

Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and the *Isrāʾīliyyāt*

in the *Tafsīr* Literature

by

Abd Alfatah Twakkal

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## Abstract

Author: Abd Alfatah Twakkal

Title: Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and the *Isrāʾīliyyāt* in the *Tafsīr* Literature

Department: Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University

Degree: Master of Arts

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This thesis seeks to analyse several traditions found in the *tafsīr* works of Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī that relate to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and the *isrāʾīliyyāt*. The purpose of the study is to examine how Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, an early Jewish convert to Islam, was viewed by his contemporaries, most significantly the Companions of the Prophet Muḥammad, while considering the complex relationship that exists between Ka‘b, the *isrāʾīliyyāt* and those Companions most famous for narrating them. By examining the relationship between Ka‘b and the Companions, including those who were not known to narrate *isrāʾīliyyāt*, this study will also serve to establish a guideline of what can possibly be attributed to the former regarding his character, sincerity and trustworthiness from his contemporaries, thereby providing a sounder basis for accepting or rejecting critical traits or descriptors that were subsequently ascribed to him by later scholars, especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Finally, this thesis aims to demonstrate the various factors that need to be taken into account when analyzing those traditions involving Ka‘b and/or his sayings as found in the *tafsīr* texts, factors that should equally be considered when approaching such traditions as found in other genres of Islamic literature.

## Résumé

Auteur: Abd Alfatah Twakkal

Titre: Ka‘b al-Aḥbār et les *Isrāʾīliyyāt* dans les ouvrages de *Tafsīr*

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Cette thèse a pour objet d'analyser un certain nombre de traditions reliées à Ka‘b al-Aḥbār et aux *isrāʾīliyyāt* que l'on retrouve dans les ouvrages de *tafsīr* d'Ibn Kathīr et d'al-Ṭabarī. Le but de cette étude est d'examiner comment Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, un des premiers juifs convertis à l'islam, était perçu par ses contemporains notamment les Compagnons du Prophète Muḥammad, tout en considérant la relation complexe existant entre Ka‘b, les *isrāʾīliyyāt* et les Compagnons les mieux connus pour avoir relaté ces traditions. En examinant la relation entre Ka‘b et les Compagnons, incluant ceux qui n'étaient pas connus pour avoir relaté des *isrāʾīliyyāt*, cette étude servira aussi d'indication de ce que l'on peut dire de Ka‘b relatif à son caractère, sa sincérité et son honnêteté par l'intermédiaire de ces contemporains. Ce travail fournira aux chercheurs une base plus solide permettant d'accepter ou de rejeter des descriptions ou des traits critiques lui ayant été attribués par des savants plus récents, surtout durant le 20<sup>e</sup> siècle. Enfin, cette thèse cherche à démontrer les divers facteurs qui doivent être pris en compte dans l'analyse des traditions ayant trait à Ka‘b et/ou ses dires qui se trouvent dans les textes de *tafsīr*, facteurs devant également être considérés lorsque l'on aborde de telles traditions dans d'autres genres littéraires islamiques.

## Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Résumé	iv
Table of Contents	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Note on Translations	viii
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
The Life of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār	6
The <i>Isrā’īliyyāt</i> : Definition and Literature Review	9
The Methodology of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in their <i>Tafsīr</i> Texts	14
<b>Analysis of Traditions Related to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār</b>	<b>23</b>
Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb	24
The Saying of Mu‘āwiyah Regarding Ka‘b and the Meaning of “ <i>kadhib</i> ”	31
<i>Kadhaba Ka‘b</i> : As the Heavens Turn on the Shoulder of an Angel	35
Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, Abū Hurayrah and the <i>Isrā’īliyyāt</i>	43
Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Abbās and the <i>Isrā’īliyyāt</i>	64
The Sun and the Moon as <i>thawrān</i> ‘ <i>aqīrān</i> in the Fire	88
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>102</b>

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قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم من لا يشكر الناس لا يشكر الله

قال [الترمذي] هذا حديث حسن صحيح

سنن الترمذي كتاب البر والصلة عن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم باب ما جاء في الشكر لمن أحسن إليك

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### **Note on Translations**

For the translation of all of the Qur’anic verses in this thesis, I have used Arthur J. Arberry’s *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955) making only slight modifications to his original translation for the sake of expressing the language in a more modernized form. However, for the verse numbering, I have opted to use that of the Qur’anic text (the Ḥaṣṣ reading) printed by the King Fahd Holy Qur’an Printing Complex in al-Maḍīnah al-Munawwarah. As for any other Arabic to English translations done throughout the work, all of them are my own unless otherwise indicated.



## Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and the *Isrā’īliyyāt* in the *Tafsīr* Literature

### Introduction

Over the past century, there has been an upsurge in the amount of material produced dealing with a particular genre of narrations that are found within Islamic literature, namely, the *isrā’īliyyāt*. The term *isrā’īliyyāt* generally refers to stories or traditions related to the Children of Israel that have their origins in Jewish source texts.<sup>1</sup> In modern times, the *isrā’īliyyāt* have become one of the more contentious issues amongst Muslim scholars. Much of the recent scholarship on the subject focuses on the place which they occupy within other various genres of Islamic literature, such as the texts of Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) or the stories of the Prophets (*qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*). One of the themes that is conspicuous in these writings is the exploration of the relationship between the traditions of Islam and those of the other Abrahamic faiths, especially Judaism. However, a more particular aspect of some of the modern writings on the *isrā’īliyyāt* that is not found in previous works is their focus on the character and reliability of certain transmitters of such narrations, and more specifically those who happen to be of a Jewish background. One such narrator is named Ka‘b al-Aḥbār.

A Yemenite Jew who converted to Islam less than 10 years after the death of the Prophet Muḥammad, Ka‘b al-Aḥbār was known to have had a vast knowledge of past scriptures and Jewish traditions, including the Torah and other genres of Jewish literature, as well as the traditions of southern Arabia. Coupled with his reported wisdom and personal charisma, Ka‘b’s status as a Biblical scholar of the first Islamic

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<sup>1</sup> A more specific definition of the term *isrā’īliyyāt* will be given below in the appropriate section.

century became legendary in the centuries that followed.<sup>2</sup> How, then, has Ka‘b been viewed by medieval and modern Muslim scholars with respect to his reliability as a transmitter of traditions within Islamic literature? Has his relation to the *isrā’īliyyāt* affected his credibility in the eyes of these scholars? If so, in what ways? What do the scholars have to say about the sincerity and personal character of Ka‘b as a Jewish convert, from the first generation of Muslims, who narrated *isrā’īliyyāt*? Answering these questions has caused a certain amount of controversy within Muslim scholarship, especially in modern times due to the politicization of the issue of the *isrā’īliyyāt* as a result of Zionism and the matter of Palestine.

Indeed, how Ka‘b has been treated by Muslim scholars over time has ranged widely, generally being considered as a trustworthy narrator by the vast majority, yet criticized by a few for being known to transmit *isrā’īliyyāt*, thereby introducing elements of Jewish origin into the Islamic tradition. Such criticisms began to surface in the medieval period from scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373). Most recently though, certain Egyptian Muslim scholars, like Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) and his disciple Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah, have gone so far as to lay charges of hypocrisy on Ka‘b, reproving him, and other Jewish converts into Islam, for seeking to conspire against and undermine the Islamic religion by introducing foreign elements into the mainstream tradition. Abū Rayyah’s incrimination of Ka‘b as being the first Zionist clearly shows a modern political agenda in dealing with the *isrā’īliyyāt* and their transmitters.

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<sup>2</sup> M. Schmitz, "Ka‘b al-Aḥbār," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2004). This short entry provides a concise and descriptive summary of Ka‘b, but offers very limited information on the nature of the traditions and stories he transmitted.

The focus of the current study, however, is not to understand the process by which the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, and specifically Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, were politicized in the context of events that occurred in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but rather to analyze the traditions that involved Kaʿb al-Aḥbār and his relationship to the *isrāʾīliyyāt* before their politicization. The idea behind this study is to critically analyse as many narrations as possible that could conceivably contain some indicators as to Kaʿb’s credibility and trustworthiness as an individual narrator<sup>3</sup> within the genres of literature in which he is most commonly found.<sup>4</sup> However, since an exhaustive analysis of all Muslim literature on Kaʿb is beyond the scope of this paper, the following study is intended to provide an example of such an analysis within one particular genre, focusing on the narrations of Kaʿb as found in the *tafsīr* literature, especially those of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr who have differing approaches to such narrations.<sup>5</sup> The method of analysis will consist of comparing and contrasting several relevant narrations dealing with Kaʿb as found in the *tafsīr* texts of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr to see what commonalities and discrepancies exist between them and what indications they contain with respect to Kaʿb’s character and trustworthiness as a narrator and source of Islamic knowledge. In this regard, the vast majority of the traditions I will examine involve Kaʿb’s relationship to his

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<sup>3</sup> In this regard, there exist several possibilities as to how Kaʿb could be related to a narration. For example, one is that he is found in the *isnād*, or chain of transmitters, of a particular tradition, the content of which can either be of the *isrāʾīliyyāt* or not. Another possibility is that the text of the tradition (*matn*) involves Kaʿb himself, whether as an exchange between him and one of his contemporaries or his contemporaries making a reference to one of his sayings. Analysing all such narrations can provide insights into who he was as a narrator and how his companions viewed him (i.e. had a good opinion of him, were suspicious of him, etc.)

<sup>4</sup> These genres of literature would include the texts of Qur’anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), the stories of the Prophets (*qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), and the collections of Prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*, pl. *aḥādīth*).

<sup>5</sup> A further advantage to using the *tafsīr* texts of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr for this analysis is that both scholars have composed comprehensive world-history texts which also contain some narrations dealing with Kaʿb al-Aḥbār in one respect or another and, hence, can be used as a complementary text to each of the respective authors’ *tafsīr* works.

contemporaries, namely, the Companions of the Prophet, and their interactions with him.

When considering the traditions that relate to Ka‘b, the Companions and the *isrā’īliyyāt*, inevitably the question of sources will arise: from where did these traditions originate and who took them from whom? By comparing and contrasting the various traditions, the purpose in conducting the following analysis is two-fold. The first aim is to help elucidate part of the complex relationship that exists between Ka‘b, the *isrā’īliyyāt* and those Companions most famous for narrating them. At the same time, by examining the relationship between Ka‘b and the Companions, including those who were *not* known to narrate *isrā’īliyyāt*, this will serve to establish a guideline of what can possibly be attributed to him by his contemporaries regarding his character, sincerity and trustworthiness, thereby providing a sounder basis for accepting or rejecting critical traits or descriptors that were subsequently ascribed to him by later scholars, especially during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The second aim is to demonstrate the various factors that need to be taken into account when analyzing those traditions involving Ka‘b and his sayings as found in the *tafsīr* texts, factors that should equally be considered when approaching such traditions as found in other genres of Islamic literature, such as the *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*.

In examining and analyzing such narrations, the approach I intend to take is multi-faceted. For some of these traditions, I will examine their content and meaning along with their implications regarding the character and trustworthiness of Ka‘b. For other traditions, however, I will consider their authenticity by examining their *isnād* (pl. *asānīd*) and *matn* while taking into consideration what Ibn Kathīr or other scholars have

said regarding the relative strength or weakness of these particular traditions.<sup>6</sup> This will involve examining similar or related traditions that may be found outside of the *tafsīr* texts of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. Hence, when applicable, I will use supplementary material from other sources including both respective scholars' historical chronicles, other *tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr* texts, and even texts of *ḥadīth* compilations and their commentaries.

In order to provide the appropriate context for this study, I will review some of the current literature that has been written on the *isrā'īliyyāt* in general, including the definition and use of the term within Islamic texts, as well as how they are related to Ka'b al-Aḥbār. Then, I will mention a few points regarding the methodologies of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in their respective exegesis texts as well as their approach to the *isrā'īliyyāt*. Before proceeding, however, I will begin with a brief biographical sketch of Ka'b al-Aḥbār.

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<sup>6</sup> Within the majority of Muslim literature, traditions that are narrated (especially Prophetic traditions) usually consist of two fundamental parts: the *isnād*, or chain of transmitters, which lists the names of those individuals who transmitted the particular narration from generation to generation and the *matn*, or text of the narration itself, which is usually in the form of a quoted saying or the witnessing of an action or event that took place.

## The Life of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār

Abū Ishāq Ka‘b ibn Mātī<sup>7</sup> al-Ḥimyarī came from a Jewish tribe in Ḥimyar, Yemen.<sup>8</sup> The title *al-Aḥbār*, which is the plural of the Arabic *ḥibr*, is a designation that indicates he was ranked among the scholars.<sup>9</sup> Although he lived during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, he never actually met him. He came to Madīnah from Yemen and became a Muslim during the caliphate of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, although some sources state that it was before then, during Abū Bakr’s rule. There are also various narrations indicating how Ka‘b became a Muslim. One tradition has Ibn ‘Abbās asking Ka‘b, “What prevented you from becoming Muslim during the lifetime of the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, or during the time of Abū Bakr and that it was not until now that you accepted Islam during the era of ‘Umar, God be pleased with him?” He responded:

My father wrote for me something from the Torah and gave it to me stating, “Act according to this,” while sealing the rest of his book. He then took an oath from me by the right of a father over his son that I would not break the seal. When the present time came and I witnessed the advent of Islam, I did not see anything wrong with it, so I said to myself, “Perchance my father hid some [important] knowledge from me, thus, I should read it.” I then broke the seal and read [what was hidden from me] only to find the description of Muḥammad, God bless him and grant him peace, and his nation, hence, I came at this time to you as a Muslim.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For his full lineage, Ibn ‘Asākir lists several different possibilities in his *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*. See ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ‘Alī Shīrī, 80 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995), v. 50, 151.

<sup>8</sup> Most of the biographical information regarding Ka‘b al-Aḥbār can be found in the various biographical dictionaries, or the *ṭabaqāt* literature. There are editorial notes in Ibn ‘Asākir’s work, as well as in Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s *al-Istidhkār*, that compile where such information can be found in many of the *ṭabaqāt* reference works. The editorial note in Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr’s work also summarizes what these sources state about Ka‘b, and it is from this source that most of the following information has been adopted, unless otherwise indicated. See Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, v. 50, 151, n. 4; Yūsuf ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd limā fī ‘l-Muwaṭṭa’ min al-ma‘ānī wa ‘l-masānīd*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Azā, 11 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1999), v. 5, 90-92, esp. n. 5. Also see Israel Ben-Zeev, *Ka‘b al-Aḥbār* (al-Quds: Maṭba‘at al-Sharq al-Ta‘āwuniyyah, 1976), 21, n. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Haim Z’ew Hirschberg, “Ka‘b al-Aḥbār,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1971-1972), v. 10, 488. He is also referred to as Ka‘b al-Ḥibr, but less frequently.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, v. 50, 159. Another version of Ka‘b’s conversion involving ‘Umar will be mentioned below in its appropriate context.

Some of these stories of Ka‘b’s conversion have become legendary and were subsequently embellished within the *qīṣaṣ*, or story-telling, genre of literature.<sup>11</sup>

Concerning his trustworthiness and his elaborate knowledge of Jewish traditions, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr states that Ka‘b was “among the greatest of the Followers (*min kibār al-tābi‘īn*) and was one of their scholars and trustworthy people” and that “he was of the most knowledgeable of people in regards to the narrations of the Torah, a *ḥibr* from the *aḥbār* of the Jews.”<sup>12</sup> In his *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, al-Dhahabī also refers to Ka‘b as “the very learned (*al-‘allāmah*), the *ḥibr*” and states how he used to relate to the Companions about the *isrā’īliyyah* books and memorize the most wondrous of stories.<sup>13</sup> He goes on to say that Ka‘b “practiced his Islam well, was firm in his religion, and was from among the most outstanding of scholars.”<sup>14</sup> Finally, al-Dhahabī relates how Ka‘b was “well-versed in the texts of the Jews” and that “he had a sense in knowing their truth from their falsehood on the whole.”<sup>15</sup>

Ka‘b used to sit often in the company of the Companions, relating to them from his texts while listening to their narrations from the Prophet. He would also accompany them on various expeditions, such as the conquest of Jerusalem with the Caliph ‘Umar.

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<sup>11</sup> Moshe Perlmann has written two articles dealing with a couple of these stories as found in various manuscript leaves located in the British Museum. See Moshe Perlmann, "A Legendary Story of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār’s Conversion to Islam," in *The Joshua Starr Memorial Volume: Studies in History and Philology*, Jewish Social Studies Publications No. 5 (New York: Conference on Jewish Relations (U.S.), 1953); idem, "Another Ka‘b al-Aḥbār Story," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Ser. 45, no. 1 (July 1954).

<sup>12</sup> Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istidhkār*, v. 5, 91.

<sup>13</sup> The Arabic reads: *fa kāna yuḥaddithuhum ‘an al-kutub al- isrā’īliyyah wa yaḥfazu ‘ajā’ib*. See Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arnā’ūṭ, 4th ed., 23 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Risālah, 1987), v. 3, 489.

<sup>14</sup> The Arabic reads: *wa kāna hasana ‘l-islām, matīn al-diyānah, min nubalā’ al-‘ulamā’*. Ibid., 489-490.

<sup>15</sup> The Arabic reads: *wa kāna khabīran bi-kutubi ‘l-yuhūd, lahu dhawqun fī ma‘rifati ṣaḥīḥihā min baṭīliḥā fī ‘l-jumlah*. Ibid., 490.

Towards the end of his life, he moved to Syria and lived in Damascus and then Ḥoms where he passed away in the year 32 or 34 AH at around 104 years of age.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> There is a difference of opinion as to the exact time of his death as well as his burial place. Ibn Sa'd states that he died during the caliphate of 'Uthmān in 32 AH in Ḥoms whereas others state that it was in the year 34 AH, one year before the assassination of 'Uthmān towards the end of 35 AH. Ibn Baṭṭūṭa states that his tomb is in Damascus, while others say that he is buried in Madīnah, even Egypt. See Jamāl al-Dīn Abī al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kāmil fī asmā' al-rijāl*, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf, 4th ed., 35 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1980-1992), v. 24, 190-193; Schmitz, "Ka'b al-Aḥbār"; Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *al-Iṣābah fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥābah*, ed. 'Alī Muḥammad al-Bajawī, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1992), v. 5, 651.



### The *Isrāʾīliyyāt*: Definition and Literature Review

The term *isrāʾīliyyāt* (sing. *isrāʾīliyyah*) has been used by various Muslim scholars to denote foreign material, more specifically of Jewish and Christian origin, that has found its way into several genres of Islamic literature, including Qurʾanic exegesis.<sup>17</sup> Some of this material was transmitted in the form of stories dealing with the origins of the universe or past prophets and their nations from as early as the first generation of Muslims after the death of the Prophet. As the origin of these narratives is from the texts of Banī Isrāʾīl, or the Children of Israel, they came to be known as *isrāʾīliyyāt*. In the same regard, any narration having to do with Banī Isrāʾīl, and by extension the People of the Book, also came to be known by term. However, according to other scholars, every foreign element in exegesis is called *isrāʾīliyyāt* and this denotes the widest sense of the term.<sup>18</sup>

As for the origin of the term *isrāʾīliyyāt* and its usage within Muslim literature, Robert Tottoli has written an elaborate article on the subject, where he deals with the occurrence of the word itself as found in Muslim texts rather than the origin of the stories or narrations contained therein.<sup>19</sup> In another of his works, Tottoli discusses the means by which such stories spread within Muslim literature, including the role of the Jewish converts such as Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, as well as how such narrations were dealt with

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<sup>17</sup> Ismail Albayrak, "Isrāʾīliyyāt and Classical Exegetes' Comments on the Calf with a Hollow Sound Q.20: 83-98/ 7: 147-155 with Special Reference to Ibn ʿAṭiyya," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 47, no. i (2002): 39.

<sup>18</sup> For a good summary of the notion of *isrāʾīliyyāt*, see Ismail Albayrak, "Qurʾanic Narrative and Isrāʾīliyyāt in Western Scholarship and in Classical Exegesis" (Ph.D diss., University of Leeds, 2000), 114-116. Albayrak's discussion on the *isrāʾīliyyāt* has also been published in a separate article. See Ismail Albayrak, "Re-Evaluating the Notion of Isrāʾīliyyāt," *Ilāhiyat Fakultesi Dergisi (Dokuz Eylul Üniversitesi)*, no. 14 (2001).

<sup>19</sup> Roberto Tottoli, "Origin and Use of the Term Isrāʾīliyyāt in Muslim Literature," *Arabica* 46, no. ii (1999).

by various scholars, from the time of Ibn Taymiyyah down to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup>

Gordon Newby explores the “Islamicization” of the *isrāʾīliyyāt* traditions as well as their impact on scriptural commentary in early Islam in his article.<sup>21</sup> He discusses how the scholars among the *mawālī*, or non-Arab Muslims, in the generation of the Followers are disproportionately represented within the *asānīd* of the *isrāʾīliyyāt* traditions found in the early *tafsīr* collections. Finally, Jane Dammen McAuliffe provides a comprehensive summary of what works have been written on the *isrāʾīliyyāt* by Western and Muslim scholars alike in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the Arabic works by Ramzī Naʿnāʾah and Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī written exclusively on the *isrāʾīliyyāt* in the *tafsīr* literature.<sup>22</sup> She also summarizes what some of the more classical scholars have written regarding the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, namely Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Kathīr, upon whose works the modern writings are grounded and includes an example of how a particular *isrāʾīliyyah* cited by Ibn Taymiyyah is dealt with in the *tafsīr* texts, leading up to the emergence of an “hermeneutic of suspicion” surrounding the *isrāʾīliyyāt*.

Regarding the narration of the *isrāʾīliyyāt* and their narrators, several articles have been written by various authors. M. J. Kister produced a detailed study on the Prophetic tradition “Narrate concerning the Children of Israel and there is nothing objectionable in that” which focuses on “whether it was lawful to turn to Jewish and Christian sources for guidance, to study Jewish and Christian compilations and to

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<sup>20</sup> Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾan and Muslim Literature* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002), 89-92, 171-183.

<sup>21</sup> Gordon D. Newby, “Tafsir Israʾiliyat: The Development of Qurʾan Commentary in Early Islam in its Relationship to Judaeo-Christian Traditions of Scriptural Commentary,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion Thematic Studies: Studies in Qurʾan and Tafsīr* 47, no. 4S (December 1979).

<sup>22</sup> Jane Dammen McAuliffe, “Assessing the Isrāʾīliyyāt: An Exegetical Conundrum,” in *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature*, ed. Stefan Leder (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998). Also see Ramzī Naʿnāʾah, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt wa atharuhā fī kutub al-tafsīr* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1970); Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt fī ʾl-tafsīr wa ʾl-ḥadīth*, *Silsilat al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah*, vol. 37 (Cairo: Majmaʾ al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah, 1971).

incorporate certain aspects from them in the Muslim cultural tradition and belief.”<sup>23</sup> He includes many narrations attributed to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih<sup>24</sup> that indicate the various themes of the *isrā’īliyyāt* narrations. Similarly, in his discussion on the *isrā’īliyyāt*, G. H. A. Juynboll focuses on the transmitters of the *isrā’īliyyāt*, especially Wahb and Ka‘b. However, unlike Kister, he does not place an emphasis on the themes of their narrations, but rather concentrates on the modern debate surrounding the reliability of such transmitters, with a special consideration of Ka‘b.<sup>25</sup> He succinctly summarizes the arguments of those scholars who attacked Ka‘b in their works, such as Rashīd Riḍā and Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah, while indicating the various rebuttals written by other scholars, such as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jamjumūnī and Muḥammad al-Samāḥī, in defence of Ka‘b.<sup>26</sup>

In another article on a related note, Ronald Nettler discusses the role that the *isrā’īliyyāt* played in the early literature of Islam where they were essentially assimilated and accepted by the majority of the early Sunni scholars. He contrasts this to the attitudes toward such narrations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, where they are viewed as

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<sup>23</sup> M. J. Kister, "Haddithū ‘an Banī Isrā’īla wa-lā ḥaraja: A Study of an Early Tradition," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972): 215.

<sup>24</sup> Wahb ibn Munabbih is another narrator of *isrā’īliyyāt* who came from a Jewish background and was very well-versed in the scriptures of the People of the Book. For more information on him and his narrations, see M. J. Kister, "On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, no. 37 (1974); idem, "On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih: An Addendum," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, no. 40 (1977); Nabia Abbott, "Wahb b. Munabbih: A Review Article," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, no. 36 (1977).

<sup>25</sup> G. H. A. Juynboll, "The Discussion on the Isrā’īliyyāt," in *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969).

<sup>26</sup> As for the authors who attacked Ka‘b, Rashīd Riḍā made several comments severely criticizing the *isrā’īliyyāt* and their transmitters in his *Tafsīr al-Manār* as well as in the Egyptian periodical edited by him called *al-Manār*, which also published al-Jamjumūnī’s responses to Riḍā’s allegations against Ka‘b. Similarly, Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah wrote an article published in another periodical that charged Ka‘b with being the first Zionist, allegations which he reiterated in his book that was subsequently published where he also attacked Abū Hurayrah for his narrating of *isrā’īliyyāt* and his relationship to Ka‘b. See Maḥmūd Abū Rayyah, "Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, huwa ‘l-ṣahyūnī ‘l-awwal," *al-Risālah* 14 (1946); idem, *Adwā’ ‘alā ‘l-sunna ‘l-Muḥammadiyyah* (Cairo: 1958).

“extraneous” material that pose certain problems.<sup>27</sup> Here, Nettler also mentions the politicized views of Riḍā and Abū Rayyah against the transmitters of the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, namely Kaʿb and Wahb, who are viewed as the earliest Zionists determined to undermine the Islamic tradition. In this regard, the *isrāʾīliyyāt* should be totally rejected and purged from Islamic literature in pursuit of a “pure Islam” free from foreign, specifically Jewish, influences. Nettler’s basic premise overall is that “this new spotlight on the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, which are now implicated in the decline and ills of Muslim intellectual life and societies, should be seen as part of the broader endeavour to reconsider and reconstruct Islamic thought in the modern context” and that “negative interest in the *isrāʾīliyyāt*...does not stem first and foremost from a concern with Jewish matters specifically, but rather from the challenge of internal Islamic reform.”<sup>28</sup>

One last source that is dedicated specifically to Kaʿb al-Aḥbār is a monograph written by Israel Ben-Zeev.<sup>29</sup> This work provides some details concerning his life, his relationship to some of his contemporaries as well as the place of his narrations, *isrāʾīliyyāt* or otherwise, within other genres of Islamic literature, such as poetry, the stories of the Prophets, and the stories of Islamic or Arabian folklore. However, the

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<sup>27</sup> Ronald L. Nettler, "Early Islam, Modern Islam and Judaism: The *Isrāʾīliyyāt* in Modern Islamic Thought," in *Muslim-Jewish Encounters: Intellectual Traditions and Modern Politics*, ed. Ronald L. Nettler and Suha Taji-Farouki, (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998). Nettler also wrote another article that explores a single scholar’s views on the role that the *isrāʾīliyyāt* played in the “Judaisation” of Islam where the legal tradition became a focus in Islam’s subsequent development, as opposed to its ethical and merciful principles that were so essential to the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad. See Ronald L. Nettler, "A Post-Colonial Encounter of Traditions: Muhammad Saʿīd Al-ʿAshmāwī on Islam and Judaism," in *Medieval and Modern Perspectives on Muslim-Jewish Relations*, ed. Ronald L. Nettler (Luxembourg: Harwood Academic Publishers in cooperation with the Oxford Centre for Postgraduate Hebrew Studies, 1995).

<sup>28</sup> Ronald L. Nettler and Suha Taji-Farouki, eds., *Muslim-Jewish Encounters: Intellectual Traditions and Modern Politics*, Studies in Muslim-Jewish relations, vol. 4 (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), xiii.

<sup>29</sup> The original work was done as a PhD thesis under the last name Wolfensohn in German whereas the edition used in this study is the author’s Arabic rendition published under the alternate name of Ben-Zeev, which has been cited above on p. 6, n. 8. The reference for the original German work is Israel Wolfensohn, “Kaʿb al-Aḥbār und seine Stellung im Ḥadīth und in der Islamischen Legendenliteratur” (F.W. Kalbfleisch, 1933).

work does not delve into a detailed analysis of such traditions as found in any of the genres, as this study will do in regards to the *tafsīr* texts of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr. At this point, I will turn to discussing the methodologies of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in their respective *tafsīr* texts before moving on to my analysis of the traditions involving Ka‘b al-Aḥbār.

## The Methodology of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in their *Tafsīr* Texts

In order to analyse the various traditions related to Ka‘b as found within the works of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, it is essential to lay out the structure and methodology of their respective *tafsīr* texts, note some of the commonalities and differences between the two, as well as examine each author’s approach to narrations that would be deemed as *isrā’īliyyāt* in the widest sense of the term.

Without a doubt, the *tafsīr* of Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/922) is one of the most important works within the genre of Qur’anic exegesis due to its prolific and comprehensive nature. His work, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān fī ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān* (The Comprehensive Exposition of the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qur’an) has been described as one of the definitive texts responsible for standardizing the form of exegesis writing from the classical period on in terms of its structure, systematic compilation and arrangement of nearly the entire corpus of exegetical traditions,<sup>30</sup> up until his time.<sup>31</sup> Al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* contains approximately 38,400 traditions, making it one of the foremost *tafsīr bi-’l-ma’tūr* (exegesis by tradition)<sup>32</sup> commentaries ever

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<sup>30</sup> The structure of exegetical *aḥādīth* is similar to Prophetic *aḥādīth* in the sense that they both consist of an *isnād* (chain of authority or transmission) and a *matn* (text of tradition), however, the latter is limited to those dealing with the Prophet himself whereas the former can include a saying of a Companion or a Follower that does not necessarily involve the Prophet. In the context of Qur’anic exegesis, both types of traditions are cited if they are relevant to a particular verse being explicated. However, the *isnād* of such traditions is not always cited in other *tafsīr* texts, which has posed certain problems for scholars in terms of determining their authenticity.

<sup>31</sup> Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Quranic Hermeneutics: The Views of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr," in *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur’ān*, ed. Andrew Rippin (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 48.

<sup>32</sup> Also referred to as *al-tafsīr al-naqlī* (exegesis by transmission). Traditionally, the *mufasssīrūn*, or exegetes, use this term to refer to the category of *tafsīr* texts that are based primarily upon the authority of transmitted exegetical traditions, or *ma’tūr*, as opposed to exegesis derived from a scholar’s personal interpretation or opinion, that is, *tafsīr bi-’l-ra’y*. The former category is generally looked upon as being superior and more praiseworthy than the latter due to the negative connotations associated with the term *ra’y* in the context of Qur’anic exegesis as found in classical *tafsīr* texts. In fact, al-Ṭabarī himself has a short section in the introduction to his *tafsīr* which narrates several Prophetic traditions that prohibit interpreting the Qur’an according to personal opinion. Hence, for al-Ṭabarī, the proper interpretation of the Qur’an cannot be attained except through a very limited number of means that only lead to certainty

composed. This vast number of traditions reflects the critical level of importance placed on *ḥadīth* narration and compilation, both oral and written, that were prevalent during the early 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Several noteworthy points can be made regarding al-Ṭabarī's methodology in his *tafsīr*. Although his interpretive enterprise is not limited simply to the narration of exegetical *aḥādīth*, it is this aspect of his *tafsīr* that will be of most relevance for this particular study.<sup>33</sup> First of all, al-Ṭabarī himself clearly sets out his intent and method in the introduction to his *tafsīr* when he states:

As for us, in setting forth its interpretation and clarifying its meanings and significations, we shall, God willing, compose a comprehensive book, which will incorporate everything which people need to know about this Book, and which will surpass all other books on this subject. In all of this we shall state whatever consensus has come down to us where there has been agreement concerning the Book of God, as well as disagreement where this has occurred, establishing the reasoning of each of the schools of thought<sup>34</sup> among them, and finally indicating in the most succinct and brief manner possible that which seems to us to be correct.<sup>35</sup>

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or true knowledge, one of which is an authoritative text, or *naṣṣ*, that has been transmitted from the Prophet himself. See Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, 24 vols. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2000), v. 1, 77-79; idem, *The Commentary on the Qur'ān*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Alan Jones, trans. John Cooper (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 34-35 and 50, n. 53. For more on the categorization of *tafsīr* texts and their definitions, see Andrew Rippin, "Tafsīr," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa 'l-mufasssīrūn*, 3 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat Wahbah, 1995), 163-167; Muḥammad Abū Shahbah, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt wa l-mawḍū'āt fī kutub al-tafsīr*, 4th ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Sunnah, 1987/1408), 43-44.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Heath has an excellent article in which he delineates some of the similarities and differences found in al-Ṭabarī's method between his *tafsīr* and history texts. He makes mention of al-Ṭabarī's philological approach to Qur'anic exegesis and how he concentrates on establishing the meaning of the text through grammatical, semantic, and historical analysis, whereas his history text focuses more on temporal narrative. Regardless, the most significant point to be made here is al-Ṭabarī's persistent use of *isnād* to indicate the sources of every tradition he cites, which Heath says "serves a rhetorical function" as "it imbues the project with an air of scientific objectivity and veracity." See Peter Heath, "Creative Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis of Three Islamic Approaches," *Arabica* 36 (1989): 184-187.

<sup>34</sup> The term he uses here for "schools of thought" is *madhhab* (pl. *madhāhib*), which includes referring to differences among the Companions, Followers and those who have transmitted from them as opposed to the common usage of the term to refer to the schools of jurisprudence. See al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, 48, n. 10.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 9.

As indicated above, al-Ṭabarī aimed to produce a text that was more comprehensive, hence, he did not look to reduce the amount of material in his *tafsīr* through the application of “some trenchant critical method,” nor did he collect everything he could find on the subject. Rather, he collected only that which he felt was reliably transmitted to him from Sunni authorities, thereby excluding any Shī‘i or Sufī traditions of interpretation.<sup>36</sup>

It was through his extensive travels throughout the major cities of Iraq, Syria and Egypt that he was able to accumulate such a large collection of traditions. Whenever he would reach a particular place, he would seek out those who narrated *aḥādīth* and take from them various traditions narrated by the Prophet, his Companions and the Followers, especially those who were known to narrate exegetical traditions. Along with these traditions, he would meticulously record their continuous chains of transmission, thereby seeking permission from those narrating to transmit the traditions himself. The use of the *isnād* would not only imbue whatever traditions he collected and narrated with a sense of authority continuous with the past; it would also guarantee the correctness of the text being transmitted. Hence, whenever he narrates a tradition in his *tafsīr* beginning with the formula “so-and-so has reported to us” (*ḥaddathanā, akhbaranā*), this means that it has been authentically transmitted to himself and he is now authorized to transmit it further, thereby making himself another link in its *isnād*.<sup>37</sup>

Similarly in the preface to his *tarīkh*, he states how he has restricted himself “to transmitting facts as they have been reported” to him.<sup>38</sup> The authority to transmit, however, does not necessarily entail that the traditions themselves are all of sound

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<sup>36</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, xii and Albayrak, “Qur’anic Narrative”, 262.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, ix-x.

<sup>38</sup> G. N. Khaki, “Muslim Historiography - A Study of Al-Tabari's Methodology,” *Islam and the Modern Age* 33, no. 2 (2002): 16.



authenticity and this is what has occupied the interest of *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* scholars alike when engaging his work.<sup>39</sup> In fact, many such scholars have been quick to point out that his *tafsīr* and *tarīkh* contain several weak and even fabricated traditions and some have severely criticized him for not being more scrupulous in his analysis of such traditions.<sup>40</sup> This is especially true for the *isrāʾīliyyāt* traditions which he includes a large number of in both of his major works.

The approach of al-Ṭabarī to exegesis is certainly not unique to his time period as many other *mufasssirūn* likewise transmitted traditions that were not necessarily authentic. The key to such exegesis, however, was the citation of the full *isnād* as later scholars would indicate in coming to the defense of al-Ṭabarī and his ilk. In other words, the inclusion of full chains of transmission was enough to exonerate him (and others) of any criticism, since during his time the knowledge of *isnāds* was so widespread that scholars would have known the relative strengths or weaknesses of any particular *isnād*, hence, the lack of any need to specify this directly in the text. Furthermore, for those who lacked this knowledge, if they desired to know the reliability of a particular tradition and its *isnād*, the onus was upon them to critically analyse it themselves. Thus, al-Ṭabarī's mere reference to the full *isnād* of any tradition he collected absolved him of the responsibility to determine the veracity of its contents.<sup>41</sup> It was subsequent *ḥadīth* scholars such as Ibn Kathīr who would take on this responsibility as evidenced in his well-known exegesis on the Qur'an.

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<sup>39</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, xix.

<sup>40</sup> Na'nā'ah, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 180-181.

<sup>41</sup> It often occurs in his *tafsīr* that he may list several divergent traditions on the same verse without necessarily trying to resolve any apparent contradictions. Although he sometimes may attempt to harmonize between such traditions or offer his support towards the opinion or tradition that he prefers, the reasons he gives for his preferences are not systematic. Gatje states that al-Ṭabarī also "openly expresses reservations concerning the validity of certain material and does not spare the pupils of Ibn

Next to the *tafsīr* work of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* is regarded by many as "one of the soundest of *tafāsīr bi'l-ma'thūr*, if not absolutely the soundest."<sup>42</sup> Like al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr relies a great deal on exegetical traditions for explicating verses of the Qur'an. His method of exegesis, as laid out in his introduction, involves several stages. The first stage consists of using the Qur'an to explain itself (*tafsīr al-Qur'ān bi-l-Qur'ān*) whereas the second looks towards Prophetic traditions, collectively referred to as the *Sunnah*, for explanations of particular verses. If no indication of meaning is found in either, the next stage is to go to the sayings of the Prophet's Companions who are distinguished as being "eye witnesses [sic] to the circumstances and situations with which they were particularly involved," followed by the last resort of going to the traditions of the generation of Followers.<sup>43</sup> Unlike al-Ṭabarī, what is common in Ibn Kathīr's work is his criticism of traditions through examination of its *isnād* or *matn*. Through such criticism, Ibn Kathīr often seeks to reduce the multivalent readings of the text into a single, monovalent one, whereas al-Ṭabarī is perfectly content to list several divergent interpretations regarding a Qur'anic verse, giving each of them the equal possibility of being correct.<sup>44</sup> One of the

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'Abbās." See Na'nā'ah, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 236; Khaki, "Muslim Historiography," 16; al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, 12-14; Helmut Gatje, *The Qur'ān and its Exegesis*, trans. Alford T. Welch (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1971), 34.

<sup>42</sup> McAuliffe, "Quranic Hermeneutics," 56.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 57. From amongst the Companions of the Prophet, Ibn Kathīr makes explicit mention of those whose traditions are the most authoritative in this regard, including the first four Caliphs, Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd.

<sup>44</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, xii-xiii and Norman Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 126. Norman Calder is especially critical of Ibn Kathīr's method which he sees as "a reduction of complexity, of detail, of *ikhtilāf* in favour of a relatively 'simple' dogmatic agenda – not an achievement of but an aspiration towards a monovalent reading of the Qur'an." Calder states that Ibn Kathīr's "primary aim was to juxtapose revelation [Qur'an] and revelation [*ḥadīth*]" which "was perhaps an expansion of revelation but it was accompanied, less commendably, by an intellectual and imaginative narrowness quite foreign to the *tafsīr* tradition as a whole." Similarly, Andrew Rippin states how the method of Ibn Kathīr and his mentor, Ibn Taymiyyah is "fundamentally antagonistic to intellectual speculation of all types, whether

advantages of studying Ibn Kathīr’s *tafsīr* alongside al-Ṭabarī’s is the fact that Ibn Kathīr very often quotes the same exegetical traditions directly from al-Ṭabarī. This allows one to see how each respective author deals with identical traditions, whether it is through silence, as is often the case with al-Ṭabarī, or through the sometimes lengthy and often critical commentary of Ibn Kathīr. Finally, due to Ibn Kathīr’s method of meticulously criticizing weak or fabricated traditions, the implication behind this is that if he is silent regarding a particular tradition, then it would be considered, at best, rigorously authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or, at the very least, acceptable (*maqbul*) according to his personal judgement.<sup>45</sup>

Regarding the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, each scholar has a different approach to such narrations. Since the notion of what defined an *isrāʾīliyyāt* tradition as such was not very refined in the time of al-Ṭabarī, it only makes sense that he would have very little to say regarding them, *per se*. Although he does criticize certain of these traditions by either questioning their authenticity through their *isnād* or simply dismissing them as lacking any benefit, he is silent on many, if not the vast majority, of such narrations.<sup>46</sup>

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legal or exegetical” as both scholars “stand in contrast to the general tendency in *tafsīr* to allow for diversity” and Ibn Kathīr specifically “champions dogmatism in his attempt to juxtapose and reconcile the Qurʾān and the *sunna*, both understood as revealed books.” See Calder, “*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 131 and Rippin, “*Tafsīr*.” Regarding the development of the idea of the Qurʾān and *Sunnah* as revelations, along with the relationship between revelatory and prophetic authority, see William Albert Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources with Special Reference to the Divine Saying or Ḥadīth Qudsī*, Religion and Society 7 (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1977).

<sup>45</sup> I am indebted to Sh. Khalid Baqqār for his indicating this to me in my personal correspondence with him.

<sup>46</sup> Naʿnāʾah offers several instances of al-Ṭabarī’s criticism of such narrations. For example, regarding verse 12:20 (which refers to the “paltry price” that Yusuf was sold for), al-Ṭabarī states how the exact amount in number or weight is not specified in the Qurʾān, nor is it indicated from a narration of the Prophet and that “there is no benefit derived in the *dīn* from knowing this amount, nor is its ignorance a source of harm, and that belief in the outward purport of what has been revealed is what is obliged and whatever goes beyond this, we regard knowledge of it as unnecessary.” For this and other examples, see Naʿnāʾah, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 237-243.

By the time of Ibn Kathīr, however, the situation is rather different. The term *isrāʾīliyyāt* has developed into a much more technical sense as is demonstrated by Ibn Kathīr’s systematic use of it in his *tafsīr*.<sup>47</sup> In dealing with such narrations within the *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* literature, he follows closely in the footsteps of his mentor, Ibn Taymiyyah.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr articulates very clearly in several places of his *tafsīr* a well-defined and laid out strategy for assessing the use and authenticity of the *isrāʾīliyyāt*. For example, in the introduction to his *tafsīr*, after mentioning the Prophetic tradition sanctioning the transmission of the stories of the Children of Israel,<sup>49</sup> he qualifies this by stating that “these *al-aḥādīth al- isrāʾīliyya*...are quoted for supplementary attestation (*lil-istishhād*), not for full support (*lā lil- iʿtiqād*).”<sup>50</sup> He then goes on to state how these narrations fall into one of three categories: i) those narrations which are known to be true and correct through the revelatory sources (i.e. the Qur’an and the authentic Prophetic *aḥādīth*); ii) those narrations which are known to be false through the same sources; iii) those narrations which the revelatory sources are silent about, falling into neither of the first two categories and, hence, can neither be affirmed nor denied. He concludes by stating that, “they are permissible to narrate for reasons already stated, however, the majority of such

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<sup>47</sup> Tottoli, “Origin”, 207-208.

<sup>48</sup> In fact, what Ibn Kathīr says in the introduction to his *tafsīr* regarding his method of *tafsīr* and his approach to the *isrāʾīliyyāt* has been taken virtually verbatim from Ibn Taymiyyah’s *Muqaddimah fī usūl al-tafsīr*. Cf. Abū ʿl-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, ed. Sāmī ibn Muḥammad Salāmah, 8 vols. (Riyadh: Dār Ṭaybah li ʿl-Nashr wa ʿl-Tawzīʿ, 1999/1420), v. 1, 8-9; Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī usūl al-tafsīr*, ed. ʿAdnān Zarzūr (Kuwait: Dār al-Qurʾān al-Karīm, 1971), 93-102.

<sup>49</sup> This is the same tradition mentioned above on pp. 10-11, n. 22.

<sup>50</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 1, 9. See McAuliffe, “Quranic Hermeneutics,” 57 for the translation as quoted above.

narrations carry no benefit in them regarding any matters of the religion” implying that exegetical disagreements over such issues will profit no one in the end.<sup>51</sup>

Throughout his text, Ibn Kathīr does not hesitate to mention deficiencies found in the *isnād* and/or *matn* of any *ḥadīth* he cites, and this is especially true for the *isrāʾīliyyāt* traditions, most of which he deems bereft of any substantial benefit. His stance towards the *isrāʾīliyyāt* is related in several places in his *tafsīr* where he deems it necessary to make a point or take a strong stance. For example, in the commentary on Q21:51, after relating what several exegetes have recorded regarding the story of Abraham’s early life, calling them all “tales of the Banī Isrāʾīl” (*aḥādīth Banī Isrāʾīl*), Ibn Kathīr goes on to state:

Of this material, whatever is compatible with the truth as we have it from the sinless [prophet Muḥammad], we accept it, because it matches what is true. But whatever is opposed to any detail [of this truth] we reject it. Whatever displays neither agreement nor disagreement, we neither declare it true nor false; we suspend judgement. Many of the *salaf* have declared a dispensation with regard to transmitting material of this type. Much of it however is of no use or value in practical matters of religion (*lā fāʾida fīhi wa-lā ḥāṣil lahu mim mā yantafiʿu fīʾl-dīn*): if it did have a use accruing to God’s servants (*mukallaf*) in their religion, then this perfect and comprehensive *sharīʿa* would have explained it. The method we follow in this *tafsīr* is to abandon many of the *Isrāʾīliyyāt* because they constitute a waste of time (*limā fīhā min tadīʾ al-zamān*), and because many of them contain lies imposed upon [the Banī Isrāʾīl] owing to their lack of distinction between true and false. This has been explained by the authorities of our community, those who preserve [its bases] and have achieved certainty.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 1, 9 and McAuliffe, “Quranic Hermeneutics,” 57.

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 5, 347-348. See Calder, “*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 120 for this translation. The above statement happens to be one of the more critical ones of Ibn Kathīr regarding the *isrāʾīliyyāt*. Similar statements regarding how many of the *isrāʾīliyyāt* passed down by the Companions and various *mufasssīrūn* can neither be affirmed nor denied can be found in his *tafsīr* of Q2:67 (v. 1, 298), Q12:58 (v. 4, 397), Q31:16 (v. 6, 338) and Q31:27 (v. 6, 348). In his comments on Q18:50 (v. 5, 168-169), Ibn Kathīr states how numerous *isrāʾīliyyāt* narrations regarding a group of *jinn* of Paradise were transmitted by the *salaf* whereas the Qurʾan is free of any need of them, and any other such reports of the past, as they are taken from sources that, unlike the texts of Islam, did not have meticulous scholars who sorted through them to distinguish between what was true and false. Thus, the general attitude that he displays throughout his *tafsīr* is for a complete and total reliance on those sources or traditions which he deems as definitively true, and anytime he cites a tradition that could be otherwise, he usually, but not always, includes critical statements to indicate the useless nature of their content. On the contrary, such statements are seldom found in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*, most likely due to the fact that al-Ṭabarī aimed more for comprehensiveness in his text rather than authenticity.

Again, what is interesting to note from this statement is that he does not rule the transmission of these narrations and the exegetical discussions surrounding them as off limits, but rather, sees that the “proper course of action is to take into account the various views expressed, ratify the sound, reject the false and then let the matter drop” so as not to fall into useless discord and debate thereby occupying oneself with insignificant matters to the exclusion of more important ones.<sup>53</sup> Regardless, what Ibn Kathīr has consciously decided to include in his text of the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, with or without critical commentary, is of significance for analyzing the traditions as they are related to Kaʿb al-Aḥbār.

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<sup>53</sup> McAuliffe, “Quranic Hermeneutics,” 57.

### Analysis of Traditions Related to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār

There exist several types of narrations within the *tafsīr* works of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr that are associated with Ka‘b in one way or another. Some traditions mention the interaction of Ka‘b with his contemporaries or their comments and views regarding him, whether in praise or criticism. Of these traditions, many of them deal with his relationship to those Companions who were known to transmit *isrā’īliyyāt*, most significantly Ibn ‘Abbās, Abū Hurayra, and ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ.<sup>54</sup> Other narrations are in the form of sayings attributed directly to Ka‘b that interpret certain Qur’anic verses. Finally, there are those narrations which Ibn Kathīr speculates as possibly originating from Ka‘b, although nothing definitive can be said about them. In this regard, it is only in Ibn Kathīr’s *tafsīr* that direct and explicit comments that link Ka‘b to the *isrā’īliyyāt* are found. Such comments also contain some of Ibn Kathīr’s personal opinions regarding those who have transmitted the *isrā’īliyyāt* from the People of the Book who converted to Islam, including Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih, which are of significance for this study and will be mentioned in their appropriate contexts.

To begin, I will focus on those traditions regarding Ka‘b and his relationship to those Companions who are *not* known to have transmitted any *isrā’īliyyāt*, specifically, ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān. I have decided to proceed with them first due to the fact that the discussion regarding their relationship to Ka‘b is not as complicated as those Companions who did narrate *isrā’īliyyāt*, where a consideration of the possible sources of such Companions’ *isrā’īliyyāt* narrations is necessary.

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<sup>54</sup> Na‘nā‘ah mentions that going through the *tafsīr bi-l-ma‘thūr* works, it will be noticed that the majority of what is narrated of the *isrā’īliyyāt* from the Companions comes from five of them: ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, Abū Hurayra, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām and Tamīm al-Dārī. See Na‘nā‘ah, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 123.

## Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb

The first encounter between Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb occurred during the latter’s caliphate, shortly before the former’s conversion to Islam. This incident is related in both of the *tafsīr* texts of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in the commentary on Q4:47 regarding the command of God to the People of the Book to believe in what has been revealed to the Prophet and it reads as follows:

Ka‘b embraced Islam in the time of ‘Umar; he set out on a journey towards Jerusalem and passed through Maḍīnah where ‘Umar went out to him and said: “O Ka‘b! Accept Islam.” He replied, “Did you not read in your Book, {The likeness of those who have been loaded with the Torah, then they have not carried it, is as the likeness of an ass carrying books}<sup>55</sup> and I have carried the Torah!” So ‘Umar left him alone. Then Ka‘b carried on his journey until he reached Ḥoms where he heard a native of the town in a saddened state saying, {O You who have been given the Book, believe in what We have sent down, confirming what is with you, before We obliterate faces, and turn them upon their backs}<sup>56</sup> to the end of the verse. Ka‘b then proclaimed, “O Lord! I have submitted (*aslamtu*)!” out of fear that he would be stricken by this verse. He then returned to his family in Yemen and came back with them [to Maḍīnah] as Muslims.<sup>57</sup>

What is interesting about this tradition is the dismissive manner in which Ka‘b disregarded ‘Umar’s invitation to accept Islam and that ‘Umar simply left him alone even after his snapping remark towards the Caliph. Nevertheless, after the conversion, various sources from the *ṭabaqāt* literature make note of the close and intimate relationship that developed between Ka‘b and ‘Umar.<sup>58</sup> Hence, it would not be unusual

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<sup>55</sup> Q62:5

<sup>56</sup> Q4:47

<sup>57</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 8, 446 and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 2, 325. As already indicated, this is only one of many versions of the story of Ka‘b becoming Muslim. For other versions, see above, pp. 6-7 and also Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, v. 50, 159-163; Perlmann, "A Legendary Story of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār’s Conversion to Islam"; idem, "Another Ka‘b al-Aḥbār Story."

<sup>58</sup> In al-Nawawī’s *Tahdhīb al-asmā’* it is mentioned how Ka‘b “took the companionship of ‘Umar and related much from him (*ṣaḥība ‘Umar wa akthara ‘l-riwāyah ‘anhu*),” whereas in al-Mizzī’s *Tahdhīb al-Kāmil* and Ibn Ḥajar’s *al-Iṣābah*, a tradition relates how ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām found Ka‘b *in the company of ‘Umar* and asked him to define who the scholars were [emphasis added]. In Ibn ‘Asākir’s *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, Ka‘b himself relates how when he went to ‘Umar, told him his story about hearing the verse and became a Muslim, the Caliph “took me as a close companion and I loved the Muslims and they



for ‘Umar to be found consulting Ka‘b on various matters, especially those involving past scriptures or the People of the Book. This did not always mean that ‘Umar would accept any and all pieces of advice given to him by Ka‘b, but rather, he would discern what was acceptable within the confines of Islam and would act accordingly, as was the case during the entrance of ‘Umar into Jerusalem.

In his *tafsīr* of Q17:1, Ibn Kathīr relates an exchange between Ka‘b and ‘Umar that takes place when ‘Umar first steps onto the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. As it was the Caliph’s first time in the Sacred City, he asked for Ka‘b’s advice as to where the place of prayer should be established to which he responded, “If you ask me, I would place it behind the Rock as the entire city of Jerusalem is before you.” ‘Umar replied, “You are imitating the Jewish religion (*ḍāhayta ‘l-yāhūdīyyah*)! Rather, I will pray where the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) prayed.”<sup>59</sup> Then the tradition describes how ‘Umar began to clean off the refuse that had accumulated on the Rock from the Christians. Ibn Kathīr adds his own commentary regarding this as follows:

Hence, he [‘Umar] did not venerate the Rock by praying behind it so as to be

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loved me (*aslamtu wa qarrabanī, wa aḥbabtu ‘l-muslimīn wa aḥabbūnī*). In another tradition, it relates how Ka‘b once distanced himself from sitting close to ‘Umar in one of his gatherings and ‘Umar explicitly disapproved of this action to which Ka‘b replied, “O Commander of the Faithful! Verily, in one of Luqmān’s wisdoms and advices to his son, he states, ‘O son! If you sit in the presence of a Sultan and there is not an empty space for one to sit between the two of you, it may happen that one who is more honourable in his sight than you may come and [not finding a space to sit by the Sultan] remain distant from him; this would prove as a deficiency on your part.’” The implication in this last tradition is that ‘Umar preferred to have Ka‘b sit near him, but Ka‘b, out of humility before the Caliph chose to sit with space between them, lest someone more worthy in Umar’s estimation should enter who would have more right to a position near the Caliph. See Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmā’ wa ‘l-lughāt*, 4 pts. in 2 vols. (Cairo: Idārat al-Ṭibā‘ah al-Muniriyyah, 1927), v. 1, pt. 2, 69; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kāmil fī asmā’ al-rijāl*, v. 24, 192; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Iṣābah*, v. 5, 651; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, v. 50, 162 and 167.

<sup>59</sup> The Rock refers to the one that presently exists beneath the Dome of the Rock that Muslims traditionally believe was the point from which the Prophet began his nocturnal ascent to the heavens (*mi‘rāj*). Ka‘b’s advice to ‘Umar was to make the place of prayer north of the Rock so as to include it in the *qiblah* when praying south towards Makkah. ‘Umar refused and made the mosque south of the Rock such that one’s back would be towards it when facing Makkah.

facing it as was indicated to him by Ka‘b al-Aḥbār who comes from a people that venerate the Rock to the point where they made it their direction of prayer (*qiblah*); rather, God had blessed him with Islam and guided him to the truth, and for this reason, when he made his suggestion, the Commander of the Faithful ‘Umar responded: “You are imitating the Jewish religion!” He [‘Umar] did not debase the Rock as the Christians did, who made it into a refuse dump because it was the *qiblah* of the Jews, but rather, he removed the filth from it with his garment.<sup>60</sup>

Focusing upon the actions of ‘Umar (as opposed to Ka‘b’s), Ibn Kathīr wants to indicate the balanced, middle course of Islam as exemplified by ‘Umar, who did not go the way of extreme veneration of the Rock like the Jews, nor of the extreme debasement of the Rock like the Christians. Regarding ‘Umar’s statement towards Ka‘b, what Ibn Kathīr emphasizes here is the Caliph’s attitude of caution towards allowing any foreign (Jewish) influence to penetrate into the practices of Islam rather than making a direct criticism of Ka‘b, *per se*.<sup>61</sup>

That ‘Umar had a certain level of approval towards Ka‘b is expressed in other traditions found outside of the *tafsīr* works in the collections of *ḥadīth*. For example, Mālik records in his *al-Muwatta‘a* the following tradition:

Ka‘b al-Aḥbār was once coming back from Syria with a group of riders, and at a certain point along the road they found some game-meat and Ka‘b said they could eat it. When they got back to Maḍīnah they went to ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and told him about that, and he said, “Who told you you could do that?”, and

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 5, 32.

<sup>61</sup> Similarly, in his *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-nihāyah*, Ibn Kathīr only makes mention of ‘Umar’s statement in passing without mentioning any direct criticism against Ka‘b. In al-Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh*, an interesting addition is made to ‘Umar’s statement to Ka‘b as he said, “Take care of your own affairs (*idhhab ilayk*); we were not commanded to venerate the Rock, but we were commanded to venerate the Ka‘bah.” Although the statement “*idhhab ilayk*” seems more critical of Ka‘b, the emphasis clearly goes back to the matter of Jewish tendencies towards the Rock that Islam does not approve of. See Abū ‘l-Fidā’ Ismā‘īl ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-nihāyah*, 10 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1988), v. 7, 57; Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: tārīkh al-rusul wa ‘l-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū ‘l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, 11 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1979), v. 3, 611; idem, *The Battle of al-Qādisiyyah and the Conquest of Syria and Palestine*, trans. Yohanan Friedmann, The History of al-Ṭabarī, vol. 12 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 194-195.

they said, “Ka‘b.” He said, “He was indeed the one I made *amīr* [commander] over you until you should return.”<sup>62</sup>

Here, ‘Umar explicitly states his appointment of Ka‘b to a leadership position among a group of riders and approves of Ka‘b’s ruling on a specific matter of jurisprudence.

However, there also exists another tradition related by Ibn Kathīr in his *al-Bidāyah wa ’l-nihāyah* that is not found in his *tafsīr* in which ‘Umar threatens Ka‘b if he does not stop relating his narrations. It is related alongside a similar statement of ‘Umar made to Abū Hurayrah, both of which are as follows:

Sā’ib ibn Yazīd said: I heard ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb say to Abū Hurayrah, “Refrain from transmitting from the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) or else I will send you back to the land of Daws!” and he said to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, “Refrain from transmitting from the past or else I will send you back to the land of monkeys [Yemen]!”<sup>63</sup>

Taken at face value, this tradition appears as a clear reproach of Ka‘b and Abū Hurayrah for their narrative activities. However, immediately after quoting these two statements of ‘Umar, Ibn Kathīr offers the context for them as a means of exonerating the two, especially Abū Hurayrah. He states:

This [refrain] was borne by ‘Umar out of his fear that the narrations would be placed in an improper context by people and that they would narrate only what is in them of dispensations; as well, if a person begins to narrate too much, he may perchance fall into some error and commit mistakes in his narrations and people would subsequently continue to transmit these errors on his behalf, and so forth; furthermore, it is related that ‘Umar subsequently allowed him [Abū Hurayrah] to narrate.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Mālik ibn Anas bin Mālik, *al-Muwattaʿa*, Jam‘u jawāmi‘ ’l-aḥādīth wa ’l-asānīd wa maknaz al-ṣaḥāḥ wa ’l-sunan wa ’l-masānīd, vol. 9 (Vaduz: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation (Jam‘iyyah al-Maknaz al-Islāmiyyah), 2000), 126, no. 787. The English translation has been adopted with slight modifications from Mālik ibn Anas bin Mālik, *al-Muwattaʿa*, trans. ‘Ā’isha ‘Abdaraḥmān (Bewley) and Ya‘qūb Johnson (Norwich: Diwan Press, 1982), 168, no. 83.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa ’l-nihāyah*, v. 8, 110. The Arabic reads: *‘an al-Sā’ib ibn Yazīd qāl: sami‘tu ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb yaqūl li Abī Hurayrah: la-tatrukanna al-ḥadīth ‘an Rasūlillāh ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam wa la-ulḥiqannaka bi arḍ daws, wa qāla li-Ka‘b al-Aḥbār: la-tatrukanna al-ḥadīth ‘an al-awwal aw la-ulḥiqannaka bi-arḍ al-qiradah.*

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

Regarding Ka‘b specifically in this context, Ramzī Na‘nā‘ah offers a similar conclusion stating, “As for the secret behind ‘Umar’s prohibiting Ka‘b from narrating and his threatening him with exile... it is out of his fear for the people in general when they hear Ka‘b’s narrations that they will not differentiate in them between what is true and what is false which will subsequently cast doubts into their beliefs, and that he sees the study of Qur’an and *ḥadīth* as more important than these *isrā’īliyyāt* that Ka‘b narrates.”<sup>65</sup>

One of the most, if not *the* most, critical statements of ‘Umar towards Ka‘b can be found in Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī’s (d. 666/1267) *Mir’āt al-zamān* where the author states, “‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (God be pleased with him) used to strike him [Ka‘b] with a whip saying, ‘Spare us from your Judaism (*da‘nā min yahūdīyyatika*)!’ and even thus, he permitted some of his narrations if they were not narrated from the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) because he became Muslim at the hands of ‘Umar...”<sup>66</sup> Interestingly enough, even with such a strong statement against Ka‘b (according to al-Jawzī’s quotation of ‘Umar, if it is authentic as it is cited without an *isnād*), some of his narrations were still permitted by the Caliph to be transmitted. Overall then, it seems that ‘Umar’s objection to Ka‘b concerned either the issue of allowing Jewish influence into the practices of Islam (as was the case with the exchange between himself and Ka‘b

<sup>65</sup> Na‘nā‘ah, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 96. Also see al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt fī ’l-tafsīr wa ’l-ḥadīth*, 128-129.

<sup>66</sup> Yūsuf ibn Qizughlī Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt al-zamān fī tārikh al-a‘yān*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-Shurūq, 1985), 77. As for ‘Umar’s hitting Ka‘b, other than the incident cited above, there is another reference to this in al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* where ‘Umar asked Ka‘b about the idea of taking one’s self to account during life before being taken to account after one’s death as found in the Book of God (i.e. the Torah in this context) to which Ka‘b responded, “Woe to the requiter of the earth from the Requirer of heaven.” ‘Umar immediately struck him with his whip (*fā-‘alāhu bi-’l-durrah*) and said, “Except for the one who takes himself to account!” to which Ka‘b responded, “O Commander of the faithful! What you said, in fact, immediately follows what I was saying in the Torah without a single letter in between the two, ‘Except for the one who takes himself to account!’” Again, there is no way to verify this incident for the lack of an *isnād*, however, Ben-Zeev believes that this incident is fabricated, not only because of its absence in earlier sources, but also because it seems unreasonable for the Caliph to strike an old man, particularly a scholar whom he respected, asked for advice, and kept him close in his gatherings. See Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*, ed. Abū Ḥafṣ Sayyid ibn Ibrāhīm, 5 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1992/1412), v. 4, 607; Ben-Zeev, *Ka‘b al-Aḥbār*, 32 and 34.

in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount, as narrated above) or it concerned the falsehood contained in some of Ka‘b’s narrations that he transmitted from corrupted Jewish sources, as would be indicated by ‘Umar’s censure above. However, if Ka‘b was narrating from his sources something that did not contradict the Qur’an, this was what ‘Umar deemed acceptable, albeit with a certain level of prudence.

Ibn Kathīr even offers the possibility of ‘Umar’s allowing Ka‘b to transmit narrations from his sources. In his commentary on Q37:107 addressing the question of the intended sacrifice of Abraham and whether it was Ishmael or Isaac, Ibn Kathīr contends that all of those Companions, including ‘Umar, who maintained that it was Isaac based their opinion on Ka‘b’s traditions as he states:

The account that it was Isaac came from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār....All of these statements, and God knows best, are taken from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. Now when he converted to Islam during the caliphate of ‘Umar, he began to report traditions to ‘Umar on the authority of his ancient books. Perhaps ‘Umar listened to him and permitted people to listen to his sources and to transmit what he had on his [Ka‘b’s] authority, [both] the corrupt ones and the good ones. Now this Islamic nation (*ummah*) has no need, and God knows best, for one letter of [those traditions] he possessed.<sup>67</sup>

Although it may be argued that ‘Umar’s prohibition of Ka‘b’s narrating from his sources occurred after his initial consent as related in Ibn Kathīr’s surmise above<sup>68</sup>, the point to

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<sup>67</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, 32-33. The translation of this statement has been adopted with slight modifications from Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1990), 139.

<sup>68</sup> An elaboration of ‘Umar’s reason for this consent can be found in Ibn Kathīr’s *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-nihāyah* (v. 2, 123) where he states: “This is Ka‘b al-Aḥbār who is from amongst the better of those who transmit from them [the People of the Book]; he became Muslim in the time of ‘Umar and would transmit some traditions from the People of the Book; ‘Umar (God be pleased with him) would approve of some of what he transmitted for its correspondence to the truth and for conciliation of his [Ka‘b’s] heart (*ta’līfān li-qalbihi*), hence, many people began taking much from what he possessed and he also exaggerated in his transmission of those traditions, many of which demonstrated the extent of his knowledge. Of these traditions are those that are false without a doubt, while others are true by the attestation of the truth that we have before us [through revelation].” In this statement, Ibn Kathīr concedes that Ka‘b is among the best of those who transmit from the People of the Book while at the same time, indicates how ‘Umar had a good opinion of him and in fact wanted to make his heart firmer in his Islam by allowing him to transmit his narrations as expressed by the Arabic “*ta’līfān li-qalbihi*.” Thus, according to Ibn Kathīr’s view, it is only when Ka‘b’s traditions do not correspond to the truth (i.e. contravene the Qur’an and

be made here is that in no instance did ‘Umar direct any criticism towards Ka‘b himself, but rather was more concerned with the impact his narrations, which contained both “the lean and the fat (*al-ghath wa ’l-samīn*)”, would have on the common people. A final note to be made regarding the above statement is that it contains one of Ibn Kathīr’s most critical comments regarding Ka‘b, namely that “this Islamic nation (*ummah*) has no need for one letter (*ḥarf*)” of his traditions. Again, the overlying theme here is that the Muslims possess authentic texts, namely the Qur’an and the Prophetic traditions, that make them free of any need to go to any other revelatory source for the attainment of the truth, especially if such sources have been corrupted. Thus, Ibn Kathīr is not criticizing Ka‘b, but rather the traditions he possesses, questioning their veracity and usefulness for the teachings of Islam.<sup>69</sup> This fact becomes much clearer when examining his comments on the tradition of Mu‘āwiyah regarding Ka‘b which will be analysed in more detail at this point.

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authentic Prophetic traditions) that criticism is warranted against the traditions themselves, rather than against Ka‘b. This is further supported by a similar statement of Ibn Kathīr in the same work (v. 1, 15) where he states, “When Ka‘b al-Aḥbār became Muslim in the time of ‘Umar, he used to narrate in the presence of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (God be pleased with him) from the knowledge of the People of the Book and ‘Umar used to listen to him out of conciliation and out of astonishment for what he possessed [of knowledge] much of which was in accordance with the truth mentioned by the immaculate Sacred Law, hence, many people allowed the transmission of what Ka‘b al-Aḥbār narrated, along with what was made permissible to narrate of the stories of the Children of Israel [through a Prophetic tradition], however, much of what he mentioned also falls into grave error and numerous mistakes.” For other traditions and further references regarding ‘Umar’s relationship with Ka‘b, see Nabia Abbott, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri: Qur’ānic Commentary and Tradition*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 8, esp. n. 33.

<sup>69</sup> One indication that Ibn Kathīr had a good opinion of Ka‘b is that there is at least one occurrence in his *tafsīr* where he invokes the mercy of God upon Ka‘b (*rahmatullāh ‘alayhi*) after the mention of his name, something that is usually said after mentioning pious and learned Muslims who have died. See his commentary on Q35:10 (v. 6, 537). Although it does not occur in this particular edition, in other editions of his *tafsīr*, the invocation occurs again after Ka‘b’s name and this can be found in Ibn Kathīr’s commentary on Q35:32.

## The Saying of Mu'āwiyah Regarding Ka'b and the Meaning of “*kadhib*”

Ibn Kathīr records a tradition in his commentary on Q29:46 where Mu'āwiyah was speaking to a group of people from Quraysh in Madinah when the name of Ka'b al-Aḥbār was mentioned. Hearing his name, Mu'āwiyah stated, “He [Ka'b] was one of the most truthful of those who narrated from the People of the Book, even though we found that some of what he said might be lies.”<sup>70</sup> In commenting on this tradition, Ibn Kathīr states:

This means that some of what he said could be classified as lies in a linguistic sense [i.e. falsehoods],<sup>71</sup> lacking willful intent, because he was narrating from manuscripts which he thought were good; however, they contained fabricated and false material, because they [the Jews and Christians] did not have in their religion scholars who were meticulous preservers [of their scriptures] as this great nation has...<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> This *ḥadīth* is also found in the collection of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (*Kitāb al-i'tisām bi-l-kitāb, Bāb qawl al-Nabī lā tas'alū ahl al-kitāb 'an shay'*) and the statement of Mu'āwiyah reads in Arabic as follows: *in kāna min aṣḍaḍi hā'ulā'i 'l-muḥaddithīna 'l-ladhīna yuḥaddithūna 'an ahli 'l-kitābi wa in kunnā ma'a dhālika la-nablū 'alayhi 'l-kadhib*. The above translation has been adopted with some modifications from Abū 'l-Fidā' Ismā'īl ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr (Abridged)*, trans. Safī-ur-Raḥmān al-Mubārakpūrī, 10 vols. (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2003), v. 7, 497. Another translation of the same tradition by Muḥammad Muḥsin Khān offers a slightly different interpretation of Mu'āwiyah's statement, especially the last part, and reads as follows: “He was one of the most truthful of those who used to talk about the people of the Book, *yet we used to detect certain faults in his information*” (emphasis added). G.H.A Juynboll translates the last part of the saying as “but in spite of this, we used to test him for falsehood.” What is noticeable in these two translations is the absence of any direct or explicit implication that Ka'b was a liar, but rather, they appear geared towards the impression that what he narrated contained some falsities. See Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Jam'u jawāmi' 'l-aḥādīth wa 'l-asānīd wa maknāz al-ṣaḥāḥ wa 'l-sunan wa 'l-masānīd, vol. 3 in 3 pts. (Vaduz: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation (Jam'iyyah al-Maknāz al-Islāmiyyah), 2000), pt. 3, 1485, no. 7448; idem, *Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: Arabic-English*, trans. Muḥammad Muḥsin Khān, 3rd revised ed., 9 vols. (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1979), v. 9, 338; Juynboll, “The Discussion on the Isrā'īliyyāt,” 123.

<sup>71</sup> The linguistic definition of *kadhib* is “to report concerning something whose reality is otherwise (*al-kadhib huwa ikhbāruhu 'an al-shay' khilāf mā huwa 'alayhi*).” Ibn al-Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī has an informative section in his work entitled *al-Ādāb al-shar'iyyah wa 'l-minaḥ al-mar'iyyah* on the various types of lying, what constitutes acceptable forms of lying in Islam and what does not. The section includes numerous traditions taken from the *ḥadīth* literature on the subject along with their context and meanings. I am gratefully indebted to Dr. Fahad Alḥomoudi for directing me to this source. See Shams al-Dīn Abī 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Mufliḥ al-Maqdisī, *al-Ādāb al-shar'iyyah wa 'l-minaḥ al-mar'iyyah*, ed. Abū Mu'ādh Ayman ibn 'Arif al-Dimashqī, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1996), v.1, 19-34. For the linguistic definition of *kadhib* as cited above, see *ibid.*, 29.

<sup>72</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 6, 285. Ibn Kathīr also mentions the lack of willful intent on the part of Ka'b regarding this same tradition in his *al-Bidāyah wa 'l-nihāyah*, v. 2, 123.

That Ibn Kathīr views Ka‘b as lacking willful intent in transmitting what is false is made even clearer in another encounter he relates between Mu‘āwiyah and Ka‘b in the commentary on Q18:83-84. Ibn Kathīr states:

Mu‘āwiyah ibn Abī Sufyān said to Ka‘b: “You say that Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn used to tether his horse to [the constellation] Pleiades?!” So Ka‘b responded to him, “If I said such, then God Himself states [about Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn] {And We gave him a means to everything}.”<sup>73</sup> And that which Mu‘āwiyah (God be pleased with him) censured from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār is correct, and the truth is with Mu‘āwiyah in his censure, for verily Mu‘āwiyah used to say regarding Ka‘b, “Even though we found that some of what he said might be lies” meaning in what he transmits, and not that he would intentionally transmit what is not in his books (*ṣuḥuf*). However, the matter regarding his books is that they are of the *isrā’īliyyāt*, the majority of which are altered, distorted, corrupted and fabricated, and we have absolutely no need for any of them whatsoever in place of the reports of God and the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) for there has come from them [the *isrā’īliyyāt*] to the people much harm and widespread corruption.<sup>74</sup>

Ibn Kathīr goes on to state how Ka‘b’s personal interpretation of this verse as rendered from his texts is incorrect and offers what he views to be the proper meaning of the verse regarding Dhū ‘l-Qarnayn. His annoyance towards the *isrā’īliyyāt* narrations as found in the *ṣuḥuf* of Ka‘b is quite clear in his comments, yet, he clearly and deliberately directs his rebuke *away* from Ka‘b by focusing on what was contained in his sources while confirming that Ka‘b would not intentionally fabricate something of his own and subsequently narrate it as if it was derived from his *ṣuḥuf*.

Various other scholars have interpreted the saying of Mu‘āwiyah regarding Ka‘b in a similar fashion. In his monumental commentary on al-Bukhārī’s collection of Prophetic traditions, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī mentions several such interpretations of Mu‘āwiyah’s statement, all of them coming to the defense of Ka‘b in one way or

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<sup>73</sup> Q18:84.

<sup>74</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 5, 190.



another. Concerning the part of the tradition “*la-nablū ‘alayhi ‘l-kadhib*”, Ibn Ḥajar states:

That is, some of what he reports to us about falls contrary to what he himself actually says;<sup>75</sup> Ibn al-Tīn states that, “This is similar to what Ibn ‘Abbās said with respect to Ka‘b: ‘What was before him [of sources] was altered, so he fell into [narrating] falsehood.’”...Ibn Ḥibbān states in his *Kitāb al-thiqāt*, “Mu‘āwiyah meant that he [Ka‘b] made mistakes regarding what he reported and he did not mean that he was a liar.”<sup>76</sup>

Ibn Ḥajar then mentions how, alternatively, some scholars state that the pronoun suffix in Mu‘āwiyah’s words “*‘alayhi ‘l-kadhib*” refers to *al-kitāb* and not to Ka‘b and that what occurs in the books of the People of the Book is what contains the lies. According to Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, the pronoun may go back to either the book or to Ka‘b and his narrations, however, without the implication of Ka‘b willfully intending to lie. Furthermore, Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ clarifies that it is not a condition that the word *kadhib* include willful intent in its meaning, but rather it simply means to narrate regarding something whose reality is otherwise. He concludes by stating that “this [saying] does not contain disparagement of Ka‘b by claiming him as a liar.”<sup>77</sup> Summarizing with a final quote, Ibn Ḥajar cites Ibn al-Jawzī who asserts that, “The meaning [of Mu‘āwiyah’s statement] is that some of what Ka‘b narrated from the People of the Book was false, and not that he himself was intentionally lying for Ka‘b was among the best of the scholars (*akhyār al-aḥbār*).”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> This part of the passage reads in Arabic: *ay yaqa‘a ba‘ḍ mā yukhbirunā ‘anhu bi-khilāf mā yukhbirunā bihi.*

<sup>76</sup> Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi-sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khaṭīb and Muḥammad Fu‘ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī, 13 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah, 1986/1407), v. 13, 346.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. Na‘nā‘ah mentions how Ibn al-Jawzī was of the most critical scholars of *jarḥ* and *ta‘dīl* who “waged war against the fabricators of hadith, hence, had he thought of Ka‘b to be of the fabricators or conspirators, he would not have held back any criticism of him and he would not have interpreted Mu‘āwiyah’s saying regarding Ka‘b in such a positive manner.” See Na‘nā‘ah, *al-Isrā‘īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 174.

With all of the above being said, it would be very difficult for anyone to draw the conclusion that Mu‘āwiyah’s statement regarding Ka‘b was disparaging of him in any way.<sup>79</sup> In addition, the various comments mentioned by Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Ḥajar provide some possible contextualization for the meaning of the word *kadhīb* or its root derivatives whenever such words occur in traditions involving Ka‘b. For example, there exist several traditions where certain Companions, after hearing a particular narration of Ka‘b, deny it by stating “*kadhaba ka‘b*” or “Ka‘b has lied.” The point of their statement, according to the context mentioned above, would be to deny the truth of what Ka‘b was narrating as opposed to accusing him of being a liar. However, in some cases, this utterance of certain Companions regarding Ka‘b’s narrations is followed by a criticism of the “Jewishness” that he retained even after becoming a Muslim. My focus will now turn to examining an example of such a tradition that is found in the *tafsīr* texts of both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.

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<sup>79</sup> To the contrary, that Mu‘āwiyah clearly had a high level of respect for Ka‘b and the knowledge which he possessed is expressed in another one of his statements as quoted by Ibn Ḥajar in his *al-Iṣābah* as well as in his *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, where Mu‘āwiyah says, “Verily Ka‘b is one of the scholars who possesses knowledge like the seas (or like abundant fruit), even though we were neglectful of him,” that is, neglectful of taking advantage of Ka‘b’s knowledge. The Arabic reads: *a-lā inna Ka‘b al-Aḥbār aḥad al-‘ulamā’ in kāna ‘indahū la-‘ilm ka-’l-biḥār (aw ka-’l-thimār) wa in kunnā fīhi la-mufarritīn*). See Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Iṣābah*, v. 5, 649-650 and idem, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 12 vols. (Ḥaydarābād al-Dakkan: Maṭba‘at Majlis Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif al-Niẓāmiyyah, 1907/1325), v. 8, 439.

### *Kadhaba Ka‘b. As the Heavens Turn on the Shoulder of an Angel*

In their commentary on Q35:41, al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr relate an interesting tradition traced back to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār regarding the heavens and its axis of rotation. What is of particular interest here is not the added commentary offered by either *tafsīr* scholar on this tradition, which, in fact, is virtually absent in this case, but rather that of the Companions who heard this tradition from Ka‘b. Al-Ṭabarī relates the tradition as follows:

Abū Wā’il said: “A man came to ‘Abd Allāh who said, “From where have you come?” to which the man replied, “From al-Shām.” ‘Abd Allāh said, “Who did you meet there?” and the man said, “I met Ka‘b.” ‘Abd Allāh said, “What did he narrate to you?” and the man replied, “He narrated to me that the heavens revolve on the shoulder of an angel.”<sup>80</sup> ‘Abd Allāh said, “So did you believe him or deny him?” and the man said, “I neither believed nor denied him.” ‘Abd Allāh stated, “I wished that you had saved yourself from your journey to him by sacrificing your riding-camel and its saddle, Ka‘b has lied! Verily, God says {God holds the heavens and the earth, lest they remove [from their place]; did they remove, none would hold them after Him}. ”<sup>81</sup>

In another version, al-Ṭabarī relates that it was a man by the name of Jundab al-Bajāfī who had made the journey to Ka‘b and when ‘Abd Allāh asked him to relate what Ka‘b had narrated, Jundab replied, “He told me that the heavens are on an axis like the axis of a mill and that this axis is a pillar on the shoulder of an angel.”<sup>82</sup> ‘Abd Allāh replied, “I wish that you had sacrificed your journey with the likes of your riding-camel” and added, “Jewishness does not speckle the heart of a servant except that it almost never leaves it.”<sup>83</sup> Then he recited the verse and said, “Its revolving is sufficient as a

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<sup>80</sup> This particular statement within the tradition reads in Arabic: *ḥaddathanī anna ‘l-samawāt tadūr ‘alā mankib malak*.

<sup>81</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘al-bayān*, v. 20, 481-482. The general meaning of the verse is that only God has the power to keep the heavens fixed in their proper place and that they remain under His control at all times. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 6, 557

<sup>82</sup> In Arabic, this statement reads: *ḥaddathanī anna ‘l-samā’ fī quṭb ka-quṭb al-raḥā wa ‘l-quṭb ‘amūd ‘alā mankib malak*.

<sup>83</sup> The Arabic of this part reads: *mā tantakit al-yahūdiyyah fī qalb ‘abd fa-kādat an tufāriqahu*. A slight variation of this statement is recorded by Abū Ḥayyān in his *tafsīr* where Ibn Mas‘ūd states, “*mā*

removal.”<sup>84</sup> The second version lacks the words “*kadhaba Ka‘b*” but contains the added comment on Jewishness speckling the heart. Ibn Kathīr only cites the first version found in al-Ṭabarī and mentions the name of Jundab as being found in the other version, but excludes the comment on Jewishness, for whatever reason.<sup>85</sup> He does, however, clarify that the “‘Abd Allāh” in the dialogue is Ibn Mas‘ūd and affirms that the *isnād* of the tradition is sound as going back to Ka‘b and Ibn Mas‘ūd.<sup>86</sup>

The point of Ibn Mas‘ūd’s statement “*kadhaba Ka‘b*” is merely to indicate the false nature of Ka‘b’s narration and that no moral implication against him is meant whatsoever when it is mentioned that he has “lied.” This is made clear by Ibn Mas‘ūd’s statement that to revolve is sufficient to indicate a moving away of the heavens from their fixed position, or *zawāl* of sorts, something that the Qur’anic verse denies according to his interpretation. As well, this is further indicated by Ibn Kathīr’s subsequent citation of another tradition from Mālik who asserts that the heavens do not revolve while using this verse and another sound Prophetic *ḥadīth* as evidence. Regarding the statement on Jewishness, there exist several variants of this tradition in other *tafsīr* texts that not only contain a different statement about Ka‘b and his tendency to interpret scripture in light of Jewish sources, but it is uttered by Ibn ‘Abbās as well. In the *tafsīr* of al-Qurṭubī, two versions are cited, one attributed to Ibn Mas‘ūd and another to Ibn ‘Abbās. In the version of Ibn Mas‘ūd, the tradition states that a man from his companions went to Ka‘b to gain knowledge from him, and upon his return, Ibn Mas‘ūd asked what he had acquired. After hearing Ka‘b’s statement, Ibn Mas‘ūd

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*tamakkanat al-yahūdiyyah fī qalb wa-kādat an tufāriqahu.*” See Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Abū Ḥayyān, *Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, 8 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabah wa Maṭābi‘ al-Naṣr al-Ḥadīthah, 198-), v. 7, 318.

<sup>84</sup> In Arabic: *kafā bihā zawālan an tadūr.* See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 20, 482.

<sup>85</sup> One can only speculate as to why Ibn Kathīr did not cite the statement on Jewishness found in al-Ṭabarī, even though he clearly alluded to the second variant naming Jundab that contained the statement.

<sup>86</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 6, 558.

replied, “Ka‘b has lied! He hasn’t left his Jewishness behind!”<sup>87</sup> Then after reading the verse, he stated, “Verily the heavens do not revolve, for had they revolved they would have removed.”<sup>88</sup> The variant attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās has him asking a man coming from al-Shām about whom he met with and, finding out it was Ka‘b, enquired as to what he had heard from him. The man replied simply, “I heard him say that the heavens revolve on the shoulder of an angel” to which Ibn ‘Abbās responded, “Ka‘b has lied! Has he not left his Jewishness behind yet?”<sup>89</sup> and then he recited the verse.<sup>90</sup>

What is peculiar about the two traditions as reported in the *tafsīr* of al-Qurṭubī is the similarity between them in their description of the incident with both Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibn ‘Abbās, as well as their response to the man coming back from al-Shām and their comment on Ka‘b’s Jewish background.<sup>91</sup> How, then, is their statement regarding

<sup>87</sup> The Arabic reads: *kadhaba Ka‘b! mā taraka yahūdiyyatahu!*

<sup>88</sup> Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Ansārī al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, 20 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-‘Arabī, 1967), v. 13, 357. This is further evidence that Ibn Mas‘ūd was negating Ka‘b’s claim of the heavens revolving, and nothing more, with his statement “Ka‘b has lied!” Even the notion of the heavens’ movement occurring “on the shoulder of an angel” is not what is at issue here. For this, there exist two variants of this tradition that involve yet a third Companion, Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān, found in Ibn Ḥajar’s *al-Iṣābah* and al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Durr al-manthūr*. In these versions, neither statements of Ka‘b that reached Ḥudhayfah contain any mention of an angel, but rather, Ka‘b is quoted as stating, “Verily, the heaven revolves on an axis like a mill (*inna ‘l-samā’ tadūr ‘ala quṭb ka-‘l-raḥā*)” or “Verily, the heaven revolves on a pole like the pole of a mill (*inna ‘l-samā’ tadūr ‘ala naṣab mithla naṣab al-raḥā*)” after which Ḥudhayfah stated, “Ka‘b has lied!” and recited the verse. There is no statement regarding Ka‘b’s “Jewishness” from Ḥudhayfah in either tradition. See Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Iṣābah* v. 5, 650; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, v. 50, 172; Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī ‘l-tafsīr al-ma‘thūr*, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1990), v. 5, 479.

<sup>89</sup> The Arabic reads: *kadhaba Ka‘b! a-mā taraka yahūdiyyatahu ba‘d?*

<sup>90</sup> al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, v. 13, 357.

<sup>91</sup> A possible explanation for the similarity between the two traditions is that the incident initially occurred with Ibn Mas‘ūd and then was subsequently attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās by later scholars. There are several indications that allude to this possibility. First of all, in the narrations cited by al-Ṭabarī above, the traditions only specify that a man came to ‘Abd Allāh (*jā’a rajul ilā ‘Abdillāh*) without specifying whether it was Ibn Mas‘ūd or Ibn ‘Abbās. It is not uncommon to find in the Prophetic *ḥadīth* literature traditions whose *isnād*, when referring to Ibn Mas‘ūd, contain simply the name ‘Abd Allāh, whereas when making reference to Ibn ‘Abbās, contain either his full name, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās, or simply Ibn ‘Abbās. Hence, when Ibn Kathīr subsequently cites the above mentioned tradition from al-Ṭabarī, he explicitly specifies that the ‘Abd Allāh in the narration is indeed Ibn Mas‘ūd. Another indication that the tradition originally occurred with Ibn Mas‘ūd can be gleaned from the fact that in the second narration cited by al-Ṭabarī and referenced by Ibn Kathīr, the man with whom ‘Abd Allāh spoke with is identified as Jundab al-Bajāfī whose place of residence was in Kūfa where Ibn Mas‘ūd lived and taught as opposed to Makkah, where Ibn ‘Abbās was. Finally, in the versions that contain the dialogue involving Ibn ‘Abbās

Ka‘b to be interpreted and contextualized? From the perspective of these two Companions, some points can be noted. In the tradition of Ibn Mas‘ūd cited by both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, he asked the man whether he believed what Ka‘b had related to him or not and the man replied neither. This is consistent with Ibn Mas‘ūd’s approach concerning the People of the Book and acquiring knowledge from them. Both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr quote Ibn Mas‘ūd as stating:

Do not ask the People of the Book regarding anything for they cannot guide you as they have gone astray themselves, for then you may deny a truth or believe in a falsehood; there is no one from the People of the Book except that he has in his heart an inclination that beckons him to his religion like an inclination to wealth.<sup>92</sup>

An equally strong, if not stronger statement is found coming from Ibn ‘Abbās on another occasion as well when he said:

How can you ask the People of the Book about anything while your Book that has been revealed to the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) is most recent? You read it pure and undistorted whereas God has informed you that the People of the Book changed their scripture and distorted it, and wrote the scripture with their own hands and said, “It is from God,” to sell it for little gain. Does not the knowledge which has come to you prevent you from asking

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cited by al-Qurṭubī and al-Zamakhsharī, neither of them has an *isnād*, making it difficult to verify the relative strength or weakness of the narrations; whereas the versions cited by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr referring to Ibn Mas‘ūd both have an *isnād*, making the traditions verifiable. Taking these points into consideration, it is possible that some scholars interpreted the initial traditions cited in al-Ṭabarī mentioning only the name ‘Abd Allāh as referring to Ibn ‘Abbās rather than Ibn Mas‘ūd, thereby allowing a tradition of similar content under the names of both Companions to be subsequently reported in later *tafsīr* works. For the version containing Ibn ‘Abbās in the *tafsīr* of al-Zamakhsharī, see Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl wa ‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta’wīl*, ed. ‘Adil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwaḍ, 6 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-‘Ubaykān, 1998), v. 5, 162, esp. n. 1249.

<sup>92</sup> See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 20, 49 and Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 6, 284. This approach has been taken clearly from two Prophetic traditions, also quoted by Ibn Kathīr in his commentary on the same verse (Q29:46). The first one is related by Abū Hurayrah who said that the people of the Book used to read the Torah in Hebrew and then explain it in Arabic to the Muslims, to which the Prophet stated: “Do not believe the People of the Book, nor deny them, but say ‘We believe in what has been sent down to us and what has been sent down to you...’” The second tradition states, “If the People of the Book narrate to you, do not believe them nor deny them, but say we believe in God, His Books and His Messengers for if it is true, you will not deny them and if it is false, you will not believe them.” See *ibid*.

them about anything? No, by God, we have never seen any man from them asking you regarding what has been revealed to you!”<sup>93</sup>

Hence, both Companions took issue with acquiring knowledge from the People of the Book. This begs another question: would this approach apply to the situation of Ka‘b who, although Muslim, was still of the most knowledgeable of the People of the Book regarding their scriptures? That is, would it be considered valid to ask Ka‘b, a Muslim, for specific knowledge knowing that his answer would most likely be influenced by his Jewish background? Clearly, when Ka‘b accepted Islam, he also accepted a new identity while simultaneously giving up his old, Jewish one.<sup>94</sup> However, he nonetheless still retained the vast cultural and intellectual heritage that he inherited from his Jewish upbringing. In this regard, the criticisms of Ibn Mas‘ūd and Ibn ‘Abbās as reflected in their comments on the retention of Jewishness by Ka‘b occur in light of a situation where his Jewish background negatively influenced his understanding of a particular matter of Islam. Hence, Ibn Mas‘ūd’s comment on Jewishness speckling the heart was probably meant to demonstrate how, even though Ka‘b was a Muslim and no longer a Jew in terms of his religion, his knowledge was still affected by his Jewish past, which is enough of a reason to exercise caution whenever hearing from his narrations. With Ibn ‘Abbās, in spite of his comments, there occur several instances in which he approached Ka‘b to ask him regarding the interpretation of several Qur’anic verses, a matter that will be dealt with in greater detail below in the appropriate section. In neither case, however, are the comments meant to question the sincerity or character of Ka‘b as a Muslim, nor question his reliability or trustworthiness, but instead, they

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<sup>93</sup> This translation has been adopted with some modifications from al-Bukhārī, *Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: Arabic-English*, v. 9, 339.

<sup>94</sup> In qualifying this statement, an important distinction to be made here is that he no longer could be considered as a Jew in the sense of a follower of the Jewish religion, nevertheless, he would naturally still retain his tribal identity, that is, as coming from the Jewish people of Yemen.

merely reflect the indication that some, if not much, of the knowledge he possessed remained somewhat problematic from an Islamic perspective for its lack of verifiability at the very least, or its outright falsity at the most. In the latter case, this would be the context of the Companions' statement whenever they declared, "Ka'b has lied" upon hearing such narrations.

Up until this point in the analysis, the focus has been mainly upon considering those traditions that give some indication of the relationship that existed between Ka'b and those Companions who were not known to have been narrators of *isrā'īliyyāt*. However, when considering the traditions that involve those Companions who were known to narrate *isrā'īliyyāt* and their relationship to Ka'b, the matter becomes much more complicated. In attempting to extricate the complex relationship between Ka'b, the Companions, and the *isrā'īliyyāt*, one of the challenges is determining the primary source of an *isrā'īliyyāt* narration transmitted by a Companion as this raises more questions than it provides answers. For example, how many *isrā'īliyyāt* narrations transmitted by certain Companions can, in fact, be originally attributed to Ka'b? What is the basis for such an attribution? What other possible sources did these Companions have for such narrations? Another issue that needs further examination when attempting to address the above questions is to determine the extent that these Companions associated with Ka'b and even approached him for the purpose of attaining a fuller understanding of Islamic scripture.

As for those Companions who were known to narrate *isrā'īliyyāt*, Gordon Newby asserts that the bulk of these traditions and their introduction into various genres of Muslim literature, including the *tafsīr* texts, can be traced back to three primary transmitters, none of whom was a Jewish convert. When examining the chains of



transmission of the majority of these traditions, the three names that occur most often as the initial narrator are ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, Abū Hurayrah, and Ibn ‘Abbās, whom Newby points out is “the ultimate authority cited for a number of *isrā’īliyyāt* traditions.”<sup>95</sup> For my analysis, I will only be dealing with the narrations involving Abū Hurayrah and Ibn ‘Abbās due to the fact that there are numerous traditions available within the *tafsīr* texts of Ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī which indicate the existence of some type of relationship between the two and Ka‘b, whereas this is not the case with ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ, even though he transmitted several *isrā’īliyyāt* traditions.<sup>96</sup> Finally, whereas Ibn ‘Abbās has the largest number of Qur’anic exegetical traditions attributed to him, Abū Hurayrah is, conversely, known to be the most prolific narrator of Prophetic *aḥādīth*. Hence, by focusing specifically on Abū

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<sup>95</sup> Newby, “Tafsir Isra’iliyat,” 687-688.

<sup>96</sup> For the study of the *isrā’īliyyāt*, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ is an important figure for several reasons. First, he is one of the Companions who narrated the Prophetic tradition that gave sanction to transmit the stories of Banī Isrā’īl without objection (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, pt. 2, 683, no. 3499). Furthermore, his prominent role in transmitting *isrā’īliyyāt* was noted by Ibn Taymiyyah in his *Muqaddimah fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* and Ibn Kathīr in the introduction to his *tafsīr*, both of whom mention how ‘Abd Allāh came into possession of two camel-loads of books from the People of the Book on the day of Yarmūk and how he used to narrate from them traditions he felt were narratable (that is, not outright false) in accordance with the Prophetic tradition he related. However, Ibn Kathīr mentions in his *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-nihāyah* (v. 1, 20) how he would narrate many things of the *isrā’īliyyāt* from them, ranging from “the accepted, the well-known, the objectionable, and the rejected.” ‘Abd Allāh was capable of reading Syriac and, according to Newby, had an “extensive knowledge of the Talmud.” Other traditions relate that he also read from the Torah itself. In fact, al-Bukhārī records a tradition in which ‘Abd Allāh was once asked by ‘Aṭā’ ibn Yasār to give the description of the Prophet as mentioned in the Torah (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, pt. 1, 396, no. 2166). One interesting variant of this tradition found in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and related by Ibn Kathīr in his commentary on Q2:119 contains an additional statement of ‘Aṭā’ who states, “I then met Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and asked him the same question whose response did not differ [from ‘Abd Allāh’s] in one letter...” This is one of the very few traditions that actually makes some sort of connection between ‘Abd Allāh and Ka‘b by relating their virtually identical description of the Prophet as found in the Torah. However, this cannot be used as a sufficient proof to conclude that one took the tradition from the other, for both ‘Abd Allāh and Ka‘b could read the Torah and had access to similar works from the People of the Book, as indicated by the former’s ability to read Syriac along with his practice of narrating from the two camel-loads of books he came into possession of on the day of Yarmūk. Hence, it is equally plausible that they each arrived at the same description of the Prophet from the Torah independently. For this tradition, see Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 1, 401-402. For commentary on this tradition, as well as the context of ‘Abd Allāh’s narration of *isrā’īliyyāt* and what possible, but limited, relationship he had with Ka‘b, see Na‘nā‘ah, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 144-159. For the role of ‘Abd Allāh in narrating *isrā’īliyyāt*, see Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah*, 98-9, especially n. 4 and Newby, “Tafsir Isra’iliyat,” 687.

Hurayrah and Ibn ‘Abbās, this analysis will encompass examples of traditions involving the two Companions who, arguably, play the most prominent role of narration within each of the two genres of Muslim literature, namely, that of Prophetic *aḥādīth* and that of Qur’anic exegetical traditions respectively. I will start with examining the traditions involving Abū Hurayrah and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār.

## Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, Abū Hurayrah and the *Isrā’īliyyāt*

Many of the entries on Ka‘b al-Aḥbār within the biographical dictionaries clearly indicate that both Abū Hurayrah and Ibn ‘Abbās narrated from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār.<sup>97</sup>

However, what is sometimes difficult to determine, as will be demonstrated below, is how authentic such narrations are in their attribution to Ka‘b whenever they are quoted within the *tafsīr* texts, especially when the traditions are potentially of the *isrā’īliyyāt*.

In examining the relationship that exists between Abū Hurayrah and Ka‘b, I will use various examples of traditions found in Ibn Kathīr’s *tafsīr* along with his commentary on them. What I intend to make clear is the following: although it is well-known and accepted that Abū Hurayrah and Ka‘b conversed with one another on several occasions, demonstrating, in my view, the amicable relationship that existed between the two,<sup>98</sup>

what is at issue here is not the reliability (or lack thereof) of Ka‘b *per se* in his transmission of narrations to the Companions, but rather the verifiability of the narrations’ contents and/or attribution as well as their ultimate origin. A further point of interest I will note is how some of these various traditions are treated by Ibn Kathīr and other *ḥadīth* scholars in regards to their ambivalence about the *isrā’īliyyāt*. The aforementioned points will become even more pronounced when dealing with the exegetical traditions of Ibn ‘Abbās and his relationship with Ka‘b and the *isrā’īliyyāt*.

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<sup>97</sup> For example, see Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmā’*, v. 1, p. 2, 68; Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, v. 8, 438; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, v. 50, 151; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, v. 3, 490.

<sup>98</sup> Within all of the traditions I researched, I found none whatsoever that recorded any type of critical exchange between the two during their conversations, making it very difficult to deduce that Abū Hurayrah was ever suspicious of Ka‘b in terms of his character, reliability and trustworthiness. In fact, there exist traditions that indicate quite the opposite. For example, it is related (although with a weak chain of transmission according to Shu‘ayb al-Arnā’ūṭ) that Abū Hurayrah once met Ka‘b, and after conversing with him and asking him questions, Ka‘b remarked, “I have not seen anyone more knowledgeable of the Torah without having read it than Abū Hurayrah.” See Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, v. 67, 343; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, v. 2, 600, esp. n. 1; idem, *Kitāb tadhkirat al-ḥuffāz*, 4 vols. (Hyderabad-Deccan: Osmania Oriental Publications Bureau, 1955), v. 1, 36.

To begin with, in analyzing those traditions that involve Abū Hurayrah, Ka‘b and the *isrā’īliyyāt*, it will be useful to examine some of Ibn Kathīr’s comments on certain Prophetic traditions narrated by Abū Hurayrah that Ibn Kathīr suspects are either of the *isrā’īliyyāt* or are the words of Ka‘b. In such cases, Ibn Kathīr makes conjectures about the possible origin of the tradition, but he nonetheless clearly objects to having such words attributed to the Prophet himself and feels that an error occurred during the transmission of the particular tradition.

For example, in the commentary on Q2:255 and Q35:40, Ibn Kathīr relates a tradition from various sources narrated by Abū Hurayrah that he heard the Prophet once state while speaking about a question that once occurred to Moses: Does God sleep? The tradition goes on to state how God, in response to Moses’ question, sent an angel with two glass vessels and the command to Moses to carry these two vessels, one in each hand, and to preserve them without letting them drop. Every time Moses would nearly fall asleep, the vessels would almost slip from his hands and he would awaken, until eventually, he fell asleep and they fell from his grasp breaking on the ground. What God did was to cast an analogy for Moses—had God ever fallen asleep, likewise the heavens and the earth would not be upheld and would come crashing down. After narrating the tradition, Ibn Kathīr states how “this tradition is extremely strange, and is most likely an *isrā’īlī* that is not traceable (to the Prophet)”<sup>99</sup> and adds in another place

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<sup>99</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 1, 679. The Arabic reads: *wa hadhā ḥadīth gharīb jiddan wa ‘l-aẓhar annahu isrā’īlī lā marfū‘*. This same tradition is narrated in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* as well although he adds no commentary to it; however, in the edition of Shākir and Shākir, there is a note mentioning what various scholars have said about the narrators found in the *isnād* of this *ḥadīth*, some of whom were found to narrate objectionable (*munkar*) traditions, quoting the example of this tradition in particular. Ibn Ḥajar’s view of this tradition is that it is objectionable (hence, not attributable to the Prophet) and that Moses could not have asked such a question, but rather, what exists is a narration where the Children of Israel asked Moses this question instead. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 5, 394, esp. n. 1.

that it is “from the objectionable *isrāʾīliyyāt*.”<sup>100</sup> Ibn Kathīr also mentions how it is very unlikely Moses could ever have asked such a question knowing the true nature of God.<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, unlike for other traditions, Ibn Kathīr does not consider the possibility that Abū Hurayrah may have procured this narration from Kaʿb. Instead, he goes on to refer to another tradition of Ibn ʿAbbās who related that the Children of Israel once asked Moses, “Does God sleep?” to which he replied, “Fear God (*ittaqu ʾl-lāh*)!” after which God beckoned Moses, gave him two glass vessels to hold and preserve, and the rest of the story goes as narrated above.<sup>102</sup>

In another *ḥadīth* related by Ibn Kathīr in his commentary on Q18:94-97,<sup>103</sup> Abū Hurayrah narrated from the Prophet a saying concerning Gog and Magog (*jūj wa maʾjūj*) and their digging through a barrier which they are trapped behind. Everyday they dig to a point where a ray of sunlight penetrates through the barrier, signifying that they have almost broken through, when their leader commands them to stop digging and to return to the barrier on the morrow to complete their dig and breakout. When they do so, they find the barrier in its original state, even stronger than before, as if they had not dug anything at all and they begin to dig again. This cycle continues until their leader states that they will return to the barrier the next day to complete their dig from where they

<sup>100</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 6, 558. Similarly, the Arabic here reads: *inna hādha ʾl-ḥadīth laysa bi-marfūʿ bal min al-isrāʾīliyyāt al-munkarah*.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., v. 1, 679. Ibn Kathīr gives this tradition as one of the reasons Q2:255 (the verse of the Throne) was revealed to the Prophet in which it states, “Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him.”

<sup>103</sup> The content of these verses gives the context for Ibn Kathīr’s commentary on them, hence, I will quote them in full here with the verse number indicated in brackets after each verse. According to Arberry’s translation (with slight modifications), they read as follows: {They said, “O Dhū ʾl-Qarnayn, behold, Gog and Magog are doing corruption in the earth; so shall we assign to you a tribute, against your setting up a barrier between us and between them?”(94) He said, “That wherein my Lord has established me is better; so aid me forcefully, and I will set up a rampart between you and between them. (95) Bring me ingots of iron!” Until, when he had made all level between the two cliffs, he said, “Blow!” Until, when he had made it a fire, he said, “Bring me, that I may pour molten brass on it.” (96) So they were unable either to scale it or pierce it. (97)}

left off “God-willing (*inshā’ Allāh*)” at which they find the barrier as it was left by them the previous day and they finally breakout of the barrier and come upon the inhabitants of the earth causing widespread turmoil.

After narrating other transmissions of this tradition, Ibn Kathīr remarks, “[The tradition’s] chain of transmission (*isnād*) is strong (*qawīy*), however, there is objection in attributing this to the Prophet due to its contents (*matn*).”<sup>104</sup> The reason Ibn Kathīr objects to this tradition as being a Prophetic saying is that it clearly goes against the outward purport of the Qur’anic verses which state that the people of Gog and Magog will not be able to penetrate the barrier due to its solid, firm and sturdy construction.<sup>105</sup> He then goes on to quote a tradition attributed to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār (without mentioning an *isnād* for it) that similarly relates how they would go to the barrier everyday and devour it (*yalḥasūnahu*, instead of *yaḥfurūnahu*) until very little of it remained, after which they would stop and return the next day only to find it in its original state. This continues until, one day, one of them is inspired to say, “Let us return to it tomorrow and then we will open it, God-willing” and they return to find it as they had left it on the previous day allowing them to finally break through. At this point, Ibn Kathīr offers the following conjecture:

Perhaps Abū Hurayrah obtained this from Ka‘b for he used to sit and converse with him very often, and then Abū Hurayrah narrated it, after which some of those narrators who took from him presumed it to be a saying of the Prophet and attributed it to him, and God knows best.<sup>106</sup>

Ibn Kathīr’s comment towards this particular tradition is not unique for there are several other instances where, due to a tradition’s contents, he suspects that its origin is foreign (i.e. of the *isrā’īliyyāt*) and not Islamic. In the case of traditions narrated by

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<sup>104</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 5, 197-8.

<sup>105</sup> See above, p. 45, n. 103, verse 97.

<sup>106</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 5, 198.

Abū Hurayrah that Ibn Kathīr regards as suspicious, the most reasonable explanation he usually provides of the tradition's origin is that it was taken from Ka'b al-Aḥbār.<sup>107</sup> If such a tradition is narrated by Abū Hurayrah on behalf of the Prophet, then a mistake occurred in the transmission of the tradition *after* Abū Hurayrah's narration of it (and not by Abū Hurayrah himself.) This is made even clearer in Ibn Kathīr's comments in his *al-Bidāyah wa 'l-nihāyah* where he quotes the following statement of Bishr ibn Sa'īd:

Fear God and take heed of preserving the *ḥadīth* for, by God, you have seen how we sit with Abū Hurayrah and he narrates from the Messenger of God (God bless

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<sup>107</sup> This is one explanation Ibn Kathīr provides when involving a Companion, like Abū Hurayrah, who was known to have had a relationship with Ka'b al-Aḥbār. In a similar example involving another Companion, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar (who was also known to narrate, albeit not as often, from Ka'b), in his commentary on Q2:102, Ibn Kathīr cites a lengthy Prophetic tradition narrated by Ibn 'Umar found in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad on the angels of Hārūt and Mārūt who were chosen by the other angels to be tested by God on earth and ended up disobeying Him and falling into sin. After narrating various versions with their respective *asānīd*, Ibn Kathīr expresses his doubts as to their strange contents and states, "It is more plausible that this is from the narration of Ibn 'Umar from Ka'b al-Aḥbār, not from the Prophet." For this he offers proof by citing two similar traditions quoted by al-Ṭabarī in his *tafsīr* that go back to Ka'b in which he narrates the exact same story regarding the two angels and then concludes by saying, "By God, they [Hārūt and Mārūt] did not reach the evening on the day of their descent to earth except that they committed all that they were prohibited from." In the edition of al-Ṭabarī edited by Shākir and Shākir, the editor makes a note of Ibn 'Umar's Prophetic tradition (no. 1688) as having a weak chain of transmission and refers to Ibn Kathīr's comments (that the tradition is from Ka'b) as being sounder due to the two traditions narrated by al-Ṭabarī (nos. 1684 and 1685) that are from Ibn 'Umar from Ka'b. In Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāyah wa 'l-nihāyah*, he also states: "Many traditions have been narrated regarding their [Hārūt and Mārūt] story, most of which are of the *isrā'īliyyāt*." Regarding the tradition found in the *Musnad* of Aḥmad, Ibn Kathīr makes several similar remarks indicating that it is clearly a fabrication from the *isrā'īliyyīn* and that the stronger chains of transmission relate it back to Ka'b, from whom others of the *salaf* took the tradition and subsequently related it as from the stories of the Children of Israel. Again, what is noticeable is that no criticism is made against Ka'b whatsoever in any of the texts, whether Ibn Kathīr's or otherwise, for narrating it. Hence, the implication is that he was not the one who fabricated the tradition, nor did he relate it with ill intent. For Ibn Kathīr's comments from his exegesis, see his *Tafsīr*, v. 1, 353-355. For his comments from his history, see *al-Bidāyah wa 'l-nihāyah*, v. 1, 33 and 43. For the traditions as found in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, as well as the editor's comments, see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, v. 2, 429-430 and 432, esp. n. 9. For the translation of two of the traditions on the angels Hārūt and Mārūt as found in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, see al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, 484-485. As for instances in which a suspicious narration is attributed to the Prophet from a Companion who was not known to have had a relationship with Ka'b, other alternative explanations are given. For example, with the case of 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Ās (see above, p. 41, n.96), there are several instances in which Ibn Kathīr puts forth his view that the narration cited does not go back to the Prophet, but rather, is a *mawqūf* narration that does not go beyond 'Abd Allāh who, in turn, obtained the questionable narration from the two camel-loads of books he came into possession of on the day of Yarmūk. For specific examples in this regard, see Ibn Kathīr's commentary in his *Tafsīr* on Q3:96 (v. 2, 78), Q6:158 (v. 3, 375), Q7:78 (v. 3, 443), Q18:86 (v. 5, 192) and Q51:41 (v. 7, 423) as well as his *al-Bidāyah wa 'l-nihāyah*, v. 1, 129-30, 178, v. 2, 98, and v. 8, 345.

him and grant him peace) and he narrates to us from Ka‘b, then leaves, after which I hear some of those who were present attribute the *ḥadīth* of God’s Messenger to Ka‘b and the *ḥadīth* of Ka‘b to God’s Messenger.<sup>108</sup>

Ibn Kathīr also makes a clear point of exonerating Abū Hurayrah from falsely narrating on behalf of the Prophet, even by mistake. Following the above quotation, Ibn Kathīr cites a statement of Shu‘bah who said, “Abū Hurayrah used to commit *tadlīs*”<sup>109</sup> meaning that he would “narrate what he heard from Ka‘b and what he heard from the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) without distinguishing between the two.” Ibn Kathīr clearly rejected this possibility by citing various other scholars, including Ibn ‘Asākir, and their defense of Abū Hurayrah’s impeccable qualities as a Companion and narrator, stating that those who made such statements were only a small group that went against the great majority of scholars.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>108</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-nihāyah*, v. 8, 112. This tradition also offers another possible context as to why ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb prohibited Abū Hurayrah and Ka‘b from narrating their narrations. See above, p. 27 and al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā‘īliyyāt fī ‘l-tafṣīr wa ‘l-ḥadīth*, 129.

<sup>109</sup> In Arabic: *Abū Hurayrah kāna yudallīs*. This usage of the verb *yudallīs*, hence the noun *tadlīs* used in the translation above, is very specific in *ḥadīth* terminology and has various meanings. In Lane’s lexicon, it mentions the meaning of *tadlīs* “in the ascription of a tradition to its relater or relaters” as various possibilities. They include, “One’s relating a tradition as from the earliest sheykh [sic] when perhaps he has not seen him, but only heard it from one inferior to him, or from one who had heard it from him, and the like;” or “when he has seen him, but has heard what he ascribes to him from another, inferior to him;” and finally “one’s not mentioning, in his tradition, him from whom he heard it, but mentioning the highest authority, inducing the opinion that he had heard it from him.” See Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Rev. ed., 2 vols. (Cambridge, Eng.: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), v. 1, 903. Erik Dickinson translates the word *tadlīs* as “misrepresentation.” See ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *An Introduction to the Science of the Ḥadīth: Kitāb ma‘rifat anwā‘ ‘ilm al-ḥadīth*, ed. Muneer Fareed, trans. Erik Dickinson (Reading: Garnet Publishing Limited, 2005), 55-56.

<sup>110</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-nihāyah*, v. 8, 112-113. There are a number of works in which a group of modern Muslim scholars attacked Abū Hurayrah and his credibility for various reasons. Such works produced a number of responses from other Muslim scholars who subsequently provided thorough rebuttals of the criticisms put forth against Abū Hurayrah. Although an entire thesis could be composed on this subject alone, that is, tracing the origins of such attacks which go back centuries (as do their rebuttals, which go back just as far), it is beyond the scope of the present paper to expand upon this topic. Hence, it will suffice to make reference to Ramzī Na‘nā‘ah’s book which lists the scholars and works (both classical and modern) that either spoke or wrote something against Abū Hurayrah followed by a list of works rebutting the modern (and classical) statements. See Na‘nā‘ah, *al-Isrā‘īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 134-5, esp. nn. 3 and 4. Some of the *ṭabaqāt* literature also refer to this matter in a similar fashion as Ibn Kathīr. For example, Ibn ‘Asākir lists many other variants of the traditions Ibn Kathīr cites that are apparently against the accepting of some of Abū Hurayrah’s narrations, however, he follows them up with his own comments and rebuttal listing other traditions that unequivocally show the reliability and credibility of Abū Hurayrah in regards to his character and narrations. See his *Tarīkh madīnat Dimashq*,



Another example of a *ḥadīth* that was purportedly taken from Ka‘b by Abū Hurayrah, and not from the Prophet (at least according to Ibn Kathīr), is cited by both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr in their respective *tafsīr* works in several places. Although there exists very slight variations, the tradition reads as follows:

Abū Hurayrah reported that God's Messenger (God bless him and grant him peace) took hold of my hands and said: God, the Exalted and Glorious, created the dust [of the earth] on Saturday and He created the mountains on Sunday and He created the trees on Monday and He created the things entailing labour on Tuesday and created light on Wednesday and He caused the animals to spread on Thursday and created Adam (peace be upon him) after ‘Aṣr on Friday; the last creation at the last hour of the hours of Friday, i.e. between afternoon and night.<sup>111</sup>

This tradition is interesting in particular because it is narrated in the authentic collection of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and there are various scholarly opinions regarding it. Ibn Kathīr makes several comments on this *ḥadīth* that are noteworthy. In his commentary on Q2:29, he expresses his doubts concerning the narration by stating:

This tradition is one of the oddities (*gharā’ib*) of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*; Ibn al-Maḍīnī and al-Bukhārī, among others of the masters of *ḥadīth* (*huffāz*), have commented upon it stating that it is from the words of Ka‘b and that Abū Hurayrah heard this [tradition] from the words of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and that it was unclear to some narrators who then [mistakenly] attributed it to the Prophet.<sup>112</sup>

In another place, Ibn Kathīr states the reason why the various scholars he cited were suspicious of this tradition’s being an authentic saying of the Prophet, namely, that it covers the creation of the earth over seven days, whereas the Qur’an clearly states that it was over six.<sup>113</sup> He quotes al-Bukhārī as stating in his *Kitāb tārīkh al-kabīr* that,

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v. 67, 358-362. For al-Dhahabī’s interpretation on the tradition of *tadlīs*, along with other comments coming to the defense of Abū Hurayrah, see his *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, v. 2, 608-9.

<sup>111</sup> This translation has been adopted with slight modifications from Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim: Being Traditions of the Sayings and Doings of the Prophet Muḥammad as Narrated by his Companions and Compiled Under the Title al-Jāmi‘-uṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*, trans. ‘Abdul Ḥamīd Ṣiddīqī, 20 fasc. in 4 vols. (Lahore: Sh. Muḥammad Ashraf, 1971), fasc. 19, 1462.

<sup>112</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 1, 215.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., v. 3, 426.

“Some [scholars] have said [this tradition] is from Abū Hurayrah from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, and this is more correct.”<sup>114</sup> In his *al-Bidāyah wa ’l-nihāyah*, after quoting al-Bukhārī as above, Ibn Kathīr adds:

...meaning that this *ḥadīth* is from those which Abū Hurayrah heard and procured from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār for they both used to keep the company of one another and meet for conversation, so one [Ka‘b] would narrate from his books (*ṣuḥufihī*) while the other [Abū Hurayrah] would narrate from the truth he took from the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace); hence, this *ḥadīth* is one of those that Abū Hurayrah procured from Ka‘b from his books, while some of the narrators [thereafter] made some presumptions [regarding it] and attributed it to the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace); its attribution [to the Prophet] is confirmed by the words “The Messenger of God took me by the hands...” but then there occurs in its contents extreme peculiarities (*gharābatan shadīdah*), among which is no mention of the creation of the heavens whatsoever and [mention of] the creation of the earth and what it contains in seven days.<sup>115</sup>

Although al-Ṭabarī also cites this tradition in his *tafsīr* text, he adds very little commentary to it and mentions nothing in respect of its authenticity as a saying of the Prophet.<sup>116</sup> However, in his *tārīkh* text, he mentions this narration and provides a lengthy discourse on the differences of opinion regarding some of the contents of the *ḥadīth*, and in particular, the first day on which the creation began, an important point to consider when analyzing this tradition, as will be shown below. At this point, it will be relevant to note how some scholars have dealt with this tradition, citing what has (and has not) been said regarding its contents and authenticity as a Prophetic saying.

In terms of the soundness of this tradition, several scholars have either affirmed it as being rigorously authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*), or have simply not mentioned anything

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., v. 6, 359 and v. 7, 168. Also see Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Kitāb al-tārīkh al-kabīr*, 8 pts. in 4 vols. (Ḥaydarābād al-Dakkan: Maṭba‘at Majlis Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyyah, 1941), v. 1, pt. 1, 413-414.

<sup>115</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa ’l-nihāyah*, v. 1, 14-15.

<sup>116</sup> For the tradition from al-Ṭabarī’s *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, see his commentary on Q11:7 (v. 15, 244) and Q41:8-9 (v. 21, 433-434). In the edition of Shākir, an editor’s note states that this tradition is indeed authentic and that there are some authors who “desire to falsify the likes of this tradition by opinion (*bi-’l-ra’y*)...while attacking the great Companion Abū Hurayrah” through means that would be deemed unacceptable to the scholarly tradition, means which have no foundation to build upon. See *ibid.*, v. 15, 244, esp. n. 1.

regarding it, thereby providing some indication that the particular scholar did not view anything unsound about the tradition's authenticity. For example, the well-known *ḥadīth* scholar, Ibn al-Jawzī,<sup>117</sup> alludes to this tradition in his *Kitāb al-mawḍū'āt* as being *ṣaḥīḥ*, while using it as evidence to contradict another tradition that he labels as fabricated.<sup>118</sup> Furthermore, the great jurist and *ḥadīth* master Muḥyī 'l-Dīn al-Nawawī mentions absolutely nothing regarding the authenticity (or lack thereof) of this tradition in his famous and monumental commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,<sup>119</sup> nor does Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Dībāj 'alā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj*<sup>120</sup> and considering the widespread acceptance of the collection of Muslim within the scholarly circles of *ḥadīth* literature, the implication is that the tradition remains as Muslim categorized it—*ṣaḥīḥ*.<sup>121</sup>

Other scholars, besides Ibn Kathīr, have also expressed their opinions that this tradition ultimately goes back to Ka'b al-Aḥbār, rather than the Prophet, and that it was narrated from him by Abū Hurayrah. For example, Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah in his *Naqd al-manqūl wa 'l-miḥakk al-mumayyiz bayna 'l-mardūd wa 'l-maqbūl* has a section with the heading “The Occurrence of an Error in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*”<sup>122</sup> where he states the following regarding this tradition:

<sup>117</sup> See p. 33, n. 78 above for Na'nā'ah's comments on Ibn al-Jawzī.

<sup>118</sup> Abū 'l-Faraj 'Abdul-Raḥmān ibn 'Alī ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-mawḍū'āt*, ed. Tawfiq Ḥamdān, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995/1410), v. 2, 114.

<sup>119</sup> Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Khafīl Mays, vol. 18 v. in 9 (Beirut: Dār al-Qalam, 1987), v. 17, 139-140.

<sup>120</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dībāj 'alā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj*, ed. Muḥammad Zakariyyā al-Kāndihlawī, 6 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam ibn Abī 'l-Arqam, 1999), v. 6, 218-219.

<sup>121</sup> For a defense of the authenticity of this tradition from a modern scholar using classical sources, including responses to the scholarly opinions that regard this tradition as problematic, see Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥah*, part 1, 7 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif li-'l-Nashr wa 'l-Tawzī', 1995/1415), v. 4, 449-450, no. 1833.

<sup>122</sup> In Arabic: *faṣl: ghaṭaṭ waqa'a fī Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*

This resembles an error that has occurred concerning the tradition of Abū Hurayrah: “God created the dust [of the earth] on Saturday...” etc., that is in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. The error that occurred is in its attribution to the Prophet, for verily it is from the sayings of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. The *imām* of the people of *ḥadīth*, Muḥammad ibn Isma‘īl al-Bukhārī stated likewise in his *Tārīkh al-kabīr* as have other scholars amongst the Muslims, and it is as they have said, for verily God has informed us that He created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six days, while this tradition indicates the period of creation as being seven days, and God knows best.<sup>123</sup>

What is most relevant about the differences of scholarly opinion regarding this tradition and its relation to Ka‘b is the first day on which the creation of the heavens and the earth took place, rather than the number of days. In his *tārīkh* text, al-Ṭabarī discusses the divergent opinions on the first day of creation as being on either Saturday or Sunday while listing the various proofs put forth by each group of scholars. Although al-Ṭabarī sides with those who stated it was Sunday while providing his rationale, he nonetheless lists those traditions stating otherwise, including the one above as found in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, without however mentioning the possibility that this tradition could have come from Ka‘b.<sup>124</sup> Significantly, those who were cited as supporting the first day of creation on Sunday were, in fact, the Jewish converts, including ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. One tradition has Ka‘b al-Aḥbār stating unequivocally that, “God began with the creation of the heavens and the earth on Sunday and Monday.”<sup>125</sup> Furthermore, al-Ṭabarī records a statement of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām to Abū Hurayrah

<sup>123</sup> Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Naqd al-manqūl wa ‘l-miḥakk al-mumayyiz bayna ‘l-mardūd wa ‘l-maqbūl*, ed. Ḥassan al-Samāḥī Suwaydān (Beirut: Dār al-Qādirī, 1990), 78. The editor has added a note (n. 1) here that also acknowledges how al-Nawawī does not state anything against this tradition in his commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. In addition, in the *tafsīr* of al-Qurṭubī, the author quotes Abū Ḥasan al-Bayhaqī’s opinion regarding this tradition as found in his *Kitāb al-asmā’ wa ‘l-sifāt* where an alternative *isnād* to the *ḥadīth* is cited by ‘Alī al-Madīnī, an *isnād* that has weakness in it. What is noteworthy, however, is that no mention of the possibility of this tradition being taken by Abū Hurayrah from Ka‘b is made here. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-aḥkām al-Qur’ān*, v. 6, 384-5.

<sup>124</sup> For the relevant sections on the first day of creation as well as the various interpretations on the meaning of a day, its possible length and the creation of the days of the week, see Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, vol. 1 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 187-193 and 208-218.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 211.

regarding the hour in which Adam was created that begins with “God began the creation of the heavens and earth on Sunday.”<sup>126</sup> The fact that Sunday was the more likely choice of Jews for being the first day of creation is supported by the notion of the Sabbath, that is, that God created the heavens and earth in six days and then “rested” on the seventh, namely, Saturday.<sup>127</sup> Hence, if anything, the above traditions, among others, would clearly indicate that Ka‘b would have preferred the opinion that Sunday was the first day of creation and this clearly goes against the outward purport of the Prophetic tradition narrated by Abū Hurayrah which begins with Saturday. Coupled with the fact that Abū Hurayrah may have also heard from ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām a narration indicating that the first day of creation was on Sunday, the view that Abū Hurayrah got his narration from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, or any other Jewish source for that matter, and that this narration was subsequently attributed to the Prophet becomes less plausible.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>127</sup> The notion of God’s “resting” on the seventh day after creation is something that the Qur’an explicitly refutes, as it rather speaks of God’s *istiwā’*, or establishment, upon the Throne which lacks any connotation of fatigue resulting from His act of creation. That being said, it would not be unreasonable to believe that any of the Jewish converts to Islam, while forgoing this idea of “resting” itself, would retain the opinion that it was on the seventh day (i.e. Saturday) where no further act of creation took place, making the first day of creation on Sunday and the last on Friday. This would also be in accordance with the story of creation as laid out in the Torah. As already indicated, the opinion that it was Sunday was upheld by both Jewish converts ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, as mentioned by al-Khāzin and Abū Ḥayyān in their respective commentaries on the Qur’an, and it was subscribed to by other exegetical scholars as well, including al-Daḥḥāk, al-Mujāhid and al-Ṭabarī. Abū Ḥayyān also adds to his list the people of the Torah and al-Ṭabarī cites a tradition of Muḥammad ibn Ishāq who states, “The people of the Torah say: God began the creation on Sunday.” For more discussion on the differences of opinion regarding the first day of creation, including comments on the tradition of Abū Hurayrah and its authenticity, see Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma‘ānī fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm wa ‘l-sab‘ al-mathānī*, 30v. in 15 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ihyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 198-), v. 24, 106; ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Khāzin al-Baghdādī, *Tafsīr al-Khāzin al-musammā lubāb al-ta’wīl fī ma‘ānī ‘l-tanzīl*, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004), v. 2, 206-207; Abū Ḥayyān, *Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, v. 4, 307. For the tradition of Muḥammad ibn Ishāq, see al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, 211.

<sup>128</sup> In his book *al-Anwār al-kāshifah*, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Yaḥyā al-Mu‘allimī does a thorough and detailed analysis of this tradition, including what al-Bukhārī and Ibn Kathīr have stated regarding it, and comes to the conclusion that there does not necessarily exist a contradiction between this tradition and the Qur’anic text as there is a way to reconcile the two, whereas the mistake in this case lies in a

One final example of a tradition which, interestingly, Ibn Kathīr finds sound while other, albeit very few, scholars believe it to be of Ka‘b’s words rather than the Prophet’s is found twice in the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr. In the first instance, the tradition occurs in the commentary on Q2:37 and is cited in a partial format as found in the collection of Muslim,<sup>129</sup> as well as other *ḥadīth* compilations,<sup>130</sup> whereas in the second instance found in the commentary on Q21:37, Ibn Kathīr cites a slightly longer version of the tradition according to Ibn Abī Ḥātim which reads as follows:

Abū Hurayrah reported that God’s Messenger said: The best day on which the sun has risen is Friday; on it, Adam was created and on it he was made to enter Paradise and on it he was made to descend from it; on it the Last Hour [i.e. Doomsday] will take place and on it there is a time at which no believer in prayer...would ask God for what is good except that He would give it to him.<sup>131</sup>

In neither instance does Ibn Kathīr make any comments that would question the authenticity of this particular tradition, nor does he relate it to Ka‘b in any way.

However, there exists a lengthier version of the tradition in *al-Muwaṭṭa’* of Mālik which provides a more complete context for the tradition while demonstrating the relationship that existed between its narrator, Abū Hurayrah, and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. For this reason, the entire narration will be cited here as found in Mālik’s collection and it reads as follows:

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particular narrator who attributed the words of the Prophet to Ka‘b and not vice-versa. Hence, according to the author, the narration is, in fact, authentic as coming from Abū Hurayrah from the Prophet. See ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Yahyā al-Mu‘allimī, *al-Anwār al-kāshifāh li-mā fī kitāb adwā’ ‘alā ‘l-sunnah min al-zīlāl wa ‘l-taḍlīl wa ‘l-mujāzafāh* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Islāmī, 1985), 185-190.

<sup>129</sup> See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* v. 1, 237-238. For the versions as narrated by Muslim, see Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Jam‘u jawāmi‘ ‘l-aḥādīth wa ‘l-asānīd wa maknaz al-ṣaḥāḥ wa ‘l-sunan wa ‘l-masānīd, vol. 4 in 2 pts. (Vaduz: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation (Jam‘iyyah al-Maknaz al-Islāmiyyah), 2000), pt. 1, 335, nos. 2013 and 2014.

<sup>130</sup> For a reference list of source texts and *ḥadīth* compilations that contain the various versions of this tradition, see ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd limā fī ‘l-Muwaṭṭa’ min al-ma‘ānī wa ‘l-masānīd*, v. 9, 336 esp. n. 1.

<sup>131</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 5, 342-343. This translation has been adopted from two separate traditions with some modifications as found in ‘Abdul Ḥamīd Ṣiddīqī’s translation of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, facs. 6, 404-5, tradition nos. 1850 and 1857.

Abū Salamah ibn ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn ‘Awf related that Abū Hurayrah said, “I went out to al-Ṭūr [Mount Sinai] and met Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and sat with him. He related to me things from the Torah and I related to him things from the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace. Among the things I related to him was that the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, ‘The best of days on which the sun rises is the day of Friday (*jum‘ah*). On it Adam was created, and on it he fell from the Garden. On it he was forgiven, and on it he died. On it the Hour occurs, and every moving thing listens from morning till sunset in apprehension of the Hour except jinn and men. During it there is a time when God gives to a Muslim slave standing in prayer whatever he asks for.’ Ka‘b said, ‘That is one day in every year.’ I said, ‘No, every Friday.’ Then Ka‘b recited the Torah and said, ‘The Messenger of God has spoken the truth.’”... Abu Hurayra continued, “Then I met ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām and I told him that I had sat with Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, and I mentioned what I had related to him about the day of Friday, and told him that Ka‘b had said, ‘That is one day in every year.’ ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām said, ‘Ka‘b lied,’<sup>132</sup> and I added, ‘Ka‘b then recited the Torah and said, “No, it is every Friday.”’ ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām said, ‘Ka‘b spoke the truth.’ Then ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām said, ‘I know what time that is.’” Abū Hurayrah continued, “I said to him, ‘Let me know it – don’t keep it from me.’ ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām said, ‘It is the last period of time in the day of Friday.’” Abū Hurayrah continued, “I said, ‘How can it be the last period of time in the day of Friday, when the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, said, “...a Muslim standing in prayer,” and that is a time when there is no prayer?’ ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām replied, ‘Did not the Messenger of God, may God bless him and grant him peace, say, “Whoever sits waiting for the prayer is in prayer until he prays?”’ Abū Hurayrah added, “I said, ‘Of course.’ He said, ‘Then it is that.’”<sup>133</sup>

In terms of the authenticity of this tradition, the vast majority of scholars, both classical and modern, consider it, as well as its various other versions,<sup>134</sup> as *ṣaḥīḥ*.

Besides occurring in the collections of Mālik and Muslim which are generally considered

<sup>132</sup> For the meaning of the statement, “Ka‘b lied” see the relevant section above on pp. 35-40. In the particular context of this tradition, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr states that, “The meaning of his [Ibn Salām’s] statement ‘Ka‘b lied’ is ‘Ka‘b erred’ (*ghaliṭa Ka‘b*). Likewise, this is how its meaning is known to the Arabs in their poetry and speech” and then he gives an example of a saying of Abū Ṭālib using the word *kadhābtum* and states, “Is it not obvious that the meaning of *kadhāb* here is not as the opposite of truth (*ṣidq*), but rather, it is to be seen from the perspective of human error in one’s opinion, hence, it is as if to say ‘your opinion has mislead you’ (*kadhābakum ḡannukum*)?” See Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Istidhkā*, v. 5, 99.

<sup>133</sup> For the Arabic tradition, see Mālik, *al-Muwatṭa’*, 36-7, no. 240. The above translation has been adopted with slight modifications from ‘Ā’isha Bewley’s translation of Mālik, *al-Muwatṭa’*, 43-44, no. 17.

<sup>134</sup> For a single source that has compiled a good number of the various versions of this tradition as well as their original sources, see *al-Musnad al-jāmi’*, ed. Bashshār ‘Awwād Ma’rūf et al. (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1993/1413), v. 16, 755-757, nos. 13085 and 13086, and 764-766, no. 13099. In addition, al-Ṭabarī has recorded in his *Tārīkh* some of the shorter versions of this tradition along with other traditions of different wording that contain similar information regarding the creation of Adam on Friday, etc. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, v. 1, 113-115. For the English translation of these traditions, see al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, 282-286.

to contain the soundest *ahādīth*, most of the reputable classical scholars of *ḥadīth*, including al-Nawawī, al-Suyūṭī, Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Aṣqalānī and Ibn Kathīr—to name those who commented on this tradition as found in either collection—do not say anything against it, thereby affirming its authenticity as classified by Muslim.<sup>135</sup> In the collection of al-Tirmidhī, after narrating one version of the tradition that does not include the mention of Ka‘b (but includes Abū Hurayrah’s conversion with ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām) the author states, “This tradition is *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*”<sup>136</sup> and al-Ḥākim in his *al-Mustadrak*, after narrating a version similar to the one in *al-Muwatta’* states, “This tradition is rigorously authenticated according to the conditions of the two Shaykhs [al-Bukhārī and Muslim].”<sup>137</sup> He also narrates a shorter form of the tradition similar to the one in Muslim although it begins, “The master of days is the day of Friday, etc.” after which al-Ḥākim indicates that the tradition is *ṣaḥīḥ* according to the conditions of Muslim.<sup>138</sup> From amongst the modern *ḥadīth* scholars, Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī considers the tradition and its isnād as related by Mālik as *ṣaḥīḥ*.<sup>139</sup>

Among the scholars that mention the possibility of a portion of this tradition coming from the words of Ka‘b and not the Prophet is Ibn Khuzaymah. After narrating

<sup>135</sup> For each scholar’s comments on this tradition as found in Muslim, see al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, v. 6, 390-2, al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dībāj ‘alā Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj*, v. 2, 389 and Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Aṣqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, v. 2, 489 and v. 8, 121. For Ibn Kathīr’s comments as found in his *Tafsīr*, see p. 54, notes 129 and 131 above.

<sup>136</sup> This categorization of *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ* is one which al-Tirmidhī uses that would indicate it as being between the grade of good (*ḥasan*) and rigorously authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*). Although it is a slightly nuanced difference in terminology, the tradition is regardless considered to be authentic according to al-Tirmidhī. He also cites a shorter tradition similar to the one found in Muslim’s collection and also classifies it as *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*. See Muḥammad ibn ‘Isā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, Jam‘u jawāmi‘ ‘l-aḥādīth wa ‘l-asānīd wa maknaz al-ṣaḥāḥ wa ‘l-sunan wa ‘l-masānīd, vol. 8 in 2pts. (Vaduz: Thesaurus Islamicus Foundation (Jam‘iyyah al-Maknaz al-Islāmiyyah), 2000), pt. ,142-141 ,1nos. 490 and 493.

<sup>137</sup> In Arabic: *hādha ḥadīth ṣaḥīḥ ‘alā sharḥ al-shaykhayn*. See Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak ‘alā ‘l-ṣaḥīḥayn fī ‘l-ḥadīth*, 4 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabah wa Maṭābi‘ al-Naṣr al-Ḥadīthah, 1968), v. 1, 278-279.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., v. 1, 277. The beginning of the tradition in Arabic reads: *sayyidu ‘l-ayyām yawmu ‘l-jum‘ah*.

<sup>139</sup> See Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Khaṭīb al-Tabrizī, *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ*, ed. Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī, 3 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Islāmī, 1985), v. 1, 428-429, no. 1359, esp. n. 1 on 429.



the tradition similar to Ibn Abī Ḥatīm's version as related by Ibn Kathīr<sup>140</sup> up until the words, "and on it the Last Hour will take place...", he states:

They [the scholars] differed regarding this saying over the words "on it Adam was created" to "and on it the Last Hour will take place" – is it from Abū Hurayrah from the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) or from Abū Hurayrah from Ka'b al-Aḥbār? It has been mentioned in *Kitāb al-kabīr* those who have made this narration from Abū Hurayrah from the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) and those who have made it from Abū Hurayrah from Ka'b al-Aḥbār; and the heart is more inclined towards the opinion of those who made these words from Abū Hurayrah from Ka'b for Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā narrated to me and said: Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf narrated to me that al-Awzā'ī narrated to me from Yaḥyā [ibn Abī Kathīr] from Abū Salamah from Abū Hurayrah who said: The best day on which the sun has risen is Friday... and on it the Last Hour will take place. Abū Salamah stated: I said to him, "Is this something you heard from the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace)?" He [Abū Hurayrah] replied, "No, this is something narrated to me by Ka'b."<sup>141</sup>

He then goes on to state that what the scholars differed over were whether the words from "on it Adam was created" to "and on it the Last Hour will take place" came from the Prophet or from Ka'b, yet there is no doubt that the first part of the tradition which states, "The best day on which the sun has risen is Friday" is definitively from the words of the Prophet.<sup>142</sup> This difference of opinion regarding the tradition is mentioned as well in al-Bayhaqī's *Kitāb al-sunan al-kubrā* where Ibn Khuzaymah's view is cited as above, although no attempt is made to resolve the difference.<sup>143</sup>

<sup>140</sup> See the narration above on p. 54.

<sup>141</sup> Muḥammad ibn Ishāq ibn Khuzaymah, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzaymah*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'ẓamī, 4 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1992/1412), v. 3, 115-116, no. 1729.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-sunan al-kubrā*, 10 vols. (Ḥaydarābād al-Dakkan: Maṭba'at Majlis Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, 1925), v. 3, 250-251. In the edition of *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzaymah*, the editor, Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A'ẓamī, makes a note after citing the *ḥadīth* that the tradition in its entirety is "rigorously authenticated to the Prophet without a doubt (*al-ḥadīth kulluhu ṣaḥīḥ marfū'an bilā rayb*)" and it is sufficient that the narration has been related by Muslim in his work, as well as by others, through different chains of transmission. The editor goes on to state that the error in this matter is perhaps coming from Yaḥyā ibn Abī Kathīr as he is one who is known to commit *tadlīs*. See Ibn Khuzaymah, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzaymah*, v. 3, 116, n. 1.

Similarly, Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī's assessment of the *ḥadīth* is that the first part listing the virtues of Friday is more likely narrated by Abū Hurayrah from Ka'b. He contextualizes his support of this view in a larger discussion of the time in which one's prayer is answered by God on Friday, as in the final part of the *ḥadīth* in Mālik's narration above where Abū Hurayrah discussed this matter with 'Abd Allāh ibn Salām.<sup>144</sup> Here, Ibn Rajab lists various narrations where the exact specification of this time is related by 'Abd Allāh (and not the Prophet) to Abū Hurayrah (or to Abū Salamah) as being during the last hour of the day (between the time of 'Aṣr and sunset). Citing similar and identical chains of transmission as Ibn Khuzaymah,<sup>145</sup> Ibn Rajab then lists several narrations that relate the words on the virtues of Friday as ultimately going back to Ka'b. After citing one scholar, Muḥammad ibn Kathīr, who attributes the narration in question to the Prophet through al-'Awzā'ī, Ibn Rajab states that its attribution to the Prophet is incorrect (*wa raf'uhu khaṭa*).<sup>146</sup> He then offers another narration that further supports his view where, according to the narrator, only the part of the tradition that acknowledges the existence of a time on Friday when prayers are answered is authentically attributed to the Prophet, whereas the rest of the tradition, which includes the time's specification, as well as the virtues of Friday and its special characteristics, are all from the saying of Ka'b. To this Ibn Rajab adds, "And perchance

<sup>144</sup> For the entire discussion regarding the specific time on Friday when prayers are answered, see Zayn al-Dīn Abū 'l-Faraj ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Fath al-Bārī sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Maḥmūd ibn Sha'bān ibn 'Abd al-Maḥsūd et al., 10 vols. (al-Maḍīnah al-Munawwarah: Maktabat al-Ghurabā' al-Athariyyah, 1996/1417), v. 8, 286-308, no. 935.

<sup>145</sup> What is common between all of the *asānīd* cited by Ibn Rajab is the following chain of transmitters: Yaḥyā ibn Abī Kathīr from Abū Salamah from Abū Hurayrah from Ka'b. The only difference that occurs between the chains is the transmitter that comes before Yaḥyā, and here Ibn Rajab lists the first narrator as either al-'Awzā'ī (as in Ibn Khuzaymah's *isnād*), Ḥusayn al-Mu'allim, or Mu'āwiyah ibn Salām (whose narration does not go as far back to Ka'b, but stops at Abū Hurayrah). See *ibid.*, v. 8, 290-291.

<sup>146</sup> According to Ibn Rajab, its attribution to the Prophet is incorrect because of the existence of al-'Awzā'ī's narration as cited above by Ibn Khuzaymah (p. 57), which clearly indicates how Abū Hurayrah heard this particular narration from Ka'b. Ibn Rajab also alludes to this tradition, although with a slightly different wording. See *ibid.*, v. 8, 291.

this is the more likely.”<sup>147</sup> Finally, Ibn Rajab cites a narration related by al-Bazzār where ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām stated to Abū Salamah:

God created Adam on Friday; and made him to dwell in Paradise on Friday; and made him to descend to the earth on Friday; and made him to die on Friday; and it is the day on which the Hour will take place, during the final hour on Friday...<sup>148</sup>

Then Ibn Rajab states:

This narration, as well, indicates that what is mentioned regarding the virtues of Friday and its special characteristics is from the narration of Abū Salamah from ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām and the narration of al-Awzā‘ī and others indicate that Abū Hurayrah used to narrate this part [of the narration] from Ka‘b. It has been narrated through a number of transmissions by Abū Hurayrah from the Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace): “The best day on which the sun has risen is Friday” also mentioning what it has of special characteristics, however, it [the narration] has deficiencies by what we have mentioned, hence, for this reason, al-Bukhārī did not relate any part of it [in his collection] whatsoever.<sup>149</sup>

After listing those scholars who narrated the tradition from Abū Hurayrah from the Prophet, Ibn Rajab concludes from his remarks that what is being attributed to the Prophet from Abū Hurayrah in these traditions is *only* the part that indicates the existence of a time on Friday when prayers are answered by God, without specifying the exact time.

Some peculiarities can be noted when considering the above opinions of Ibn Khuzaymah and Ibn Rajab in light of the various narrations of the tradition, especially the one as related by Mālik in his *al-Muwatta’*. The first point of significance is that it is Abū Hurayrah who is recorded as stating to Ka‘b from the Prophet that “The best of days on which the sun rises is the day of Friday, etc.,” rather than the words occurring as a statement from Ka‘b to Abū Hurayrah. Interestingly, with the traditions narrated by Abū Hurayrah that Ibn Kathīr suspected to be from Ka‘b and not the Prophet, there is

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid. The Arabic reads: *wa la‘alla hādhā huwa ’l-ashbah*.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., v. 8, 292.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

no context within the traditions themselves that explicitly specifies a meeting or conversation taking place between Abū Hurayrah and Ka‘b, which is unlike the above *ḥadīth* as narrated by Mālik. Furthermore, those traditions that Ibn Kathir, and other scholars, considered to be most likely from Ka‘b had content in one form or another that aroused suspicion. That is, both traditions discussed previously regarding Gog and Magog and the creation of the earth beginning on Saturday over seven days outwardly contradicted Qur’anic verses, thereby providing the impetus for considering them as possibly of the *isrā’īliyyāt*, while rejecting them as Prophetic sayings and rendering them as narrations of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār from Abū Hurayrah. Whereas with the narrations discussing Friday as being the best of days along with its virtues, Ibn Khuzaymah does not provide any reason from their contents that would, in and of themselves, render them suspicious as Prophetic sayings or possibly of the *isrā’īliyyāt*. Although Ibn Rajab uses conflicting narrations regarding the specificity of the special time on Friday when prayers are answered to support his view, it would not be difficult for scholars to combine the meanings of the apparently conflicting traditions to resolve any contradiction between them. Ultimately then, it would be perfectly acceptable to have the Prophet describe what is special about Friday as articulated in the various narrations for they contain nothing that purportedly goes against any Islamic teaching as found in the Qur’an or other Prophetic traditions. In addition, the existence of other authentic traditions containing similar content only serves to strengthen the above narrations as being from the Prophet through Abū Hurayrah rather than from Ka‘b.<sup>150</sup> Hence, it is no

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<sup>150</sup> One example of such a tradition is found in Ibn Kathīr’s commentary on Q33:56 where he cites a Prophetic tradition on the virtues of increasing the amount of blessings one says on the Prophet on the day of Friday. The tradition reads as follows: “Aws ibn Aws al-Thaqafi narrated: The Prophet (God bless him and grant him peace) said: Among the most excellent of your days is Friday; on it Adam was created, on it he died, on it the last trumpet will be blown, and on it the shout will be made, so invoke more blessings on

surprise that very few scholars considered these narrations as anything other than authentic.

Regarding the relationship that existed between Abū Hurayrah and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, several observations can be made from the above traditions and the commentary made upon them. First of all, the tradition from Mālik’s *al-Muwatta’* clearly demonstrates that Abū Hurayrah did not have any problem meeting up with Ka‘b and having a discussion, where the former would narrate Prophetic traditions while the latter would narrate from his sources, including the Torah. This is also mentioned by Ibn Kathīr on more than one occasion in his works. Second, when Ka‘b had made a claim that the day on which God gave whatever good a Muslim asked for only occurred once every year, Abū Hurayrah did not accept it from him and in fact corrected him, prompting Ka‘b to re-check his sources only to affirm Abū Hurayrah’s interpretation of its occurring every Friday, which was again reaffirmed by ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām as being the intended meaning of the Prophet’s words. This goes to show that Abū Hurayrah, in his conversations with Ka‘b, would not necessarily accept everything that was said to him, but instead would be critical and would not hesitate to correct any mistaken understanding that might be coming from Ka‘b on a particular matter. Finally, none of the traditions or the comments made by various scholars indicates any instance where Abū Hurayrah said anything that was critical of Ka‘b’s sincerity and character as a Muslim or reliability as a narrator. To the contrary, one can only find

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me that day, for your blessings will be submitted to me. The people asked: Apostle of God, how can it be that our blessings will be submitted to you while your body is decayed? He replied: God, the Exalted, has prohibited the earth from consuming the bodies of Prophets.” After listing the compilers who related this tradition in their collections, Ibn Kathīr mentions those scholars who declared it as *ṣaḥīḥ*, including Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Nawawī, al-Dāraqūṭnī and, interestingly enough, Ibn Khuzaymah. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 6, 473. The translation of the tradition was adopted with slight modifications from Abū Dāwūd Sulaymān bin al-Ash‘ath al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abu Dawud*, trans. Aḥmad Ḥasan, 3 vols. (Lahore: Sh. Muḥammad Ashraf, 1988), v. 1, 269, no. 1042.

indications of an amicable relationship existing between the two when combing through the various traditions and commentaries made upon them.

In conclusion, the above analysis of traditions cited from the works of Ibn Kathīr has offered examples of three different possibilities regarding Prophetic traditions narrated by Abū Hurayrah and their relation to the *isrāʾīliyyāt* or to Kaʿb. Concerning the first tradition involving the question of Moses about God, Ibn Kathīr labeled it as from among the *isrāʾīliyyāt* although he did not suspect it as being taken by Abū Hurayrah from the narrations of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār. The second and third traditions involving Gog and Magog and the creation of the heavens and earth, respectively, are of those narrations that Ibn Kathīr suspected of being taken by Abū Hurayrah from Kaʿb and then subsequently attributed to the Prophet. With these narrations, although Ibn Kathīr does not explicitly label them as of the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, the implication is present since they consist of traditions that contradict Qurʾanic verses and are ultimately of foreign origin according to him. The final tradition on the virtues of Friday consists of a Prophetic narration from Abū Hurayrah that Ibn Kathīr regarded as authentic, whereas other scholars deemed part of it to be taken by Abū Hurayrah from the sayings of Kaʿb. What the above examples demonstrate is that when examining Prophetic traditions narrated by Abū Hurayrah that potentially involve Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, the classical scholarly discourse surrounding them is one of verifying the particular narration's content and original attribution rather than being a discourse questioning the character, sincerity and reliability of Kaʿb, an issue that is totally absent in the classical Islamic source texts examined above. As well, they also demonstrate that when dealing with traditions of the Companions, specifically Abū Hurayrah, which could be classified as of the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, their ultimate origin is not a matter that is always clearly defined for in

none of the cases above could it be claimed with any degree of certainty that the narration came from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār through Abū Hurayrah. In fact, for the last tradition examined above on the virtues of Friday, the scholars more easily arrived at the conclusion that it was indeed an authentic narration of the Prophet rather than one of Ka‘b. In this regard, it is the matter of authenticity that occupied certain of the classical scholars of *ḥadīth*, specifically Ibn Kathīr in his works, when dealing with potential *isrā’īliyyāt* traditions narrated by Abū Hurayrah that could have been obtained from Ka‘b.

A different scenario emerges, however, when examining the traditions that involve Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and another Companion known for narrating *isrā’īliyyāt*, namely, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās. My focus will now turn to analysing such traditions as found in the *tafsīr* texts of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr.

### Ka'b al-Aḥbār, 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās and the *Isrā'īliyyāt*

'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās, the paternal cousin of the Prophet, was born in Makkah three years prior to the *hijrah* and was only 13 years of age when the Prophet passed away. His profound intelligence was recognized by the elder Companions from early on and he later became one of the most knowledgeable of the Companions, especially in regards to the Qur'an. For this reason, several epithets were conferred upon him, including *al-baḥr* (the ocean), *ḥibr* or *rabbānī 'l-ummah*,<sup>151</sup> and more significantly, *tarjumān al-Qur'ān*, or interpreter of the Qur'an, a title given to him by 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd who himself was another great Qur'anic scholar amongst the Companions.<sup>152</sup> He established his own school of *tafsīr* in Makkah and is considered by many as the *shaykh al-mufasssīrīn*. Ibn Taymiyyah stated in his *Muqaddimah*, "As for *tafsīr*, the most knowledgeable of people are the people of Makkah because they are the Companions of Ibn 'Abbās, like Mujāhid, 'Aṭā', 'Ikrimah, etc..."<sup>153</sup> Hence, Ibn 'Abbās is often regarded as the single most cited authority in the works of many subsequent exegetes, as is the case with the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī.<sup>154</sup> However, before engaging the exegetical traditions of Ibn 'Abbās as related to Ka'b al-Aḥbār and the *isrā'īliyyāt*, it is

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<sup>151</sup> The two terms *ḥibr* and *rabbānī* have similar connotations of a learned, righteous man. The former is usually used for very knowledgeable Jewish scholars, as is the case with Ka'b al-Aḥbār, however, here it is used to refer to Ibn 'Abbās who is regarded as the equivalent for the Muslim community, hence, the title *ḥibr al-ummah*. According to Lane's lexicon, the latter term *rabbānī* more specifically connotes a devout worshipper of God who possesses a great knowledge of Him, as well as a learned one who practices what he knows and teaches others. In the Qur'an (5:44 and 5:63), the two terms occur in a single verse in plural form as *al-rabbāniyyūna* and *al-aḥbār*, although the translation of the terms will vary from one translation to another. For the various meanings of the two terms, see Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, v.1, 498 and 1006-1007. Interestingly, there is a narration cited by Ibn Sa'd where the title *rabbānī 'l-ummah* is given to Ibn 'Abbās by Ka'b himself. See Muḥammad ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, ed. Iḥsān 'Abbās, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), v. 2, 370.

<sup>152</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, v. 2, 366.

<sup>153</sup> Na'nā'ah, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 124.

<sup>154</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Commentary*, xvi.



critical to consider Ibn ‘Abbās’ approach to the People of the Book in general, their traditions and the acquisition of knowledge from them.

In the *ḥadīth* collection of al-Bukhārī, Ibn ‘Abbās is cited as cautioning from taking knowledge from the People of the Book. Although his statement was already quoted above, it will be repeated as it relates to the current discussion and it reads as follows:

How can you ask the People of the Book about anything while your Book that has been revealed to the Messenger of God (God bless him and grant him peace) is most recent? You read it pure and undistorted whereas God has informed you that the People of the Book changed their scripture and distorted it, and wrote the scripture with their own hands and said, “It is from God,” to sell it for little gain. Does not the knowledge which has come to you prevent you from asking them about anything? No, by God, we have never seen any man from them asking you regarding what has been revealed to you!”<sup>155</sup>

There are various ways in which this tradition is interpreted. In the commentary of Ibn Baṭṭāl on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, it is linked with the Prophetic saying, “Do not ask the People of the Book regarding anything”<sup>156</sup> where the prohibitive statement is referring to matters of Divine legislation (*sharā’i’*). That is, “Do not ask them regarding their Divine Laws what is not clarified by our [Islamic] Laws so as to act according to them, for our *sharī’ah* is sufficient, and whatever is not explicitly stated within our primary texts, then it is through discernment and deduction [based on Islamic sources] that our Laws are derived.”<sup>157</sup> However, when it comes to inquiring about stories of past nations and the likes from them, there is no objection. Regardless, the above prohibition would

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<sup>155</sup> This tradition occurs three times in al-Bukhārī’s collection, each narration having a different *isnād* with slight variances in the *matn*. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, v. 1, 510, no. 2726, v. 3, 1486, no. 7450 and 1523, no. 7617. Also see above, pp. 38-39, n. 93.

<sup>156</sup> In his collection, al-Bukhārī himself links Ibn ‘Abbās’ saying with the above Prophetic tradition as he places Ibn ‘Abbās’ narration in a section with the heading: *Bāb qawl al-Nabī lā tas’alū ahl al-kitāb ‘an shay’*. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, v. 3, 1485.

<sup>157</sup> ‘Alī ibn Khalaf ibn Baṭṭāl, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Abū Tamīm Yāsir ibn Ibrāhīm, 10 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 2000/1420), v.10, 391.

not apply to those of the People of the Book who had embraced Islam, like Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām. This opinion was cited by Ibn ‘Abbās himself and others in connection to the interpretation of Q10:94 which alludes to asking those who recite the Book before you, where the verse is referring to such people who had already accepted Islam and were no longer Jews or Christians.<sup>158</sup> In a similar vein, Badr al-Dīn al-‘Aynī, who also wrote a commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, states regarding the transmission of the stories of Banī Isrā‘īl that the prohibition of questioning the People of the Book “is applicable to those people who had not embraced Islam.”<sup>159</sup>

Another way in which Ibn ‘Abbās’ statement can be understood is as a warning to the general populace, who possess little or no knowledge, not to ask the People of the Book about anything out of fear that it may cause confusion or corruption in their beliefs.<sup>160</sup> However, the prohibition of asking would not apply to the likes of Ibn ‘Abbās and others who are firmly grounded in Islamic knowledge so as to be able to discriminate between what is true and false in the sayings of the People of the Book. In fact, according to Ibn Kathīr, Ibn ‘Abbās had learnt the knowledge of the *isrā‘īliyyāt*, something that in essence could only be done by approaching the People of the Book in one regard or another.<sup>161</sup> A final possible way of viewing the tradition is that it was stated during the early, formative period of Islam and that such a prohibition was subsequently abrogated after Islam had been firmly established, a context similar to the Prophetic statement allowing the narration of the stories of the Children of Israel.<sup>162</sup>

From this perspective, the asking of the People of the Book and the transmission of

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., v. 10, 391-2.

<sup>159</sup> Albayrak, “Qur’anic Narrative,” 119.

<sup>160</sup> Na‘nā‘ah, *al-Isrā‘īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 126.

<sup>161</sup> This is what has been mentioned by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī in his lengthy comment on the *isrā‘īliyyāt*. See Albayrak, “Qur’anic Narrative,” 120.

<sup>162</sup> See above, p. 41, n. 96 for the reference to this Prophetic tradition.

*isrāʾīliyyāt* could no longer do any harm and some Muslim scholars believe this is one of the means by which the *isrāʾīliyyāt* found their way into the *tafsīr* literature.<sup>163</sup>

Regarding Ibn ‘Abbās’ going to the People of the Book, scholars have taken various positions on the matter, of which I will mention only those that directly relate to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār for the purpose of this analysis.<sup>164</sup> The first is that Ibn ‘Abbās used to go often to the People of the Book, especially the converts such as Ka‘b, whenever he had doubts about certain issues as he felt that they had knowledge in such affairs. This position is articulated by Ignaz Goldziher in his text *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung* as well as by Israel Ben-Zeev (Wolfensohn) in his monograph on Ka‘b.<sup>165</sup> The impression given by Goldziher and Ben-Zeev is that Ibn ‘Abbās would do this frequently enough so as to regard them as a preferred source of knowledge and that he would do so not only for *isrāʾīliyyāt* narrations or information about past scriptures, but even for obtaining the context or meaning of certain Qur’anic verses or Arabic words therein. This is due to a number of traditions found in the *tafsīr* texts, especially that of al-Ṭabarī, that would indicate such.

Other scholars, such as Ramzī Na‘nā‘ah, state that this position is exaggerated and that it would be inconceivable for Ibn ‘Abbās, as *tarjumān al-Qur’ān* for whom the Prophet himself supplicated to God to give him wisdom and understanding of Islam and the Qur’an,<sup>166</sup> to have the need to resort to such people for the sake of knowledge,

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<sup>163</sup> Albayrak, “Qur’anic Narrative,” 118-121. The above two interpretations are similar to the context of ‘Umar’s statement to Ka‘b and Abū Hurayrah and his prohibiting them of narrating their traditions. See above, pp. 27-28.

<sup>164</sup> Doing a complete analysis of all of the traditions related to Ibn ‘Abbās, the People of the Book (including the converts, or those Muslims well-versed in the Jewish scriptures) and the *isrāʾīliyyāt* is a subject that could serve as its own topic of research in a separate work and is, hence, beyond the scope of this thesis.

<sup>165</sup> Ignaz Goldziher, *Madhāhib al-tafsīr al-Islāmī*, trans. ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Najjār (Beirut: Dār Iqra’, 1983), 85-89; Ben-Zeev, *Ka‘b al-Aḥbār*, 62-63.

<sup>166</sup> For the traditions that contain these supplications, see Ibn Sa’d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, v. 2, 365.

particularly in light of his statement above discouraging others from doing so.<sup>167</sup>

Furthermore, Na'nā'ah states that none of the Companions had an understanding of the Qur'an as Ibn 'Abbās did and that they were the ones who used to go to him for the interpretation of verses. Thus, it seems far-fetched to consider him going to the People of the Book frequently for explanations of the text, especially to ask about the meaning of Arabic words, for he was a pure Arab and possessed a greater knowledge of the language than Ka'b and his likes. Rather, Ibn 'Abbās would go to the People of the Book only within set limits, in order to seek what is in concord between the Qur'an and Biblical texts with the specific purpose of confirming the contents of the former. Whatever went against the Qur'an, in creedal tenets or otherwise, Ibn 'Abbās would not agree with nor would he accept it from them.<sup>168</sup>

In addition, regarding the traditions specifically related to Ka'b, Na'nā'ah states:

In spite of what has come in the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī of narrations which, on the outward, purport that Ibn 'Abbās used to direct many of his questions to Ka'b al-Aḥbār, I cannot surrender to the correctness of all of such narrations, and I believe that most of them are falsely attributed to him, for it is well known to all scholars that in his *tafsīr*, Ibn Jarīr does not hold to the truth of all that he narrates, so why is it unreasonable to consider that some of what has been attributed to Ibn 'Abbās from his narrations of Ka'b or others be false?<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> See above, p. 65.

<sup>168</sup> Na'nā'ah, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 126-127. Muḥammad Husayn al-Dhahabī makes similar statements regarding Ibn 'Abbās' limits in his approach to the People of the Book and disagrees with Goldziher's assertion as well. He states that, "The truth is that [Goldziher's] charge [regarding Ibn 'Abbās] is the absolute furthest from the truth and what is correct (*ba'īd kull al-bu'd 'an al-ḥaqq wa 'l-sawāb*) for verily, [when] Ibn 'Abbās, and others amongst the Companions...used to ask the Jewish scholars who accepted Islam, their questions would not be on matters related to creedal beliefs, foundations of the religion, or [its] branches, but rather, they would be regarding details of some stories or past narrations; they would not accept everything that would be stated to them as totally correct and not susceptible to doubt, but rather, they would judge [what they heard] according to their religion and intellects; whatever they found in concord with the religion and the intellect, they believed, and what differed from them, they rejected." See al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt fī 'l-tafsīr wa 'l-ḥadīth*, 100-107.

<sup>169</sup> Na'nā'ah, *al-Isrā'īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 128. Interestingly, Noeldeke Schwally expresses doubts that Ibn 'Abbās ever had direct contact with Ka'b, however, this opinion has nothing to substantiate it as will be shown by the following analysis of traditions in al-Ṭabarī's text. For the opinion of Schwally, see Ben-Zeev, *Ka'b al-Aḥbār*, 62.

The author then goes on to emphasize the importance of examining the chains of transmission of each saying of Ibn ‘Abbās within the *tafsīr* literature to determine whether or not something was actually narrated from him. The reason is that the books of *tafsīr* contain several contradictory narrations attributed to him which have no means of being reconciled.<sup>170</sup> However, regarding the traditions involving Ibn ‘Abbās approaching Ka‘b, Na‘nā‘ah draws his conclusion of false attribution above without actually analyzing the chains of transmission himself. Hence, what I intend to do through my analysis below is to confirm *some* of Na‘nā‘ah’s conclusions while simultaneously demonstrating the inaccuracies within both of the positions of Goldziher and Na‘nā‘ah. In doing so, I will propose a more accurate conclusion concerning the relationship between Ibn ‘Abbās and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, in particular. In addition, I will also consider the matter of authenticity regarding certain *isrā’īliyyāt* traditions narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās as per the comments of Ibn Kathīr and Na‘nā‘ah.

The first significant matter to be noted about the traditions of ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās and the *isrā’īliyyāt*, as well as those related to him and Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, is that they generally are not from the genre of Prophetic *aḥādīth*, but rather, are predominantly from the genre of Qur’anic exegetical traditions.<sup>171</sup> The main difference between the traditions within each of the two genres is that the former cite a word or deed of the

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<sup>170</sup> Na‘nā‘ah, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 131-132.

<sup>171</sup> There are, of course, exceptions to this where a Prophetic tradition is suspected as being of the *isrā’īliyyāt* narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās. One example is cited by Ibn Kathīr in his commentary on Q78:38 regarding the *rūḥ* (spirit) that is referred to in the verse, where Ibn ‘Abbās relates a Prophetic saying that describes an angel so tremendous that if commanded to swallow up the seven heavens and the earth in a single bite, it would do so. Ibn Kathīr comments on this tradition stating, “This tradition is extremely odd and its attribution to the Prophet requires consideration [as being false]; rather, it is more likely a narration that stops at Ibn ‘Abbās [in its *isnād*] and is from what he obtained of the *isrā’īliyyāt*, and God knows best.” Another example of this occurring can be found in his comments on Q20:39 where Ibn Kathīr states regarding a different tradition that “[This tradition] stops at Ibn ‘Abbās and very little of it is attributable to the Prophet; rather, it seems that it is from what Ibn ‘Abbās has obtained from that which is permissible to narrate of the *isrā’īliyyāt* from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, or others...” See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 8, 310 and v. 5, 293 for the first and second examples, respectively.

Prophet himself, whereas the latter do not go back to the Prophet directly. Hence, most of the narrations I will be dealing with here go back only to Ibn ‘Abbās.

Throughout the *tafsīr* text of al-Ṭabarī, there can be found a number of traditions where Ibn ‘Abbās goes to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and asks him questions regarding the meaning of either specific words or the general content of several Qur’anic verses. The reason for Ibn ‘Abbās’ action can be interpreted in one of at least three ways: first, as a means for gaining knowledge regarding a matter that he previously did not know of; second, as a means for enquiring how the People of the Book interpreted such matters in order to compare with the Islamic understanding of the Qur’anic text; or third, to simply check on the correctness of Ka‘b’s Islamic knowledge regarding a matter and ensure that he has the proper understanding of it. As already indicated, Goldziher and Ben-Zeev would incline towards the first reason whereas Na‘nā‘ah towards the second while qualifying his position with the suspicion that many such narrations, merely due to their proflity in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*, are inauthentic. However, when examining these traditions more thoroughly, several significant points can be made.

First of all, regarding their number, there are approximately fourteen such traditions which explicitly state that Ibn ‘Abbās approached Ka‘b to enquire about a Qur’anic verse.<sup>172</sup> Interestingly, of the fourteen traditions, many of them possess the exact same chain of transmission and structure in their content. What is significant about this is that the traditions can be reduced into different groups based on their

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<sup>172</sup> Although this number may not be exhaustive within al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*, I am confident that through my numerous electronic searches within the text that I have located the majority, if not all, of such traditions. For the *tafsīr* text online, see Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (accessed 2006); available from [www.altafsir.com](http://www.altafsir.com). Many other *tafsīr* texts can also be found on this excellent and very comprehensive website on Qur’anic exegesis, which also contains a feature allowing one to search through all of the texts. The texts are also available in the software program al-Maktabah al-Shāmilah Ver. 2.04.

chains of transmission and structure. This observation has not been discussed by previous scholars, hence, the approach to analyzing these traditions here, in light of their common *isnād* and structure, is a novel and more holistic one. The importance of this fact can be realized only through citing all of the traditions in their respective *isnād* groups, and they are as follows:

- Group A: Yūnus ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā narrated that [‘Abd Allāh] Ibn Wahb [ibn Muslim] stated: Jarīr ibn Ḥāzim related to me from Sulaymān al-A‘mash from Shimr ibn ‘Aṭiyyah from Hilāl ibn Yasāf who said:
- No. 1: We were sitting with Ka‘b, myself and Rabī‘ ibn Khaytham and Khālīd ibn ‘Ur‘urah along with a group of our companions, when Ibn ‘Abbās entered; he sat beside Ka‘b and said: “O Ka‘b! Tell me about *sijjīn*!” So he replied, “As for *sijjīn*, it is the lowest level of the seven earths, and in it is the souls of the unbelievers...”<sup>173</sup>
- No. 2: Ibn ‘Abbās asked Ka‘b while I was present regarding *al-‘illiyyīn* so Ka‘b said, “It is the seventh heaven, and in it is the souls of the believers.”<sup>174</sup>
- No. 3: Ibn ‘Abbās asked Ka‘b while I was present, “What is the saying of God Almighty regarding Idrīs {And We raised him to a high place}?”<sup>175</sup> So Ka‘b replied, “As for Idrīs, God revealed to him, ‘I will raise up for you everyday an amount of good deeds equal to all of the good deeds of the children of Adam’; Idrīs desired an increase in the amount of deeds raised up for himself, so he told a friend of his from amongst the angels how God had revealed such and such to him and asked if the angel could speak to the Angel of Death so as to extend his life in order to gain an increase in his deeds; the angel then carried Idrīs between his wings and ascended into the sky; when they reached the fourth heaven they met the Angel of Death as he was descending, so the angel spoke to him regarding Idrīs’ request to which he replied, “And where is Idrīs now?” The angel answered, “He is on my back.” The Angel of Death said, “How astonishing! I was just told to take the soul of Idrīs in the fourth heaven and I questioned myself saying, ‘How can I take his soul in the fourth heaven while he is on earth?’” So he took the soul of Idrīs then and there and this is the meaning of God’s saying, {And We raised him to a high place}.”<sup>176</sup>

<sup>173</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 24, 282.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 291.

<sup>175</sup> Q19:56.

<sup>176</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 18, 212.

- No. 4: Ibn ‘Abbās asked Ka‘b regarding the Lotus tree of the utmost limit (*sidrat al-muntahā*) while I was present, so Ka‘b replied, “It is a lotus tree that is upon the heads of the angels who carry the Throne [of God]; the knowledge of all created beings terminates at it, with no single creature possessing knowledge of what is beyond it, and for this reason, it is named the Lotus tree of the utmost limit, for the cessation of knowledge [that occurs] at it.”<sup>177</sup>
- Group B: [‘Abd al-Ḥamīd] Ibn Ḥumayd [ibn Naṣr] narrated that Ya‘qūb [ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sa‘d] al-Qummī narrated from Ḥaṣṣ ibn Ḥumayd from Shimr [ibn ‘Aṭiyyah] who said:
- No. 5: Ibn ‘Abbās came to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and said to him, “Tell me about the words of God, {No indeed; the book of the libertines is in *sijjīn*...}”<sup>178</sup> So Ka‘b replied, “Verily, the soul of the libertine is taken up into the heavens, but the heavens refuse to accept it and it is brought back down to the earth, which also refuses to accept it; it then descends beneath seven earths until it reaches *sijjīn*, and it is the boundary of Iblīs [Satan]; there a parchment is brought out [for the soul] and it is numbered and sealed, after which it is returned beneath the boundary of Iblīs, in the knowledge of its [i.e. the soul’s] destruction until the Day of Judgement.”<sup>179</sup>
- No. 6: Ibn ‘Abbās came to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and asked him, saying, “Tell me about the words of God, {No indeed; the book of the pious is in *‘illiyyīn*...}”<sup>180</sup> So Ka‘b replied, “Verily the soul of the believer, when it is taken, it is ascended with to the heavens, to which the doors of heaven open up and the angels meet it with glad tidings; they continue to ascend with it until it reaches the Throne [of God], from which a parchment is brought out which is numbered and sealed, in the knowledge of its [i.e. the soul’s] salvation from the reckoning on the Day of Judgement...”<sup>181</sup>
- No. 7: Ibn ‘Abbās came to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and said to him, “Tell me about the words of God, Glorified and Exalted, {God is the Light of the heavens and the earth...}”<sup>182</sup> So Ka‘b replied, “God is the Light of the heavens and the earth, {the likeness of His Light} [refers to] the likeness of Muhammad, God bless him and grant him peace, which is like a niche.”<sup>183</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., v. 22, 514.

<sup>178</sup> Q83:7.

<sup>179</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 24, 283-284.

<sup>180</sup> Q83:18.

<sup>181</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v.24, 291-292.

<sup>182</sup> Q24:35.

<sup>183</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 19, 179. The construct here of God’s Light as referring to Muḥammad is similar to the construct of God’s House being the Ka‘ba. That is, it is a possessive construct that signifies praise and honour to what is being connected to God, as opposed to having any anthropomorphic implications such as God’s House being the one the He resides in, etc. So in this instance, Muhammad is



- No. 8: Ibn ‘Abbās came to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and said to him, “Tell me about the words of God, {The likeness of His Light is as a niche}.”<sup>184</sup> He replied, “God has cast an analogy with the niche, which is an aperture, to Muhammad, God bless him and grant him peace; the niche {wherein is a lamp, the lamp} which is his heart is, {in a glass, the glass} which is his chest {as it were a glittering star}; He has likened the chest of the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, to a glittering star, then the lamp as referring to his heart; so He said {[the light] is kindled from a Blessed Tree, an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West} [meaning] that neither the [rising] sun of the East nor the [setting] sun of the West touches it, {whose oil wellnigh would shine, even if no fire touched it} [meaning that] Muhammad would wellnigh appear [brilliant and illuminated] to people on his own, even if he were not to state to them that he is a Prophet, just as that oil wellnigh would shine...”<sup>185</sup>
- No. 9: Ibn ‘Abbās came to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and said to him, “Tell me about the words of God, {At the Lotus tree of the utmost limit, nigh which is the Garden of Refuge}.”<sup>186</sup> So Ka‘b replied, “Verily, it is a lotus tree at the foundation of the Throne at which the knowledge of every scholar, high-ranking angel, and sent Prophet ceases; whatever lies beyond it is of the unseen realm; no one knows about it except God.”<sup>187</sup>
- Group C: Ya‘qūb ibn Ibrāhīm narrated to me that [Ismā‘īl] Ibn ‘Ulayyah narrated that Ḥumayd [ibn Abī Ḥumayd al-Ṭawīl] related from Ishāq ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥārith from his father that:
- No. 10: Ibn ‘Abbās asked Ka‘b regarding His words {Glorifying Him by night and in the daytime and never failing}<sup>188</sup> and {[They] glorify Him by night and day, and grow not weary}<sup>189</sup> so he [Ka‘b] said, “Does your blinking burden you? Does your breathing burden you?” He said, “No.” He [Ka‘b] replied, “Verily, they instinctively glorify God as you instinctively blink and breathe.”<sup>190</sup>
- No. 11: Ibn ‘Abbās asked Ka‘b regarding His words {Then We bequeathed the Book on those of Our servants We chose}<sup>191</sup> until His words {By the

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not seen as being a part of God in any way or form, but rather is honoured as being God’s Light that He guides others with.

<sup>184</sup> Q24:35.

<sup>185</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v.19, 180.

<sup>186</sup> Q53:14-15.

<sup>187</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 22, 513-514.

<sup>188</sup> Q21:20.

<sup>189</sup> Q41:38.

<sup>190</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 18, 423.

<sup>191</sup> Q35:32.

leave of God}; he [Ka‘b] said, “Their shoulders came together,<sup>192</sup> by the Lord of the Ka‘bah, then they were given the merit by their deeds.”<sup>193</sup>

The remaining two traditions are unique in their *isnād* and *matn* and are as follows:

- No. 12: Al-Ḥusayn [Sunayd ibn Dāwūd] narrated that Mu‘tamir ibn Sulaymān narrated from his father from Sayyār<sup>194</sup> from Ibn ‘Abbās that he asked Ka‘b regarding the Mother of the Book (*umm al-kitāb*) so he replied, “It is the knowledge of God of what He has created and of what His creation will do, so He said to His knowledge, ‘Become a Book’ so it became a Book.”<sup>195</sup>
- No. 13: Aḥmad ibn Abī Surayj al-Rāzi narrated to me saying, Zakariyyā ibn ‘Adī narrated that ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn ‘Amr narrated from Zayd ibn Abī Unaysah from Yazīd ibn Abī Ziyād from ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥārith that Ibn ‘Abbās asked Ka‘b regarding the Garden of Eden so he replied, “It is vineyards and grapes in Syriac.”<sup>196</sup>

Before considering the specific contents of the above traditions, it is essential to examine their chains of transmission in terms of their authenticity. For the first two groups of traditions, Groups A and B, most of the individuals in the two chains are considered at best trustworthy and reliable (*thiqāt*) according to the scholars who specialize in the science of narrators (*‘ilm al-rijāl*), or are at the very least acceptable (i.e. are not considered weak).<sup>197</sup> An example of the latter would be Sulaymān al-

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<sup>192</sup> The initial part of the statement, *tamāsat manākibuhum*, should be interpreted metaphorically here as their supporting one another until they became equal or on the same level.

<sup>193</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 20, 466.

<sup>194</sup> In some versions of Ibn Kathīr’s *tafsīr* on Q13:39, he has the name Yasār instead of Sayyār, but the rest of the *isnād* remains the same. However, because there is no person named Yasār who is known to narrate from Sulaymān, the father of Mu‘tamir, then it is likely a mistake in Ibn Kathīr’s text. The edition used for this study confirms this and has the name Sayyār. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*; v. 4, 471.

<sup>195</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 16, 491 and v. 18, 681.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., v. 14, 352. The fourteenth tradition involves Ibn ‘Abbās asking K‘ab about the meaning of a word in a Qur’anic verse for no other reason than to confirm his own reading of the verse, as opposed to another Companion’s reading. This tradition will be dealt with in more detail below.

<sup>197</sup> For examining the rank of any individual within any *isnād* in this research paper, I have used a software program produced by Ḥarf entitled *Ḥadīth Encyclopedia* (version 2.1) that contains over 62,000 Prophetic traditions with their full chains of transmission. This program allows the user to choose any narrator within any *isnād* and view a brief biography, as well as, more importantly, their rank which is determined by what several of the major classical *ḥadīth* scholars specialized in the science of narrators have stated about a particular narrator. However, the use of this program as a tool for determining the authenticity of a narration has its limitations for there is much more to the authenticity of a tradition than its *isnād*. In this regard, my analysis of the above traditions is limited and will not be in accordance with the highest

A‘mash who, although the majority of scholars attest to his reliability, one scholar, Ibn Hibbān, states that he was reliable and trustworthy, except that he used to commit *tadlīs*.<sup>198</sup> What is most noteworthy regarding the two chains of transmission is that they both contain a common narrator, Shimr ibn ‘Aṭiyyah. In Group A, he is the second-last narrator before the narration of Ibn ‘Abbās’ meeting Ka‘b, whereas in Group B, he is the one directly narrating the tradition of Ibn ‘Abbās. The latter point is significant because Shimr did not live early enough to have met any of the Companions, including Ibn ‘Abbās, hence, all of the traditions that he narrates without an intervening narrator (such as Hilāl ibn Yasāf, who did live during the time of the Companions) are considered interrupted (*munqaṭi‘*).<sup>199</sup> Although many scholars would consider such narrations as automatically weak in regards to their authenticity due to the interrupted *isnād*, this is not always the case. Here, for example, Shimr is considered to be a reliable and trustworthy narrator (*thiqah* or *ṣaḍūq*) with no difference of opinion amongst the *‘ilm al-rijāl* scholars concerning him. Now when examining the contents of the traditions in

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and most rigorous standards of *ḥadīth* scholarship. That is, what has been related regarding any of the above traditions’ authenticity based on its *isnād* is not by any means a definitive judgment on the narration, but rather, my intent is only to offer various possibilities or points to ponder regarding their authenticity. Performing a more thorough analysis of such traditions would necessitate having the requisite knowledge involved in the various sciences of *ḥadīth* and *ḥadīth* criticism. Furthermore, for any *isnād* that would contain any sort of deficiencies, such as having a reliable and trustworthy narrator who commits *tadlīs* or an interrupted chain of transmission, a more thorough analysis would also entail going through the entire corpus of exegetical traditions (that have *asānīd*) from a variety of sources to see whether or not other narrations with a similar *isnād* or *matn* exist that would offer support to the respective deficiency in the tradition, thereby strengthening its authenticity. In light of the above considerations, including my own limited scholarly capacities regarding the sciences of *ḥadīth*, such an analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. I am indebted to Shaykh ‘Adil Yūsuf, a *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* specialist, for directing my attention to this matter. For the software program, see *Ḥadīth Encyclopedia* (Mawsū‘at al-ḥadīth al-sharīf) Ver. 2.1 (Riyadh: Ḥarf Information Technology).

<sup>198</sup> See above, p. 48, n. 109 for the meaning of *tadlīs*.

<sup>199</sup> One way in which the term *munqaṭi‘* is used in *ḥadīth* terminology is to classify a tradition where the name of the narrator who is a Follower (i.e. one who met the Companions) immediately preceding the tradition of a Companion is missing, hence, causing an interruption in the chain of transmitters. This results in an *isnād* like the one above in Group B where Shimr, who did not meet the Companions, is relating something that Ibn ‘Abbās did. When the same occurs with a Follower narrating a Prophetic tradition, the *ḥadīth* is called *mursal*, a term which can also be used to refer to a *munqaṭi‘* tradition as narrated above. See Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ al-Shahrazūrī, *An Introduction to the Science of the Ḥadīth*, 44.

Groups A and B, many of them are devoted to similar topics such as *sijjīn* (nos. 1 and 5), *‘illiyyīn* (nos. 2 and 6) and the Lotus tree (nos. 4 and 9). Hence, due to the existence of other traditions that have an uninterrupted chain of narrators (as in Group A) that contain similar contents, this could be viewed as strengthening those traditions with an interrupted *isnād* ending with the narrator that is common between the two traditions. In this case, as Shimr, who is a trustworthy and reliable narrator, is the common narrator between the two sets of traditions, one possibility is that Shimr would have obtained his knowledge regarding Ibn ‘Abbās’ approaching and questioning of Ka‘b from Hilāl ibn Yasāf, who was actually present when the event occurred, thereby strengthening those traditions whose interrupted *isnād* ends in Shimr. This has further implications as will be mentioned below.

The significance of the traditions in each of the respective Groups A and B having the same *isnād* and structure is that this offers the very likely possibility that *all* of the questions asked by Ibn ‘Abbās to Ka‘b in each of the traditions, in fact, occurred in one single sitting, as opposed to representing several separate occasions.<sup>200</sup> For example, in Group A, the beginning of every tradition contains Hilāl ibn Yasāf, the

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<sup>200</sup> It is not uncommon for a single *ḥadīth* composed of multiple parts or several statements to be narrated as separate traditions with a similar, if not identical, *isnād*. An example of this occurring within the *tafsīr* literature can be found regarding the commentary on Q24:35, where tradition no. 8 in Group B above, as found in the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī, is broken down into several separate traditions in the *tafsīr* of Ibn Abī Ḥātim. The latter work contains seven separate traditions, all narrated by Shimr, describing Ibn ‘Abbās approaching Ka‘b and asking about the meanings of certain parts of the verse (i.e. {wherein is a lamp}, {in a glass}, {the glass, as it were a glittering star}, etc.) Each of the traditions in Ibn Abī Ḥātim’s *tafsīr* has the identical *isnād* as follows: Muḥammad ibn Yahyā narrated to us that Yazīd ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz related that Ya‘qūb ibn ‘Abd Allāh [al-Qummī] narrated from Ja‘far ibn Abī Mughīrah from Shimr ibn ‘Aṭīyyah. Although most of the narrators in this chain are reliable at best, and acceptable at worst, the fact that it represents a different chain of transmission than the one in al-Ṭabarī’s text that, nevertheless, still goes back to Shimr only goes to strengthen the traditions in each of the *tafsīr*-texts as they complement one another. The structure of each tradition is also the same as that found in al-Ṭabarī with Shimr stating, “Ibn ‘Abbās came to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and said to him, ‘Tell me about the words of God...’” For the separate narrations, see tradition nos. 14571, 14577, 14580, 14583, 14593, 14614 and 14618 respectively in ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*, ed. As‘ad Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib, 14 vols. (Makkah: Maktabat Nizār Muṣṭafā al-Bāz, 1999/1419), v. 8, 2596-2603.

narrator, stating, “...while I was present” when Ibn ‘Abbās asked Ka‘b regarding such and such a verse.<sup>201</sup> The exception is the first tradition (no. 1) which provides the actual context of when Ibn ‘Abbās asked Ka‘b his questions on the various Qur’anic verses in the presence of Hilāl and company.

In the second group, the same phenomenon occurs with Shimr’s using the exact same wording of Ibn ‘Abbās’ *coming* to Ka‘b and saying to him, “Tell me about the words of God...etc.”<sup>202</sup> Furthermore, as already mentioned above, the contents of many of the traditions in Groups A and B are devoted to similar topics. This allows for an even further possibility that, regarding the traditions of Group B, Shimr was relating in his own words other details that he had heard from Hilāl which were stated during the latter’s gathering when he observed Ibn ‘Abbās’ approaching Ka‘b and questioning him. Hence, the number of times that Ibn ‘Abbās actually went to Ka‘b according to the above traditions in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* could be reduced from thirteen to only four if all of the traditions in Groups A and B occurred in a single gathering, as well as if the two traditions in Group C occurred at one time, again, based on their identical *isnād*.<sup>203</sup>

As for the traditions in Group C and tradition no. 12, the chains of transmission contain no interruptions and none of the individuals in the respective *asānīd* is considered weak, except for al-Ḥusayn ibn Dāwūd who is considered weak by some

<sup>201</sup> The Arabic of these traditions reads: *sa’ala Ibn ‘Abbās Ka‘ban wa ana ḥāḍir.*

<sup>202</sup> The Arabic of these traditions reads: *jā’a Ibn ‘Abbās ilā Ka‘b al-Aḥbār fa qāla lahu ḥaddithnī ‘an qawli-llāh...* There also exists in the *Kitāb al-zuhd* of Ibn al-Mubārak a single narration with a slightly different *isnād* leading to Shimr that records *all* of the above questions of Ibn ‘Abbās to Ka‘b regarding the exact same verses as the five traditions in Group B. In each instance, the answer of Ka‘b is nearly identical in Ibn al-Mubārak’s tradition to those found in Group B. See ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-A‘ẓamī, 3 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, n.d.), v. 2, 434, no. 1223.

<sup>203</sup> Even if the traditions in Group C are considered as occurring at separate times, this would still reduce the number of times Ibn ‘Abbās approached Ka‘b to six (i.e. Group A as one event, Group B as one, Group C as two and then the final two traditions as two) which is still less than half of the number of times if one were to consider each of the thirteen traditions as separate events.

scholars. As well, the only exception from amongst the narrators in tradition no. 13 is Yazīd ibn Abī Ziyād who is also deemed as a weak narrator whereas the rest are considered trustworthy.

Regarding the contents of the above traditions as being of the *isrāʾīliyyāt* according to Ibn Kathīr, only five out of the thirteen are cited in his *tafsīr*, of which he comments only on the one about the Prophet Idrīs.<sup>204</sup> He calls this particular tradition “strange and odd” (*gharībān ‘ajībān*) and after citing it states, “This is from the *isrāʾīliyyāt* stories of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār; part of it contains ignorance, and God knows best.”<sup>205</sup> His silence on the other four traditions suggests that he deems them, at the very least, acceptable.

Thus far, none of the thirteen traditions cited above clearly indicate *why* Ibn ‘Abbās approached Kaʿb and asked him about the various Qur’anic verses. It is clear from the above traditions that this was something that actually did occur and on more than one occasion, however, it may not have occurred as often as the number of traditions would indicate. In this regard, the conclusion of Naʿnāʾah that most of the traditions found in al-Ṭabarī are falsely attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās merely due to their abundance does not hold up. In addition, after examining the chains of transmission of each tradition and finding them at best rigourously authenticated, and at worst acceptable, it is all the more difficult to deny that Ibn ‘Abbās did indeed approach Kaʿb to ask him questions. The above traditions also go to show that Ibn ‘Abbās did not have any problems or concerns in doing so, and none of them indicate that he suspected the

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<sup>204</sup> The traditions that Ibn Kathīr cites from al-Ṭabarī’s text in full are nos. 2, 3, 11 while only parts of nos. 1 and 8 are cited. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 8, 352 for nos. 1 and 2, v. 5, 240-241 for no. 3, v. 6, 60-61 for no. 8, and v. 6, 549 for no. 11.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., v. 5, 240-241. The Arabic reads: *hādhā min akhbār Kaʿb al-Aḥbār al-isrāʾīliyyāt, wa fī baʿḍihī nakārah, wa-llāhu aʿlam.*

character or sincerity of Ka‘b in any way, or that he held anything against him, due to his Jewish background.

Regarding *why* Ibn ‘Abbās would approach Ka‘b in the first place, given Ibn ‘Abbās’ firm knowledge of the Qur’an and its interpretation, I would propose that it was *not* for the sake of gaining knowledge of a previously unknown matter to Ibn ‘Abbās in the vast majority of cases, as Goldziher or Ben-Zeev would tend to indicate. One way in which this can be demonstrated is through examining the traditions and opinions of Ibn ‘Abbās in regards to a particular verse where he approached Ka‘b to enquire about and compare his opinion with Ka‘b’s answer. If they differ, then either Ibn ‘Abbās would not have agreed with Ka‘b, even though it may not have been explicitly denied in the traditions where he approached Ka‘b,<sup>206</sup> or at the very least, he had a different perspective on the matter. For example, there are instances where a different tradition is narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās that contradicts what Ka‘b states in his answer to Ibn ‘Abbās. In tradition no. 3 above on the Prophet Idrīs, Ka‘b mentioned that Idrīs’ soul was raised up to the fourth heaven where it was taken out of his body. After citing this tradition, Ibn Kathīr records another tradition of Ibn ‘Abbās where he states that Idrīs was “raised up to the *sixth* heaven and died therein.”<sup>207</sup> What subsequently needs to be verified in this instance, as well as in any other, is the authenticity of Ibn ‘Abbās’ statement, which is an entirely different matter on its own.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> As would be in the instances where some Companions did deny the authenticity of what Ka‘b was saying through their statement “Ka‘b has lied,” as already mentioned in the relevant section above.

<sup>207</sup> Ibn Kathīr, v. 5, 241. In his *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-nihāyah*, Ibn Kathīr mentions how the more correct opinion is that Idrīs is in the fourth heaven, as indicated in an authentic Prophetic *ḥadīth*. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāyah wa ‘l-nihāyah*, v. 1, 93.

<sup>208</sup> There are many instances within Ibn Kathīr’s *tafsīr* that state two differing opinions of Ka‘b and Ibn ‘Abbās, such as in the commentary on Q48:16 (v. 7, 338) regarding a “people given to vehement war” (*qawm ‘ulī ba’sin shadīd*) as to who they represent. Many exegetes differed regarding this matter, with it being narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās that they were the Persians, while Ka‘b stated that they were the Romans. To do an exhaustive analysis, the major task at hand would be to comb through the *tafsīr* text of, say, Ibn

A final tradition found in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* clearly indicates the reason for Ibn 'Abbās' approaching Ka'b to enquire about the meaning of a word in a Qur'anic verse, and that is to confirm his own opinion of a matter when he differed with other Companions. In this tradition, Ibn 'Abbās differed with Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ regarding the reading of a word in Q18:86 indicating where the sun sets. Whereas Mu'āwiyah and 'Amr read the verse as *fī 'aynin ḥāmiyatin* (in a fiery spring), Ibn 'Abbās insisted it be read as *fī 'aynin ḥami'atin* (in a muddy spring). When they decided to ask Ka'b to help resolve the matter by telling them where the sun set according to the Torah, he stated, "You are more knowledgeable of the Qur'an than I, however, I find in the Book [i.e. the Torah] that it sets in black mud."<sup>209</sup> What is noteworthy here is that more than one Companion agreed to go to Ka'b and allowed him to help resolve their difference of opinion. This is something that would not occur had any of them been suspicious of Ka'b in any way and also goes to show further that the Companions trusted Ka'b enough to provide them with an answer that would help them resolve their discrepancy.<sup>210</sup>

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Kathīr and locate all of the verses where there exist the opinions of both Ibn 'Abbās and Ka'b and compare the two, as well as check the authenticity, if possible, of their narrations. This would also involve much sorting out as to those narrations that have to do with *isrā'īliyyāt* and those that don't. Doing the above would serve the purpose of determining which narrations or opinions Ibn 'Abbās could have obtained from Ka'b and those that he could not have.

<sup>209</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, v. 18, 96. Ibn Kathīr records a variant narration where Ka'b replies to Ibn 'Abbās, "Ask the people of the Arabic language (*ahl al-'arabiyyah*), for they are more knowledgeable than I regarding this, but as for myself, I find the sun sets in the Torah in water and mud." In this tradition, Ka'b's initial statement indicates how he is not a person with a firm background or knowledge in Arabic, ruling out the possibility that Ibn 'Abbās, a master of Arabic, would ever approach Ka'b in order to ask about the meaning of an Arabic word which he was ignorant of. Ibn Kathīr also records another tradition where Ka'b states, "By the One who holds Ka'b's life between His hands, I did not hear anyone read it as it was revealed in the Torah other than Ibn 'Abbās, for we find it [the sun] in the Torah setting in a clod of black mud." See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 5, 192-193.

<sup>210</sup> According to Na'nā'ah, "it was by way of these answers that many *isrā'īliyyāt* circulated amongst the Muslims." In fact, most of what was narrated by the Muslims from the People of the Book was by this way, that is, by answering the questions of Muslims regarding the details of events, characters and Qur'anic questions, some of which would come in detail, others in brief, and that the Muslims used to respect their answers for what they knew of previous scriptures. This is also what Ibn Khaldūn states in



To reemphasize, upon reflecting on the contents of all of the traditions above, it becomes clear that Ibn ‘Abbās did not have any sort of problem with Ka‘b al-Aḥbār in regards to his character, sincerity or trustworthiness. Instead, what appears to be the primary issue when dealing with Ibn ‘Abbās and his narration of *isrā’īliyyāt* is the authenticity of such narrations as going back to Ibn ‘Abbās as well as the veracity of their content, moreso than his relationship to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār. This point is reaffirmed several times in the *tafsīr* of Ibn Kathīr where he expresses his doubts regarding certain narrations of Ibn ‘Abbās as going back to him and at times offers a conjecture as to the source of Ibn ‘Abbās’ narration, which sometimes would include Ka‘b, among other possible sources. For example, in his commentary on Q15:28, which refers to the episode of God creating the human being and then commanding the angels to prostrate to His new creation, Ibn Kathīr relates a narration of Ibn ‘Abbās (also mentioned by al-Ṭabarī in his *tafsīr*) that states how a group of angels refused to follow the command of God to prostrate. God then destroyed them and created another group of angels who did the same and then God destroyed them as well. This occurred several times until the last group of angels finally obeyed the command of God and prostrated. After citing the tradition, Ibn Kathīr states, “There is remoteness in establishing the certainty of this narration from him [Ibn ‘Abbās], but rather, the outward purport is that it is an *isrā’īlī* tradition, and God knows best.”<sup>211</sup>

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his *Tārīkh* regarding the infiltration and spread of the *isrā’īliyyāt*, the acceptable and rejected, into the *tafsīr* texts. He adds that due to the early Arabs not being a people of “books or knowledge,” they were simple and unlettered. Hence, if they desired to know the details regarding the “beginning of creation and the secrets of existence,” they would seek out such details from the People of the Book who possessed the scriptures that came before them, being the people of the Torah from the Jews, like Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, Wahb ibn Munabbih and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Salām, and those who followed them from the Christians. See Na‘nā‘ah, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 110 and ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh Ibn Khaldūn*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003), v. 1, 470.

<sup>211</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 4, 534 and al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, v. 17, 101.

Another example is found in the commentary on Q27:41-44 regarding the story of Bilqīs, the Queen of Sheba and Sulaymān. Here, Ibn Kathīr cites a lengthy tradition that contains clear anomalies and aberrations. Towards the end of the narration it states, as mentioned in the Qur'an, how Sulaymān's palace floor was made of a thin layer of glass beneath which was water. The narration goes on:

Sulaymān said to the Queen, "Enter into the palace." When she saw the palace floor, she reckoned it was wet and raised her gown, exposing her shins which were hairy. On seeing this, Sulaymān stated, "This is ugly! What will remove this?" They [the devils] replied, "A straight razor will." Sulaymān said, "The markings left behind by a straight razor are ugly." The devils then made a depilatory agent,<sup>212</sup> hence, Sulaymān was the first person for which a depilatory agent was made.<sup>213</sup>

Ibn Kathīr then comments that this tradition is "detestable and extremely odd (*munkar gharīb jiddan*)" and that "perhaps it is from the delusions of 'Aṭā' ibn al-Sā'ib that he [falsely] attributed to Ibn 'Abbās."<sup>214</sup> He then adds:

What is the more probable in the likes of these contexts is that they are of those [stories] taken from the People of the Book and of what is found in their texts, such as the narrations of Ka'b and Wahb, may God Almighty forgive them both for what they transmitted to this *ummah* from the stories of the Children of Israel of unusual, strange things and oddities, of what occurred and what did not occur, of that which was corrupted, altered and abrogated; God, Glorified be He, has made us sufficient of such [things] by providing us with what is more correct, beneficial, clearer and more eloquent and to God is all praise and grace.<sup>215</sup>

Again, Ibn Kathīr's overlying concern here has to do with the veracity of the narrations' contents and laments such corrupt sources' being transmitted in the first place.

However, his comments towards those who transmitted such stories, namely, the

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<sup>212</sup> In Arabic, the term used is *nawrah* which consists of a mixture of quick lime with arsenic, or orpiment, among other ingredients that is made into a paste when mixed with water; after its application, it loosens the hairs in about two minutes and then it is immediately washed off. See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, v.2, 2866.

<sup>213</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 6, 195-197.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

Muslims who possessed knowledge of previous scriptures such as Ka‘b and Wahb, is not one of harshness. Rather, he asks for God’s forgiveness towards them as an indication that he feels they were committing a mistake by transmitting their problematic narrations, and not that they were attempting to undermine the tradition of Islam in any way by corrupting the truth with falsehood.

One final example that demonstrates the complexities involved in Ibn ‘Abbās’ *isrāʾīliyyāt* narrations within the *tafsīr* literature, including the difficulty in attributing his narrations to a particular primary source, has to do, once again, with a story involving the Prophet Sulaymān and his ring. In the commentary on Q38:34, many *tafsīr* texts, including Ibn Kathīr’s and al-Ṭabarī’s, cite an outrageous tradition that goes against several tenets of Islamic creed regarding prophets. Although there exist many variants of this narration, I will cite the one found in Ibn Kathīr’s text which has a strong *isnād* to Ibn ‘Abbās, and it reads as follows:

Regarding the words of God Almighty {And We cast upon his [Sulaymān’s] throne a mere body; then he repented} he said: Sulaymān, upon him be blessings and peace, wanted to enter the lavatory, so he gave his ring to Jarādah, who was his most beloved wife; then, the Devil came in the form of Sulaymān to Jarādah and said to her, “Give me my ring” and she did so. When the Devil put on the ring, all humans, *jinn* and devils became subjugated to him. When Sulaymān, upon him be peace, exited the lavatory, he said to her, “Give me my ring” to which she replied, “I gave it to Sulaymān.” He then said, “I am Sulaymān!” and she responded, “You have lied! You are not Sulaymān!” Thereafter, there would not be anyone that he would approach and tell them that he is Sulaymān except that they would deny him, to the extent that young boys would throw stones at him. When Sulaymān saw this, he realized that he was being tested by God Almighty. Meanwhile, the Devil ruled over the people in place of Sulaymān, and when God desired to return Sulaymān’s kingdom to him, he placed within the peoples’ hearts feelings of rejection towards that Devil. They then sent a group to Sulaymān’s wives and asked them, “Do you disapprove of anything from Sulaymān’s actions?” They responded, “Yes! Verily, he approaches us while we are in our menses, and he never used to do so!” When the Devil saw that people were starting to become aware of who he really was, he thought that his affair would soon be over, so he had some [devils] write a book containing magic and disbelief and they then buried the book underneath Sulaymān’s throne. They

then caused an arousal surrounding the book and read it out to the people saying, “By this Sulaymān appeared upon the people and over-powered them!” So the people disbelieved in Sulaymān, upon him be blessings and peace, and they remained doing so...<sup>216</sup>

The story goes on to state how the Devil then threw the ring into the sea, which was subsequently swallowed up by a fish and that Sulayman, who began working for some fisherman, eventually received the particular fish containing his ring as his wage. As he cleaned the fish, he opened up its stomach only to find his ring, and after putting it back on, his entire kingdom and his power over it returned to him.

Needless to say, the scholars who commented on this tradition, both classical and modern, condemned it as of the false *isrāʾīliyyāt*, especially the parts of the tradition that state how the Devil took the form of Sulaymān, and how he also was able to have intimacy with his wives, two matters that according to Islamic belief God would never allow to happen for a prophet. They also question why no mention of such a ring was made in the Qurʾan or *ḥadīth* if it contained so much power.<sup>217</sup> What is more important for the purpose of this analysis are the comments of the scholars regarding the source of this tradition: would Ibn ʿAbbās actually narrate such a tradition and if so, where did he get it from and why would he narrate it? After citing the narration, Ibn Kathīr states:

Its *isnād* to Ibn ʿAbbās, God be pleased with them both, is strong, however, it appears that he acquired this tradition, if it can authentically be attributed to him, from the People of the Book, amongst whom are a group who do not believe in the prophethood of Sulaymān, upon him be blessings and peace, and made up lies concerning him...<sup>218</sup>

What is noticeable in Ibn Kathīr’s statement regarding the narration’s *isnād* being strong to Ibn ʿAbbās is his qualification “if it can authentically be attributed to him” (*in*

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<sup>216</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, 68-69.

<sup>217</sup> For criticisms regarding this tradition from both classical and modern scholars, see Naʿnāʾah, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 246-247 and Abū Shahbah, *al-Isrāʾīliyyāt wa l-mawqūʿāt*, 270-275.

<sup>218</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, 69.

*saḥḥa* ‘*anhu*), which indicates the difficulty in being able to ascribe it to him with any certainty. In this regard, Na‘nā‘ah expresses his doubts that this story’s narration can be authentically attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās at all, in spite of its strong *isnād* to him.

Na‘nā‘ah also states that even if it was authenticated back to him, he was narrating it to show its falsity, and not his support for it in any way. He further asserts that its strong *isnād*, as indicated by Ibn Kathīr and other scholars, does not necessitate its soundness in terms of its *matn*.<sup>219</sup> Ibn Kathīr goes on to mention how longer versions of this story were narrated by others of the *salaf*, all of whom took it from the People of the Book.<sup>220</sup>

However, the most interesting and telling tradition for this analysis regarding this story as narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās and its connection to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār can be found in the *tafsīr* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/827) which contains the following:

‘Abd al-Razzāq narrated from Isrā‘īl [ibn Yūnus ibn Abī Ishāq] from Furāt al-Qazzāz from Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr from Ibn ‘Abbās who said: Four verses from the Book of God, I did not know of their interpretation until I had asked Ka‘b al-Aḥbār about them; [first] the people of Tubba‘ in the Qur’an which does not mention Tubba‘...and I also asked him regarding the words of God {And We cast upon his [Sulaymān’s] throne a mere body; then he repented} and he [Ka‘b] replied: The Devil that took the ring of Sulaymān which has power over his kingdom; he [the Devil] threw the ring into the sea and it was eaten by a fish; as Sulaymān was wandering about, he was given that same fish in charity, so he purchased it<sup>221</sup> and ate it, at which point he came upon his ring inside it and then his kingdom was returned to him.<sup>222</sup>

The narrators in the *isnād* of this tradition are all considered reliable and trustworthy at the highest levels, rendering the tradition, at the very least, acceptable if not rigourously

<sup>219</sup> Na‘nā‘ah, *al-Isrā‘īliyyāt wa atharuhā*, 247, n. 1.

<sup>220</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, 69.

<sup>221</sup> According to the Islamic creed, one of the signs of prophethood is that they will accept a gift, but not charity, hence, even though the fish was given to him as charity, Sulaymān could not have accepted it as such and would have purchased it. However, this tradition with the identical *isnād* is also cited in Ibn ‘Asākir’s *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* as well as in al-Suyūṭī’s *tafsīr* (citing it from ‘Abd al-Razzāq, but without a full *isnād*), both of which state that he roasted the fish (*ishtawāhā*) instead of purchasing it (*ishtarāhā*). See Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, v. 11, 9; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, v. 5, 581.

<sup>222</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq ibn Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, ed. Muṣṭafā Muslim Muḥammad, 3 vols. (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1989/1410), v.2, 165-166. The other two verses of the four that Ibn ‘Abbās enquired about are not mentioned in the tradition.

authenticated. If this is the case, it offers the most conclusive evidence that Ibn ‘Abbās indeed obtained the story on the ring of Sulaymān from Ka‘b, although the version narrated in the *tafsīr* texts from Ibn ‘Abbās is lengthier and more detailed. Moreover, it also provides further evidence against Goldziher’s assertion that Ibn ‘Abbās would approach the People of the Book often to enquire about things he did not have knowledge of in regards to the Qur’an or the meaning of its words as there were only “four verses” he “did not know of their interpretation,” which according to ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s tradition, are related to the stories of past nations or prophets, stories that would be spoken about in the scriptures of the People of the Book. What is surprising is that neither al-Ṭabarī nor Ibn Kathīr make mention of this tradition in their *tafsīr* texts, even though ‘Abd al-Razzāq was a very early scholar from whom both authors cite traditions in their works.

Taking into consideration all of the above traditions and their analysis, I would consider Ibn ‘Abbās’ approach to Ka‘b for the purpose of comparing what previous scriptures of the People of the Book have to say in regards to certain Qur’anic verses for the sake of confirming what is correct in the previous scriptures. In addition, if Ibn ‘Abbās’ questions towards Ka‘b were in regards to matters that might not be explicated in previous scriptures, such as the Lotus tree, *sijjīn* and *‘illiyyīn*, then it was either for the sake of assessing the accuracy of Ka‘b’s knowledge in Islamic matters or for confirming Ibn ‘Abbās’ own position on a particular issue, as opposed to enquiring for the sake of learning something previously not known to Ibn ‘Abbās, a situation which occurred seldomly. As Ka‘b’s answers would usually conform with what can be found in sound Prophetic traditions, then there would be no need to deny what he stated, especially if a particular matter had more than one interpretation to it. In such a case,

this is where instances of Ibn ‘Abbās’ opinion differing from Ka‘b’s would occur. Nevertheless, it would be of paramount importance in all cases to confirm whether or not a particular narration or opinion indeed can be attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās, which is not an easy task in and of itself.<sup>223</sup> Finally, I would consider that Ibn ‘Abbās had an amicable relationship with Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, and showed towards him much respect due to his vast knowledge, while never suspecting him of being insincere or undermining of the Islamic tradition.

The above analysis was done using only those traditions found primarily in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*. In order to complete a more thorough analysis regarding Ibn ‘Abbās, the *isrā’īliyyāt* and Ka‘b, a similar analysis would have to be done using those traditions found in other genres of literature as well, such as the stories of the prophets, or the chronicles of history. One of the benefits in doing so is that it would allow more accurate conclusions to be drawn than those put forward in some of the scholarship that has already been written on the matter, as was the case above with the writings of Goldziher, Ben-Zeev, and to a lesser extent Na‘nā‘ah. To conclude this analysis, I will consider one final example of a tradition found in al-Ṭabarī’s historical chronicle, which Gordon Newby and David Halperin have written on, which will highlight some of the above issues when dealing with the traditions that involve Ibn ‘Abbās, Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and potential *isrā’īliyyāt* narrations.

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<sup>223</sup> As for the number of traditions that can be attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās within the *tafsīr* literature with absolute certainty, this is an extremely small number compared to the countless number of traditions that have been ascribed to him. In his *al-Itqān*, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī cites a quotation from Imam al-Shāfi‘ī who said, “There has not been established in the *tafsīr* literature [narrations] from Ibn ‘Abbās except for approximately one hundred traditions (*Iam yuthbit ‘an Ibn ‘Abbās fī ‘l-tafsīr illā shabīḥ bi-mi‘at ḥadīth*).” In this specific regard, Herbert Berg has also done an analysis on the authenticity of Ibn ‘Abbās’ exegetical narrations in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* text. See Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā, 2 vols. (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1993/1414), v.2, 1233; Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period*, ed. Andrew Rippin, Curzon Studies in the Qur’ān (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 112-218.

## The Sun and the Moon as *thawrān* ‘*aqīrān* in the Fire

Al-Ṭabarī cites in his *Tārīkh* the following tradition from ‘Ikrimah, the servant of Ibn ‘Abbās:

Ibn ‘Abbās was seated one day, when a man came to him and said: “O Ibn ‘Abbās, I have heard the most amazing thing from Ka‘b al-Ḥabr, concerning the sun and the moon!” [Ibn ‘Abbās,] who had been reclining, sat upright. “What is that?” he said. “He asserted (*za‘ama*) that the sun and the moon will be brought on Resurrection Day as if they were two castrated bulls (?*thawrān* ‘*aqīrān*),<sup>224</sup> and thrown into Hell!” Said ‘Ikrimah: One of Ibn ‘Abbās’s lips few upward in anger, and the other fell. “Ka‘b has lied! Ka‘b has lied! Ka‘b has lied!” he said, three times. “This is Judaism, which he wants to bring into Islam! God is too mighty and too gracious to give punishment for obedience. Have you not heard God’s utterance, *He pressed the sun and the moon into service to you, tireless* (Surah 14:33) —meaning their tirelessness in obedience to Him? How shall He punish two slaves whom He praises as tireless in obedience to Him? God fight that *ḥabr* and befoul his *ḥabriyya*! How bold he makes with God! How he slanders these two slaves obedient to God!”<sup>225</sup>

At this point, Ibn ‘Abbās repeats the phrase “To God we belong and to Him is our return”<sup>226</sup> several times, takes up a stick and scratches the ground with it for a while.

He then lifts his head, tosses the stick and says, “Shall I not inform you of what I heard from the Messenger of God (God bless him and give him peace) concerning the sun and the moon, their original creation and their ultimate fate?” Then a very lengthy and detailed exposition follows, all of which is in the form of a conversation between the Prophet Muḥammad and several of his Companions.<sup>227</sup> Towards the end of the tradition, ‘Ikrimah, the original narrator, concludes:

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<sup>224</sup> As the translation of this tradition is taken verbatim from Newby’s article, I have left his translation of the phrase *thawrān* ‘*aqīrān* as “two castrated bulls” as is, even though I do not agree with it and will discuss my reasons in more detail below.

<sup>225</sup> D. J. Halperin and G. D. Newby, “Two Castrated Bulls: A Study in the Haggadah of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, no. 102 (1982): 631-632.

<sup>226</sup> The phrase *innā lillāh wa innā ilayhi rāji‘ūn* is a Qur’anic one (Q2:156) that is said whenever a misfortune or a calamity befalls.

<sup>227</sup> For the full tradition in Arabic, see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, v. 1, 65-75. For the full translation of the tradition, see al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, 232-244.



I arose, with the party of men who had been given this report (*ḥuddithū bihi*) and we went to see Ka‘b. We told him how upset Ibn ‘Abbās had been at his report (*ḥadīth*), and what he had reported from the Apostle of God. Ka‘b went with us back to Ibn ‘Abbās, and said: “I have heard how upset you were at my report, and I beg pardon of God and repent. My report was drawn from a *dāris*-book (*kitāb dāris*) that was in circulation<sup>228</sup>—I did not realize how much Jewish innovation (*tabdīl al-yahūd*) it contained—while your report is drawn from a new book (?*kitāb jadīd*), the report of the covenant (*ḥadīth al-‘ahd*) with the Merciful,<sup>229</sup> and from the lord and the best of the prophets. I should like you to teach me the report, that I may commit it to memory; when I have been taught it, it will take the place of my previous report.”<sup>230</sup>

In their article, Halperin and Newby attempt to show the Judaic origins of this idea of the eschatological punishment of the sun and moon based upon the attribution of the above tradition to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, as well as Ibn ‘Abbās’ labeling of the notion as “Judaism which he [Ka‘b] wants to bring into Islam.” Although the authors suspect that this tradition is “a literary composition, designed as a framework for the cosmological material that follows” and that “it is natural to suspect that it [the punishment of the sun and moon] is in fact a development in Muslim eschatological lore, [which is] at some point repudiated, denounced as ‘Judaism,’ and put in the mouth of the famous Jewish scholar Ka‘b,” they nevertheless assert its connection to the Judaism of Ka‘b.<sup>231</sup> After

<sup>228</sup> The authors have left this particular word *dāris* intentionally untranslated in the tradition as they subsequently make a separate note about it. As the tradition “emphatically asserts that the prediction of the final punishment of the sun and moon is characteristically Jewish (*yāhūdīyya*)” the authors feel that they are “surely justified in translating [*kitāb-dāris*] as ‘midrash-book’.” They do so by connecting the term *dāris*, which lexically means “worn-out,” to its verbal roots that imply reading and studying, or “midrash.” However, as the word *dāris* connotes something not only ancient and dilapidated, but also effaced, erased and obliterated, another possible meaning of the term that I would see as more befitting in this context is a book that is no longer fully in tact in its original form, due to the passage of time and its being passed from hand to hand (*kitāb dāris tanāwalathu ‘l-aydī*) as well as the amount of “Jewish innovation it contained.” Franz Rosenthal translates the phrase *kitāb dāris tanāwalathu ‘l-aydī* as “a well-worn book that has passed through many hands.” For the authors comments on this point, see Halperin and Newby, “Two Castrated Bulls,” 632-633, esp. n. 12. For Rosenthal’s translation, see al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, 243.

<sup>229</sup> The authors admit their difficulty in translating the phrase *kitāb jadīd ḥadīth al-‘ahd bi ‘l-rahmān* and think that it might be a textual corruption, however, Rosenthal’s rendering of the phrase as “a new book recently revealed by the Merciful One” conveys its meaning quite well and accurately. See al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, 244.

<sup>230</sup> Halperin and Newby, “Two Castrated Bulls,” 632-633.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 631, n. 3 and 633.

their analysis, they conclude by declaring that they “have verified Ibn ‘Abbās’ identification of Ka‘b’s claim as ‘Judaism’.” However, such a Judaism is “not rabbinic Judaism, but some more archaic form akin, if not identical, to that which produced the Enoch literature” and that Ka‘b is to be associated with “a related variety of Judaism more inclined to apocalypticism” that existed alongside a rabbinic form in seventh-century Arabia which “decisively influenced Muhammad’s new religion.”<sup>232</sup>

One of the main concerns arising from the authors’ method and conclusions in their paper is that they base their analysis upon the assumption that there indeed exists a connection between the idea of the sun and moon being thrown into Hell as a punishment and the Judaism of Ka‘b, even though they suspect that the tradition was likely not said by Ka‘b, but was rather “put in [his] mouth” at a later time. The problem that exists here is they did not perform a thorough analysis of the tradition from *within* Islamic literature to determine two things, both of which would obviously affect their conclusions: first, the authenticity of its connection to Ka‘b and Ibn ‘Abbās’ rejection of the idea as Judaism; and second whether or not the idea itself has a verifiable basis within Islamic cosmology and eschatology based on the primary texts of Islam. Thus, what I intend to elucidate below is that the tradition as cited in al-Ṭabarī has not only been deemed weak, but fabricated, and that when examining the other traditions that contain the same idea of the sun and moon as being *thawrān* ‘*aqīrān* and thrown into Hell, there is no basis to connect the tradition with either Ibn ‘Abbās, Ka‘b al-Aḥbār or Judaism. Finally, I will also cite Prophetic traditions that have been deemed rigorously authenticated and which express the idea of the sun and moon being thrown into Hell, as well as a statement of Ibn ‘Abbās stating something similar, and their connection to a

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<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 638.

Qur’anic verse in order to demonstrate that the idea does exist within the primary texts of Islam.

In the text of al-Ṭabarī’s *Tārīkh*, the editor, Muḥammad Abū ’l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, notes what Ibn al-Athīr and al-Suyūṭī have to say regarding this tradition and some of its variants.<sup>233</sup> In his *al-Kāmil*, Ibn al-Athīr summarizes this tradition without mentioning its details and then he states, “I turned away from this tradition for its contradicting of reason; had its *isnād* been authentic, then I would have mentioned it and spoken according to it; however, the tradition is not authentic and something of such importance should not be accepted into the books if the *isnād* is so weak, as it is with this [tradition].”<sup>234</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī also relates several variants of this tradition in his work *al-Ālā’ al-maṣnū’ah fī ’l-aḥādīth al-mawḍū’ah*, the first of which includes a similar episode of a man coming to Ibn ‘Abbās, Ḥudhayfah and ‘Alī ibn Abī Tālib and telling them that he heard the most amazing thing from a man, although it does not specify the man as Ka’b.<sup>235</sup> The tradition goes on to state how all three Companions said that the man who narrated about the sun and moon as *thawrān ‘aqīrān* in Hell lied, however, without mentioning anything about the idea being “Judaism which he wants to bring into Islam.” In addition, Ibn ‘Abbās did not lose his composure according to this version. After the narration of the entire tradition, again, which has some variations within it when compared to the one cited by al-Ṭabarī, al-Suyūṭī states that the tradition is fabricated as its *isnād* contains many unknown and weak

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<sup>233</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, v. 1, 75, n. 3.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid. Also see al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, 232, n. 436.

<sup>235</sup> Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Bakr al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ālā’ al-maṣnū’ah fī ’l-aḥādīth al-mawḍū’ah*, 2 vols. (Egypt: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, n.d.), v.1, 45-47.

narrators.<sup>236</sup> Another well-known *ḥadīth* scholar, Ibn al-Jawzī, also confirms this in his work *Kitāb al-mawḍū‘āt* where he states, “This tradition is without a doubt fabricated and in its *isnād* is a group of weak and unknown narrators.”<sup>237</sup> The grandson of Ibn al-Jawzī, Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, makes a further comment in his work *Mir‘āt al-zamān fī tārīkh al-a‘yān* stating:

As for the tradition narrated by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī from Ibn ‘Abbās, it is amazing how Ibn Jarīr, with his knowledge of *aḥādīth*, cites the likes of this from the Messenger of God, God bless him and grant him peace, and that his endeavours with his traditions and narrations, along with his aim of expanding his book, do not deter him from the mentioning of such utterances from which sound intellects flee and from which skins shudder; anyone who becomes acquainted with this tradition from his *tārīkh* will understand what I have said.<sup>238</sup>

Commenting on the other variant mentioned by al-Suyūfī that does not mention the name of Ka‘b, Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī states that it is also a fabrication and that it would have been more appropriate had the likes of all such narrations narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās stopped at him rather than being attributed to the Prophet himself, whose honourable rank is far above such that these types of words would be spoken by him.<sup>239</sup>

Although the main concern the above scholars have with the very lengthy narration on the sun and moon is its attribution to the Prophet, the fact that the tradition has been labeled as a fabrication entails that even the episode between Ibn ‘Abbās and Ka‘b at the very beginning and end of the tradition is also fabricated.<sup>240</sup> This is supported by the fact that within the other variations that exist, none of them mentions Ka‘b or his recanting in Ibn ‘Abbās’ presence at the end of the tradition, and none of

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>237</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-mawḍū‘āt*, v. 1, 92.

<sup>238</sup> Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir‘āt al-zamān*, 146.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid., 146-147.

<sup>240</sup> Ben-Zeev draws this conclusion by inference, stating that this episode contradicts many other traditions which show the amicable relationship between the two, in light of which it seems unreasonable that Ibn ‘Abbās would behave with Ka‘b as such. See Ben-Zeev, *Ka‘b al-Aḥbār*, 33.

them mentions anything about the connection between Jewish thought and the ideas about the sun and moon expressed at the beginning of the tradition. In fact, the statement about the sun and moon as *thawrān* ‘*aqīrān* being thrown into Hell exists in separate *ahādīth* attributed to the Prophet himself that have no connection to Ka‘b or Ibn ‘Abbās whatsoever, either in their *isnād* or *matn*. At this point, it will be fruitful to examine these Prophetic traditions, as well as what scholars have said regarding their meaning and authenticity.

The first Prophetic tradition contains the exact phrase attributed to Ka‘b in al-Ṭabarī’s citation and is recorded in Ibn al-Jawzī’s *Kitāb al-mawqū‘āt* as follows:

Al-Qaṭṭān said that ‘Amr narrated from Yazīd al-Yasārī who said that Durust ibn Ziyād narrated from Yazīd ibn al-Raqqāshī from Anas from the Prophet, God bless him and grant him peace, who said: “The sun and the moon are *thawrān* ‘*aqīrān* in the Fire.”<sup>241</sup>

This particular narration is not authentic according to Ibn al-Jawzī and Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī because it has a weak chain of transmission due to it containing Durust and Yazīd ibn al-Raqqāshī, both of whom are weak narrators.<sup>242</sup> The tradition is also found in al-Ṭaḥāwī’s *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār* with the same *isnād* from Durust onwards.<sup>243</sup>

A slight variant of this tradition is recorded in al-Ṭaḥāwī’s work as an exchange between Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Abū Salamah which reads as follows:

‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Mukhtār narrated from ‘Abd Allāh al-Dānāj who said: “I saw Abū Salamah ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān sit in a mosque during the time of Khālīd ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Khālīd ibn Asīd when Ḥasan came; so he sat by him and they

<sup>241</sup> The Arabic reads: *al-shams wa ’l-qamar thawrān ‘aqīrān fī ’l-nār*. See Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-mawqū‘āt*, v. 1, 92-93.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid., 93 and Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī, *Mir’āt al-zamān*, 144 and 146.

<sup>243</sup> The editor of one edition of al-Ṭaḥāwī’s work, Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt, who is a well-known contemporary *ḥadīth* scholar, makes a note that the *isnād* of this tradition is weak due to the weakness of Durust and Yazīd ibn al-Raqqāshī. However, the tradition is somewhat strengthened by another slightly variant *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah which is *ṣaḥīḥ* and which will be discussed in more detail below. See Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt, 16 vols. (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-Risālah, 2006), v.1, 172, n.1. Regarding the weakness of Durust, see Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, v. 3, 209-210.

began to converse. Abū Salamah said, ‘Abū Hurayrah narrated from the Prophet, upon him be peace, who said: The sun and the moon are two bulls rolled-up on the Day of Resurrection.’<sup>244</sup> Hasan said, ‘What is their sin?’ He replied, ‘I narrate to you from the Messenger of God, God bless him and grant him peace’ so Hasan remained silent.’<sup>245</sup>

The editor of al-Ṭaḥāwī’s work, Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūṭ, affirms that this *ḥadīth* is *ṣaḥīḥ* according to the conditions of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and relates that al-Bukhārī himself has a similar narration in his collection with the wording, “The sun and the moon are rolled-up on the Day of Resurrection.”<sup>246</sup> The implication by Ḥasan’s question towards Abū Salamah in the above tradition is that they will be thrown into the Fire. This is confirmed by al-Ṭaḥāwī’s chapter heading for this section which records the Prophetic tradition as above, except with the added words *fi ’l-nār* (in the Fire) after *thawrān mukawwarān*.<sup>247</sup> Al-Ṭaḥāwī’s subsequent commentary on the tradition also makes this point very clear as he states:

What came from Ḥasan in this tradition was out of objection to Abū Salamah, and his objection—and God knows best—was due to what occurred in his [Ḥasan’s] heart that they would be thrown into the Fire as a punishment, whereas Abū Salamah did not have any answer to him in this regard. Our answer to this on behalf of Abū Salamah is that it [their being thrown into the Fire] will not be as a punishment to them, but rather, as a means for punishing those who are in the Fire, just as the angels that God has placed therein are for punishing its inhabitants. Do you not consider His words, Most High {O you who believe! Guard yourselves and your families against a Fire whose fuel is people and stones, and over which are harsh, terrible angels who disobey not God in what He commands them} that is, of punishing the inhabitants of the Fire {And [the angels] do what they are commanded}.<sup>248</sup> Likewise, the sun and the moon are in it [the Fire] in this regard, as a punishment for the inhabitants of the Fire for their sins, not for the sake of being punished, for they [the sun and moon] have no sins.<sup>249</sup>

<sup>244</sup> The Arabic reads: *al-shams wa ’l-qamar thawrān mukawwarān yawm al-qiyāmah*.

<sup>245</sup> al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, v. 1, 171.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 170, n. 1. The Arabic reads: *al-shams wa ’l-qamar mukawwarān yawm al-qiyāmah*. Another edition of the same work, but with a different editor, also affirms the tradition’s authenticity. See Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Tuḥfat al-akhyār bi-tartīb sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, ed. Abī al-Husayn Khālīd Maḥmūd al-Ribāt, 10 vols. (Riyadh: Dār Balansiyyah, 1999), v. 9, 423.

<sup>247</sup> al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, v. 1, 170.

<sup>248</sup> This refers to the verse found at Q66:6.

<sup>249</sup> al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, v. 1, 170-171.

Similarly, in Ibn Ḥajar's commentary on al-Bukhārī's version of the *ḥadīth*, he cites several opinions that unequivocally state how the final destination of the sun and moon is indeed Hell, albeit for various possible reasons, none of which are for being punished. He states:

As for His saying *mukawwarān*, the narration of al-Bazzār and others adds "in the Fire"... Ibn Wahb stated in his *Kitāb al-ahwāl* from 'Atā' ibn Yasār regarding His words {And the sun and moon are brought together}<sup>250</sup> who said: "They will be brought together on the Day of Resurrection, then they will be thrown into the Fire." Ibn Abī Ḥātim relates something similar from Ibn 'Abbās as well. Al-Khaṭṭābī stated: "Their being in the Fire is not meant as a punishment for them, but rather, as a reproach towards those people who used to worship them in this world, in order for them to know that their worshipping of them [the sun and moon] was false." It was also said that they were created from the Fire, hence, they will return to it.<sup>251</sup> Al-Ismā'īlī stated: "Their being placed in the Fire does not necessitate their being punished, for verily, God has placed in the Fire angels and stones and other things as a means of punishment for the inhabitants of the Fire, as an instrument from the instruments of punishment...which are not themselves punished."<sup>252</sup>

Finally, Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī also records in his work *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥah* the tradition with the wording, "The sun and the moon are two bulls rolled-up *in the Fire* on the Day of Resurrection" and also confirms that it is *ṣaḥīḥ* according to the conditions of al-Bukhārī.<sup>253</sup>

<sup>250</sup> Q75:9 which reads in Arabic: *wa jumi'a 'l-shams wa 'l-qamar*.

<sup>251</sup> This idea was articulated by Ibn Qutaybah in his book *Kitāb ta'wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*. Commenting on the tradition that is narrated in the exchange between Abū Salamah and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, he states: "The sun and the moon are not punished in the Fire when they enter it such that it could be said, 'What is their sin?', but rather, since they were created from it, they will return to it." He goes on to say that, "Those things which are created in subjugation and are restricted to one purpose, like fire, or celestial bodies subjected to orbiting, or the flowing seas, etc. are not subject to punishment nor do they acquire good deeds (*ḥasanāt*)."<sup>252</sup> This would be like the one who would say in regards to God's words {Fear the Fire whose fuel is people and stones}[Q2:24], "What is the sin of the stones?" See 'Abd Allāh ibn Muslim ibn Qutaybah, *Kitāb ta'wīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth*, ed. Maḥmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī and Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (Cairo: Maṭba'ah Kurdistān al-'Ilmiyyah, 1908/1326), 122-123.

<sup>252</sup> Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-Bārī bi sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, v. 6, 346.

<sup>253</sup> al-Albānī cites where this tradition, along with its variants, can be found in other texts. He adds some commentary on these traditions similar to the ones found in Ibn Ḥajar's *Fath al-Bārī* quoted above. See al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-aḥādīth al-ṣaḥīḥah*, v. 1, 242-245, no. 124.

Concerning the idea of the sun and the moon's being rolled-up (*mukawwarān*) and thrown into the Fire, it is linked with the first Qur'anic verse in Sūrat al-Takwīr which states {When the sun shall be wound up}.<sup>254</sup> In his *tafsīr* on this Sūrah, Ibn Kathīr makes mention of the *ḥadīth* of Durust while acknowledging its weakness and he also cites the *ḥadīth* narrated by Abū Hurayrah that was related in the exchange between Abū Salamah and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.<sup>255</sup> Of more significance, Ibn Kathīr cites two narrations that connect this verse with the notion of the sun and moon being lit on fire or placed into Hell. The first is a tradition attributed to Ibn 'Abbās who states regarding the verse, "God will roll-up the sun, the moon and the stars in the sea on the Day of Resurrection, and then He will send a westerly wind<sup>256</sup> igniting them all on fire."<sup>257</sup> The second narration cited is a Prophetic tradition, along with its full *isnād*, where the Prophet said in commenting on the verse {When the sun shall be wound up}, "Wound up in Hell."<sup>258</sup> As Ibn Kathīr makes no comments about the authenticity of either tradition, he would consider them at the very least acceptable to relate with little or no weakness in them.

Finally, in regards to the meaning of '*aqīrān*' as an adjective of *thawrān* (two bulls) in the tradition of Durust, al-Ṭaḥāwī provides an adequate explanation of what it refers to as follows:

<sup>254</sup> Q81:1. The Arabic verse reads: *idhā 'l-shams kuwwirat*. There are several meanings of the word *kuwwirat* in this context, but the general idea is that it would be wound round like a turban, or folded up, and be darkened as its light would be taken away. The translation of this verse is my own. See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, v. 2, 2637.

<sup>255</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 8, 329.

<sup>256</sup> The westerly wind (*rīḥ dabūr*) carries negative connotations for it is described as being the "worst of winds" which is violent and does not make trees fecund, nor raise clouds. It also blows only in the hot season and is "very thirsty." According to a tradition, it is the wind that destroyed the tribe of 'Ād as well. See Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, v. 1, 847.

<sup>257</sup> The Arabic reads: *yukawwiru- 'llāh al-shams wa 'l-qamar wa 'l-nujūm yawm al-qiyāmat fī 'l-baḥr, wa yab'athu- 'llāh rīḥan dabūran fa-taḍrimuhā nāran*. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, v. 8, 329.

<sup>258</sup> The Arabic reads: *kuwwirat fī jahannam*. Ibid.



As for the meaning of *al-‘aqr* that is mentioned regarding the two [the sun and moon] in this tradition according to the scholars of language, the word is not meant in terms of a punishment for the two, as this sense could not be applied to them; this is due to the fact that they were of the servants of God in this world as mentioned in His Book by His words {Have you not seen how to God prostrate all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth, the sun and the moon...} up until His words {and many of humankind? And many merit the chastisement}.<sup>259</sup> So He informed us that His punishment is deserved only by other than those who prostrate to Him in this world. However, both used to swim in their orbits in this world, just as He has said {It behooves not the sun to overtake the moon, [neither does the night outstrip the day, each swimming in a sky]}.<sup>260</sup> He then caused them to return on the Day of Resurrection commissioned to the Fire, as others, like the angels, are commissioned to it. So He cut them off from their swimming in their orbits in this world and rendered them, by their being cut off, as two who are wounded or hamstrung, unable to move. Hence, they are termed as *‘aqīrān* in a metaphorical sense, not that they are literally in a state of *‘aqr* (unable to move due to being wounded).<sup>261</sup>

Thus, the idea of the sun and moon as being “castrated” has very little basis,

linguistically or otherwise, according to the above context.<sup>262</sup>

To summarize, it becomes clear from the above traditions and commentaries that the idea of the sun and moon being thrown into Hell has a firm root in Islamic cosmology and eschatology based on a Qur’anic verse and sound Prophetic traditions. The authentic Prophetic traditions confirm the sun and the moon being described as *thawrān* (two bulls), *mukawwarān* (rolled-up), and *fī ‘l-nār* or *jahannam* (in the Fire or Hell). In addition, the weak Prophetic tradition that describes them as *thawrān ‘aqīrān* has no connection whatsoever to either Ka‘b al-Aḥbār or Ibn ‘Abbās in their *isnād*. The only tradition that links the idea with Ka‘b and has Ibn ‘Abbās clearly rejecting it as Judaism, is the fabricated one cited by al-Ṭabarī that is used by Newby and Halperin in their article. In fact, there are at least two narrations alluded to by Ibn Ḥajar and Ibn

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<sup>259</sup> Q22:18.

<sup>260</sup> Q36:40.

<sup>261</sup> al-Ṭahāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, v. 1, 172.

<sup>262</sup> Rosenthal’s translation of them as “two hamstrung oxen” is more accurate and sensical. See al-Ṭabarī, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, 233.

Kathīr where Ibn ‘Abbās himself is quoted as saying that the sun and moon will be lit on fire or thrown into Hell, contrary to his stance of severe objection in al-Ṭabarī’s version of the tradition. Hence, there is no firm basis from within the Islamic texts to associate this idea with Judaism or as a narration of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār to begin with, such that any further analysis could be done to determine the type of Judaism that Ka‘b, or the idea, is affiliated with. Finally, in terms of labeling the idea as of the *isrā’īliyyāt*, there is no mention made by any of the above scholars regarding this possibility, especially in light of the sound Prophetic traditions. If anything, what could be labeled as of the *isrā’īliyyāt* would be the lengthy and fabricated traditions attributed to the Prophet from Ibn ‘Abbās rather than the idea of the sun and moon as two bulls being thrown into the Fire.

## Conclusion

The above study has clearly demonstrated a number of points in regards to Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and his narrations of *isrā’īliyyāt*. First of all, concerning the sincerity and trustworthy character of Ka‘b, there does not occur a single instance where any of his contemporaries, most notably the Companions of the Prophet, expressed any doubts in terms of his sincere belief and practice of the Islamic tradition. The traditions that describe his relationship to the Companions demonstrate that they held him in high esteem and regard due to his vast knowledge and sound character. The only criticisms they directed towards him were in regards to some of his narrations that contained falsities or wondrous stories that contradicted certain elements within the Islamic creed. Such criticisms were definitively against the contents of his narrations that he truthfully transmitted from previous corrupted sources, and were never against Ka‘b, *per se*. Even so, not all of his narrations were criticized as such for many of them were in accordance with Islamic beliefs and were based upon sound interpretations of the Qur’an and/or Prophetic traditions.

Second, in terms of the Companions taking such narrations from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and narrating them themselves, the analysis above shows that although they would listen to his narrations on various occasions, they would not necessarily accept everything he had to say. In other words, the Companions would not hesitate to correct him if they knew what he was saying was not accurate or not in accordance with the tradition of Islam and would openly express their objections to any foreign (i.e. Jewish) influence not compatible with Islamic practices and beliefs. However, the very fact that they would listen to Ka‘b in the first place only goes to show that they respected what he possessed in terms of his knowledge, but were not uncritical of it.

Third, the scholars of Islam who wrote about him thereafter never articulated anything disparaging of Ka‘b as being of Jewish background and the likes, that is, up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was considered as a reliable narrator who never intentionally lied in his transmissions. The problem would always go back to what he was narrating of the *isrā’īliyyāt*, which is what contained the falsehood. Hence, the scholars, like Ibn Kathīr, would be more concerned with the authenticity of his narrations’ contents rather than with his character, and this applies to any and all of the narrators of the *isrā’īliyyāt*.

Finally, a further challenge for the scholars in dealing with such traditions is determining the authenticity of a particular narration’s attribution to ensure that a tradition was actually narrated from the original narrator. In fact, Shu‘ayb al-Arnā’ūṭ states specifically about Ka‘b that, “Not everything attributed to him is necessarily authentic as being from him, for there were many liars who came after his time and who attributed many narrations to him that he never stated.”<sup>263</sup> This only goes to show the exalted reputation that Ka‘b had amongst the Muslims, such that even attaching his name to a tradition would grant it some level of authority.<sup>264</sup> The same would apply to those like Ibn ‘Abbās to an even greater extent, whose status is much grander than Ka‘b’s and whose abundant traditions in the *tafsīr* works pose an even greater challenge to scholars.

The issue of authenticity opens up several other possibilities for further research. For example, as the above study referred primarily to the exegetical work of Ibn Kathīr, a *ḥadīth* scholar concerned with the historicity of various narrations, it would be

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<sup>263</sup> al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a‘lām al-nubalā’*, v. 3, 389-390, n. 3.

<sup>264</sup> One also has to bear in mind the grandeur of his status that is associated with Islamic and Jewish folklore amongst the story-tellers who appealed to the common masses by using his name, even if falsely. This status is due to some of his fantastic *isrā’īliyyāt* stories and narrations that he related from his sources.

interesting to examine how other *tafsīr* scholars who had more philosophical orientations treated Ka‘b and how they used his narrations. More specifically, such a study would entail contextualizing Ka‘b and his narrations within the *tafsīr* texts that represent the differing epistemological foundations and methodologies of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* scholars versus the *ahl al-ra’y* scholars. Another line of enquiry would be to examine Ka‘b’s treatment throughout the historical development of the genre of classical *tafsīr*, a study consisting of a comparative survey of various exegetes and their works from several historical periods.<sup>265</sup>

Ultimately, then, any study involving Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and the *isrā’īliyyāt* as found within any of the genres of Islamic literature would have to take into consideration all of the above points. As for those who charged Ka‘b with anything other than what has been set out and made clear in the above study, then the words of Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī succinctly sum up an appropriate response: “O God! Verily Ka‘b has been wronged by his accusers, and I cannot say anything regarding him other than that he is trustworthy and reliable, a scholar whose name was exploited and had many narrations attributed to him, most of which were fables and falsehoods, only to be circulated amongst the common masses and accepted by the aged from amongst the uneducated.”<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> In this regard, the works of contemporary scholars who deal with exegetes that have not been studied in depth or with classical *tafsīr* texts that have not been used widely, or even hitherto remain in unpublished manuscript form, would be of immense contribution to such a study. An excellent example of such a work would be Walid Saleh’s recent publication on the formation of the classical *tafsīr* tradition that discusses the exegesis of al-Tha‘labī, an scholar of the 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> century who lived during the time period between al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr and was an essential contributor to the development of the genre of *tafsīr*. See Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qur’ān Commentary of al-Tha‘labī*, ed. Gerhard Bowering and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Texts and Studies on the Qur’ān (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

<sup>266</sup> al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt fī ‘l-tafsīr wa ‘l-ḥadīth*, 139-140.

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