

Chapter 4: The Prophecies

[The Return of Imam al-Husayn](#)

The return of Imam al-Husayn is one of the most emphasised themes in *Kitab al-Raj'ah*. Although more *hadith* refer to the return of his father, Amir al-Mu'mineen¹, the strongest *hadith* predict that Imam al-Husayn will return first. *Ziyarat* texts – including the only ‘strong’ one included in *Kitab al-Raj'ah*² – also emphasise the return of Imam al-Husayn, even though they refer to the return of other Imams as well.

However, what Imam al-Husayn will do when he returns is a vastly more controversial question. The moderately verifiable *hadith* (‘average’ and above) only say that he will return and rule until his eyebrows droop (presumably, from age).³ No mention is made of him fighting.

In contrast, the ‘unreliable’ and ‘very unreliable’ *hadith* spin elaborate tales of him returning to slay his enemies and the enemies of the Shi'a. One of the ‘very unreliable’ *hadith* – related from Sahl ibn Ziyad – exemplifies this genre. In it, Sahl ibn Ziyad recounts a speech that Imam al-Husayn is said to have made to his companions before they were martyred in Karbala. Of course, it goes without saying that this speech was never recorded in any mainstream history books, even though the Battle of Karbala is one of the most documented events in Islamic history. Since this *hadith* – as the others – has not yet been published in English translation, it is worth including here, if only as a sample of the unreliable narratives:

“The Messenger of Allah said to me: ‘... **You will be martyred here along with your companions, but you will not feel the heat of the iron.**’ Then he recited: ‘**O Fire, be coolness and safety for Abraham.**’⁴ The fighting will be cool and peaceful for you. Then rejoice, for, by God, when they have killed us, we will return to our Prophet. Then, I will remain as long as God wills, and so I will be the first whom the Earth splits open for. I will rise, and I will remain as long as God wills. Then Amir al-Mu'mineen will rise, and the Qa'im. From near God, a contingent from the Heavens will descend that has never descended to the Earth before. Jibra'il and Mika'il and Israfil and armies of angels will be sent down. Muhammad and 'Ali and I and my brother and all of those whom God has blessed will be sent

down in waves after waves of forces of the Lord, [and] a horse of light, which none of the Creation has ridden before.

Then the Prophet will raise his banner and defend it for the Qa'im with his sword. Then, as God brings to be, by His will, from behind the Mosque of Kufa, God will cause two springs to flow, one of oil and one of milk.

Then Amir al-Mu'mineen will defend the Prophet with his sword and summon me to the East and the West. I will not meet any enemy without shedding his blood, and I will break the idols until I reach India and conquer it.

Daniel and Joshua will rise with Amir al-Mu'mineen, and they will fight. God and His Messenger have spoken the truth. God will raise seventy men from Basra to fight with them, and He will raise a group to go to Rome, which they will conquer.

Then I will slay every creature whose flesh God has forbidden, until only pleasantness remains upon the Earth. I will come to the Jews and Christians and those of other faiths and give them a choice: either Islam or the sword. I will bestow generously upon those who become Muslim, but I will burn the blood of those who hate Islam.

No man from our Shi'a will remain without God sending down an angel to caress his face and to acquaint him with his wives and his status in Heaven. No blind or crippled or suffering person will remain on Earth without God taking away their suffering through us, Ahl al-Bayt.

Then, blessings will be sent down from the sky to the Earth until the trees are overwhelmed with the fruit that God has ordained for them. Summer fruits will be eaten in winter, and winter fruits will be eaten in summer. This is God's promise: ***'If the People of the Book had only believed, we would have sent them blessings from the Heavens and the Earth, but since they disbelieved, we took them to account for what they were doing.'***⁵

Then, God will give our Shi'a a miraculous honour by which nothing on Earth will be hidden from them, so that if a man wants to know something about a member of his family, he will be informed of the knowledge that he had hitherto not known".⁶

The extremist themes in this *hadith* are obvious – forces from the Heavens, the Imam slaying all unclean beasts and all those who oppose him (although, in a much more commonly accepted *hadith*, the Imam said to have described the merits of bringing water to a thirsty dog, not slaughtering it). What comes through most poignantly, however, is not the violence or exaggeration, but, rather, the promises at the end. Prosperity, sovereignty, succour, knowledge, and honour – these are the very things the Shi'a of that time were so desperately lacking. Many must have been wondering when the divine aid would come. *Hadith* like this, which promise the good end, are sharp reminders of the difficulties they must have been living in. Thus, it is no surprise that they were circulated. Nonetheless, despite their

comforting value, they cannot be traced back to the Imams.

The Most Unreliable Chains of Narration in Kitab al-Raj'ah

Similar extremist themes recur in two *hadith* which are distinguished by having the worst chains of narration in *Kitab al-Raj'ah*. The first chain begins with four narrators who were condemned by all biographers who mentioned them⁷:

Imam al-Sadiq – Yunus ibn Zhibyan (a ‘confused’ extremist who spread weak *hadith*, whom Ibn al-Ghadha’iri specifically says not to refer to) –... **Al-Husayn ibn Ahmad al-Minqari** (who spread weak and ‘strange and unestablished’ *hadith*) –... **‘Abdullah ibn Qasim al-Hadhrami** (an extremist Waqifi liar who spread weak *hadith* and narrated from extremists) –... **Musa ibn Su’dan** (an extremist who spread weak *hadith*) –... **Ibn Abi al-Khattab** –... **Sa’d**.

Despite such a glorious introduction, this *hadith* merely asserts that Imam al-Husayn will carry out the accounting of human beings in the *raj'ah* as Imam ‘Ali will do in the Hereafter. While this idea would be compatible with extremist beliefs (and undoubtedly was compatible with the extremist beliefs of some of the narrators listed above), it does not fall outside of the theoretical bounds of normative Shi‘ism as long as the Imams are considered to be acting under the orders of God.

The other distinguished *hadith*, however, resembles the ‘very unreliable’ *hadith* from Sahl ibn Ziyad much more closely; perhaps that is because it is also related from Sahl ibn Ziyad. Although it comes from the relatively reliable book of *Al-Kafi*, its chain of narration is even worse than the preceding one, as it consists of the following individuals who (other than Imam al-Sadiq and Al-Asim) were condemned by all the biographers who mentioned them⁸:

Imam al-Sadiq –... **‘Abdullah ibn al-Qasim al-Batal** (an extremist Waqifi liar who spread weak *hadith*) –... **[Ibraheem] al-Asim** (no information) –... **[Muhammad ibn al-Hasan] Ibn Shimun** (a liar and ‘corrupter of the faith’ who spread weak *hadith* and who first became a Waqifi and then a ‘pillar of extremism’, about whom Ibn al-Ghadha’iri says, ‘Do not refer to him or anything associated with him’) –... **Sahl ibn Ziyad** (whom some identified as a weak extremist liar of corrupt faith) –... **an unidentified group of people**.

What might a sequence of corrupted extremist Waqifi liars relate? First, they engage in *tafsir* (or, rather, *ta'weel*) of the Qur’an, explaining how verses criticising the misdeeds of Bani Isra’il really refer to the murder of Imam Ali, the treaty of Imam Hasan, and the murder of Imam al-Husayn. Then, the *hadith* describes how the Qur’an predicts the raising of the people to take vengeance for the blood of Imam al-Husayn. After that, it continues in characteristic narrative style:

‘Then We returned for you a Return (*karrah*) against them⁹’ is the emergence of al-Husayn (A) with 70 of his companions. They will have golden helmets. Each helmet will have two faces. They will announce to the people that this is al-Husayn and he has risen, so that none of the believers shall doubt, and that he

is not the Dajjal or the Satan¹⁰. The Qa'im – the Hujjah – will be among them. When recognition is clear in the hearts of the believers that he is al-Husayn (A), the Hujjah will die, and al-Husayn ibn 'Ali (A) will wash him and shroud him and lay him in his grave, as only a divine successor can do that for a divine successor.¹¹

The idea that only a divine successor can bury a divine successor is found in other Shi'a *hadith*, such as *hadith* relating to the Battle of Karbala (Al-Muqarram, 2005, n.921). The idea that Imam al-Husayn might outlive the Mahdi could also be inferred from the 'very strong' *hadith* which predicts that he will rule until his eyebrows droop. However, only this *hadith* and another *hadith* without a chain of narration predict that he will actually bury the Mahdi¹². Therefore, while this idea does not contradict any established predictions, it cannot be confirmed. Given the lack of credence of those who were relating it, it should not be included in *raj'ah* narratives.

The Return of the Companions of Imam al-Husayn

Similarly, the specific return of the companions of Imam al-Husayn is not directly supported. While they may be prophesied to return on the grounds that all true believers will be returned¹³, no reliable *hadith* describe their return. Only three *hadith* mention them at all: the above *hadith* (already sufficiently maligned), a *hadith* with only one narrator who himself was considered a liar and an extremist¹⁴, and another *hadith* with only the primary narrator listed. This latter *hadith* prophesies a re-enactment of the entire Battle of Karbala, only with the Imam victorious¹⁵; this prophecy closely resembles some of the unreliable, extremist-oriented *hadith* – in particular, a *hadith* that predicts the re-enactment of the Battle of Siffin¹⁶.

While, again, no reliable *hadith* contradict the prophecy of the return of the companions of Imam al-Husayn, no reliable *hadith* support it, either. Therefore, while this prophecy may in fact be ascribed to the Imams, it also should not be included in the *raj'ah* narrative.

The Return of Amir al-Mu'mineen

In contrast to the reliable *hadith* which portray Imam al-Husayn returning as a civil leader, the reliable *hadith* about Amir al-Mu'mineen portray him returning as a warrior. In a rather non-extremist-sounding *hadith*, Imam Al-Baqir advises Abu Hamzah al-Thumali, a renowned companion of the Imams:

O Abu Hamzah, do not raise 'Ali other than what God has raised him in. It is enough for 'Ali that He will fight the people of the Return (*karrah*) and conduct the marriages for the people in Paradise¹⁷.

However, the reliable *hadith* do not specify whom he will fight or why. Although popular understanding preaches that he will fight the dead, some *hadith* uphold that the dead will be raised to fight the living¹⁸. Therefore, all that can conclusively be said about Amir al-Mu'mineen is that he will return to fight – but whether he will fight the living or the dead in an offensive or defensive war has not been reliably

preserved.

The Return of the Ancient Prophets to Fulfil their Covenant

The prophecy that he will fight is bolstered by five *hadith* (including one ‘strong’ and one ‘very strong’) which assert that all prophets from the time of Adam will be revived to fight for him in order to fulfil the covenant they took with God, an allusion to verse 3:81 of the Holy Qur’an, an excerpt of which reads:

Allah took a covenant with the prophets, saying: ‘I give you a Book and Wisdom; then comes to you an apostle, confirming what is with you. Will you believe in him and render him help?’(3:81)

Since this verse does not specify the nature of the covenant that the prophets took, this interpretation is only one of many; however, in the context of the *raj’ah*, it affirms that pre-Islamic personalities are predicted to return. Therefore, the *raj’ah* predictions are not confined to the post-Islamic period, as some authors have speculated.

The Beast (Dabbat al-Ardh)

A more curious role that Amir al-Mu’mineen is prophesied to fill is that of the Beast (*dabbat al-ardh*)¹⁹. The Beast is mentioned once in the Holy Qur’an:

And when the Word is fulfilled against them, We will bring forth for them a Beast from the Earth to speak to them [and to tell them] that the people did not believe in Our signs. (27:82)

Unlike Judaeo-Christian descriptions of the Beast, and even some medieval Muslim imaginings²⁰, this Qur’anic description is rather mild and portrays only its primary attribute – that it will speak – presumably, because speaking is its most important function. Otherwise, it does not even specify whether it will emerge in human or animal form²¹.

However, twenty-four *hadith* in *Kitab al-Raj’ah* identify the Beast as Amir al-Mu’mineen. Three stories predominate. In the first, the Prophet wakes Amir al-Mu’mineen in the mosque and calls him the *dabbat al-ardh*; one ‘very strong’ *hadith* relates this²². In the second, Amir al-Mu’mineen directly asserts he is the Beast; two ‘strong’ *hadith* relate this²³. In the third, Amir al-Mu’mineen implies he is the Beast but does not say it directly²⁴, and, in one case, uses a phrase – popular in esoteric circles – that this knowledge is:

... difficult and causes difficulty, and no one discusses it except the nearby angels, or the sent prophets, or the believing servants whose hearts God has tested for faith.²⁵

These latter *hadith* are both less numerous and less reliable than those where Amir al-Mu’mineen actually says he is the Beast.

Unlike Amir al-Mu’mineen the Commander, Amir al-Mu’mineen the Beast will not fight²⁶. Rather,

several *hadith* – including one ‘strong’ *hadith* – predict he will bear the *maysam* (animal brand)[27](#).

Although the reliable *hadith* do not say what he will do with it, a *hadith* with no chain of narration predicts that he will brand people’s faces as animals are branded[28](#). An ‘unreliable’ *hadith*, attributed to Amir al-Mu’mineen, provides some plausible detail:

The Beast will come out from the earth near Safa[29](#), and with it will be the seal of Solomon and the stick of Moses. It will put its seal upon the face of every true believer and stamp on it:

‘This is a true believer.’ And it will put it upon the face of every disbeliever and write upon it:

‘This is a true disbeliever.’[30](#)

Despite the ‘unreliable’ chain of narration, the content of this *hadith* agrees with the reliable *hadith* as well as the Qur’anic verse and offers a plausible explanation of what the Beast might do with the *maysam*.

Unlike some other *raj’ah hadith*, which bear obvious signs of importation from other religious traditions, this Beast prophecy is sufficiently distinct from the Beast prophecy in the Book of Revelations to suggest that it was not borrowed from Christianity. For one thing, in the Book of Revelations, an angel brands the good on their foreheads (Rev. 7:3), but the Beast brands the evil (Rev. 13:16–18) – whereas, here, the Beast brands both. Additionally, in the Book of Revelations, the Beast is portrayed as evil; whereas, here, Amir al-Mu’mineen is portrayed as good. Therefore, it is more likely to have been an endemic Islamic teaching.

Atypically, twelve of the Beast *hadith* are traced directly to Amir al-Mu’mineen; this is unusual since most *hadith* were not recorded until later. Ten of these *hadith* are from a series of twenty-two *hadith* reproduced in *Muntakhab al-Basa’ir* from a book called *Kitab Ta’weel Ma Nuzzila min al-Qur’an fi al-Nabiy wa Alihi (S)*, said to have been endorsed in the handwriting of Sayyid Ibn Tawus; this collection also features a *hadith* from the prolific Sunni narrator Abu Hurayrah and a story from the Jews, both of which indicate that Amir al-Mu’mineen is the Beast[31](#). Additionally, both *Tafsir ‘Ali ibn Ibrahim* and *Al-Kafi* include *hadith* identifying Amir al-Mu’mineen as the Beast. Therefore, as odd as it might sound, reliable *hadith* do suggest that the Imams prophesised that Imam ‘Ali would return as the Beast[32](#).

[A ‘Strong’ Hadith with Weak Content](#)

The ‘Beast’ narrative does bring up the question of how Amir al-Mu’mineen will return in these dual roles. One possibility is that he will return more than once; this idea is supported by an ostensibly ‘strong’ *hadith*. However, while the chain of narration of this *hadith* is reasonably strong, its lengthy and effusive style is much more similar to the unreliable narrative *hadith*. It spans a broad range of topics, such as the pre-creation of the Prophet and Imams and the covenant of the Prophets. It then launches into a long eulogy of the merits of Amir al-Mu’mineen, related by Amir al-Mu’mineen himself, a fraction of which reads:

I have *karrah* after *karrah*, and *raj'ah* after *raj'ah*. I am the Master of the Returns (*raj'at*) and the Reappearances (*karrat*). I am the the Master of the Forces and the Vengeances and the amazing Nations (*al-dawlat al-'ajeebat*).... I am the one who was given control of the clouds and the thunder and the lightning, and the darkness and the light, and the winds and the mountains and the seas, and the stars and the Sun and the Moon³³.

Taken piecemeal, some sections of this *hadith* might arguably fit within the limits of normative Shi'a belief (although those limits can admittedly be rather broad). For instance, the reference to Amir al-Mu'mineen controlling the stars could be construed as an allusion to the controversial theory of *wilayah takweeniyyah*, by which God grants His representatives the theoretical ability to control the universe³⁴. However, taken as a whole, this *hadith* overwhelmingly exaggerates Imam 'Ali to the level of godhood in extremist style. It also reflects the extremist expressions of vengeance. Therefore, although the chain of narration of this *hadith* is 'strong', its content will be treated as questionable throughout this analysis.

The Muntasir and the Saffah

Three *hadith* predict the return of Imam al-Husayn and Amir al-Mu'mineen as the *muntasir* (the 'avenger') and the *saffah* ('the blood-shedder'), respectively³⁵. The *muntasir* – that is to say, Imam al-Husayn – is predicted to emerge 19 years after the appearance of the Qa'im to avenge his blood and the blood of his companions. He will 'kill and take prisoner' until he himself is surrounded and killed. Then, in anger, the *saffah* will emerge – namely, Amir al-Mu'mineen – and he will massacre all the enemies of the *muntasir*.

Apart from contradicting the reliable *hadith* describing the lengthy rule of Imam al-Husayn, the concept of the *muntasir* and the *saffah* appears connected to one person – 'Amr ibn Abi Miqdam al-Thabit, whom Ibn al-Ghadha'iri criticises as 'very weak'³⁶. He relates *hadith* about it twice from Jabir al-Ju'fi, a companion of Imam al-Sadiq. In the third *hadith*, the chain of narration is cut off after Jabir, but since the content is the same, it may well have also come from him. In any case, the tale of the *muntasir* and the *saffah* appears absolutely unreliable.

The Return of the Prophet Muhammad

Although, in normative Shi'a belief, the Prophet is considered to be of a higher status than the Imams, he plays a secondary role in the *raj'ah* narrative. The reliable *hadith* simply say he will return, without any indication of what he might return to do. For instance, two 'very strong' *hadith* read:

Your Prophet will return to you³⁷.

Although this prophecy may appear to refer only ambiguously to the *raj'ah*, one of these *hadith* also mentions the return of Imam al-Husayn to rule until his eyebrows droop.

Only the unreliable and chainless *hadith* describe the Prophet as a fighter; however, even then, they

demote him to a secondary role – as fighting for Imam Ali, Imam al–Husayn, and the Qa'im. The only *hadith* to grant him an equal role (again, an 'unreliable' *hadith*) tells how the Prophet once became uncharacteristically angry and threatened the Quraysh that he would slash their necks in the *raj'ah*. This *hadith* is even all the more unreliable, considering that none of the Quraysh themselves ever mentioned it, *hadith* on the *raj'ah* being the exclusive property of the Shi'a³⁸.

Given that the Prophet headed the Islamic community, he might be expected to take up leadership. However, only two *hadith* mention this. One, which has no chain of narration, predicts that the Prophet will rule for 50,000 years and Amir al–Mu'mineen for 44,000 – thus preserving the superiority of the Prophet (although considerably lengthening their lifespans)³⁹. The other, which is 'unreliable', foretells a re-enactment of the Battle of Siffin (similar to the *hadith* which foretells a re-enactment of the Battle of Karbala). Only after the battle is won does the Prophet return to life – still, not as a fighter, but as a ruler:

Then there will be another return with the Prophet (S) so that he becomes the caliph over the Earth, and the Imams are his governors....Allah will give His Prophet (S) rule over all of the people from the day when Allah created the world until the day He destroys it⁴⁰.

While the arrangement of the Prophet as the caliph and the Imams as his governors does appeal to the Shi'a conception of their respective roles, the conclusion to this *hadith* presents a problem since not all people are expected to return in the *raj'ah*. Therefore, although the idea of the Prophet ruling is not problematic in and of itself, no reliable *hadith* support it.

Religious Syncretism in a Hadith about the Prophet

Only one 'very unreliable' *hadith* presents the Prophet as a primary figure in the *raj'ah*. This *hadith* is related by two of the same 'Waqifi extremist liars' who related the *hadith* about the return of the companions of Imam al–Husayn. Like the other 'very unreliable' *hadith*, it features an unusually detailed narrative. Of all the *hadith* in *Kitab al–Raj'ah*, this one also most obviously calls to mind other Near Eastern religious beliefs. In this 'very unreliable' *hadith*, Satan reaches the end of his respite, and the Prophet returns to slay him:

So when the known day arrives, Amir al–Mu'mineen (A) will return with his companions, and Iblis [Satan] with his companions. They will meet in a land near the Euphrates. It will be said to him: 'Al–Rawha is near to your Kufa,' and so they will fight a battle which has never been seen before since Allah the Mighty and Glorious created the world.

It is as if I [Imam al–Sadiq] am looking at the companions of 'Ali, Amir al–Mu'mineen (A). They will have retreated one hundred steps back, and it is as if I see them, and some of their feet are dipping into the Euphrates.

Then, at that time, the Compelling Lord, Mighty and Glorious, will descend in the shadows of the clouds, and the angels, and the Messenger of God (S) will determine the matter in front of him. In his hand will

be a spear of light. So when Iblis looks at him, he will retreat, fleeing upon his heels, and his companions will say to him: ‘Where are you going? You have been victorious!’

And he will say: ‘I see what you do not see. I fear God, the Lord of the Worlds.’ Then the Prophet (S) will overtake him and pierce him with a stab between his shoulders, and he will be destroyed, and all of his followers will be destroyed. From that time, God, the Mighty and Glorious, will be worshipped and no partners will be ascribed to Him⁴¹.

Although the Qur’an (2:210) metaphorically mentions the idea of God descending in the clouds, the actual expectation of God Himself descending to Earth goes completely against Shi’a theology, which denies the possibility of ever physically seeing God (Sobhani & Kazemi, 2001). However, it does correspond to a passage about Jesus in the Book of Revelations:

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, including those who pierced him. (Rev. 1:7)

The great war against Satan also resembles a prediction in the Book of Revelations, except that, here, Satan is destroyed by fire rather than a weapon of light:

And after the thousand years, Satan will be released from his prison, and he will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. They went up over the breadth of the earth, and surrounded the camp of the saints, and the beloved city. Fire came down out of heaven from God, and devoured them. (Rev. 20:7–9)

Despite the similarities to the Bible, the religious syncretism in this *hadith* is not limited to Christianity; it also calls to mind Manichaean beliefs about the earthly destruction of evil. These Manichaean-style *hadith* can be traced back to one of the unreliable narrators, ‘Abdullah ibn al-Qasim al-Hadhrami, whom Najjashi condemned for relating *hadith* from extremists. In addition to relating this *hadith* and the *hadith* about the return of the companions of Imam al-Husayn⁴², he also related other Manichaean-sounding *hadith* – in particular, the explanation that:

Regarding the words of God, the Exalted and Glorious: **‘On the Day when they will be tried upon the Fire’**⁴³, he [the Imam] said: ‘They will be melted in the *karrah* like gold is melted, until everything returns to its form, meaning its truth.⁴⁴’

Apart from the fact that no other *hadith* describe the *raj’ah* as a time of sifting things into their true form, this idea sounds again like an import from Manicheism, which holds that the good and evil are ‘mixed’ in the earthly life but separated right before the Hereafter^{45.46} Since, in most cases, ‘Abdullah ibn al-Qasim al-Hadhrami is the primary narrator and attributes these *hadith* directly to Imam al-Sadiq, he seems to be the most likely contributor of this Manichean and Christian content. Of course, since Manicheism itself is said to have been influenced by Christianity, perhaps a better description – which

Amir–Moezzi would undoubtedly approve of – is ‘Near Eastern gnostic content.’

Tafsir Hadith and the Return of the Prophet

While almost half of the *raj'ah hadith* cite Qur'anic verses, the *tafsir hadith* stand out in predictions regarding the Prophet – not only for their unreliability, but also because they refer to commonly quoted verses. These are some of the verses said to speak of his return:

'Verily, He who ordained the Qur'an for you will return you to the Resurrection' (28:85).

According to the only reliable *tafsir hadith* referring to the Prophet, this verse predicts the return of the Prophet in the *raj'ah*.

'And he will enter the Mosque as he entered it the first time' (17:7).

While this verse is generally understood to refer to return of the Jews to the Temple, a *tafsir hadith* with no chain of narration says that this verse refers to the Prophet and Amir al–Mu'mineen entering the Sacred Mosque during the *raj'ah* (which, basically, would be the third time they would enter it).

'And the end (akhirah) will be better for you than the beginning' (93:4).

This verse is addressed to the Prophet. Although *akhirah* usually refers to the Hereafter or to the latter end of the Prophet's life, a 'very unreliable' *hadith* explains that, here, it refers to the *raj'ah*.⁴⁷

'O you who are wrapped in cloth, rise, and warn!' (74: 1-2)

Three 'very unreliable' *hadith* explain that this verse refers to the role of the Prophet as a warner during the *raj'ah*.⁴⁸ They do not explain why he would come back to warn people since, according to Shaykh al–Mufeed, repentance will no longer be possible in the time of the *raj'ah* (McDermott, 1986).

While two of the *hadith* relating this interpretation are relatively concise, the third is much more revealing. Aside from offering this interpretation, it says that the verse 'Every soul will taste death' was originally revealed as 'Every soul will taste death and resurrection (*manshurah*)' and was meant to refer to the *raj'ah* before it was truncated. Of course, this interpretation contradicts the vast number of reliable *hadith* which specify that only selected souls – rather than every single soul – will experience the *raj'ah*. It also contradicts the general belief that the Qur'anic text has been preserved intact.

Curiously, all three of these *hadith* – although in different wordings – are related from Muhammad ibn Sanan, through another narrator, through al–Mankhal ibn Jameel. In fact, these are the only *raj'ah hadith* that al–Mankhal ibn Jameel narrates, although Muhammad ibn Sanan narrates others. It is difficult to determine which of them might have originated this content (assuming it is false, of course). While the end of the *hadith* – which predicts the resurrection and punishment of 'Uthman and the Umayyids – may provide a clue, it too does not suffice, for the same pair narrated other extremist–sounding anti–Umayyid

hadith, such as: ‘If you leave aside your prescribed ritual prayer, do not leave aside cursing the Umayyids.⁴⁹’ However, since al-Mankhal ibn Jameel is higher on the chain of narration and only participated in these three *raj’ah hadith*, it will be assumed that this material came from him – especially since he was condemned for being weak, extremist, and corrupting *hadith*⁵⁰.

Since Qur’anic verses are said to have multiple layers of meaning, the contradiction between these interpretations and other, more commonly established interpretations is itself not problematic. However, in addition to being unreliable, these *hadith* do seem to stretch the meaning of the verses. The latter interpretation, in particular, appears as if it could have been the product of extremists (such as al-Mankhal ibn Jameel), since belief in the corruption of the Qur’anic text was popular among them.

Therefore, these interpretations cannot be looked towards to find a role for the Prophet in the *raj’ah*, and the only reliable *tafsir hadith* predicts the same thing as the other reliable *hadith* do – namely, that the Prophet will appear.

The Return of all the Imams

In addition to Qur’anic verses, *ziyarat* texts are quoted throughout *Kitab al-Raj’ah*.⁵¹ Like the *tafsir hadith*, the *ziyarat hadith* are typically unverified. However, unlike some of the *tafsir hadith*, they do not stretch the bounds of credibility.

The most reliable of these *hadith* is a quotation from *Ziyarat al-Jami’ah al-Kabeerah*, or *The Complete and Comprehensive Salutation*, which is addressed to all the Imams. Although it hails from the prominent work *Man La Yahdhuru al-Faqih*, it is categorised as ‘average’ since it was narrated through three unknown narrators and one – Muhammad ibn Isma’il al-Barmaki – whom Ibn al-Ghadha’iri calls ‘weak’ (although Najjashi and ‘Allamah Hilli call him ‘trustworthy’). The selection reads:

Make me one who follows in your footsteps and follows in your paths and is guided by your guidance and is raised in your group and returns in your *raj’ah* and rules in your states and is honoured with your safety and is present in your days and whose eyes are pleased tomorrow with the sight of you⁵².

This selection is the strongest evidence in all of *Kitab al-Raj’ah* that the Imams indicated they would return. It also indicates that they said they would hold temporal power. However, it is worth noting that it only specifically mentions the Imams, not the Prophet.

Additionally, one ‘strong’ *hadith* attributed to Imam ‘Ali implies the return of the Imams:

I am the aged one (*sayyid al-shayb*), as old as Job, and, by God, He will join me with my children like he joined Jacob [with his children].⁵³

Even if this *hadith* is reliable, it does not explicitly state how or why he will be joined with his children, or which children they will be – that is to say, all of the Imams, or just some of them. Therefore, it can only

be taken as supplementary evidence. It does, however, suggest that the *raj'ah* was discussed well before the second or third centuries, as some have postulated.

Further supplementary evidence can be gleaned from 'Ali ibn Ibrahim who, in his *tafsir*, says that there are many *hadith* in which the Imams say they will return to the world, at which time they will be aided in a way they were never aided before⁵⁴. Since he was living much closer to the time of the Imams, he was probably much more aware of what they said; however, since he does not actually provide these *hadith*, they cannot be viewed as conclusive in this study. He also does not clarify whether they will fight, rule, or fulfil some other function.

It is also not clear whether the Imams are predicted to return all at once, or in sequence, or some other manner. Outside of *Kitab al-Raj'ah*, 'Allamah al-Majlesi takes the effort to prove that more than one Imam can be present on Earth at one time, as long as only one officially takes the role of Imam – and that no one should object to the *raj'ah* because of this point; apart from providing an argument, the *hadith* he cites in his argument suggest what concerns some of the early Shi'a might have had regarding the *raj'ah*. And, of course, since the dead will have already risen, the natural laws of the world will have already been bent; and so, in comparison, having multiple Imams hardly bears mentioning⁵⁵.

However, the unreliable *hadith* do conflict on how the Imams will return. In contrast to an 'unreliable' *hadith* which predicts that the Imams will return as governors,⁵⁶ a 'very unreliable' *hadith* predicts not only twelve Imams but twelve Mahdis (as distinct from Imams)⁵⁷. This *hadith*, in turn, contradicts a 'suspect' *hadith* that Amir al-Mu'mineen will be the last to die⁵⁸. Therefore, how or when the Imams are predicted to return and hold power cannot be deduced.

The Return of Non-Prophetic Individuals

Perhaps the most agreed-upon idea about the *raj'ah* is that it will not be for all; rather, only those who have absolute faith and absolute faithlessness will be returned⁵⁹. Several *hadith*, including one 'strong' and one 'very strong'⁶⁰, put forward this Qur'anic verse as proof of a selective resurrection:

On the Day when We will gather from every people a band of those who rejected Our signs, and they will be kept in ranks. (27:83)

The *hadith* argue that this verse must refer to the *raj'ah* since all people will be resurrected in the Hereafter, not just 'bands'. It has therefore become one of the more prominent verses in polemical discussions.

The Believers must Die and Be Killed

Another frequently quoted premise is that the believers must 'die and be killed.' Eight *hadith* – including three 'very strong' and one 'strong' – explain how this idea also implies the necessity of the *raj'ah*⁶¹. For if a believer is killed, he must return to this world to die a natural death. And if he dies a natural death, he

must return to this world to be killed.

This prophecy may have been comforting to those who would have liked to give their lives for their faith, as an 'unreliable' *hadith* suggests:

I said to him [the Imam][62](#): I have grown old, and my bones have become weak. I would love to end my life being killed for you.

He said: It is not like that. If it does not happen soon (*al-'ajilah*), it will happen in the life to come (*al-ajilah*).[63](#) [64](#)

However, it does seem incongruous that a mass number of believers would be resurrected to be slain by their enemies as a time when the believers are supposed to have the earthly upper hand. After all, the believers ostensibly cannot enjoy the victory of truth if they are dead. While strong in terms of chain of narration, this prophecy does not fit into either the reliable or the unreliable descriptions of the essence of the *raj'ah*.

Of all the reliable predictions, this one is the most highly dependent on Sa'd (and Ibn Abi al-Khattab), as seven of the eight *hadith* citing this verse come from Sa'd through Ibn Abi al-Khattab (although, in some cases, other narrators narrate with Ibn Abi al-Khattab). The remaining *hadith* only has the primary narrator listed and looks as if it may be identical to a *hadith* that Sa'd related. Without Sa'd, this idea would not have persisted until the present day.

Destroyed Peoples will not Be Returned

In contrast, a different verse of the Qur'an is cited to prove that those peoples whom God destroyed will not be returned in the *raj'ah*:

It is forbidden for any people that We have destroyed to return. (21:95)

Although this verse can be interpreted in other ways that do not involve the *raj'ah*, it does have to be admitted that it could literally mean this.

Three *hadith* refer to this verse. Of the three, one is indeterminate as its primary narrator cannot be conclusively identified; however, it is probably a strong chain of narration as it contains Ibn Abi 'Umayr.[65](#) The second is 'suspect' due to the presence of Muhammad ibn Sanan al-Zahiri (who also narrated the *hadith* about the *mudaththir* from al-Mankhal ibn Jameel) – but it also seems potentially reliable since it also contains Ibn Abi 'Umayr[66](#). The third *hadith* has no chain of narration; unlike the other two, it is ascribed to Amir al-Mu'mineen[67](#). Therefore, just as the former prophecy is dependent on Sa'd, this prophecy is dependent on Ibn Abi 'Umayr. However, unlike the former prophecy, it does not appear to contradict the essence of other established *hadith* on the *raj'ah*.

The Return of Specific Individuals to Aid the Imams

In addition to the general prediction of the return of the believers, a few specific individuals are named as returning on the side of the Imams. The strongest *hadith* – which, admittedly, can only be assumed to pertain to the *raj'ah* – predicts the return of two lauded companions of Imam al-Sadiq:

It is as if I am with Hamran ibn A'yan and Maysar ibn 'Abd al-'Azeez with their swords when they are addressing the people between Safa and Marwa.[68](#) [69](#)

While the primary narrator of this *hadith*, Ibn Bukayr, was considered very reliable, he also held Fathi beliefs. Since many of the non-Imami sects emphasised the immediate need for revolt, his views may have affected how he perceived or related the Imam's words.

Two other *hadith* – one 'suspect' and one 'very unreliable' – predict the return of another lauded companion, 'Abdullah ibn Shareek al-'Amiri. While the 'suspect' *hadith* only say that he will be raised with Isma'il, the son of Imam al-Sadiq[70](#), a 'very unreliable' *hadith* – related through the aforementioned Sahl ibn Ziyad – presents a grander picture:

Abu Ja'far (A) said: It is as if I am with 'Abdullah ibn Shareek al-'Amiri, and he is wearing a black turban with the ends between his shoulders, and he is ascending the foot of the mountain between the hands of our Qa'im of the Ahl al-Bayt with 4,000 men shouting 'God is great!' and advancing[71](#).

Although 'Allamah Majlesi quotes this *hadith* from *Rijal al-Kashshi*, it can no longer be found in the modern edition of *Rijal al-Kashshi*, and so Kashshi's motivation for including it cannot be deduced. (However, Ibn Dawud does verify that it came from Kashshi; perhaps his book was the one that 'Allamah Majlesi quoted it from) Apart from the fact that it is 'very unreliable', this *hadith* is the only one to assign such a heroic role to an ordinary individual, and so it probably was misrelated, either in spirit or in content.

Some of the ancients are also mentioned. Although it has already been established that the prophets were predicted to return, a story in a 'suspect' *hadith* tells of why one specific prophet, Isma'il ibn Hizqayl, is expected to return. In this *hadith*, Imam al-Sadiq is asked whether the Qur'anic verse **'And mention Isma'il in the Book; he was true to his promise and was a messenger sent' (19:54)** refers to Isma'il, the son of Abraham. The Imam replies that it does not, for Isma'il died before Abraham, and, anyway, Abraham was of such high stature that Isma'il would not need to be mentioned after him. Rather:

This was Isma'il ibn Hizqayl, the prophet (A) whom God raised among his people, but they denied him and killed him and flayed the skin from his face. So God became angry with them and sent him Satata'eel, the Angel of Punishment, who said to him: 'O Isma'il! I am Satata'eel, the Angel of Punishment. The Great Lord has sent me to you to punish your people with whatever type of

punishment you like.’

So Ismail said to him: ‘I have no need of that, O Satata’eel.’

So God revealed to him: What would you like, O Isma’il?

Isma’il said: ‘O Lord, You have taken a covenant with Yourself for Lordship, and with Muhammad for prophethood, and with His successors for allegiance. You have told Your creation what his people will do to Husayn ibn ‘Ali (A) after the Prophet. You have promised to resurrect Husayn so he can take revenge for what they did to him. So my desire from You, O Lord, is that you return me to the world so that I may take revenge for what they did to him as you raise Husayn.’

So God promised Isma’il ibn Hizqayl this, and he will return with Husayn ibn ‘Ali (A)[72](#).

Although this *hadith* is not verifiable, it does reflect many common Shi‘a themes – for instance, foreknowledge of the martyrdom of Imam al-Husayn. This verse has been connected with Isma’il ibn Hizqayl elsewhere – but without his request to be returned in the *raj‘ah* (Rayshahri, 2009). However, the main thrust of the *hadith* – that Imam al-Husayn will return to avenge himself – cannot be found in any of the reliable *hadith*. Therefore, like its chain of narration, this particular retelling of the story of Isma’il ibn Hizqayl seems suspect.

Finally, a couple of *hadith* without sufficient chains of narration predict the return of other notable ancients. One foretells that, from behind Kufa, twenty-three ancients will return: fifteen from the people of Moses, the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (*ashab al-kaht*), and the Prophet Joshua. Along with them will emerge four companions of Amir al-Mu’mineen: Salman al-Farsi, Abu Dujanah al-Ansari, Miqdad, and Malik al-Ashtar[73](#).

In the other *hadith*, the Prophet predicts that Salman will meet all the Imams – thus suggesting that they might return together, or at least within a reasonable time frame[74](#). The *hadith* about Salman al-Farsi seems slightly more credible than the *hadith* about ‘Abdullah ibn Shareek since, first of all, Salman’s name is more iconic; and, second, the prediction of his return is less elaborate. In any case, all of the individuals mentioned would be expected to return under the categories of the return of the Prophets and the return of the believers. However, whether or not they were actually predicted to return together from Kufa cannot be verified.

The Punishment of Individuals Revered in the Sunni Tradition

No reliable *hadith* actually predict that any specific people will be returned to be punished. However, since one of the sectarian objections to the *raj‘ah* is that the Shi‘a predict the return and chastisement of certain personalities respected in the Sunni *tradition*, *hadith* about them are worth exploring separately.

The most graphic description of the punishment of these individuals is found in the Hadith of Mufaddal – which, as described earlier, is absolutely unreliable and carries no weight whatsoever as an indicator of

the teachings of the Imams. Additionally, three ‘very unreliable’ *hadith* in *Kitab al-Raj’ah* address those individuals. One – which is the *hadith* about the corruption of the Qur’anic text narrated by al-Mankhal ibn Jameel – describes Amir al-Mu’mineen and his followers fighting the resurrected ‘Uthman ibn ‘Affan and his followers.⁷⁵ It also alludes to killing ‘the man from Bani Umayyah by the tree’; as that phrase is quite vague, it may or may not refer to the story in the Hadith of Mufaddal. However, since the remaining content of this *hadith* is so questionable, and since al-Mankhal ibn Jameel was thought to have corrupted *hadith*, this *hadith* must be dismissed.

The second *hadith* predicts the return of A’ishah to receive shariah punishment⁷⁶. It was related by three suspect narrators, including Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Daylami, whom Najjashi condemns as ‘very weak’, ‘an extremist’, and ‘a liar’ and summarises with: ‘Do not depend on him for anything.’

The third *hadith* does not actually mention those to be punished by name. However, it appears to be a sideways reference to specific individuals as part of ‘the oppressors and *taghut* from the Quraysh and Bani Umayyah.⁷⁷ It is related from ‘Ali ibn Abi Hamzah al-Bata’ini – whom Kashshi calls a ‘cursed liar’ and whom Ibn al-Ghadha’iri invokes he curse of God upon – and his son, who received similar reviews.

To summarise, all three *hadith* predicting the return and punishment of revered Sunni personalities are not only unreliable, but, given the reputation of their narrators, were probably forged. Therefore, there is no evidence that the Imams verbalised these predictions.

The Punishment of the Umayyids

Additionally, eight *hadith* describe the resurrection and punishment of the Umayyids. *Hadith* like this are hardly surprising since the Umayyids, among other things, instituted the ritual cursing of Amir al-Mu’mineen and instigated the murder of Imam al-Husayn. Of these *hadith*, however, two are ‘unreliable’, two are ‘very unreliable’, and the remaining four lack sufficient chains of narration. Although the general idea of the return of the Umayyids does not contradict any verifiable *hadith*, the unreliability of these *hadith* suggests that specific predictions of their return may not have been uttered by the Imams

However, Shaykh al-Mufeed did refer to the revivication and punishment of Yazeed ibn Mu’awiyah (the Umayyid caliph who ordered the murder of Imam al-Husayn) in one of his debates with the Mu’tazilites (McDermott, 1986). Therefore, this idea seems to have been in common circulation among the learned Shi’a of his time, and this may lend it some credence.

Places and Times

A Rising in Rajab

Apart from the question of what will happen during the *raj’ah*, there is the question of when it will happen, and where. Attempts to put the *raj’ah* in some sort of context often revolve around five *hadith*

which describe a rising in the month of Rajab – which, depending on the narrative strand one accepts, may or may not be the only *raj'ah*. These *hadith*, in turn, revolve around some usual verses accredited – and probably falsely accredited – to Amir al-Mu'mineen:

Al-'ajab kull al-'ajab bayna Jumada wa Rajab

How strange and wondrous, so entirely strange and wondrous, between Jumada and Rajab⁷⁸

Of the *hadith* foretelling the rising in Rajab, three are 'unreliable' and two are 'very unreliable'; perhaps their only redeeming factor is that they were all narrated in different books by different unreliable narrators.

However, were one to wonder what these verses foretold, an unusually grotesque 'unreliable' *hadith* paints a picture of this strange and wondrous event:

When the Qa'im rises, it will rain upon people in the month of Jumada al-Akhirah, and ten days of the month of Rajab. It will be a rain that all of creation has never seen the like of before. With it, Allah will cause the flesh and bodies of the believers in their graves to grow [like plants]. It is as if I see them, facing each other, and coming forth from the area of Juhaynah⁷⁹. They are tearing their hair from the dirt⁸⁰.

While the return of the believers is supported, the return in Rajab is not. While there is no particular reason to object to it – seeing as there are only twelve months to choose from – the diversity in the chains of narrations suggests that someone might have coined these verses, and they later took on their own life. This idea is supported by an unusual *hadith* in which one of the companions of Imam al-Sadiq relates that he chanced upon a people who believed that the Prophet had composed these verses about the rising in Rajab⁸¹.

Kufa

Just as Rajab is the primary time mentioned, Kufa is the primary place mentioned in the *raj'ah hadith*. Eleven *hadith* relate prophecies slated to unfold in or around Kufa. Of these *hadith*, five are 'unreliable', two are 'very unreliable', two lack sufficient chains of narration, and one is the *hadith* described earlier as having a 'strong' chain of narration but suspect content. When read together, these *hadith* predict that the world will not end until the Prophet meets Amir al-Mu'mineen near the Mosque of Kufa – perhaps, as one 'unreliable' *hadith* predicts, in the (relatively) nearby cemetery of Wadi al-Salaam⁸².

Although none of the *hadith* mentioning Kufa are reliable, the emphasis on Kufa is not terribly suspect. Amir al-Mu'mineen concluded his caliphate in Kufa and was buried nearby; therefore, he would be expected to rise there. Other *hadith* describe the merits of worshipping in the Mosque of Kufa, and Mesopotamia itself boasts of historical and religious significance as the cradle of civilisation where the ancient prophets walked. The final chapter of human history might be expected to begin there.

On the other hand, given that expectation, anyone who wanted to fabricate a *raj'ah* story would probably set it in Kufa. Since most of the Kufa *hadith* were related by individuals who were known for lying and extremism, this is a distinct possibility. Therefore, the predictions regarding Kufa cannot be confirmed.

Purposes of the Raj'ah

Vengeance

Since the *raj'ah* is so popularly associated with the concept of vengeance, it may seem odd to introduce it as a separate subject. And yet, although twenty-six *hadith* in *Kitab al-Raj'ah* specifically predict vengeance or punishment – as opposed to simply battle – not a single one is even remotely reliable. Eight are ‘very unreliable’, five are ‘unreliable’, and three are ‘suspect’. Not only do many of the unreliable *hadith* (several of which have been cited previously) contain questionable content, but these ‘suspect’ *hadith* are also likely to be inauthentic, as two pertain to the *muntasir* and *saffah* (attributed to ‘Amr ibn Thabit), and one is the extended story of Isma’il ibn Hizqayl.

Although the remaining *hadith* which lack chains of narration could be authentic, they either mimic the inauthentic content or else rely on questionable Qur’anic interpretations. For instance, one chainless *hadith* interprets this verse of the Qur’an as pertaining to punishment in the *raj'ah* with the sword:

And We will make them taste the minor punishment in lieu of the major punishment so that they may return. (32:21)

Even if al-Mankhal ibn Jameel had not related the same interpretation in his very unreliable *hadith* about the *mudaththir* and the corruption of the Qur’an, interpreting ‘the minor punishment’ as ‘punishment in the *raj'ah*’ does not make sense. For if this minor punishment were to transpire during the *raj'ah*, the causal relationship between ‘the minor punishment’ and ‘returning’ would be lost, since the returning would have occurred before the punishment. A more common interpretation seems more plausible; namely, that God might punish some people in this earthly life so they would repent and return to Him (Al-Mahalli & As-Suyuti, 2007).

The other chainless *hadith* are similarly unconvincing. Therefore, despite the common association of the *raj'ah* with vengeance, all surviving evidence suggests that the Imams did not actually articulate this.

It is possible, however, to speculate who might have articulated it. While the *hadith* about vengeance come from a variety of ‘very unreliable’ narrators, certain narrators figure more prominently among them and may have introduced certain ideas into the narrative. They are:

- ‘Abdullah ibn al-Qasim al-Hadhrami, mentioned above for the Manichaean ideas that he attributes to Imam al-Sadiq.
- Abu Jameelah (Al-Mufaddal ibn Salih), who relates the unsubstantiated story about the Prophet

threatening to slice the necks of the Quraysh in the *raj'ah*.

- **'Ali ibn Abi Hamzah al-Bata'ini** and his son Hasan, mentioned above for their two *hadith* featuring the Umayyids.
- **'Amr ibn Shimr al-Ju'fi**, who predicts the second Battle of Siffin.
- **'Amr ibn Thabit**, mentioned above for describing Amir al-Mu'mineen and Imam al-Husayn as the *saffah* and the *muntasir*.
- **Al-Mankhal ibn Jameel**, mentioned above for his *hadith* about the *mudaththir*, the corruption of the Qur'anic text, and the Umayyids.
- **Muhammad ibn Sulayman al-Daylami**, who relates the above *hadith* about the punishment of A'ishah and another *hadith* about punishing the enemies of the Shi'a in the *raj'ah*. His *hadith* differ from the others in that they are phrased in the subjunctive tense – that is to say, 'If the Qa'im had stood (*law qad qaama al-Qa'im*)' – rather than in the simple future tense.
- **Al-Qasim ibn Yahya ibn Hasan ibn Rashid**, who relates two *hadith* about souls being returned to heal themselves by sending their enemies to extreme punishment. No one other than him relates this idea.⁸³
- **'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azeez** – who, despite being unreliable, does not relate anything of distinction other than predictions of violence. His questionable but non-extremist *hadith* correlate with Fadhl ibn Shadhan's opinion that he was a poor narrator but not an extremist.

All of the above, with the exception of 'Amr ibn Thabit, were severely condemned by all the biographers who mentioned them. Although other unreliable narrators also participated in the narration of *hadith* regarding vengeance, these narrators appear to be most responsible for the ideas mentioned after their names.

A handful, such as al-Hadhrami and al-Bata'ini, were also known for holding Waqifi beliefs; this is not particularly surprising since many of the early Shi'a left the Imami path in search of an Imam who would lead an imminent uprising. However, not all of the unreliable *raj'ah* narrators were of non-Imami persuasions. While divergent beliefs may have led some to invent or exaggerate prophecies of vengeance, these sects were clearly not the sole source of this idea. Given their diversity, these narrators were not the sole source of vengeful narrations either; probably, they were simply an outgrowth of the situation the Shi'a were living in.

[Fulfilling the Promise of God](#)

Of course, it is entirely possible that the Imams did predict that the deceased would be returned to be punished – but if they did, no reliable record remains. If they did not, however, the question arises: what

will they be revived for?

Several *hadith* argue that the *raj'ah* is necessary to fulfil the promise of God on the grounds that God promised certain things to (or required certain things from) certain individuals in the Holy Qur'an. Since these promises were not fulfilled during their earthly lifetimes, they must be resurrected before the end of the world to fulfil them. While this idea has an inherent logic, accepting these arguments requires accepting these particular Qur'anic interpretations, which are not always apparent.

For instance, a *hadith* with no chain of narration says that the following verses apply to Amir al-Mu'mineen⁸⁴:

Then He made him die and buried him. Then when He wills, He will resurrect him. Nay, he did not judge as he was commanded. (80:21-23)

According to the *hadith*, since Amir al-Mu'mineen was not able to judge as he was commanded in this life, he will be returned to life to do so. However, since none of the verses actually mention Amir al-Mu'mineen, his relationship to them can only be accepted on faith.

Another *hadith* – specifically the 'unreliable' *hadith* which predicts the second Siffin – says that this verse applies to the Prophet:

In order to make it [Islam] manifest over all religions, even though the polytheists detest it. (9:33)

According to this *hadith*, the Prophet must return to life to fulfil this prophecy. However, it is not clear to the casual observer why the Mahdi could not take this role instead.

On the other hand, three *hadith* – including one 'very strong' *hadith* – say that this verse will be fulfilled in the *raj'ah*:⁸⁵

And We wish to bestow upon those who have been oppressed in the Earth and make them Imams and make them the inheritors. (28:5)

By itself, this verse does not appear to necessitate the *raj'ah*. Since the Imams were already considered Imams in their lifetimes, they do not need to be resurrected in order to become Imams again. Nor do any *hadith* describe the resurrection of the oppressed *per se*.

However, these *hadith* do indicate one thing – and that is, in the early days, the theological justification for the *raj'ah* did not centre on divine punishment. Rather, it was based on the necessity of fulfilling the word of God. Additionally, while this latter *hadith* itself does not sufficiently offer a convincing purpose for the *raj'ah*, when combined with the subsequent *hadith*, it does suggest what might have been intended in the *raj'ah* prophecies.

What Happened to Prior Peoples Must be Repeated

In addition to calling upon Qur'anic verses, polemical *hadith* arguing for the *raj'ah* also cite a *hadith* which says that everything that happened to Bani Isra'il (or to prior peoples) must happen to the Muslims. Undoubtedly because of this *hadith*, which is also found in Sunni collections⁸⁶, many traditional texts arguing for the *raj'ah* – from Shaykh al-Saduq on – begin by introducing the Qur'anic precedent of resurrected peoples prior. Although four *hadith* – including one 'strong' *hadith*⁸⁷ – mention it, this *hadith* from '*Uyun Akhbar al-Ridha* is of particular interest as it portrays what sectarian debates over the *raj'ah* might have been like during the lifetimes of the Imams⁸⁸:

Al-Ma'mun said to al-Ridha (A): 'O Abu al-Hasan, what do you say about the *raj'ah*?'

He (A) said: 'It is true. It happened to prior peoples, and the Qur'an speaks of it, and the Messenger of God (S) [said]: 'Everything that happened to the prior peoples will happen to this people, sandal by sandal, arrow-feather by arrow-feather [that is to say, exactly the same way].''...

Although this particular *hadith* was categorised as 'suspect' on account of the final narrator (whom 'Allamah Hilli and Ibn al-Ghadha'iri call 'weak'), the *hadith* itself contains no suspicious content; on the contrary, it offers a logical argument in the style of argumentation attributed to the Imams.

Polemically speaking, this *hadith* is also one of the strongest arguments for the validity of the *raj'ah* within the Islamic discourse. More pertinently, it suggests a convincing purpose for the *raj'ah* other than vengeance, since prior peoples were not resurrected in order to be punished again. In contrast, prior peoples such as the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus (*ashab al-kahf*) were resurrected to witness the power of God, the victory of truth over falsehood, and to experience freedom from oppression – which the early Shi'a were definitely living in⁸⁹.

Combined with the prior *hadith*, which describes the *raj'ah* as a time when the oppressed will inherit the Earth, a less violent interpretation of the *raj'ah* emerges. Although fighting was prophesied, the fighting was not to be for the sake of sating one's desire for vengeance. Rather, it would be a time when the most faithful and the most faithless would be resurrected to witness the truth, and witnessing that might be sufficient earthly punishment for the faithless.

A Cosmological Necessity?

Finally, it has been suggested that the purpose of the *raj'ah* is none of the above. Rather, the return of some of the deceased could simply be a by-product of the reorganisation of the world before the Hereafter, at which time the *barzakh* (the purgatory world) would be collapsed in preparation for the final Judgment.⁹⁰ While many souls will be sleeping during that time, the most faithful and the most faithless would still be awake and receiving either reward or punishment. Perhaps, at this time, the barrier between the *barzakh* and the physical world would be destroyed, and these souls would emerge back into the physical world. The evil – such as the Pharaoh of Egypt – would to seize the opportunity to try to

regain power, and so they and their archenemies would naturally come to blows.

This idea is supported by parallel *hadith* which describe ‘those who manifest absolute faith and those who manifest absolute disbelief’⁹¹ as being awake in the *barzakh* and returned in the *raj’ah*, respectively. (Interestingly, one of the *hadith* using this phrase for the *barzakh* also comes from Sa’d in *Muntakhab al-Basa’ir*,⁹² but similar *hadith* are also narrated from several other sources as well) This phrase also recurs in a *hadith* describing who believes and disbelieves in Amir al-Mu’mineen⁹³; from a Shi’a perspective, those who believe in Amir al-Mu’mineen (that is, those who have ‘absolute faith’) would be the most likely people to return with him. It is possible that this could have been the original explanation intended for the *raj’ah* which was later sidelined in favour of more satisfying – or more comprehensible – stories of vengeance.

1. ‘Amir al-Mu’mineen’ (or ‘The Commander of the Faithful’) is an honorific title commonly used for Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. Since it occurs frequently in these *hadith*, it has been used throughout to refer to Imam ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib.

2. *Hadith* #116.

3. See *Hadith* #1 and #19 for ‘very strong’ *hadith* expressing these ideas.

4. Qur’an 21:69. Qur’anic translations adapted from the famous translation by Yusufali (1999) in favour of the literal meaning of some of the verses.

5. Qur’an 7:96.

6. *Hadith* #52. All *hadith* translations composed by A. Inloes as literally as semantically possible.

7. *Hadith* #13. See Appendix C for references regarding the *hadith* narrators.

8. *Hadith* #103. Names in [square brackets] were not present in the original text of the *hadith* and were inferred.

9. Qur’an 17:6.

10. The Dajjal is akin to the Antichrist.

11. *Hadith* #103.

12. The other *hadith* is #130a.

13. See below, under ‘The return of non-prophetic individuals’.

14. *Hadith* #89, related from Salih ibn Sahl.

15. *Hadith* #78, related from Salih ibn Sahl.

16. *Hadith* #75, quoted under the section on the return of Amir al-Mu’mineen.

17. *Hadith* #22.

18. *Hadith* #62.

19. ‘Beast’ may not be the best translation for *dabbah* since a *dabbah* can refer to a creature in human or animal form. However, since the prophecy of the *dabbah* appears to correspond loosely with the Judaeo-Christian prophecy of the Beast, this translation has been used here.

20. Cook (2002) relates some popular medieval Muslim portrayals of the Beast.

21. ‘Allamah Tabataba’i (1997, vol. 15, p. 398) expands on this point in his explanation of this verse.

22. *Hadith* #30, categorised as ‘very strong’, relates this.

23. *Hadith* #123, categorised as ‘strong’, relates this.

24. See, for instance, *Hadith* #138–6 and *Hadith* #138–11.

25. *Hadith* #66, ‘unreliable’. For more background on this phrase, see *The Divine Guide in Early Shi’ism* (Amir-Moezzi, 1994, p. 182 n. 283).

26. Although *Hadith* #138–18 refers to the Beast as the ‘minor punishment’ (citing verse 33:21 of the Qur’an), this *hadith* is ‘unreliable’ and is contradicted by other unreliable *hadith* which refer to the ‘minor punishment’ as the return of the Messenger of God bearing a sword.

27. *Hadith* #123.

- [28.](#) Hadith #128.
- [29.](#) A mountain near Mecca.
- [30.](#) Hadith #120, an excerpt.
- [31.](#) Hadith #138–10 and Hadith #138–12.
- [32.](#) Hadith #30 ('very strong') and Hadith #123 ('strong'), respectively.
- [33.](#) Hadith #20, from Muntakhab al-Basa'ir. The chain of narration does contain one questionable individual – Ahmad ibn Khalid ibn Muhammad al-Barqi, who is said to have been reliable but to have narrated from weak narrators; however, the narrators above him are both agreed to be reliable. The full chain of narration is: Imam Al-Baqir –... 'Asim ibn Hameed –... Ibn Abi Najran –... Ahmad ibn Khalid ibn Muhammad al-Barqi –... Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Bajali –... a book narrated from Muhammad ibn al-Hasan ibn 'Abdullah al-Atrush.
- [34.](#) For an explanation of this belief, see An Enlightening Commentary of the Holy Qur'an, vol. 5, commentary of verses 3:48–49 (Imani, 2005).
- [35.](#) Hadith #121, #122, and #130d.
- [36.](#) However, since the other biographers do not criticise him, he is not listed as 'unreliable'.
- [37.](#) Hadith #19 and Hadith #33.
- [38.](#) Hadith #60.
- [39.](#) Hadith #130b.
- [40.](#) Hadith #75 (excerpt).
- [41.](#) Hadith #12 (excerpt).
- [42.](#) This hadith was quoted above in the section on the return of Imam al-Husayn.
- [43.](#) Qur'an 51:13.
- [44.](#) Hadith #15, 'unreliable'.
- [45.](#) See Sundermann (1998) for a description of Manichaean eschatological beliefs.
- [46.](#) In contrast, the commentator of Bihar al-Anwar speculates that these hadith refer to other hadith (which themselves are unreliable) saying that good and bad human beings were pre-created out of different types of clay.
- [47.](#) Hadith #43, from Tafsir Ali ibn Ibrahim.
- [48.](#) Hadith #10, #11, and #55, all from Muntakhab al-Basa'ir.
- [49.](#) Tahdheeb al-Ahkam, vol. 2, p. 109.
- [50.](#) Although Muhammad ibn Sanan has also been criticised by some biographers, the condemnation of him is not as severe.
- [51.](#) A ziyarat is a ritual salutation typically read in front of the graves of the Prophet and Imams.
- [52.](#) Hadith #99.
- [53.](#) Hadith #80, from Majalis al-Mufid. Hadith #137, which does not have a chain of narration, contains similar content.
- [54.](#) His commentary follows Hadith #50.
- [55.](#) For example, see Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 25, p 107.
- [56.](#) Quoted above in the section on the return of the Prophet.
- [57.](#) Hadith #138–21.
- [58.](#) Hadith #65.
- [59.](#) Hadith #1, Muntakhab al-Basa'ir, 'very strong'; Hadith #30, Tafsir Ali ibn Ibrahim.
- [60.](#) Hadith #5 and #6, respectively, both from Muntakhab al-Basa'ir.
- [61.](#) Hadith #5, #58, and #59 ('very strong'); Hadith #70 ('strong').
- [62.](#) The hadith does not specify which Imam was being addressed.
- [63.](#) While 'al-ajilah' generally refers to the Hereafter, 'Allamah Majlesi is suggesting that, in this context, it refers to the raj'ah.
- [64.](#) Hadith #84.
- [65.](#) Hadith #65.
- [66.](#) Hadith #29.
- [67.](#) Hadith #149.

- [68.](#) Safa and Marwa are two hills in Mecca.
- [69.](#) Hadith #7, 'strong'.
- [70.](#) Hadith #82.
- [71.](#) Hadith #81.
- [72.](#) Hadith #132.
- [73.](#) Hadith #95.
- [74.](#) Hadith #162.
- [75.](#) Hadith #55.
- [76.](#) Hadith #93.
- [77.](#) Hadith #42.
- [78.](#) Hadith #46 and #85.
- [79.](#) Hadith #94, Irshad al-Qulub.
- [80.](#) Hadith #85.
- [81.](#) Juhaynah refers to a tribal meeting place either in the Arabian Peninsula or (more likely in this context) near Kufa. Thanks to Dr. J. Hussain for providing this translation.
- [82.](#) Hadith #113.
- [83.](#) Hadith #16 and Hadith #17.
- [84.](#) Hadith #119.
- [85.](#) Hadith #50, Hadith #126 and Hadith #162.
- [86.](#) See Sahih Bukhari, Kitab Ahadith al-Anbiya, Bab 53, hadith #3494.
- [87.](#) Hadith #45 ('suspect'), #71 ('average'), #74 ('strong'), and #137 ('indeterminate').
- [88.](#) Hadith #45.
- [89.](#) The Holy Qur'an tells of several people who died and were revived, such as the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, the Prophet 'Uzayr, seventy people from the people of Moses, and Dhul Qarnayn. See Al-Raj'ah aw al-'Awdah ila al-Hayat al-Dunya ba'd al-Mawt (n.d.).
- [90.](#) All credit for this idea goes to Prof. M.S. Bahmanpour.
- [91.](#) 'Man mahhadha al-imana mahdhan aw mahhadha al-kufra mahdhan.'
- [92.](#) The hadith from Muntakhab al-Basa'ir is in Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 6, p. 235, hadith #52; several similar hadith from different sources are mentioned subsequently in the same section.
- [93.](#) Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 26, p. 257, hadith #33

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