

# Strange Exegetical Interpretations: A Critical Study in Light of the Qur'anic Text and the Prophetic Sunnah

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines and critically analyzes certain interpretations found in works of Qur'anic exegesis that exhibit elements of conceptual oddity or interpretive readings inconsistent with the spirit of Islam as derived from the Noble Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah. Such interpretations are also at variance with the broader contextual framework of the Qur'anic discourse. The significance of this study arises from the pressing need to reassess certain interpretations found in some exegetical works that diverge from the sound meanings of the texts and, consequently, obscure the contemporary reader's understanding of religion and the Qur'an. Accordingly, the study seeks to re-examine a number of passages that have been interpreted in ways that conflict, in particular, with the Qur'anic text itself and, more broadly, with the spirit of Islam. The study aims to highlight sound methodological frameworks for understanding the Noble Qur'an and to draw attention to the risks of interpretations that are detached from context and from the overarching meanings consistent with the spirit of Islam. The research problem lies in the absence of precise criteria among some exegetes, which at times leads to the emergence of interpretations that contradict the values and concepts established by the Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah. The study adopts both the descriptive and analytical approaches. The descriptive method identifies and presents to the reader selected instances of exegesis that, in our view, conflict with the Qur'anic text and the spirit of Islam in the works of some exegetes. The analytical method, on the other hand, undertakes a re-examination of those instances that are inconsistent with the spirit of Islam in general and with the Qur'anic text in particular, with the aim of producing a reading that is coherent with the sound understanding of the Qur'anic text. The study concludes with a number of findings, foremost among them identifying for the reader certain instances of Qur'anic exegesis in the works of some commentators that are inconsistent with the Qur'anic text, conceived as an integrated whole whose parts are interconnected like the organs of a single body, and that do not accord with the spirit of Islam. It further proposes a re-reading of such instances in a manner that brings them into alignment with both the Qur'anic text and the spirit of Islam.

**Keywords:** Strangeness; Qur'anic Exegesis (Tafsīr); Critique; Qur'anic Text; Prophetic Sunnah

## INTRODUCTION

The Noble Qur'an is the primary source of legislation and guidance in Islam. It has received profound attention from scholars throughout the ages, making the science of Qur'anic exegesis (tafsir) a vast field for their intellectual efforts in explaining its meanings and uncovering its implications. This exegetical heritage has contributed to a broad understanding of the Qur'anic text, reflecting the diversity of schools and approaches, as well as the varying environments and cultures in which the exegetes emerged. However, despite its great

scholarly value, this rich legacy is not without certain interpretations that exhibit a degree of peculiarity, or readings that appear distant from the general context of the Qur'anic text, or inconsistent with the spirit of Islam as manifested in the totality of its texts and objectives.

From this perspective, there emerges a need to reexamine some of these interpretations not with the intention of diminishing the scholars' efforts, but within the framework of scholarly review necessitated by the nature of the Islamic sciences, which aims to attain an understanding closer to the intended meaning of God Almighty. The Qur'anic text is not a collection of isolated verses to be understood apart from their contexts; rather, it is an integrated structure whose parts support one another, whose meanings are interrelated, and whose passages interpret each other within a coherent framework that reflects the unity of the message and its overarching objectives.

Some of the interpretations found in the books of tafsir may be understood in a way that creates ambiguity for the contemporary reader, especially when they are detached from their context or not read in light of the Qur'an's overarching principles and the general values of Islam. Therefore, engaging with this heritage requires a degree of methodological awareness that balances benefiting from the efforts of earlier scholars with a critical perspective that restores matters to their well-established foundations.

Accordingly, the idea of this study stems from an interest in reexamining certain exegetical passages that appear inconsistent with the spirit of Islam or with the general context of the Qur'anic text, in an attempt to understand them more precisely. This approach takes into account the unity of the text, respects its internal coherence, and highlights its meanings in their integrated form. In doing so, the study seeks to contribute to establishing a conscious and well-founded reading of the Noble Qur'an one that combines respect for the scholarly tradition with rigorous academic analysis thereby preserving the clarity of the Qur'anic text and bringing its meanings closer to proper understanding.

There is perhaps no more appropriate starting point for this topic than addressing the intended meaning of the term tafsir, which is discussed in the first section of this study.

## SECTION ONE: THE CONCEPT OF TAFSĪR (EXEGESIS)

Among the strange interpretations is what was narrated from Al-Hasan al-Basri regarding the meaning of "ignorance" in the Almighty's saying: "Allah only accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and then repent soon after; it is they to whom Allah will turn in forgiveness" [An-Nisa' 4:17]. He interpreted ignorance to mean: committing a sin while not knowing that it is a sin, and once informed that it is sinful, he abandons it (Yahya ibn Sallam ibn Abi Tha'labah, 2004, pp. 96–97). However, the interpretation that appears closer to correctness, in our view, is that the meaning of the verse is: whoever disobeys his Lord is ignorant until he refrains from the act of disobedience. (Mujahid ibn Jabr al-Makki al-Qurashi al-Makhzumi, 1989, p. 270).

If we consult lexicographers regarding the meaning of *tafsīr*, we find that they state: "*al-fasr* means clarification. One says *fasara al-shay'a* (with kasrah) or *yafsuru-hu* (with dammah), *fasran* and *fassara-hu*, meaning to elucidate or make it clear; *tafsīr* bears the same meaning. Ibn al-A'rābī said: *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl* (interpretation), and *ma'nā* (meaning) are synonymous. And in His statement, the Exalted says: '...and the best in explanation (*tafsīrā*)'; *al-fasr* also denotes the uncovering of that which is concealed (Ibn Manzur, 1994, P.55). As for the technical (terminological) definition of *tafsīr*, it is: the clarification of the intended meaning of an ambiguous expression. (Ibn Manzor, 1994, p.55)

In *Al-Ayn*, *tafsīr* is defined as the explanation and elaboration of the Book; one says *fassara-hu yafsir-hu fasran* and *fassara-hu tafsīran* (Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, n.d., p.247). In *Al-Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, it is stated that *al-fasr* means clarification and the unveiling of what is concealed, while *tafsīr* is the disclosure of the intended meaning of what is ambiguous (Al-Fīrūzābādī, 2005, p. 456). Scholars have differed as to whether *tafsīr* (exegesis) and *ta'wīl* (interpretation) are synonymous or distinct. A group of scholars, inclined toward the linguistic (Arabic) perspective, held that the two terms are synonymous—this being the view of the majority of early exegetes (Ibn al-Jawzī, 2001 p.12). Accordingly, whatever was not known or customary to the Arabs is not to be taken into account in argumentation, *tafsīr* (exegesis), or *ta'wīl* (interpretation). In this regard, al-Shāṭibī states: "The

Shari'ah is unlettered (*ummiyyah*), and whatever was not customary among the Arabs is not to be considered within it" (al-Shāṭibī, 1997, 4/261). He further affirms the same meaning, saying: "Once this is established, it becomes clear that the Shari'ah is unlettered and does not depart from what was familiar to the Arabs" (al-Shāṭibī, 1997, p.126).

If the meaning is already clear, there is no need for exegesis. Al-Shāṭibī states: "The science of *tafsīr* (exegesis) is required only insofar as the understanding of the intended meaning of the discourse depends upon it. If the intended meaning is already known, then any addition beyond that constitutes undue contrivance (*takalluf*). This becomes evident in the case of 'Umar ... This is illustrated by the report that when he recited, "and fruits and *abb*" (Qur'ān 80:31), he paused over the meaning of *abb*. This is a lexical (individual-word) meaning, and ignorance of it does not impair understanding of the compositional (contextual) meaning of the verse as a whole. For it is understood from the fact that God has informed, concerning human sustenance, that He sent down water from the sky and thereby brought forth numerous varieties of what serves as human food: some directly, such as grains, grapes, olives, and date-palms, and some indirectly, namely what serves as pasture for livestock in general. Thus, any further specification of each individual item within these categories is merely supplementary (al-Shāṭibī, 1997, p.126).

## SECTION TWO: FOUNDATIONS AND PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE QUR'ĀN

The foremost principle upon which the understanding of the intended meaning of the Qur'ānic text is based is that: "When exegetes differ regarding the interpretation of a verse, a clause, or a word from the Book of God, the most correct opinion is that which accords with the Qur'ān's own usage in contexts other than the point of dispute whether in individual lexical items or in syntactic constructions" (Bin Ḥusayn al-Ḥarbī, 2008, p.153). This means that construing the meanings of the Speech of God must accord with and remain consistent with the Qur'ān's own usage, its linguistic system, its particular conventions, and the established, customary senses of its expressions.

This same idea is affirmed by Ibn al-Qayyim when he states that the Qur'ān possesses its own distinctive conventions and established meanings that cannot be disregarded in its exegesis or in attempts to arrive at its intended sense. He further indicates that ignorance of this principle is a cause of the weakness found in many exegetical opinions, stating: "The Qur'ān has its own distinctive convention (*urf*) and established meanings; it is not appropriate to interpret it by other than these, nor is it permissible to explain it outside its own convention and the customary senses of its expressions. It must not be interpreted by meanings that are unfitting to it... Reflect carefully on this principle and keep it firmly in mind, for it will benefit you in recognizing the weakness and falsity of many exegetical opinions, and you will be certain that they are not what the Speaker—Exalted is He—intended by His speech" (Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, n.d., pp.27–28).

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah likewise affirms this same principle: that the meanings of the Speech of God must be construed in accordance with the Qur'ān's own usage, its linguistic system, its particular conventions, and the established senses of its expressions. He further adds that the Qur'ān must be read in light of the Prophetic Sunnah, the general usage of the Arabic language, and the statements of the Companions. These constitute three additional principles that are added to the first rule under discussion, namely: reading the Qur'ān with the aim of interpreting it in light of its language, its established usage, and the customary meanings of its expressions. He states: "If they differ, then the view of some of them does not constitute a proof against others, nor against those who come after them; rather, one should refer in such matters to the language of the Qur'ān, or the Sunnah, or the general usage of the Arabic language, or the statements of the Companions regarding it" (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1980, p. 46).

And al-Shāṭibī establishes that mastery of the Arabic language is not merely required for the exegete at the point of beginning the interpretation of the verses of God, but rather he affirms that it is a fundamental pillar of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning). He states: "Since the Qur'ān and the Sunnah have been revealed in the Arabic language, and since the Arabs had established conventions of usage by which clear speech and its apparent meaning are distinguished from what is ambiguous, and literal meaning from figurative usage, and the general from the

specific, and the unequivocal from the ambiguous, and the explicit text from its implications, and so on... It therefore became necessary for a student of the Sharī‘ah—on account of these two foundational principles—to possess knowledge of the Arabic language in all aspects of its discourse, and of what its meanings naturally convey in speech. Mastery of the Arabic language at this level thus became a pillar of ijtihād, as has been established among the majority of the scholars of uṣūl al-fiqh” (al-Shāṭibī, 1997 M, p. 4).

Al-Shāfi‘ī explains the various mechanisms of the Arabic language through which meaning is understood and general discourse is interpreted. He establishes that God, Exalted is He, revealed the Qur’ān in the language of the Arabs, and that its discourse conforms to their modes of expression. Accordingly, understanding the Qur’ān cannot be achieved except through mastery of the characteristics of the Arabic language, its methods, and its expressive structures, including due consideration of the Arabs’ linguistic usage when attempting to comprehend the Qur’ānic text.

Al-Shāfi‘ī states: “God addressed the Arabs in His Book in their language, in accordance with what they know of its meanings. Among the meanings they recognized was the expansiveness of their language, and that its nature allows for a statement to be expressed in a general and apparent form, while the general apparent sense is intended... And sometimes the first part of the expression suffices for understanding its latter part; and a general, apparent expression may be intended in its general sense, while including what is specific, and evidence for this may be derived from some part of what is addressed within it. And sometimes a general, apparent expression is intended to denote something specific, and there may be an outward meaning which, from its context, is understood to intend other than its apparent sense. All of this can be known from the beginning of the discourse, or its middle, or its end. And it may begin a statement in which the first part of its wording clarifies its last part, and it may also begin a statement in which the last part of its wording clarifies its first part. It may also express something in a way that defines it through meaning without explicit verbal clarification, just as indication (*ishārah*) conveys meaning.

Such usage is regarded as among the highest levels of eloquence in their speech, as it is known only to those endowed with knowledge among them, and not to those who are ignorant. They may also refer to a single thing by multiple names, and use a single name to denote multiple meanings. These aspects which I have described as being combined in the knowledge of the people of learning are, despite the differing ways by which they are known, clearly and distinctly understood” (al-Shāfi‘ī, 1938, p. 51–53). His statement, “God addressed the Arabs in His Book in their language,” indicates that the Qur’ān was revealed in accordance with the Arabic system of expression—namely in its vocabulary, stylistic structures, and semantic indications. This entails that the exegete must take into account the Arabs’ linguistic conventions and communicative usages in order to properly understand the text.

Al-Shāfi‘ī’s text in *al-Risālah* also points to multiple forms of semantic usage involved in understanding the text, including:

- A general expression intended to convey universality: where the wording encompasses all its instances without restriction or specification.
- A general expression intended to denote a specific meaning: this is one of the rhetorical devices whereby a general term is employed, while what is actually intended is a particular subset.
- An apparent (literal) expression intended to signify other than its apparent sense: that is, the presence of an indirect meaning understood from the context (such as metaphor or metonymy).

This diversity indicates that meaning is not derived from the apparent wording alone, but rather from the context and accompanying indicators (contextual clues).

Ibn Taymiyyah clarifies for us the most effective methods for understanding the Book of God. He states that these methods include interpreting the Qur’ān by the Qur’ān itself, where what is stated in a general form in one place is clarified in detail in another, what is absolute in one place is restricted in another, and what is ambiguous in one place is explained in another, and so on. He also states that among the best and most reliable methods for understanding the Book of God is interpreting the Qur’ān through the Sunna. Ibn Taymiyyah states: “The most

sound method in this regard is to interpret the Qur'ān by the Qur'ān itself; for whatever is stated in a concise or general form in one place is explained in detail in another, and whatever is brief in one place is expanded in another. If this proves difficult for you, then you should turn to the Sunnah, for it explains the Qur'ān and clarifies it. Rather, Imām Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī said: Everything that the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) judged is derived from his understanding of the Qur'ān. God, Exalted is He, said:

{إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِتَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِمَا أَرَاكَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَكُنَ لِلْخَائِنِينَ خَصِيمًا} (An-Nisā': 105)

“Indeed, We have sent down to you the Book in truth so that you may judge between people by what God has shown you. And do not be an advocate for the treacherous.

For this reason, the Messenger of God (peace and blessings be upon him) said: “Indeed, I have been given the Qur'ān and something like it along with it” (Ibn Ḥanbal, 2001. p. 410), meaning the Sunnah. The Sunnah is also revealed to him through divine inspiration (*wahy*), just as the Qur'ān is revealed, though it is not recited in the same manner as the Qur'ān is recited. Imām al-Shāfi'ī and other leading scholars have cited numerous proofs for this principle, which is not the place to elaborate here. The point is that you should seek the interpretation of the Qur'ān within the Qur'ān itself; if you do not find it there, then in the Sunnah; and if the interpretation is not found in either the Qur'ān or the Sunnah, then one should refer to the statements of the Companions. This is because they possessed greater knowledge of it due to their direct witnessing of the revelation and the circumstances specific to its descent, as well as their complete understanding, sound knowledge, and righteous practice” (Ibn Taymiyyah, 2001, p.12)

## EXAMPLES OF SOME STRANGE OR RARE INTERPRETATIONS AMONG EXEGETES

One of the strangest interpretations in this field is what al-Zamakhsharī presents in his exegesis *al-Kashshāf* regarding the verse of God Almighty:

عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذِنْتَ لَهُمْ حَتَّى يَتَّبِعَ لَكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَتَعْلَمَ الْكَذِبِينَ

“May Allah pardon you, [O Muhammad]. Why did you grant them permission [to stay behind], until it became clear to you who were truthful and you came to know the liars?”

where he claimed that its meaning is: “You erred and did what was wrong.” He says: “*May God pardon you* is a euphemism for wrongdoing, because pardon is its corollary, and its meaning is: you erred and did what was wrong and

لِمَ أَذِنْتَ لَهُمْ

“Why did you grant them permission?”

An explanation of what is implied by the expression “pardon.” Its meaning is: “Why did you grant them permission to remain behind from military expedition when they sought your permission and offered their excuses? Why did you not delay granting permission until it became clear to you who was truthful in his excuse and who was lying?” (al-Zamakhsharī, 1987, p. 274).

As for al-Qurtubī, the author of *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, he presented his discussion in interpreting the verse under consideration using the passive/reporting formula (*qīla* – “it was said”), stating: “The statement of God, Exalted is He:

عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذِنْتَ لَهُمْ

“May Allah pardon you; why did you grant them permission?”

It is said that it is an opening of speech, as when you say: ‘May God set you right, honor you, and have mercy on you! Such-and-such was the case.’ According to this interpretation, it is appropriate to pause at His saying:

عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ

“May Allah pardon you.”

He informed him of forgiveness before mentioning the sin so that his heart would not be overwhelmed with fear. And it is also said: the meaning is that God has forgiven you what may have been considered a fault in your granting them permission. According to this interpretation, it is not appropriate to pause at His saying: ‘May God pardon you,’ based on this estimation” (al-Qurṭubī, 1964 M, P.154).

As for al-Ṭabarī, the author of *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, he said: “The statement regarding the interpretation of His saying:”

عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُمْ حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَتَعْلَمَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

May Allah pardon you; why did you grant them permission until it became clear to you who were truthful and you came to know the liars?”

Abū Ja‘far said: “This is a rebuke from God—Exalted is His remembrance—by which He reproached His Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) for granting permission to those whom he allowed to remain behind when he set out to Tabūk to campaign against the Romans, from among the hypocrites.

He—Glorious is His praise—says: “May God pardon you, O Muḥammad, for what occurred on your part in granting permission to those hypocrites who sought your leave to abstain from going out with you and to remain behind you, before you were able to discern who among them was truthful and who was .

لم أذنت لهم

“Why did you grant them permission?”

or what reason did you grant them permission? (so that those who were truthful might become clear to you, and you might know the liars He says: “It was not proper for you to grant them permission to remain behind you when they said to you, ‘If we were able, we would have gone forth with you,’ until you would know who among them had a valid excuse for staying behind and who did not. Thus, your permission to those whom you allowed to remain behind would have been based on knowledge of their excuse, and you would have known who among them were liars—those who stayed behind out of hypocrisy and doubt concerning the religion of God” (al-Ṭabarī, n.d., pp. 272–273).

As for Ibn ‘Aṭīyah, in his exegesis *al-Muḥarrar al-Wajīz fī Tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘Azīz*, he sufficed with what al-Qurṭubī and al-Ṭabarī had stated in their commentaries (Ibn ‘Aṭīyah al-Andalusī, pp. 38–39).

And what the soul finds most reassuring in interpreting the saying of God, Exalted is He

عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ لِمَ أَذْنَتْ لَهُمْ حَتَّى يَتَبَيَّنَ لَكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَتَعْلَمَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

May Allah pardon you; why did you grant them permission, until it became clear to you who were truthful and you came to know the liars?”

is that it is an expression of honor, love, and nobility from God—Exalted is He—towards His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him), as God Almighty mentioned for

عَفَا اللَّهُ عَنْكَ

“May Allah pardon you.”

before any reproach directed at His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him):

لَمْ أَذِنْتَ لَهُمْ

“Why did you grant them permission?”

and this is more noble and more honorable than placing reproach before forgiveness, as in the saying of God Almighty, addressing the believers:

وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ إِذْ تَحُسُّونَهُمْ بِإِذْنِهِ حَتَّى إِذَا فَشِلْتُمْ وَتَنَزَّاعْتُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَوَاصَيْتُمْ مَنْ بَعْدَ مَا أَرَائَكُمْ مَا تُحِبُّونَ مِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرِيدُ الدُّنْيَا وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرِيدُ  
الْآخِرَةَ ثُمَّ صَرَفَكُمْ عَنْهُمْ لِيَبْتَلِيَكُمْ وَلَقَدْ عَفَا عَنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (Āl ‘Imrān: 152)

“And Allah had certainly fulfilled His promise to you when you were destroying them by His permission, until you lost courage and fell into dispute about the matter and disobeyed after He had shown you what you love. Among you are those who desire this world, and among you are those who desire the Hereafter. Then He turned you away from them to test you, and He has already pardoned you. And Allah is full of bounty to the believers.”

where God Almighty mentioned reproach and admonition to the believers first in His saying:

وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ وَعْدَهُ إِذْ تَحُسُّونَهُمْ بِإِذْنِهِ حَتَّى إِذَا فَشِلْتُمْ وَتَنَزَّاعْتُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ وَوَاصَيْتُمْ مَنْ بَعْدَ مَا أَرَائَكُمْ مَا تُحِبُّونَ مِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرِيدُ الدُّنْيَا وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرِيدُ  
الْآخِرَةَ ثُمَّ صَرَفَكُمْ عَنْهُمْ لِيَبْتَلِيَكُمْ (Āl ‘Imrān: 152)

“And Allah had certainly fulfilled His promise to you when you were defeating them by His permission, until you lost courage, disputed about the matter, and disobeyed after He had shown you what you love. Among you were those who desired the world, and among you were those who desired the Hereafter. Then He diverted you from them in order to test you.”

before forgiveness in His saying:

وَلَقَدْ عَفَا عَنْكُمْ وَاللَّهُ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (Āl ‘Imrān: 152)

“And He has already pardoned you. And Allah is full of bounty to the believers.”

Accordingly, “beginning the rebuke by informing him of forgiveness is a great act of honor and a noble subtlety, for He informed him of forgiveness before addressing him with the reproach itself. In this opening there is also a figurative expression indicating the lightness of the cause of the rebuke, as it is equivalent to saying: ‘It was not appropriate that

And the rebuke was cast in the form of a question about the reason, as an allusion that he only granted them permission due to an interpretation he had considered. He, on the whole, expected from him correctness, such that he would be asked about something of this nature, in the manner of a question used by a seeker of knowledge who is in pursuit of understanding. And this is one of the forms of gentle expression in censure or reproach, whereby the one expressing disapproval presents himself as if he is merely inquiring about a reason that has remained unclear to him” (Ibn ‘Āshūr, 1984, p. 210).

And among the strange interpretations is what many exegetes have held when they claimed that Ya‘qūb (Jacob), peace be upon him, instructed his sons to enter through separate gates rather than a single gate, out of fear that they might be afflicted by the evil eye, and that is in His saying

وَقَالَ يَبْنَی لَا تَدْخُلُوا مِنْ بَابٍ وَاحِدٍ وَادْخُلُوا مِنْ أَبْوَابٍ مُتَفَرِّقَةٍ

“And he said, ‘O my sons, do not enter through one gate but enter through different gates.’”

Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī states in his interpretation of the saying of Ya‘qūb (Jacob), peace be upon him: “The Exalted God informed us that Ya‘qūb, peace be upon him, commanded them to enter through separate gates, out of concern for them—either from the harm of the evil eye or from exposure to an enemy” (Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, n.d., 4/4). Thus, he places the possibility of harm from the evil eye before the fear of exposure to an enemy

And another author includes this under the category of ‘rare interpretations and astonishing exegetical readings,’ stating in his explanation of the saying of Ya‘qūb (peace be upon him): ‘The majority held that he feared for them the evil eye, as they were people of awe and beauty. It is also said that he feared the king might learn of their strength and power and therefore intend evil against them out of concern for his kingdom’ (al-Kirmānī, n.d., P.544)

Among the strange indeed, astonishing interpretations are those advanced by exegetes regarding the identity of the third man mentioned in the Almighty’s statement in *Surah Ya-Sin*:

“When We sent to them two...”

إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَيْكُمْ مُّرْسَلُونَ (yaSīn: 20)

“When We sent to them two messengers, but they denied them both, so We strengthened them with a third, and they said, ‘Indeed, we are messengers to you.’”

This is because the intertextual connections between verses from *Surah Tā Hā* and other verses throughout the Qur’an bring to light a reality that the exegetes did not point out, but which our teacher, Professor Dr. Tammam Hassan, highlighted. The essence of his view is that the third messenger—by whom God strengthened the two messengers sent to the people of the town—is in fact the believing man mentioned in *Surah Ghāfir* and *Surah Yā Sīn*. God, Exalted be He, says:

﴿ وَقَالَ رَجُلٌ مُؤْمِنٌ مِّنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَكْتُمُ إِيمَانَهُ أَتَقْتُلُونَ رَجُلًا أَن يَقُولَ رَبِّيَ اللَّهُ ﴾ (Ghāfir: 28)

“And a believing man from the family of Pharaoh who concealed his faith said: ‘Would you kill a man because he says, “My Lord is Allah?”’”

﴿ وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَقْصَا الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى قَالَ يَفْقَهُوا أَنِّي أَتَّبِعُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ ﴾ (Yā Sīn: 20)

“And from the farthest part of the city came a man running. He said, ‘O my people, follow the messengers.’”

﴿ (Al-Qaṣaṣ: 20) وَجَاءَ رَجُلٌ مِّنْ أَقْصَا الْمَدِينَةِ يَسْعَى قَالَ يُمُوسَى إِنَّ الْمَلَأَ يَأْتَمِرُونَ بِكَ لِيَقْتُلُوكَ فَاخْرُجْ إِنِّي لَكَ مِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ ﴾

“And a man came from the farthest part of the city, running. He said, ‘O Moses, indeed the chiefs are conspiring against you to kill you, so leave [the city]; indeed, I am to you of the sincere advisers.’”

Tammam Hassan comments on verses from *Surah Yā Sīn* as follows:

﴿ وَأَضْرَبَ لَهُمْ مَثَلًا أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ \* إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَيْكُمْ مُّرْسَلُونَ \* قَالُوا مَا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا وَمَا أَنْزَلَ الرَّحْمَنُ مِن شَيْءٍ إِن أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَكْذِبُونَ \* قَالُوا رَبُّنَا يَعْلَمُ إِنَّا إِلَيْكُمْ لَمُرْسَلُونَ \* وَمَا عَلَيْنَا بِالْبَلِّغِ الْمُبِينِ \* قَالُوا إِنَّا تَطِيرُنَا بِكُمْ لَيْلٍ لَّمْ تَنْهَوْا لَنَا جَمْعَكُمْ وَلَيْسَتَكُمْ مِّنَّا عَدَابُ الْإِيمِ \* قَالُوا طَائِفُكُمْ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ ذُكِّرْتُمْ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ \* وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَقْصَا الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى قَالَ يَفْقَهُوا أَنِّي أَتَّبِعُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ \* أَتَّبِعُوا مَن لَا يَسْئَلُكُمْ أَجْرًا وَهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ \* وَمَا لِي لَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ \* ءَأَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِهِ ءَالِهَةً إِن يُرِدْنِ الرَّحْمَنُ بِضُرٍّ لَّا تُغْنِ عَنِّي شَفَعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُنْقِذُون \* إِنِّي إِذًا لَّفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ \* إِنِّي ءَأَمَنْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ فَاسْمَعُون \* قِيلَ ادْخُلِ الْجَنَّةَ قَالَ لَيْلَيْتُ قَوْمِي يَعْلَمُونَ \* بِمَا غَفَرَ لِي رَبِّي وَجَعَلَنِي مِنَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ ﴾ (Yā Sīn: 13-27)

“And present to them an example: the people of the city, when the messengers came to it. When We sent to them two, but they denied them, so We strengthened them with a third, and they said, ‘Indeed, we are messengers to you.’ They said, ‘You are nothing but human beings like us, and the Most Merciful has not revealed anything; you are only lying.’ They said, ‘Our Lord knows that we are indeed messengers to you, and our duty is only clear

conveyance.’ They said, ‘Indeed, we see an evil omen in you. If you do not desist, we will surely stone you, and a painful punishment from us will surely touch you.’ They said, ‘Your omen is with yourselves. Is it because you have been reminded? Rather, you are a transgressing people.’ And from the farthest part of the city came a man running. He said, ‘O my people, follow the messengers. Follow those who ask no reward of you, and they are rightly guided. And why should I not worship the One who created me, and to whom you will be returned? Should I take besides Him gods whose intercession, if the Most Merciful intends harm for me, will not benefit me at all, nor will they save me? Indeed, then I would be in clear error. Indeed, I have believed in your Lord, so listen to me.’ It was said, ‘Enter Paradise.’ He said, ‘If only my people knew how my Lord has forgiven me and made me among the honored.’”

Tammam Hassan comments on these verses as follows: “There is a Sender, three messengers, and a town to which the three messengers were sent. Then there is the conveyance of the message and its denial, the ill-omening of the messengers, and the threat of stoning and punishment. Finally, there comes the distinctive role performed by the third messenger, with whom God reinforced the efforts of the first two. So, what did the exegetes say—upon which they almost unanimously agreed?” (Tammam Hassan, 2001, p. 173). He then presents—may God have mercy on him—the views of some exegetes, such as Al-Qurtubi, Abu Hayyan al-Andalusi, Al-Nasafi, and Al-Shanqiti—clarifying the weakness of their interpretations regarding the identity of the third messenger mentioned in *Surah Yā Sīn*.

(Yā Sīn: 14) إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَيْكُم مُّرْسَلُونَ

“When We sent to them two messengers, but they denied them both, so We strengthened them with a third, and they said, ‘Indeed, we are messengers to you.’”

#### A. Al-Qurtubi:

“This town is Antioch, according to all the exegetes, as reported by al-Māwardī. The ‘messengers’ were sent by Jesus by the command of the Lord, and they are Ṣādiq, Ṣadūq, and Shālūm—the last of whom is the third.” (Al-Qurtubi, n.d., 15/18)

#### B. Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ:

“The town is Antioch; there is no اختلاف (difference of opinion) regarding the account. They were three, united in their coming, though differing as to the time of their arrival. Their names are Ṣādiq, Ṣadūq, and Sham‘ūn.” (Abū Ḥayyān, 1993, P. 313)

#### C. Al-Nasafi:

“The town is Antioch, and the messengers were sent by Jesus to its people. The first two are Ṣādiq and Ṣadūq, and the third is Sham‘ūn.” (Al-Nasafi, 1995 M, P. 395–396)

#### D. Al-Shanqīṭī:

He did not address the account at all, despite the presence of other Qur’anic passages that help clarify it, even though he maintains that his work explains the Qur’an by means of the Qur’an itself.

He then clarifies—may God have mercy on him—the weakness of what our esteemed exegetes, such as al-Qurtubi, Abu Hayyan, al-Nasafi, and others (may God have mercy on them all), relied upon in their interpretation of the identity of the third messenger in *Surah Yā Sīn*, saying:

Let us first examine the position of the exegetes in their treatment of the concepts indicated by the text, and let the Sender be the first of these concepts. God Almighty says:”

{ إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ }

“When We sent to them two messengers.”

He attributes the sending to Himself, Glorified be He, whereas the exegetes attribute the sending to Jesus, peace be upon him, even though he is not mentioned in the context of this passage. It is as if some of them, such as al-Qurtubi for example, sensed this inconsistency and therefore added that the sending attributed to Jesus was by

the command of the Lord. As for the messengers, the names of two of them are Arabic, while the third has a Hebrew name. I do not know whether the two were considered Arabic in the view of the exegetes, or whether the Jews used to give their children Arabic names. If we look at the town that was the destination of the sending, we find that it is Antioch, yet the exegetes did not cite any historical evidence to support their identification of this town.

It was important that there should be a historical maintained. (Tammam witness to the delivery of the message to the people of this town, and to their denial of the messengers, their ill-omening of them, and their threats of stoning at one time and punishment at another. Finally, the exegetes should have clarified for us how the effort of the third messenger served as support for the first and second messengers. This, in essence, is the point of weakness in what the exegetes have Hassan, 2001, pp. 173–174). In any case, the intertextual relationship between the verses of *Surah Yā Sīn* (13–27) and what is mentioned regarding the story of Moses, peace be upon him, in other surahs such as Al-A‘rāf, Ṭā Hā, Al-Mu‘minūn, Ash-Shu‘arā’, Al-Qaṣaṣ, Ghāfir, and Ad-Dukhān, among other surahs, remains evident.

I say that the intertextual relationship established between the verses of *Surah Yā Sīn* (13–27) and what is mentioned in the previously cited surahs regarding the story of Moses, peace be upon him, serves as evidence against the exegetes’ view that the town referred to in the Almighty’s statement is:

﴿أَصْحَابُ الْقَرْيَةِ إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ﴾

“The people of the town, when the messengers came to it.”

It is “Antioch.”

Tammam Hassan states, clarifying the correctness of his view that the town mentioned in *Surah Yā Sīn* is Egypt, not Antioch as the exegetes maintain, and that the messenger who supported Moses and Aaron is the believing man from the family of Pharaoh, saying:

The following is an interpretation of these verses (*Surah Yā Sīn: 13–27*) in light of the intertextual relationship between them and other surahs:

﴿وَأَضْرَبَ لَهُمْ مَثَلًا أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ﴾

“And present to them an example: the people of the town.”

It is Egypt, as evidenced by what follows thereafter.

﴿إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ﴾

“When the messengers came to it.”

They are three: Moses, Aaron, and the believing man from the family of Pharaoh.

﴿إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ﴾

“When We sent to them two messengers.”

God Almighty says: ﴿أَذْهَبَ أَنْتَ وَأَخُوكَ بِآيَاتِي﴾ [Ṭā Hā: 42]

“Go, you and your brother, with My sign

﴿فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ﴾

“Then We strengthened (them) with a third.

God Almighty says: ﴿وَقَالَ رَجُلٌ مُّؤْمِنٌ مِّنْ آلِ فِرْعَوْنَ يَكْتُمُ إِيمَانَهُ أَتَقْتُلُونَ رَجُلًا أَن يَقُولَ رَبِّيَ اللَّهُ﴾ (Ghāfir: 28)

“And a believing man from the family of Pharaoh who concealed his faith said: ‘Do you kill a man for saying, ‘My Lord is Allah’

﴿وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَقْصَا الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَىٰ قَالَ يَفْقَهُوا أَمْرًا مِّنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ﴾ (Yā Sīn: 20)

“And there came from the farthest part of the city a man, running. He said: ‘O my people, follow the messengers.’”

﴿وَجَاءَ رَجُلٌ مِّنْ أَقْصَا الْمَدِينَةِ يَسْعَىٰ قَالَ يُوسَىٰ إِنَّ الْمَلَأَ يَأْتَمِرُونَ بِكَ لِيَقْتُلُوكَ فَاخْرُجْ إِنِّي لَكَ مِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ﴾ (Al-Qaṣaṣ: 20)

“And a man came from the farthest part of the city, running. He said: ‘O Moses, indeed the chiefs are conspiring against you to kill you, so leave (the city). Indeed, I am to you of the sincere advisors.’”

﴿وَقَالَ الَّذِي ءَامَنَ يَفْقَهُوا إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ مِّثْلَ يَوْمِ الْأَحْزَابِ﴾ (Ghāfir: 30)

“And the one who believed said: ‘O my people, indeed I fear for you the like of the day of the factions.’”

﴿وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ يُوسُفُ مِنْ قَبْلُ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ﴾ (Ghāfir: 34)

And Joseph had certainly come to you before with clear proofs.”

﴿إِنَّا إِلَيْكُمْ لُمُرْسَلُونَ﴾

“Indeed, we are messengers to you.”

God Almighty says: ﴿إِنَّا رَسُولُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾ (Ash-Shu‘arā’: 16)

“Indeed, we are messengers of the Lord of the worlds.”

﴿مَا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا﴾

“You are only human beings like us.”

God Almighty says: ﴿فَقَالُوا أَأُتَوْنَ لِبَشَرَيْنِ مِثْلِنَا﴾ (Al-Mu‘minūn: 47)

“So they said: ‘Shall we believe in two human beings like ourselves?’”

﴿إِن أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَكْذِبُونَ﴾

“You are only telling lies.”

﴿فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَكَانُوا مِنَ الْمُهْلَكِينَ﴾ (Al-Mu‘minūn: 47)

“So they denied them both, and thus they became among the destroyed.”

﴿قَالُوا إِنَّا تَطَيَّرْنَا بِكُمْ﴾

“They said: ‘Indeed, we consider you a bad omen.’”

God Almighty says: (Al-A‘rāf, 7:131) ﴿وَإِنْ تُصِيبْهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَطَّيَّرُوا بِمُوسَىٰ وَمَنْ مَّعَهُ﴾

But when an evil affliction befalls them, they attribute it to Moses and those with him.”

﴿لَئِنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهُوا لَنَرْجُمَنَّكُمْ﴾

“If you do not desist, we will surely stone you.”

﴿وَإِنِّي عُدْتُ بِرَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ أَنْ تَرْجُمُونِ﴾ (Ad-Dukhān: 20)

“And indeed, I have sought refuge in my Lord and your Lord lest you stone me.”

﴿وَلَيَمَسَّنَّكُم مِّنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ﴾

“And there will surely touch you from us a painful punishment.”

God Almighty says: (Ash-Shu‘arā’ 26:19) ﴿قَالَ لَئِنْ اتَّخَذْتُ إِلَٰهًا غَيْرِي لَأَجْعَلَنَّكَ مِنَ الْمَسْجُونِينَ﴾

“If you take a god other than me, I will surely make you one of the imprisoned

That is the intertextual relationship between the story of “*the people of the town when the messengers came to them*” (Qur’an 36:13–27) and the Qur’anic indications pointing to the idea that the intended referents of these verses are Moses, Aaron, and the believing man. (Tammam Hassan, 2001, pp. 173–174)

## CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

It becomes clear through this study that Qur’anic exegesis is not merely a linguistic process or a narrative account detached from the text. Rather, it is a disciplined scholarly practice based on understanding the language of the Qur’an within its Arabic framework, considering its specific usage, interrelating its verses, and then drawing upon the Sunnah and the statements of the early Muslim scholars when necessary. It also appears that exegetical differences in certain passages arose due to reliance on unverified historical reports or external assumptions not supported by explicit Qur’anic evidence, which led to variation in identifying certain figures and events. In light of the Qur’anic intertextual approach, it becomes evident that the Qur’an interprets itself, and that the internal relationships between its verses can reveal meanings that may not emerge when relying solely on external narrations.

From this perspective, the study reached the following findings:

1. The original meaning of *tafsir* is “revealing and clarifying meaning,” and in early linguistic usage there is a strong overlap between *tafsir* and *ta’wil*, to the extent that many scholars consider them synonymous.
2. Understanding the Qur’anic text is closely tied to established Arabic linguistic usage and to the Qur’an’s own stylistic conventions, as affirmed by al-Shatibi, Ibn al-Qayyim, and others.
3. Neglecting the “internal Qur’anic linguistic convention” and relying on unsupported historical narrations may lead to wide differences in interpreting textual meanings, as seen in the interpretation of the story of the People of the Town in Surah Yā Sīn.
4. The method of interpreting the Qur’an by the Qur’an itself, then by the Sunnah, and then by the statements of the Companions represents a more reliable approach to determining meaning than relying solely on later exegetical reports.
5. Some exegetical opinions regarding Qur’anic narratives—such as identifying the town as Antioch or naming the messengers—lack direct Qur’anic evidence or conclusive historical proof, which makes them open to critical reconsideration.
6. Reading the Qur’an through internal intertextual relations between its surahs reveals its thematic and semantic unity and opens new horizons for understanding some Qur’anic narratives.
7. Applying the intertextual approach as presented by Dr. Tammam Hassan represents an attempt to move beyond traditional exegesis toward a structural reading of the Qur’anic text based on internal textual relations.
8. Reconsidering certain exegetical assumptions does not imply rejecting the classical heritage, but rather reactivating it within a critical framework grounded in the Qur’anic text itself.

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