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3. Is The Mahdi Superior To The Masih?

The *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad, *sallallahu ‘alaihi wa alihi*, is that only the best of the *Ummah* should be their *khalifah*. Shaykh Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 H) confirms:

ففي هذا الخبر إخبار عمر بين المهاجرين والأنصار أن أبا بكر سيد المسلمين وخيرهم وأحبهم إلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم ذلك علة مبايعته فقال بل نبايعك أنت فأنت سيدنا وخيرنا وأحبنا إلى رسول الله صلى الله عليه و سلم ليبين بذلك أن الأمور به تولية الأفضل وأنت أفضلنا فنبايعك

In this report is the declaration of ‘Umar among the Muhajirun and the Ansar that Abu Bakr was the *sayyid* of the Muslims and the best of them, and the most beloved of them to the Messenger of Allah. This is the reason for pledging allegiance to him. So, he (‘Umar) said, “Rather, we will pledge allegiance to you because you are our *sayyid*, and the best of us, and the most beloved of us to the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him”. He wanted to make clear through it that: **WHAT IS ORDAINED IS TO GIVE AUTHORITY TO THE BEST**, and you are the best of us. So, we will pledge allegiance to you. [1](#)

‘Umar considered Abu Bakr to have been the best of the *Ummah* after the Messenger’s death; and on that account, he campaigned the *khilafah* for him. Whether he was correct in his assessment or not has been answered in detail in our first book *‘Ali: The Best of the Sahabah* and in our second, *On the Khilafah of ‘Ali over Abu Bakr*. What is important here is: why will Prophet ‘Isa, *‘alaihi al-salam*, submit to the authority of the Mahdi, *‘alaihi al-salam*? After all, the Mahdi will be the Imam of the *Ummah* while the Masih will be a member of it. The Mahdi will be the *amir* of the believers; and the Masih will be one of those believers. The Mahdi will rule the earth by kingdom, and ‘Isa b. Maryam will be one of his subjects. Since the Masih is a prophet, why will he submit the authority to the Mahdi, a non-prophet, and take orders from him? Will ‘Isa consider himself better to the Mahdi or vice versa?

It is highly tempting to think that the Masih will be under the Mahdi *against his will*; that is, he will be the best, but will be disqualified from leadership due to his tribe. Prophet ‘Isa is an Israilite while the *amirs* of this *Ummah* can only come from the tribe of Quraysh. However, this would be a very weak excuse. If Allah had wanted, He could have made an exception for the Masih, in view of his special circumstance. For instance, that authentic *hadith* could have read: “The Imams are from Quraysh, except ‘Isa b.

Maryam.” The fact that our Lord has made no such exception shows that there really is no need for it. Islam is not a tribal religion; and Allah will never compromise quality for tribal affiliations. He has fixed the *Imamah* within the tribe of Quraysh only because He has also placed the best of us amongst them. Therefore, the best of Quraysh at each point in time is also *always* the best of Allah’s creation at that period. That best of Quraysh, of course, is then the chosen, rightful *khalifah*, even if people reject his authority. Apparently, Allah has made no exception for Prophet ‘Isa because the rule of the Mahdi over him does not upset or compromise the requirements of *khilafah*. Imam al-Mahdi will be the best of Quraysh, and therefore the best of creation. He will thereby be the rightful *amir* over all humans and non-humans. In simpler words, the Mahdi will be superior to the Masih in rank before Allah.

It is perhaps in recognition of this fact that Ibn Sirrin (d. 110 H), one of the earliest and best Sunni scholars – from the senior Tabi’in – declared that the Mahdi is “superior to some prophets”. However, this view of his does not represent that of the mainstream Ahl al-Sunnah, despite his extremely high status among them. The orthodox Sunni position is that ‘Isa is vastly superior to the Mahdi. He is a prophet and the Mahdi is not. To them, every prophet is superior to every non-prophet till the Day of *al-Qiyamah*. Therefore, going by their submission, in the Mahdi-Masih case, quality will be compromised for tribal affiliations.

The primary Sunni evidence for the superiority of all prophets over all non-prophets – as we have confirmed repeatedly from some of their anti-Shi’i debaters – are these verses:

وتلك حجتنا آتيناها إبراهيم على قومه نرفع درجات من نشاء إن ربك حكيم عليم وهبنا له إسحاق ويعقوب كلا هدينا ونوحا هدينا من قبل ومن ذريته داوود وسليمان وأيوب ويوسف وموسى وهارون وكذلك نجزي المحسنين وزكريا ويحيى وعيسى وإلياس كل من الصالحين وإسماعيل واليسع ويونس ولوطا وكلا فضلنا على العالمين

And that was Our *Hujjah* which We gave **Ibrahim** against his people. We raise whom We will in ranks. Certainly your Lord is All-Wise, All-Knowing. And We bestowed upon him **Ishaq** and **Ya’qub**, each of them We guided – and We guided **Nuh** before (him) – and among his offspring were **Dawud**, **Sulayman**, **Ayub**, **Yusuf**, **Musa**, and **Harun** – thus do We reward the good-doers – and **Zakariyyah**, **Yahya**, **‘ISA** and **Ilyas** – each one of them was of the righteous – and **Isma’il**, **al-Yasa’**, **Yunus** and **Luqman**; **AND EACH ONE OF THEM WE MADE SUPERIOR ABOVE THE WORLDS.**²

This passage gives the names of *only* eighteen prophets – including ‘Isa b. Maryam – and states that Allah “made” each of them superior above the worlds. There is no reference to the other prophets – whether generally or specifically. As such, the verses cannot be used for all prophets. Meanwhile, the last part above also has the same wording as that of this *ayah*:

ولقد آتينا بني إسرائيل الكتاب والحكم والنبوة ورزقناهم من الطيبات وفضلناهم على العالمين

And indeed, We gave **the offspring of Israil** the Book, and authority and prophethood, and We provided them with good things, **AND WE MADE THEM SUPERIOR ABOVE THE WORLDS.**[3](#)

So, what are these verses saying? That the eighteen prophets are superior above all creatures, and above Muhammad and the other prophets that are not mentioned, till the *Qiyamah*? That the Israilites are better than all non-Israilites till the end of time? Perhaps, we should let the Messenger of Allah provide the answers. Imam al-Hakim (d. 403 H) records:

حدثنا أبو عبد الله محمد بن عبد الله الزاهد الأصبهاني ثنا أحمد بن يونس الضبي بأصبهان ثنا أبو بدر شجاع ابن الوليد قال : سمعت زياد بن خيثمة يحدث عن أبيه عن ابن عمر رضي الله عنهما قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم : إن لله عبادا ليسوا بأنبياء ولا شهداء يغبطهم الشهداء والنبيون يوم القيامة لقربهم من الله تعالى ومجلسهم منه ... هم أولياء الله عز وجل الذين لا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون

Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah al-Zaid al-Isbahani – Ahmad b. Yunus al-Dhabi – Abu Badr Shuja' b. al-Walid – Ziyad b. Khaythamah – his father – Ibn 'Umar, may Allah be pleased with them both:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: “Verily, there are worshippers of Allah **who are neither prophets nor martyrs. The martyrs and the prophets will envy them** on the Day of *al-Qiyamah* DUE TO THEIR CLOSENESS TO ALLAH THE MOST HIGH AND THEIR STATUS TO HIM ... **They are the *awliya* of Allah the Almighty**, those upon whom no fear shall come, nor shall they grieve.”[4](#)

Al-Hakim comments:

هذا حديث صحيح الإسناد ولم يخرجاه

This *hadith* has a *sahih* chain but they (i.e. al-Bukhari and Muslim) both have not recorded it.[5](#)

Imam al-Dhahabi (d. 748 H) agrees:

صحيح

Sahih[6](#)

While analyzing this same *hadith*, 'Allamah al-Albani (d. 1420 H) says:

أخرجه الحاكم في «المستدرک» ... وقال: «صحيح الإسناد ولم يخرجاه» ، ووافقه الذهبي. قلت: وهو كما قال

Al-Hakim recorded it in *al-Mustadrak* ... and said: "It has a *sahih* chain but they both have not recorded it" and al-Dhahabi agreed with him. **I say: It is as they both have said (i.e. it truly has a *sahih* chain).**[7](#)

In other words, the *awliya* of Allah will have ranks and positions on the Day of *al-Qiyamah* which even prophets and martyrs will envy.

It must be noted that "envy" in Arabic is of two types: *al-hasad* and *al-ghab*⁸. Imam Ibn al-Athir (d. 606 H), a top Sunni *hadith* linguist, explains both:

الحسد : ان يرى الرجل لأخيه نعمة فيتمنى أن تزول عنه وتكون له دونه . والغبط : أن يتمنى أن يكون له مثلها ولا يتمنى زوالها عنه .

Al-Hasad: a man sees a blessing of his brother and wishes that he (i.e. his brother) loses it and it becomes his own instead.

*Al-Ghab*⁸: to wish to have the like of it (i.e. the blessing of his brother) without wishing that he (i.e. the brother) loses it.[8](#)

The *hadith* has adopted the second word to describe the envy of the prophets and martyrs. Therefore, it is the good envy, and not the sinful type. The prophets and martyrs will wish to also have the like of the ranks of the *awliya* on the Day of *al-Qiyamah*, along with them. It is apparent from the *hadith* that the prophets and martyrs will not be able to reach the level of the *awliya* – in terms of status and nearness to Allah – and will wish to do so. This confirms absolutely the superiority of these *awliya* over the prophets and martyrs.

Imam Abu Dawud (d. 275 H) as well documents:

حدثنا زهير بن حرب وعثمان بن أبي شيبة قالنا ثنا جرير عن عمارة بن القعقاع عن أبي زرعة بن عمرو بن جرير أن عمر بن الخطاب قال قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم " إن من عباد الله لأناس ما هم بأنبياء ولا شهداء يغبطهم الأنبياء والشهداء يوم القيامة بمكانهم من الله تعالى " قالوا يارسول الله تخبرنا من هم ؟ قال " هم قوم تحابوا بروح الله على غير أرحام بينهم ولا أموال يتعاطونها فوالله إن وجوههم لنور وإنهم على نور لا يخافون إذا خاف الناس ولا يحزنون إذا حزن الناس وقرأ هذه الآية { ألا إن أولياء الله لا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون } .

Zuhayr b. Harb and 'Uthman b. Abi Shaybah – Jarir – 'Amarah b. al-Qa'qa' – Abu Zur'ah b. 'Amr b. Jarir – 'Umar b. al-Kha⁹ab:

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Verily, among the worshippers of Allah are people who are neither prophets nor martyrs. **The prophets and the martyrs will envy them on the Day of *al-Qiyamah* DUE TO THEIR POSITION TO ALLAH THE MOST HIGH.**" They asked, "O Messenger of

Allah, inform us about them?” He replied, “They are a people who love one another with the Spirit of Allah, despite that they are not related by blood and do not give wealth to one another. I swear by Allah, their faces surely will be light, and they will be upon light. They will not fear when the people will fear, and they will not grieve when the people grieve.” Then, he recited this verse {No doubt! Verily, **the awliya of Allah**, no fear shall come upon them nor shall they grieve}.⁹

And al-Albani declares:

صحيح

*Sahih*¹⁰

This shows that they will have a “position” to Allah which the prophets and martyrs will lack. Imam Abu Ya’la (d. 307 H) has a similar *hadith* too:

حدثنا عبد الرحمن بن صالح الأزدي حدثنا محمد بن فضيل عن عمارة عن أبي زرعة عن أبي هريرة قال قال رسول الله - صلى الله عليه و سلم - : إن من عباد الله عبادا يغبطهم الأنبياء والشهداء قيل : من هم لعلنا نحبههم ؟ قال : هم قوم تحابوا بنور الله من غير أرحام ولا أنساب وجوههم نور على منابر من نور لا يخافون إن خاف الناس ولا يحزنون إن حزن الناس ثم قرأ : { ألا إن أولياء الله لا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون } [يونس : 62]

‘Abd al-Rahman b. Salih al-Azdi – Muhammad b. Fudhayl – ‘Amarah – Abu Zur’ah – Abu Hurayrah:

The Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, said: “Verily, there are certain worshippers of Allah. **The prophets and martyrs will envy them.**” It was said, “Who are they, so that we may love them?” He replied, “They are a people who love one another with the Light of Allah, despite having no blood relationship. Their faces will be light, and they will be upon pulpits of light. They will not fear if the people fear and they will not grieve if the people grieve.” Then he recited {No doubt! Verily, **the awliya of Allah**, no fear shall come upon them nor shall they grieve} [Yunus: 62]¹¹

Dr. Asad says:

إسناده صحيح

Its chain is *sahih*¹²

‘Allamah al-Albani also submits concerning the *riwayah*:

قلت: وإسناده صحيح على شرط الشيخين

I say: Its chain is *sahih* upon the standard of the two Shaykhs. [13](#)

Elsewhere, the ‘Allamah says about this same *hadith*:

صحيح

Sahih [14](#)

And Shaykh al–Arnau[ؒ] concurs with him:

إسناده صحيح

Its chain is *sahih* [15](#)

With this, it is clear that the Messenger of Allah declared some *awliya* to be superior in rank above prophets and martyrs. This means that ‘Isa’s *nubuwwah* is not sufficient evidence of his alleged superiority over Imam al–Mahdi. Moreover, Allah Himself will “send” the Mahdi to be the Imam and *amir* – and therefore the best – of some of those same *awliya* whose status with Allah will make prophets and martyrs envy them on the Day of *al–Qiyamah*.

- [1.](#) Abu al–‘Abbas Ahmad b. ‘Abd al–Halim b. Taymiyyah al–Harrani, Minhaj al–Sunnah al–Nabawiyyah (Muassasat Qur’ubah; 1st edition, 1406 H) [annotator: Dr. Muhammad Rashad Salim], vol. 8, p. 565
- [2.](#) Qur’an 6:83–86
- [3.](#) Qur’an 45: 16
- [4.](#) Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad b. ‘Abd Allah al–Hakim al–Naysaburi, al–Mustadrak ‘ala al–Sahihayn (Beirut: Dar al–Kutub al–‘Ilmiyyah; 1st edition, 1411 H) [annotator: Mustafa ‘Abd al–Qadir ‘A’[ؒ]], vol. 4, p. 188, # 7318
- [5.](#) Ibid
- [6.](#) Ibid
- [7.](#) Abu ‘Abd al–Rahman Muhammad Nasir al–Din b. al–Hajj Nuh b. Tajati b. Adam al–Ashqudri al–Albani, Silsilah al–Ahadith al–Sahihah wa Shayhun min Fiqhah wa Fawaidihah (Riyadh: Maktabah al–Ma’arif li al–Nashr wa al–Tawzi’; 1st edition, 1422 H), vol. 7, pp. 1368–1369, # 3464
- [8.](#) Abu Sa’adat al–Mubarak b. Muhammad, Ibn al–Athir al–Jazari, al–Nihayah fi Gharib al–Hadith wa al–Athar (Beirut: al–Maktabah al–‘Ilmiyyah; 1399 AH) [annotator: Tahir Ahmad al–Zawi and Mahmud Muhammad al–Tanahi], vol. 1, p. 383
- [9.](#) Abu Dawud Sulayman b. al–Ash’ath al–Sijistani al–Azdi, Sunan (Dar al–Fikr) [annotator: Muhammad Nasir al–Din al–Albani], vol. 2, p. 310, # 3527
- [10.](#) Ibid
- [11.](#) Abu Ya’la Ahmad b. ‘Ali b. Muthanna al–Mawsili al–Tamimi, Musnad (Damascus: Dar al–Mamun li al–Turath; 1st edition, 1404 H) [annotator: Dr. Husayn Salim Asad], vol. 10, p. 495, # 6110
- [12.](#) Ibid
- [13.](#) Abu ‘Abd al–Rahman Muhammad Nasir al–Din b. al–Hajj Nuh b. Tajati b. Adam al–Ashqudri al–Albani, Silsilah al–Ahadith al–Sahihah wa Shayhun min Fiqhah wa Fawaidihah (Riyadh: Maktabah al–Ma’arif li al–Nashr wa al–Tawzi’; 1st edition, 1422 H), vol. 7, p. 1370, # 3464
- [14.](#) Abu Hatim Muhammad b. Hibban b. Ahmad b. Hibban b. Mu’adh b. Ma’bad al–Tamimi al–Darimi al–Busti, Sahih Ibn Hibban bi Tartib Ibn Balban (Beirut: Muassasat al–Risalah; 2nd edition, 1414 H) [annotators: Muhammad Nasir al–Din al–

Albani and Shu'ayb al-Arnauḡ], vol. 2, p. 332, # 573

[15.](#) Ibid

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