī'a tradition, who lived in the era of the ninth Imām, Muḥammad al-Jawād and is one of al-Qummī's teachers.[714] Al-Ayyāshī was a contemporary of Furāt and a Sunni scholar who embraced the Ja'farī school, but only one volume of his works survived. Abul Ḥasan 'Alī Ibn Ibrāhīm al-Qummī another major Shī'ī scholar, who existed in the time of the eleventh Imām, Ḥasan al-'Askarī. Al-Qummī's father studied with many disciples

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[712] Gleave, Robert, *Early Shi'i Hermeneutics: Some Exegetical Techniques Attributed to the Shi'i Imams, Aims, methods, and Concepts of Qur'ānic Exegesis*, ed. by Karen Bauer, (London, Institute of Ismaili Studies, Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 141-172 (p. 141).

[713] Ayoub. M, *A Study of Imāmī Shī'ī Tafsīr*, Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān, ed. by Andrew Rippin, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 177-198.

[714] Ibid, p. 185.

of the earlier Imāms and al-Qummī narrated tradition from him. Finally, al-Nu'mānī, a student of al-Kulīnī (d. 329/941), the author of al-Kāfī one of the four canonical texts of Shī'a *Ḥadīth*. Al- Nu'mānī is reputed to have left an important *tafsīr* related to the authority of the sixth Imām, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq. His treatise on *tafsīr* is considered an important source of early Shī'a *tafsīr*, reproduced in al-Majlisī's encyclopaedic work *Bihār al-Anwār.*

The hermeneutical approach of these authorities was to simply compile the traditions ascribed to the first generation, without any personal comments. Due to the period of the living Imāms extending to the first three centuries, Ayoub believes that it's difficult to gauge the first and second generations of Shī'ī exegetes as they overlap. He claims that this represents the formative or pre-classical period of Shī'ī *tafsīr*. In summary, this era, similar to that of the Sunni scholarship existed to compile the words of the authorities, with the difference that the Sunni scholarship permitted the inclusion of their views into *tafsīr*, but the Shī'ī scholarship did not consider its importance or need.

The third generation of Shī'ī exegetes extends over a long period, well into the sixteenth century. This generation includes al-Sharīf al-Rāḍī (d. 405/1015), his brother al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), Abū Ja'far al-Ṭūsī (460/1067), known as Shaykh al-Ṭā'ifah (pre-eminent jurist of the Shī'a) student of al-Murtaḍā, whose views he represented al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153), along with his predecessors, represent what may be considered as the classical period of Shī'ī *tafsīr*.[715]

Commentaries produced in this era took a broader view of *tafsīr* than that of their predecessors, incorporating Sunni views into their *tafsīr*, previously rejected by earlier exegetes due to their belief in the inauthenticity of the Uthmānic codex. Future commentators belonging to this group includes Mullā Ṣadra al-Shirāzī (d. 1050/1640), Ḥāshim al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1695), and 'Alī al-Ḥuwayzī (d. 1112/1700), and Mullā Muḥsin Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1191/1777). These exegetes lived during the era where Shī'ī power was consolidated in Iran, in contrast to the classical era (pre-Būyid) approach the exegetes in this era took a polemical approach, especially to Sunni *tafsīr*.

Scholars of the third generation took the traditions of the first two generations and used them as ammunition against their opponents. Al-Kāshānī, in his *Tafsīr al-Ṣāfī*, goes as far as suggesting that the first transmitters from the Imāms practised *taqiyyah* (concealing belief to avoid persecution), meaning many traditions may have been lost.[716] This may lead people to believe that polyvalence which did not agree with the polemical views of exegetes from the first two generations was discarded

[715] Ibid.

[716] Ibid, p. 186.

to protect their heritage and identity. In the third generation, there was a shift from this approach as the Shī'ī scholarship felt stability and no longer the need to hold onto their former position.

The final stage of development in Shī'ī *tafsīr* is arguably the contemporary stage. Notable works such as the *tafsīr* of Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Tabtabā'ī, *al-Mīzān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, and al-Sayyid Abū'l Qāsim al-Khū'ī's, *al-Bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, attempt to address modern believers through their long theological and philosophical tradition. Their approach resembles the classical period. This is shown in al-Khū'ī's *tafsīr* where he challenged both the Sunni and the Shī'ī.[717]

Bar-Asher claims the unique characteristics of the *tafsīr* in the pre-Būyid era can be identified by four things; *tafsīr* by virtue of *Ḥadīth*, selective concern with the actual Qur'ānic text, sparse interest in theology where issues pertaining to the institute of Imāmah define it, and an extreme anti-Sunni tendency and hostile attitude to the companions.

Based on the first characteristic, *tafsīr* by virtue of *Ḥadīth*, it can be argued that the pre-Būyid Imāmī literature can be categorised as *tafsīr bil ma'thūr* because its main characteristic involved is the transmission of *Ḥadīth*.[718] With regards to the major Shī'ī books of traditions, the foremost text is al-Kāfī, authored by Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Ya'qūb al-Kulīnī (d. 329/941). He is the equivalent of al-Bukhārī, and his categorisation is similar to Sunnis, with terms such as *Ṣaḥiḥ*, *Ḥasan* and *Ḍa'īf*. The second and third texts are *al-Tahdhīb* and *al-Iṣtibṣār fī mā Ukhtulifā fīhī min al-Akhbār* by Muḥammad Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī. The fourth text is *man lā Yaḥḍuruhū al-Faqīh* by Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Ibn Bābawayh. Other notable texts are *Waṣāil al-Shī'a* by al-'Amālī and *Bihār al-Anwār* by al-Bāqir.[719] These are the major texts that Shī'ī exegetes relied upon in their books.

These characteristics can be defined as both doctrinal and literary.[720] From a doctrinal perspective, the exegete does not have the authority to pass any judgement or express personal opinions, unless they are based on tradition passed down to them (via their Imāms). From the literary perspective, each idea, rule, and article of faith must be transmitted in the form of *Ḥadīth*, with *isnād* traced back to the Imāms. This conflicts with the rationalist approach (*Ahl al-ra'y*). Subsequently, exegetes from this period differ from future exegetes and in this manner their *tafsīr* share a similar trait with the Sunni

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[717] Ibid.

[718] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p. 73.

[719] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*,p. 31.

[720] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p. 73.

tafsīr by displaying great dependency on their own *Ḥadīth* and dismissing those belonging to the Shī'ī, and later incorporating a rationalist approach.

This attitude shifted with post-Būyid *tafsīr*, with al-Ṭūsī in *al-Ṭibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* leading this reform. He openly claims that he has adopted an entirely different approach to his predecessors due to none of his predecessors producing a *tafsīr* for the entire Qur'ān, claiming it was this that had inspired him to write a complete commentary. Al-Ṭūsī advocated previous works of *tafsīr* were merely a collection of exegetical materials found mainly within a body of *Ḥadīth* collections, without any accompanying commentary.[721] Subsequently, he became a representative of independent exegeses and argued that the Qur'ān should be interpreted rationally, in addition to employing correct traditions of the prophet Muḥammad, his household and the Imāms. In light of this, his *tafsīr* is replete with Imāmī traditions but antithetical to pre-Būyid *tafsīr*. This is evident in his marginalisation of the traditions and the omission or abbreviation of isnād. He primarily provides a continuous discourse, where the author articulates his opinions and preferences.[722]

The second most influential post-Būyid *tafsīr* is *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* by his disciple al-Ṭabrisī who provides an interesting evaluation of the pre-Būyid Imāmī exegesis, advocating his *tafsīr* and that of al-Ṭūsī are based upon similar texts that predate their works, but also distinctively different.[723] His *tafsīr* begins with an elaborate summary of the virtues of the study of the Qur'ān, concentrating on the fact that Shī'ī scholarship of *tafsīr* largely focused on providing abbreviated works based on a traditionally transmitted corpus, without delving into the meanings and profundities, except for al-Ṭūsī who served as an exemplar for al-Ṭabrisī.[724]

Al-Ṭabrisī praises his predecessors stating "Scholars, past and present, attempted to reveal the secrets of the Qur'ān and composed impressive works in this field and many ventured in great depth, except our scholars did not compile detailed works, merely recording traditions that reached them, without delving into their meanings and unveiling their secrets."[725] Towards the end of the statement, he seems to be criticising his scholars for not adopting the hermeneutical approach of their opponents, showing that he partially acknowledged the efficiency of his opponents' approach. Al-Ṭabrisī follows this criticism by mentioning his teacher, al-Ṭūsī, initially praising him and his *tafsīr*, describing him

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[721] Shah, *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur'ān*, i, pp. 1-157 (p. 41.)

[722] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p. 75.

[723] Ibid, p. 76.

[724] Shah, *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur'ān*, i, pp. 1-157 (p. 42).

[725] Al-Ṭabrisī, Abu 'Alī al-Faḍl Ibn al-Ḥasan, *Majma' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, Vols. 10 (Dār al-'Ulūm, Beirut, Lebanon, 2005), i, pp. 7-8 (p. 7).

as "a great teacher, and his *tafsīr* as being the light of truth, replete with truth, profound secrets, where the author explained what he included." But, he follows this with criticism of al-Ṭūsī saying that he incorporated grammatical discussion in his *tafsīr*, did not distinguish between *ṣalāh* (sound) and *fasād* (unsound) traditions, and did not have a proper presentation of his work, amongst other things.[726]

Al-Ṭabrisī identifies an important distinction of his work by emphasising al-Ṭūsī's *tafsīr*, and by extension, his own, act as the point of separation between the old and new hermeneutical approaches. He believes their scholarship engaged in an in-depth study of the actual content and context of the Qur'ān, an important aspect of *tafsīr* which is absent from the pre-Būyid *tafsīr*. Al-Ṭabrisī's exegetical position can further be discerned through the selective use of Sunni material, something considered reprehensible, for example he cites a tradition found in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* which states that a person should not interpret the Qur'ān according to their independent rational thinking. This shows that *tafsīr* before the pre-Būyid era did not focus on the entire Qur'ān and was limited in what it dealt with.

From this perspective, it can be argued pre-Būyid *tafsīr* showed reluctance in incorporating polyvalence and distinctly presented itself as monovalent, whereas post-Būyid *tafsīr* felt the need to move away from this to address and accommodate the needs faced by the Shī'ī scholarship at that time. The need to incorporate Sunni material in their works was a major shift away from their doctrinal and hermeneutical position.

Bar-Asher points out the Sunni exegete al-Ṭabarī is reputed to have influenced al-Ṭabrisī's hermeneutical approach and cites that al-Ṭabarī employed three types of traditions, mainly from Ibn 'Abbās to support his stance on the permission and prohibition of *tafsīr*. The first type of tradition forbids *tafsīr* according to personal opinion and without prior knowledge. Such a person will go to hell. The second type of tradition promises punishment, but only for those who interpret according to their own opinions. The third type promises punishment, but only for those who interpret the Qur'ān without prior knowledge. Al-Ṭabrisī chose the third category for his approach, that he would perform *tafsīr* utilising prior knowledge, as it conformed to his exegetical approach.[727]

Acceptance of al-Ṭabarī's opinion shows a significant development of the hermeneutical approach in the era before the great Occultation, where Imāmī doctrine embraced divergent and opposing views, including aspects of Sunni views. In essence, the acceptance of rationalism developed alongside the

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[726] Ibid.

[727] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p. 77.

employment of traditionalism, all legitimised through Imāmī *Ḥadīth* and the Imām's authority.[728] After the great Occultation, Imāmī theology adopted facets of Mu'tazilite doctrine into Imāmī works. Later commentators, particularly because of *Ḥadīth al-thaqalayn* (*Ḥadīth* of the two weighty things) and other similar narrations, upheld the view that the Imāms were the only authority that required adherence, yet despite this, exegetes tended to apply their personal views.

The second identifying characteristic of pre-Būyid *tafsīr* is a selective concern with the Qur'ānic text, as they had limited interest in issues unrelated to the Shī'ī. It could be argued that their exegetical techniques were non-uniform. For example, Furāt completely ignores anything non-Shī'ī, whereas al-Qummī and al-'Ayyāshī discuss issues that are non-Shī'ī. This highlights a similarity with the Sunni and the Mu'tazila in terms of selectivity of material as the other two also displayed this characteristic. In light of this, it is evident that the Imāmī Shī'a's exegetical agenda was to identify scriptural authority for their Imāms, anything else was secondary at best and could be ignored. Shī'ī *tafsīr* only became more complete towards the end of the third century, principally amongst the Imāmī, with *tafsīr* al-Qummī (d. 327/939), which remained prominent until al-Ṭabrisī whose work replaced it, who took a different approach.[729] Shī'ī exegetes favour allegorical interpretation, favourable to their theology typical of a sectarian *tafsīr*, differing from Sunnis. Gatje acknowledges this and criticises Western scholars for portraying Shī'a *tafsīr* as a 'miserable web of lies and stupidities'.[730]

Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī saw the limitations of the previous approach and abandoned it and similar to al-Ṭabarī they focused on the entire Qur'ānic text, interpreting it verse by verse. Their hermeneutical approach was similar to the Sunni and Mu'tazila as they examined variant readings (qirā'ah) where possible, produced lexical discussions of words (lugha), provided a discussion on syntax (i'rāb), introduced discussion of content (ma'nā) and finally an examination of *asbāb al-nuzūl* of certain verses.

The third identifying characteristic is limited interest in theology and issues about Imāmah. Imāmī exegetes displayed little interest in theological and doctrinal issues, despite being aware of them, and anytime such issues became prominent they would deal with them marginally by providing a *Ḥadīth* to corroborate their opinions. In truth, it would be unfair to claim that they were disinterested in doctrinal matters as evidence exists of their contributions to the defence of their doctrines such as

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[728] Ibid, p. 79

[729] Gatje, Helmut, *The Qur'ān and its Exegesis* (Oxford, UK, 1996), p. 39.

[730] Ibid.

freewill and anthropomorphism.[731] Shaykh al-Mufīd and Sharīf al-Murtaḍā are identified as being influential in leading independent thinking.

The fourth identifying characteristic is extreme anti-Shī'ī views and hostility towards the companions of the prophet Muḥammad. Pre-Būyid exegetes did not recognise the authority of the Uthmānic codex and only referred to it when they challenged its authenticity, similar to their acceptance of Sunni scholars. Imāmī scholars held the companions responsible for the editing of the Qur'ān, accusing them of falsification. In light of their attitude towards Sunni scholars, Imāmī scholars deemed them unworthy as they incorporated the traditions of their companions, including the first three caliphs. In their eyes, the only person worthy of acceptance is 'Alī and his descendants, the Imāms.[732] Al-Dhahabī argues that Shī'ī exegeses contain a large amount of anti-Sunni traditions, with the majority of traditions having no chains of narration, and their mere presence in these compilations is deemed sufficient for their authenticity. The phrase "an Imām from the Imāms of the *Ahl al-Bayt*, the children of 'Alī said…" is only mentioned before the text. If there was a chain, it would usually contain a radical narrator, who would be dismissed. The majority of the narrations conflicted with the Sunni principles of *Ḥadīth*, and the text conflicted with established principles and rationality.[733]

Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī developed a different approach and included Sunni material in their *tafsīr* and even ventured to mention the narrators by name. Furthermore, this is reinforced by their attitude towards the companions and the Prophet's wives 'Ā'isha and Ḥafṣa. Pre-Būyid *tafsīr* is replete with defamations and accusations against them and the companions, yet such allegations are predominantly absent from later works.[734] Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī avoid including controversial traditions, but this is not a uniform approach as later Imāmī exegetes still denigrated the companions, especially the first three caliphs, although not as explicitly as their predecessors, but subtly by not recognising their honorifics, contained in Sunni literature.[735]

The hermeneutical approach of the Shī'ī scholarship, as with the other two schools, primarily focused on the preservation and development of its doctrine and school, with little regard for anyone and anything else. Initially, this involved adopting an extreme view of dismissing anything not tied to them in the pre-Būyid era, therefore adopting a monovalent approach which safeguarded their

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[731] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p. 81.

[732] Ibid, p. 82.

[733] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, p. 32.

[734] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p. 83.

[735] Ibid, p. 84.

survival and growth. The post-Būyid era saw a change in their approach a more open attitude towards other schools, endorsing a polyvalent approach and showing a change in their hermeneutical approach to address significant gaps in their exegesis. This did not herald an approach that was without any restrictions as they still ensured they did not compromise on their fundamental doctrinal beliefs. In relation to prophetic infallibility they were still extremely cautious and unapologetically rejected anything that compromised their position, as I will highlight later.

5.6.3 The Need for *Tafsīr* and Shī'ī Exegetical Methods

Regarding hermeneutical approaches, Sunni commentators in the early period of *tafīsr* relied primarily on prophetic traditions and the companions and their successors, with *ijtihād* becoming an additional tool later on.[736] Shī'ī commentators, on the other hand, accepted the Prophet Muḥammad's traditions in light of the *Ḥadīth al-thaqalayn*. The Zaydī are the first major Shī'i and the most prominent *tafsīr* of their school belongs to Abū Jārūd (d. 140/757), with a large part of his *tafsīr* consisting of quotations from *tafsīr al-Qummī*, belonging to one of the leading Shī'ī exegetes.[737]

Mustafa Shah writes that *tafsīr* is held in high regard amongst the Shī'ī, but due to their religious beliefs, this privilege was exclusive to the corpus from Imāms, according to the largest denomination of Shī'ī. The traditions reported about the Imāms conclusively advocate that exegetical authority lies with the Imāms and no one else.[738]

All denominations have attempted to ground their beliefs in the Qur'ān and Imāmī exegetes are no different, regardless of whether they were moderate or held extreme tendencies.[739] In truth the methods of the Imāmī exegetes are no different from their Sunni counterparts, they also employ traditions for *tafsīr*, but the Imāmī Shī'ī believe that their traditions to be superior. Despite accepting *Ḥadith*, they supplement and sanction them through the doctrinal authority of the Imāms, who received the authentic Qur'ān from the fourth caliph 'Alī.[740] They maintain that true understanding of the Qur'ān is only possessed by the Shī'ī.[741] One example of how they dealt with this is their attitude towards *mubham* verses that are positive in their message, arguing that they referred to 'Alī,

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[736] Ibid, p. 183.

[737] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p46.

[738] Shah, *Tafsīr: Interpreting the Qur'ān*, i, p. 41.

[739] Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'ān and its Exegesis*, p. 38.

[740] Ibid.

[741] Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī*, p. 88.

the Imāms and the Shī'ī. The negative verses were automatically deemed to be referring to their enemies, especially their first three caliphs.

The methods used by the Imāmī exegetes are similar to those used by Sunnis and are wide-ranging. They include textual interpretations, such as variant readings, lexical interpretations and grammatical commentary, which interpret the text in association with ideas that the Imāmī exegetical traditions related to it. This includes the widespread use of traditions regarding *asbāb al-nuzūl*, utilisation of *naskh*, traditions which include *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā* and many allegorical and typological interpretations.[742]

A guiding principle for Shī'ī *tafsīr* is the belief that the Qur'ān has two dimensions; the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*). The former is concerned with law, ethics, morality etc., whereas the latter is concerned with metaphysics, divine realities and so forth.[743]

They claim to reconcile the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* e.g. Q47:15, *ẓāhir* refers to God and *bāṭin* refers to the knowledge of the *Ahl al-Bayt*.[744] The Imāmī believe that there is more than one *tafsīr* for a verse and assert that the Imām is appointed by Allah to do *tafsīr*, as he is appointed by him for the political status of the *ummah* and *taqiyyah*.[745]

One reason for employing allegorical interpretations is to produce complex readings to support their doctrinal positions. It could be argued that this may make better reading for those who desire such information, but for others, this amplifies their sectarian approach due to their interpretations and the influence of the Imāms. It can be argued that this is grounded in the belief that the Qur'ān is primarily relevant to the Shī'ī and their needs. Moreover, it highlights the importance of the Imāms as they are the sole interpreters. Most of their *tafsīr* advocate this principle and show that the Imām's absence signifies the silence of the Qur'ān, thus only the Imāms have the authority to perform *tafsīr*.[746] They unanimously agree that in Q3:7 "Those who are firmly rooted in knowledge." refers to the Imāms, who possess a measure of divine knowledge unavailable to the rest of humanity. In a sense, revelation is seen to continue through them.

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[742] Ma'rifah, *Al-Tafsīr Wal-Mufassirūn*, p. 101.

[743] Ayoub, *The Qur'ān and its interpreters*, i, p. 18.

Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, ii, p. 22.

[744] Ibid, p. 23.

[745] Ibid, p. 25.

[746] Gatje, *The Qur'ān and its Exegesis*, p. 39.

Among their qualification the Imāms identified as *muḥaddithūn*, individuals are spoken to by the angels and, therefore recipients of non-Qur'ānic forms of revelation. But, the Imāms' role is not a legislative one, rather they receive the true and full meaning of the prophetic revelations, including the correct *tafsīr*, knowledge of the concealed (*ghayb*), and the elucidation of the Qur'ān's references to history and prophecies of future events.

Gleave identified four exegetical techniques. The first technique he identifies is 'meaning equivalence', and this is not dominated by sectarian themes. Within exegetical traditions, Imāms are credited with simple meanings of the verses, but there is no explanation provided or justification as to why. No other alternative is produced and it is based almost entirely upon the characteristics of the Imām. Gleave further adds that from a sectarian perspective, the Shī'ī tend to relate Qur'ānic verses to support their cause. In this situation, a verse is matched to a doctrine without any scholarly investigation.[747]

The second technique is 'explanatory glosses'. The Imāms provided explanations though not as detailed as their successors. Gleave believes that these statements had the context of scholarly debate, both within the Imāmī and other sects. He claims that by doing this one shows their superiority over their opponent, through demonstration that views are based upon a consistently applied and coherent framework. This could be the reason why Imāms are portrayed as not merely providing the law, but also providing a method of deriving the law from the available texts, including the Qur'ān.[748]

The importance of the Imām's discourse becomes evident in later Imāmī jurisprudence. The notion that the Imāms revealed not just the law, but also a process of legal deductions. This enabled jurists to justify the disciplines of *tafsīr* and *Uṣūl al-Fiqh*.[749]

The third technique is 'linguistic exegesis'. Imāms employed the science of Arabic linguistics to help *tafsīr*. Imāms at times appear to direct the reader towards the original meaning. Other times they desire to draw them away. Gleave adds there is insufficient evidence to provide a clear and comprehensive picture of the Imām's exegetical methodology. Gleave adds that outside of the aforementioned, there is very little to show an interest in the language of the Qur'ān. It was rare for them to do that.[750]

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[747] Gleave, *Early Shi'i Hermeneutics: Some Exegetical Techniques Attributed to the Shi'i Imams, Aims, methods, and Concepts of Qur'ānic Exegesis*, p. 146.

[748] Ibid, p. 151.

[749] Ibid, p. 152.

[750] Ibid, p. 156.

The fourth technique is Qur'ānic hermeneutics categories, the identification categories such as *muḥkam*, *mutashābih*, *nāsikh*, *mansūkh* amongst others.

Ayoub, on the other hand, claims the first and most important principle is that the Qur'ān has a *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*, an outer dimension and inner dimension, possibly up to several levels. He quotes Ja'far al-Ṣādiq as saying that the Qur'ān must have many meanings beyond the apparent one. The beginning of a verse could have one meaning, the middle another and the end another.[751]

The second unique principle is that of *jārī* (continued pertinence of applicability) and *inṭibāq* (analogic application). *Jārī* means that the Qur'ān must always have a reference that should take place as an event in history. The other two principles following on from *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* are *nāsikh* and *mansūkh* and *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*.[752]

Al-Dhahabī advances another opinion that the Mu'tazila influenced the Shī'ī principles, including their hermeneutical approach and the influence is present in the works of scholars such as the Imām al-Ḥasan al-'Askarī, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, Abū 'Alī al-Ṭabrisī and others. Al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā goes as far as claiming 'Alī was a Mu'tazilī, maybe even the founder, a notion that is easily dismissed as there is no valid evidence to support this theory.[753]

Examination of Shī'ī history and Shī'ī *tafsīr* and their exegetical approaches has revealed several issues, presenting that whilst there a marked differences between the Shī'ī and their counterparts, there are many similarities. Shī'ī exegetes also place importance in *Ḥadīth*, like their Sunni counterparts, but only accept those traditions related to their Imāms. Furthermore, there is evidence of a change in their hermeneutical approach, highlighted by a distinct change in their approach between the pre-Būyid and post-Būyid scholarship. Despite the change in approach, there were still traces of their previous approach which resurfaced later on. They had replaced their extreme attitude towards the companions and Sunni scholarship with a moderate attitude but later adopted it again.

They changed their attitude towards their counterparts and accepted Sunni and Mu'tazila views, mainly using them to further their causes. In terms of the exegetical approach, they are reluctant to accept anything other than information related to them by their Imāms. Their exegetical approach lies in between the Sunni and Mu'tazila, incorporating elements from both and in terms of their establishment, they are junior to Sunnis and on par with Mu'tazila. The next step would be to examine

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[751] Ayoub, *A Study of Imāmī Shi'ī Tafsīr*, Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān, p. 187.

[752] Ibid, p. 188.

[753] Al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wal Mufassirūn*, p. 20-21.

their attitude towards *Isrā'īliyyāt*. The Sunni were more accepting of narratives, allowing their inclusion, whereas Mu'tazila was far stricter, using their intellect to dismiss anything that was not rationally acceptable, allowing traditions that were deemed *Ṣaḥīḥ* to be dismissed. The Shī'ī lie in between them accepting mainly traditions from their Imāms but allowing certain Sunni traditions favourable to their cause, but incorporating some Mu'tazila doctrine, again to their own needs.

In conclusion, *tafsīr* has evolved since its existence, beginning with the elucidation of the prophet Muḥammad and evolving to reflect the changing needs of the Muslims and their societies. The prophet Muḥammad provided limited *tafsīr*, for specific verses the companions required and not the entire Qur'ān. Throughout the ages that followed *tafsīr* expanded each generation employed more exegetical tools, including ijtihad and *Isrā'īliyyāt*. The approach differed as early as the time of the companions, with some hesitant to move beyond the prophetic explanation, for example, Abu Bakr, and others such as 'Alī and Ibn Mas'ūd openly asking people to pose questions on the Qur'ān to them. Despite this, it is evident those who came later realised both options were available and gravitated to whatever felt appropriate to them. The prophetic model was available to both sets of exegetes and they based their approach on this. To this end, four sources of *tafsīr* have been identified, Qur'ān, *Ḥadīth*, *ijtihād* and *Isrā'īliyyāt*, with the former two gaining greater acceptance than the latter.

With the emergence of the three major schools of Islam, their influence resulted in further changes in the hermeneutical approach of Muslims, contributing to approaches to Qur'ānic exegesis. Sunni tradition seems to be the dominant source for the historiography of all three schools, forcing us to rely on it for the Shī'ī and Mu'tazila hermeneutical approaches. The Sunni approach was inherently polyvalent, with traces of monovalence, which could be said to a similar degree for the Shī'ī, who substituted the opinions of the companions with the opinions of the Imāms, with a less polyvalent approach compared to the Sunni. The most underrepresented approach belongs to the Mu'tazila, who have little to no surviving works, therefore through piecing together sources from Sunni texts, they exemplify a monovalent approach that they are unprepared to compromise at any cost, influencing Sunni to a small degree and Shī'a to a greater degree.

My focus will now turn to the main aspect of the thesis, the presence of controversial narratives concerning Biblical and Islamic prophets mentioned in Muslims *tafsīr*, the different schools that incorporated them, the extent of their appropriation and the reasons why they adopted this approach. The objective is to determine whether the schools remained faithful to their original approaches, or improvised to incorporate new sources and changed their approach. The next chapter will focus on three case studies and nine exegeses, four from the Sunni school, three from the Shī'ī and one from the Mu'tazila.

Prophetic Infallibility and Polyvalence in *Tafsīr*

As previously highlighted in chapter two, prophetic narratives appear in the Qur'ān with a variable degree of detail. The reason is that details contained within the narrations are not the primary concern of God's message to his creation, but rather the divine message and lessons contained within them, provided by God for the guidance of humankind and as mercy for them. Often these narratives include sparse detail related to the incidents recorded, merely alluding to an incident or on occasion providing limited information. This has led exegetes to go beyond the information contained within the Qur'ān to other sources to supplement the 'missing' detail required to understand the text. Consequently, there has been a mixed reaction to the inclusion of this 'outside' detail to supplement Qur'ānic understanding. Exegetes have long wrestled with this issue and have taken up different positions regarding this, some welcoming the additional detail, others categorically rejecting it, and some taking a more balanced approach.

Key to this discussion is the debate surrounding para-Biblical otherwise known as *Isrā'īliyyāt* traditions that are utilised as an exegetical tool. They also form an integral part of the monovalent versus polyvalent approach of exegetes, significantly contributing to the discussion on prophetic infallibility in light of these traditions. A point of note here is that despite the importance of doctrine, it is clear that Muslim exegetes have not been discouraged from adopting the narratives they believed to be essential to their understanding of the Qur'ān, despite the complications they may cause.

Qur'ānic narratives have received significant attention in Western studies, especially concerning their relationship with Jewish and Christian scriptural traditions. Scholarly attempts have endeavoured to identify a genealogy for these narratives, tracing them to their 'original source', subsequently leading to the claim by earlier scholars of 'borrowing'[754]. Recent scholarship seems to have moved away from this notion, permitting further examination of these narratives, and broadening the scope to allow advanced insight. By doing this, they have begun to treat the Qur'ān on a more equal status, although retaining elements of their predecessor's visions. They have accepted that it is extremely

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[754] Abraham Geiger, *Was Hat Mohammed Aus Dem Judenthume Aufgenommen. Eine von Der Königl. Preussischen, Rheinuniversität Gekrönte Preisschrift* (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1833); translated into English by F. M. Young tr, *Judaism, and Islam. A Prize Essay* (Madras: Printed at the M. D. C. S. P. C. K. press and sold at their depository, Vepery, 1898).

Bell, Richard, *Introduction to the Qur'ān*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh at The University Press, 1953).

Nöldeke, Theodore, Schwally, Friedrich, Bergstraber, Gotthelf, Pretzl, Otto, *The History of the Qur'ān*, (Leiden, Brill, 2013).

This is also apparent in works such as that of Heinrich Speyer's *Die biblischen Erzahlungen im Qoran (1961)*, where the author has been unable to prove any 'borrowing' of narratives from the Qur'ān's antecedent traditions.

difficult to unequivocally prove that absolute borrowing occurred, or even to a greater degree, simply because elements of the narratives differed in the Qur'ān, or provided a greater deal of detail, which was absent from its predecessors.[755]

The attempt at explaining Qur'ānic narratives has been at the forefront of many studies, though the unconventional arrangement of the narratives has posed problems for scholars. Excluding the narrative of Joseph, the only complete Qur'ānic account, all other narratives are presented in a fragmented manner, often appearing incoherent and lacking detail. Biblical figures such as Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon and others are mentioned, but in comparison to the antecedent texts, they lack detail, or so the claim has been made. The lack of any reliable records regarding direct quotations from the earlier Abrahamic texts signifies that these narratives are not appropriated from the antecedent texts; rather the Qur'ān itself iterates that they affirm what has already been revealed in the Old and New Testament.[756] Furthermore, as divine texts, they have one thing in common; their origin is the same, regardless of certain differences.

The dismissive attitude displayed by earlier scholars from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has, I feel, impeded progress in better understanding the common aspects existing between them. The reading of the Qur'ānic narratives cannot be merely reduced to their link to Jewish and Christian texts, that they projected the same narratives, especially because the Qur'ān itself does not specifically attribute the narratives to any particular text, other than acknowledging that it affirms certain narrative details found in previous religious texts. The Qur'ānic narratives can be seen as having multiple functions, including explaining the teachings of Islam (reliance upon God, respecting his prophets etc.), supporting the prophet Muḥammad by reminding him of the struggles of the previous prophets, strengthening the faith of the believers, instruction in morality and etiquettes and more. To reduce them to derivatives of the antecedent texts is dismissive and does not explain how in certain cases the details contained within them do not exist within the Biblical versions. Furthermore, could this be a significant factor in determining a cause contributing to the effect it has had on a polyvalent or monovalent approach?

The aforementioned claim of Western scholars (Muslims appropriated narratives from earlier texts) has presented a major challenge to Muslim scholars who have attempted to piece together a more complete and coherent narrative, often facing accusations of appropriating 'foreign' sources. Chief

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[755] Griffith, *The Bible in the Qur'ān*, pp. 54-55.

Donner, Fred M, *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds, (London, Routledge, 2007), pp. 29-30.

[756] Q3:3, Q2:97, Q4:47.

amongst those who attempted this are the exegetes and historians, who provided insight into these stories, but at the same time have risked criticism for neglecting their traditions. Prominent exegetes including al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Suyūtī, including many others have attempted to present the missing details required in these narratives, but the principal question here is that doing so did they compromise their traditions, and to what extent were they furthering their doctrines? In light of their doctrinal position.

In my analysis, I will examine specific Qur'ānic verses depicting incidents where prophets are portrayed as being in controversial situations and expound upon them by presenting the opinions of various exegetes from the three main Islamic Schools of thought, the Sunni, Shī'a, and the Mu'tazila. I will expound the view that to understand the explanations linked to these Qur'ānic narratives a polyvalent approach is needed while highlighting the possible issues associated with a monovalent approach.

6.1 Characteristic of Early *Tafsīr* and the Inclusion of Exegetical Narratives

Arguably, a claim may be staked that a hallmark of early *tafsīr* was the desire to explore the divine word and to provide as many explanations as possible without fear of reproach, as long as the explanations conformed to the practice initiated by the prophet Muḥammad and his companions. Calder,[757] Bauer,[758] Coppens[759] and others have argued that polyvalence was a pre-eminent characteristic of early *tafīsr* and modernity played a factor in a shift from this position to monovalence.

In Chapter Three I have highlighted the positions of the three major schools of exegesis and their hermeneutical approaches, consequently demonstrating the Sunni school was the most inclined towards polyvalency, all the while entertaining monovalency wherever required. In comparison, the Shī'ī school initially was inclined towards monovalency pre-Būyid era, which later became more polyvalent post-Būyid era. The Mu'tazila held perhaps the sternest position, displaying an inflexible monovalent approach and ensured this remained their hallmark through their *Uṣūl al-Khamsah*, which I explained is difficult to establish definitively, as very little of their *tafsīr* survived. I will now attempt

[757] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr*, pp. 101-140.

[758] Bauer, Thomas, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams* (Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen, 2011).

[759] Coppens, P. (2021), *Did Modernity End Polyvalence? Some Observations on Tolerance for Ambiguity in Sunni tafsīr*, Journal of Qur'anic Studies, 23(1), 36-70. https://doi.org/10.3366/JQS.2021.0450.

to provide Qur'ānic examples of stories where that mention prophets that exegetes expounded and what position they adopted in their *tafsīr*, without explicitly contravening any *ijmā*.

6.1.1 Characteristics of Polyvalent *Tafsīr*

The Qur'ān has multiple levels of meaning, as Shahab Ahmed adamantly claims, all of which can be embraced simultaneously.[760] In light of this for *tafsīr* to be polyvalent the exegete must be able to employ more than one source to explain the verses, providing the sources are acceptable and meet the requirements outlined by the ultimate authorities of Qur'ānic exegesis, the prophet Muḥammad and his companions. For *tafsīr* to be truly considered polyvalent it had to be viewed as more than *Ḥadīth* and *athar*-oriented, incorporating the exegetical tools *Isrā'īliyyāt* and *ijtihād*. The role of *Isrā'īliyyāt* cannot be undermined as an exegetical tool and the controversy surrounding them has influenced exegetes, some embracing them and others religiously avoiding them.

In reality, this should not be a dogmatic versus narrative approach, it could be identified as *tafsīr bil ra'y* vs *tafsīr bil ma'thūr*, rather it needs to transcend this to truly be guidance for humanity until the end of times. Consequently, in choosing the three narratives mentioned in the Qur'ān from the three major schools discussed in chapter three, the Sunni, Shī'a and Mu'tazila, I hope to show the hermeneutical approach of the exegetes, how they engaged with the narratives and subsequently provided exegesis. My reason for including these particular exegetes is they are amongst the foremost representatives of their schools, each providing a unique insight into what approach they favoured and what this meant for *tafsīr* as a genre. The Qur'ānic narratives of the prophet Joseph and the Potiphar's wife, David and Bathsheba and Solomon's tribulation are selected as they present a challenge to the exegetes to plug the gaps in detail that exist in Qur'ānic narratives. The gap in the narratives provides the opportunity for exegetes to employ their chosen approaches and show a certain amount of flexibility granted to them by Qur'ānic hermeneutics.

6.2 First Case Study – The Narrative of Joseph

The Biblical narrative of Joseph is a detailed affair, similar to that of the Qur'ān, but with comparatively greater detail. The narrative contains the same trajectory of Joseph's fall and rise and culminates with him bringing his people to Egypt and his death. From a Biblical perspective, the story of Joseph is a complicated narrative, with questions surrounding the role of Joseph and the actual victim. Weinberger mentions that Jewish and Christian communities initially viewed Joseph as a model of piety when he refused to sleep with the Potiphar's wife, but there is another side to the story

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[760] Ahmed, Shahab, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016).

where he may not be as innocent as once presumed. Citing the Biblical verse Gen. 39:11, he argues Rabbis depict Joseph as someone who invited sexual attention, drawing on the allusion in the verse that Joseph 'preened' and 'primped' himself to be noticed by the Potiphar's wife.[761] James Kugel mentions the Rabbis believe Joseph did this to be intimate with her. He argues there had to be evidence of his sin as his punishment was in the form of his imprisonment.[762] Weinberger asks the question behind the Biblical narrative intimating that Joseph should have slept with her and answers this claiming it is related to a major theme in the Pentateuch: liberation.[763]

Bakon[764] does not agree with Weinberger and Kugel, arguing according to some of the sages Joseph is portrayed in the Jewish tradition as *tzaddik* (Jewish for a righteous man) due to his resistance to the temptation, despite the persistence of the Potiphar's wife highlighted in Gen. 39:10, but she ultimately wears him down. He highlights there was attraction from both, but he managed to resist her and was punished for that. The simple fact is that the Biblical narrative of Joseph does not detail anything that directly implicates Joseph in the sin; any deductions made must be from external sources.

The idea of attraction from both and that Joseph was equally to blame, therefore ultimately sinning is not directly taken from the Biblical text, rather it is deduced from the sages' readings of it, resulting in Midrashic interpretations.[765] Kugel questions whether Joseph was innocent claiming the earlier sages praised him to such a degree they almost depicted him as superhuman, righteous, virtuous, and resistant to temptation.[766] Kugel identifies his 'tale bearing', which brought him divine punishment, his 'vanity' and dandy-like primping that brought him the attention of the Potiphar's wife, leading to wrongful accusation and imprisonment. Kugel declares rabbinic sources find Joseph to be anything but innocent.[767] He cites the Babylonian Talmud that depicts an entirely different view, and suddenly

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[761] Weinberger, Theodore. "'And Joseph Slept With Potiphar's': A Re-Reading." Literature and Theology, xi, no. 2, 1997, pp. 145–51. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23926832. Accessed 18 Feb. 2024.

Kugel, James L, *In Potiphar's House : The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts*, [Second edition], (Harvard University Press, 1994), pp.76-79.

[762] Ibid.

[763] Weinberger, Theodore. "'And Joseph Slept With Potiphar's': A Re-Reading." Literature and Theology, xi, no. 2, 1997, pp. 145–51. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23926832. Accessed 18 Feb. 2024.

[764] Bakon, S. (2013), *'Subtleties in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife'*, Jewish Bible Quarterly, 41(3), 171+, available: https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A334379859/AONE?u=anon~4a95588d&sid=googleScholar&xid=b6a54615 [accessed 18 Feb 2024].

[765] Kugel, *In Potiphar's House : The Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts*, pp. 94-124.

[766] Ibid, p.94.

[767] Ibid.

there are two views, one that presents him as innocent, according to Genesis 39 and the other from the Babylonian Talmud.[768]

The story of Joseph holds a unique position in the Qur'ān as being the only full-fledged narrative, containing one hundred and eleven verses that chart the entire life of Joseph, albeit in less detail than that in the antecedent texts.[769] Of the twenty-five prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān by name, Joseph is mentioned twenty-six times (only twice outside surah Yusuf).[770] His story is characterised as the 'fairest of all stories'[771] and maps his life from childhood to adulthood, culminating in his rise to the king of Egypt. The Qur'ān portrays Joseph's character as one of moral superiority, virtue, faith and chastity, despite facing adversity for most of his life. This earned him the title *siddīq*[772] (truthful) and someone whom God bestowed 'judgement and knowledge' upon.[773] Furthermore, the Qur'ān describes Joseph as a 'sign'[774] for those who question (along with his brothers) and that in their story there is a 'lesson/warning'[775] for those who ask about them.

Despite such accolades, controversy has surrounded one particular incident involving Joseph, the incident with the Potiphar's wife.[776] After hearing about Joseph's dream, his brothers conspired to kill Joseph by throwing him into a well and failing, a passing caravan discovers Joseph forcing his brothers to sell him to the caravan as a runaway slave.[777] Upon arrival in Egypt, the caravan sells Joseph to the Potiphar who purchases him and introduces him to his wife. He explicitly instructs her to show care towards Joseph, which the Qur'ān captures as "And the one from Egypt who purchased him said to his wife, "Keep him honourably, perhaps he may benefit us or we may adopt him as our son".[778]

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[768] Ibid, p.95.

[769] Q6:84, Q40:34.

[770] Q12.

[771] Q12:3.

[772] Q12:46.

[773] Q12:22.

[774] Q12:7 "Surely in Joseph and his brothers there are signs for those who ask".

[775] Q12:111 "Indeed in their stories there is a lesson for those of understanding. Never was the Qur'ān a fabricated narration, but a confirmation of what was before it and a detailed explanation of all things and guidance and mercy for a people who believe."

[776] Q12:24.

[777] 37 Genesis 39-51.

[778] Q12:21.

After this initial introduction the Qur'ān does not mention anything regarding Joseph's life, simply proceeding to inform the reader that upon reaching maturity, Joseph was granted knowledge and wisdom, excluding any details regarding his time in the house of his owner.[779] This identifies the Qur'ānic view that the reader is not required to know anything concerning this period as it does not play any part in God's divine plan and instruction for humans. The narrative next mentions Joseph when it introduces the situation between him and the Potiphar's wife. The Qur'ān states "And she, in whose house he was, sought to seduce him". She closed the doors and said, "Come you." He said, "[I seek] the refuge of Allah. Indeed, he is my master, who has made good my residence. Indeed, wrongdoers will not succeed."[780]

The following verse highlights the controversial incident involving the attempted seduction of Joseph by the Potiphar's wife and the questionable resistance from Joseph. The verse states "And indeed she was determined [to seduce] him, and he would have submitted to her had he not seen the proof of his Lord. And thus We should avert evil from him and immorality. Indeed, he was from Our chosen servants."[781]

6.2.1 Exegetical Narratives

The first dilemma Muslim exegetes face appears in verses Q12:21-29. A prophet of God, despite the rank and status accorded to him, has it seems, passed the boundary of morality commanded of all believers: refrain even from approaching situations where adultery becomes possible. If this is the case, where does it leave the infallibility accorded to them? Does this compromise the religion and its teachings? Furthermore, this breaks the trust between Joseph and his master, the Potiphar.

1. The first issue we need to address is the narratives presented by each of the exegetes. Each exegete brings a unique understanding to the discussion and provides valuable insight into how they address this verse.

Al-Ṭabarī[782] addresses this verse by dividing it into sections, initially mentioning the narratives concerned with the particular section and then presenting his analysis. Despite being a proponent of *tafsīr bil Ma'thūr*, al-Ṭabarī is not hesitant in extending beyond the traditional position of utilising *Ḥadīth*, comfortable with resorting to using *Isrā'īliyyāt* and forgoing the critical examination of

[779] Q12:22.

[780] Q12:23.

[781] Q12:24.

[782] Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad Ibn Jarīr, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl 'Āy al-Qur'ān*, , xiii, p. 80.

narrations. The first narrative al-Ṭabarī presents is from al-Suddī[783], which documents the encounter between Joseph and the Potiphar's wife when she corners him, expressing her love for him. She compliments him earnestly, which subsequently leads to both of them surrendering to their desires and nearly committing sin. It was only the image of Jacob that brought him to realisation and caused him to escape.[784] This is followed by a second narration mentioning the Potiphar's wife pursuing Joseph, using different tactics, ultimately wearing him down, and leading him to the enclosed space within the house.[785]

2. Ascription of narratives to prophets

Al-Ṭabarī' begins by first examining the meaning of the word *hamm*, which in the Arabic language refers to 'an individual conversing to themselves about doing something, but not carrying it out." He begins with a narration of Ibn 'Abbās where he was asked about the meaning of *hamm* and he responded: "Between her legs." Similar narratives are presented from Mujāhid[786], Sa'īd Ibn Jubayr[787], and 'Ikramah.[788] Al-Ṭabarī then addresses the issue of the difficult nature of these narratives by clearly stating that there is a scholarly dispute as to why such actions cannot be attributed to a prophet of God. He identifies his understanding of the delicate nature of narrating such stories and the controversy surrounding them, yet proceeds anyway, displaying his position that the prophetic dispensation of *ḥaddithū 'an Banī Isrāīla wa la ḥaraja*[789] applied here and without a polyvalent reading we cannot make sense of the situation.

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[783] Ibn 'Adī, Abū Aḥmad al-Jurjānī, *Al-Kāmil fī Ḍu'afā al-Rijāl*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Fikr, 1984), vi, p2266.

[784] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl 'Āy al-Qur'ān*, xiii, p81. "She said, "Oh Joseph, how beautiful your hair is!". He responded, "It is the first thing to fall out from my body!" She then said, "How beautiful your body is!" He replied, "It is for the earth to consume!" She continued in her pursuit of him until she was determined to seduce him and he succumbed to her, so they entered the home and she locked the doors. He began to loosen his trousers but saw a vision of Jacob standing in her home, gnawing on his knuckles. He said, "O Joseph! Are you going to succumb to her! If you do not succumb to her, then you will be like a bird in the skies, safe from capture. But if you succumb to her then your example will like the bird, when it dies it falls upon the earth, incapable of defending itself. Furthermore, your example if you do not succumb to her is like the example of a stubborn bull that has not been conquered. But your example if you succumb to her is like the example of a bull when it dies and ants crawl into its horns, it is incapable of protecting itself." Joseph fastened his trousers and moved to leave, opposing her, but she confronted him and grabbed the shirt tail from behind, and tugged at the corner until it ripped from the shirt and it fell. Joseph discarded it and hastened towards the door.

[785] Ibid.

[786] Ibn Sa'd, Muḥammad, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā*, (Maktaba al-Khanji, 2001), viii, pp. 27-28.

[787] Ibid, viii, p.374.

[788] Ibid, iii, p.331.

[789] Narrated 'Abdullah bin 'Amr The Prophet peace be upon him said, "Convey from me (teachings) even if it is a single verse and narrate from the Children of Israel and whoever attributes a lie to me intentionally let them prepare their abode in the Hellfire."

6.2.2 The Issue of Desire from Joseph and the Potiphar's Wife.

6.2.2.1 Sunni *Tafsīr*

From the outset, al-Ṭabarī demonstrates his enthusiasm for exposing all the possible narratives connected to this incident for the reader to see.[790] He presents various explanations, ranging from the prophets being tested by God when they commit an error (by leave of God's will), to renewing their obedience to him as a means of earning His favour and mercy. By suggesting this, al-Ṭabarī attempts to humanise the prophets and show they had a human side that occasionally was allowed to prevail and project the prophets as a blueprint for their followers who would know which example to follow if they ever slipped.

Al-Ṭabarī informs that other scholars (without identifying who) have speculated that prophets are tested so they can ascend to the position of leaders and role models for sinners, allowing them hope in God's forgiveness, if they seek it, and preventing them from forsaking his mercy. By suggesting this, he is comfortable with the narrations and supports a polyvalent reading of the situation.[791]

A third group of scholars (still unidentified) however oppose their predecessors, believing their opinions conflict with the interpretation required of the term *hamm*. This group argues the term has to be interpreted as 'the woman desired to seduce him and he desired to repulse her', to safeguard prophetic infallibility. It is clear that a monovalent reading is the only suitable and acceptable option for them as the primary objective is to safeguard the integrity of the prophets and any other reading will be unacceptable.

Al-Ṭabarī draws the readers' attention to the fact there is a difference among the groups concerning the requirements of prophetic infallibility, identifying some were more relaxed than others, which shows their belief was centred around other factors influencing this decision. By identifying the role of a prophet as a leader, role model, and the epitome of hope in God's mercy and forgiveness, they opted for a pedagogical approach to accepting the narratives, whereas a purely theological stance adopted by the third group will not accommodate this.[792]

The need to provide a haven for the vulnerable believers, who would no find sanctuary anywhere else, and the fact that God's elected representatives were designated for this, reinforced their views that without committing any prohibited act, the prophet could engage in something which could

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[790] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl 'Āy al-Qur'ān*, xii, p. 80.
[791] Ibid.
[792] Ibid.

potentially lead to the prohibited act. However, they would ultimately fall short of completing it, all due to God's protection that would come into force and prevent its completion.

As for what Joseph saw, this question also shares the same fate as the previous incident. Numerous opinions are documented, all are deemed possible and acceptable and again al-Ṭabarī is comfortable mentioning them without exhibiting any hesitation. The opinions range from Joseph seeing his father gnawing on his knuckles, to a voice ordering him to desist and to avoid destruction, or seeing verses of the Qur'ān on the ceiling pronouncing the punishment of adultery.

After listing the narratives al-Ṭabarī states all of the explanations are possibilities, he surprisingly concludes the discussion by saying that the best recourse here, after all that is presented, is to accept what God has mentioned in the Qur'ān, without recourse to these narratives, to simply and exclusively accept that stance and discard everything else. He does not condemn any of the explanations nor does he examine or comment on the narrations, rejecting or condemning any, he simply puts his opinion forward and plays it safe.

Al-Suyūtī and al-Qurṭubī follow in al-Ṭabarī's steps by listing narrations to provide context to the verse, yet surprisingly for a *muḥaddith* al-Suyūṭī only mentions two narrations regarding the term *hamm* and moves on to a discussion on the word *burhān*. Unusually, it seems that he omits the discussion, instead choosing to document what al-Ṭabarī has stated, literally referencing him a few times, but without pursuing any discussion or analysis with real conviction. Al-Suyūṭī's methodology seemingly dismisses the need to analyse the narratives or explore any theological implications, preferring al-Ṭabarī's position.

In addition to al-Ṭabarī's narration, al-Suyūtī in particular includes additional narrations. The first narration is attributed to Ibn 'Abbās where it details the seduction of Joseph. The Potiphar's wife made herself attractive and lay on her bed and he desired her by sitting between her legs until he heard a voice prohibiting him. Gabriel appeared in front of him in the form of Jacob gnawing on his knuckles.[793] In comparison to al-Ṭabarī, al-Suyūtī does not hesitate to relate the incident with a degree of explicitness that is absent from al-Ṭabarī's narrative, but again he does not mention any

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[793] Al-Suyūtī, *Al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bil Ma'thūr*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Fikr, 2011), iv, p.520-21.

"When she decided to seduce Joseph, she prepared herself and lay on her couch. He also showed desire and sat between her legs and loosened his trousers, when he heard a voice from the heavens call out "O Son of Jacob! Do not become like a bird whose feathers have been plucked, it will be without wings." He did not heed the warning until he saw proof from his lord, Gabriel in the form of Jacob gnawing on his knuckles. Joseph became fearful and his lust seeped out of his fingertips and he fled towards the door and found it locked. Joseph raised his leg and kicked the smaller door, splitting it open. The Potiphar's wife followed him and cornered him, grabbing his shirt and ripped it until it reached his shins and they came across her husband at the door."

condemnation of the details. Content with accepting the details, he is more relaxed towards the incident and does not reveal any concerns of compromise to prophetic infallibility. He indicates in his attitude that the incident does not have any bearing on the status of prophethood without actually declaring this.

Al-Suyūṭī's second narration contains the additional detail that the Potiphar's wife covers up an idol. When Joseph questions her regarding her action, she professes her shame at being observed by the idol committing sin, which leads Joseph to admonish himself for not fearing God.[794] Again, al-Suyūtī shows no hesitation in bringing this narration to the reader's attention but decides not to comment on its status.

In a third narrative, Joseph is strongly reprimanded and reminded his name is on the roll of Prophets, therefore he should exercise caution as he is about to behave like a fool.[795] Al-Suyūtī directs our attention to a narrative he references from al-Ṭabarī in which he mentions all of Jacob's children had twelve children each, except for Joseph, who had eleven, because of desire being driven from his body. This narrative further enforces the argument that such narrations incriminate Joseph as there is no positive element to them, no pedagogical value associated with them and they do not provide any lessons of religious value to anyone. Arguably, an argument exists that al-Suyūtī was prepared to include these narrations to highlight the humanistic qualities of a prophet and again provide a sanctuary for the vulnerable believers; consequently, he adopts a polyvalent position. Similar to al-Ṭabarī, al-Suyūtī was a recognised authority in not only *tafsīr*, *Ḥadīth* but also numerous other sciences. He is reputed to have authored over five hundred texts in multiple disciplines. Therefore, it is highly implausible that he would negligently relate such traditions that would challenge the doctrine of prophethood.[796]

Al-Qurṭubī surprises us by taking steps that the former exegetes avoided and adopting a specific stance. Despite the similarity between his narratives to those mentioned by al-Suyūtī, al-Qurṭubī openly declares that there is no dispute among the scholars that both of their desires were sinful.[797]

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[794] Ibid, 521, "'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib narrates "She desired him and he desired her. His desire was to undo his trousers. She went to an idol inlaid with rubies and pearls, in one corner of the house, and hung a white sheet between her and the idol. Joseph asked her "What are you doing?" She replied "I am ashamed at my God observing me in this state." Joseph replied "You are afraid of an idol that cannot eat or drink, and I am unashamed of my lord who holds every soul accountable?" He then said to her "Never come near me!" This is the sign that he saw.

[795] Ibid, "Jacob's image appeared before him gnawing on his knuckles, saying "O Joseph! Are you engaging in foolishness, whilst your name is on the records of Prophets?" That was the proof and God removed all desire from within him."

[796] Ibid.

[797] Al-Qurṭubī, Abū 'Abd Allah Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Abī Bakr, *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Mu'assisah al-Risālah, 2006), xi, p311. "There is no doubt their *hamm* was *ma'ṣiyah* (sin).

Surprisingly, he is very blunt with his opinion and does not attempt to deny this nor explain it away. He believes that such emotions and actions are permitted for prophets and this does not affect their infallibility, rather it compliments it and gives it a different edge. In essence, he allows the narratives a place in a particular context. He acknowledges from a doctrinal perspective such behaviour does not constitute a sin and has no bearing on the prophet's status.

Al-Qurṭubī follows this by claiming, "As for Joseph's desire, it faded when he saw the proof, something obligatory to prophetic infallibility. He further adds that some scholars (unidentified) hold the opinion Joseph's resistance to seduction is the actual reason for his praise and that he had intended to carry out the act, but resisted when he saw the proof.[798]

Without any reservation, al-Qurṭubī advocates for prophetic infallibility, but in doing so, he allows the narratives supporting the observations of Ibn 'Aṭiyyah, who presents the opinions of Ibn 'Abbās and other narrators that the wisdom directing the appropriation of these narratives is that they serve as a beacon of hope for sinners. The narratives allow sinners to gain hope and believe that their repentance leads them back to God's forgiveness, as it served Joseph, someone who was greater than they were. This can all be attributed to Joseph's desire (*hamm*) and what transpired after that. Thus the support for these narratives is clear; the acceptance of polyvalence is evident and is not considered as a challenge to prophetic infallibility.

Al-Qurṭubī provides support for his position on the authority of Abū 'Ubayd Ibn Sallām, who claims Ibn 'Abbās and others did not dispute Joseph desired the Potiphar's and he (Ibn 'Abbās) was foremost in his understanding of the Qur'ān, most respectful towards prophets and unquestionably would not utter anything without evidence. A quote is also attributed to al-Ḥasan that God does not mention the sins of prophets to dishonour them, but rather so that they do not despair from his forgiveness.[799]

Furthermore, al-Ghaznawī argues there is wisdom behind the 'slips' (*zillah*) ascribed to prophets that can be attributed to an increased fear in God, shame, and greater pleasure in forgiveness, amongst other possible reasons. Ultimately, prophets serve as beacons of hope for sinners and the details contained in such narratives do not contradict or compromise prophetic infallibility, rather such things humanise prophets and allow them to function in their actual capacities as saviours of humanity.[800]

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[798] Ibid, 312.

[799] Ibid, p. 312.

[800] Ibid.

Ibn Kathīr, identified as a proponent of the Sunni school, shares the same enthusiasm as al-Zamakhsharī, and in this instance, follows his methodology launching into the discussion regarding the Qur'ānic narrative immediately by highlighting the dispute amongst the scholars. He continues by listing various narratives, citing Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, Sa'īd Ibn Jubayr, and others (narratives that al-Ṭabarī mentioned).[801] As Calder claims, Ibn Kathīr adopts a strict monovalent approach, turning his back on the traditional approach of a polyvalent approach adopted by the first group.[802]

Al-Rāzī is the last Sunni exegete to contribute to the discussion and displays no interest in entertaining narratives; instead, al-Rāzī directs the reader's attention towards the important issue at hand, the actual verse, by dividing this into several points of discussion. He chooses to engage in a discussion to explain the Qur'ānic verse in light of doctrine. He first addresses whether Joseph committed a sin or not and his position coincides with al-Ṭabrisī, Joseph intended to sin. Al-Rāzī cites al-Wāḥidī who claims exegetes, who have complete faith in their knowledge and rely upon their opinions; firmly believed Joseph had desired intimacy. He presents quotes from 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and Ibn 'Abbās (mentioned by al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī), proceeding to soundly refute them arguing no Qur'ānic verse nor authentic ḥadīth are provided to support any of these opinions.[803]

The second opinion is that of the *muḥaqqiqūn* (experts from amongst the exegetes and theologians) who argue Joseph is innocent and free from accusations. Al-Rāzī directs the reader to his discussion in *surah al-Baqarah* for a more detailed answer, whilst providing evidence as to why it is impermissible to accept the controversial narratives. Al-Rāzī chooses to approach the issue logically, providing evidence that does not rely on any narratives and is theologically motivated. He refuses to acknowledge there is any pedagogical benefit to them. He goes as far as saying that those who believe in God must exonerate Joseph and solely accept God's evidence of his innocence, but, if they are those who accept the Devil, they can accept the Devil's vindication of Joseph.[804] His obvious rejection of the narratives shows the express reservations held by al-Rāzī that nothing supersedes the authority of the Qur'ān. In simple terms, narratives may contain details that could help understand Qur'ānic stories, but the details contained within them do not allow their acceptance, there is no compromise in this.

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[801] Ibn Kathīr, 'Imād al-Din Ismā'īl Ibn 'Umar Al-Damishqī, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, (Cairo, Egypt, Mu'assisah Qurtubah, 2000), viii, pp. 26-31

[802] Calder, Norman, *Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr*, pp. 101-140.

[803] Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *Mafatīḥ al-Ghayb/al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dar al-Fikr, 1981), xviii, p.117-23.

[804] Q15:39-40. "He said "My lord! I swear by the fact that You sent me stray, I shall distract them in the earth, and I shall lead all of them astray. Except those among them who are Your chosen bondsmen."

6.2.2.2 Mu'tazila *Tafsīr*

As the sole representative of the Mu'tazila, al-Zamakhsharī does not display the same enthusiasm with the narratives as the Sunni school and launches himself into the exegesis by addressing the major theological question of how a prophet can desire to commit a sin and display the intent to carry it out. Proceeding to argue against it, he explains that Joseph's *nafs* (egoistic self) was pre-disposed towards intimacy and the lust of youth attracted him to her, which resembled a desire for intimacy. He postulates the *hamm* was extreme, otherwise, why would avoidance of such an act deserve such high praise? If Joseph's desire mirrored hers then God would not have praised him as 'his sincere servant'.[805]

Al-Zamakhsharī proceeds to list multiple opinions of exegetes but concludes by dismissing the opinions of *Ahl al-Ḥashw and Jabr* (the *Ahl as-Sunnah*), whose beliefs Allah and his prophets refuted. He shows his support for his theological school asserting these were not the creed of the Mu'tazila, because if the slightest 'slip' (*zallah*) had been discovered from Joseph, then it would have been mentioned in the Qur'ānic narrative, and his repentance and forgiveness would have been documented, similar to that of Adam, David, Noah, Job and others.[806]

Al-Zamakhsharī categorically shows his support for a strict monovalent approach dismissing the need for an alternative explanation, completely rejecting any and every narrative, and strictly adhering to what the Qur'ān has mentioned. He does not consider there to be any truth nor benefit in mentioning any narrative and makes that abundantly clear, pedagogical or otherwise and unequivocally believes that only the Mu'tazila are responsible and worthy enough to deal with the narratives properly. Being the sole representative of his school in terms of producing a complete exegesis of the Qur'ān, he accepts the responsibility of upholding the tenets of his school.

6.2.2.3 Shī'ī *Tafsīr*

The Shī'ī exegetes al-Ṭabrisī and al-Ṭūsī conclude this group of scholars, adopting the same exegetical approach as al-Zamakhsharī, first tackling the linguistic meanings of the word *hamm*, then the different connotations of the word *hamm*, concluding that any negative connotations associated with the word are unacceptable and have to be dismissed because no sin is permitted for a prophet.[807]

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[805] Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, (Riyadh, Maktabah al-'Abīkān, 1998), iii, p.268.

[806] Ibid.

[807] Al-Ṭabrisī, Abū 'Ali Faḍl Ibn Ḥasan, *Majma' al-Bayān li-'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dar al-Murtaḍa', 2006), v, p. 298.

They firmly root their approach in their theological beliefs and are seemingly uninterested in narratives.

Al-Ṭabrisī, employing al-Zamakhsharī's approach, identifies two groups, those who accept the narratives and those who reject them. He ignores any mention of narratives and provides a similar analysis, arguing the Potiphar's wife's desire to sin, whilst Joseph was attempting to repel her advances.[808] His approach clearly shows the Mu'tazila influence, where the primary concern is to preserve the doctrinal position, subsequently rejecting the narratives and any benefits they could hold. Evidently, a polyvalent approach was not on offer and the belief is that nothing takes precedence over prophetic infallibility, and no pedagogical value could be associated with a prophet falling short of the standards God commands others to obey. Al-Ṭūsī follows a similar line of discussion. Both exegetes unequivocally reject a polyvalent approach, openly adopting the monovalent approach, due to doctrine surpassing any entertaining readings of the situation.

The focus of this group is undoubtedly not the narratives, but rather the discussions surrounding a linguistic discussion and the theological implications of accepting or rejecting sin for Joseph, with al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭabrisī moving to distance themselves and their respective schools from ascribing sin to a prophet, evidently dismissing any use for listing such narratives, including pedagogical. In their view, this approach exhibits these narratives should not be acknowledged or adopted for any reason, except maybe to show their rejection.

In summary, this first group of scholars, al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Suyūtī permit polyvalent readings of this verse through the various narratives included, seemingly under the condition of them serving as vehicles of pedagogy. Yet, this is not the standard practice of all exegetes, as we will see in the following group.

The second group of exegetes, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Zamakhsharī, and Ibn Kathīr present very little in the way of narratives but do offer a brief discussion with a particular focus on addressing their opinions and providing an understanding. Despite differences in their theological stance and exegetical approaches, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr adopt the strategy of immediately engaging in the discussion surrounding the incident, unlike al-Ṭabrisī and al-Ṭūsī who primarily address the grammatical discussion, before turning to the incident between Joseph and the Potiphar's wife.

Al-Ṭūsī, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad Ibn Ḥasan, *Al-Ṭibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dar Iḥyā al-Turāth al-'Arabī), vi, p. 119-23.

[808] Ibid, p.300.

The representative of the third group, al-Rāzī decides to focus on the discussion regarding prophetic infallibility, instead of the narratives, presumably due to their belief these narratives are of no value, their authenticity dismissed and contravening theological beliefs. Subsequently, they are not as forgiving and welcoming of the narratives we have already seen.

3. Prophetic infallibility and Joseph's predicament

The previous discussion identifies that prophetic infallibility *'iṣmah* is central to all of the groups, irrespective of their theological backgrounds. Interestingly though, personal theological positions do not seem to completely dictate their decisions in accepting or rejecting the narratives, though they do contribute to a degree. Each group of scholars has a particular methodology that is central to their attitude to the narratives.

The first group's approach involves listing all the narratives, controversial or otherwise, attempting to present all the details involved, but in a manner where they can humanise the figures in question, all the while attempting to protect their integrity. This group has presented Joseph as a figure who escaped and survived numerous tests from God and always upheld complete faith and trust in him, whilst feeling comfortable enough to employ the narratives. They maintain a prophet could never sin, yet they could be drawn to it as a test of their faith in God and to show people that humans can avoid precarious situations and that the prophets after escaping the situations are reminded that ultimately all rely on God and his forgiveness is there for all.

The second group arguably opt for a safer stance choosing to avoid the narratives, insomuch as dismissing any mention of them, instead they focus on the debate surrounding three main facets of the story, the term *hamm*, what Joseph saw, and the issue of prophetic infallibility. The influence of the Mu'tazila theology and methodological approach is evident in the admittance of Ibn Kathīr, al-Ṭabrisī and al-Ṭūsī, who openly adopt al-Zamakhsharī's stance, with al-Ṭabrisī mentioning al-Zamakhsharī and endorsing his theological position regarding prophetic infallibility. They seem to overlook their theological differences and unite over an issue that they deem focal to their identity. This group does not attempt to overly humanise the prophets nor do they see any pedagogical aspect that would influence their decision to omit the narratives, as they believe they compromise their faith, something they refuse to accept.

The methodological approach of the third group of exegetes is similar to that of the previous scholars, but provides a more detailed discussion, simultaneously ignoring the narrations, but departs from the previous approach by vigorously attacking those who accept the narrations, primarily utilising theological arguments. Al-Rāzī dismisses the first group of exegetes, despite belonging to the same theological school, arguing that there is no evidence to support such views. He brushes aside any

attempt by them to justify their employment of controversial narratives and is highly critical of them. Al-Rāzī resorts to logic to support his position, brutally concluding that anyone who believed in God could not accept these narratives.

This group is by far the most critical and does not entertain any pedagogical advantage, showing that their theological position was far too important for them to compromise. It was far easier to dismiss the narratives as spurious as to allow them to be interpreted in light of pedagogy or any other reason.

6.3 Second Case Study – The Narrative of David and Bathsheba

The second case study deals with David, the prophet king, father of Solomon and the recipient of the Psalms. Recognised in all three Abrahamic faiths he enjoys a mixed reception, receiving a diverse representation in the antecedent texts, whilst being honoured in the Qur'ān. In total, David appears sixteen times in the Qur'ān, but unlike Joseph, does not have an entire chapter dedicated to him. Furthermore, he is mentioned in various contexts, occasionally in a list with other prophets[809], a few times with Solomon[810], and alone in the case of Goliath[811]. Unlike the Bible, the Qur'ān focuses on pivotal moments in David's life rather than providing a detailed account. He is first mentioned when his exploits against Goliath are introduced, followed by a record of his ascension to the throne[812], his wise rule and God's creation, the animals and mountains praising God with him[813], finally culminating in his tribulation and forgiveness.[814]

Comparatively, David is mentioned over a thousand times in the Bible, with details of his triumphs, failures, and the numerous roles he occupied as a warrior, leader, and poet scrutinised and finally culminating in his redemption. The detailed narratives commence in Book 1 Samuel 16 and conclude with the death of David in First Kings.[815] The level of coverage signifies the importance of David in the Bible and the role he plays throughout his life.

In the Qur'ān, David's character is portrayed as God-fearing, morally upright, and a virtuous, faithful person, who despite his humble background, ascended to kingship and was granted great honour

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[809] Q4:163, Q6:84.

[810] Q21:78, Q27:15.

[811] Q2:251.

[812] Ibid.

[813] Q38:18.

[814] Q38:21-24.

[815] Attridge, Harold. W, *The Harper Collins Study Bible*, (New York, USA, Society of Biblical Literature, Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), pp389-479.

through selection as a recipient of one of the divine books, the Psalms.[816] The Biblical narrative depicts a different David, initially portrayed as a devout and God-fearing person, but after ascension to the throne, displaying tyrannical behaviour, becoming a man who covets power and women.

In contrast, God describes David in the Qur'ān as *awwāb* (one who turned back to his lord frequently) and *'abdanā* (our servant). Despite this, David is tested by God and seeks forgiveness, which he is subsequently granted. This is the second narrative to address an incident between a prophet and a married woman, a recurring theme that bears some similarities to the previous case study.

In truth, the Biblical coverage of David is far from forgiving and for some modern Biblical scholars requires a re-reading, as it is the story of a victimiser overpowering a victim and in sticking with the traditional view, the victimiser overshadows the victim, without any real acknowledgement of the latter. Postell believes for Biblical scholars the story of David and Bathsheba is a mirror for the story of Joseph and the Potiphar's wife, and describes Joseph's behaviour as exemplary and David's as disgraceful.[817] He claims David's willingness to commit adultery is a mirrored reflection of Joseph's refusal to commit adultery. Postell's work focuses on drawing parallels between the two narratives to show how one individual epitomised the commands of God, whilst the other transgressed them. Surprisingly, he claims few scholars noticed the similarities between the two stories, with the victimiser in both stories punishing the victim, and both being given responsibilities over their master's homes.[818] Postell focuses on the sexual element of the narratives, ignoring other details and arguably highlighting the prophets were human and susceptible to sin equally.

In contrast, the Qur'ān introduces David in the surah *Ṣād*, as a model of patience for the prophet Muḥammad stating, "Bear with what they say and remember Our bondsman David, lord of might, he was ever turning in repentance (toward Allah). Indeed We subjected the hills to say the praise with him, at night and morn."[819] In truth, all the prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān are identified as models, in certain aspects, for the prophet Muḥammad, he is reminded the prophets suffered, were driven out, ridiculed etc. before him, yet they did not abandon their mission or compromise their faith.[820]

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[816] Q4:163.

[817] Postell, Seth D. *"Potiphar's Wife in David's Looking Glass: Reading 2 Samuel 11-12 as a Reflection Story of Genesis 39."*, Tyndale Bulletin, lxxi, no. 1, 2020, pp. 95-113.

[818] Ibid, p.109.

[819] Q38:17.

[820] Q3:184. "If you are rejected by them, so too were messengers before you who came with clear proofs, divine Books, and enlightening Scriptures."

The Qur'ānic narrative continues until it reaches the verse, "And David became certain that We had tested him, and he asked forgiveness of his Lord and fell bowing (in prostration) and turned in repentance to God. And lo! He had access to Our presence and a happy journey's end."[821]

God identifies David's patience in the Qur'ān as an example for the prophet Muḥammad when he faced accusations from the disbelievers of Makkah who accused him of being a liar and a sorcerer, he felt suffocated and helpless.[822] God advises him to show patience in the face of adversity, much like David, who persevered and was rewarded with great honour and status. The verses preceding the incident in question discuss the fate of previous nations who disobeyed God and ridiculed his messengers.[823] God informs us of the people of Noah, 'Ād and Pharaoh, who all denied their messengers and were subsequently destroyed because they rejected these individuals and their representation. The surah then moves on to subsequently counsel the prophet Muḥammad to show forbearance in the face of adversity despite what the enemies did. He is reminded of the prophet David, God's servant, the 'lord of might', who always turned to his lord, unlike those who denied God.

The Qur'ān introduces David as an individual, upon whom God bestowed a great kingdom, caused the mountains and trees to sing the praise of God with him, and most of all God rewarded him with wisdom and discernment in speech. The portrayal of David in the narrative is designed to depict him as an example from whom the prophet Muḥammad should take inspiration and support.

Despite such accolades, the ensuing verses illustrate a situation that exegetes find difficult to elucidate, forcing many of them to draw upon material outside the scope of the traditional sources of the Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth*. The verses state "And David became certain that We had tested him, and he asked forgiveness of his Lord and fell bowing [in prostration] and turned in repentance [to Allah]."[824]

In chapter 38, verses 17-20 God showers David with praise and presents him as an exemplar for the prophet Muḥammad. After informing the prophet Muḥammad that historically disbelievers have always opposed messengers sent to them, mocking, ridiculing and even disposing of them. God advises the prophet Muḥammad "Be patient O Prophet with what they say. Remember Our servant,

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Q6:34. "Indeed, messengers before you were rejected but patiently endured rejection and persecution until Our help came to them. And Allah's promise ⌜to help⌝ is never broken. And you have already received some of the narratives of these messengers."

[821] Q38:24-25.

[822] Q38:17.

[823] Q38:3-17.

[824] Q38:24.

David, the man of strength. Indeed, he constantly turned to Allah." In saying this, God presents David as the archetype of patience and commands the prophet Muḥammad to follow his example. God continues to praise David by following on with the following verse "Indeed We subjected the mountains to hymn Our praises along with him in the evening and after sunrise. Moreover, We subjected the birds, to flocking together. All turned to him echoing his hymns." God subjugating the creation to worship alongside him further exemplifies the status of David. Furthermore, David's legacy is cemented in God's eyes by his elevation to prophet-king in the verse "We strengthened his kingship, and gave him wisdom and sound judgment."

The aforementioned accolades should automatically elevate David above any form of criticism and disrepute, alleviating any misconceptions and reconciling any issues that may arise from the next verse, but this is not the case. Two men appear in David's presence, causing him to become apprehensive of them and after their reassurance, they explain that they have a dispute and one of them has been wronged. After passing judgment, David realises that he is the subject of God's test and seeks repentance.[825] The verses make no mention of David's indiscretion that warranted forgiveness, only that it had been a tribulation, resulting in him seeking repentance first and subsequently receiving forgiveness.

The ambiguity in the verse has led to many exegetical attempts to present a coherent reading of the incident, hoping to grant the reader a suitable understanding. This has resulted in an array of opinions, with some exegetes suggesting that the verses alluded to David's adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.

6.3.1 The Cause of David's Tribulation

6.3.1.1 Sunni *Tafsīr*

Al-Ṭabarī takes the lead once again and true to his methodology, he launches straight into the narratives providing the absent details for the Qur'ānic verses, in particular highlighting scholarly opinions are divided into two camps. He proceeds to list the narrations, identifying which group of scholars supported which narratives.

Addressing the first group, al-Ṭabarī[826] provides a narration from Ibn 'Abbās, where Ibn 'Abbās recounts an incident in which David enquires from God about the elevation of his forefathers and

[825] Q38:21-25.

[826] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl 'Āy al-Qur'ān*, xx, p. 64.

what he could do to attain similar rank to them.[827] David shows a desire to emulate the glory enjoyed by Abraham, Isaac and other previous prophets. Although perhaps unusual to some who may believe prophets should adopt a life of poverty and abstinence, this request in itself is not prohibited nor discouraged. His son and successor Solomon also made a similar request when he asked God for a kingdom that no one before him had possessed and nor would they be granted such a thing after.[828] What sounds unusual is the request to put himself in abject difficulty to gain prominence, an act that is unprecedented simply because prophets would avoid such a thing as it could bring uninvited hardships. Furthermore, some may argue the nature of the question itself queries the very belief in reliance upon God and trust in his judgement, due to the nature of the request and acceptance of the challenge.

David's willingness to subject himself to voluntary tribulation raises questions: why would an individual, especially a prophet of God willingly volunteer to become the subject of tribulation, despite knowing nothing about the effects and consequences, without God's decision to subject him to divine reasons? This request itself is a challenge for some scholars as it certainly questions the wisdom of David. The focus of the narrative then turns to David's attempt to capture a magnificent

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[827] David asked God "O Lord, you granted Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob a great status, the likes of which I desire for you to bestow upon me." God replied "I have tested them in a manner that I have not subject you to, if you desire I can subject you to the same tribulation and bestow upon you what I bestowed upon them!" David replied, "I accept!" God informed him "Continue until I reveal your tribulation." Then whatever God decreed occurred and that remained with him until he was close to forgetting. One day David was standing in the miḥrāb when he saw a pigeon that he tried to capture. The pigeon headed for a small window in the wall and David attempted to capture it, when suddenly his gaze fell upon a woman bathing. The prophet of God descended from the chambers and sent for her, and she responded. David enquired about her husband and she informed him that he was away (on military duty). David wrote to his commander and ordered him to direct her husband to his regiment for duty, in order for her husband to be killed, which subsequently happened. The husband's companions survived, and were victorious, but God saw what had happened with David, he decided to vindicate him.

One day David was standing in his quarters, when he suddenly found two disputants facing him who had scaled the wall. When David saw them whilst he was reciting, he was alarmed and became silent. David said "I have become weak in my power so much so that people have begun to confront me my quarters. The two men replied ""Fear not. [We are] two adversaries, one of whom has wronged the other." "It was incumbent upon us to come to you, hear us." One of the litigants said "Indeed this, my brother, has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe; so he said, 'Entrust her to me." He desires to complete a hundred with it and leave me without anything. "And he overpowered me in speech". "If I requested something and he requested something, he was more convincing than me, and if I rejected something and he rejected something, he did so more vehemently than I." For this reason he said "And he overpowered me in speech"

David said "You were greater in need of your ewe than he." "He (David) "He has certainly wronged you in demanding your ewe" until "and few are they." David had forgotten his own situation and the two angels looked at each other when he said this and smiled at each other. David saw this he was certain he had been tested, "He asked forgiveness of his Lord and fell down bowing [in prostration] and turned in repentance [to Allah]." David sought forgiveness for forty nights, to the extent that vegetation grew from the tears he shed from his eyes and God made his kingdom difficult for him.

[828] Q38:35. He prayed, "My Lord! Forgive me, and grant me a kingdom that will unmatched by anyone after me. You are indeed the Giver of all bounties."

pigeon, whilst in his private quarters and subsequently coming upon an unclothed woman bathing. Rather than turning away, he is smitten by her and pursues her, going as far as having her husband killed in the line of duty to remove him.

From a Sunni doctrinal perspective, the narrative challenges the position of prophetic infallibility, questioning the responsibilities placed upon prophets and the code of conduct ascribed to them. Why would a prophet willingly invite trouble upon himself? Why would he resort to such tactics to achieve the results in question? Despite the issues raised in the previous case study where an argument exists for Joseph's actions, the same argument cannot be presented here. A prophet may be captivated by the beauty of God's creation in the form of the pigeon, but would he resort to pursuing it? By prophetic standards, especially those of the prophet Muḥammad, the perfect exemplar for Muslims, prophets should be above such worldly distractions. Furthermore, when coming upon the naked woman, it would be expected and demanded of a normal believer to turn away and not look back, so how is a prophet allowed to continue looking and then go on to pursue her with such vigour? To continue the pursuit and arrange for a murder to be committed to acquire the woman would go against the divine teachings of the Qur'ān, let alone the prophetic code of conduct.

Furthermore, it is interesting that God would allow a prophet to commit not one but two major sins without immediately holding him accountable. The resolute pursuit of sin by coveting another man's wife is forbidden in all the divine books, so how is it possible to accept a narration that contradicts the fundamental teachings? Moreover, for God to not directly address the prophet and instead to send two men or angels to rectify the prophet makes the issue confusing, as the degree of sin does not comply with the response from God. When the prophet Muḥammad turned away from the blind companion, God immediately addressed this with revelation, where he informed him that it would have been better for him to have addressed the companion rather than the Quraysh elite. [829] The appropriation of the narrative raises questions about al-Ṭabarī's exegetical methodology. In the previous case study, an argument exists for its inclusion, but this narrative certainly has its challenges, especially when the cause of revelation for the Qur'ānic is to encourage the prophet Muḥammad to use David as a role model of how to behave in the face of adversity.

Al-Ṭabarī, offers a second narration related by Al-Suddī regarding verse Q38:21.[830] He introduces details not present in the previous story concerning David's daily ritual. David divided his time into

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[829] Q80:1-13.

[830] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl 'Āy al-Qur'ān*, xx, p. 66.

"David divided his time into three days, one day to sit in judgement of people, one day dedicated to the worship God, and one day reserved for his wives, he had ninety nine wives. During his reading of the scriptures, David read about the

three days, one for sitting in judgment of his people, one for his worship and one for his wives. Al-Suddī mentions that David had ninety-nine wives, coinciding with the Qur'ānic allusion in the story of the two plaintiffs, in which the number is mentioned when one of the plaintiffs complains his brother has ninety-nine ewes, whilst he has only one, which brother also covets.

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status of his forefathers and after reading their accounts he said "Lord I have observed that all good has been bestowed upon my forefathers before me, grant me the same as you bestowed upon them and subject me to the same tribulation you subjected them to." God informed David "Your forefathers were tested in a manner you have not been tested in. Abraham was tested when he was asked to sacrifice his son, Isaac with the loss of his sight, and Jacob with his grief for Joseph." David said "God subject me to the same as you subjected them to and grant me what you granted them." God informed him "You will be tested, await it."

Time passed, as God had decreed and one day Satan came to him in the form of a golden pigeon and fell at his feet when he was praying. David reached to capture it, but it escaped and he followed it but it escaped until it ended up at a slit in the window. He reached out to capture the pigeon, it escaped, and as he looked to see where it had gone to pursue it.

David saw a woman bathing on the roof of her home, the most beautiful woman in existence. She became aware of his gaze, observed him staring, let her hair drop, and covered herself, which further escalated his desire for her. David enquired about her and was informed that she was married, her husband was away on a military expedition. David sent a message to the commander of the expedition instructing him to send Uriah against a particular enemy and the commander did as instructed, but Uriah returned victorious. The commander informed David of this and David wrote back instructing him to send Uriah against another enemy, stronger than the previous one. The commander sent Uriah, who returned victorious, and the commander informed David of this. David responded by asking him to send Uriah against another enemy and the commander sent him. The third time Uriah was killed and David married Uriah's widow. When she came to him she did not spend much time with him when God sent two angels in human form, who sought permission to enter his presence. They came to him on the day of his worship and were denied by the guards, but managed to traverse the walls and enter his private quarters, finding him worshipping.

The angels told him "Fear not. [We are] two adversaries, one of whom has wronged the other, so judge between us with truth and do not exceed" i.e. do not fear "and guide us to the sound path." i.e. deal with us justly. David said, "Relate to me your story!" One of them said, "Indeed this, my brother, has ninety-nine ewes, and I have one ewe." He desire to take my ewe to complete one hundred ewes. David asked the other "What do you say?" He replied, "I have ninety nine ewes and my brother has one, I want to take his ewe so that I can complete a hundred."

David asked, "Was he averse to this?" he replied, "He was averse to it" David replied, "Then I will not permit that" The brother responded, "You are not in a position to do that!" David informed him "If you covet that and proceed with your intentions then I will strike this, this and this." The Jewish scholars interpreted that as the tip of the nose, the base of the nose and the forehead. The brother replied 'O David! You are more deserving of being struck on this; this and this because you had ninety-nine wives and Uriah had only one. You were driven in having Uriah killed; resulting in his death and then you married his wife."

When David looked at the litigants but they had disappeared and he realised what had transpired, he had been tested. David fell into prostration, cried, and remained in like that for forty days, without raising his head except to answer the call of nature, after which he would return to prostration, crying and seeking repentance, to the extent that the tears from his crying caused vegetation to grow where they had fallen.

After forty day God sent revelation to David "Raise your head, I have forgiven you" David said, "Lord How do I know you have forgiven me? You are a fair judge, impartial in your judgement. If Uriah was to come to you on the Day of Judgement, holding his head in right or left hand, blood flowing from his jugular vein, in the presence of your throne, crying out "Lord, ask him why he had me murdered?" God asked David "If Uriah does this I will ask him to forgo his claim and he will accede to my request for which I will grant him paradise." David responded "Lord now I believe you have truly forgiven me." So much remorse filled David that he did not raise his head until the day he left this world."

This narrative also contains David's request and desire but provides additional detail relating to the actual tribulations faced by Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.[831] It further adds the golden pigeon was the devil who had assumed the form of a golden pigeon to distract David from his worship. This detail of this narrative questions David's commitment to God and challenges the bestowment of the mentioned accolades, which God identified to make him a model for Muḥammad to follow. The second narrative continues to present similar details to those mentioned in the first, but additionally, it relates to David's relentless pursuit of the woman and the two failed attempts to have Uriah killed. The narrative demonstrates David as the antithesis of Joseph, an individual displaying a depraved and immoral character.

The narration continues with the appearance of two men, or according to some narrations, two angels in the guise of men, who came to David to bring litigation for him to hear.[832] The interesting fact that stands out is the admission of borrowing from Jewish scholars, where David's threat to wealthier brother was interpreted as being the tip of the nose, the base of the nose and the forehead. The response does no favours to David's reputation and depicts him as showing disdain for God's law. David's response, when he sees the plaintiffs disappear, is one of realisation at God's rebuke, causing him to seek repentance. For forty days, David cries and asks for forgiveness, until God forgives him, Yet David seems reluctant to accept God's decision to forgive him, repeatedly asking for reassurance. [833] Once again, this raises serious questions about the faith, judgement and behaviour of a prophet, especially one who was granted such prominence. It seems to suggest God would compromise his justice to provide his prophet with cover for his mistakes. In a separate narration, 'Aṭā al-Khurāsanī (d. 175/752) states, "David carved his mistake into his hand so that he never forgot. Whenever he gazed at his hand he trembled and shook."[834]

The second group of scholars view the incident from a completely different perspective, ignoring any claim of infidelity, instead asserting David was subject to tribulation because he believed he could go through an entire day without sinning.[835] His tribulation took place on the very same day he thought of this. Though the narratives are similar to those presented by the first group, they have differences.

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[831] Ibid, p. 67.

[832] Q38:22.

[833] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl 'Āy al-Qur'ān*, xx, p. 68.

[834] Ibid.

[835] Ibid, p. 69. "Al-Ḥasan narrates that David divided his time into four days, one for his wives, one for his worship, one to sit in judgement of the Israelites and one for the Children of Israel where he would enjoin them and they would enjoin him, he would reduce them to tears and they would bring him to tears. One day he is asked if anyone can go through a day without sinning and David believed he was possible.

The narrative specifies David divided his time into four days for his affairs, distributed between his private and personal life. On the day dedicated to his people, he encouraged his subjects to exhort them and they asked him if a person could avoid sinning for a day, David believed it to be possible for himself, resulting in God testing him. A similar incident concerning Moses and Khiḍr[836] exists in Qur'ānic exegesis where Moses is asked one day who the most knowledgeable person on the earth and he believes it to be himself.[837] God instructs him to find Khiḍr and learn from him as a lesson in humility.[838] A second issue of contention is the distraction David suffered from whilst worshipping, where a pigeon caused him to turn from his worship of God, initiating the whole process of his tribulation. The rest of the detail is the same as the previous narrations. Moreover, the woman in question who is at the centre of the controversy is identified as Solomon's mother, which further complicates the issue as a prophet is born from an illegitimate relationship.

Following on from this, al-Ṭabarī cites a third narration related by Wahb Ibn Munabbih containing similar details.[839] Towards the end of the narrations listed for this section, al-Ṭabarī mentions a *Ḥadīth* to support all the previous narratives, a step he did not take for the previous case study.[840] It is possible he feels the need to add additional support here due to the details of this case study, containing complications that make it harder to rely on narratives alone. The *Ḥadīth* supports the theme of the

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On the day he had reserved for Children of Israel he said to them "Exhort me". They asked him "Can a man pass a day without committing sin?" David believed in himself that he would be able to. Upon the day of his worship David locked the doors to his chambers and instructed the guards to prevent everyone from entering. He immersed himself in the study of the Torah and whilst he was reading a beautiful, multi shade golden pigeon landed in front of him and he reached forward to capture it. The bird flew and landed just out of reach and he pursued it to catch it until his gaze fell upon a woman bathing and her beauty and appearance struck him.

When she saw his shadow on the ground, she concealed herself with her hair, which only enhanced his attraction to her. David arranged for her husband to be sent to take charge of one of his armies, meanwhile instructing him to proceed to a particular region, where he would not be able to return from. He did as commanded, fell and subsequently David proposed to her and married her. Qatādah mentions she was the mother of Solomon."

[836] Q18:65-82.

[837] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl 'Āy al-Qur'ān*, xv, p.323.

[838] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 4725, vi, p. 198.

[839] Wahb Ibn Munabbih relates that when the Israelites would gather around David, God revealed the Psalms, taught David how to work iron and make it malleable. God commanded the mountains and the birds to glorify God with him and according to what has been reported God has not granted anyone a voice equal to that of David. According to what has been mentioned, when David read from the Psalms, wild animals, enchanted by his voice, would draw close to him and he would be able to take them by the scruff of their necks. Even the devils, who made flutes, lutes, and cymbals, tuned the pitch them according to David's voice. David was a great mujtahid and resolute worshipper. He ruled the Children of Israel, he judged amongst the Israelites with the will of God, with many prophets descending from him, he was a great mujtahid amongst the prophets, cried excessively, and then he was subject to the tribulation of the woman. David has a chamber where he would read the Psalms and offer prayers. Below this chamber there was a garden that belonged to an Israelite and it was his wife who was David's tribulation.

[840] Ibid, p. 74.

narrations presented allowing the possibility of a prophet transgressing, committing questionable acts resulting in God's forgiveness. God assures David of his forgiveness on the Day of Judgement, if Uriah was to bring claim against David seals his forgiveness.[841] This conclusion with the *Ḥadīth* makes al-Ṭabarī's position clear that entertaining the available possibilities mentioned in the narratives is not only possible but may be used to explain certain difficulties faced by scholars concerning infallibility. Al-Ṭabarī is consistent in his acceptance of polyvalence in *tafsīr*, advocating for the inclusion of possibilities as they serve as paradigms for believers.

Al-Qurṭubī's discussion concerning the story of David is not only extensive; it also provides great insight into how to read this narration and the connected details. He approaches the discussion from a slightly different angle and provides a different reading from al-Ṭabarī, removing David's aspirations from the story completely and claiming David thought to himself if he was tested he would survive. Therefore, there was no request to God nor a mention of certain aspirations, but in turn, God decided to inform him he would be tested. David's tribulation came in the form of an extremely beautiful bird that caught his eye, ultimately leading him to discover Uriah's wife. Al-Qurṭubī supports this narration by presenting the narrative of Ibn 'Abbās, which details David having Uriah murdered and then proposing to his wife, promising her that if she had a son, her son would be the ruler after him. Fifty men from the Children of Israel witnessed the recording of this agreement.

After she had given birth to Solomon two angels appeared as narrated in the Qur'ān.[842] This narrative is not mentioned by any of the former exegetes but does bring a new aspect to light, that David is

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[841] Ibid, p. 85.

"Anas Ibn Mālik narrates that the prophet Muḥammad said "When David the prophet looked at the woman and was tested, he assembled the Children of Israel and instructed their commander "When the enemy faces you place so and so person in front of the Ark of Covenant." In that time the Ark of the Covenant was used as an intermediary for seeking divine assistance for victory, and whoever was placed in front of the Ark did not return until they had been killed or the enemy had been defeated. The husband of the woman had been killed in action and two angels descended and related his story to him. David realised his situation and fell into prostration and remained like that for forty days, until vegetation grew as a result of his tears, and the earth consumed a part of his forehead. In prostration he would recite, (the narrator states the following about himself) these are the only words I learned from al-Raqqāshī, "Lord! David has committed an error greater than the distance between the east and west, if you do not show mercy to the weakness of David and forgive his sin, you will make his sin a narrative for the ages to follow him.

Gabriel came to him after forty nights and said "David! God has forgiven what you had intended." David replied "I know God is capable of forgiving me of what I had desired and I know God is most just and not unfair, but what would happen on the day of judgement when that person comes to God and says "Lord! My blood is on David's hands." Gabriel answered "I have not asked God that, if you desire I can do so." David affirmed and Gabriel ascended, whilst David fell into prostration and remained there as long as God desired. Gabriel returned and said "O David! I have asked God about what you requested" He replied "Inform David that God will you on the Day of Judgement and say "Surrender you blood right you have over David. He will reply "Lord! It is yours." God says "You will have what you desire in paradise and whatever you want in exchange of it."

[842] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, xviii, p. 155.

portrayed as someone who capitalises on benefitting from his sin, showing scant concern for any repercussions for any of his actions.

Surprisingly, in a move that can only be deemed as a defence for including controversial narratives, al-Qurṭubī includes a *Ḥadīth* that he attributes to Ḥākim al-Tirmidhī from Anas Ibn Mālik. The prophet Muḥammad said, "When David saw the woman, he had her husband sent to battle, asking for him to be placed in front of the Ark of the Covenant to defend it, ultimately ending in him being killed."[843] Ibn Kathīr outright dismisses the *Ḥadīth*, asserting that the narrative has weak chains of narrations and accuses Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d.327/938)[844], a scholar of *Jarḥ* and *Ta'dīl*, of narrating a *Ḥadīth* that has no sound chain. He cites the reason for rejection as weakness in the narrator Yazīd al-Raqqāshī, who despite being a pious individual was weak, thus compromising the credibility of the narration.

Al-Qurṭubī's next narration is reported on the authority of al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1035/6),[845] the exegete and historian, who claims some scholars believe David was tested by God because he desired the status awarded to his forefathers.[846] The narrations contain the same details as those found in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, that David would divide his days into three, one to sit in judgement of the Children of Israel, one to devote to his worship and one for his wives and his personal affairs.[847] Al-Qurṭubī is not appeased with just two narrations and further adds some on the authority of al-Kalbī[848] and al-Suddī[849], where al-Kalbī narrates David asked to be tested to attain the ranks of his forefathers and was tested when a gold dove appeared and he pursued it, culminating with David seeing a woman bathing.[850]

Al-Qurṭubī follows this with a narration of al-Suddī, where it mentions Uriah's wife saw David's shadow and covered herself. Her husband was Uriah son of Ḥannān, who was accompanied by Ayyūb Ibn Ṣūriyā, the nephew of David. David wrote to him and instructed him to ensure Uriah's death,

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[843] Al-Tirmidhī, Al-Ḥakīm, *Nawādir al-Uṣūl fī Aḥādith al-Rasūl,* (Beirut, Lebanon, Dār al-Jīl, 1992), ii, p.178.

[844] Pavlovitch, Pavel, *'Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī'*, in: Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Devin J. Stewart. Consulted online on 21 January 2024 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_30667>

[845] Exegete and author of the text on stories of the prophets *Arāis al-Majālis fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā*.

[846] Al-Tha'labī, *'Arā'is al-Majālis fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā' Or 'Lives of the Prophets'*, p. 468.

[847] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, xviii, p. 156.

[848] Muḥammad Ibn al-Sā'ib al-Kalbī.

[849] Muḥammad Ibn Marwān Ibn 'Abdallah Ibn 'Abd al Raḥmān al-Suddī al-Asghar.

[850] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, xviii, p. 157.

which subsequently occurred.[851] The narrative chillingly incriminates David, signifying he was fully aware of his actions and the act was undoubtedly premeditated. What is interesting here is al-Qurṭubī including the narration without commentating on it. He seems comfortable with the details and is open to accepting traditions taken from al-Th'alabī's *Arā'is al-Majālis fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā* Or 'Lives of the Prophets'[852], where narratives provided by questionable narrators such as al-Suddī and al-Kalbi are employed.

Despite citing multiple narrations, surprisingly al-Qurṭubī asserts in his opinion the most authentic opinion is David asked Uriah to divorce his wife and God informed him of his error, reminding him of his role as a prophet and not to chase after the world. Being content with listing all possible narrations, al-Qurṭubī is content in allowing the reader to access various details reported from external sources, most of them not from the Qur'ān nor *Ḥadīth*.

Surprisingly, al-Qurṭubī follows this by pointedly refuting the stories of murder attributed to David, citing Ibn 'Arabī as evidence to support him. He pointedly argues the narrations are completely spurious because David would not spill the blood of another for personal gain; the actual issue was his request to Uriah to divorce his wife. If this is the case, then it raises an important question, why cite such narrations when you just want to refute them? Why not simply indicate their existence and outright dismiss them? His approach seems to suggest that he wants to alert the reader to the multiple narrations connected with the verse and that attributing certain things to a prophet is permitted without compromising their status, but serious charges cannot be explained or accepted.

He demonstrates a relaxed position on prophetic infallibility, allowing the prophet to display human characteristics common amongst believers, and attraction towards other humans, especially concerning the prophet Muḥammad.

Al-Qurṭubī supports his position by addressing the issue of the prophet Muḥammad's marriage to Zaynab Bint Jaḥsh, where he draws parallels between the prophet Muḥammad's case and David's proposal to Uriah's wife, except in the case of the prophet Muḥammad, he did not ask her husband to divorce her.[853] In arguing this, al-Qurṭubī shows there are elements of such narratives that are not only acceptable but serve a purpose in identifying common themes existing amongst the stories of the prophets. This provides hope for the believers that an incident related to their prophet, which some people find issues with, is not controversial and does not cast aspersions upon his status. Moreover,

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[851] Ibid.

[852] Ibid.

[853] Ibid, p. 169.

there are parallels between the stories that allow previous prophets to be exonerated from allegations levelled against them.

Al-Qurṭubī does not fail to draw upon his predecessor al-Ṭabarī whilst establishing David's exact sin, stating exegetical authorities have asserted David was reprimanded because of his proposal after Uriah had already proposed. He attempts to explain that some scholars have endeavoured to reconcile this issue by saying if David had known about the proposal, he would not have proposed it. However, it is equally possible that he knew of the proposal, but was smitten by her and could not help himself. David had numerous wives and the proposer (Uriah) did not, thus God informed David of his mistake in the form of the angels.

The basis of this explanation can be viewed as an attempt to humanise David, allowing the narratives to stand in a framework that humanises the subject, whilst maintaining the status credited to them. Al-Qurṭubī personally mentions multiple opinions he believes were the reason for David's forgiveness, including David looking at her, ordering her husband to protect the Ark of the Covenant and desiring to marry her if her husband died, proposing to her after Uriah had died and finally to passing an unfair judgement.[854]

Despite all the possible explanations, al-Qurṭubī reverts to the position of the previous scholars, conclusively citing an ultimatum ascribed to the caliph ʻAlī, related to the authority of al-Suddī and al-Thaʼlabī, that categorically dismiss the narrations upon pain of punishment. Al-Suddī narrates ʻAlī declared he would punish with one hundred and sixty lashes any person who narrated any inappropriate narration regarding David. Eighty lashes are a punishment for accusing a normal person and one hundred and sixty is for accusing a prophet.

Al-Qurṭubī supports this declaration with a quote from al-Thaʼlabī, who narrates something similar where ʻAlī pronounces the punishment to accepting the narratives and narrating from storytellers.[855] However, Ibn al-ʻArabī outright dismisses this as being inauthentic and proclaims the harshest judgement so far. He responds to anyone who questions his opinion regarding those who hold such controversial opinions by answering as follows. People have different opinions on the issue, but anyone who claims a prophet sinned deserves execution, including those who accuse David of glancing at her and touching her. If anyone believes this, they deserve punishment. For those who claim he saw a woman bathing naked and she in turn covered herself when she noticed him, there is no issue here according to the consensus of the Muslim Ummah because a single involuntary glance

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[854] Ibid, p. 175.

[855] Ibid.

is forgiven, and there was no second glance.[856] With regards to the opinion that David was awaiting Uriah's death, this is completely dismissed, alongside the controversial proposal issue.

Al-Qurṭubī's extensive discussion on this incident shows the significance of the issue at hand and despite the all-encompassing narrations presented depicting David's sin and his forgiveness; the theological implications are far too great to ignore. Acknowledgement of the controversial aspects would categorically jeopardise prophetic infallibility, not only implicating the prophet in question but also casting doubt over every prophet, past and present. It would also raise issues regarding the prophet Muḥammad and the matter of his adopted son Zayd Ibn al-Ḥārithah divorcing his wife Zaynab Bint Jaḥsh for the prophet Muḥammad to marry her. In conclusion, upholding the dominant view on prophetic infallibility is far more significant than allowing the appropriation of problematic narratives.

Al-Suyūṭī's contribution is restricted to merely mentioning the same narratives listed by the other exegetes regarding David seeing the woman, his infatuation with her, ordering Uriah's death and so forth. He decidedly chooses not to pursue any discussion as the other exegetes have done, leaving the issue relatively untouched. Al-Suyūṭī's contribution does not clearly outline his actual position, possibly alluding to his acceptance of the narrations to provide details, otherwise unavailable to Muslim exegetes. This would be their sole function.

True to his position, Ibn Kathīr does not abandon his monovalent position, mentioning scholars have related many narratives on David's tribulation, hinting at al-Suyūtī and al-Ṭabarī, summarily dismissing them as *Isrā'īliyyāt*, and categorically declares no tradition is established on the authority of any recognised authority.[857] However, he mentions the narration cited by al-Qurṭubī traced to Ibn Abī Hātim and announces it has no sound chain of transmission, identifying weak narrators as the cause of rejection. He concludes that we need to leave the detailed understanding of the verse to God and suffice with the Qur'ānic recitation of the verse. He views acceptance of this narration, irrespective of the reason, as setting a dangerous precedent as it allows people to justify polyvalence through whatever means they see fit, even if it means citing weak traditions. This is a contributory factor to his inflexible and monovalent approach.

The final Sunni exegete al-Rāzī addresses this issue identifying three opinions regarding the narrative of David, the first ascribes a major sin to him, the second identifies it to be a minor sin, and the last outright rejects the previous two. The first group of Scholars believe David sinned and their argument

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[856] Ibid, p. 176.

[857] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, xii, pp. 81-82.

can be summarised in the following manner. They claim David fell in love with Uriah's wife, and decided Uriah was an obstacle that needed to be removed, thus after multiple attempts managed to have Uriah killed, subsequently marrying his wife. God sent two angels in the form of litigants to make him understand the error of his ways. Through their dispute and his passing judgment regarding their case, David realises his error and repents.[858]

Al-Rāzī proceeds to analyse the position, but puts his stamp of monovalence on the issue almost immediately, citing why he rejects this belief by presenting two opinions. Firstly, if you ascribe such accusations to a normal sinful person, even if they are the worst of people, that individual would furiously object to such accusations and exonerate himself or herself, more than likely cursing those who would attribute such things to them. Consequently, how could an intelligent person ascribe such things to someone innocent like a prophet and expect that to be accepted? Secondly, killing a person intentionally is unacceptable for a normal person, how is this permitted for a prophet?

Al-Rāzī next turns his focus to the second group of scholars stating the outcome of their position amounts to two things, plotting the murder of a believer and coveting another man's wife. The first is explicitly prohibited within the Qur'ān, and the second is the prophet Muḥammad's *Ḥadīth* categorically forbids a believer to harm another believer.[859] This concludes with the dismissal of the opinion that David sinned.

The third group of scholars use a different approach to dismiss the accusations against David. Using the Qur'ānic text itself, they argue the attributes bestowed upon David prior to the mention of the litigation and the attributes bestowed upon him after the incident defy negative portrayal of him. Based on such glowing attributes, how is it possible David could commit such heinous acts?

After elaborating on the ten exemplary attributes of David mentioned in the verses, before the incident with the litigants, al-Rāzī mentions a further ten attributes mentioned after. He claims these attributes prove the narratives false and he does not stop there, highlighting the inclusion of such narrations is problematic, leading to questions on the justification of such a move. He does not hesitate to address the issue.

Upon completing his analysis and citing the multiple reasons explaining why the narratives are unacceptable, al-Rāzī stresses the story of David's alleged indiscretion is false. He decides to tackle

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[858] Al-Rāzī, *Mafatīḥ al-Ghayb/al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, xxvi, p. 189.

[859] Ibid.

Al-Bukhārī, Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, ḥadīth 6119, viii, pp. 84-85.

the question of why such narratives were included in both t*afsīr* and *Ḥadīth* texts. He provides a detailed answer that addresses the issue without the normal polemical dismissal, He explains if anyone questions why numerous scholars of *tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* narrated the story despite the controversy surrounding it then the accurate answer is as follows.

Where pieces of evidence conflict and you have a situation of indisputable evidence (*Khabr Mutawāṭir*) on one side conflicting with a solitary report (*Khabr Wāḥid*), reverting to the indisputable evidence is preferred (*Awlā*).[860] Added to this is the argument that innocence is the default position of prophets, therefore anytime evidence of prohibition and permissibility conflict, evidence of prohibition takes precedence. Our (Sunni) theological position dictates we must display caution. Furthermore, if the story is true and we do not disseminate it, there is no accountability on the Day of Judgement; nevertheless, if it is false and we circulate it, we will suffer harsh punishment.

Al-Rāzī seals his response by citing the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet Muḥammad "When you know something clear as the bright sun, testify to it." Here we have no certainty regarding the authenticity of the controversial narrations; on the contrary, evidence suggests we refuse to acknowledge their authenticity. He offers an excuse on behalf of those who incorporated the narratives in their respective works he says it is evident that not all exegetes agree upon the narratives, but the authoritative (*muḥaqqiqūn*) scholars have rejected them.

Al-Rāzī does not entirely abandon those who included the narrations, offering them a solution to the issue if they somewhat relent on their stance if it involves attributing a major sin to David. He argues in the best-case scenario for those scholars the incident is a minor sin and not major in the Jewish Law in David's time because David proposed to her after Uriah had already proposed. He dismisses the claim David gazed upon the naked woman bathing and his inclination to her was a natural reaction, something a person bears no accountability for.[861] It was the practice of David's people if they were interested in a man's wife that they would ask him to divorce her. Al-Rāzī shows his discontent with this last point but allows it stating even though this was permissible in the light of their law, it was still beneath the dignity of a prophet's status.

The third and final opinion is direct; nothing should be attributed to David, minor or major, the sole option is to attribute only high praise to him. The only way to reconcile this situation is to believe that a completely different narration exists where a group of people attempted to assassinate David; they traversed the walls and found him with a company of people who stopped them. The two litigants

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[860] Ibid, *Mafatīḥ al-Ghayb/al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, p. 192.

[861] Ibid.

lied, claiming they had a dispute they needed to settle. In truth, there is nothing in the Qur'ān to suggest any sin can be attributed to David.

In conclusion, despite producing three opinions, there is little room for confusion as to al-Rāzī's belief concerning the correct opinion. However, al-Rāzī does mention there is a divide amongst the exegetes and scholars of other Islamic sciences, many accepting the narrations to provide an alternative reading, with the belief it does not compromise prophetic infallibility. Yet, he does not believe there is merit to them and warns people against accepting them, ultimately rejecting the narratives and advocating for the sole opinion he argues is worthy of the status accorded to prophets.[862]

True to his reputation, Ibn Kathīr adopts the strictest of approaches, purely monovalent, to such a degree that he completely dismisses all and any narratives. He openly displays his disdain for them and those who quote them, stating exegetes have mentioned narratives regarding the incident in the verse, with the majority of them borrowed from *Isrā'īliyyāt*. He declares the chains of narration are weak and that the best recourse in this situation is to recite the narrative within the Qur'ān and leave the knowledge contained within it to God alone the Qur'ān is the truth and the detail it contains is the truth.[863]

Ibn Kathīr denies any benefits associated with narratives since they directly contend with theological beliefs, something he stresses Muslims cannot compromise. In this aspect, he is more aligned with al-Zamakhsharī and the Shī'ī scholars than the Sunni exegetes, comfortable with the monovalent approach, deeming it to be the sole approach.

6.3.1.2 Mu'tazila *Tafsīr*

The sole representative of the Mu'tazila, al-Zamakhsharī's approach to these narratives curiously differs from the previous case study. It is entirely possible he also anticipates the difficulty of the case and rather than resort to the narratives employed by exegetes such as al-Ṭabarī, he decides to pre-emptively explain David's actions. Al-Zamakhsharī begins by explaining the practice of David's people, that if a man found another man's wife attractive he would ask him to divorce his wife and marry her. This practice was a charitable act amongst the Children of Israel that they made a common practice. A similar is practise recorded for the Muslims when they migrated to Madinah and the Anṣār, if they had more than one wife showed similar sentiment towards the Muhājir, offering to divorce

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[862] Ibid, p. 163.

[863] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, xii, p. 81-82.

one wife for the Muhājir to marry.[864] Al-Zamakhsharī does not attempt to defend David's actions, going as far as admitting there is consensus that he saw the wife of Uriah and fell in love with her. David also acts upon his impulse and sends a request to Uriah to divorce her and Uriah is unable to refuse the request so he decides to divorce her. David then married her and she became the mother of Solomon. There is no mention of David having Uriah killed.

Al-Zamakhsharī then mentions David's reprimand by God who said, "In light of your great status, your elevated position and your numerous wives, it was unworthy of you to ask another man, who only had one wife, to divorce her. You needed to control your desires and show restraint in the face of tribulation."[865] He adds a second report that "Uriah proposed to her first, followed by David, whose actual sin was that he proposed to her after another had. It is clear he plays it safe and does everything to avoid contravening the *Uṣūl al-Khamsah*.

Al-Zamakhsharī outright dismisses the narratives that mention David's desire to ascend the heights of his ancestors, including the narrative of Wahb Ibn Munabbih. He argues any discussion and mention of such things is not only reprehensible, as their narrators are certain (questionable) individuals, hinting at Wahb Ibn Munabbih, but this involves acts deemed beyond permissible for prophets. Instead, he decides to support his position with a narration from Sa'īd Ibn al-Musayyib and Ḥārith al-A'war from 'Alī Ibn Abī Ṭālib, "Whoever narrates to you the incident of David from the narratives of the storytellers, he should be lashed one hundred and sixty times. This is the punishment for accusations against the prophets."[866] He clearly has no sympathy for those who utilise such narrations, discouraging the practise by clearly advocating for a monovalent reading under the threat of punishment.

Al-Zamakhsharī's willingness to list the narratives mentioning the controversial details, subsequently dismissing them is clearly to defend his school and to expose those who allowed such narratives. In his opinion, there is nothing salvageable from the narratives and the open attack on prophetic infallibility is reprehensible.

Furthermore, he documents a similar incident occurring in the presence of the caliph Umar Ibn 'Abd al-Azīz. A virtuous scholar (unidentified) was present at court when a person falsely related the incident of David. The scholar stated if the narrative is based upon what is in the Qur'ān, then it is not permitted for us to ignore it; otherwise, it is sacrilege to speak. However, if it is as you have

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[864] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 3780, v, p. 80.

[865] Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, v, p. 252.

[866] Ibid, p. 253.

mentioned and God has concealed this information regarding his prophet, then you should not be exposing it. Umar Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz stated, “Hearing this answer is more beloved to me than the rising of the sun.” The incident acts as a warning for anyone thinking negatively about the prophets.

Al-Zamakhsharī advocates for a monovalent reading of the situation, passionately arguing the only explanation possible here is the incident is identified as a mere request by David to the husband asking him to divorce his wife and nothing further. Otherwise, why is there no explicit mention of the incident in the Qur’ān? The only acceptable explanation is that reprimanding implicitly resonates better within the soul, is more penetrative within the heart, and is more effective in highlighting an error. He points out such behaviour is displayed by the wise demonstrating how they advise a child when the child does something reprehensible, they advise them subtly without being obvious.[867]

The objective of the narration is to offer hope to people who find themselves in a similar position to the character in the story. This will show greater chastisement, but at the same time maintain a sense of decorum between the chastiser and chastised. Paradoxically, he accepts reprimand for prophets,

Al-Zamakhsharī continues with narratives dealing with David’s admonishment in the form of two litigants. He mentions that God sent two angels to David in human form, seeking an audience with him. They learnt it was David’s day of worship and the guards prohibited them from entering, so they scaled the walls and entered. He did not sense them until they were seated in front of him. Al-Zamakhsharī suggests the cause as presenting a delicate issue in a dignified manner so that David’s matter is addressed through the argument between the brothers, meanwhile safeguarding a prophet’s dignity. The issue of the brother with ninety-nine ewes trying to usurp his brother’s single ewe is compared to David desiring Uriah’s wife.[868]

In this case, al-Zamakhsharī borrows from al-Ṭabarī, despite his harsh criticism of him, that David realised his mistake and fell into prostration, remaining there for forty days, only raising when he had to offer his prayers. His excessive weeping caused vegetation to grow where his tears fell and the water he drank would be two-thirds tears, seeking God’s forgiveness until he ended at death’s door.[869] This kept him away from his kingdom, allowing his son Īshā to try to usurp David’s kingdom. When God forgave David, he waged war against his son and defeated him.[870] He concludes David’s only

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[867] Ibid.

[868] Ibid, p. 255.

[869] Ibid, p. 260.

[870] Ibid, p. 261.

issue was being reproached for his acceptance of one side of the story as opposed to listening to both sides.[871]

Although al-Zamakhsharī does not abandon the Mu'tazila view, he relaxes his strict approach, demonstrated in the first case, by allowing narrations. The only time he accepts narratives is when he believes they support his position and provide details that explain David's tribulation, but at the same time, he uses his position to defend David.

6.3.1.3 Shī'ī *Tafsīr*

The Shī'ī scholarship displayed a predominantly monovalent approach, exhibiting the influence of the Mu'tazila. This is clear in al-Ṭabrisī's approach when he adopts a similar approach to the aforementioned exegetes, selecting to present linguistic discussions, before addressing the meaning of the verses, where after God had bestowed wisdom and the discernment of speech upon David, David followed that with the incident in question.[872] As an adherent of the *Ithnā 'Ashariyyah* (Twelvers), al-Ṭabrisī avoids any mention of the narratives, focusing instead on the discussion surrounding the repentance of David, questioning the cause. He proposes some scholars believe David attained repentance through complete devotion and submission to God, through humility in worship and prostration to God, just as God had mentioned about Abraham "And the one who, upon Whom I pin my hopes, will forgive me my mistakes on the Day of Judgement."[873] Al-Ṭabrisī intentionally decides to exclude any mention of the controversy surrounding David's predicament.

His determined approach to the exclusion of any controversy displays the hallmark of the monovalent approach, supported by the Shī'ī theological view on prophetic infallibility. As for his opinion regarding "So We forgave him that"[874], al-Ṭabrisī says God accepted it from him and acknowledged it. He argues that the words 'seeking forgiveness' and 'repentance' in the verse equated to acceptance. The verse 'We forgave him' is a declaration from one who exonerates the prophets from all sins.

The *Imāmīyyah* and other denominations who permit minor sins for prophets claim David's repentance was for a minor sin he committed, and support their argument with various opinions.

1. According to al-Jubbah, Uriah proposed to a woman, whose family were in favour of her marriage to him, but David heard of this he subsequently proposed to her. The woman's family arranged

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[871] Ibid.

[872] Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān li-'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, viii, p. 269.

[873] Q26;82.

[874] Q38:25.

her marriage to David, overlooking Uriah for which David was reprimanded upon his desire to pursue worldly distractions.

2. David sent Uriah on a mission resulting in his death, for which David showed no concern because he felt a desire towards his wife. God reprimands David for this in the form of two angels assuming human form and acting as litigants.

3. In their law, whenever a man died and left a widow behind, his guardians had the most right over her in terms of marriage. When Uriah was killed, David proposed to his wife, and David's might and rank discouraged her guardians from proposing. David was reprimanded for this.

4. David was engrossed in worship when a man and woman came to him to judge between them. David looked at the woman to identify her, a look legally permitted, but found himself attracted to her naturally. After he judged their issue, he returned to his worship. His mind was still preoccupied by her during his prayer and he was reprimanded for that.

5. God reprimands David for making a hasty judgement in a dispute before all pieces of evidence had been presented, a fundamental prerequisite. Instead, he listened to the claim of one litigant without enquiring from the other, something he had not done before. It was the unusual timing of the judgement that caused him to forget and resulted in the decision.

Al-Ṭabrisī contends with the details in David's narrative that highlight he excelled in his prayers and aspired to reach the heights attained by his predecessors, Abraham, Moses, and other prophets. These details leave no doubt regarding the fallacy of the incident attributed to David as acceptance of such a narrative casts doubt over God's justice. How is it that prophets of God, trustees of God's revelation and his ambassadors, would be guilty of a heinous act like adultery that would render their testimony void? An incident of this magnitude would repulse people from the prophets, causing people to reject them. Unquestionably, the prophets were far superior.[875]

Al-Ṭabrisī concludes his arguments with a narration from 'Alī "If I encounter anyone who believes David married Uriah's wife, I will have him lashed (eighty times) twice, once for contempt of prophethood and once for contempt for Islam.[876] He clearly shows the narratives hold no value for him and only a monovalent approach is viable as nothing supersedes prophetic infallibility. His approach identifies the influence of al-Zamakhsharī and the Mu'tazila doctrine upon the Shī'ī approach. Finally, he suggests an allegorical reading of certain parts of the incident concerning the

[875] Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān li-'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, viii, p. 270.

[876] Ibid.

litigants. He claims, "It is possible the two disputants were humans, and the ewes were literal and not figurative, David was scared because they suddenly appeared, against normal practice, and subsequently he was reprimanded because he judged unfairly against the accused before he was asked.

Breaking from the traditional model of Shī'ī *tafsīr*, where exegetes solely relied on *Ḥadīth*, al-Ṭūsī is the first to produce a complete commentary on the Qur'ān, creating the template for future exegetes. Not only did he incorporate the opinions of other Shī'ī scholars, but he also set the precedent for including Sunni scholars, decidedly moving towards a polyvalent approach. His exegetical approach mirrored the Sunni model by including multi-layered discussion on all aspects of the Qur'ān.[877]

Similar to al-Ṭabrisī, al-Ṭūsī also employs allusion in his explanation, arguing the five verses portray God's address to his prophet encapsulated in a question form.[878] The objective is to inform the reader of David's story and his judgement of two litigants, with a particular focus on the absence of action on behalf of David. Al-Ṭūsī approach differs from that of the previous exegetes, choosing to engage in the discussion surrounding the context of the two litigants and the ninety-nine ewes.[879]

Furthermore, al-Ṭūsī confidently employs narrations from Wahb Ibn Munabbih and unlike the previous Shī'ī scholars, he does not hesitate to cite Wahb, whom some Sunni exegetes avoid due to his affinity to Jewish narrations. Wahb Ibn Munabbih states the litigants were not biological brothers, but rather brothers in faith, further claiming the majority of exegetes believe there is *kināyah* (allusion) here of the ninety-nine ewes to David's wives.

Not content with this answer, al-Ṭūsī then cites Abū Muslim Muḥammad Ibn Baḥr al-Isfahānī, who completely dismisses the aforementioned opinions, arguing the ewes were ewes and nothing more, there is no allusion here. Al-Ṭūsī concludes the discussion by stating the litigants were humans and not angels and there were no ewes. David's reason for being startled by them was simple; they appeared suddenly, at an unexpected time, when he would not normally meet people. This is clear, but the exegetes oppose this.[880]

After listing numerous narratives in an attempt to portray the incident in a clearer light, al-Ṭūsī then turns his attention to the main crux of the narratives, the reason for David's admonishment. He refuses

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[877] He included pre-Islamic Arabic literature, provided grammatical discussion on difficult words of the Qur'ān, discussed variant recitations, fiqh, theology, and rhetoric in verses of the Qur'an.

[878] Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Ṭibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, viii, p. 551.

[879] Ibid, p. 552.

[880] Ibid.

to acknowledge an alternative reading of the situation, i.e. the alleged affair with Bathsheba and states, "Our scholars have said the error lay in David deciding the litigant had oppressed, when in fact he had not asked him for his statement. Etiquettes of Judicial rulings (*qaḍā*) dictate that he should not have passed judgement nor made a statement until he heard from the defendant too, therefore his actions amounted to *tark al-nudb* (relinquishment of a recommended act).[881] He makes his position abundantly clear that he is unprepared to acknowledge any form of sin. Al-Ṭūsī does include that other scholars have disagreed with his stance and claimed David's act amounted to a minor sin, but remains unaffected in his stance.

Al-Ṭūsī's acceptance of *tark al-nudb* (relinquishment of recommended acts) can be viewed as his attempt to protect and humanise the prophets, by accepting them without compromising their status. Yet, in doing this, he has conflicted with al-Ṭabrisī by demonstrating a slightly lenient approach without outright rejection regardless of theology. On the matter of David's forgiveness, al-Ṭūsī believes God forgave him for the minor indiscretion.

He displays an openness to accepting the opinion presented by other scholars that David sought forgiveness for proposing after Uriah had done so already and, therefore received a reprimand because prophets are supposed to be innocent of such acts, even though it is *mubāḥ* (permissible) act, purely on the basis that it would drive people away from them.

Al-Ṭūsī concludes the discussion by declaring the best position to adopt in this particular case is to believe David avoided a *mandūb* (recommended) act regarding a judicial decision (*qaḍā*). The rest of the opinions are unworthy of being attributed to prophets because they comprise of acts that they should be exonerated from, acts that would repel normal people. He attacks all those who accept such a narrative by saying, "The narration related by ignorant people who believe David lusted after the wife or Uriah, then commanded Uriah to go and fight until he was killed, is false and fabricated. It should be treated as a *khabr al-wāḥid* (solitary report) that has no truth; moreover, it is impermissible to accept *khabr al-wāḥid*, particularly regarding the prophets.

The narrative contains actions that cannot be accepted by a normal person, much less prophets and God has protected prophets from such indiscretion by granting them an exalted position. Al-Ṭūsī argues how could God choose a person who lusts after his own people's wives and dares to have them killed unjustly. This is not possible for a prophet, and only a person who has no idea or belief

[881] Ibid, p. 553.

regarding the rank of prophets, which God bestowed upon them would do such a thing.[882] He concludes by relating the same narration from ʻAlī that al-Ṭabrisī presented.[883]

6.4 Third Case Study - The Narrative of Solomon

The third case study focuses on Solomon, the son of David and the Prophet King. Renowned for his wisdom and kingdom, he ranks only second to David amongst the Israelite kings and another prophet who underwent tribulation from God. Despite this, Jewish tradition has struggled with a dual portrayal of Solomon, torn between the first person to establish the Temple of Jerusalem, and an idolatrous sinner. Keiter claims throughout history, Jewish literature has had to contend with Solomon's mixed legacy, either ignoring difficult aspects of his story or apologising for his conduct. Unapologetically, she accuses the Tanakh of presenting a sterilised version of his narrative, despite Solomon evoking both criticism and apology, with Jewish sources choosing to shield him.[884]

Alternatively, Biblical tradition presents him as a sage, recognising his legendary wisdom, acknowledging him as an almighty ruler of the kingdom inherited from his father David, and for being one of the greatest Israelite kings. The Biblical portrayal of Solomon focuses considerably on his accomplishments and consolidation of power and similar to the previous two case studies analysed, Solomon achieved universal status as a figure of power and wisdom, yet his story is also marred by controversy and he does not fare any better than David and Joseph.

This representation creates conflict with an initial positive portrayal of Solomon that soon becomes negative. To begin with, Solomon's lineage is questionable due to David and Bathsheba's infidelity, which I highlighted in the previous case study. This ultimately contributes to his ascension to the throne, albeit through his mother's guile, manoeuvring, and Solomon's elimination of any competition.[885] The questionable representation continues after his ascension to the throne, depicting what is essentially a good man turning bad and then reforming himself to become good, the ultimate redemption story.

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[882] Ibid, p.554.

[883] Ibid.

[884] Keiter, Sheila Tuller, *The Jewish Understanding of the Scriptural Solomon Narrative: Examining Biblical, Classical Rabbinic, and Major Medieval Responses* (Los Angeles, University of California, published doctoral thesis, 2018), pp. ii–iii.

[885] Sarkio, Pekka, *Solomon in History and Tradition*, The figure of Solomon in Jewish Christian an Islamic Tradition King, Sage and Architect, (Leiden, Brill, 2013), p53-55.

Ginzberg, Louis, *Legends of the Jews*, (Philadelphia, USA, The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), ii, p. 945.

The only aspects of Solomon's portrayal comparable to that of the Qur'ān, are in terms of his wisdom, bravery, and generosity, with the difference reflected in the accusation of sinning, causing his downfall. Verheyden argues Solomon fared better in Christian writings, especially later ones than he did in Jewish texts.[886] Interestingly, the subject of Solomon's narrative changes from the previous two case studies from accusations of adultery to accusations of polytheism, hypersexuality and mistrust of God.

Moreover, the Biblical details regarding Solomon are mainly taken from the 'First Book of Kings' where David is identified as Solomon's father and Bathsheba as his mother. Biblical narratives depict Bathsheba, in collusion with the prophet Nathan, as manoeuvring David into appointing Solomon as king after his death.[887] This depiction in itself raises multiple questions, how was Bathsheba able to deceive David? How was David so weak and gullible to fall for the scheme? Furthermore, Nathan, whom God appoints to show David the error of his way, was complicit in the deceit, amongst other troubling issues.

Langer breaks Solomon's negative portrayal in the Biblical texts and sees him as having committed three sins, his love of horses leading him to accumulate too many, amassing too much property and having a fascination with too many women.[888] The gravest of these is the last, which is mentioned in 1 Kings 11:1, where it states "King Solomon loved many foreign women besides the daughter of Pharaoh, from nations with which the LORD had forbidden the Israelites to intermarry, because he said, they will turn your hearts to their Gods."

Langer highlights a mixed reception amongst the Rabbis to Solomon's actions; some believe Solomon married foreign women to turn them to his Lord, therefore an act of obedience to the Lord, whereas others believe he was seduced by the women to sin and guilty of sexual deviance, depicting him as a weak individual, similar to his father. Solomon is reputed to have had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, which explains why certain people struggled with his character, going as far as accusing him of being hypersexual.[889] The accusations also include his love for foreign women, including princesses like the pharaoh's daughter, who is guilty of enticing Solomon to practise idolatry. Solomon's other wives are also accused of turning his heart away from God to other

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[886] Verheyden, Joseph (2013), *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Tradition*, Themes in Biblical Narrative Jewish and Christian Traditions, (Leiden, Brill, 2013), p.4.

[887] 1 Kings, 1.1-38.

[888] Langer, Gerhard, *Solomon in Rabbinic Literature,* The Figure of Solomon in Jewish Christian and Islamic Tradition: King, Sage, and Architect, ed. by Joseph Verheyden, (Leiden, Brill, 2013), p. 130.

[889] 1 Kings 11:3.

deities[890], resulting in him building temples to honour them, and incurring divine wrath of God, who removed tribes of Israel from his rule.[891]

In conclusion, in the Jewish and Christian texts, Solomon is characterised as a power-hungry monarch, who systematically eliminated his opponents to establish his kingdom, who had multiple wives and concubines who resorted to polytheism, with his support, yet despite this, he was renowned for his wisdom, and was deemed wiser than all the sages of Israel.[892] He ruled successfully for many years and his reign proved prosperous until the northern tribes rebelled and accused Solomon of favouring his tribe, concluding in the tribes splitting and the kingdom ending after his death.[893] The Bible concludes with a chapter titled 'The Errors of Solomon' where the image of a perfect king is shattered by a catalogue of errors depicting his violation of God's covenant and promise of an eternal Davidic dynasty.

In contrast, Islamic tradition does not struggle to reconcile with Solomon's character, despite the limited details in the Qur'ān. Solomon is portrayed as a great prophet, the son of a great prophet, and a mighty king who inherits a kingdom unsurpassed by anyone. Furthermore, he is renowned for his legendary wisdom, which the Qur'ān openly declares that he displayed from a very young age.[894] Solomon's portrayal is arguably positive in the Qur'ān, with certain verses mentioning vague incidents that do not provide the reader with detail that would allow the reader to determine the nature of the portrayal.

Solomon receives generous coverage in the Qur'ān with seventeen mentions, charting different events that took place at various stages of his life, all of which highlight his wisdom, power, and tests, culminating with his death. This is no different to the antecedent texts, where Solomon receives praise for his wisdom mentioned in Q21:78. As a young child, he assists his father in settling a dispute between two men concerning the destruction of crops belonging to one individual caused by the animals of the other. The next time the Qur'ān mentions Solomon he inherits David's wisdom and kingdom and receives further blessings, gaining the ability to talk to animals[895]and control the devil,

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[890] Sarkio, *Solomon in History and Tradition*, p. 54-55.

[891] Ibid, 1 Kings 11:4-9-13, Q3:0-34.

[892] First Kings, 2.1-46, p. 481.

[893] Ibid, 12.1-24, p. 498-99.

[894] Q27:15.

[895] Q27:16.

the wind[896] and other elements.[897] His encounter with the Queen of Sheba displays the recognition of his power and might by other rulers of his time, which transcended that of other humans, allowing him to command the devil to carry out his commands.[898] The Qur'ān defends Solomon against accusations of disbelief levelled against him, dismissing charges of practising magic, asserting the devils were responsible for this, teaching the people.[899]

Our case study focuses on Q34:38, where there is an allusion to Solomon's tribulation in the form of a body placed on his throne.[900] Excluding the allusion, the verse does not mention any other detail, leaving the reader in suspense, wondering about the details of his tribulation. In this respect, Solomon shares the fate of Joseph and David, all recipients of divine tests to prove their worthiness of the positions of power granted to them.

Additionally, Islamic tradition portrays Solomon as one of only four individuals to have ruled the world. Two are non-believers, Nebuchadnezzar and Nimrod, two are believers, Solomon, and Alexander, and only Solomon has the privilege of being a prophet and king.[901] This merit alone places Solomon on a unique pedestal amongst the prophets, as he is the sole person to achieve such an accomplishment.

The Qur'ān presents three major incidents from Solomon's life, the first is when David hears the case of two litigants and permits Solomon to sit alongside him, concluding with David adopting Solomon's recommendation. The second incident mentions Solomon inheriting the mantle of David, as king and prophet and praying to God for a kingdom unlike any granted to those before him and those to come after him. God answers his prayer and blesses him with power over the animals, the elements and

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[896] Q21:81, Q34:12.

[897] Q27:16.

[898] Q27:23-44.

[899] Q2:102.

[900] The prophet Muḥammad stated, "I am the closest of all prophets to Jesus, the son or Mary, and all the prophets are paternal brothers; their mothers are different, but their faith is one."

Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 3443, iv, p.853.

Q38:34.

[901] Walker, J, Fenton, P, 'Sulayman B. Dawud', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ix, pp. 822-24.

Langer, Gerhard, *Solomon in Rabbinic Literature*, The figure of Solomon in Jewish Christian an Islamic Tradition King, Sage and Architect, pp. 129-131.

Solomon is depicted in rabbinic literature as ruler of the world, although there is no mention of the other three.

even the devils.[902] The third story concerns Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, where the Hoopoe bird reports to Solomon of a queen who governs a nation of people who worshipped the sun and the narrative outlines the interaction between Solomon and the queen. In summary, the Qur'ān portrays Solomon as an intelligent, wise, and devout prophet king whose wisdom and leadership are a model for the prophet Muḥammad.

This case study explores the incident mentioned in Q38:34-37 "And We certainly tried Solomon and placed on his throne a body; then he returned. He said, "My Lord, forgive me and grant me a kingdom such as will not belong to anyone after me. Indeed, You are the Bestower." The verse does not provide a detailed and coherent narrative of Solomon's tribulation, rather it alludes to an incident where God tests Solomon by placing a body on his throne, upon which he seeks God's forgiveness and then asks for a kingdom unrivalled by anyone. This detail provides no context for the tribulation and confuses the reader further when Solomon asks for forgiveness, immediately followed by a request for forgiveness and a kingdom unrivalled by any other. This has led the exegetes to engage with the verse and attempt to provide the missing detail to clear up the mystery surrounding Solomon's tribulation.

6.4.1 Sunni *Tafsīr*

From the Sunni school, the first to address this is al-Ṭabarī, who is uncharacteristically quiet in his approach to this verse, varying from his previous methodology. He decides not to engage with the same critical approach as before, content with merely listing narratives, and in particular focusing on one. The extent of his focus is the involvement of a devil and the loss of Solomon's ring of power.

Al-Ṭabarī is content to offer insight into the verse, proposing the tribulation involved a devil assuming Solomon's form and taking his rule. He highlights there is debate regarding the devil's name, whether it was *Sakhr*, *Āṣaf*, *Āṣur* or *Ḥabqīq*, who appeared in human form and sat upon Solomon's throne.[903] He supports his opinion with a quote from Ibn 'Abbās, corroborating it was a devil called *Sakhr* who took Solomon's form and sat on his throne.[904] In a separate narration, also from Ibn 'Abbās, it states that the body was a devil to whom Solomon had entrusted his ring, resulting in the devil throwing Solomon's ring into the sea. Solomon's power and control over his kingdom lay in his ring.[905] This is the extent of his discussion on this verse, which conflicts with his earlier approach where he engages with the verse to a greater degree, not only analysing the verse, but examining the narratives and

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[902] Q27:15-19.

[903] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl 'Āy al-Qur'ān*, xx, p. 87.

[904] Ibid, p. 88.

[905] Ibid.

analysing them, arguing where he feels the opinion is questionable, or he feels an alternative line of approach is available. Unusually, he does not explicitly mention anything remotely associated with *Isrā'īliyyāt*.

Al-Ṭabarī continues with the same theme and narrates from Mujāhid presenting an alternative explanation to the devil narrative. Mujāhid claims Solomon asked the devil called *Āṣaf* how he tested people and the devil in return requested Solomon to grant him his ring to demonstrate to him. When Solomon did as asked the devil threw it into the sea causing Solomon to lose his kingdom. *Āṣaf* then took Solomon's place on his throne ruling over the people, but God denied him control over Solomon's women. The people did not recognise Solomon and denied him when he asked to identify himself or made any request, until one day a woman gave him a fish in which he discovered his ring, and helped restore his power and kingdom.[906]

Both sets of narratives focus on a devil displacing Solomon and assuming his position and power, except for control over his wives, which God did not permit. The notion of God allowing a devil to assume the prophet's form and role is surprising and questionable to Muslim scholarship as it would affect the prophet's representation of God and his rule and additionally raise serious questions about Islamic prophetology, he does not comment on this.[907]

Al-Ṭabarī then adds a second plausible reason for the devil assuming Solomon's position, he presents a narration from al-Suddī that a devil sat on his throne for forty days, and this was Solomon's test. The cause of this tribulation is Solomon acceding to his wife's request to pass judgment in favour of her brother.[908] The devil is identified as *Ḥabqīq*, who was punished by being placed into an iron chest,

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[906] Ibid, p. 89.

[907] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ix, p. 93.

The Prophet Muḥammad's ḥadīth negates this in relation to him, so reasonably extend to other prophets as their roles were divine. The prophet Muḥammad said, "Whoever has seen me in a dream, then no doubt, he has seen me, for Satan cannot imitate my shape.

[908] One of Solomon's hundred wives named Jarādah, his favoured and trusted wife, the only one to whom he would entrust his ring when he had visit the bathroom. One day she came to Solomon and informed him her brother had a dispute with someone and if they came to Solomon, he was to judge in her brother's favour. He agreed to her request but did not fulfil his promise, so he was tested. He handed her his ring when he entered the bathroom, and a devil took his place. He asked her for Solomon's ring and she gave it to him. When Solomon emerged from the bathroom, he asked for the ring and she informed him she had already given it to him. Solomon disappeared and the devil ruled in his place for forty days. The scholars and leaders rejected his decisions and came to his wives complaining Solomon had lost his mind and they rejected his authority.

His wives became upset by this and went to find him and surrounding him. They spread out and began to recite the Torah. He flew in front of them and landed on a bench, with his ring. Then he flew again until he flew over the sea and his ring fell into the sea, which a sea mammal swallowed. Solomon remained in the same state until a fisherman discovered him extremely hungry, asking for food. He informed them he was Solomon and one of the fishermen struck him, injuring him. Solomon washed the blood from his face on the shore whilst the other fishermen berated the one

which was locked, sealed, and finally thrown into the ocean where he is still there today and will remain there until the Day of Judgement.[909]

Not content with the two explanations, al-Ṭabarī offers a third reason for Solomon's tribulation, his obsession with horses The narration is reported on the authority of al-Ḥasan that the prophet Solomon became pre-occupied with a beautiful horse that was gifted to him, causing him to miss *'Aṣr* prayer, and resulting in Solomon's anger culminating in the sacrifice of the horse. Solomon's anger is justified because it was for the sake of God, not for personal reasons. This show of obedience results in God bestowing a superior horse on him and granting him command of the winds. Solomon could start at Eilat in the morning and would be at Qazwayn by midday, and then he would fly from Qazwayn and be at Kabul at night to rest.[910]

This is the extent of al-Ṭabarī's discussion regarding the tribulation of Solomon. He decides not to engage in discussion of the content, the connection to *Isrā'īliyyāt* or the implications of the message contained within the narrative. The extent of his polyvalence is limited to listing the different narratives related to the verse, nothing further. Unexpectedly, he does not engage in dismissing nor promoting any one particular narrative. Moreover, the narrative regarding Solomon's love for horses is documented in the Bible itself, including his worship, showing there is some Biblical influence, even though al-Ṭabarī does not mention this.

The next Sunni exegete introduced to the discussion is al-Qurṭubī, who true to his methodology maintains his position of listing and examining narrations, approaching the exegesis of this verse with more or less the same focus. He dives into the discussion with a quote sourced from al-Zamakhsharī that Solomon's tribulation took place twenty years after his ascension to the throne and his rule continued for twenty years after his tribulation.[911] He decides to identify the timeframe for the incident perhaps to highlight this was an incident that did not affect him in his role as king or prophet, possibly indicating the incident is not as serious as some may believe.

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who struck Solomon, telling him he had done a terrible thing. The fisherman protested that the man had claimed he was Solomon. He asked the other fishermen to give Solomon 2 rotten fish. When Solomon opened and began to wash them he discovered his ring in one of the fish and put it on. God restored his beauty and kingdom and the birds came to him, encircling him and the people realised he was Solomon.

The people came to him, apologising for their conduct and he dismissed their behaviour, re-taking his kingdom and had the devil brought to him. On that day God bestowed control over the winds and devils.

[909] Ibid, p. 92.

[910] Ibid, p. 94.

[911] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi' li Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, xviii, p. 198.

Al-Qurṭubī follows this detail by listing the various narratives, beginning with Solomon wanting to show favour to his wife's family member in a dispute. The remaining narrations portray Solomon hiding away from the people for three days to conquer an island nation and marrying their princess who ultimately engaged in polytheism without Solomon's knowledge. Once again citing al-Zamakhsharī as his source, he provides more detail for this than the other two narratives. Interestingly, he does not cite anyone from his school of thought, choosing to mention someone from a different school. He identifies Wahb Ibn Munabbih as the source for this narration.

Al-Qurṭubī's narratives focus on quotes from Ka'b al-Aḥbār and Wahb Ibn Munabbih, individuals accused of contributing to the large influx of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in the *tafsīr* tradition. Ka'b attributes the loss to Solomon having his horse executed, similar to what al-Ṭabarī mentioned. Additionally, Wahb cites the incident involving Solomon's wife engaging in polytheism in his home without his knowledge, resulting in him losing his kingdom and a devil assuming his form and sitting on his throne.

Al-Qurṭubī does not shy away from attributing narrations to al-Zamakhsharī as he has done at the beginning of his discussion, showing his influence upon Sunni scholarship. Interestingly, he does resort to this in the previous two case studies, displaying an uncharacteristic approach. It is plausible he did not need to mention them before because he had sufficient evidence from his scholarship, or he felt the need to engage support from another school that shared a strict approach to prophethood.

More surprising is al-Qurṭubī's inclusion of a narrative attributing the tribulation to Solomon being intimate with one of his wives during menstruation, a point the al-Ṭabarī has not raised, and marriage outside his faith, something God had forbidden. The Bible mentions Solomon's marriage to foreign women, which shows al-Qurṭubī, may have accessed Biblical material to list this cause, but he does not mention this nor allude to it.[912]

Despite listing all the aforementioned causes, al-Qurṭubī concludes by acknowledging God knows best the true cause. He chooses not to identify any particular narration as his chosen opinion nor does he present any debate on what is acceptable or not. He simply lists them and moves on to the discussion of the body placed on the throne, choosing to defend prophetic infallibility by saying the truth lies with God.

Regarding the body on the throne, al-Qurṭubī begins by identifying the majority of exegetes who believe it was a devil called *Sakhr*. Unlike al-Ṭabarī, he mentions narrations taken directly from Ibn

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[912] 1 Kings 11:1-13.

‘Abbās describing the devil and his prodigious power, taking the ring from Solomon’s wife, *Amīnah*, adding that Mujāhid claimed the devil took the ring directly from Solomon due to Solomon's enquiring about the manner of tribulation they subjected people to. He adds a final narration relating how Solomon was intimate with his wives when they were menstruating.[913]

In comparison to al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī decides to provide a detailed collection of narratives, showing greater interest in including in-depth details of everything. He cites narratives from ‘‘Alī, Jābir Ibn ‘Abd Allah, and others, all of them providing the same details, but decides to refute the claim the devil assumed the form of Solomon, saying this is an impossibility.

The third Sunni exegete al-Suyūtī illustrates his position as a *muḥaddith* (*Ḥadīth* scholar) and following in the footsteps of the previous exegetes, launches into presenting the same narrations they provided to explain the verse. The first narrative al-Suyūtī presents is transmitted by two scholars, Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī[914] and al-Ḥākim al-Nishapūrī[915] (who categorises it as a *Ṣaḥīḥ* narration) in which Solomon has to pass judgment for two disputing parties. Despite passing judgment fairly, he secretly desired to rule in favour of his wife’s relatives and God reprimanded him informing him he would face tribulation, but did not identify where and what form.

Al-Suyūtī offers a second reading of the situation, presenting a narration from al-Tirmidhī,[916] Ibn Jarīr (al-Ṭabarī), and Ibn Abī Ḥātim, all reputable *Ḥadīth* scholars, where it mentions when Solomon wanted to enter the bathroom he would entrust his wife *Jarādah* with his ring.[917] A devil assuming Solomon’s place tricked the wife, took his ring of power and assumed rule in his stead until Solomon recovered his ring.[918] Al-Suyūtī supports the exegesis of this verse with narratives, ascribed to *Ḥadīth* scholars recognised for their *Ḥadīth* mastery and acknowledged as authorities.

Interestingly, he decides to mention Ibn ‘Abbās’s acknowledgement that he had to rely on Ka’b al-Aḥbār to understand the exegesis of this verse. Ibn ‘Abbās explains he struggled with four verses of the Qur’ān until he asked Ka’b al-Aḥbār, one of those was the verse connected to Solomon’s tribulation. He explains that the devil took the ring of Solomon and threw it into the sea, which

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[913] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi’ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, xviii, p.200.

[914] Abū ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Bashīr al-Tirmidhī (d. 255/869).

[915] Abū ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allah al-Ḥākim al-Nishapūrī (d. 405/1014).

[916] Muḥammad ibn ‘Isā, (d. 279/892).

[917] ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Ḥātim Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Tamīmī al-Hanẓala al-Rāzī.

[918] Al-Qurṭubī, *Al-Jāmi’ li Aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, xviii, p. 179.

Solomon recovered when it emerged from a fish caught by a fisherman.[919] By providing this explanation, al-Suyūtī argues for the inclusion of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in *tafsīr* as an exegetical tool to help understand verses, that someone of his prodigious knowledge and authority struggled with. He set the precedent for their inclusion, but from authoritative persons alone.

Al-Suyūtī then adds a few other readings, Solomon being instructed to build a temple without the sound of construction tools whilst being built, a devil called *Āṣaf* throwing Solomon's ring into the sea, after asking to see it when Solomon asked him how devils tested people. In short, al-Suyūṭī's opinions coincide with those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī.[920] He does not mention any additional narratives, nor does he provide any critique of the details, he is content with merely listing narratives.

The fourth exegete is al-Rāzī, who decidedly deviates from the approach of the previous exegetes, avoiding engagement with the deeper issue and true to his methodology, is very open regarding the interpretation of this verse. He recognises two groups of scholars who have presented an explanation. He labels the first group as *Ahl al-Ḥashw wal Riwāyah* (a derogatory term used for people who relied upon unreliable narrations)[921], clearly showing his disdain for them and the *Ahl al-'Ilm wal Taḥqīq* (a term used for scholars and experts).[922]

Al-Rāzī opens with the first group who identified four narrations connected to the exegesis of this verse. The first narration relates to Solomon conquering a nation and marrying the princess after killing the king. She feels the loss of her father and asks him to commission a painting of him so she can see it every day and take comfort from it, but along with her servants, she soon begins to prostrate to it and as a result, Solomon receives a reprimand. Consequently, he loses his ring, suffers rejection by everybody and ends up on the streets until he recovers the ring.[923] The second narrative involves his wife worshipping the image and Solomon losing his ring, Āsif, his advisor, asks him to repent to God. The third narrative states Solomon enquired from the devil how people are tested and handed over his ring to the devil, leading to the loss of his kingdom. Al-Rāzī adds this group believe these narratives explain the tribulation mentioned in the verse. The fourth narrative states his tribulation

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[919] Ibid, p. 180.

[920] Ibid, p.p180-186.

[921] Halkin, A. S. *"The Ḥashwiyya."* Journal of the American Oriental Society, vol. 54, no. 1, 1934, pp. 1–28. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/594316. Accessed 29 Jan. 2024.

[922] Al-Rāzī, *Mafatīḥ al-Ghayb/al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, xxvi, p. 207.

[923] Ibid, p. 207-208.

was a result of his hiding away from his people for three days, leading to the loss of his kingdom and a devil sitting on his throne.[924]

Though he does not outright argue it, al-Rāzī alludes to his belief that the narrations are *Isrā'īliyyāt* and displays his allegiance with the second group, who distanced themselves from such narratives through various arguments. Firstly, they argued if the devil can adopt the shape and character of a prophet then trust in *Shariah* would cease. The people who saw Muḥammad, Jesus, Moses and other prophets were seeing devils in reality, who adopted the forms to mislead the people. Islam rejects this opinion unequivocally.

The second argument presented by al-Rāzī is that if such a thing were possible for devils, they would be able to treat all scholars and saints in the same manner, destroy them, their works and even their homes. When such an act is impermissible for scholars and saints, how will it be possible for the prophets?[925]

The third argument provided is God's wisdom and grace cannot allow a devil to have power over a prophet's wives, this is unacceptable.

The fourth and final argument questions how Solomon could permit his wife to worship an image, which amounts to disbelief, if he did not permit this then the woman is sinful so why does Solomon receive punishment for her mistake?

After presenting the rebuttal of the first group, al-Rāzī turns his attention to four explanations presented by the second group. The first explanation is Solomon had a child which the devils felt would be a threat to them and planned to kill the child. When Solomon found out he tried to protect him by concealing him in the clouds, but they discovered him and killed him. When the body fell on Solomon's throne, he realised he had done wrong and not trusted in God, therefore was reprimanded.

For the second explanation, they draw on a source unavailable to the previous group, a *Ḥadīth* from the prophet Muḥammad, which allows them to 'proverbially speaking, stamp their authority on the *de facto* position. The *Ḥadīth* states Solomon claimed he would pay a conjugal visit to all his seventy wives in one night and each one would bear him a child that would fight in the way of God, but forgot to seal that by invoking the name of God (saying 'God willing').[926]

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[924] Ibid, p. 208.

[925] Ibid.

[926] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 3424, iv, p.398.

The third explanation provided mentions Solomon is afflicted with a severe illness rendering him corpse-like, which was the extent of his tribulation. The Arabs describe an ill person as 'flesh and bones' or a 'body without a soul'. They used allusion here to explain his tribulation.

In the fourth explanation al-Rāzī presents, he argues it is plausible God caused fear in Solomon's heart or anticipation of tribulation, which caused him to become a lifeless body on the throne.

In all of his explanations, al-Rāzī does not engage with any of the narrations presented by al-Ṭabarī. However, he does not ignore them; rather he identifies them with questionable scholarship that rivals authoritative scholarship. He attempts to provide a balanced representation from both sides but ultimately chooses to side with those who dismiss them. Al-Rāzī fares better than al-Ṭabarī in this manner but interestingly is not as vocal in this case study in comparison to the previous two case studies.

Concerning Solomon seeking forgiveness, al-Rāzī argues this is due to Solomon selecting a less desirable act over a more desirable act, not due to sinning. Therefore, a person of great status is required to seek forgiveness, because their actions amount to the equivalent of a normal person sinning.[927] He attempts to establish this position by citing a *Ḥadīth* of the prophet cited from al-Bukhārī where the prophet Muḥammad expresses "By Allah! I seek Allah's forgiveness and repent to him more than seventy times a day."[928]

In summary, al-Rāzī dismisses the narratives presented by the first group, unwilling to acknowledge they had any value at all, simply because the implications of accepting them will affect Muslim prophetology, which in turn has an impact on the prophet Muḥammad's prophethood. Al-Rāzī's approach is monovalent in comparison to the previous exegetes; he identifies them as false and challenging prophetology, particularly prophetic infallibility. He is content with listing controversial narratives to dismiss them and does not believe they serve any other purpose.

The final Sunni exegete to contribute to this study is Ibn Kathīr and similar to al-Rāzī he remains faithful to his monovalent approach. He lists narrations from al-Suddī, Qatādah, Mujāhid and many others, but does not hold back in labelling the narratives *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Moreover, he does not hold back in identifying individuals he feels are responsible for recklessly narrating controversial narrations, openly asserts the worst of them are attributed to Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrated from Ibn 'Abbās regarding

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[927] Al-Rāzī, *Mafatīḥ al-Ghayb/al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, xxvi, p.209.

[928] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 6307, viii, p.180.

Solomon losing his kingdom when his ring was taken from his wife by a devil posing as Solomon.[929] This is despite Ibn Abī Ḥātim's status as a prolific *Ḥadīth* scholar; Ibn Kathīr seems to focus his criticism more towards him because he has a greater duty of care to narrate responsibly.

Again, it seems the desire to reject the narrations due to their origin supersedes the need to consider any implications for rejection. Ibn Kathīr believes safeguarding prophetic infallibility is essential and of greater importance, maybe believing the incident of the prophet Muḥammad forgetting to mention "If God wills" did not warrant concern as it did not contravene infallibility.

Despite this, Ibn Kathīr shows an analytical and critical approach, unlike the previous exegetes. He states the chains of transmission for the narrations can be traced back to Ibn 'Abbās and is certain they are taken from the People of the Book, but questions their authenticity.[930] He implies the narratives are from a group amongst the Israelites who deny the prophethood of Solomon; therefore, they accuse him of immorality. Again, he does not hesitate to denounce those whom he deems to have questionable motives or beliefs, providing evidence for his monovalent approach.

Ibn Kathīr believes this is the reason why the narrations contain unacceptable facts, especially the mention of Solomon's women. God protected the wives of Solomon from disgrace, in order to protect the reputation of his prophet. He criticises the fact that many of the earlier scholars narrated this detailed narrative, including the likes of Sa'īd Ibn al-Musayyib, Zayd Ibn Aslam and many more. Ibn Kathīr does not hold back and accuses all of them of taking from the People of the Book.[931] In this respect, he is the only one who openly embraces criticism of the narrations and is adamant about their Jewish origins, even questioning chains of transmission.

Sunni exegetes have revealed a mixed approach to the narratives and in truth though the dismissal of the narratives arguably helps protect prophetic infallibility, it raises certain questions. One particular question arising from this is the challenge to prophetic humanity, are we sanitising the texts? Can a man who is the vehicle of God's message be capable of immorality? Christianity looks at the redemptive element in their definition of prophets and openly permits their indiscretions as a means of educating people, allowing them hope in God's mercy and most importantly being able to relate to the representatives of God. It also helps to cement the legacy of Jesus, showing God sent all prophets before him to prepare humanity to receive the ultimate saviour. On the contrary, Islam does not allow the portrayal of prophets in such an immoral manner, despite a similar trajectory for the

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[929] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, xii, p. 90-93.

[930] Ibid, p. 93.

[931] Ibid.

prophets, where an argument exists that the prophets served a similar purpose for the prophet Muḥammad. However, in this respect, some scholars are not prepared to allow the narratives to denigrate the prophets and undermine their roles as guides for their followers.

The alternative argument is if you take away the human aspect of their lives, this will compromise their position as saviours of humanity and their positions as perfect role models. By sanitising the narratives, are we sanitising the faith to a degree where the prophets are undermined? Arguably, prophets have to possess a degree of leniency to allow them to perform their roles, and certain acts such as forgetfulness are permitted. Therefore, the dismissal of such narratives would result in the prophets' disconnection from their followers.

Additionally, the definitions of 'prophet' and 'sin' play a vital part as they determine the relevance and acceptance of the narrations and determine whether Islamic prophetology supports their acceptance or is insistent upon their rejection. The exegetes who allowed the narratives, despite some of the criticising them, would have probably included the narrations to allow the redemptive nature of their responsibilities to be understood. All prophets have redemption, not from sin, but from minor slips, which helped their followers to maintain and grow in their faith. We can deduce the attribution of minor slips to them from the *Ḥadīth* detailing events on the Day of Judgement when all prophets will express their inability to intercede on behalf of the people to initiate proceedings. The prophet Muḥammad will be the sole individual to fulfil this responsibility.[932]

The discussion of the narratives highlights the importance of the theological implications concerning the narratives. All three groups mentioned the narratives and whilst some merely mentioned them and maybe provided a very brief explanation, others determinedly advocated for their theological schools, often showing that if the need arose they would defend it, citing explanations and interpretations, but not conceding their positions.

Interestingly, some exegetes felt the need to include our next exegete, al-Zamakhsharī, which shows they felt the need to include scholars from other schools to support their position, possibly feeling this supports their position. If the narratives are outright unacceptable and challenge the core of their theological beliefs regarding prophethood, why would they insist on mentioning them, surely the appropriate course of action would be complete exclusion. This shows they believed some elements were acceptable and needed to be included.

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[932] Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 7440, ix, pp. 325-328.

6.4.2 Mu'tazila *Tafsīr*

From the Mu'tazila perspective, al-Zamakhsharī heads in a different direction from al-Ṭabarī, citing the narrative al-Qurṭubī attributed to him, claiming Solomon's tribulation occurred after twenty years of his rule and he ruled for a further twenty years after that. His tribulation was a consequence of the devils plotting to kill Solomon's child because they believed the survival of the child would result in their continued enslavement would be perpetual. Their plot involved killing the child or taking away its sanity. When Solomon learned of this, he concealed the child in the clouds and did not see him until he fell onto Solomon's throne. God informs Solomon his error was to abandon trust in his lord. Consequently, Solomon sought forgiveness from his lord and God forgave him.

In a second narrative, al-Zamakhsharī mentions a *Ḥadīth* where Solomon declares he would impregnate seventy wives in one night with each one bearing him a male child who would fight in the way of God, but he neglected to say 'God willing'. He impregnated all of his seventy wives, but only one gave birth, to half a child. The Prophet Muḥammad commentated on this saying, "By the being in whose hand my life is, if he (Solomon) had said "If God wills" all the children would have fought in the path of God."[933] He was not critical of Solomon's actions but rather reminded his followers that any action performed by them must involve invoking God.

The message of the *Ḥadīth* is clear; you must put your faith in God and not your abilities, a common motif of the Qur'ān when it addresses the believers. The fact that Solomon was ready to deal with both situations himself, especially the protection of his son, seems to show he felt secure enough to handle the situation not deliberately overriding God's authority, rather confident in his abilities bestowed by God upon him.

In this aspect, the exegetes may have felt comfortable accepting the narratives because it was relatable to them and is something God reminds the prophet Muḥammad of in the Qur'ān when he says to him "And never say of anything "I will do this tomorrow without adding "If Allah wills!" But, if you forget, then remember your lord and say, "I trust my Lord will guide me to what is more right than this." [934] The Qur'ān openly portrays that prophets had a human side that made them relatable to their followers, and the prophet Muḥammad was no different, if anything, he was superior to all prophets and his tribulations were greater. The verse mentioned concerning the prophet Muḥammad identifies

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[933] Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf 'an Ḥaqā'iq Ghawāmiḍ al-Tanzīl wa Wujūh al-Ta'wīl*, v, p.268.

Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ḥadīth 2819, iv, p.64

[934] Q18:23-24.

a similar experience to the one mentioned in the *Ḥadīth*, where he also forgets to mention, "If God wills".

Al-Zamakhsharī puts a question mark on the authenticity of all the narrations, the ring of power, the devil assuming Solomon's form, and the idol worship in his home, by declaring God knows best, but strangely stops short of an outright personal dismissal. In this respect, his approach is similar to some of the Sunni exegetes who adopted a monovalent approach. He rejects the narratives and blames this on the narratives being 'Jewish fallacies'. He maintains the devils are not capable of practises such as overwhelming prophets, altering God's commandments, and asserting control over a prophet's wives, all of which are abhorrent. This would be especially valid in the circumstances where the devil, in Solomon's form, was making inappropriate demands from his wives, demands that Solomon would never subject them. A *Ḥadīth* of the prophet Muḥammad categorically denies this and the argument for the acceptance of the narration would be that it serves to show that prophets, despite their slips, do not abandon their responsibilities or compromise their moral and ethical positions.

As for taking the form of a prophet, al-Zamakhsharī claims there is a difference of opinion amongst the doctrines of the different faiths, some may allow it, others not. He argues prostrating in front of an image is inconceivable, a prophet of God would permit such a heinous act, but if it is without his knowledge, then he is not accountable.[935] Al-Zamakhsharī attempts to dismiss any allegations aimed at the prophet, showing a reluctance to reinforce an earlier point that he was unwilling to dismiss the narrations outright. He acknowledges certain elements were difficult to accept, due to their direct challenge to the theological implications, but again surprisingly is prepared to accept a devil can assume the form of a prophet, as it was acceptable in the prophetology of some.

This is an unusual stance from al-Zamakhsharī as his *modus operandi* was dismissal of anything contravening the innocence of prophets, unwilling to entertain the possibility of any value associated with them. The reason for this is clear; it contravenes the theological belief of his school and challenges their foundations, the five principles. The only possible value attached to them is they served to humanise prophets, showing that they were capable of minor lapses such as not placing their full trust in God, albeit subconsciously to maintain their theological position. In addition, it allows Muslims to maintain the *status quo* regarding the prophet Muḥammad's superiority over all prophets. His representation of the Mu'tazila school here is possibly at its weakest in all three case studies.

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[935] Ibid.

6.4.3 Shī'ī *Tafsīr*

Representing the Shī'ī, al-Ṭabrisī's analysis is presented first and he maintains his methodological approach of first discussing the grammatical analysis of the verses in question, before delving into other discussions. Following this, he analyses the narratives starting with the distraction caused by the horse. From the outset, he declares there is a dispute amongst the scholars regarding Solomon's tribulation, downfall and the body on the throne. All the narrations listed by al-Ṭabrisī are identical to those mentioned by all the previous exegetes, which include Solomon claiming he will produce seventy children who would fight in the way of the Lord, Solomon attempting to conceal his child from the devil who wanted to kill it, and so forth. He points out that Solomon's story immediately follows his father's story in the Qur'ān and that God praises Solomon as 'the best of servants', someone who relied upon God in all his affairs.[936]

Al-Ṭabrisī highlights Solomon's passion for horses by mentioning some narratives from al-Kalbī and al-Ḥasan. Al-Kalbī narrates Solomon conquered Damascus and captured a thousand horses in spoils of war, indicating Solomon's passion for horses. On the other hand, al-Ḥasan mentions a winged horse that emerged from the sea and when Solomon had performed his first prayer, the horse was presented to him, distracting him until sunset. Al-Ṭabrisī claims this incident relates to the verse "And he said, "Indeed, I gave preference to the love of good [things] over the remembrance of my Lord until the sun disappeared into the curtain [of darkness]."[937] The word 'good' in the verse refers to horses, which Qatādah and al-Suddī also supported.

Despite these narratives, al-Ṭabrisī openly shows reluctance in accepting them, arguing he believes Solomon's tribulation arose from not performing prayer at its beginning time, where most reward lies. Not content with this, al-Ṭabrisī turns to al-Jubbāī for support, who claims Solomon did not miss any obligatory prayer, but rather a supererogatory prayer, which Solomon would end up performing anyway at the end of the day. The delay was a result of his preoccupation with the horse.

Al-Ṭabrisī then includes Ibn 'Abbās's narration, where he asks 'Alī regarding the exegesis of this verse and 'Alī in turn asks him what he had heard. Ibn 'Abbās replied he had heard Ka'b mention Solomon was distracted by his horses which caused him to miss his prayer. God asked him to return the horses to him, there were fourteen in total. Solomon ordered their execution and God took his kingdom from him for fourteen days because he had the horses killed.[938] 'Alī retorted that Ka'b had

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[936] Ibid, p. 272.

[937] Q38:32.

[938] Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-Bayān li-'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, viii, p. 273.

lied and the actual reason for Solomon's distraction with the horses arose from his intention to fight his enemies and preparation for that. God instructed the angels responsible for the sun to return it and Solomon was able to perform prayer on time." Al-Ṭabrisī firmly states that the prophets of God do not commit oppression nor do they command anyone to oppress others because they are innocent and pure.[939] His response indicates his belief that the protection of prophetic infallibility surpasses the adoption of questionable narratives that challenge it.

Al-Ṭabrisī further explores the dispute surrounding Solomon's fall, his tribulation and the body placed on his throne by addressing the four opinions. The first mentions a narrative where Solomon claims one day in his gathering he would impregnate all of his wives in one night.[940] This narrative does not amount to sin, minor or major being committed, as it is *mustaḥab* to mention 'if God wills'. The second mentions the cause of tribulation as the devils conspiring to kill his son when he was born because they feared perpetual servitude. Solomon tried to conceal him in the clouds, but realised it was futile when he found the body of his deceased son on his throne. The only plausible reason for Solomon's tribulation and reprimand was due to his fear of the devils and not trusting in God. He attributes a third opinion to al-Jubbāī where he mentions Solomon had a stillborn child that was placed on his bed. A fourth opinion states it was Solomon's body when he was unwell, which God tested him with, i.e. a severely unwell person is like a corpse.[941]

The previous exegetes have all included these narratives in their respective works and none of them has endorsed any of the narratives, signifying their role as possible alternative reasons, but nothing concrete to explain the tribulation.

The next Shī'ī exegete al-Ṭūsī agrees with al-Ṭabrisī, including the same sources of al-Suddī, Qatādah, and Shī'ī scholars.[942] He mentions the narrative of the devil *Sakhr* and Solomon losing his ring[943] but strangely mentions an opinion that the tribulation resulted from Solomon impregnating his wives during their menstruation, or trying to visit all his wives in one night to have as many children as he could.[944]

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[939] Ibid, p. 274.

[940] Ibid.

[941] Ibid.

[942] Al-Ṭūsī, *Al-Ṭibyān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, viii, p. 560.

[943] Ibid, p. 561.

[944] Ibid, p. 562.

Al-Ṭūsī defends Solomon arguing, that even if we were to accept that he did not say "If God wills" verbally, he would have intended it, otherwise, his claim would be a lie and this was impermissible for prophets, even in the eyes of those who permit minor sins, including al-Ḥasan and others. Interestingly, in his defence of Solomon al-Ṭūsī overlooks the fact that the prophet Muḥammad also forgot to mention, "If God wills" and God reprimands him in the Qur'ān.[945] Therefore, the narrative serves to explain Islamic prophetology and allows prophets minor slips, which in turn allows Muslims to maintain the superiority of Muḥammad, if people attribute such a slip to him.

Al-Ṭūsī proceeds to explain why narratives listing Solomon's attributes mentioned by other exegetes cannot be accepted. Whilst explaining the word *Anāba* (turned to), he states exegetes have attempted to explain his tribulation by claiming Solomon repented to God due to his slip and his kingdom, which was tied to his ring, was returned to him. He counters this narrative by saying the 'righteous exegetes' and those who defend the infallibility of prophets argue God would not permit a devil to impersonate a prophet, that prophethood cannot be tied to a ring, and that God would not snatch prophethood away from a prophet. The Qur'ānic verse mentions none of these possibilities, nor does it allude to any of them, therefore why should we accept them?

Concerning the body on the throne, he acknowledges the existence of multiple narrations and proceeds to examine them. The first narration involves Solomon's claim he will pay a conjugal visit to a hundred wives in one night. Al-Ṭūsī argues this was a statement made out of love for his wives, rather than a boast or pursuit of worldly glory and God exonerates him of such intentions, otherwise, people would aspire to such practice. One wife gave birth to a stillborn child that Solomon placed on the throne and sought forgiveness from God, not due to committing a minor sin. Al-Ṭūsī dismisses the claims of those who believe Solomon did not invoke God as false.

Al-Ṭūsī decides not to pursue the exegesis further after dismissing any probability of a minor sin or otherwise. He also refuses to acknowledge any benefit of the narratives and attempts to explain what the acceptable traditions mention. He attempts to safeguard prophetic infallibility and refuses to entertain anything that would compromise prophetic infallibility, purely because it would reduce them to lesser role models for the people and compromise God's system of prophethood.

In conclusion, narratives concerning prophetic infallibility have received mixed acceptance and led to three groups emerging whose theological differences and hermeneutical approaches have not influenced how they approached controversial narratives. The first group of exegetes comprising of

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[945] Q18:23-24.

al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Suyūtī do not hesitate to mention the controversial narratives and in theory support polyvalent readings of the verses through the various narratives cited by them. Despite this, they do not share the same approach; al-Ṭabarī mentions narratives and often discusses them, with occasional dismissal of them due to them contravening prophetic infallibility. Al-Suyūtī is comfortable mentioning the narratives and does not engage in discussion regarding them, which is unusual for someone of his calibre. Al-Qurṭubī is the strictest of this group, opting to mention the narratives and then proceeding to discuss them occasionally dismissing them because they challenged prophetic infallibility and on some occasions attempting to justify certain details of the narratives.

The second group of exegetes, al-Ṭabrisī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Zamakhsharī, and Ibn Kathīr differ by shifting the focus from the narratives, mentioning very little, but do offer a brief discussion with a particular focus on addressing their own opinions and providing an understanding for the readers. Despite differences in their theological stance and exegetical approaches, al-Zamakhsharī and Ibn Kathīr immediately engage in discussion surrounding the controversial incidents in each narrative, unlike al-Ṭabrisī and al-Ṭūsī who primarily address the grammatical discussion, before turning to the controversial incident at hand. Comparatively, this group is more interested in the polemical side of the discussion and offer stronger support for prophetic infallibility. Moreover, despite his theological differences al-Zamakhsharī seems to be a leading voice for the Sunni and Shī'ī exegetes, with the latter clearly adopting the approach of his school.

The sole representative of the final group of exegetes is al-Rāzī who decide to focus on the discussion of prophetic infallibility, instead of the narratives, largely ignoring them presumably due to their belief these narratives are of no value, their authenticity dismissed and contravening theological beliefs. Subsequently, he is not as forgiving and welcoming of the narratives as others and resolute in his position, without compromise in any of the case studies, choosing to dismiss any value associated to them.

Prophetic infallibility is central to all three schools but clearly not to the same degree nor for the same reasons. The Mu'tazila and Shī'ī schools, with Ibn Kathīr and al-Rāzī, exhibit a consistent approach and do not back away from defending prophetic infallibility. However, the do not agree in the value of the narratives, with some of them choosing to mention them and other outright refusing to do so. The other group consisting of Sunni scholars, al-Ṭabarī, al-Suyūtī, and al-Qurṭubī actively mention the narratives, with some choosing to discuss and occasionally dismiss them, whereas other chose to mention them for the readers' information and decide to avoid further engagement with them. Their approach is a reflection of not just their hermeneutical approach, but also their theological approach.

In the Biblical and para-Biblical narratives, the three prophets are portrayed as putting themselves in precarious positions that have allowed the situation to turn bad, which in turn has allowed exegetes and scholars of those faiths to interpret their cases in a manner that compromises their infallibility. The Qur'ān and *Ḥadīth* have presented them in a very different manner, despite vague details related to their situations, and maintained their infallibility. Exegetes have faced the conundrum of reconciling between the Qur'ānic narrative and the details found in Biblical sources, attempting to maintain the innocence and dignity of prophets, meanwhile trying to portray them as individuals people should emulate. In conclusion, it is difficult to achieve this.

Conclusion

This study has examined the appropriation of controversial narratives related to prophetic infallibility found in classical exegetical works belonging to the three main schools of Islam; the Sunni, Mu'tazila and Shī'a. The aim has been to reveal how Muslim exegetes dealt with the controversial narratives in their respective works, how the doctrine of prophetic infallibility influenced their hermeneutical approaches, and to explain why they chose to address or avoid the narrations.

By exploring the history of the term *Isrā'īliyyāt* and how Muslim exegetes treated Jewish anecdotes, it becomes evident that classical Muslim exegetes employed a variety of sources, including Jewish anecdotes, when interpreting the Qur'ānic narratives. They did this in order to provide a coherent account of the narratives, particularly where they concerned trials and tribulations faced by previous nations and specific historical personalities. Furthermore, these anecdotal narratives have no certain origin or specific era, despite some claiming that they are connected to Biblical and para-Biblical texts and others arguing that they are taken from other mythologies.

When examining the evolution of the term *Isrā'īliyyāt* I have established that prophets play an important role in all three faiths and Islam's relationship with the antecedent faiths permits scholars to draw upon their narratives. The Qur'ānic narratives lack the information required to provide an accurate detailed account of the incidents, instead choosing to focus on delivering God's message to the adherents of the faith; therefore, details were never a necessity. Consequently, Muslims were forced to look elsewhere for answers and *Isrā'īliyyāt* served to provide the missing information. Some scholars have argued that the term *Isrā'īliyyāt* has rendered the narratives subject to rejection because information they supplied belonged to Judaism.

Tracing the evolution of the term has shown that despite numerous attempts, scholars including Tottoli, Wheeler, Firestone and others have been unable to reconcile the controversy surrounding it. The term still engenders resentment and suspicion, not so much due to its connection to Judaism but rather due to the challenge it poses to the Muslim doctrine. Despite the research conducted, it is difficult, probably impossible to determine the origin of these narratives, as Wheeler, Tottoli, Firestone and others have argued. I do not believe it is anti-Jewish or anti-Christian sentiment that is the cause of their rejection. Despite the fluctuation of the term between acceptance and rejection there has not been a resolution that has effectively harmonised the attitude of scholars; there is little reason to believe, given that *Isrā'īliyyāt* are still objects of suspicion, that this *status quo* will change. This is what led me to examine the subject of polyvalence in tafsīr, which I believe has been a trait of Qur'ānic exegesis from the very beginning. The hermeneutical approach of exegetes has influenced

whether they adopted a polyvalent or monovalent approach as it influenced their position on *Isrā'īliyyāt*.

The doctrine of prophetology plays an important role in the attitude towards *Isrā'īliyyāt* and I have shown that in the doctrines of all three faiths prophethood plays a significant part, yet there are significant differences that influence their narratives and beliefs regarding prophets. Islamic prophetology dictates that prophets are human beings and representatives of God; therefore, they have to possess almost perfect characters to be considered exemplars for their followers. Chief amongst the characteristics is *'iṣmah* (prophetic infallibility), which all three Muslim schools believe is an essential characteristic, but it varies between the schools. The Mu'tazila and Shī'a are strict and do not allow anything controversial to be associated to prophets, whereas Sunnis differ, with some adopting a strict position similar to the other two schools and others presenting a more relaxed view, allowing *zallah* (slips), and even minor and major sins. For the Mu'tazila, the narratives contradict their *Uṣūl al-Khamsah* and for the Shī'a, they compromise Imamate, resulting in both being unprepared to compromise their position under any circumstance. Prophethood in Judaism and Christianity differs to that of Islam, primarily consisting of God's representatives inviting people to his worship, but at the same time leaving them subject to the same indiscretions as their followers, faring no better.

My research indicated that this is essentially due to the difference in the definition and expectations of prophets. As Aune points out, they were individuals who were intimately associated with holy places and religious rituals, combining the role of priest and prophet, a distinction not found within Islam. These definitions and portrayals of prophecy have very few, if any, similarities to Qur'ānic prophethood. Prophets in the Qur'ān are only subject to God, no one else, yet Biblical prophets were responsible for menial tasks and often subject to the rule of kings, which demonstrates a clear distinction between the prophetic roles and prophetology. Furthermore, categories are created for prophets that are not found within Islam and they are ascribed positions that Islamic prophetology deems below their dignity. Additionally, there seems to be little focus on what prophecy actually was, and more on the institution of prophets and who they were. This distinction sets the three faiths apart and automatically dictates that they would treat prophets differently, with Muslims displaying a cautious approach, readily dismissing things they felt inappropriate, which Biblical scholars would readily accept.

The doctrine of infallibility is also another key element in determining what is deemed acceptable for prophets, and again I have identified that it exists in all three faiths. I have determined that this doctrine also varies within the faiths themselves, with Christians agreeing upon the infallibility of the Church, but disagreeing in relation to the pope, and Jews ascribing it to the rabbinic sages. This

concept is similar to that of Biblical and papal infallibility, whereby both the text and the individual are deemed beyond error, and according to the Shī'a, the infallibility of the Imāms. The Jewish and Christian scholars did not extend infallibility to prophets, only to those they believed were responsible for the preservation of the faith.

I have demonstrated that there are differences among the Jewish people regarding religious authority, which determines their attitudes towards infallibility and to whom it is ascribed. The reformists claim that religious authority lies in the ethical and universalistic teachings of the prophets. They are the only group to claim this, and bear some similarity to the Muslims. Conservative Jews dispute this and believe that religious authority lies with the people. Their culture, customs and practices throughout any age are their ultimate source of authority. They hold the belief that Judaism includes the religious texts, Hebrew Bible, Talmud and the codes, as well as the people's practices. Rabbi Moshe Zucker claims that whilst the early rabbinic exegetes rejected any form of absolute prophetic sinlessness, the geonic exegetes reflected the stance of the Mu'tazila on the matter. Both believed that whilst there was no such thing as *'iṣmah*, *per se*, prophets were nonetheless sinless. Overall, it is evident that, unlike the majority of Muslims, there is a general rejection of the concept, accepting only the notion of the Torah and to an extent the rabbis.

Comparatively, Sunni scholarship is relaxed and in comparison to the Shī'a and Mu'tazila, who believe that all prophets were infallible throughout their lives, the vast majority of Sunni scholars agree upon the necessity of prophetic infallibility, after the declaration of prophethood, adding that it does not consider mistakes (*khata*) and forgetfulness (*sahw*) as sin. This allows them to accept Biblical narratives as long as they do not contain 'immorality'. Other Sunni scholars are far more relaxed and permit sin before the declaration of prophethood as long as it does not reach the level of immorality or necessitate punishment. This group allow the narratives and are bolder in mentioning details that others would shun. As mentioned before, I believe it is due to the need to maintain a connection between the prophets and their followers. Their stance is similar to that of the Qadariyyah, who as a group believe that sins committed by prophets are not actual sins, but rather mistakes in interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and independent reasoning (*ijtihād*). Some believe they can commit minor sins that do not deter people from them.

The categorisation of narratives is another key aspect that I believe influenced the inclusion or exclusion of *Isrā'īliyyāt*, but for more recent scholarship rather than earlier. Both the Testaments and the Qur'ān contain narratives and many of them are shared across the three faiths. These stories contain mythological details, yet there is disagreement within all three faiths regarding their categorisation as anything other than revelation. Most importantly, the divine texts only contain revelation according to the orthodox positions of all three faiths, therefore I believe the term 'sacred

narrative' is more suitable, and reflective of the divine nature of the texts. Furthermore, the terms offered by Western scholarship, such as myths, legends and folklore, are themselves controversial and laden with negative connotations that do not permit them to be used without discrimination. Therefore, it is safer to avoid these terms when discussing religious texts. The only time they may be used will be for narratives subject to controversy.

The difficulty with these terms is not due to lack of attention or research. Despite numerous efforts by many scholars of all backgrounds, there has never been a universally accepted definition for any of the terms mentioned. This directly affects the categorisation of Biblical and Qur'ānic narratives. Eliade and others have attempted to classify religious narratives and have provided numerous categorisations, none of them appropriate. They have been categorised as legends by the likes of Knappart and Schwarzbaum, as folklore by others, which is more generic in its anthropological use and covers legends, myths, folklore, and more. More common is the term myth, which again has no conclusive definition, despite numerous attempts. Groenewald bemoans this and argues that the term myth is laden with negative connotations that cannot be dismissed. Buxton, Bolle and Smith agree with this, despite some attempts by certain scholars, such as Cupitt, to validate the term and use it in a positive manner. Bultmann and Eliade also attempt to rescue the term in conjunction with religious texts, but are challenged by Callender and others. For me, this answers the question on whether religious texts contain myths; the answer is no, because religious texts for the Abrahamic faiths are based on revelation, and the term 'myth' contradicts this.

I have argued that the narratives found within the respective texts are unique to them, despite parallels existing in other faiths. It is reductive to declare borrowing without definitive evidence, as is the case with the Qur'ān and the antecedent texts. The Qur'ān acknowledges that it came to verify the earlier texts, not denying that it contained similar information, yet establishing its own position amongst them. Furthermore, there is nothing conclusive to determine that these narratives were appropriated from any other texts.

Another challenging aspect of this discussion relates to the origin of the Biblical narratives. I disagree with Gaster, who believes they are not truly Biblical. In fact, parallels can be found in the ancient pagan faiths. Eliade and Armstrong support this view and believe the polytheist narratives found their way into Jewish texts due to ancient Hebrews, who were polytheists. This creates difficulties for Muslim scholars as it raises the question of why Muslim scholars would appropriate them, again without definitive proof of this occurring. It is entirely plausible that the polytheistic faiths may have appropriated the narratives from the Abrahamic texts; there is no real method of determining this. Alternatively, the exegetical texts do contain narratives that are not taken from revelations. I believe Muslim scholars may not have known this; otherwise, they would have identified it and outright

rejected them. Unfortunately, there is no way of determining where they appropriated the narratives from; the only reference has been the prophet Muḥammad's companions who had converted from Judaism.

The doctrine of prophetology also influences how Muslim scholars perceive the narratives, and affects their acceptance. Comparatively, prophetology in Islam is the second most important doctrine in the Qur'ān after *Tawḥīd*, whereas in Judaism and Christianity it was developed later. Therefore it acted as a regulator for Muslims more than the other faiths. As stated before, the Qur'ān itself claims to act as a verifier for the antecedent texts. Therefore, similarities will naturally exist, but Griffith acknowledges that it is unfair to accuse the Qur'ān of completely borrowing. He does acknowledge that the Qur'ān is selective in what it narrates, which as I have explained is due to the focus not being on storytelling, but rather the instruction of humanity, on a need-to-know basis. Modern scholars have distanced themselves from the position of predecessors such as Goldziher, who believed the Qur'ānic narratives were distorted versions of those found in the antecedent texts. In truth, Qur'ānic narratives have their own standing, despite sharing details with their predecessors. Islam's prophetology places prophets on a pedestal above the normal people, where they enjoy a unique position amongst God's creation as the spokespeople of God. Although Qur'ānic and Biblical prophetology, deal with the same subject matter in essence, they take two different approaches. Qur'ānic prophetology focuses on presenting the prophets as people of great character and distinction, individuals who were the embodiment of the divine message and therefore the truth, occasionally displaying signs of their humanity. Conversely, Biblical prophetology depicts prophets as individuals who had a degree of familiarity with Jesus but overall were no different to normal humans when it came to committing sins and suffering lapses. Qur'ānic prophetology is geared towards presenting the prophet Muḥammad's claim and his primacy amongst the prophetic family, much like that of Christianity with Jesus and Judaism with Moses. Qur'ānic narratives of prophets deliberately provided sparse detail.

Prophetology directly affects the appropriation of Biblical narratives and directly affects polyvalence in tafsīr. The evolution of *tafsīr* from the time of the prophet Muḥammad shows the fluctuation between polyvalence and monovalence. The prophet's role was one of elucidator, and he explained the Qur'ān when asked, but did not attempt to provide a complete explanation of the Qur'ān. His companions became the first exegetes, initially relying upon his *Ḥadīth* alone, then adding *Isrā'īliyyāt* and *ijtihād*, creating a polyvalent approach, yet not discarding the monovalent approach. Despite this, they utilised *Isrā'īliyyāt* carefully, with strict conditions, but their successors and subsequent generations grew complacent and allowed things to enter that conflicted with the theological beliefs. The Prophet did not need to exercise *ijtihād* because he received revelation, therefore *tafsīr* was

monovalent from this perspective, yet he left the door open for polyvalence because he did not provide a complete *tafsīr* of the Qur'ān.

This shaped the identity of *tafsīr* in terms of polyvalence and monovalence, and subsequently, companions such as 'Alī, Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd identify with the former. Through them four schools emerged: the schools of Ḥijāz, Makkah & Madinah, the school of Baṣra and the school of Kūfa, ultimately shaping *tafsīr* for future generations.

Amongst the companions, Ibn 'Abbās is identified as a major proponent of polyvalence. I feel he is unfairly targeted and accused of being the cause for the influx of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in *tafsīr*. Goldziher and Amin accuse him of being unworthy of the status conferred upon him, even though the rigorous testing of narrations would not have allowed him to display negligence. In truth, there is no evidence to prove he was negligent. Ibn 'Abbās is responsible for establishing the school of Makkah, 'Abdullah Ibn Mas'ūd is responsible for the Schools of Iraq, and Ubay Ibn Ka'b is responsible for creating the school of Madinah and is considered an authority on Abrahamic texts, in particular *Isrā'īliyyāt*. All of them adopted *ijtihād* and *Isrā'īliyyāt*, showing a polyvalent approach. The companions influenced and shaped the next generation, incorporating new aspects of *tafsīr* and accommodating development for other forms of *tafsīr*, including legal, theological, grammatical, Sufi, and periphrastic forms, amongst others.

During this period the sectarian groups emerged, with the Shī'a and Mu'tazila at the forefront, influencing *tafsīr* with their hermeneutical approaches. Unfortunately, the historiography of Mu'tazila in itself is an issue, particularly concerning *tafsīr*, highlighting a lack of Mu'tazila resources to paint an accurate picture. In fact, Mu'tazila history relies on Sunni sources, which already puts it at a disadvantage. From what we can discern, they based their hermeneutical approach on *Uṣūl al-Khamsah* and subsequently ignored *Ḥadīth* and *Isrā'īliyyāt*. Based on what is available to us, we understand the hermeneutical approach of the Mu'tazila is best described as overwhelmingly monovalent, as it is fundamentally influenced by the aforementioned five principles.

Their surviving *tafsīr* show that any verse whose meaning visibly conflicted with their beliefs would be interpreted rationally, without the employment of *Ḥadīth* or other exegetical tools. This approach differed from that of their rivals, the Ahl as-Sunnah and Shī'a, who employed additional exegetical tools including the opinions of the companions, their successors (Sunni approach) and Imāms (Shī'ī approach) to provide context to their interpretation. Consequently, the five principles led to the rejection of *Ṣaḥīḥ Aḥādīth*, resulting in the rejection of mainstream beliefs, such as punishment in the grave and intercession for sinners. Mu'tazila mistrust of others governed their approach, despite their influence on the Shī'a and Sunni. Their hermeneutical approach established their view on prophetic

infallibility; they would not compromise under any circumstances. Despite Mourad identifying al-Jishūmī's *tafsīr* as the best source to date for understanding the Mu'tazilite hermeneutical approach, he acknowledges that it is impossible to verify whether all the Mu'tazila exegetes used this hermeneutical system.

Shī'a history suffered a similar fate to the Mu'tazila. Their works did not survive from the earlier period, and again we have had to rely on Sunni history to determine their hermeneutical approach, with Momen and Rippin bemoaning the fact that they had received very little attention in comparison to Sunni history. This in turn makes it difficult to establish the historicity of Shī'a *tafsīr*. It is safe to state that both the Sunni and Shī'ī scholarship had established hermeneutical exegetical tools, agreeing upon the primacy of the Qur'ān, but subsequently splitting after that. Where Sunni scholarship focused on *Ḥadīth*, Shī'ī scholarship focused on the Imāms, and both based their polyvalent approach upon these. Yet Shī'ī scholarship shows a change from a strictly monovalent position in the pre-Būyid era, where there was no tolerance for non-Shī'a works and authority, to a more polyvalent approach in the post-Būyid era. The other interesting factor is the influence of the Mu'tazila upon both the Sunni and Shī'a schools, yet the reverse does not exist.

After the first three centuries, commentaries began to take a broader view of *tafsīr* than that of their predecessors, incorporating Sunni views previously rejected by earlier exegetes. Al-Ṭūsī and al-Ṭabrisī saw the limitations of the previous approach and abandoned it, and then similar to al-Ṭabarī they focused on the entire Qur'ānic text, interpreting it verse by verse. The hermeneutical approach of the Shī'ī scholarship, as with the other two schools, primarily focused on the preservation and development of its doctrine and school, with little regard for anyone or anything else. In the pre-Būyid era, this involved adopting an extreme view of dismissing anything not tied to the school, therefore adopting a monovalent approach that safeguarded their survival and growth. The post-Būyid era saw a more open attitude towards other schools, endorsing a polyvalent approach and showing a change in their hermeneutical stance to address significant gaps in their exegesis. This did not herald an approach that was without any restrictions, as they still ensured they did not compromise on their fundamental doctrinal beliefs. In relation to prophetic infallibility, they were still extremely cautious and unapologetically rejected anything that might compromise their position. In truth, the methods of the Imāmī exegetes are no different from their Sunni counterparts, who also employ traditions for *tafsīr*, but the Imāmī Shī'ī believe their traditions to be superior. The methods include textual interpretations such as variant readings, lexical interpretations and grammatical commentary, and interpretations based on the understandings found in the Imāmī exegetical traditions.

In conclusion, *tafsīr* has evolved since its inception. It was initially limited due to the presence of the prophet Muḥammad and his explanations, becoming more detailed over time to match the changing

circumstances. Furthermore, excluding the Mu'tazila, the other two schools underwent significant changes, switching gradually from a monovalent approach to a polyvalent approach because of variant circumstances and influences, but realistically split between the two positions. Changes in Muslim circumstances influenced the sources utilised for *tafsīr*, which were limited in the early years, with the later additions of *ijtihād* and *Isrā'īliyyāt*, which alternated between acceptance and rejection.

With the emergence of the three major schools of Islam, their influence resulted in further changes in the hermeneutical approach of Muslims, which contributed to approaches to Qur'ānic exegesis. The Sunni tradition is the dominant source for the historiography of all three schools, forcing us to rely upon it for Shī'ī and Mu'tazila hermeneutical approaches. The Sunni approach was inherently polyvalent, with traces of monovalence, which could also be said to a similar degree for the Shī'ī, who substituted the opinions of the companions with the opinions of the Imāms, with a less polyvalent approach than the Sunni. The most underrepresented approach belongs to the Mu'tazila, who have little to no surviving works. Through piecing together sources from Sunni texts, it appears they exemplify a monovalent approach that they are unprepared to compromise at any cost, influencing Sunni to a small degree and Shī'a to a greater degree.

From the three case studies examined, the difference between the faiths and their position on prophetic infallibility and narratives concerning them becomes evident. Some of the details found within Qur'ānic exegeses are taken from the Old Testament, but as Biblical scholars and exegetes have admitted, many other details are taken from either para-Biblical texts or are the interpretations of sages found in the Talmud.

There is little detail within the Old and New Testaments, with more details taken from para-Biblical texts, such as the Talmud. From the Biblical perspective, the three prophets are presented as humans who succumbed to their human traits, prompting some people to support a rereading of the narrations where Joseph is equally as guilty as the Potiphar's wife. They advocate for the sin of Joseph, arguing that the feelings were mutual, a view that some Muslim scholars endorsed. A similar approach exists for David and Bathsheba and for Solomon and the body on the throne. Kugel cites the Babylonian Talmud and declares that rabbinic sources provide the details that were missing.

Nine exegetes from three schools were selected, but the representation is disproportionate, as highlighted earlier, because the Mu'tazila only have al-Zamakhsharī, the Shī'a have three and the Sunni five. Despite this, the three schools provide a diverse approach to the narratives. The Mu'tazila representation is purely monovalent in its approach; al-Zamakhsharī does not deviate from his position, and he shuns anything that challenges and contradicts the *Uṣūl al-Khamsah*.

Debatably the most significant contribution of this thesis is to invite Muslim scholarship to re-direct the focus towards *Isrā'īliyyāt*, in particular the examination of the following things. Firstly, the actual origin of these narratives has never been definitively established, with speculation that it was the Old and New Testaments, which I have shown is not the actual case. The rabbinic texts are mentioned as the sources of some details, but in fact, I believe there is more that can be learned. This means the term *Isrā'īliyyāt* needs further investigation in order to determine what exegetes have been referring to throughout history. Did it apply to an oral or written tradition? Which traditions are referred to in which era, and are they the same or different? This will also shed light on whether in the prophet Muḥammad's time he was indicating the existence of two sets of traditions when he prohibited Muslims from narrating everything from the Jewish scholars, yet allowed them to narrate those traditions in line with Islamic teachings.

We also need to ascertain how much material Muslims had access to in the different eras. It may be plausible that the earlier Muslims had limited material and it was mostly sound, as opposed to later, or vice versa. As mentioned earlier, we do not have the luxury of having a definitive copy of the Old and New Testament, therefore we cannot be sure of the narratives contained in the versions present today, as they cannot be reliably authenticated. Therefore, we have to presume that Muslim exegetes had reliable information regarding their authenticity or inauthenticity.

This thesis invites Muslim scholarship to investigate and engage in comparative prophetology beyond the normal polemical approach, which is the current standard for determining the narratives appropriated. The research focused on identifying the doctrinal position of the three schools and their differences, but moving from this to a position where the common ground, which is the infallibility of prophets, could be used to establish a standard approach shared across the schools to govern the borrowing of narratives. In turn, I feel this would help deal with the two approaches of polyvalence and monovalence in *tafsīr*, which are used to identify polarised positions. I believe this can pave the way for a reconciliation between the schools regarding prophetic infallibility, whereby prophets will be protected from sins, major or minor and at the same time allowed human errors, which would humanise them to a degree where they are considered relatable to their followers.

The thesis also identifies that influence does exists between the three schools, which has led to an impact on the theological position regarding prophetic infallibility, mainly Sunni and Shī'a borrowing from the Mu'tazila, and also the Mu'tazila and Shī'a having dependency upon the Sunni for their own history. The fact that they are able to overlook theological differences when they are able to establish a common cause is evidence that they can come to some version of a common understanding. Furthermore, it is imperative that research be conducted on Shī'a history to help better understand

and map their exegetical and hermeneutical approaches, instead of relying primarily on Sunni material.

In my research I was only able to focus on select *tafsīr* and select case studies, in essence limiting myself. Therefore I believe further research should expand to include more case studies and *tafsīr*, for example the incidents of Lot, Moses, Jonah, and other prophets, whose accounts in the Qur'ān are limited and in exegesis the narratives are controversial. This will allow greater understanding of whether the narratives are restricted to some prophets rather than others and how exegetes engaged with them. I have already shown in my work how some exegetes were silent or reserved in their interactions with certain narratives, and how some relied on other schools to help them establish their position. However, is this the case for every incident under this context? The works from all eras need to be included and a case must be made to include works belonging to less prominent schools.

In this thesis, I have embraced the idea that prophetic infallibility is central to all three schools and must play an important role when it concerns stories and narratives that question a prophet's role, judgement and integrity. Yet, we must not lose sight of the fact that an overly strict view may damage the relationship of exemplars between prophets and their followers. We must not be hasty and argue for a de-mythologisation of the texts, removing all traces of these narratives, otherwise we will de-humanise prophets and make them inaccessible. We must develop a system where we can keep the narratives and assign a role to them, not allowing them to challenge the doctrine, but at the same time maintaining that they have importance, otherwise previous scholarship will be dismissed and rendered moot.

In conclusion, the Jewish anecdotes will continue to dominate Muslim readings of Qur'ānic exegesis, and Qur'ānic narratives will continue to be dominated by the discussion on whether Biblical and para-Biblical narratives serve a purpose in understanding them, particularly if they challenge the theological position of Muslims. Focus therefore needs to be on how a re-reading of Qur'ānic exegesis will take place, whilst determining the exact origin of the narratives and their validity. The exegetical narratives must not be expunged from Qur'ānic exegesis and should not be dominated by Western scholarship alone; Muslims must be allowed to find and present their own position. Furthermore, there needs to be a clear reconciliation between the polyvalent and monovalent approaches, as both are required to understand Qur'ānic narratives. I believe my thesis provides a good groundwork in paving the way forward for scholars to better understand how to use controversial narratives and how to reconcile the theological position they challenge with the value they possess, which allowed earlier Muslim exegetes to employ them in their respective works.

Limitations of the thesis include restriction to pre-modern works of exegetes from the three major schools, which needs to be improved by including minor schools and their hermeneutical approaches. Furthermore, the focus is only on Arabic exegeses, which excludes a vast array of works found in the Persian and Urdu languages that will definitely shed new light on controversial narratives and the doctrine of prophetic infallibility. Added to this I believe more case studies need to be examined and maybe the inclusion of the prophet Muḥammad himself and cases related to him, which will show if the doctrine of infallibility is equally applied to all prophets or do Muslims treat their own prophet differently.

Due to the limitations of my thesis, I am unable to explore other interrelated aspects of the narratives that can also contribute to a greater reading of the prophetic narratives. In particular, the distraction Solomon faced causing him to compromise his prayer and Joseph pinning his hopes on two prisoners whose dreams he interpreted to speak on his behalf to the king. This will allow me to explore the possibility that often prophets are reminded of their own humanity and mortality. Moreover, they are reminded that they are also subject to divine laws and need to adhere to them at a higher level.

Furthermore, I am also aware of the limitations of my research regarding the concept of ‘iṣmah. I believe it can be examined further with a more critical eye, but that is something for future research, where I can take some of the statements in the thesis that may be interpreted as sweeping and normative faith statements that take 'iṣmah for granted with a view to analysing them in light of other perspectives connected to this theological belief.

The scope for growing this research is definitely available and broader research needs to take place in order to provide greater insight.

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