

The Qur'anic Attitude Towards the People of the Book

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Abstract

This thesis is a study of the references in the Qur'an to the People of the Book which, for Muslims, represent the theoretical groundwork of relations with them. It also considers the practical aspect of such relations as reflected in the Prophet's relationship with the People of the Book during his life. In this way, it combines both the theory represented by the Qur'an and the practical application of the same by the Prophet. By looking at these two aspects, we aim to provide a more comprehensive perspective of the characteristics of the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book, and to counter and correct some of the numerous misrepresentations and misunderstandings that have existed throughout history regarding the image of the Qur'an in the minds of Muslims and non-Muslims.

The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter One attempts to place this study in a broader context, offering a historical background to the environment in which the Qur'an was revealed and in which the Prophet was brought up, and examining the influence of Judaeo-Christian culture on the people of western Arabia. Chapter Two illustrates the Qur'anic attitude towards the beliefs of the People of the Book. Chapter Three considers the Qur'anic approach towards the scriptures of the People of the Book. Chapter Four is a sketch of the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims as depicted in the Qur'an. Chapter Five focuses attention on nine verses in particular which demonstrate the Qur'anic relationship with the People of the Book. Chapter Six is devoted to the Prophet's relationship with the People of the Book as a reflection of the teachings of the Qur'an. We conclude by considering some of the implications of this study for the future of Muslim-Christian relations today, and, in particular, the chances of an increase in peaceful coexistence between the two communities.

Declaration

I, the undersigned, do hereby truly declare that this thesis has been written by me and does not represent the work of any other persons.

Mohammad Khair N. A. Al-Ali

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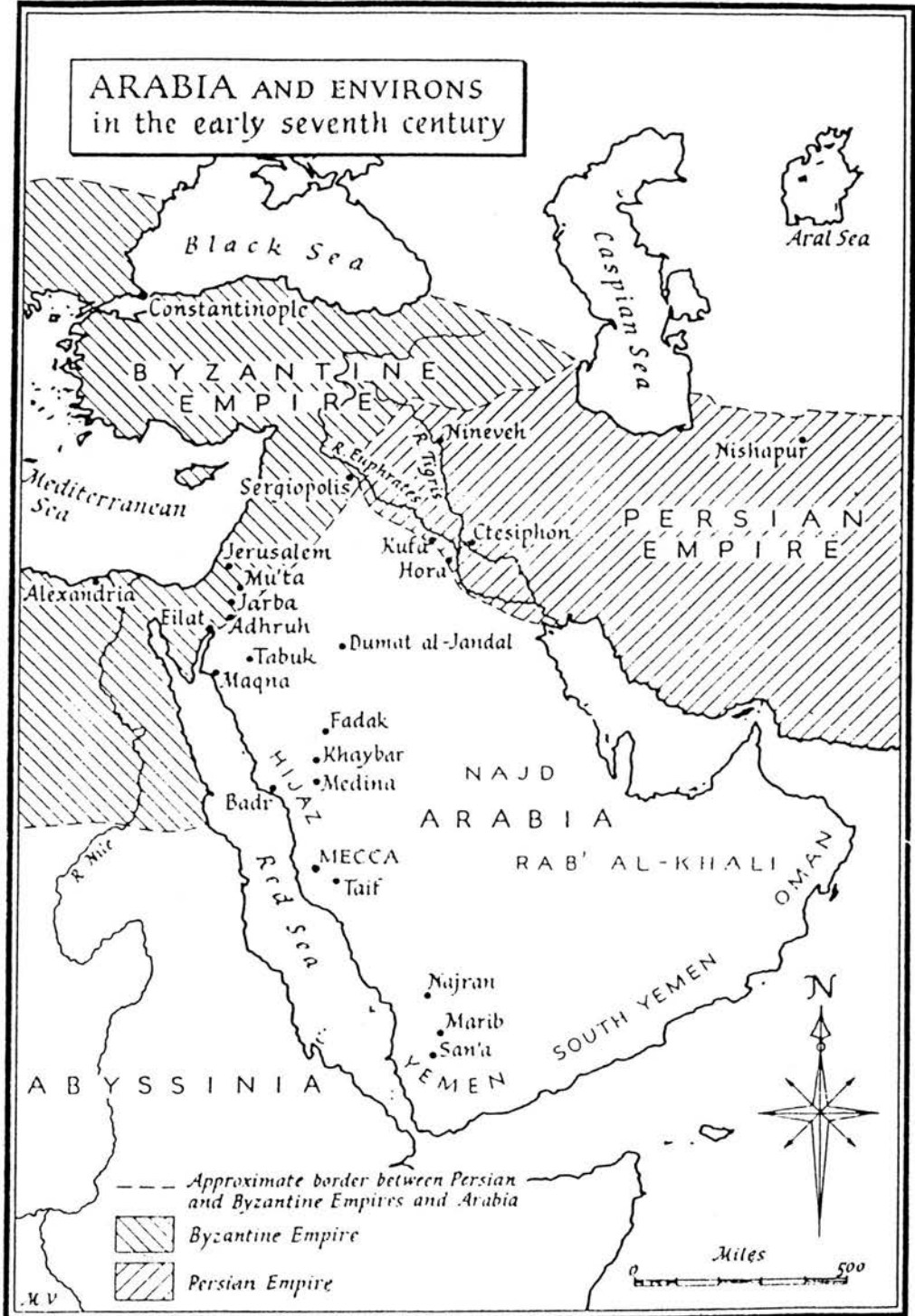
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ARABIA AND ENVIRONS
in the early seventh century



Introduction

The Qur'an, for Muslims, is the final message of Allah which was revealed to the Prophet for all mankind. It is incumbent on them to recite a portion of the Qur'an daily in their prayers. Muslims believe in the virtue of memorising the whole Qur'an; therefore many Muslims endeavour to memorise the Qur'an from an early age by heart. Although there is a gap between the teachings of the Qur'an and the life-style of Muslims, the Qur'an remains as their general code of life. Many historical and political factors play their part in drawing the image of the Qur'anic attitude to the People of the Book. The need for a better understanding of the Qur'anic teachings was never as great as it is today. The presence of Muslim populations in every country of the West has made it necessary for Muslims and non-Muslims to understand what the Qur'an teaches regarding the relationship between people of different faiths. World communities are coming into close encounter with one another more than ever, culturally, politically and economically. This close contact between nations demands greater mutual understanding of beliefs, values and life-styles of the different people of the world. People of different faith can live together and differences should not be a cause of conflict or a source of discord.

Those who are overwhelmed by the achievements of science during the last two centuries believe that religion has exhausted its purpose. For others, however, religion is an important human need which cannot easily be discarded or pushed to the sidelines of this current life. Perhaps it is true to say that none can dismiss religion as irrelevant to the chief concerns of this century. Some people also still believe that only religion can inspire man to rise above himself and suffer for noble ideals, otherwise material rewards will

occupy a man's soul, and then greed, selfishness and lust will become the only motives behind his deeds. For Muslims, religion is of great importance and the Qur'an remains the most important source which directs and moulds their relationships with people of other faiths. Therefore, it is important to understand this relationship, and devote more study to the subject in order to draw a clearer picture of the Qur'anic approach to Jews and Christians.

Writing about the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book is an essential matter, because it concerns the external relationships of Muslims with the outside world, the West in particular. However, when writing about the external relations of Islam and Muslims with the outside world in current days, we are challenged by three essential matters: firstly, the position of the Qur'an in directing the external relations of the Muslim World; secondly, the extent to which 'religion' in general is responsible for shaping the international relations of the world states; and thirdly, the question of power and the consequences of its exercise. This thesis does not aim to solve these three matters. However, it aims to provide a complete picture of the relation between the Muslims and the People of the Book as presented by the Qur'an. In order to provide an example of this relation we combine both the theoretical picture of the external relations of the Muslims with the People of the Book represented by the Qur'an and the practical picture of this relation represented by the Prophet. In this way, this thesis provides an example of this relation in a period when the Qur'an was fully responsible for shaping the Islamic state and its polity in Madina. It also illustrates how the Prophet exercised his power in Madina, and examines how this power influenced his attitude towards others.

Today, the world is in great need of religious tolerance. However, the aim of this paper is not to search for reconciliation and appeasement, or search for common ground in beliefs with the people of other religions - although there are many - but to show to what extent the Qur'an tolerates the differences between them and to bring together the main Qur'anic verses which sketch the whole picture of external relations with them.

Geographically speaking, this study is restricted to the Ḥijāz, the cradle of Islam, although there is a need to shed light on some surrounding areas, namely, Yemen, Ethiopia, Ḥīra and Syria. The study deals with a limited period, focusing on the period of time covered by the life of the Prophet from his birth in Makka shortly before the advent of Islam until his death after the full political establishment of a fully-functioning Islamic polity in Madina. Restricting this study to the Prophet's time provides an early picture of the practical attitude embodied by the Prophet, whose life is understood by Muslims to be the best reflection of the Qur'anic teachings.

During several visits to churches and meetings with the People of the Book, in particular Christians, I found that there is a need for a study which explores the characteristic of the Qur'anic approach to the People of the Book. In my daily direct contact with Muslims in mosques and Islamic centres, I found that Muslims also need a greater understanding of the Qur'anic attitude to the People of the Book. I also found that there is a need for a study which provides the whole picture of the relation between the Muslims and the People of the Book. These reasons were not the only reasons which motivated me to undertake this study, since I also found that there is a need for reviewing much of what has been written about the subject. Therefore, this study provides a more comprehensive framework for studying the relation between the Muslims and the People

of the Book, aiming to benefit both Muslims and non-Muslims, and increase the chances of peaceful coexistence between them.

Dealing with the translations of the Qur'an is often beset by many difficulties, and it is often difficult to translate some of its verses in a complete and literal manner from the original Arabic into English. One of the reasons which make it difficult to reproduce the text in English is that a multiplicity of meanings in the Arabic often enables a single word to yield a whole group of concepts. Thus it is true to say that 'interpretation' is often a more appropriate word to use than 'translation'.

This thesis deals with five categories of verses which can be considered as references to the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book. These are: verses which provide a historical background and highlight the environment in which the Qur'an was revealed and in which the Prophet was brought up; verses which demonstrate the Qur'anic attitude towards their beliefs and scriptures; verses which reveal their attitude towards the Muslims in both a moral and a physical way; verses which emphasize the Qur'anic attitude towards dealings with them; and verses which point to many events in the Prophet's encounter with the People of the Book.

According to the Qur'an, some of its verses cannot be understood without consulting other verses as well as expert scholars. The Qur'an itself has given the basic rule of interpretation, contained in the following verse:

He is the One Who revealed to you this scripture. Of its verses, some are decisive, constituting the essence of the scripture; others are allegorical. Those who harbour doubts in their hearts dwell on the allegorical verses, to

create confusion and misrepresentation. No one knows its interpretation except Allah and those well-grounded in knowledge.¹

This verse tells us that the Qur'an has two types of verses one of which needs to be referred to expert scholars. Those verses whose meanings are clear and decisive, forming the bases of the Qur'anic teachings, are called *muḥkamāt*, while those with allegorical meanings, whose interpretation should not be attempted by non-specialists but should rather be left to the experts in the field, are called *mutashabihāt*.

This thesis, in order to clarify the relation between the Muslims and non-Muslims, assumes, as most Muslims do that the Qur'an alone cannot be understood without consulting other sources, such as the *ḥadīth* and *sīra*. Some writers, however, especially earlier Western scholars, have refused to accept the validity of the *ḥadīth* because, according to them, it mostly suffered from falsification. Therefore, this thesis, by citing mostly from al-Bukhārī (810- 870 A.H.), attempts to rely on only the most respected *ḥadīth* scholars among Muslims who have done their utmost to purify the *ḥadīth* from falsification.

The above-mentioned categories are studied in the light of the works of Qur'anic commentators, biographers of the Prophet, and traditionists. Although I refer to many commentaries, I have mostly relied on three Qur'anic commentaries: firstly, that of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH), the earliest major written work of *tafsīr*;² secondly, that of Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH), who lets one part of the revelation clarify the meaning of another part, and, if

¹ Q. 3:7.

² Al-Dhahabī, *al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, 1/209. See also Aḥmad Amīn, *Fajr al-Islam*, p. 274. However, some written works of *tafsīr* began earlier, such as those of Mujāhid ibn Jabbār al-Makkī who died in 122 A.H., Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Khurasānī who died in 150 A.H. See al-Sawwāf, "Early Tafsīr: A Survey of Qur'anic Commentary up to 150 A.H.", *Islamic Perspective*, ed. Khurshid Aḥmad and Z. Ansārī, pp. 135-145.

no such clarification can be found, refers to *ḥadīths*; and thirdly, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671 AH), who pays much attention to matters related to the *aḥkām*. These commentators, although they cite many views regarding one verse, all incline in the end to one view. After studying their argument about the verses in question, I mostly take the view which has the agreement of these mentioned commentators alongside my own understanding and other elements which help to better elucidate the meaning of the Qur'an., such as the context of the references, which includes the context of the *sūra* and the verses under examination, as well as the general perspective of Islam, its teachings, and its world-view. One also notes that there are many verses are associated with specific people, events and places. This association helps in clarifying the time and the meaning of these verses. Therefore, I have consulted the literature on the occasions of revelation, that is, the historical background providing the primary reason or cause underlying the revelation of a Qur'anic portion or verse to the Prophet.

Many western writers advance a number of assertions regarding the Qur'an and attribute its authorship to the Prophet. For example, they assert that the Prophet derived the Qur'an from the Judaism and Christianity prevailing in the Hijāz at the time.¹ They also assert that the Qur'anic language is not pure Arabic and includes a large number of words derived from Hebrew or Syriac.² In order to justify their assertions, they assume that the Prophet himself developed the Qur'an gradually.³

¹ See, for example, Bell, *The Origin of Islam*. And also see, Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*.

² See, for example, Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'an*.

³ Such as, Bell, *The Origin of Islam*. Watt wrote a review of Bell's assumptions and added more assumptions to those of Bell in his book, *The Dating of the Qur'an*.

However, the Qur'an, according to Muslims, is the divine book of Islam which contains the tenets and religious laws upon which the faith of Islam is founded and is also the source of its morals and ethics. Accordingly, Muslims believe that some people, from the past and up to the present, have done their utmost to prove that the Qur'an is not of divine origin. In the past, the pagans of Makka, for instance, did everything in their power to challenge the belief that the Qur'an was a divine revelation:

Naught is this but a lie which he has forged and others have helped him
at.¹

They also described the Qur'an as being tales of the ancients, which the Prophet had caused to be written.² They also asserted that Muhammad was taught by a man.³ They even alleged that the Qur'an was the work of a magician or a priest, in order to deny that it was a divine revelation inspired to Muhammad to guide mankind.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the authenticity of the Qur'an, or to look into internal or external evidence for the divine authorship of the Qur'an. Rather, this thesis starts from the assumption that, according to the Muslims, the Qur'an represents the code of external relations with the outside world. This thesis considers that the Qur'an we have is the exact words of the Qur'an which was in the hand of the Prophet. Some Western writers have pointed to this and remarked that:

¹ Q. 25:4.

² Q. 25:5.

³ Q. 16:103.

In the Koran we have, beyond doubt, the exact words of Muhammad without subtraction and without addition.¹

Regarding the *ḥadīth*, some Western scholars have taken a sceptical approach to the *ḥadīth*. The whole body of *ḥadīth* literature has been called into question and it has been suggested that none of the traditions surviving can be accepted as genuine at face value. The conclusion of one of the more prominent of these writers reads as follows:

In fine, we may from all that has been said, conclude that tradition cannot be received with too much caution, or exposed to too rigorous a criticism; and that no important statement should be accepted as securely proved by tradition alone, unless there be some farther ground of probability, analogy, or collateral evidence in its favour.²

When dealing with references in the Qur'an, Western writers attempt to isolate them from other sources, such as *ḥadīth* and *sīra*. However, according to the majority of the Muslims, the *ḥadīth* is the second source of Islam after the Qur'an. The Prophet was commanded by Allah to relate to people everything that had been inspired to him by Allah and in addition the explanation of the Qur'an.

And We have also sent down unto you the Qur'an that you may explain clearly to men what is sent down to them.³

¹ For example see, Smith, *Muhammad and Muhammadanism*, 1874, p. 21. Burton although he accused the *ḥadīth* of falsification also states:

'What we have today in our hands is the *Mushaf* of Muhammad.'

See, Burton, *The Collection of The Qur'an*, pp. 239-240.

² Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. ix.

³ Q. 16:44.

The Qur'an mentions that the duty of the Prophet is to clarify the truth to people when there is a dispute:

And We have not sent down the Book to you except that you may explain clearly unto them those things in which they differ.¹

According to Muslims, the Prophet's interpretation of the Qur'an, his conduct, his actions, and his advice are all essential elements of the *ḥadīth*. The Prophet himself referred to the necessity of adhering to his *ḥadīth* in his famous farewell speech in which he said:

I have left two matters for you and if you adhere to them both you will never be misled. They are Allah's Book and my *sunna*.²

There is no denying that there are many false fabricated traditions and sayings that have been ascribed to the Prophet but the learned scholars of Islam were aware of this possibility and accordingly scrutinized most of them. The Qur'an has stated a method for judging any matter:

O you who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain the truth.³

The Prophet also warned people against attributing any false *ḥadīth* to him saying:

¹ Q. 16:64. See also 3:32, 4:65, 4:80, 33:36 and 59:7.

² *Sunna*: The legal ways, orders, acts of worship and statements of the Prophet which have become models to be followed by the Muslims. See *Mishkāt al-Masabīh*, 1/66.

³ Q. 49:6.

He who attributes falsehood to me intentionally shall dwell in the fire of Hell.¹

As a result, Muslim scholars have done their utmost to confirm authentic *ḥadīths* and to reject false and fabricated versions.

The *ḥadīth*, according to the Muslims, provides an interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an by the Prophet himself. For example, Muslims perform their daily prayers according to the manner and instructions described in detail in the *ḥadīth*, because the manner of performing one's prayers is not mentioned in the Qur'an. There are many other similar matters that are explained in the *ḥadīth*. Therefore, the use of *ḥadīth* in this thesis is to support the references of the Qur'an and not the other way round with the verses of the Qur'an having used to support the *ḥadīth*. This indicates that the *ḥadīths* used in this thesis are those which do not contradict with any of the Qur'anic statements but which clarify their meaning and show how the Prophet practised them.

The third source is the *sīra* which consists of reports or *ḥadīths* but arranged in a chronological order. This thesis, although relying mostly on Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra* (85-150 A.H.), also refers to some other biographers, such as Ibn Sa'd (168-230 A.H.) and al-Ṭabarī (224-320 A.H.).

One notes that the systematic collection and preservation of *ḥadīth* and *sīra* material began almost simultaneously, by the middle of the first century of the Hijra at the latest, and that it aimed at collecting and preserving information about the life of the Prophet. These sources, despite some of their shortcomings, alongside the Qur'an and its commentaries, complement and supplement one another, and still remain the basic work

¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 91, p. 99.

for the broad outlines of the relations between the Muslims and the People of the Book.¹ So, because this thesis aims to introduce the Qur'anic references to the relations with the People of the Book as they are understood by the majority of the Muslims, it claims an assumption not arguments and deals with the views of contemporary Muslims and the sources used by them.

According to the majority of Muslim scholars, although the Qur'an does not provide a complete record of the life of the Prophet, all other sources should be judged in the light of its verses. Any *ḥadīth* or report found contrary to it, or not in harmony with its facts, spirit and intent, must be questioned. This is the same as the Prophet's words:

After my death sayings attributed to me will multiply just as a large number of sayings are attributed to the prophets who were before me. What is told you as a saying of mine you must compare with the Qur'an. What is in agreement there with is from me whether I have actually said it or not.²

Ḥadīth, then, should agree with the Qur'an and not contradict it. Guillaume, for example, notes:

This is not, of course, to assert that the *ḥadīth* literature is destitute of any historical foundation: such a conclusion would be unwarranted. But the undoubted historical facts do demand that each individual *ḥadīth* should be judged on its merits.³

¹ Watt mentions that the soundest methodology is to regard the Qur'an and the early traditional accounts as complementary sources. See, Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca*, p. xv.

² Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam*, p. 53.

³ Guillaume, *The Traditions of Islam*, p. 29.

This thesis, although it accepts the general Muslim assumption, does not dismiss Western sources. Alongside Muslim views regarding the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book, it provides the reader with the views of some Western scholars. By this, it gives readers, in particular some Muslim scholars who have ignored Western views regarding this subject, some Western interpretations of verses and events and explains how these verses and events are interpreted or understood by these scholars. It also enables the general reader to understand better the discussions that follow on the views of these Western writers concerning the Qur'anic approach to the People of the Book.

Many questions emerged in my mind when I began this study: What was the religious environment which existed in Arabia prior to the rise of Islam, in particular the Hijāz, the cradle of Islam? What was the impact of this environment on the Qur'an? What were the relations that existed between Jews, Christians and pagan Arabs in Arabia before Islam? Does the Qur'an accept the People of the Book and allow Muslims to live with them in peace? How does the Qur'an treat minorities living among the Muslims? Does the Qur'anic attitude towards the beliefs of the People of the Book justify waging war against them? Does the Qur'an seek war or peace? Can war be just? Does the Qur'an have two faces? Is the Qur'anic attitude a reflection of internal or external developments? To what extent did the practical attitude of the Prophet towards the People of the Book during his lifetime harmonise with the theoretical attitude of the Qur'an? How did the Prophet exercise his power in Madina? Was it possible for the People of the Book to live in peace side by side with the Prophet? These are the questions which emerged in my mind when I proposed this study and to which hopefully I have provided some answers.

This study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter offers a historical background to the religious situation in the Ḥijāz, the cradle of Islam, prior to the rise of Islam, and seeks to place this study in a broader context. It also highlights the relationship between pagans, Jews and Christians in the pre-Islamic period. It scrutinizes the origin of the Jews and the Christians of the Ḥijāz, showing to what extent they influenced its people. It also examines the question of *tahannuf* and many other practices among the Arabs, illustrating their relation with the religion of Abraham. Chapter Two focuses on the Qur'anic attitude to the beliefs of the People of the Book. Chapter Three demonstrates the Qur'anic attitude towards the scriptures of the People of the Book. Chapter Four sketches the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims as depicted in the Qur'an. Chapter Five shows how the Qur'an responds to both the beliefs and the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims, a response which is analysed through a detailed study of nine verses as examples of its approach to the People of the Book. Chapter Six is devoted to the Prophetic attitude towards the People of the Book during his lifetime, which represents, according to Muslims, the implementation of the Qur'anic teachings regarding relations with them. It also shows the extent to which this practical attitude harmonised with the theoretical attitude of the Qur'an.

I hope that both Muslim and non-Muslim readers will benefit from this study, and that it will provide convincing answers to the questions which emerged in my mind regarding this subject.

Chapter One: The environment of the Hijāz prior to the rise of Islam

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a historical background to the subject, exploring the environment of the Hijāz in which the Qur'an was revealed and in which the Prophet was brought up. It highlights the relationships that existed among the people of Arabia on the eve of Islam. In order to understand this environment, one needs to study the religious situation of its people, their origins and the effect of the Judeo-Christian culture on them. It also discusses the presence of the *ḥunafā'* among the Arabs and examines their relation with the religion of Abraham.

The land with which this study is concerned is the Hijāz, the cradle of Islam.¹ Yet, it is not possible to deal with the people of the Hijāz in isolation without looking at other places that had ties with it, such as Yemen, Najrān, Syria, Hīra and Ethiopia. However, the history of the Hijāz will be dealt with only in outline since a detailed account is beyond the scope of this research.

Section A: The Arabs

1. The meaning of the word 'Arab'

There are two main assertions regarding the term 'Arab':

- (i) That this name is a name given to nomads.

¹ Al-Khatrāwī refers to Amīn Madanī who mentions that the Hijāz generally includes Makka, Madina, Tā'if, Taymā', Khaybar, al-'Ulā, and Tabūk. See al-Khatrāwī, *al-Madina fi al-'Aṣr al-Jāhili*, 4/312. The Arabic word Hijāz means 'barrier' and indeed its backbone is formed by the chain of the Sarāt Mountains which runs parallel to the Red Sea and separates the flat coastal area, called Tihāma, from the lonely highlands of Najd. See Esin, *Mecca the Blessed Madinah the Radiant*, p. 15.

- (ii) That although the name Arab is a vague name, it is associated with ignorance and barbarism.

Some writers base their views regarding the meaning of the name 'Arab' on the Bible which identifies this word with desert and waste barren land which is waterless and treeless. Therefore, Jandora refers to the Bible when he points to the origin of the Arabs and mentions that they were nomad tribes of the desert land which lay to the south and east of the Jewish state, who were called the Arabs by other ancient people.¹ Saunders considers that the majority of the inhabitants of Arabia were nomads and, therefore, the name Arab has been restricted to the desert-dwellers.² He mentions that this name may possibly be connected with the Hebrew root *abhār* which means to move or pass.³ Newby mentions that the name 'Arab' is a vague name and it was applied to any nomadic pastoralist or Bedouin in the Near East regardless of his native language.⁴ However, many other sources suggest that the word 'Arab' is a name given to a well-known people and with relation to the Ḥijāz most of its population were sedentary. There are semantical differences between the word 'Arab' and the word '*a'rābī*', bedouin. So, if you say to an *a'rābī*, 'O Arab,' he will be pleased, but if you say to an Arab man, 'O *a'rābī*,' he will become angry. The term *a'rābī* in the Qur'an refers to nomads and not a name which is given to the Arabs.⁵ The Qur'an differentiates between nomads and other people of Arabia in many places which indicates that nomads were only a part of the population of Arabia. The Qur'an says:

¹ Jandora, *The March from Madina*, p. 7.

² Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 3.

³ Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 3. See also Gabrieli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, p. 26.

⁴ Newby, *A History of the Jews*, p. 8

⁵ Q. 9:97-98, and 49:14.

And among the Bedouins round about you, some are hypocrites, and
so are some among the people of Madina.¹

This verse differentiates between the nomads who used to live outside the area of Madina and the people of Madina itself. Ibn Manẓūr states that al-Azharī considers that one who does not distinguish between *a'rābī* and Arab is biased.² Therefore, the Arabic and many non-Arabic sources mention that not all the Arabs were nomads but there were various societies in Arabia: nomads; agriculturists; and traders.³

The following three cities are examples which indicate that nomads were only a part of the population of Arabia:

1. Makka was a big religious centre and its sanctity provided Makka with safe environment for trade and businesses and made it also a trade centre.⁴ It was also a centre for Arab intellectuals and literary integration as well. The fair of 'Ukāẓ witnesses that the Arabs had reached a marvellous level in poetry and literature, since the best compositions were awarded appropriate prizes and the very distinctive ones are said to have been written in golden letters and hung on the Ka'ba walls.⁵ There were big markets in Makka, such as 'Ukāẓ, and Dhū al-Majāz. Makka also consisted of several big markets in accordance with the country of origin of the goods available there, such as the Egyptian Market, *dār miṣr*, where wares from Egypt were stocked and distributed.⁶

¹ Q. 9:101. See also 9:90, 9:97-99, 9:120, 48:12 and 48:16.

² Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-Arab*, 1/586.

³ Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 57. See also Peters, *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, vol. 3, p. xiv. Al-Khaṭrāwī, *Al-Madīna fī al-'Aṣr al-Jāhili*, 3/104-105.

⁴ Q. *Sūra* 106. This *sūra* refers to the tribe of Quraysh and their trades and caravans in wintertime and in summer.

⁵ These poems were called the *mu'allaqāt*.

⁶ Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 2/263.

2. Madina was a fertile land which enabled its people to be farmers. Its people were mostly agriculturists. Its land produced dates, fruits and vegetables. The people of Madina were also traders and craftsmen.¹ Therefore, in Madina there were many markets, such as al-Bathā', al-Safsāf, and al-Jisr.

3. Ṭā'if was a fertile land which enabled its people to be farmers, and to provide Makka and some other parts of Arabia with crops, fruits and vegetables.² The People of Ṭā'if were hunters, agriculturists, and traders.³ There was also a religious centre in Ṭā'if called al-Rabba. It seems that the people of Ṭā'if used to glorify al-Rabba in the same way that the people of Makka used to glorify the Ka'ba.⁴

What also supports the idea that there were various societies in the Ḥijāz is that the Arabs knew the system of commerce and trades. The Arabs, as traders, were able to write an account.⁵ They used to collect the tithe from those who entered Arabia from among the traders of Syria and the Byzantines.⁶ They knew about weights and measures.⁷ They knew about currency and currency exchange.⁸ Makka was a religio-commercial centre due to the existence of the Ka'ba in it, alongside its situation on the international trade route.

¹ Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, under Yathrib, p. 87. See also al-Ya'qūbī, *al-Buldān*, p. 313. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, p. 278. Al-Sharīf, *Makka and Madina*, p. 376. And see al-Khatrāwī, *Al-Madina fi al-'Asr al-Jāhili*, 3/126-129. Ibn Qutayba, *al-Ma'ārif*, p. 194.

² Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 2/193. See also Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, article 'Ṭā'if', p. 9.

³ Abū Yūsuf, *al-Kharāj*, p. 40. Al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, p. 237, and p. 427.

⁴ Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, p. 16. Al-Jārim, *Adiān al-Arab*, p. 149.

⁵ Al-Sharīf, *Makka and Madina*, p. 216.

⁶ Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 1/101. See also al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, 2/350-351.

⁷ Al-Sharīf, *Makka and Madina*, p. 216.

⁸ Fihmī, *al-Nuqūd al-'Arabiyya*, p. 8.

Some other writers assert that the Arabs were ignorant and barbarism. These writers translate the word *jāhiliyya* as ignorance and barbarism.¹ However, the meaning of the word *jāhiliyya* in the Qur'an, according to the Muslim historians, means error or misguidance.² And these errors were in habits, practices, and traits. To know to what extent the Arabs of the Ḥijāz were civilized during *jāhiliyya*, we should know about some aspects of the life of the Arabs. Some of these aspects were the establishment of *Dār al-Nadwa*;³ the *Fuḍūl* Confederacy;⁴ and the *Muṭayyibūn* Confederacy.⁵ One also needs to study the reason behind the four battles of the *Fijār* to find that these battles happened on the ground that oppressed people should be supported, and their rights be protected.⁶ We should also know some other civilized functions relating to the administration of Makka and the Ka'ba, such as the *hijāba*, the responsibility of the possession of the key of the Ka'ba and being in charge of its upkeep, the *siqāya*, the responsibility of supplying water to the pilgrims and to administer the well of *Zamzam*, the *rifāda*, the responsibility of supplying provisions to the pilgrims and providing them with food during the pilgrimage season, and the *liwā'*, the responsibility of command in

¹ See, for example, Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, p. 24. See also Hittī, *History of the Arabs*, p. 87. Gabrieli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, p. 44. Williams, *The Word of Islam*, p. 38.

² Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāya fī Gharīb al-Hadīth*, 1/323.

³ This assembly of *dār al-Nadwa*, was established in Makka by the Quraysh to settle the affairs of the Quraysh. The chief of each clan spoke on behalf of his clan, and discussions in this council were adopted by unanimity. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 53.

⁴ The *Fudūl* Confederacy was established when the tribes of Quraysh decided to make a covenant for peace after the Sacrilegious War between them. They assembled to restore peace by forming confederacy at Makka for suppressing violence and injustice, and vindicating the rights of the weak and the destitute. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 57-59. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/289-293.

⁵ The *Muṭayyibūn* Confederacy was established to put an end to dispute between the clans of the Quraysh regarding the five responsibilities or associations of the *Hijāba*, the *Siqāya*, the *Rifāda*, the *Nadwa*, and the *Liwā'*. See Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 1/350. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 56-57.

⁶ These battles were happened to defend the sanctity of the sacred months, and give the Arabs peace and security during these months, *al-Ashhur al-Ḥurum*. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/289-290.

war and right to bear the standard of the tribe. These works remain as a witness that the Arabs were not ignorant. Some of these offices also were linked with Abraham through the Ka'ba and *Zamzam*.¹ Therefore, the Prophet approved and retained many pre-Islamic practices and continued what the prophets before him had brought.²

The statement of Ja'far in front of the Negus in Ethiopia, on behalf of the Muslim emigrants, is also another evidence which illustrates that the word *jāhiliyya* did not mean ignorance or barbarism or wildness. Therefore, Ja'far, in his statement, pointed only to some polytheist practices of the *jāhiliyya* when he states:

We were People who lived in *jāhiliyya*, worshipping idols, eating dead animals, committing adultery,....³

What supports this view is that when Abū Dharr, one of the Companions, said to Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ, 'O *ibn al-sawdā*', i.e. the son of black woman, the Prophet became angry and said to Abū Dharr, 'There is *jāhiliyya* in you.' And that is why some contemporary Muslim writers describe the state of the practices of some people even in these days as in a state of *jāhiliyya* although they have reached a high level in technology and civilization.⁴

¹ In order to deny any link with Abraham, Hawting, however, denies the link between the *siqāya* and the Zamzam well and associates it with the drinking of an alcoholic beverage, *nabīdh*. He attempts also to deny other offices of Makka, such as *rifāda* and *liwā*', and their link with Abraham. See Hawting, "The Sacred Offices of Mecca from *Jāhiliyya* to Islam", *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, ed. F. E. Peters, 1999, pp. 244-266.

² The Prophet says: 'I have been sent only for the purpose of perfecting good morals.' This *hadīth* indicates that there were still some morals before the coming of the Prophet. See Mālik, *al-Muwatta'*, No. 1634, p. 651.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 151. One notices that Guillaume translates the word *jāhiliyya* as uncivilised. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 151.

⁴ Muhammad Qutub, for example, names his book '*Jāhiliyyat al-Qarn al-'Ishrīn*.'

2. The origin of the Arabs

The Arabs are the descendants of Abraham through his son Ishmael. Abraham was from Irāq, a town called Ur, near Kūfa. Abraham left Ur with his nephew Lot and travelled to Harrān, then to Palestine, followed by Egypt. In Egypt, Pharaoh rendered his daughter Hājar at Sarah's service. Sarah gave Hājar to Abraham, so he might take her as his second wife.¹ Abraham returned to Palestine where Hājar gave birth to Ishmael. After bitterness of feeling arose between Sarah and Hājar, Abraham was urged by his first wife Sarah to send Hājar and her son Ishmael away. Abraham then took Hājar and her son to Makka, leaving them both in the barren valley near the sacred house, the Ka'ba. The Qur'an points to this when it mentions that Abraham said, 'O my Lord, I have made some of my offspring to dwell in an uncultivable valley by Your Sacred House.'² This verse suggests that the Ka'ba was built before Abraham, probably by Adam, but at this time Abraham only rebuilt the Ka'ba on its old foundation.³ Some writers claim that Abraham neither went to Makka, nor built the Ka'ba.⁴ However, the Qur'an, the *ḥadīth* and all major Muslim sources agree that Abraham visited Makka many times. Ibn Sa'd mentions that Abraham visited Makka three times during his life, and in his last visit he proclaimed to mankind the pilgrimage.⁵ The Qur'an mentions that during one of his visits to Makka, Abraham and Ishmael raised the foundations of the Ka'ba.⁶ Al-Bukhārī records some *ḥadīths* regarding the several visits of Abraham to Makka when he went to see his wife Sarah and his son Ishmael. These *ḥadīths* also mention that Ishmael married

¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, 1/474.

² Q. 14:37.

³ See al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 9/316.

⁴ Guillaume, *Islam*, pp. 61-62. See also Margoliouth, *Mohammed and the Rise of Islam*, p. 104.

⁵ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/48.

⁶ Q. 2:127.

a woman from the Yemenite tribe of Jurhum, and then he divorced her following to some advice from Abraham during one of his visits to Makka, which caused Ishmael to marry another woman from the same tribe.¹

The Arab historians used to divide the Arab kinsfolk into three major groups:²

- (i) The ancient Arabs who perished before the time of Abraham, among whom were ‘Ād, Thamūd, Madyan and others, and about whom the Qur’an gives some of their history.
- (ii) The pure Arabs, the Qaḥṭānians who originated from the progeny of Ya‘rub ibn Yashjub ibn Qaḥṭān.
- (iii) The naturalised Arabs, the Adnānians who originated from the progeny of Adnān.

However, Ibn Khaldūn mentions that there were only two Arab generations:

- (i) Those who perished before Abraham.
- (ii) Those who originated from the progeny of Ishmael including both branches of the Adnānians and the Qaḥṭānians.³

Ibn Khaldūn mentions that the Arabs who perished before the time of Abraham and the pure Arabs were the same and they had perished, while all the Arabs who remained in Arabia were naturalised Arabs and originated from one ancestor.⁴ Most Muslim sources and historians also agree that the Adnānians and the Qaḥṭānians were

¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1415, pp. 665-670.

² Abū al-Fidā, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī Akhbār al-Bashar*, 1/124. See also al-Nadawī, *Tārīkh Arḍ al-Qur’an*, 2/78-86.

³ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Ibar*, 2/46-47.

⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Ibar*, 2/46-47 and 2/19.

both the descendants of Ishmael.¹ The Qur'an used to address the people of Madina as a whole as one ancestry to which the Prophet was referring. The Qur'an says:

There has come unto you a messenger from among yourselves.²

This Madinan verse indicates that both the Aws of the south and the Quraysh of the north belonged to one ancestry and the Prophet is from among them. In another Madinan verse Abraham is mentioned as the great ancestor of those among whom Islam was preached at that time, the Arabs of the south and north, 'It is the religion of your father Abraham.'³ Al-Bukhārī states that once the Prophet passed by a group of people from the tribe of Aslam, who were related to Qaḥṭān, whilst they were practising archery and he said, 'O sons of Ishmael, practise archery, for your father was a great archer.'⁴ Here, the Prophet was relating the Qaḥṭānian Arabs from the tribe of Aslam to Ishmael. The Prophet mentions that all the Arabs were the descendents of Ishmael, the son of Abraham.⁵ What also supports this *ḥadīth* is that the history of Arabia shows that some of the Qaḥṭānian tribes, namely, the Aws and the Khazraj, formed a great part of the Muslim community in Madina when they migrated from the south. Ibn Ḥajar argues that the fathers of the famous Companions from both the Qaḥṭānians and the Adnānians were nearly the same in number, and therefore he concludes that both Adnān and Qaḥṭān were the descendants

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/156. This is also the opinion of Ibn Ishāq. See *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 3-4. There are some western writers who also mention that the geographers of the classical world did not differentiate between the South Arabian and the North Arabian, and considered all the Arabs of the peninsula to be branches of the same race. See, for example, Jandora, *The March From Madina*, p. 29, note No. 40.

² Q. 9:128.

³ Q. 22:78.

⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1420, p. 673.

⁵ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/51.

of the same father, Ishmael.¹ Al-Mas‘ūdī also mentions that within the Arab poems there is no evidence that the Arabs were divided into two branches, and the poets of both branches were proud of their relationship to their father, Abraham.² One also notices that this division did not appear in any stage among the Arabs, neither at the time of the Prophet, nor during the time of the four caliphs.³ Jawād ‘Ali, therefore, concludes that those who divided the Arabs into Adnānians and Qaḥṭānians were influenced by the Bible since the Bible states that the inhabitants of northern Arabia are traced back to Abraham through his son Ishmael.⁴

In the following passages we study the similarities and differences between the people of southern Arabia and the people of northern Arabia, exploring the relationship between them:

a. Similarities and differences between the people of southern Arabia and the people of northern Arabia

The language of the people of Arabia was Arabic regardless of the fact that the people of the south spoke an Arabic which had its own dialectal variants, and the people of the north spoke pure Arabic, and also had their own dialectal variants. Both groups played a great role in the history of the Islamic and pre-Islamic periods. Politically, the people of the south played a great role in the history of Arabia, whereas the north was internationally a marginal and subsidiary factor within the political game of the great contemporary powers in the Near East.

¹ Al-‘Asqalānī, *Faḥ al-Bārī*, 6/537-39.

² Al-Mas‘ūdī, *al-Tanbīh wal Ashrāf*, p. 109.

³ Jawād ‘Ali, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 1/332.

⁴ See Jawād ‘Ali, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, 1/332. Jawad ‘Ali seems here to refer to Genesis, 25:16-18, 12:2, and 16:10.

The Yemenites called their rulers Tubba'. Some historians suggest that the title Tubba' means 'priest-kings' which indicates that the rulers of the Yemen used a title Tubba' in the same way that some other nations did, such as the Pharaohs of Egypt, and the Negus of Ethiopia.¹ As in the north, religion played an important part in the history of the south and its people. Between the first and the third centuries, the People of the Book had played a greater part in Yemen than in the north. At times Judaism influenced the Yemenites, at other times Christianity, and later, when it came under Persian rule, some Yemenites became Zoroastrians. It seems that the political situation of Yemen and its fall under the power of other nations helped in the establishment of different religions among the people of Yemen before Islam. The people of the south then came under attack from outsiders several times which created some differences between the south and the north. The political division of the south into separate states was chronic, and it enabled foreign powers to set one state against another. After the conversion of Rome, Christianity entered into the history of the south through the Ethiopians. Now, the Persian and Byzantine Empires had definite religious and economic policies which operated to the disadvantage of southern Arabia. The conversion of Ethiopia to Christianity brought Byzantium closer and closed the ring around the south. This international factor played a great role in the south and made it more influenced by the Christianity of Ethiopia and the Zoroastrianism of Persia than the north.² In contrast to the south, as we will mention in the next pages of this paper, the religion of the north, although it had become mixed

¹ The Persian called their ruler, Khosrau. The Egyptians called their ruler Pharaoh. See Holt, *the Cambridge History of Islam*, 1A/7.

² Holt, *The Cambridge History of Islam*. 1A/13.

with idol worship and innovations, stayed under the influence of the religion of Abraham.

Before 300 A.D. the tribe of Ḥimyar dominated Saba', although they sometimes declined and then regained their strength. The reason for this decline was the Nabatean dominance over the north of Arabia which was followed by the Byzantine dominance over the naval trade routes, especially after the Byzantine conquest of Egypt, Syria and the north of Arabia. Another reason for the decline of Yemen was the effect of inter-tribal warfare in the Yemen. As a result, the trade of Ḥimyar failed to a great extent, and the families of Qaḥṭān became disunited and scattered. After 300 A.D. and until the coming of Islam, Yemen lost its independence. The Byzantines helped the Ethiopians occupy Yemen in 340 A.D. making use of the constant inter-tribal conflict between Hamadān and Ḥimyar. This occupation continued to 378 A.D. After that, Yemen regained its independence till the coming of the great flood of the Ma'rib Dam in about 450 A.D. which again caused the fall of Yemen. As a result, the tribes of Aws and Khazraj migrated to Madina, and others migrated to Syria where they established the family of Ghassān.

The massacre of the Christians which took place at Najrān by the hand of the last Tubba' in Yemen, Dhū Nuwās, caused the Ethiopian army, under the leadership of Iriāt, to conquer Yemen again in the year 525 A.D.¹ Iriāt was later assassinated by one of his army leaders, called Abraha, who took over the rulership of Yemen.² When Abraha came to power, he deployed his soldiers to demolish the Ka'ba in which a disaster

¹ Al-Mubarakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*, p. 24. See also Zagh'lūl, *Fī Tarīkh al-Arab*, p. 197.

² Al-Mubarakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*, p. 24.

happened to him and his armies which led to their destruction.¹ Close upon his death there appears to have followed the fall of Ethiopian rule in Yemen. Following that, corruption spread over Yemen which encouraged one of the Ḥimyarites to go to the Byzantine Emperor to seek his support against the Ethiopians, and to ask him to put Yemen under his authority. The Emperor told the Ḥimyarite that he could not provide him with any support at this time which caused the Yemenites to seek support from the other main power of that time, the Persians. The Persian Emperor agreed to give his assistance, and throughout that agreement, Yemenites restored their independence and appointed Ma'dikarib as their king.² Later, Ma'dikarib was assassinated and Yemen became a Persian colony. Persian rulers maintained the rulership of Yemen until the reign of Bādhān, the last Persian ruler in Yemen who embraced Islam in 638 A.D., thus terminating Persian domination over Yemen.³

b. The relationship between the Arabs of the north and the Arabs of the south

Despite the above-mentioned differences between south and north of Arabia, there is evidence that there were good relations between south and north. The tribes of the north were fairly well known in the south. For example, the tribe of Quraysh was well known in the south, for 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the grandfather of the Prophet and the leader of the Quraysh, used to trade in Yemen.⁴ The people of Yemen used to respect 'Abd al-

¹ The date on which the event of al-Fīl took place was in the same year that the Prophet was born, and that was in 570 A.D. The Qur'an refers to this event in *Sūrat al-Fīl*. See al-Mubarakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*, p. 25. See also Zaghūl, *Fī Tarīkh al-Arab*, p. 199.

² Al-Mubarakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*, p. 25.

³ Al-Mubarakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq al-Makhtūm*, p. 24.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jamī' al-Bayān*, 12/702.

Muttalib, and when his name was mentioned, his men and caravan were safe.¹ The Qur'an also mentions the safety of their caravans.² Yūsuf 'Ali describes the prestige of the Quraysh among the Arabs when he comments on *Sūrat Quraysh* saying, 'In those days of general insecurity, the Quraysh prestige as custodians of Makka enabled them to obtain covenants of security and safeguard from the rulers of neighbouring countries on all sides, Syria, Persia, Yemen and Ethiopia, protecting their trade journeys in all seasons.'³ He also points to the influence which resulted from this contact saying, 'The Quraysh became practised travellers and merchants, acquired much knowledge of the world and many arts, and perfected their language as a polished medium of literary expression.'⁴

Ibn Ishāq mentions another statement which also confirms the good relation between north and south:

Abd al-Muttalib came to the camp (of Abraha) and inquired about Dhū Nafar, who was a friend of his.⁵

The traditions brought by Abraham were the most important and universal feature in the social life of the Arabs. Arabs, despite their division into numerous tribes, maintained their genealogy tracing it ultimately to Abraham. All the peoples of all the tribes, from north and south, believed the Ka'ba to have been built by Abraham and considered it their spiritual centre. Ibn Ishāq, for example, states:

¹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 20/188. See also, Holt, *The Cambridge History*, 1A/7.

² Q. *sūra* 106.

³ Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, commentary No. 6276, p. 1702.

⁴ Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, commentary No. 6277, p. 1702.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 25.

A member of one of the ruling families in the Yemen, Dhū Nafar by name, summoned his people and such of the Arabs as would follow him to fight Abraha and stop him from attacking and destroying Allah's holy house and a certain number supported him.¹

Ibn Sa'd mentions that whenever 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib went to Yemen, he used to be the guest of one of the leaders of Ḥimyar, which again indicates the existence of good relations between the south and the north.² Further to this respect to the Quraysh, the Tubba' Abū Karib al-Ḥimyarī, one of the kings of Yemen who visited Makka, is said to have been the first one to provide the Ka'ba with a covering, *kiswa*, and with a door with a lock.³

3. Hira and Syria at the time of the coming of Islam

The Arabs of Syria were the Byzantium vassal and the Arabs of Ḥira were the Persian vassal. On the eve of Islam, Ḥira was ruled by the Persians who sometimes appointed kings from among the vassal Arabs, and at other times from among themselves, according to their own best interests. This situation continued even after the battle of Dhū-Qār when the Persians and their allies, who called Iyās al-Ṭā'iy the king of Ḥira, were defeated by the Arabs.⁴ After their defeat, the Persian Emperor decided to appoint Persian rulers only over Ḥira, but soon after, in about 632 A.D., authority returned to the

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 23.

² Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/86.

³ Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, article Ka'ba, p. 193.

⁴ The battle of Dhū Qār witnessed the most furious fighting between the Arabs and the Persians, and, for the first time in their history, the Arabs routed the Persians. This fighting was happened soon after the birth of the Prophet in about 610 A.D. The Prophet described that victory saying, 'That day was the day on which Arabs got their rights from the Persians.' See Zāghlūl, *fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, pp. 230-231.

chief of the Lakhmid family, al-Mundhir al-Ma'rūr, who re-ruled Ḥīra for only a few months until Islam took over.¹

In Syria, we find also that the Ghassānid kings who were granted leadership by the Byzantines ruled Syria before the advent of Islam. The Ghassānid Arabs were used to defend the Byzantine borders against other Arabs and against the Persians. Shortly after the coming of Islam, the reign of the Byzantines came to an end with the battle of Yarmūk in the year 634 A.D. or thereabouts. The main contact between the Hijāz and Syria was based on trade. The Prophet went to Syria twice before his prophethood on trade journeys.² On his first visit, when he was a child, he was accompanied by his uncle, Abū Tālib, on a caravan. The reason why his uncle took Muhammad with him this time was because his uncle loved him so much and used not to leave him alone at any time.³ The second time was when his uncle was in need which caused him to advise Muhammad to ask Khadīja if she would agree to employ him as a leader of her caravan to Syria. Khadīja was delighted to employ Muhammad since his people used to call him the trustworthy, *al-Amīn*. Muhammad went to Syria and when he returned back to Makka, he returned back with a big profit compared to previous caravans, and this led Khadīja to think of marrying Muhammad, who agreed to do so.⁴ The trade contacts between the Arabs and the Syrians perhaps enabled some individuals from Arabia to have the opportunity to ask its monks about the religion of Abraham and a true religion.

¹ Al-Khudarī, *Muhādharāt Tārīkh al-Umam*, 1/29-32.

² Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/119.

³ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/119-120. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/283-284.

⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/129-131. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/293-294.

This trade contact also opened debates among the Arabs regarding a prophet who would appear soon in Arabia.¹

4. The religious situation in the Ḥijāz prior to the rise of Islam

a. The leadership in Makka

The ‘Amāliqites and the Banū Jurhum, were the people who lived in Makka before the time when the Quraysh took the lead from the tribes of Kināna and Muḍar.² The leadership in Makka passed into the hands of Quṣayy in about 440 A.D. Quṣayy took over Makka after a fight which broke out between the Quraysh and Khuzā‘a while Yemen, Syria and Ḥīra were under the authority of the Byzantines or the Persians. Quṣayy established the ‘Assembly House’ (*dār al-nadwa*) where consultations relating to serious matters were conducted.³ This ‘House’ offered the opportunity to solve problems which had arisen, and to secure the unity of the Quraysh. Religious activities became the main duty of Quṣayy, who presided over the *dār al-nadwa*, monopolising in his hand issues related to war, custodianship of the Ka‘ba, and providing water and food for the pilgrims. Afterwards, the leadership of Makka passed into the hand of al-Muṭṭalib ibn Hāshim, the grandfather of the Prophet, then into the hand of his sons who took the same position as Quṣayy in Makka until the rise of Islam.⁴ The Quraysh became the custodians of the Sacred House to which Arabs from all over Arabia came to pay respect and homage. The Arabs in general respected this leadership of the Quraysh. The

¹ See, for example, the statement of Maysara the slave of Khadīja in Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/130. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/521. See also Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/153-156.

² Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 2/334.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, p. 53.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/205-211. See also Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, 2/337.

governor of Makka ruled among the Arabs in the name of religious leadership. Accordingly, the rulers of Makka maintained their duties to look after the interests of all the Arabs, particularly the interests of the pilgrims.

b. The position of Makka

In Makka, as a sanctuary, visitors were assured the safety of their lives which led to the establishment of trade, and made Makka a trade centre around a religious place. The Qur'an refers to this when it mentions Abraham's words:

O our lord, I have made some of my offspring to dwell in a valley without cultivation by your sacred house in order, O lord, that they may offer prayers perfectly.¹

In this statement, the Qur'an mentions that Makka was a sanctified place from a long time ago, even before Abraham. Therefore, Abraham brought his offspring to Makka because of its sanctity otherwise it would not have attracted the attention of Abraham if it was not such a place.² This verse also shows that in order to help the Makkans worship Allah; He provided them with features which made their trade successful. Makka therefore became a trade centre. The Qur'an points to this and mentions that when Abraham had come to Makka, he offered and dedicated the work to Allah in humble supplications, asking Him for a blessing on himself and his progeny in general. The Qur'an mentions that Allah answered the supplication of Abraham and granted the people of Makka peace and sustenance. The Qur'an says:

¹ Q. 14:37.

² However, some writers mention that it was impossible to think of Makka in terms other than trade. See, for example, Shaban, *Islamic History*, p. 3.

And remember when Abraham said: ‘My Lord, make this city (Makka) a place of security and provide its people with fruits.’¹

It was not only the pagan Arabs who respected the Ka‘ba and recognised its sanctity. This spirit of respect seems to have influenced some of the Jews and Christians who used also to honour the Ka‘ba. Al-Bukhārī records that once the Prophet entered the Ka‘ba and found pictures of Mary on its walls.² This *ḥadīth* suggests that some Christians had at some time come to do honour to the sanctuary of Abraham since a Christian man had been allowed to paint an icon of Mary on an inside wall of the Ka‘ba.

The Jews also knew the sanctity of the Ka‘ba. Ibn Ishāq mentions that when Tibān, the king of Yemen, passed by the tribe of Hudhayl while he was on his way to Yemen, they advised him to destroy the Ka‘ba, since the sole object of this tribe was to bring about his destruction for they knew that any king that treated it with disrespect was sure to die. Before Tibān decided to destroy the Ka‘ba, he consulted two Jewish rabbis who were with his company who advised him not to destroy it saying, ‘We know of no other temple in the land which God has chosen for Himself, and if you do what the people of Hudhayl suggest, you and all your men will perish.’ The king Tibān asked the rabbis what he should do when he got there, and they told him to circumambulate the Ka‘ba, to venerate and honour it, to shave his head, and to behave with all humility until he had left its precincts. This incident shows that the Jewish rabbis and even the tribe of

¹ Q. 2:126.

² Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, 4/365.

Hudhayl both recognised the sanctity of the Ka'ba.¹ The reason why the Jews and the Christians honoured the Ka'ba is possibly related to their influence by the Arabs.

c. The Arabs' journey from monotheism of Abraham to paganism

The era before the coming of the Prophet became the farthest from monotheism although some Arabs had complied with the call of Abraham. The Arabs gradually had forgotten most of what they had been reminded of, and started to worship idols while also retaining some monotheist traits. The number of idols increased till there were three hundred and sixty statues surrounding the Ka'ba.² These idols were distributed among the tribes of Arabia.³ The worship of idols had become the most prominent feature of Arab religion. As a result, the Arabs started to devote themselves to idols, calling for their help in hardship, circumambulating them, prostrating themselves before them, consecrating certain portions of food, drink, cattle and crops to them, dedicating certain animals to them, and currying favours with them through votive offerings of crops and cattle.⁴ Moreover, some of the Arabs believed in soothsayers, diviners and astrologers, and some of them were the worshippers of jinn such as the Banū Mulaḥ from the tribe of Khuzā'a.⁵ The Arabs also practised the worship of *ansāb*.⁶ The worship of *ansāb* also originated in Makka when some Arabs started to take some stones from the Ka'ba out of glory and respect for it which led them, later, to take these *ansāb* as a means of worship.⁷

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 8-9.

² Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Mukhtaṣar al-Sīra*, p. 74.

³ Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, 1/122

⁴ Q. 5:103.

⁵ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 14/271. See also al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, 2/154.

⁶ Q. 5:3, 5:103, 6:136, 6:138, and 6:139.

⁷ Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣṅām*, p. 53.

Although the Arabs in general retained some of the traditions of Abraham, they mixed these traditions with innovations till they became in manifest error, as the Qur'an describes them.¹ Despite these innovations, some individual Arabs used to declare, 'We are the people of Abraham, and the people of the sacred house.'² These Arabs knew that they were far from the religion of their father, Abraham. One of these individuals was Zayd ibn Nufayl who used to say, 'O God, if I knew how you wished to be worshipped I would so worship you; but I do not know.'³ Some other Arabs used to say to one another, 'You know that your people have abandoned the religion of your father.'⁴ Qiss ibn Sā'ida al-Iādī while he was preaching in 'Ukāz used to say, 'Verily, Allah has a religion which is dearer to Him than yours.'⁵ These sayings show that these Arabs realised that their people had gone astray and thought that they themselves were the only people who were still holding to the remnants of the monotheism of Abraham. This is clearly confirmed by Zayd's statement when he declared:

O Quraysh, by Him in whose hand is the soul of Zayd, not one of you follows the religion of Abraham but me.⁶

Furthermore, Muslim sources mention that some of the Arabs were considered as believers because they retained the religion of Abraham at that time of mixture of

¹ Q. 62:2. However, some writers, in order to cut any relation between the religion of the Arabs before Islam and Abraham, assert that all of the above-mentioned rituals which are related to Abraham were polytheistic and there was no conceivable connection with Abraham. See Muir, *The Life of Mahomet*, p. ccx.

² Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, 1/226. And Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1/199.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 99-100. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/238-241.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/238.

⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/231.

⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 99-100

thought and beliefs. The Prophet once told his Companions that Zayd ibn Nufayl would be resurrected on the day of resurrection as one whole nation.¹

One concludes that some of the teachings of Abraham, as also the Ka'ba, were held in respect even in the days of idols and superstitions, not only by the Makkans but, as we mentioned above, by other surrounding people who used to honour the Ka'ba and go for pilgrimage to Makka. Among the reasons why the Arabs honoured the Ka'ba are: firstly, because Abraham was their ancestor through his son Ishmael; secondly, because they inherited a lot of rites and practices from Abraham which influenced their practices and even their pagan worship.

d. The Arabs heard about Judaism and Christianity

The Arabs had heard about Judaism and Christianity. Zayd ibn Nufayl declared that he had heard about Judaism and Christianity but did not like to follow either of them.² Waraqa ibn Nawfal also knew about Christianity. Waraqa seems to have known well about the coming of a prophet, and so when Khadīja informed him about what had happened to Muhammad in the cave of Ḥirā', he declared, 'That was the same *nāmūs* that came to Moses.'³

There are also many references suggest that the Arabs had been informed by the People of the Book about the coming of a prophet from the Arabs. Ibn Sa'd mentions that some Arabs heard from the Christian monks that a prophet from the Arabs would

¹ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/161-162. See also al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, 5/50.

² Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/162.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, p. 107. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/533. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 1/576. The word *nāmūs* refers to the angel who is entrusted with divine secrets. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 107.

come whose name would be Muhammad. Due to this information, some Arabs gave the name Muhammad to their sons in the hope that he might be that prophet.¹ Ibn Sa‘d mentions many names of those who were called Muhammad before Islam, such as Muhammad Ibn Khuzā‘ī ibn Ḥuzāba from the Banū Dhakwān, Muhammad ibn Sufyān ibn Mujāshi‘, Muhammad al-Jashmī, Muhammad al-Usaydī, and Muhammad al-Fuqaymī.²

e. The Arabs knew Allah

From ancient times the Arabs knew about Allah, even before the coming of Judaism and Christianity.³ Three prophets are mentioned in the Qur’an who called to monotheism among the perished Arabs, namely, Hūd, the prophet of ‘Ād, who dwelt in al-Ahqāf in Yemen;⁴ Sālih, the prophet of Thamūd, who dwelt in the north of Arabia, near Tabūk;⁵ and the prophet Shu‘aib, the prophet of Madyan, who lived in northern Saudi Arabia.⁶ Later on, and before the coming of Judaism and Christianity, Abraham and Ishmael preached monotheism among the Arabs. There was no prophet sent to the Arabs after them till the coming of Muhammad. This means that the Arabs remained without a prophet for a long time.⁷ As a result, the religion of Abraham became corrupted.

¹ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/169.

² Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/169.

³ Muir asserts that the foundation of the Arab faith was a deep-rooted idolatry which contradicts the idea of the Qur’an that there were prophets who called to monotheism even among the perished Arabs, and later there was Abraham and his son Ishmael who also called to monotheism among the Arabs before the coming of Judaism and Christianity. See Muir, *the Life of Muhammad*, p. xcvi.

⁴ Q. 7:65. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 7/211.

⁵ Q. 7:73. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 7/212.

⁶ Q. 7:85. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/215.

⁷ Q. 35:24, 28:46 and 36:7.

The Arabs used the name Allah in their sayings, supplications and poems. For example, ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib’s words to Abraha indicate that ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the leader of the Qyraysh, knew about Allah, so when Abraha asked him, ‘What do you want?’ ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib replied, ‘I want my camels to be returned.’ Abraha was amazed at his request, asking himself, ‘Is not the Ka‘ba dearer to him than camels?’ ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib explained to Abraha the reason why he did not ask Abraha to leave the Ka‘ba saying, ‘I am the lord of the camels, and the temple likewise has a Lord who will defend it.’¹ Moreover, as Jawād mentions in his *Mufaṣṣal*, the ancient poets of the Arabs, such as Zuhayr ibn Abū Sulmā, al-A‘shā, Zayd ibn ‘Amr ibn Nufayl and ‘Ubayd ibn al-Abras, shows that these poets used many terms related to monotheism in their poems.²

The Qur’an also mentions a group of people among the Arabs who realised the power of Allah, yet followed their own desires and took idols as intermediary deities between them and Allah. The Arabs, as the Qur’an states, used to say, ‘We worship idols only that they may bring us near to Allah.’³ The Qur’an also says, ‘If indeed you ask them, ‘Who has created the heavens and the earth and subjected the sun and the moon?’ They will surely reply, ‘Allah.’⁴ Aws ibn Hajar, in his poems, swore by Allāt and al-‘Uzza, but at the same time declared that Allāh is the greatest. He says, ‘By Allāt and al-‘Uzza and those who believe in them, and by Allah who is the greatest of them.’⁵

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 25.

² Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/108-110.

³ Q. 39:3.

⁴ Q. 29:61.

⁵ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/357.

f. The turning point in the monotheism in Arabia

Many Muslim historians believe that the religion of Abraham continued till ‘Amr ibn Luḥayy ibn Qamṣa brought idols from Balqā’ in southern Jordan which the Mo’abites were worshipping.¹ When Luḥayy saw the worship of these idols, he approved of it and believed it to be righteous.² This shows that polytheism found its way among the Arabs from their neighbours. Some writers also mention that Ibn Abū Kabsha al-Khuzā‘ī was the first person to leave the religion of Abraham and begin worshipping the star of al-Shi‘rā.³ It could be that Luḥayy brought the idols, and Ibn Abū Kabsha brought the worship of stars. As a result, idols and stars, gods and goddesses, began to be worshipped in Arabia and this kind of worship spread gradually until it became the main aspect of the Arabs’ religion.

The Arabs changed the religion of Abraham to suite their own interest. For example, they seized the camels of the weak people claiming that these camels were a gift from their Lord, which they are prohibited to return to their owners.⁴ The following example also illustrates how the Arabs related some of their practices to Abraham and his son Ishmael to justify them for their own interests. When the Prophet entered the Ka’ba he found pictures, fitted on its walls, of Abraham and Ishmael practising

¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, 1/499. See also, Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/80-81. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/187-190. Al-Kalbī, *al-Asnām*, p. 8. Al-Kalbī mentions that ‘Amr ibn Luḥayy once fell seriously ill and was told that if he took a bath in a special spring in Jordan he would be cured. So he went there, took a bath, and was then cured. As he observed the people worshipping idols he investigated the reason for doing so. ‘Amr was impressed by the idea, and, therefore, he took some of these idols with him to Makka. See al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣnām*, p. 8.

² What happened to Luḥayy when he saw the people of Jordan was like what happened to the Israelites when Moses took them across the sea; they came upon a people devoted entirely to some idols of which they had. They requested, ‘O Moses, fashion for us a god like unto the gods they have.’ See Q. 7:138.

³ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/81.

⁴ Zaghlūl, *Fī Tārīkh al-Arab*, p. 358.

divination by arrows.¹ This incident illustrates how the Arabs used to justify their superstitions by tracing them back to Abraham, which also suggests that Abraham was considered as a higher authority to which these Arabs referred their practices. This also shows that Muir's view that there was no trace of anything Abrahamic in the essential elements of the Arab superstitions is incorrect.²

It seems that the Arabs did not develop an elaborate mythology or involved theology around their gods and goddesses. Their polytheism was grafted on to the Abrahamic religion. Despite their inclination into gross idolatry, the Arabs had not lost sight of Allah as the Lord of the universe. The Arabs throughout the ages used to call the Ka'ba the House of Allah while all the other shrines were each named after some specific god or goddess, such as the shrine of Allāt, and that of al-'Uzza. Therefore, if the Ka'ba had been originally built for any idolatrous deity, one would have expected the name of that deity to have remained associated with it.

g. The *ḥunafā'*

Some names of the *ḥunafā'*

There were some people who had no interest in worshipping idols, such as Waraqa ibn Nawfal, Qiss ibn Sā'ida al-Iyādī, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Jaḥsh, Zayd ibn 'Amr ibn Nufayl, 'Umayya ibn Abū al-Ṣalt, 'Uthmān ibn al-Ḥuwayrith, and others. There were also some *ḥunafā'* from Madina such as Abū Qays Ibn al-Najjār from the Khazraj, Swayd ibn al

¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ*, 4/366.

² Muir considers all the Arab practices to have had no connection with the religion of Abraham. Muir attempts to prove that the Ka'ba and the rites connected with it were polytheistic and of south Arabian origin. He also thinks that the Ishmaelite tribes imposed the Abrahamic legend on their practices and then this was adopted by the Arabs as a national religion. See Muir, *The life of Mahomet*, 1/111.

Ṣāmit, and As‘ad ibn Zurāra. Some of these *ḥunafā’* would consider themselves as simple-minded if they were to worship idols. Zayd ibn ‘Amr, in one of his poems points to this meaning saying:

I will not call on Hubal, since it was considered as our god,
But that was when I was simple-minded person.¹

The meaning of the term *ḥanīf*

The term ‘*ḥanīf*’ was given to those who inclined not to worship idols, and seems to have been used before Islam. For example, Umayya ibn Abū al-Salt in his poems said, ‘Every religion other than the *ḥanīfiyya* is false.’² Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the word *ḥanīf* means to be straight. He also mentions that some other authorities linked this word with the pilgrimage, or with the practice of circumcision since Abraham was the first prophet to establish these practices. Al-Ṭabarī states that to restrict the meaning of *ḥanīf* only to the pilgrimage and circumcision is incorrect because this means that the polytheists who used to perform pilgrimage were *ḥunafā’*, and the Jews who used to practise circumcision were also *ḥunafā’*. Al-Ṭabarī supports this view by referring to the Qur’an which considers that neither the polytheists, nor the Jews and the Christians were among the *ḥunafā’* since this name is associated with Abraham and his followers. The Qur’an says:

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was a *ḥanīf* and a Muslim, and he was not among the polytheists.³

¹ Zaghlūl, *Tārīkh al-Arab*, p. 358.

² Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj al-Dhahab*, 1/78.

³ Q. 3:67. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 1/616-618.

Ibn Kathīr gives many meanings to the word *ḥanīf*. He believes that the meaning of *ḥanīf* is to be straight or to be honest and sincere. He also mentions that the word *ḥanīf* is a title given for those who used to face the Ka'ba during their prayers and performed the pilgrimage which is rejected by al-Ṭabarī as we mentioned above.¹ Al-Qurṭubī mentions that the word *ḥanīf* means to incline to something. He states that the Qur'an called Abraham *ḥanīf* because he inclined to the religion of Allah. He also mentions that *ḥanīf* also means 'to be straight.'² The Qur'anic commentators mention that the word *ḥanīf* is an Arabic word derived from the Arabic root *ḤNF*, which means to incline to, or turn away from something, or also to be straight since the word *ḥanīf* occurs twelve times in the Qur'an with these meanings.³ However, some writers refer many of the Qur'anic terms to Hebrew and Syriac in order to show that Muhammad borrowed these terms from Judaism and Christianity. Some writers associate the term *ḥanīf* with the Syriac word '*hanpa*' which means pagan heretic or religious dissident.⁴ Katsh mentions that this term is the Hebrew term, *tchinot*.⁵ Bell mentions that this term was in use by the Christians to point to unconverted Arabs, those who were neither Jews nor Christians but who continued to follow the ancient native religion.⁶ Bell argues that the use of the term *ḥanīf* in the Qur'an implies that the term was in use before the Prophet. He thinks that this use was to denote a class of religious people who were known and respected and

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/163.

² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2/137. See also Ibn Manẓūr. *Lisān al-Arab*, 9/57. Al-Jazarī, *al-Nihaya fi Gharīb al-Athar*, 1/451.

³ See 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, p. 279.

⁴ Gabrieli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, p. 43. See also Trimmingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 262.

⁵ Abraham Katsh, *Judaism in Islam*, p. 108.

⁶ Bell, "Who Were The Ḥanīf?", *The Muslim World*, 1930, p. 121.

turned away from idolatry.¹ Bell mentions that the first time the Prophet adopted this term *ḥanīf* and related himself to Abraham was after his emigration to Madina for the sake of breaking with the Jews.² However, one finds that the Qur'an uses the term *ḥanīf* in the early stage of the revelation since this term is mentioned six times in the Makkan *sūras*, which indicates that the reference in the Qur'an to the term *ḥanīf* as well as to Abraham and his message was made at Makka before any break or encounter with the Jews.³

Causes of *taḥannuf*

When the *ḥunafā'* of Arabia saw their people worshipping idols, they left them and went out of Arabia searching for doctrines related to that of their ancestor, Abraham. The worship of idols neither attracted their hearts, nor inspired their souls to worship.⁴ Therefore, some *ḥunafā'* travelled outside Arabia and made a great effort in searching for the religion of Abraham, asking monks and rabbis about it. Others left their people and went to live in caves. This also indicates that Judaism and Christianity played some role in the Arabs' religious activities which caused the *ḥunafā'* to go on searching for the true religion outside Arabian territories, namely, Syria and Irāq. Many narratives of the Muslim historians support this view. Ibn Ishāq narrates that one day, while the Quraysh were celebrating their feast, Zayd ibn 'Amr ibn Nufayl, 'Ubayd Allāh ibn Jaḥsh, 'Uthmān ibn al-Ḥuwayrith and Warāqa ibn Nawfal had a secret meeting because they

¹ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 58.

² Bell, "Who Were The Hanīf?", *The Muslim World*, 1930, pp. 122-123. Fazlur Rahman challenges the notion that the Qur'an has been developed due to the break with the Jews. See Rahman, "Pre-Foundations of the Muslim Community in Mecca", *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, ed. Peters, 1999, pp. 185-204.

³ Q. 6:79, 6:161, 10:105, 16:120, 16:123, and 30:30.

⁴ Abraham Katsh argues that the *ḥunafā'* of Arabia were Jews. See Katsh, *Judaism in Islam*, p. 108.

would be persecuted if the idolaters caught them. They consulted one another regarding the religious situation of their people. They declared that their people were misguided and had disobeyed the command of their father, Abraham, in worshipping idols. These people came to the fact that these idols caused neither benefit nor harm.¹ As Lings says, ‘The *ḥunafā*’ would have nothing to do with the idols, whose presence in Makka they looked on as a profanation and pollution.’² Therefore, these *ḥunafā*’ had to search for the true religion somewhere else. Zayd ibn ‘Amr ibn Nufayl went to Syria, where he may have studied Christianity, but he remained a seeker until his death. ‘Uthmān ibn al-Ḥuwayrith migrated to Byzantine territory and became a Christian. Ibn al-Ḥuwayrith was one of the intelligent men of the Quraysh.³ He went to Syria and there he formed a scheme of becoming the ruler of Makka and turning its people into Christians with the support of the Byzantine authority. Ibn al-Huwayrith visited the Byzantine Emperor, who saw in the plan an opportunity to turn the heart of Arabia, Makka, which was a centre of religion and trade, into a satellite state like the Ghassānid kingdom.⁴ Accordingly, the Emperor wrote to the people of Makka asking them to surrender to Ibn al-Ḥuwayrith as their governor. The people of Makka opposed the plan and, therefore, Ibn al-Ḥuwayrith escaped to Syria. In Syria, he encouraged the Byzantine authority to stop the Makkans’ trade with Syria. This led the Byzantine authority to arrest two of the leading merchants of Makka, Sa‘īd ibn al-‘Āṣī and Hishām ibn Shu‘ba, who were released later by the diplomacy of al-Walīd ibn al-Mughīra who turned the tables upon Ibn al-Ḥuwayrith.

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 98-103.

² Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 16.

³ Al-Fāsī, *al-‘Iqd al-Thamīn*, 1/153.

⁴ Muhammad al-Baghdādī, *al-Munammīq fī Akhbār Quraysh*, p. 185. See also al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-‘Umīf*, 1/255.

Later Ibn al-Ḥuwayrith was poisoned to death by ‘Amr ibn Jafna al-Ghassānī who was the one who imprisoned the two leading merchants of Makka.¹ What happened to the other two *ḥanīfs* was that ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Jahsh separated himself from idolatry but adopted no other faith until he became a Muslim. Later, Ibn Jahsh emigrated to Ethiopia with some other Muslims and there he became a Christian. Waraqa ibn Nawfal also became a Christian.²

The *ḥunafā’* were not reformers

It is noteworthy mentioning that some writers consider the *ḥunafā’* as reformers.³ These writers allege that the Arabs mind awoke just before the appearance of Muhammad and rebelled against the worship of idols and pre-Islamic superstitions. They believe that this awakening was embodied in Mohammed’s mission who placed himself at the head of the movement of the reformers who called themselves *ḥunafā’*. However, the existence of hanifism as an organised body as insisted by some writers, has no support in the Muslim sources.⁴ Even non-Muslim writers oppose this view and state that the *ḥunafā’* did not form any organized group but were a few isolated individuals.⁵ The Qur’an also does not point to any movement or group called *ḥunafā’* but it mentions the term *ḥanīf* to describe anyone inclined to the straight path.⁶

¹ See Suhaylī, *al-Rawd al-‘Umīf*, 1/255.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 99. Jawād ‘Ali mentions that the Qur’an uses the word *ḥunafā’* to describe those who are following the straight path but not certain group who presented before Islam.

³ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/457.

⁴ Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia*, article *hanīf*, pp. 132-133.

⁵ Gabrieli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, p. 43.

⁶ Q. 98:5.

The conflict between the *ḥunafā'* and the idolaters

Some of the *ḥunafā'* were persecuted, such as Zayd who was persecuted by al-Khaṭṭāb, which caused him to leave for Iraq and Syria, where he asked the monks and rabbis of these places about the religion of Abraham.¹ This event shows that the people of Makka were ready to prevent any opposition against their idols in Arabia. This incident also shows that the idolaters of Arabia fought against those who opposed their idols and worship. The question that arises here is, did the idolaters fight against Judaism and Christianity and persecute them as they persecuted some of the *ḥunafā'*? From the available evidence, and as we will mention in Section B of this Chapter, one finds that the motive behind the conflict between the Arabs and the Jews in Madina was based on economic and racial disputes.² One therefore cannot trace any sign of conflict based on religious motive between the pagan Arabs and the People of the Book.

Muhammad's sojourn in the cave of Ḥirā'

The Prophet, before his prophethood, acted in the same way as the *ḥunafā'*. He had rejected the worship of idols. Being known as *al-Amīn*, the honest and trustworthy, made the Quraysh accept his judgement regarding the quarrel in respect of fitting the Black Stone in the wall of the Ka'ba which could have led to fighting and killing. Being a shepherd helped favourably in his habit of meditation and deep investigation into the wide universe around him. The Prophet's heart was restless about the practices which existed around him which caused him to sojourn in the cave of Ḥirā'.

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/238.

² Al-Khaṭṭāwī, *al-Madina fī al-'Aṣr al-Jāhili*, 3/243-244.

Kister also considers that this sojourn of the Prophet in the cave of Ḥirā' as the same practice which some people used to practise in the period of the *jāhiliyya*.¹ Kister is not sure whether the sojourn of Muhammad was according to Abraham's law or that of Moses or Jesus, or whether it was according to the law of some of his predecessors, or whether he did or did not follow any other law before his call.² He refers to Sprenger who refutes the possibility of devotional practices of Makkans at the cave of Ḥirā' as incompatible with the spirit of the *jāhiliyya*. Sprenger, and along with him Watt, suppose that Ḥirā' served as a summer resort for these Makkans who could not afford to spend the summer in Ṭā'if, therefore, Sprenger asserts that Muhammad might have pitched a tent in front of the cave to offer his family a place since the cave was too small.³

The following reasons lead us not to accept the previous view:

- (i) It is impossible that tens of people were staying in the cave of Ḥirā' making *taḥannuth*, simply because *taḥannuth* needs solitude. So, this seclusion would not be suitable if the *mutaḥannithūn* took their families with them.
- (ii) One assumes that a man like Muhammad, who was the husband of Khadīja, one of the richest traders of Makka, could easily have afforded to go to Ṭā'if for a summer break if this was the motive behind the Prophet's sojourn.
- (iii) To practice *taḥannuf* during the time of *jāhiliyya* was the only option for those who rejected the worship of idols. Therefore, the only option for the Prophet was to leave for seclusion.

¹ Kister, *Studies in Jāhiliyya*, p. 223.

² Kister, *Studies in Jāhiliyya*, p. 223.

³ Kister, *Studies in Jāhiliyya*, p. 228.

h. Belief in the Hereafter among the Arabs

There are various allusions to the Hereafter. In some Arab poems, such as the *mu‘allaqa* of Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, there are terms related to the Hereafter.¹ However, the people of Arabia, in general, did not recognise the doctrine of the Hereafter. They worshipped for the purpose of worldly gain, wealth and health.² The Qur’an refers to this, saying:

What, when we die and become dust and bones, shall we then be raised
up again, and also our fathers of old?³

Some of the Arabs may have heard about the Hereafter from the Jews. Ibn Ishāq states that Salama ibn Waqash said, ‘We had a Jewish neighbour among the Banū ‘Abd al-Ashhal, who came out to us one day from his house. He spoke of the day of resurrection, the reckoning, the scale, paradise and hell. When he spoke of these things to the polytheists, who thought that there could be no rising after death, they said to him, ‘Do you think that men can be raised from the dead to a place where there is a garden and a fire in which they will be recompensed for their deeds?’ He replied, ‘Yes.’ Then the Jewish man described hell fire to them and told them about its signs.’⁴ This narration suggests that, although the Jews spoke of the Hereafter, there seems to have been little influence by them on the Arab beliefs. Therefore, the Qur’an pays great attention to explain this belief of the Hereafter and introduce it to the Arabs. The Qur’an mentions that the doctrines of the Hereafter were part of the teachings of Abraham.⁵ However, the Arabs had forgotten this belief and,

¹ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-‘Arab*, 6/109-115.

² Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/432. Q. 50:3, and 45:24. See also al-Khatrāwī, *al-Madīna fī al-‘Aṣr al-Jāhilī*, 3/261-262.

³ Q. 37:16-17.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, pp. 93-94.

⁵ Q. 87:18-19.

therefore, they wondered that there has come to them a Prophet who brought strange doctrines regarding the life after death.¹

i. Circumcision, the *sunna* of Abraham

Al-Ṭabarī mentions that Abraham was the first prophet to establish the pilgrimage and circumcision which would then remain as acts of worship till the Day of Judgement.² According to al-Bukhārī, Abraham did his circumcision at the age of eighty.³ There is an incident which shows the importance of this practice in Arabia before the coming of the Prophet. Ibn Ishāq relates that during the battle of Ḥunayn, the Muslims found a slave belonging to the tribe of Thaḳīf. When they saw that he was uncircumcised, they were astonished and some of them shouted, ‘O people. Thaḳīf do not practise circumcision.’ Al-Mughīra ibn Shu‘ba, one of the tribe of Thaḳīf, stood up to defend the position of his people saying, ‘O people, this slave belongs to a Christian man.’ Then he showed them some other people killed in the battle to prove that they were circumcised.⁴ This incident indicates that being uncircumcised was considered shameful among the Arabs. This also shows that some of the practices of the religion of Abraham had remained unchanged and strictly practiced, and indeed after the coming of Islam, Muslims continued to practise circumcision as part of their religion.

¹ Q. 50:2-3. See also as examples 22:5, 13:5, 23:35, 23:82, 27:67, 37:16, 37:53, and 56:47.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 1/617-618.

³ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtasar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1411, p. 664.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 572.

Section B: The People of the Book

1. Introduction

This section highlights the extent to which Judaism and Christianity was present in the Hijāz and influenced its population in the pre-Islamic period. It shows the extent to which these religions were spread, and sheds light on the relationships between the People of the Book with one another and with the Arabs on the eve of Islam.

Before discussing the situation of the Jews and the Christians, it is worth mentioning that from the Islamic point of view, Muhammad was not a bringer of a new religion but all prophets before him taught the unity of Allah. The Qur'an confirms this saying:

The same religion He has established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah and that which We have sent by inspiration to you and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses and Jesus, that you should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein.¹

The Prophet also illustrates that his mission emphasised and complemented previous religions:

The association between the former prophets and me is similar to a fine building with a place for a missing corner brick. The people admired it and desired that brick to be laid, and I am that brick.²

¹ Q. 42:13.

² Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1475, p. 696.

The two previous statements indicate that Allah's religion is the same in essence. Its creed and faith has not changed in content since Adam, the first prophet.¹ However, there are some variations in the laws ordained to the various prophets, perhaps due to sociological reasons. The prophets before Muhammad were sent to their own individual nations and not to all nations, and each nation required its own language and law, and its injunctions varied according to the course of time.² This philosophy is not only the philosophy of Islam. In the Book of John in the New Testament we are told that the people of the time of Jesus were not mature enough to understand all that he could tell them; consequently, they had to wait until their power of understanding, or the power of truth, would have attained the required maturity.³ It is essential here to mention that in the course of time the people's interests and even their understandings change, and due to this, the messages sent to them by their Lord require some changes to be made.

The creed has not changed in its content simply because the teachings of the prophets regarding creed and beliefs will not differ from time to time. Regarding the law, one finds that the Qur'an mentions that Moses was sent to the Children of Israel whose circumstances demanded hard legislation of compulsion, but later Jesus brought them a less severe law. The Qur'an points to this change, mentioning that Jesus said to the Children of Israel:

I have come to you to attest the law before me, and to make lawful to you part of what was forbidden to you.⁴

¹ Q. 21:25.

² Q. 14:4 and 30:47.

³ Kochler, *The Concept of Monotheism*, 77-78. See John, 16:12.

⁴ Q. 3:50.

The Qur'an also mentions that one of the duties of the Prophet was to release the People of the Book from their heavy burdens and from the yoke that was upon them.¹ Yūsuf 'Ali refers to the change in legislation saying, 'In the formalism and exclusiveness of the Jews there were many restrictions which were removed by Islam.'²

The people of the Ḥijāz, as mentioned in the previous section, were monotheists in the beginning but later on, their religion became corrupted and was overwhelmed by idolatry. The Arabs became ready to accept all kinds of doctrines brought to them from within or from without Arabia. The Arabs accepted the worship of idols and stars although this worship was strange to their old religion, the religion of Abraham. Therefore, it is strange not to find that Judaism and Christianity influenced the Arabs, especially the *ḥunafā'*, those who searched everywhere for the religion of Abraham, for Judaism and Christianity are in essence Abrahamic. We find that even those among the *ḥunafā'* who had an interest in Christianity found it in Syria but not in Arabia. Lecker also mentions that the Arabs of Madina on the eve of the Hijra were immersed in idol worship. He mentions that the extent of this is surprising because the Jews of Madina are believed to have influenced their Arab neighbours.³

The main reasons why the *ḥunafā'* and the other Arabs did not become Jews or Christians according to the writers are:

¹ Q. 7:157.

² Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, commentary No. 1128, p. 390.

³ Lecker, "Idol Worship in Pre-Islamic Medina", *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, ed. Peters, 1999, p. 141.

- (i) The hostility between the Jews and the Syrian Christians caused the Arabs to concentrate on their own trade and business, and not to involve themselves in the conflict between these two people.¹
- (ii) The Jews had considered themselves as the chosen people, and, therefore, their religion became a religion of race.²
- (iii) One also concludes that the Jews migrated to Arabia to escape from the Romans and the Syrian Christians and it was better for them not to become active in inviting the Arabs to Judaism which could cause the Romans to go after them. Saunders thinks that the Jews of Arabia rarely indulged in proselytism, kept severely to themselves, and were viewed by the Arabs with some suspicion and dislike.³
- (iv) Some apologists, however, mention some other reasons and assert that the *ḥunafā'* and the Arabs did not become Jews because the Jews were tolerated by the Arabs and they did not like to enforce their religion on them.⁴ Glubb mentions that it was difficult for a people who held strong views on the honourable duty of revenge to absorb the spirit of a religion which commanded them to love their enemies and to turn the other cheek to aggressors.⁵ Trimingham mentions that there were two other factors which explain the failure of Christianity to influence the Arabs. Firstly, the interpretation of the Gospel presented no challenge to the Arab way of

¹ Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, pp. 212-213.

² Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, pp. 212-213.

³ Saunders, *A history of Medieval Islam*, p. 11.

⁴ Wilfonson, *al-Yahūd fi Bilād al-'Arab*, p. 72. The Qur'an by mentioning the story of the 'People of the Trench', it rejects any use of force to convert people to Islam. These people of Najran were persecuted and put to death by Dhū Nuwās when they refused to become Jews. See Q. 85:4-8. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 16-18.

⁵ Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad*, p. 36.

life, and did not inspire them to express their Christianity in an Arab idiom. Secondly, the Arab way of life possessed within it exceptional powers of resistance.¹ On the other hand, Bell, one of those interested in the question of influence, thinks that many of the Jews of Arabia were proselytes rather than Jews by race, and, therefore, he concludes that Judaism had some attraction for the Arabs.² Bell, by saying this, attempts to emphasise the idea that there was a large influence which was exercised by Judaism on the Prophet himself.³ Newby also argues that Islam was derived from Judaism and Christianity, simply because these religions were older and prior to Islam.⁴

2. The Jews

Some writers mention that Arabia was a Christian land in pre-Islamic times but without Christianity having had a deep effect on its inhabitants.⁵ Some others mention that the Jews were present in all areas of Arabian society and enjoyed great prestige and influence there.⁶ Others are of the opinion that the Jews as well as the Christians of Arabia were different from those who were in Europe, Iraq and Palestine. Israel Wilfonson, for example, believes that the Jews of Arabia had a different creed from that of the Jews of Palestine and Iraq, stating that the Jews of Palestine and Iraq did not

¹ Trimmingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 309.

² Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 14.

³ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 101.

⁴ Newby, *A History of the Jews*, p. 106. On the other hand, some writers assert that the Prophet has adopted many pagan rituals, in particular, the pilgrimage and its rituals. See, for example, Rubin, "The Ka'ba", *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, ed. Peters, 1999, pp. 313-347.

⁵ See, for example, Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, pp. 16-17. Bell refers to Cheikho who mentions that the whole of Arabia was Christian in the pre-Islamic period.

⁶ Newby, *The History of the Jews*, p. 49. Newby asserts that Arabia has been a country for Jews and a presence in Jewish history from the earliest legends, and continued to be a home for Jews until this century. See Newby, *The History of the Jews*, p. 7.

consider the Jews of Arabia as pure Jews.¹ Trimmingham mentions that the reason why the Jews of Arabia were different from that of Aramaic-speaking Jews in Babylonia is because they were not subject to Talmudic discipline.²

The following pages explore the situation of the Jews in Arabia in the pre-Islamic period:

a. The meaning of the name 'Yahūd'

The Qur'an calls the Jews *yahūd*, *hūd*, *alladhīna hādū* and *Banū Israel*.³ Commentators and philologists mention three views for calling the Jews *hūd*, *yahūd* or *alladhīna hādū*:

- (i) Because they repented after they worshipped the calf, and the name could therefore be derived from the root *hawada* which means to repent.⁴
- (ii) Because they move themselves whilst reading the Torah, *yatahawwadūna* 'indama *yaqra'ūn al-Tawrāh*.⁵
- (iii) Because they are related to Yahūdha, the fourth son of Jacob.⁶

Those who favour the third view mention that the Arabs sometimes use the letter *dāl* instead of the letter *dhāl* when they translate words into Arabic, and this derivation goes in line with the Qur'an when it calls them Banū Israel. Therefore, the reason behind calling the Jews Banū Israel is that they are related to Jacob, son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, and Jacob was called Israel, which in Hebrew means 'Abd Allah'.⁷

¹ Wilfonson, *Tārīkh al-Yahūd fī Bilād al-Arab*, p. 13. Armstrong mentions that the religion of the Jews of Arabia was of a somewhat rudimentary nature. See Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 55.

² Trimmingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 249.

³ See the Qur'an. 2:113, 2:111, 2:62, and 2:40 respectively.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/358. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/90. Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1/471.

⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/90. See also Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, p. 19.

⁶ Al-Khulī, *Tārīkh al-Milal*, 2/4. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/90. And al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1/471.

⁷ Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, p. 18.

The other name attributed to the Jews, which is not mentioned in the Qur'an, is 'Ibrāniyyūn or 'Ibriyyūn. The reasons behind giving this name to the Jews are: firstly, because they were related to Abraham who crossed - the Arabic word is 'abara - the Euphrates River when migrating from Iraq;¹ secondly, because they are related to 'Ibr or 'Āber, the fifth grandfather of Abraham.²

b. The first influx of the Jews into Arabia

A discussion about the history of the Jews could be prolix as it began since Jacob migrated from Palestine to Egypt in about 1900 B.C. when Jacob and his sons left for Egypt to join Joseph who was one of Pharaoh's ministers at that time.³

What is relevant here is to embark upon some opinions regarding the first influx of the Jews into Arabia:

1. Newby who supports his view by mentioning a portion of a story from the *Kitāb al-Aghānī*. He states that Moses had sent soldiers against the first people to settle Madina before the Children of Israel, the Amālekites, and ordered them to kill all of the Amālekites. Newby supports his view with a Biblical story which states that the Children of Israel were the second people to settle in Arabia.⁴ However, the Qur'an states that the Jews refused to obey when Moses ordered them to invade the Holy Land which Allah had assigned to them. They said, 'O Moses, in this Holy Land there are a people of great strength, and we shall never enter it till they leave it, and, when they leave it, then we

¹ See Ishāq Saqqa who refers to both historians, Ibn al-Salībī who died in 1171 A.C. and Ibn al-'Ibrī who died in 1286 A.C. Saqqa, "al-'Ibrāniyyūn", *Al-Arabi Kuwaiti Journal*, No. 91, June 1966, p. 151.

² Ṭantāwī, *Banū Israel*, p. 18. See, Faraj, *al-Yahūd*, p. 10.

³ Q. 12:55-56, and 12:99-100.

⁴ Newby, *A history of the Jews*, pp. 14-15. See also al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, pp. 94-99.

will enter.’¹ Then Yūsha‘ and Caleb encouraged them to enter, but again they refused and said, ‘O Moses, we shall never enter it as long as they are there, so go you and your Lord and fight you two, we are sitting right here.’² It seems that this Qur’anic statement suggests that the Israelites refused to fight the Amālekites of the Holy Land rather than to fight against the Amālekites of the Ḥijāz, since the liberation of their Promised Land, as they believe, was more important than the occupation of Arabia and entering into war with the same Amālekites for the sake of its desert.

Newby considers the previous story of *al-Aghānī* as an appropriate introduction to another story from the same book. It reads, ‘Then Rome rose up over all the Children of Israel in Syria, trampled them under foot, killed them, and married their women. So, when Rome conquered them in Syria, the Banū al-Nadir, the Banū Qurayza and the Banū Bahdal fled to the Children of Israel in the Ḥijāz.’³ From these stories, he concludes that the first coming of the Children of Israel to Arabia was in the time of Moses and later on, the Banū al-Nadir, the Banū Qurayza and the Banū Bahdal fled to the Ḥijāz to join their brothers who were already there. This statement, if reliable, could mean that there were some individuals who managed to flee shortly before the main mass escape of the Jews from the Romans in 70 A.D. This statement also explains that those Jews who lived in Arabia before the coming of the second wave of emigrants had probably escaped to live in Arabia after the destruction of their Temple at the hand of Nebuchadnezzar in 586

¹ Q. 5:22.

² Q. 5:24. See the complete statement in the Q 5:20-26.

³ Newby, *A History of the Jews*, p. 16.

B.C. The evidence gathered by Newby comes from biblical sources only even the Arabic sources are also dependent on biblical sources.¹

2. That the Jews' first migration to Arabia was in the time of David in the period 1012-972 B.C.² The purpose of this migration was probably for trade, and perhaps some of migrants remained there, since the kingdom of David, according to the Jews, had flourished during that time.³

3. Most historians are of the opinion that the main exodus of the Jews was caused by the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., by the Romans leader, Titus.⁴ Historians do not find a solid evidence which confirm the presence of the Jews as a community in Arabia before the destruction of their Temple in 70 A.D., when the Banū al-Nadīr and Banū Qurayẓa and Banū Qaynuqā' fled Syria following the consequences they experienced at the hand of the Romans. However, historians do not rule out the possibility of that some individual Jews, from time to time, fled to Arabia, in particular after the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonian leader Nebuchadnezzar in about 586 B.C.⁵ and the Romans in 70 A.D.

¹ See Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab*, 6/516-517. And also see the origin of the story in, 1 Samuel 15: 5-7 which mentions that God ordered Saul to destroy all the Amālekites, but Saul and the Israelites, succumbing to the temptations of wealth and power when they spared Agag, the Amālekites King, alongside with the best types of wealth and cattle. Gil, however, considers this biblical story as pure imagination. He, therefore, thinks that the Jews were the first people to inhabit Madina. See Gil, "The Origin of the Jews of Yathrib", *The Arabs and Arabia on the Eve of Islam*, ed. Peters, 1999, p. 146. One notes here that the story itself could be unauthentic and a pure imagination as Gil mentioned but the denial of the existence of the Amālekites is a fact since all major sources mention that the first people to inhabit the Hijāz were the Amālekites and Banū Jurhum, and that before the coming of the Banū Israel.

² Fattāh, *Al-Yahūdiyya*, p. 36.

³ Q. 21:78-80. See Fattāh, *al-Yahūdiyya*, p. 37.

⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqadimma*, 2/594. See also Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, pp. 55-56. Wilfonson, *Tārīkh al-Yahūd fī Bilād al-'Arab*, p. 9. See also Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab*, 6/518.

⁵ Ibn-Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/39. See also Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab*, 6/517-518.

4. Al-Khaṭrāwī cites some other minor views regarding the first influx of the Jews into Arabia. He mentions that once Moses came to Makka to perform pilgrimage with his people, and during their return from Makka, some Jews chose to remain and live in Madina.¹ He also mentions that the Jews went to Madina because they found in the Torah that a prophet would appear in a place with palm trees and water in between stony areas. As the Jews believed, this description matched one of four places in Arabia, namely, Taymā', Khaybar, Fadak, and Madina. Therefore, they chose to settle in these places in the hope that they would follow the prophet who would appear there.²

The above-cited views suggest that the Jews migrated to Arabia from outside Arabia, escaping persecution, or perhaps hoping that they would join a prophet there. The main exodus of the Jews was caused by the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. by the Romans. Accordingly, some of them settled in Madina, some settled in places, such as Khaybar, Fadak, Taimā', Wādī al-Qurā, and others occupied other places. It seems that at the arrival of Islam, there were only a few Jews who had settled in Makka since no evidence which traces their presence there as a community. Therefore, neither the Makkan *sūras* of the Qur'an, nor the historical sources about Makka pay much attention to the Jews which indicates that they had no major part to play in Makka.

c. The origin of the Jews of Arabia

Regarding the origin of the Jews of Arabia, one can cite the following three views:

¹ See, for example, al-Khaṭrāwī, *al-Madina fi al-'Aṣr al-Jāhilī*, 3/69.

² Al-Khaṭrāwī, *al-Madina fi al-'Aṣr al-Jāhilī*, 3/70.

- (i) That the Jews of Arabia consisted of both the Jews who originated from the progeny of Israel and the judaized Jews who originated from the Arabs.¹
- (ii) That of al-Ya‘qūbī, Winkler, and Caskel who mention that all the Jews of Arabia were originally Arabs and became Jews under the influence of Jewish preachers.²
- (iii) That all the Jews of Arabia were emigrants and not originally Arabs.³

It is well known that Arabia was far from Byzantine and Persian power which helped in making it a safe place for both traders and refugees. Therefore, it is not strange to find that the Jews, especially after the first and the second destruction of the Temple, took refuge there, or went there as merchants.

The following factors suggest that the Jews of Arabia were not originally Arabs except for some Arabs who were influenced by the Jews, or converted to Judaism under certain circumstances:

- (i) There are some narratives which indicate that the origin of some of the Jewish tribes of Arabia was related to the Tribes of the Israelites, the *ashbāt*, such as the Banū al-Nadīr and Banū Qurayza, since they were related to *al-Kāhin* son of Aaron, and they used to be proud of their origin as the people of Madina used to call them the sons of al-Kāhin.⁴

¹ See, for example, Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/518.

² Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/530-531. See also al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya‘qūbī*, 2/49-52. Al-Khaṭrāwī, *al-Madīna fi al-‘Aṣr al-Jāhili*, 3/72.

³ See Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, pp. 57-59.

⁴ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh Al-Arab*, 6/522-523. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, p. 444. After the deportation of Banū al-Nadīr, a Jewish poet answered a Muslims’ poet, ‘You satirised the purest stock of the two priests.’ The Muslim poet replied, ‘ground of the remains of the family of the two priests, and their glory which once was great became feeble.’ This incident suggests that the tribe of Banū al-Nadīr related themselves to al-Kāhin ibn Aaron. See, Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 3/283-284.

- (ii) The Qur'an, in forty-one occasions refers to the Jews as, 'O Children of Israel.'¹ It only once uses the phrase, 'O you who that stand on Judaism.'² This suggests that the Jews of Arabia were not Arabs but from the progeny of Israel.
- (iii) When also studying the names of the Jews, we find that many of the Jews of Arabia adopted Arabic names or used these Arabic names to name their children. Moreover, one finds that many Jewish names indicate that the second or the third grandfather's name was not an Arabic name, such as 'Abd Allah ibn Şūriā', Tha'laba ibn She'iā, Rifā'a ibn Yazīd ibn al-Tābūt which also suggests that they were not originally Arabs.³
- (iv) Many writers mention that the Jews consider themselves as the chosen people and this makes them a closed ethnic group.⁴ Therefore, one finds that the big number of castles built by the Jews indicates that they were unlike the Arabs who felt no need for this kind of protection in their own land.

This however does not mean that there were no converted Arabs, but these converts, perhaps, had no deep hold in Judaism, such as Banū Tha'laba and Banū Zayd.⁵ The following incidents and statements suggest that there were reasons that caused some Arabs to convert to Judaism:

- (i) There is a *ḥadīth* which points to the possibility of some converted Arabs through the will of their fathers:

¹ See 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, article Israel, pp. 42-43.

² Q. 62:6.

³ See, for example, Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, p. 58.

⁴ Trimmingham mentions that, regardless of their origin, the Jews of Arabia felt themselves quite different from the Arabs among whom they lived, and had erected a self-sufficient barrier around themselves. See Trimmingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Time*, p. 249.

⁵ Ibn Munabih, *al-Tijān*, pp. 182-186.

Every child is born a Muslim innately, on the state of innateness (*fitra*).

His parents turn him into Judaism or Christianity or Zoroastrianism.¹

- (ii) The women of the Aws and the Khazraj whose infants used to die, possibly out of illness or disability, used to make a vow that if their next child lived they would make him a Jew, since they considered the Jews to be People of the Book and their religion to be better than theirs.²
- (iii) Some parents sent their children to Jewish women to be suckled by them. Their fathers believed that the Jews were People of the Book, so it was a blessing to send their children to them to be suckled.³
- (iv) Some of those Arabs who converted to Judaism did so under the pressure of their need for protection, especially at the time of revenge and war. For example, many writers mention that once the clan of the Banū Ḥishna ibn ‘Akārīma killed a group of people from the clan of Banū Rubā‘a and fled to the Jews of Taymā’ asking for their protection. The Jews did not allow them to enter their castles until they had converted to Judaism. Later on, the same clan went to Madina, and when Islam arose there, they converted to Islam.⁴

d. The relationship between the Arabs and the Jews

As we mentioned in Section A, there is no evidence that there was a religious conflict between the Jews and the pagan Arabs. Although there were some everyday contacts

¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, No. 1385.

² Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 3/268. See also Newby, *A History of the Jews*, p. 53.

³ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 3/268.

⁴ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-‘Arab*, 6/525. Newby mentions this event briefly in his, *A History of the Jews*, pp. 52-53. See also Moshe Gil, *The Origin of the Jews of Yathrib*, pp. 210f.

between the Jews and the Arabs, the Jews had little influence on them, in religion in particular. The Jews of Arabia used to live separately in segregated places. Their residences were in fertile areas, isolated and remote from the Arabs and protected with castles and other such protection.¹ Unlike the Arabs, the Jews became well known in building castles. Their persecution at the hands of the Romans and other nations alongside their anxiety about their future led them to protect themselves with strong castles.² They always lived together, and each clan or tribe were gathered into a compact mass.³ They used to assemble at their own allocated places of worship and teaching.⁴ They had their own law with regard to slaughtering animals, sacrifice, inheritance and marriage. They had their feasts and holidays.⁵ They used to let their hair down and not to part it as the Arabs did.⁶ Furthermore, they used mostly their Hebrew language to communicate with one another, although they were able to speak Arabic and some knew Syriac.⁷

The Qur'an also records that the Jews used to refer to the Arabs as illiterate people. They believed that there was no blame on them betraying the Arabs and usurping their belongings.⁸ This suggests that the Jews retained their ethnic particularism. But this

¹ Kent, *A History of the Hebrew People*, p. 25. Wizeman mentions that to live in isolation was one of the peculiarities of the Jews in all periods which caused them to consider the people who were living around them as enemies. See Wizeman, *mudhakkirāt*, p. 3. See also Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, 1/48.

² The Qur'an points to the Jewish castles in the verse 59:14.

³ Jawād, *al-Mufasssal fi Tārīkh al-'Arab*, 6/531-532.

⁴ Muslim sources called the house in which the Jews used to assemble *bayt al-Midrās*. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 260. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/573. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqāt*, 1/164.

⁵ See Tantāwī, *Banī Israel*, p. 58.

⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1490, p. 699.

⁷ Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, p. 85.

⁸ Q. 3:75.

does not mean that there was no interaction between the Jews and the Arabs because nations living together will inevitably be affected by one another.

e. The conflict between the Jewish tribes in Arabia

The Jewish historical records show that after the death of Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel divided into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom and the Southern Kingdom. There was a conflict between these kingdoms and each treated the other as an enemy to the extent that the king of the Southern Kingdom sought help from the king of Damascus against the Northern Jewish Kingdom, which led to the destruction of these kingdoms.¹ Similarly, and in Madina in particular, there was a conflict between the Jewish tribes of Arabia. The following statements of the Qur'an point to this conflict:

And remember when We took your covenant (saying): 'Shed not the blood of your people, and do not turn out your own people from their homes. Then, you ratified this and bore witness. After this, it is you who kill one another and drive out a party of you from their homes, and assist (their enemies) against them in guilt and transgression. And if they come to you as captives, you ransom them, although their expulsion was forbidden to you. Then do you believe in a part of the Book and reject the rest?'²

This statement outlines the conflict between the two parties, the Banū Qaynuqā' and their adherents, allies of the Khazraj, and al-Nadir and Qurayza and their adherents, allies

¹ Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, 1/84. See also Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, pp. 42-43.

² Q. 2:84-85.

of the Aws.¹ When there was a war between the two pagan tribes, the Aws and the Khazraj, each Jewish side helped its allies against its own brothers. Furthermore, they shed each other's blood, while the Torah was in their hands by which they knew what was allowed and forbidden. However, the Aws and the Khazraj were polytheists worshipping idols, and pay no attention to the punishment of the Hereafter or to what was permitted and forbidden. Moreover, this Qur'anic verse tells us that when the war came to an end, they, i. e. the two above-mentioned parties, ransomed their prisoners in accordance with the Torah, but disregarded the bloodshed that had been incurred in helping the polytheists. Therefore, the Qur'an criticised their conduct when they believe in a part of the Book and reject the rest of it. The Qur'an, in the next verse, remarks that killing their own brothers and helping the polytheists were for the sake of the gain of this world, 'It is they who buy this life at the price of the next life.'²

It is not strange to find that the Jews of Qurayza and al-Nadir were opposing the Jews of Qaynuqā', since the first two tribes considered themselves, in particular the Banū al-Nadīr, as the sons of al-Kāhinayn, Moses and Aaron, which suggests that perhaps racial hatred also existed amongst them.³ The Banū al-Nadīr used to take advantage of the other Jewish tribes before the law. Ibn Abbās relates that if someone from the Banū Qurayza killed someone from al-Nadir, then the first must be killed as a penalty, but if someone from al-Nadir killed someone from Qurayza, then the Banū al-Nadīr only had

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/441 new. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/105-106. Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2/22-23.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/447 new. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, pp. 252-253. Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2/24.

³ Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Aghānī*, 19/94. See also Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-'Arab*, 6/522.

to pay the blood money, which was a certain load of dates.¹ The Jewish leaders used to judge between their own people unjustly and according to one's prestige.² They also used to accept bribes which led them deliberately to change their verdicts.³ Therefore, the Jews preferred to come to the Prophet to judge between them in their affairs.⁴ So, the Prophet used to judge between them justly and according to their own law, the Torah.⁵

As a result of the internal conflict among the Jews, they had gradually become weak, and their situation could be described in the same way as Newby describes it when he says, 'At the birth of Muhammad in 570 A.D., the Jewish communities in Arabia were in political and economic decline.'⁶ After comparing their situation in Arabia during that time, and in the past when they enjoyed greater prestige, Newby adds, 'Jews everywhere in the Ḥijāz were losing control over the best land and water.'⁷

f. The conflict between the Arabs and the Jews before the coming of Islam

Did the Jews live in Arabia in peace before Islam? In order to answer this question one should refer to the history of the Jews. References show that the Jews have suffered

¹ Yaḳūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, article 'Yathrib', 4/462. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/583. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/178. Jawād 'Ali, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-'Arab*, 6/523.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/583. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/56. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/178.

³ Q. 5:42. Al-Ṭabarī mentions twenty-eight narratives to support the view that the meaning of *suḥt* in verse 5:42 is bribery. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/579-582.

⁴ Q. 5:42. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/582-583.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/357. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/170. The Qur'an in verse 9:34, states that most of the Jewish rabbis and Christian Monks devoured the wealth of their people in falsehood. Yūsuf 'Ali comments on the above mentioned verse saying, 'this was strikingly exemplified in the history of Mediaeval Europe, though the disease is apt to attack all people and organisations at all times.' He adds, 'Priests got rich by issuing indulgences and dispensations; they made their office a stepping-stone to worldly power and possessions. Even the Monastic Orders, which took vows of poverty for individuals, grew rich with corporate property, until their wealth became a scandal, even among their own nations.' See Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, commentary No.1291, p. 447. Al-Qurṭubī states that the rabbis used to accept bribery. This explains the reason why the Jews preferred the Prophet's judgement to the rabbis' judgement. This also could explain the reason why rabbis and monks could not attract the people of Arabia, in particular, the *ḥunafā'*. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 8/112.

⁶ Newby, *A History of the Jews*, p. 49.

⁷ Newby, *A History of the Jews*, p. 49.

continuous persecutions from the beginning of their history. According to the commentators, the Qur'an points to this saying:

Behold! Your lord did declare that He would send against them (the Jews), to the day of Judgement, those who would afflict them with grievous penalty. Your Lord is quick in retribution, but He is also oft forgiving, most merciful.¹

The historical record of the Jews gives evidence that after the death of Solomon, the Northern Jewish Kingdom in Palestine was persecuted in about 721 B.C. by the Assyrians king, Sarjun. Similarly, the Assyrians invaded the Southern Jewish Kingdom in about 677 B.C. The Babylonian King, Nebuchadnezzar, in about 610 B.C., occupied Jerusalem, and seven years later he destroyed the city yet again and killed its people. In 330 B.C., the Jews in Palestine had fallen under Persian rule. Ten years later, Ptolemy destroyed Jerusalem and killed thousands of its Jews. The next persecution caused by Antiochus was between 170-168 B.C., followed by the huge destruction of Jerusalem carried out by the Roman commander, Titus, in 70 A.D. Under the reign of Trajan, the Jews were also prevented from practising their religion and the Romans took away their freedom of worship, which led the Jews to flee their homes and to emigrate to many parts of the world.²

In Arabia before Islam, in particular in Madina, the relationship between the Arabs and the Jews was mostly strained and fraught with ill feeling. In moments of

¹ Q. 7:167-168. See, for example, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/102-103.

² Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, pp. 617-617. Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, 1/83-98. See Charlesworth, *Jews and Christians: Exploring the past, present and future*, pp. 180-207.

acrimony, the Jews used to say to the Arabs, 'The time of a prophet who is to be sent is now at hand, and with him we shall slay you even as 'Ād and Iram were slain.'¹

The following statement illustrates this conflict which is summarised as follows:

When the tribes of the Aws and the Khazraj saw that the Jews were enjoying a good life, supplied with wealth and prestige while they were weak and poor, they sent Mālik ibn 'Ajlān to the prince of Ghassān, Abū Jubayla 'Ubayd ibn Sālim ibn Mālik, to seek his support against the Jews. Ibn 'Ajlān told the prince about the Jewish triumph and aggression. The prince advised Ibn 'Ajlān to return to Madina and to tell its people including the Jewish leaders that the prince would come to Madina and therefore they should gather to welcome the prince. Mālik prepared such a place to receive the prince. While the prince, the Jewish leaders and the men of the Aws and the Khazraj were gathering together, the soldiers of the prince killed all the Jews who had gathered there. As a result, the conflict between the Jews and Arabs terminated, and the Arabs triumphed over the Jews in Madina.²

Haykal thinks that the reason why the Christian Arabs from the Ghassānids supported the Aws and the Khazraj is because they abhorred the Jews who crucified Jesus. Therefore, it was a good opportunity for these Christians to support the Arabs

¹ 'Ād and Iram were two ancient Arab tribes who perished before the coming of Abraham.

² Al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Aghānī*, 19/97. See also Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 1/401.

against the Jews.¹ What supports this view is that, after the Prophet's death we find that the relation between the Jews and the Christians was strained and fraught with ill feeling. Therefore, when the Patriarch of Christians of Palestine agreed to surrender to the Muslims he put as a condition that the Muslims should not allow any Jews to settle in Jerusalem which shows the hostile relation between the Jews and Christians at that time. That was in 636 A.D., when 'Umar received the key of the main gates of Jerusalem.²

As a result, the Aws and the Khazraj gained victory over the Jews. The Jews of Arabia had become unable to oppose the Arabs openly which caused them to keep these two main tribes of Madina as enemies to one another.³ Accordingly, the Jews of the Banū Qaynuqā' allied with the Khazraj, and the Banū al-Nadīr and Qurayza allied with the Aws. This Jewish strategy, on the other hand, guaranteed two things to them: firstly, it guaranteed for them safety and protection against one another; secondly, it gave them the opportunity to keep the Aws and the Khazraj divided.

g. The Jews in Yemen

Islamic sources agree that Judaism was brought to Yemen through contacts between the kings of Yemen and the Jews of the Ḥijāz. They also agree that Abū Karib Tibān As'ad was the one who invited his people to adopt Judaism.⁴ After Tibān, his son Ḥassān came to the throne, but after a short time he was killed by his brother 'Amr. When 'Amr died, the Ḥimyarite kingdom fell into disorder and the people split up into parties, which

¹ Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 212. However, Yāqūt denies any support from the Ghassānids but the Aws and the Khazraj were able to triumph over the Jews in Madina, but it seems that Yāqūt exaggerates in describing how these Arab tribes persecuted the Jews. See Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, 4/385.

² See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 4/159.

³ Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 212.

⁴ Wahb ibn Munabbih, *al-Tījān*, pp. 295-296. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/426-427. Ibn Ishāq, *the Life of Mohammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 6-10. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/163-167.

resulted in the throne of Yemen being seized by Dhū Shanātir who put the royal family to open shame, and killed the leaders of the Ḥimyarites. After this leader, Dhū Nuwās came to the throne and all the Ḥimyarites were united behind him. As Saunders concludes, Dhū Nuwās saw that the old paganism was moribund and that Yemen required a new faith to strengthen its moral basis, but unwilling to adopt Christianity, the religion of his powerful neighbours, Ethiopia, he proclaimed his adhesion to Judaism.¹ Saunders thinks that the reason why Dhū Nuwās chose to be a Jew was because of the influence of his mother who was a Jewish slave girl.² Dhū Nuwās reigned for some considerable time until the Ethiopian Christians achieved control over Yemen in about 525 A.D. under the leadership of Aryāt. This took place just two years after the campaign of Dhū Nuwās, who adopted Judaism, against the Christians of Najrān.³ The Qur'an refers to this campaign:

Cursed were the people of the ditch
Of fire supplied abundantly with fuel
When they sat by it
And they witnessed what they were doing against the believers
And they had nothing against them, except that they believed in
Allah.⁴

¹ Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 13.

² Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 13.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, pp. 12-14. See also al-Mubārakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq*, trans. p. 24.

⁴ Q, 85:4-8. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, 1/68-104. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 19/251-256. Ibn Ishāq mentions that Dhū Nuwās had killed nearly twenty thousand of the people of Najrān. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, p. 17. And see also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 19/256.

This campaign of Dhū Nuwās against the Christians in Najrān caused the Ethiopians to occupy Yemen. Dhū Nuwās, by his campaign against the Christians, wanted to assure the future of the Jews against the danger of the Byzantines, their historical enemy, and to force them to accept Judaism.¹ Having refused to do so, they were thrown alive into a big ditch where a great fire had been set.² One of the Najrānis managed to flee and went to the Byzantine court for their help and told them what had happened in Najrān to its Christians. Accordingly, the Emperor of the Byzantine sent a letter to the Ethiopian king ordering him to help the Christians of Najrān and seek revenge. As a result, Yemen was re-occupied by the Ethiopians and entered into a new era.³

In brief, one can say that the Jews had flourished in Yemen twice: firstly, under the leadership of Solomon; secondly, under the leadership of Dhū Nuwās. As a result of the Ethiopians' re-occupation of Yemen, which was followed by the occupation of the Persians, Judaism seems to have declined in Yemen but some Jews and Christians remained there until the rise of Islam. The Prophet's letter sent to the king of Himyar shows that there were still some Jews and Christians in Yemen during the Prophet's life. The Prophet sent Mu'ādh ibn Jabal to the people of Yemen and told him that he was going to meet the People of the Book.⁴ The Prophet told him, 'If a Jew or a Christian becomes a Muslim, he is a believer with his rights and obligations, and he who holds fast to his religion is not to be turned.'⁵ When Islam came during the life of the Prophet, the

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, p. 17. See also Wherry, *A Comprehensive Commentary on The Qur'ān*, p. 45.

² Saunders mentions that the martyrs of Najrān are commemorated in the liturgies of the Greek, Latin and Oriental churches. See Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 13.

³ Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 13.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, p. 644.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, p. 643.

Jews of Yemen became Muslims after sending their deputation to Madina with their acceptance of Islam.¹ When the Prophet was on his death-bed he had given instructions that the Jews of the Ḥijāz and the Christians of Yemen be expelled from Arabia.² Some writers take this as evidence that there were no Jews in Yemen at that time. They support their view by mentioning two points: firstly, the Prophet had mentioned the Christians of Yemen only in his instruction; secondly, there is no evidence show that ‘Umar expelled any Jews from Yemen since he was the second caliph and the first one to fulfil the Prophet’s instruction of expelling the People of the Book from Arabia.³

3. The Christians

a. The Qur’anic name ‘Naṣārā’

The Qur’an has given the title ‘People of the Book’ to the Jews and the Christians thirty one times. Occasionally, the Qur’an uses this name with respect to the Jews only, as in the case of *Sūrat al-Ḥashr*.⁴ The special name given to the Christians in the Qur’an is *Naṣārā*, which is mentioned in the Qur’an fifteen times.⁵ The Qur’an only once uses the title ‘People of the Injīl’ for the Christians.⁶ Some writers assert that the Qur’an gives the name *Naṣārā* only to the members of the eastern churches living under Muslim rule.⁷ However, the Qur’an seems to give this title to all Christians since there is no evidence show that the

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans, Guillaume, pp. 642-643.

² Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, p. 59. See also Malik, *al-Muwatta’*, No. 1609, p. 644.

³ Ṭanṭāwī refers to Darwaza who supports the view that there were no Jews in Yemen at the end of the Prophet’s time in three of his works, namely, *Tārīkh al-Jins al-Arabī*, 5/148, and *‘Aṣr al-Nabī*, p. 105, and also in his *al-Qur’ān wal-Yahūd*, p. 34. See Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, p. 59.

⁴ Q. 59:11.

⁵ ‘Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu’jam*, article ‘Naṣārā’, pp. 875-876.

⁶ Q. 5:47.

⁷ See, for example, Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p. 440.

Qur'an gives the name Naṣārā to some Christians and gives a different name to others. There are also some poets who refer to the name *Naṣārā* in their poems, such as Umayya ibn Abī al-Ṣalt, Jābir ibn Ḥunna, Ḥātim al-Ṭā'iy and Tukhaym ibn Abī al-Tahkmā'.¹

Al-Ṭabarī gives three explanations for the etymology of the name Naṣārā:²

- (i) That one of its root meanings in Arabic is 'to help' or to 'offer assistance' and so it was applied to the Christians because of their support for each other and the mutual assistance shown among them.
- (ii) That these people were associated with a town called Nāṣira. Therefore, Jesus was called the Nazarene, the *nāṣirī*, as he was living in this town. Al-Ṭabarī supports this second view with three *ḥadīths*.
- (iii) That is because of their declaration that they were the helpers (*anṣār*) of Jesus. The Qur'an states that when Jesus questioned his followers saying, 'Who will be my helpers for Allah?' They replied, 'We are Allah's helpers.' The word 'helper' is derived from the Arabic root *nsr* from which Naṣārā is then derived.

Although commentators agree with one another in preferring these three explanations without any clear preference for any one of them, it would seem that the association of the name Naṣārā with the town of Nāṣira is most appropriate. Therefore, it

¹ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/583-584.

² See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/359. See also Al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, 1/281-282. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/90. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1/473. McAuliffe mentions that the preferred explanation in al-Ṭabarī's view is the second view, which is mentioned above, as indicated by the number of *ḥadīths* he records in support of it. However, I could not trace this agreement of al-Ṭabarī, although he supports the second explanation with three *ḥadīths*. See McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, p. 95.

is more suitable that the Christians related themselves to the town, Nāṣira, and called themselves Naṣārā, and the Qur'an continues to give them the same name.¹

There are some reasons why one would prefer the second explanation:

- (i) The history of the Christians indicates that there was hostility and hatred between different Christian denominations which contradicts the first explanation.
- (ii) It is not convincing that the Qur'an called them Naṣārā because a group of Christians declared that they were the helpers (*anṣār*) of Jesus.
- (iii) One also remarks that neither Jesus nor his disciples spoke Arabic at that time such that the derivation of this name Naṣārā might be derived from the Arabic root, *nsr*.

b. Elements which helped in bringing Christianity to the Arabs

Arabia became a land surrounded by Christianity, whilst the tribes of the Peninsula itself were still pagan and independent. Although the number of Christians in the Hijāz was small, the following elements illustrate how Christianity was brought there:

Missionaries

There is no clear evidence about missionary work which was carried out by individual Christians, or by the support of the Byzantine regime. One notes that there were some individual Christians who carried Christianity to Arabia, such as a missionary from Syria named Faymiyūn.² Another example of missionary activity from outside of Arabia was

¹ Ibn Manẓūr refers to ibn Sayyida who states that philologists, such as al-Jawāhirī and al-Layth are of the opinion that the word *Nasārā* refers to those related to a town called Nāsira. See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-Arab*, 5/211.

² Ibn Ishāq, *the Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 15-16. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, pp. 434-435.

Paul who visited Arabia and spent some time there, just shortly after his conversion.¹ Regarding Paul's visit to Arabia, Bell refers to Harnack's suggestion that the reason behind it was to engage in missionary work.² However, Bell thinks that the nature of Paul's visit to Arabia is uncertain, as is the length of time which he spent there. Harnack considers that Paul only withdrew to quiet and solitude for a time to determine his future policy after his conversion to Christianity.³ Jawād mentions that there were many churches in Hīra, playing a part in preaching the teaching of the Nestorians and bringing it to Arabia.⁴ The Byzantines also attempted to plant Christianity in Makka through appointing 'Uthmān ibn al-Huwayrith as a governor of Makka, but he was rejected even by his own clan, Banū Asad. The Byzantine ruler seems to have seen that if Ibn al-Huwayrith could plant Christianity in Makka, then it will be a good opportunity to turn the heart of Arabia, together with the commercially prosperous and religiously central city of Makka, into a satellite state like the Ghassānid state in Syria.⁵

Monks

There were some monks, such as Bahīrā and Nastūr, living by the trade route of Syria, in cells, away from their people.⁶ Some Arabs whilst travelling to Syria met these monks

¹ Bell, *the Origin of Islam*, p. 15.

² Bell, *the Origin of Islam*, p. 15.

³ In the book of Galatians, 1:15-17, Paul said, 'But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.' See Bell, *the Origin of Islam*, pp. 15-16.

⁴ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/597-599.

⁵ Suhailī, *al-Rawḍ al-Umī*, 1/255.

⁶ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/153-156.

and perhaps heard about Christianity from them.¹ Some *ḥunafā'* also met these monks and perhaps learnt about the religion from them, such as Waraqa who later became a learned Christian.² One also notes that many historians refer to the story of Salmān al-Fārisī which explains how he became Muslim, and shows that there were some monks across Syria and Irāq who played a part in his conversion.³

Trade

The arrival of Byzantine traders in Arabia for commerce was also one of the elements which played a part in bringing Christianity to Arabia. Al-Ṭabarī relates that on one occasion some traders from Syria went to Madina to sell olive oil. When they had sold their goods, the traders invited the two sons of Abū al-Ḥuṣayn into the fold of Christianity, and the sons accepted the invitation and went with them to Syria.⁴ The traders were engaged in discussing religious issues. When a number of Ethiopian traders who traded in Makka saw Muhammad, they told his foster-mother that he would have a great future, and therefore they would like to take him back home with them.⁵

It is also well known that there was regular trade between Arabia and its neighbouring countries, such as the two trade Journeys, in summer to the cooler regions of Syria and in winter to the warmer region of Yemen.⁶ Al-Qurṭubī relates to al-Harāwī

¹ Trimmingham is of the opinion that the Makkans were in contact with the Christians of Syria through commercial relations as well as with the diffused witness of the monks. See Trimmingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 247.

² Jawād, *al-Mufasssal fī Tārikh al-Arab*, 6/589.

³ See, for example, Ibn Ishāq, *the Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 95-98.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/16.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *the Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 73.

⁶ Q. *sūra* 106. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 12/702-703. Some historians mention that the first appearance of the Christianity in Yemen was after the Ethiopian Christians conquered Yemen in response to the killing of the Christians of Najrān at the hand of the King of Ḥimyar, Dhū Nuwās. Some writers

who mentions that there were four brothers from the tribe of Quraysh who engaged in a treaty with the rulers of four areas around Arabia, Hāshim engaged with Syria, ‘Abd Shams with Ethiopia, al-Muttalib with Yemen, and Nawfal with Persia.¹ It has been recorded that some Christians of Hīra, like Ka‘b ibn ‘Adī al-Tanūkhī, one of the Christian chiefs of Hīra, traded in Arabia and entered into a business partnership with ‘Umar ibn al-Khattāb in the linen trade before the coming of Islam.² These incidents mentioned above suggest that there were trade transactions between the Arabs of the Hijāz and their neighbours most of whom were Christians. These trade transactions helped Christianity to find its way to the Hijāz, and helped them to know about Christianity.³

There is also evidence that there was another type of trade which brought to Arabia some Christian slaves from abroad, such as Nastās, Mīnā, and Yūḥannā.⁴ Some of these slaves were able to read the Injīl and translate some of its meaning to the Arabs.⁵ There was a Christian slave in Makka called Jabr, a slave of Banū al-Hadramī, who was able to read the Torah and the Injīl.⁶ The man who also brought Christianity to Najrān was called Faymiyūn. He was captured by Arabs, and sold as a slave in Najrān. The people of Najrān were pagans and worshipped a tree at that time. Faymiyūn told his

mention that the reason for the Ethiopian invasion was related to political and economical factors. However, whatever the causes was the mass killing of the Christians of Najrān was the main cause of their invasion. See Sālīm, *Dirasāt fi Tārīkh al-‘Arab*, pp. 131-133. See also al-Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya‘qūbī*, 1/162. And al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/437.

¹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 20/188.

² Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/596.

³ Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 247.

⁴ Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 260.

⁵ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/588-589. See also Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 260.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 7/648. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 10/158.

master that they were in error. He told his master that he could curse the tree in the name of God, and God would destroy it. His master agreed, and Faymiyūn invoked God's name against the tree and God sent a wind against the tree, which tore it from its roots and cast it on the ground. The people of Najrān adopted Faymiyūn's religion, Christianity.¹

One remarks here that although the Arabs did not pay much attention to the beliefs of their slaves, when Islam established its activity amongst the slaves in Makka, Muslim slaves began to be persecuted in a brutal way by their masters.²

Other elements

There are some other elements which helped in bringing Christianity to Arabia, and in converting some individual Arabs to Christianity. The first element is the protection and support given to those Arabs who lived under Byzantine rule. The Byzantium used to give protection and support to the Ghassānids. They granted Ibn al-Huwayrith great support and prestige. They were the supporter of Abū 'Āmir al-Rāhib against the Prophet. This perhaps encouraged some Arabs to adopt Christianity in order to get their protection and support. It is also well known that the campaign which was carried out by the Ethiopian Christians against the king of Himyar, Dhū Nuwās, helped in bringing Christianity to Yemen.³

The attraction in seeing the monks in cells reciting the Injīl attracted some Arabs to adopt Christianity. The attraction of churches which were built of great splendour and

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *the Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 15-16.

² Ibn Ishāq, *the Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 143-150.

³ See Sālim, *Dirāsāt Fi Tārīkh al-'Arab*, pp. 131-133. See also al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, 1/162. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/437. And al-Mubārakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq*, trans. p. 41.

quality, as seen in Yemen also played a part in bringing Christianity to Arabia. For example, the main purpose of the cathedral of Qullays, built by Abraha in San‘ā’ in Yemen, was to attract the attention of the Arabs by virtue of its superb grandeur and renowned splendour of great architectural work.¹ Many Arab poets also used to refer to the beauty and attraction of churches built in Syria, Ḥīra, Ṭā’if, Najrān and Yemen in their poems.² The attraction of several types of wine which brought to Arabia from Syria and Byzantium caused poets to praise them as well as to praise their producers.³ Bell refers to al-A‘shā who said:

Many an early cup (glistening) like the eye of a cock have I drunk with
trusty youths in its curtained chamber while the church-bells rang, pure
wine like saffron and amber, poured in its glass and mixed, spreading a
costly perfume in the house, as if the riders had (just) arrived with it
from the sea of Darin.⁴

The impact of these elements on the Arabs of the Ḥijāz

The extent to which the previous factors played a part in bringing Christianity to the Ḥijāz is limited.⁵ A general study of ancient Arabian poetry shows that little can be found

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p21. Ibn Ishāq relates that Abraha sent a letter to the Ethiopian King saying, ‘I have built a church for you, O king, such as has not been built for any king before you. I shall not rest until I have diverted the Arab pilgrimages to it.’ See also Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *M’ujam al-Buldān*, article ‘Qullays’, 4/395. And see al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/440.

² Al-‘Ashā, in a poem, calls the church of Najrān as *ka’bat Najrān*. See Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *M’ujam al-Buldān*, article Najrān, 4/756. See also Ibn al-Kalbī, *al-Aṣṅām*, pp. 44-45.

³ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, pp. 43-44.

⁴ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, pp. 43-44.

⁵ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 17. Trimmingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 259.

in the pre-Islamic era which mentions themes relating specifically to Christianity.¹ In these poems one finds only some indications showing that the Arabs knew something about Christianity. Some poets refer to the externals of Christianity, its churches and bells, such as al-‘Ashā, Imru’ul Qays, Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā and ‘Adī ibn Zayd.² These poets also refer to the Injīl.³ They refer to the cross.⁴ They point to the several types of wine, Christian ceremonies, and the lamp of the monk’s cell which has been used at night.⁵ There are some poems which refer to the books of the monks, such as the Psalms, though they may not have had knowledge of that particular book.⁶

There are some indications that Christianity influenced some early Muslims in some monastic practices. The Qur’an criticises Christians for inventing monasticism, as it was not part of the original message and, therefore, the Prophet used to remind Muslims that Islam disagreed with monasticism. When ‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn asked the Prophet for permission to castrate himself, the Prophet prevented him from doing so.⁷ Many *ḥadīths* show that the Prophet kept his companions away from the influence of

¹ Trimingham mentions that the testimony of the poets to the influence of Christianity in a spiritual and sociological sense is negative. He adds that the profession of Christianity had not affected the Arabs’ mode of life or their poetry except on the surface. See Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 247.

² Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, pp. 43-44. ‘Adī ibn Zayd belonged to a family originated from Yamāma, his father left for Hīra and lived there. Zayd became famous because of his ability in writing and speaking both Arabic and Persian. He married the daughter of al-N‘umān, the king of Hīra, but later the king al-N‘umān took him as a prisoner. He stayed in prison until his death. See al-Mashriq, part one, December 1944, p. 26.

³ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, footnote No. 1, 6/680.

⁴ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/665. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 26.

⁵ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 44 and p. 45 respectively. See also Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 247.

⁶ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 45. See also Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, footnote No. 2, 6/678.

⁷ Al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 6/243-245.

these practices, and forbade them, such as the ban on marriage, exaggeration in decorating mosques and praising the person of the Prophet.¹

The above-mentioned elements, which helped in bringing Christianity to the Ḥijāz, gave the Arabs the opportunity to gain some knowledge about Christianity. The presence of Christians in Arabia helped in preparing the Arabs to accept a new prophet to a certain limit.² When Muslim biographers recorded the history of pre-Islamic times they mentioned many events and incidents which show that the People of the Book had foretold the coming of a new prophet to the Arabs.³

The following three examples illustrate to the extent which the presence of Christianity helped in preparing the Arabs to be ready to accept a new prophet:

- (i) Salmān, the Persian, found his way to Islam through several Syrian Christian monks.⁴ One of these monks told Salmān that a prophet was due to arise who would be sent with the religion of Abraham, and who would come forth in Arabia. The monk advised Salmān saying, 'If you are able to go to that country, do so.' In compliance with this advice, Salmān went to Arabia and met the Prophet in Madina and later became a Muslim.⁵
- (ii) Zayd ibn Nufayl went to Syria seeking the religion of Abraham, questioning monks and rabbis until one of them advised him to go back to Makka as a prophet

¹ Al-Bukhārī relates that the Prophet said, 'Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Mary, for I am only a slave. So, call me the slave of Allah and His apostle.' See Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1439, pp. 680-681.

² Zaghlūl is of the opinion that the readiness of the Arabs in the Ḥijāz to accept the new prophet is limited to some Arabs. He supports his argument in the fact that the Prophet faced a hard opposition from the pagan Arabs as well as from the Jews of Madina. See Zaghlūl, *Fi Tārīkh al-'Arab*, pp. 372-373.

³ See Ch. 3 pp. 134-143.

⁴ Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, p. 500. See also Ibn Ishāq, *the Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 95-98.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 95-98.

was to be sent there.¹ Zayd decided to go back to Makka when he was well enough but in the country of Lakhm he was attacked and killed.²

- (iii) Waraqa ibn Nawfal, who the first one to be informed about what happened to Muhammad in the cave of Ḥirā', confirmed that Muhammad was the prophet of Allah and that what had come to him in the cave was the same *nāmūs* just like that had come to Moses before him.³ Waraqa met some Syrian monks and learnt about Christianity from them.⁴

c. The presence of Christians in the Ḥijāz

According to both Muslim and non-Muslims sources, there was a limited presence of Christianity in the Ḥijāz in the pre-Islamic times unlike Ḥīra and Syria. This fact led Trimingham to conclude that there was no direct Christian influence upon Muhammad during the formative years of his mission since there is no trace of it in the early *sūras* of the Qur'an.⁵ The conclusion of Trimingham indicates that there is no evidence which shows that there was a Christian environment in the Ḥijāz which later became the cradle of Islam.⁶

¹ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/162.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 103.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 107. One can notice that Muslim sources and historians mention many incidents and stories regarding the expectation of the coming of a prophet in Arabia.

⁴ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/589.

⁵ Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 259.

⁶ Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 42. Sweetman mentions that Islam grew and developed in a partially Christian environment. See al-Khaṭrāwī, *al-Madīna fi al-'Aṣr al-Jāhili*, p. 268. Trimingham refers to al-Azraqī who mentions that there was a Christian cemetery in Makka which suggests that there was Christian community in Makka, However, this community was a small one as we mentioned above. See Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 260.

The following reasons illustrate that Christianity had little hold upon the inhabitants of the Hijāz:

1. The different language of the Injīl caused a problem for the Arabs in adopting Christianity.¹ In his *Origin of Islam*, Bell refers to Cheikho's suggestion that Arabia as a whole was Christian in the pre-Islamic times.² However, after studying the multitude of references and statements of Cheikho, Bell concludes that his evidence is not enough to show that Christianity had any deep hold upon the inhabitants of Arabia except for certain individuals among them, such as Waraqa who later became a Muslim.³ Bell, in order to support his view, refers to Harnack who states that there was no pre-Islamic translation of the Bible into Arabic.⁴ Harnack considers this as strong proof that Christianity had no footing at all among the Arabs.⁵ Furthermore, there is an indication in the Qur'an which shows that the Christians spoke a language other than Arabic, probably Aramaic or Syriac, which created difficulty for the Arabs in understanding the language:⁶ when some Arabs claimed that a Christian slave had taught Muhammad the Qur'an, the

¹ Saunders mentions that Christians failed to create a Christian Arabic literature or to translate the Gospels into Arabic. See Saunders, *a History of Medieval Islam*, pp. 12-13.

² Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, pp. 42-43.

³ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, pp. 42-43. Ibn Ishāq states that there were some individuals in the Hijāz with a deep grasp of Christianity, such as Waraqa who attached himself to Christianity and studied its scriptures. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 99. One perhaps concludes that the deep grasp of Christianity helped Waraqa in becoming a Muslim. As a reference to conversion of Waraqa see Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/21. However, Zaghūl refers to Lammens who, in his book *L'Arabie Occidentale avant l'Hégire*, denies that Waraqa was a Christian but from the *hunafā'*. See Zaghūl, *Fi Tārīkh al-'Arab*, p. 369. However, all major sources mention that Waraqa was a Christian and has knowledge of the Scriptures.

⁴ Saunders states that Christianity gained lodging in Arabia, particularly in Yemen, but he also believes that Christians failed to create a Christian Arabic literature or to translate the Bible into Arabic. See Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, pp. 12-13.

⁵ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 17.

⁶ Muir mentions that it is doubtful whether an Arabic translation of the Scriptures, or any part of them, was ever within Muhammad's reach. See Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, note No. 1, p. 156

Qur'an in reply to them says, 'The tongue of him they wickedly point to is notably foreign, while this (the Qur'an) is clear Arabic.'¹

2. Another reason was the controversies which occurred amongst the Christian denominations regarding the position of Jesus in relation to the godhead and the nature of his person. These controversies led the Arabs not to pay attention to the divided Christians. These controversies created differentiation within Christian beliefs and divided them into sects. The Byzantine Christians believed in the concept of the Trinity which indicates that Jesus was both god and man at the same time. The Nestorians of Hīra and the Sassāniān Empire held to the belief that Jesus was only a man who became Son of God through his mission and only became divine after the resurrection.² Some Arabs in Syria and the south of Arabia were monophysites believing that Jesus was simply god and that he appeared as a man. The Qur'an points to some differentiation between the beliefs of these denominations, 'Disbelievers indeed are those who say, 'Allah is one of three.'³ It mentions one of the beliefs that Jesus and Mary are two gods, 'O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say unto men, 'Worship me and my mother as gods?''⁴ The Qur'an also mentions that Christians believe in the sonship of Jesus, 'And the Christians say, the Messiah is the son of god.'⁵ Another verse points to the belief that Jesus himself was the real god, 'In disbelief indeed are those who say that Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary.'⁶ The

¹ Q. 16:103. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 10/158. Jawād mentions that there were Aramaic names given to churches and people and used by the Christians of Arabia, such as the word 'mār'. See Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/599.

² Saunders states that the Nestorians were driven out of the Byzantine Empire and sought refuge in Persia, which later found a foot in Yemen. See Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 12,

³ Q. 5:73.

⁴ Q. 5:116.

⁵ Q. 9:30

⁶ Q. 5:17.

differentiations in fundamental beliefs caused a conflict between these denominations which allowed hostility to occur among them. Bell considers the persecution of Christians by Christians as a bitter one and more severe than the persecution of Christians by pagans.¹ Sweetman emphasises the point that the situation of Christianity before the coming of Islam was agitated by controversy after controversy. He remarks that these controversies sometimes even led to some groups burning their opponents.² The Qur'an also points to the hatred which existed between these denominations:

From those who call themselves *Naṣāra* (Christians), We took their covenant, but they have abandoned a part of the message that was sent to them. So, We planted amongst them enmity and hatred till the Day of Judgement.³

3. A further reason was the dependence of Christianity on contact with denominations from a distance, such as Syria, Ethiopia, Yemen and Ḥīra. When many historians speak about the Ḥijāz during the pre-Islamic period, they only mention some individuals who lived amongst the Arabs as slaves or traders. For example, in Jawād's collection of material about the presence of Christianity in the Hijāz from both Muslim and non-Muslim sources, he mentions only some Christian slaves all of whom came from outside Arabia, and a few people from amongst the Arabs, namely, 'Uthmān ibn al-

¹ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 5.

² Sweetman relates that after the conflict which appeared in the Council of Nicæa, Constantine burnt bishops who opposed the decision of the Council. See Sweetman, *Islam and Christianity*, vol. I, p. 44.

³ Q. 5:14. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/114-115.

Ḥuwayrith and Warāqa from Makka, and the two sons of Abū al-Ḥuṣayn and Abū ‘Āmir al-Rāhib from Madina.¹

The following examples show the dependence of Christianity on contact with denominations from a distance, and indicate the strong relation between the convert Arabs and the Syrian Christians:

‘Adī ibn Ḥātīm

There is evidence show that ‘Adī was a Christian, and when he approached the Prophet to embrace Islam wearing a cross on his neck.² ‘Adī himself stated that he was a chief of noble birth, a Christian, and he was his own master in religious matters. When ‘Adī heard about the coming of the Prophet, he ordered his slave to bring his camels, and put his family and children on them and decided to join his fellow Christians in Syria.³ This indicates that ‘Adī had travelled to Syria and learnt about Christianity there.

Umayya ibn Abī al-Ṣalt

Umayya used to trade in Syria. Before the coming of the Prophet, he went to Syria with Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb. Umayya seemed to have been well-known amongst the Christians in the villages of Syria as they took him to their houses and gave him money and gifts.⁴ Later, Umayya went again to Syria after the Prophet had migrated to Madina. When Umayya returned from Syria, he decided to meet the Prophet again to embrace Islam

¹ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/582-622. One notes that Ibn Ishāq in his *Sīra*, al-Ṭabarī in his *Tārīkh*, Ibn Kathīr in his book *al-Bidāya* and Ibn al-Athīr in his *al-Kāmil*, mention a limited number of Christian names presented in the Hijāz. Trimingham mentions that the presence of Christians in Makka relates mainly to non-Makkans. See also Trimingham, *Christianity among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 260.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 6/354. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 8/110.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 638.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/221-223.

since he had met the Prophet in Makka before. He promised his people that, after his meeting with the Prophet he would investigate Muhammad's prophethood. Before reaching Madina, Umayya arrived at Badr, the place where the battle of Badr had taken place. The people there told Umayya that the Muslims had killed his uncle's sons, 'Utba ibn Rabi'a and Shayba ibn Rabi'a. Due to this news Umayya became angry, and immediately changed his mind, going to Makka, and from there to Ṭā'if, his native town.¹ The *ḥadīth* of Abū Hurayra points to this incident, stating that the Prophet said that Umayya was close to becoming a Muslim.²

Abū 'Āmir al-Rāhib

Abū 'Āmir is the third example which shows the dependence of Christianity on contact with denominations from a distance. Abū 'Āmir was known as al-Rāhib (the monk) as he used to be a practising monk. When Islam arrived in Madina Abū 'Āmir went to see the Prophet. He decided to leave Madina and go to Makka with some people from the tribe of Aws.³ Abū 'Āmir played a great part in Madina when the Muslims went to Tabūk to fight against the Byzantines and their vassal Arabs, causing trouble for the Prophet in his absence by advising his men to build the opposition mosque.⁴ After the conquest of Makka, Abū 'Āmir left it and went to Syria and stayed there until he died.⁵

¹ Ibn Kathīr *al-Bidāya*, 2/226. Ibn Ishāq mentions that the son of Shayba, al-Walīd ibn 'Utba, also had been killed in the battle of Badr. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 299.

² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/228.

³ Al-Ṭabarī mentions that Abū 'Āmir went to Byzantium to seek support with 'Alqama Ibn Ghulātha, from the tribe of Qays and Ibn 'Abd Yālayl, from the tribe of Thaḳīf. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/472.

⁴ Q. 9:107. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/470.

⁵ Al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi'*, 8/235. Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/458-459.

Waraqā ibn Nawfal

Waraqā is the fourth example which shows the dependence of Christianity on contact with denominations from a distance. Waraqā converted to Christianity through his contacts outside Arabia, not through the activities of the Christians of the Ḥijāz.¹

Further to the previous examples, one finds that the Christian Arabs frequently asked the Byzantine Emperor for help and support on several occasions, such as in the previous mentioned case of Abū ‘Āmir, and the case of ‘Uthmān ibn al-Huwayrith who also asked Caesar for help when his people harmed him. To these cases one can add the Christians of Najrān who asked the Byzantine Emperor for help against the Jews.² These incidents also suggest that there were no Christian community in the Ḥijāz to be asked for help and support.

d. The Qur’an shows some contacts with Christians in the Ḥijāz

The Makkan *sūras* do not mention the Christians or Christianity except verse 29 of *Sūrat al-Naḥl* which points to a method of dialogue with the People of the Book. Although the Christians in the Ḥijāz were only individuals, as mentioned before, the Qur’an seems to have given them consideration, and opened the door for dialogue with them. This dialogue helped the Christians to come in contact with the Muslims from an early time. As a result of this early contact, twenty Ethiopians who lived or traded in Makka embraced Islam.³ There was also dialogue with some Christians of Makka, such as Jabr,

¹ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/501.

² See Ch. 1, p. 64.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 179.

the slave of the Banū al-Ḥadramī.¹ Later, this dialogue expanded to conclude a deputation from the Christians of Najrān who came to Madina debating with the Prophet regarding Jesus.² There is evidence that there were some Christians who lived in Madina in an area called the Market of the Nabṭ where they used to sell their crops.³ Ḥassān ibn Thābit, in one of his poems, mentions that the Jews and the Christians of Madina rejoiced when the Prophet died which also suggests that there were some Christians in Madina at that time.⁴

However, there is no evidence that the Christians in Madina represented a community. Therefore, when the Prophet emigrated to Madina he made a covenant with the Jews without mentioning the Christians.⁵ The early Qur'anic *sūras* mainly emphasise the principles of monotheism and deal with the majority of the Makkan population, the pagans, rather than the few Christians. Later, when Islam expanded to Madina and beyond, the Qur'an started to mention more about Christianity. Contacts with the Christians increased, and it therefore became necessary for Muslims to know more about Christianity and other religions in order to understand them and to take the right attitude required towards them. One finds that more than eighty verses at the beginning of *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān* are concerned with the Christians.⁶ The Qur'an points to disputes that existed between Jews and Christians in Madina, 'The Jews say that the Christians follow nothing, and the Christians say that the Jews follow nothing, though they both recite the

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 180.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, pp. 270-271.

³ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-'Arab*, 6/602-603.

⁴ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fi Tārīkh al-'Arab*, 6/602.

⁵ Trimmingham mentions that Christianity was non-existent among the Arabs of western Arabia. See Trimmingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times*, p. 249.

⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 272. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/162-164.

Scriptures.’¹ *Sūrat al-Mā’ida* commands the Muslims not to take either the Jews or Christians as protectors which shows the possible contacts with them in Madina. The Qur’an says, ‘O you who believe, take not the Jews and the Christians as protectors.’² Another verse distinguishes between the attitude of the Jews and that of the Christians to the Muslims, ‘You will find the strongest among men in enmity to the believers to be the Jews and Pagans, and you will find the nearest among them in love to the believers to be those who say, ‘We are Christians.’³ This verse divided the people at that time into four groups: Muslims, Jews, Christians and pagans. Although these verses mentioned above do not mention whether these Christians lived in or outside Madina, it shows that they were in contact with the Muslims regardless of where they lived.

Overall, one concludes that the environment of the Ḥijāz on the eve of Islam is neither a Jewish, nor a Christian. The assertion that the Qur’an drew heavily on Judaism and Christianity in formulating its teachings is challenged by a lot of evidence which show that there is no evidence of any deep Judeo-Christian influence on its people. However, it shows that the people of the Ḥijāz retained their own religion which originated from the religion of Abraham but had developed through time till it had become corrupt.

¹ Q.2:113.

² Q. 5:51.

³ Q. 5:82.

Chapter Two: The Qur'anic attitude to the beliefs of the People of the Book.

The Qur'an, in brief, discusses some of the beliefs of the People of the Book, and mostly Christian beliefs. However, the Qur'an does refer to some Jewish beliefs but mostly when answering certain questions which had been raised by some Jews during the life of the Prophet in Madina.¹ The Qur'an denies the main Christian beliefs but considers their attitude as the most peaceful attitude of non-Muslims towards Muslims.² According to Ibn Kathīr, the Jews had knowledge about the truth but turned away from it, and the Christians had not knowledge and were misguided and confused.³ The Qur'an mentions that the Jews had misled the Christians deliberately, advising the Christians not to follow the vain desires of the Jews who strayed themselves from the right path and misled many (*ḍallū min qablu wa aḍallū kathīran*):

... and do not follow the vain desires of people who went astray before
and who misled many.⁴

Therefore, the Jews are described in the Qur'an as those who have earned the anger of Allah:

Guide us to the straight way. The way of those on whom you have
bestowed your grace, not the way of those who have earned your anger,
nor of those who have gone astray.⁵

¹ See Ch. 6, pp. 230-238.

² Q. 5:82.

³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/26.

⁴ Q. 5:77. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1/194. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/654.

⁵ Q. 1:6-7.

These verses mention the following three groups of people:

- (i) Those on whom Allah has bestowed his grace and kindness.
- (ii) Those who have earned Allah's anger.
- (iii) Those who have strayed.

When 'Adī ibn Ḥātīm asked the Prophet about these groups, the Prophet replied that those who had earned Allah's anger were the Jews, and those who had gone astray were the Christians.¹ Al-Ṭabarī relates fourteen *ḥadīths* to support the view that those who had earned Allah's anger were the Jews, and fourteen other *ḥadīths* to support the view that those who had gone astray were the Christians.² The major Qur'anic commentators agree that those who have earned Allah's anger are the Jews and support their view by mentioning that within the Qur'an one finds two other references to the Jews which describe them as *maghdūbi 'alayhim*.³

As we mentioned above, the Qur'an mostly discusses the beliefs of the Christians, such as the divinity of Jesus and Mary, the sonship of Jesus, the crucifixion of Jesus, the trinity and other such beliefs. Some writers assert that when the Qur'an talks about Christian beliefs it talks about the beliefs of some heretical Christian sects in Arabia.⁴ This means that when the Qur'an mentions the beliefs of the People of the Book it mentions some of the beliefs of those Christians who came in to contact with the Muslims. However, there is no evidence to accept this view and restrict the verses of the Qur'an to particular sect and time since the Prophet addressed the rulers of Christian

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/110. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/26-27.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/110-115.

³ Q. 3:112 and 48:6. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1/194.

⁴ Sweetman, *Islam and Christian Theology*, vol. 1, part 1, pp. 57-58. Watt, *Early Islam*, p. 66.

lands, such as Ethiopia, Syria and Byzantium, Bahrain, Yamāma, Najrān and Yemen. In these lands there were different Christian denominations. This indicates that the Prophet's contacts were not only with particular sects but also with their main denominations.

To judge the Qur'anic account of Christian beliefs one needs to know what the meaning of monotheism is according to Muslims, Christians, and Jews which is beyond the scope of this paper.¹ This is because one needs to study the range of beliefs of the Christian denominations which is not among the aims of this study. As example of the difficulty in studying the meaning of Christian monotheism, we find that when some Muslim writers judge the Christian beliefs which were decided by the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., these writers believe that the decision of Nicaea erroneously took a stand against monotheism. Muslim writers believe that this council opposed the declaration of Arius who is considered, in their eyes, as closer to true monotheism than the decision of Nicaea. These Muslim writers also criticize this council, which was the first general council of the church after the persecution of Arius who declared that Christ was not God, but a creature.² In contrast, Bell, for example, believes that the proclamation of the Nicaean Council was certainly a great victory for monotheism and sane thinking.³

The following pages introduce some of the beliefs of the People of the Book as discussed in the Qur'an, and illustrate the Qur'anic attitude towards these beliefs.

¹ Saunders, for example, mentions that Islam is the most uncompromising monotheism. See Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 35.

² Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā*, pp. 346-356. See also al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Nihāl*, 2/42-43. Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, p. 73. Abū Zahra, *Muhaḍḍrat fī al-Naṣrāniyya*, p. 150.

³ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 3.

1. The Qur'anic attitude to the Prophets of the People of the Book

A great part of the Qur'an deals with prophets and messengers.¹ The total number of the prophets is obscure. The Qur'an mentions twenty-five prophets only. The Qur'an mentions that there were some more prophets and messengers but their names are not mentioned:

Of some messengers We have already told you the story; of others We have not.²

The Qur'an mostly deals with prophets and messengers who were sent to the Children of Israel. The Prophet Abraham is mentioned sixty-nine times in twenty-five *sūras*. One *sūra* is named after him.³ Abraham's son Ishmael is mentioned twelve times in eight *sūras*. The Qur'an mentions Abraham alongside his son Ishmael in events which refer to the religion of the Prophet Muhammad and the building of the Ka'ba. It mentions Abraham alongside his son Isaac in events which relate to the Children of Israel, such as the story of Joseph.⁴ Isaac is mentioned seventeen times. Jacob, or Israel, the son of Isaac is mentioned sixteen times as Jacob, twice the Qur'an calls him Israel and forty-one times the Qur'an refers to him as the father of the Jews.⁵

¹ The difference between prophet and messenger is that the messenger is received a new message from Allah and called his people to believe in it, but the prophet did not received a new message but continued to proclaim the former message. Thus the prophet is considered as successor to the messenger who went before him. The messenger is at the same time a prophet but the prophet is not at the same time a messenger. See, for example, Rahmān, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, p. 82. See also Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia*, article *rasūl*, pp. 469-470.

² Q. 4:164, 40:78.

³ The *sūra* which is named after Abraham is *sūra* 14.

⁴ Q. 12:6 and 12:38.

⁵ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, pp. 42-43.

The Prophet Moses is mentioned one hundred and thirty-six times in thirty-four *sūras*.¹ The two most emphasized parts of Moses's life in the Qur'an are his struggle with his people to keep them on the right way and his encounter with the Pharaoh of Egypt. David is mentioned in the Qur'an sixteen times, mostly in connection with Solomon. And Solomon is mentioned seventeen times. Zachariah is mentioned seven times in four *sūras*, mostly in connection with Jesus and his mother Mary. John is mentioned five times. Jesus is mentioned twenty five times as 'Son of Mary' and five times as 'The Messiah, son of Mary.' Three *sūras* in the Qur'an are named after a person or event connected with Jesus, namely, *Āl-'Imrān*, *al-Mā'ida*, and *Maryam*. Jesus is mentioned in fifteen *sūras*, six of them Makkan.

Some historical accounts of the prophets which are mentioned in the Qur'an differ from those of the scriptures, others resemble them, and others are partially similar to them.² These similarities have caused some writers to claim that the Prophet's knowledge regarding the beliefs of the People of the Book is derived from the scriptures. Regarding the differences, one finds that some writers relate them to the Prophet's lack of knowledge about the scriptures; others assert that these differences are occurred as a result of the Prophet's contact with sects and heresies.³ Muir, however, considers the Qur'anic sources of Christian doctrines as imperfect and defective and, therefore,

¹ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, pp. 854-855.

² Seale mentions that sometimes the Qur'an restate and interprets some of the Bible's major themes. He, therefore, attempts to state some beliefs shared by both Muslims and the People of the Book. See Seale, *Qur'an and Bible*, p. 71.

³ Andrae, *Mohammed*, pp. 106-129. Wherry asserts that most of the Prophet's teachings were borrowed from Jewish law. See Wherry, *A Comprehensive Commentary on the Qur'an*, 1/96-190. See also Seale, *Qur'an and Bible*, p. 71. Watt, *Muhammad at Makka*, pp. 1-29. Gibb, "Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia," *Harvard Theological Review*, 55, (1962), pp. 269-280. Sourdel, *Medieval Islam*, trans. Watt, p. 7. Robinson, *Islam A Concise Introduction*, p. 121.

concludes that Christianity had little real influence on Islam.¹ Francesco Gabrieli assumes that Muhammad's works and practices were characterised by a genius of compromise between the traditional values of Arabia and the higher concept of monotheism, which reached him from Christianity.² Some writers also bring to the surface the accusation that the Prophet relied on human teachers, or was instructed by a monk called Bahīra whom the Prophet encountered during his childhood, or perhaps by a Nestorian monk called Sergius who deliberately set out to use the Prophet to corrupt the Arabs.³ Some others claim that the Prophet derived his information from people, such as Waraqa, Qiss ibn Sā'ida, and Salmān the Persian.⁴ Others assert that the Qur'anic account of Christian beliefs is not accurate and cannot be of divine origin.⁵ Basetti-Sani finds that the majority of Jewish Orientalists emphasise the dependence of the Prophet on Jewish sources, following the line of Geiger, Goldhizer, Herschfeld, Horovitz, Schapiro, Katsh, Finkel and Sidersky. On the other hand, he finds that Christian Orientalists, such as Ahrens, Tor Andrae, Bell, Tisdall, Nu and others tend to place the emphasis on Christian influence.⁶

However, the first chapter of this study shows that the assertion that the Qur'an drawn heavily on Judaism and Christianity in formulating its teachings is challenged by many pieces of evidence.

1. There is no evidence of any deep Judeo-Christian influence on the Hijāz. The presence of Jews and Christians in the Hijāz and the surrounding lands could not inspire

¹ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 148.

² Francesco Gabrieli, *The Conquests of Islam*, p. 23.

³ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 10.

⁴ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 10. See also Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 315.

⁵ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, pp. 8-10.

⁶ Basetti-Sani, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ*, pp. 53-54.

the religious life of the Ḥijāz. Its people retained their own religion which originated from the religion of Abraham but had been developed by the time till it had become corrupt. The inhabitants of Madina, in particular, by staying away from becoming Jews have attracted the attention of many writers since there was great Jewish attendance there. The *ḥunafā'*, who had great concern of Abraham and his religion and who asked the Jews and Christians about him, also refrained from becoming Jews or Christians except in some cases.

2. There are some problems in this assumption since the assumed Christian environment is itself accused of heresies and sectarianism. In the case of Judaism, we find that some writers consider the Jews of the Ḥijāz as not as pure as the Jews of other lands and had a different creed from them. This seems to have led some writers to justify the notion that the Qur'anic teachings which are borrowed from Jews and Christians no more than heresies. Further to this discussion, the Qur'an insists that the contemporary Jews and Christians were mistaken and misguided and have deviated from the straight path of their original scriptures. This raises the following two questions: how can the Qur'an formulate its monotheism from heresies and impure doctrines? And, how can the Qur'an borrow heavily from doctrines which are accused of deviation from the path of Moses and Jesus by the Qur'an itself?

3. One finds that there was no written scripture in Arabic at that time.¹ The Qur'an also denies the old accusation that the Prophet obtained his knowledge from a Christian teacher:

¹ Saunders, for example, mentions that the Christians failed to create a Christian Arabic literature or to translate the Bible into Arabic. See Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, pp. 12-13.

The tongue of the man they refer to is foreign, while this is a clear Arabic tongue.¹

The Qur'an shows that its historical account of the prophets is from a divine origin. It, therefore states that neither the Prophet nor his people knew the news regarding prophets before the revelation.² The Qur'an, after mentioning the birth of Mary, confirms that:

This is of the news of unseen which We reveal to you.³

When news of Noah is mentioned, the Qur'an states that:

This is of the news of unseen which We reveal to you, which neither you nor your people knew before this.⁴

And when news of Joseph is mentioned it states that:

This is of the news of the unseen which We reveal to you.⁵

Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the Prophet would not have known about the news of the prophets before him if the Qur'an had not been revealed to him.⁶ What al-Ṭabarī mentions does not mean that the Prophet knew nothing about the Christians.

The points of contact through similarity of terms and themes are not always proper evidence in establishing a direct dependence. Therefore, one can say that some historical accounts of the Qur'an resemble those of the scriptures simply because the Qur'an has confirmed the scriptures that came before it, and guarded them against corruption:

¹ Q. 16:103.

² Q. 3:44, 11:49 and 12:102.

³ Q. 3:44.

⁴ Q. 11:49.

⁵ Q. 12:102. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 7/310.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 7/56. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/265.

To you (Muhammad) We sent the Qur'an in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety.¹

This verse mentions that the Qur'an, regarding its historical accounts of the scriptures, comes with a twofold purpose: firstly, to confirm the original message; secondly, to guard, or act as a check to its interpretation. The Qur'an uses the Arabic word *muhaymin* which means one who safeguards, watches over, stands witness, preserves, upholds and entrusted with.² Yūsuf 'Ali mentions that the Qur'an safeguards the Qur'an for it has preserved within it the teachings of all the former Books. It watches over these Books in the sense that it will not let their true teachings be lost. It supports and upholds these books in the sense that it corroborates the word of Allah that has remained intact in them. It stands as a witness because it bears testimony to the word of Allah contained in these Books and helps to distinguish it from the interpretations and commentaries of the people that might have got mixed up with it.³

The Qur'an is not a book of history although history is a part of it. According to the Qur'an, when it mentions the history of the People of the Book or their beliefs it aims to teach the truth and give advice, direction and warning.⁴ The Qur'an also mentions that the historical accounts of the People of the Book are not mere narratives or histories but they explain to the Children of Israel most of what they disagreed about.⁵

¹ Q. 5:48.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/606-608.

³ Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, commentary No. 759, p. 263

⁴ Q. 11:120.

⁵ Q. 27:76.

a. The religion of Abraham

Abraham lived before the revelation of the Torah and the Gospel. He was the tribal father of both the Jews and the Arabs. Abraham occupies a central position in Muhammad's argument with the Jews of Madina.¹ When the Qur'an linked the Prophet with Abraham in the early stages in Makka, it did not give up Moses to the Jews and Jesus to the Christians. The Qur'an, therefore puts Muhammad alongside his two brothers Moses and Jesus who are also related to Abraham. However, when the Jews and the Christians desired to be related to Abraham, the Qur'an mentions that the only thing which decides the best claim to Abraham and the people most worthy of him is true adherence to his religion:

Among mankind the ones who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet, and those who have believed.²

The Qur'an gives Abraham the title *ḥanīf* seven times.³ It orders the Prophet to be *ḥanīf* in the same way that Abraham was.⁴ It also orders both the Muslims and the People of the Book to be among the *ḥunafā'*.⁵ The Qur'an emphasises the association of Abraham with Muhammad and the Ka'ba in Makka.⁶ The Qur'an mentions that Abraham and Jacob had both enjoined Islam, i.e. submission to Allah, on their offspring:

¹ Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, p. 65.

² Q. 3:68.

³ Q. 2:135, 3:67, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161, 16:120 and 16:123.

⁴ Q. 6:79, 10:105 and 30:30.

⁵ Q. 98:5.

⁶ Q. 2:125-127, 3:97, 14:35 and 22:26. The association of Abraham with the Ka'ba is one of the central features of the pre-Islamic part of Ibn Ishaq's *Sira*. See, for example, Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet*, p. 65.

Behold, His Lord said to him (Abraham): ‘Submit.’ He said: ‘I have submitted myself to the Lord of the Universe.’ And this was the legacy that Abraham left to his sons, and so did Jacob: ‘Oh my sons, Allah has chosen the faith for you, so die not except as Muslims.’¹

The Qur’an also mentions that when death approached Jacob, he said to his sons:

What will you worship after me? They replied: ‘We shall worship your God and the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, one God, and to him we submit.’²

The previous statements indicate that the religion of Abraham is the religion of all the prophets who came after him. Moreover, the above verse puts Ishmael alongside Abraham and Isaac to show that the people of these two branches, i.e. the branch of Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs’, and the branch of Jacob the ancestor of the Jews, should submit to one God and that is Allah:

Say you: ‘We believe in Allah, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and that given to Moses and Jesus, and that given to all prophets from their Lord. We make no difference between one and another of them, and to Him we have submitted.’³

¹ Q. 2:131-132.

² Q. 2:133.

³ Q. 2:136. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 1/618-619.

b. The Qur'an respects all prophets

The Qur'an emphasises its attitude to the prophets when it says:

And each one of the believers believes in Allah, His angels, His Books, and His messengers. They say: 'We make no distinction between any of His messengers.'¹

Thus the Qur'an commands Muslims to believe in all the messengers and honour them all:

Those messengers, We preferred some to others; to some of them Allah spoke, others He raised to degrees (of honour), and to Jesus, the son of Mary, We gave clear signs and supported him with the Holy Spirit.²

Al-Qurtubī mentions that this verse states that all the prophets were equal from the point of view of their being prophets. However, there is a distinction between them since they had different duties and miracles and faced different situations.³ Therefore, the Qur'an mentions that Abraham is the friend of Allah, and that Allah had spoken directly to Moses, and that Allah raised Jesus to degrees in heaven.⁴

The Qur'an states that the mission of the prophets is to convey the message of Allah to their own people. It seems that all the prophets in the Qur'an say, 'O my people',⁵ except Muhammad which is taken as an indication that Muhammad the only

¹ Q. 2:285.

² Q. 2:253.

³ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 3/251. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/3.

⁴ Q. 2:253. See al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/93.

⁵ One notes that in verse 6 of *Sūrat al-Ṣaff*, Jesus addressed the Israelites, saying, 'O People of Israel' while in verse 5 of the same *sūra*, Moses addressed them, saying, 'O my people'. As al-Qurtubī mentions, the first address is to show that Moses was related to the people of Israel, but Jesus, according to his birth from his mother Mary, was not related to them. See al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 18/75.

prophet who was sent to all mankind.¹ Within the Qur'an many verse indicate that the Prophet was sent to all mankind. One of the Makkan verses reads:

Say 'O Muhammad: 'O mankind, verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah.'²

c. All the prophets of the Qur'an are human beings and Allah's servants

The word *bashar*, human, is mentioned in the Qur'an thirty-nine times. Twenty-two times are linked with the prophets of Allah. The Qur'an mentions that the prophets were human beings, and, therefore some people rejected them because they expected that prophets should be more than humans:

We see you nothing but a man like ourselves.³

The Qur'an also says:

What kept men back from belief when guidance came to them, except that they said: 'Has Allah sent a man to be a messenger?'⁴

According to the Qur'an, the best way to reveal Allah's message to human beings is to choose messengers from among themselves, not from angels, as humans could mutually understand each other:

Say (Muhammad): 'If there were angels settled on earth walking about in peace and quiet, We should certainly have sent down to them

¹ For example, in the New Testament we find that Matthew mentions that Jesus refused to listen to a Canaanite woman when she came to him seeking his help on the ground that she was not from among the Children of Israel and that he was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel. See Matthew, 15:21-28.

² Q. 7:158. See also 21:107, 25:1, 38:87, 68:52 and 81:27.

³ Q. 11:27, 17:94, 23:24, 23:34, 54:24, 23:47, 64:6 and many other such verses.

⁴ Q. 17:94.

from the heavens an angel for a messenger.’¹

Because the prophets of the Qur’an served Allah’s mission, we frequently find the title servant, ‘*abd*, applied to them. Altogether, there are twenty-one instances of this, including one where it is applied to Moses,² three where it is applied to Jesus,³ and thirteen where it is applied to Muhammad.⁴ To emphasise this title with regard to Jesus, the Qur’an mentions that the first word that Jesus spoke in the cradle (after his mother Mary pointed to him asking him to defend her position) was, ‘I am the slave of Allah.’⁵ Ridā comments on this reply saying that the first thing one might expect from Jesus at that critical time was to defend his mother by saying, ‘My mother Mary is an innocent woman’, but instead he says, ‘I am the slave of Allah.’⁶

Being men, the prophets needed some miracles to support their position when they claimed prophethood. The miracles given to the prophets differed from one to another according to the most challenging works of their people at that time. The miracles of the prophets were suited to contemporary circumstances.⁷ Although miracles should demonstrate in a graphic way the power of Allah, they sometimes led some people to accuse their prophet of doing magic.⁸ In other cases some people were amazed by the miracles which caused them to think of the prophet’s divinity, such as what

¹ Q. 17:95.

² Q. 37:122.

³ Q. 4:172, 19:30 and 43:59.

⁴ Q. 2:23, 8:41, 17:1, 18:1, 25:1, 39:36, 53:10, 57:9, 72:17 and 96:10.

⁵ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 5/789. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/76.

⁶ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 5/789. The word slave or servant in the Qur’an associates with submission to Allah. According to Muslim traditions the best names are the slave of Allah, ‘Abd Allah.

⁷ See, for example, Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/320.

⁸ Q. 7:132 and 28:36.

happened when a Christian group of Najrān came to Madina arguing about the divinity of Jesus on the evidence of his signs and miracles.¹

d. The Qur'anic Jesus

The Qur'an ascribes a number of names, qualities and honourable titles to Jesus. The Qur'an calls Jesus 'the Messiah'.² Jesus in the Qur'an is a 'Servant of Allah',³ a 'Prophet',⁴ a 'Messenger', 'Warner and Bringer of glad tidings'.⁵ It also calls Jesus the 'Word of Allah',⁶ 'Spirit',⁷ a 'Sign',⁸ a 'Mercy',⁹ 'Blessed and Pure',¹⁰ a 'Witness and an Eminent one',¹¹ 'One brought near and One of the upright'.¹² Some of these titles and qualities are held in common with other prophets, but there are some qualities which have been given only to Jesus, such as 'Word of Allah' and 'Spirit from Allah'. This great number of qualities led some Christian writers to say that Islam is the only non-Christian religion which recognizes Jesus and his place in history.¹³ Moreover, some

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 271.

² Q. 3:45, 4:157, 4:171, 4:172, 5:17, 5:72, 5:75, 9:30 and 9:31.

³ Q. 4:172, 19:30 and 43:59.

⁴ Q. 19:30. Jesus in the Qur'an is mentioned many times as a prophet in company with other prophets. In five times is mentioned after the mentioning of Moses and six times after the mentioning of Abraham. See 2:87, 3:84, 4:163, 5:46, 6:83-85, 33:7, 42:13 and 57:26-27.

⁵ The Qur'an mentions that Jesus is a Messenger of Allah, and his mission is like other messengers' mission. The Qur'an describes the messengers' mission as to warn their people and bring them glad tidings. See Q. 2:213, 4:165, 6:48 and 18:56.

⁶ In the Qur'an Jesus receives the title 'Word of Allah' four times. See Q. 3:45, 4:171, 3:39 and 19:34.

⁷ The Qur'an applies the title 'Spirit' to Jesus six times. See Q. 2:87, 2:253, 4:171, 5:110, 21:91, and 66:12.

⁸ Q. 21:91, 23:50 and 19:21.

⁹ Q. 19:21.

¹⁰ Q. 19:31 and 19:19.

¹¹ Jesus is a witness. See Q. 4:159 and 5:117. Jesus also is an eminent one. See Q. 3:45.

¹² Q. 3:45. And for the title 'one of the Uprights' see Q. 3:46 and 6:85.

¹³ See, for example, Fox, *Apostles of Palestine*, p. 14 and p. 49.

writers consider the Qur'anic respect to Jesus as a reference to his divinity, and assert that Jesus was more than human.¹

According to Muslim beliefs, Jesus will return before the Hour and his return will be an indication of the Hour. The Qur'an refers to Jesus' return:

And there is none of the People of the Book, but must believe in him before his death, and on the Day of Resurrection, he will be a witness against them.²

The three underlined pronouns in this verse should be discussed in order to know to whom these pronouns refer. Al-Ṭabarī and other commentators mention several views regarding these pronouns:

1. That the three pronouns here refer to Jesus, and this verse refers to the idea that the People of the Book who are alive at that time will believe in Jesus when he comes back down.³ Al-Zamakhsharī believes that not only those who are alive at that time will believe in Jesus but possibly that Allah will bring all People of the Book to life in their graves and inform them about Jesus' return.⁴ Al-Ṭabarī favours this first view because he believes that these pronouns refer to Jesus and confirm his return to earth as an indication of the Hour.⁵ Al-Ṭabarī traces this interpretation to the following five authorities: Ibn 'Abbās, Abū Mālik, al-Ḥasan, Qatāda, and Ibn Zayd.

The following reasons make this view worthier than the others:

¹ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 10.

² Q. 4:159.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/356-357.

⁴ al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1/589.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/360. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/514.

- (i) There are many *ḥadīths* which are related by many *muḥaddiths*, which mention the return of Jesus, such as the collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim who record many *ḥadīths* to this effect in the most authentic books of *ḥadīths* according to majority of the Muslims. These *ḥadīths* are traced to many authorities by many routes.¹ Ibn Kathīr records twelve *ḥadīths* to support his view that Jesus will return back before the Hour.² One of these *ḥadīths* is that the Prophet says, ‘By the one in whose hands my soul is, surely the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you as a just ruler. He will break the cross and kill pigs and there will be no *jizya*. Money will be in abundance, so that nobody will accept it, and a single prostration to Allah will be better than the whole world and whatever is in it.’ Then the narrator of the *ḥadīth*, Abū Hurayra, recited the above mentioned verse.³
- (ii) It is linguistically true that pronouns must refer back to someone mentioned shortly before. And according to the majority of the Qur’anic commentators, such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, on the basis of context, the first pronoun ‘him’ in the previous verse must refer back to someone mentioned shortly before, which is Jesus.⁴
- (iii) There is agreement between the Qur’anic commentators that the third pronoun refers to Jesus which means that it is Jesus who will be a witness against the People of the Book. And if it is Jesus who will be a witness then it is most

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 4/356-357. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 16/91-93.

² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/515-520.

³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4/436.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 4/361. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/514.

probably Jesus who will be believed in which makes the three pronouns in the above-mentioned verse refer to Jesus.¹

2. That the second pronoun refers to every individual from the People of the Book. This indicates that the People of the Book will believe in Jesus before they die when every individual is faced with the truth just before the soul leaves the body, and at that time every individual is able to distinguish between truth and false.² Al-Ṭabarī objects to this view because it means that every one of the People of the Book will die as a Muslim although he did not believe in Muhammad and other prophets.³ Ibn Kathīr finds a solution to this objection by mentioning that faith at the moment of death is of no avail, supporting his view by two verses from the Qur'an.⁴ One notes that if faith at the moment of death is of no avail then we should eliminate this view on the basis that it is pointless for the Qur'an to mention it. However, al-Zamakhsharī objects to this note and mentions that we can accept this view on the basis that the Qur'an mentions this view as a threat to the People of the Book to believe before that time when the soul is about to leave the body.⁵

3. That the first and the third pronouns both refer to Muhammad and the second pronoun refers to the People of the Book. According to this view, no one from the

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/361. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/514.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/514. Al-Qurṭubī does not prefer a specific view but he mentions that the strongest views are the first two views which are mentioned above. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/13.

³ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/360.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/515. See also Q. 4:18, and 40:84-85.

⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1/589.

People of the Book will die before believing in Muhammad.¹ However al-Ṭabarī rejects this interpretation on the basis of the context.² Al-Qurṭubī also sets aside this view.³

4. That the first pronoun refers to Allah which means that every individual from the People of the Book will believe in Allah before he dies but this faith at the moment of death is of no avail.⁴

After citing the previous four views regarding the previous verse, we refer to another verse which refers to Jesus' return before the Hour:

And he shall be a known sign for the Hour.⁵

There are many views regarding the underlined pronoun 'he' in this verse:

1. The pronoun 'he' refers to Jesus which means that the coming of Jesus back down to earth is an indication of the vanishing of this world and the arrival of the Hour. Al-Ṭabarī mentions three distinct readings to the word '*ilm*', in this verse (of which he favours the first):

- (i) '*Ilm* which means knowledge.
- (ii) '*Alam* which means sign.
- (iii) '*Dhikr* which means mention or reminder.⁶

2. Some commentators mention that the pronoun 'he' in the previous verse refers to the Qur'an to mean that the Qur'an is knowledge pertaining to the Hour for it

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/361. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/514. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/13.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/361.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/13.

⁴ Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1/589. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/13. Al-Qurṭubī does not also support the fourth view which is mentioned above. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/13.

⁵ Q.43:61.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 11/205-206.

gives details about the Hour.¹ Al-Ṭabarī traces this view only to the authority of al-Hasan and Qatāda.² Ibn Kathīr for his part mentions that this interpretation is not the right one and believes that the pronoun ‘he’ refers to Jesus.³

What makes the first view that the pronoun ‘he’ in the previous verse refers to Jesus worthier than others is that:

- (i) The whole passage in which this verse is mentioned refers to Jesus; therefore the pronoun ‘he’ refers back to the one who has been mentioned before and that is Jesus.
- (ii) There are many authentic *ḥadīths* that speak of Jesus’ return.⁴
- (iii) The meanings of the three variant readings of the word ‘ilm, i.e. ‘ilm, ‘alam and *dhikr*, supports the view that Jesus’ return will be a sign or a reminder for the Hour.⁵ One notes here that one of the meanings of the word *dhikr* is reminder and it is true to say that Jesus also is a reminder of the coming of the Hour.
- (iv) There are many authorities who favour the view that the pronoun ‘he’ in the previous verse refers to Jesus. Al-Ṭabarī traces this interpretation to the following authorities: Ibn ‘Abbās, al-Ḥasan, Mujāhid, Qatāda, al-Suddī and al-Ḍahhāk.⁶ Ibn Kathīr also traces this interpretation to the following authorities: Ibn ‘Abbās,

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 11/205. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 16/91.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 11/205. Al-Qurṭubī also refers this above-mentioned view to the authority of Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 16/91.

³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 4/119.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/515-520.

⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 4/119.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 11/204-205.

Mujāhid, Abū Hurayra, Abū Mālik, ‘Ikrima, al-Ḥasan, Qatāda, al-Ḍahhāk and Abū al-‘Āliya.¹

(v) That the belief that Jesus will return before the Hour is well established in Islam.²

The sonship of Jesus

The Qur’an relates Jesus to his mother Mary twenty three times. It relates Jesus to his mother Mary while all other prophets of the Qur’an are mentioned only by their names. Al-Rāzī suggests that the Qur’an, by relating Jesus to Mary, wants to show that he was a human being with no father.³ Ibn al-Jawzī relates that the Qur’an uses the title ‘Son of Mary’ in opposition to those who say that Jesus is the Son of God.⁴ Mary is mentioned thirty four times in the Qur’an in twelve *sūras*.⁵ One *sūra* of the Qur’an, *Maryam*, is named after her. Riḍā criticizes both the Gospel of Matthew and Luke which are determined to trace Jesus’ descent from David through Mary’s husband Joseph but not through his mother, the virgin Mary, although Mary was not married at that time but betrothed to Joseph.⁶

The Qur’an only once mentions that the Christians took Jesus as a son of Allah:

The Jews say: ‘Ezra is the son of Allah.’ And the Christians say: ‘The Messiah is the son of Allah.’ That is a saying from their mouths. They imitate the saying of the disbelievers of old.⁷

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 4/119.

² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/515-520. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 16/91-93.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 11:105. The title ‘Messiah’ in the Qur’an is mentioned eleven times. See Q. 3:45, 4:151, 4:171, 4:172, 5:1, 5:72, 5:75, 9:30 and 9:31.

⁴ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr*, 1/389.

⁵ ‘Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu’jam*, article *Maryam*, pp. 839-840.

⁶ Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 3/289. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 6/13. See Luke 1:27 and Matthew 1:18.

⁷ Q. 9:30.

Some commentators mention that not all the Jews claim the sonship of ‘Uzayr.¹ Ibn Kathīr mentions that those who believed in the sonship of ‘Uzayr were only the ignorant from among the Jews.² Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the allegation of the Christians when they say that Jesus is the son of God imitates the saying of the Jews before them who said that ‘Uzayr is the son of God.³ He traces this interpretation to the following four authorities: Ibn ‘Abbās, Qatāda, al-Suddī and Ibn Jurayj.⁴ Al-Ṭabarī also relates on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that the saying that Jesus is the son of God imitates the saying of the pagans before the Jews and the Christians.⁵ Ibn Kathīr supports the view that the saying of the Jews and the Christians imitates the saying of those who went astray before them in general.⁶

It seems that the Qur’an uses the word ‘son’ in the previous verse in a physical sense. Within the Qur’an there are many verses which suggest that treating Jesus as the son of God in a physical sense existed among the Christians, otherwise the Qur’an would not give such attention to this matter. The Qur’an denies the idea that Allah has a son, *walad*, eighteen times, sometimes in direct connection with the People of the Book.⁷ For example, in *sūra* 4:171, the Qur’an, after mentioning the Christian beliefs of the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity, confirms that Allah is above having a son. In *Sūrat al-Baqara*, the Qur’an, after mentioning the accusation of the Jews and the Christians to

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 6/352. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/318. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 8/108. Newby points to the possibility that the Jews of Arabia were acquainted with the teaching that ‘Uzayr was a great man. See Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, pp. 60-61.

² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/318.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 6/352.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 6/352.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 6/352.

⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/318.

⁷ Q. 2:116, 4:171 and 19:35.

one another of having been misguided, closes the debate saying, ‘And they say: ‘Allah has begotten a son.’¹ In *Sūrat Maryam*, the Qur’an, after mentioning Jesus’ birth, closes the story, saying, ‘Such was Jesus the son of Mary, a statement of truth about which they dispute. It is not befitting to Allah that He should beget a son.’² Another example is that the Qur’an, at the close of *Sūrat Maryam*, and on three successive occasions, rejects the idea that Allah has a son.³ Ibn Kathīr mentions that within the Christians there were some groups who treated Jesus as a real son, and some others used the word son to be no more than a tribute and honouring only.⁴

Many Christian writers deny taking the word son in a literal sense.⁵ Parrinder, for example, argues that the sonship of Jesus means nothing more than nearness in love but agree that some Christian sects used to treat Jesus as a real son of god.⁶ Therefore, he assumes that the Qur’an sought to correct their belief.⁷ He also remarks that this could have happened because the Greeks, who used to call a holy person ‘son of God’ as a title of honour, influenced these sects and even influenced the disciples of Jesus.⁸ Parrinder also prefers not to take the ‘sonship’ literally, and makes a list of statements made by many Muslim and Christian writers to support the idea that son only means the son of

¹ Q. 2:116.

² Q. 19:35.

³ Q. 19:88-90.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/33. One finds that in Psalm 2:7, David said, ‘I will proclaim the decree of the Lord he said to me: ‘You are my son’. The same title was given to Solomon in 1, Chronicles 22:10, ‘He (Solomon) shall build a house for my name, and he shall be my son, and I will be his father.’ And in John 20:17, Jesus said, ‘I am returning to my Father and to your Father,’ which could only mean my Lord and Your Lord.

⁵ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, p. 126. See also Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslims*, pp. 289-295. Brown, *Jesus and God in the Christian Scriptures*, p. 55.

⁶ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, p. 126. See also Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslims*, pp. 289-295.

⁷ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, p. 126.

⁸ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, p. 131.

love.¹ Commenting on the Qur'anic expression 'Son of the road' that means wayfarer, Cragg says, 'Nobody inquires about tramps as born of the road's wedlock.' Cragg argues that the sonship of Jesus meant nothing more than obedience and love, so that the terms 'Father' and 'Son' have no physical significance but are used analogically.² Bell looks at this issue from another angle and asserts that the Christian communities with which the Prophet came into contact were Monophysites who unduly ignored the humanity of Jesus.³ On the other hand, he mentions that there is a possibility that the sonship which is mentioned in the Qur'an regarding Jesus may be a reference to saint worship since legends and devotions grew up around the lives of some of the Christian martyrs and ascetics.⁴ Brown also argues that the 'Son of God' was not a title invented for Jesus by the Apostle, but was adopted by the Christians from the ancient Jewish scriptures in which this title was used metaphorically to describe the relationship between the Jews and God.⁵

The Prophet notices that what persuaded some Christians to apply the title 'Son of God' to Jesus is their exaggeration in praising the person of Jesus. This reason is the same reason which caused some Jews to give the title 'Son of God' to 'Uzayr who was the most knowledgeable one on the Torah in his time.⁶ Therefore, the Prophet reminds his people not to exaggerate in praising him personally lest they put him in a similar position to that of Jesus, saying:

¹ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, pp. 130-132.

² Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslims*, pp. 289-295.

³ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, pp. 134-135, and p. 158.

⁴ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 159. See also, Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, p. 157.

⁵ Brown, *Jesus and God in the Christian Scriptures*, pp. 55-56.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jami' al-Bayan*, 6/350-351. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/318. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 2/43-46. Al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi'*, 8/108. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, pp. 60-61.

Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised Jesus the son of Mary, for I am only a slave. So, call me the slave of Allah and his Messenger.¹

The Divinity of Jesus

The Qur'an in more than one hundred places confirms that Allah is only one. It denies that Allah is one of three in a trinity:

Surely, in disbelief are they who say that Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary. But the Messiah said: 'O Children of Israel, worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.' Verily, they do blaspheme who say: 'Allah is one of three in a trinity,' for there is no god except one God...The Messiah, the son of Mary was no more than a messenger; many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They both used to eat food.²

Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the Qur'an rejects those who say that Jesus is the son of Allah, and those who say that Allah is one of three in a trinity.³ He also notes that the majority of Christians believed in the trinity before they divided into denominations.⁴

The Qur'an also says:

Surely, in disbelief are they who say that Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary.⁵

¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtasar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1439, p. 680.

² Q. 5:73-75.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/653.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/652. Al-Shahrastānī, mentions that the Christians have been divided into seventy-two divisions. See al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 2/37.

⁵ Q. 5:17, 5:72.

Jesus in the Qur'an laid no claim to godhood:

I said to them aught but what You did command me to say: 'Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord, and I was witness over them while I dwelt amongst them.'¹

The Qur'an also mentions that some Christians believe in the divinity of Mary:

And remember when Allah will say: 'O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say unto men take me and my Mother as two gods besides Allah?''²

Parrinder, while considering the belief in the divinity of Mary as a Christian heresy, acknowledges that some Christians practiced this belief.³ According to Parrinder, the factors which led the Christians to exalt Mary are the influence of the pagan cult of goddesses, alongside the growing currency of the titles 'God-Bearer' or 'Mother of God' which were widely used in the fifth century.⁴

The 'Trinity'

The aim of this section is not to explain in details the meaning of the Trinity, or to investigate the position of Jesus in the Christians' belief of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, but to highlight what the Qur'an says about it.

The Qur'an rejects belief in the trinity. It states:

O People of the Book, do not exceed the limits in your religion, nor say of Allah aught but the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was a messenger of Allah and His word which He bestowed on Mary, and

¹ Q. 5:117.

² Q. 5:116.

³ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, p. 135.

⁴ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, pp. 63 and see also pp. 134-135.

a spirit from Him. So, believe in Allah and His messengers. Say not three. Cease, it would be better for you. For Allah is one, glory be to Him, above having a son.¹

It also says:

Surely, they disbelieve who say: ‘Allah is the third of three (in a trinity).’ But there is no god but one god.... Christ, the son of Mary, was no more than a messenger; and many were the messengers that passed away before him. His mother was a woman of truth. They both used to eat food.’²

The two previous verses show that believing in the trinity is disbelief. The Qur’anic commentators mention many interpretations of the trinity among the Christians. Al-Qurṭubī relates that al-Zajjāj states that the ‘Three’ here are three gods.³ According to Ibn Abbās the three here are: Allah, Mary and Jesus.⁴ It seems that Ibn Abbās points to those who considered Mary as part in the godhead, i.e. Father, Jesus and Mary. Ibn Kathīr accepts Ibn Abbās’s view referring to verse 116 of *Sūrat al-Mā’ida* which says: ‘Remember when Allah will say to Jesus, ‘Did you say unto men worship me and my mother as two gods besides Allah?’ Yūsuf ‘Ali mentions that the worship of Mary, though repudiated by the Protestants, was widely spread in the earlier churches, both in the east and the west.⁵ Muir, although he is uncertain, thinks that the trinity of

¹ Q. 4:171.

² Q. 5:73-77.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 6/23.

⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 6/23.

⁵ Yūsuf ‘Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*, commentary No. 829, p. 286.

the Qur'an is that of the father, mother and son.¹ However, Muir does not mention the other interpretation of the trinity.

Ibn Kathīr mentions that the Christians give many interpretations of the position of Jesus in the trinity, and he considers that all of them are considered as disbelief.² This trinity, according to Basetti-Sani, has nothing to do with the trinity of authentic Christianity.³ This writer seems to consider one interpretation of the trinity and regards others as disbelief.

The meaning of the trinity differs from one denomination to another. But it seems that apologist Christians, in order to make the meaning of trinity understandable, say that the 'Three' only amount to the separate personification of three attributes of one God.⁴ Parrinder, therefore, mentions that orthodox Christians agree that God cannot be one of three and that the notion of three gods is as offensive to Christianity as it is to Islam.⁵

Watt admits that there has been misunderstanding and difficulties regarding the interpretation of the trinity and believes that those who believe in three gods are the simple minded Christians who fall into something like the error of tritheism in practice, but so far as they are tritheists they are heretics, and, according to him, those might be derived from Christians.⁶ However, according to the Qur'an, there is a total rejection of any type of association with Allah regardless of any interpretation.

¹ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 156.

² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/527.

³ Basetti-Sani, *The Qur'an in the Light of Christ*, p. 29.

⁴ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, pp. 138-140. See also Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret*, p. 308.

⁵ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, p. 134.

⁶ Watt, *Early Islam*, p. 67.

The 'Spirit'

The Qur'an mentions that Jesus is a 'Spirit from Allah' but gives no explanation of this title. The word spirit, *rūh*, is mentioned in the Qur'an twenty-one times, six times only in connection with Jesus.¹ Nine times, the word *rūh* in the Qur'an is mentioned to mean the angel Gabriel;² five times to refer to breathing into something or somebody from Allah's spirit two of which are in connection with Mary, the mother of Jesus;³ and three of which are in connection with Adam.⁴ The word *rūh* is mentioned two times as a term whose meaning people inquired about;⁵ and once as a title for Jesus that he is a spirit from Allah.⁶ The word *rūh* is also mentioned four times to refer to that which a person is strengthened by, three of them in connection with Jesus,⁷ and once in connection with the believers.⁸

As mentioned above, the Qur'an once calls Jesus a spirit from Allah, three times mentions that Allah strengthened Jesus with the Holy Spirit, and twice the Qur'an mentions that Allah breathed of His spirit into Mary.

Al-Ṭabarī mentions five views on the meaning that Jesus is a spirit from Allah:⁹

- (i) A breath from Allah, because the Qur'an mentions that Allah breathed into Mary.
- (ii) That Jesus was a human because Allah brought him to life by saying: 'Be'.
- (iii) It means mercy from Allah.

¹ Q. 2:87, 2:253, 4:171, 5:110, 21:91 and 66:12.

² Q. 16:2, 16:102, 19:17, 26:193, 40:15, 42:52, 70:4, 78:38 and 97:4.

³ Q. 21:91 and 66:12.

⁴ Q. 15:29, 32:9 and 38:72.

⁵ Q. 17:85.

⁶ Q. 4:171.

⁷ Q. 2:87, 2:253 and 5:110.

⁸ Q. 58:22.

⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/374-375.

- (iv) A spirit from Allah which he created and gave the shape of a human being and sent to Mary.
- (v) It means Gabriel, which means that Allah bestowed His word on Mary through him.

One notes that none of the previous views are special or could be taken as a reference to the belief of the divinity of Jesus. Moreover, the Qur'an shows that Allah strengthened the prophets who came before and after Jesus with the Holy Spirit, *rūḥ al-Qudus*. The Qur'an shows that Allah also continues to strengthen righteous people with *rūḥ*, saying, '...for such, He has written faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with *rūḥ* from Himself.'¹ Within the *ḥadīths* also one finds that Allah strengthens not only prophets with the 'Spirit' but also the righteous people.² The Prophet once said to his poet Ḥassān ibn Thābit when he satirized the Muslim enemies, 'O Ḥassān, satirize them and the Holy Spirit is with you.'³ Some *ḥadīths* also mention that the spirit is breathed into every human being while he is in the womb of his mother.⁴ The previous references show that supporting Jesus with the 'Spirit' is in accordance with other people who find the same support from Allah.

The Qur'an gives no interpretation to the meaning of spirit and avoids any speculation regarding its meaning. The Qur'an says, 'And they ask you concerning the spirit, say, 'Its knowledge is with my Lord, and of knowledge you have been given only

¹ Q. 59:22. Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the word spirit in the verse 22:58 means proof, light and guidance. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 12/26.

² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 4/297.

³ Al-Jazarī, *Jāmi' al-Uṣūl*, 5/176. See also Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā*, p. 121. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/106-107.

⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4/290.

a little.’¹ Therefore, the Qur’an uses the term spirit in different senses, and none of them are special or could be taken as a reference to the belief in the divinity of Jesus.²

The ‘Word’

The word ‘word’ is mentioned in the Qur’an many times, twenty-six times in a singular form, *kalima*, and two times in a singular form linked with the pronoun ‘*nā*’, *kalimatunā* (Our word) and ‘*hu*’, *kalimatuhu* (His word). Fifteen times in the Qur’an the word ‘word’ means the fair promise of Allah and his command, and ten times to mean the content of sayings or teachings. In the Qur’an Jesus receives the title ‘word’ three times.³ According to Muslim commentators, the title ‘word’ which is given to Jesus in the Qur’an means that Jesus was created by the command ‘Be’ and he was.⁴ Al-Qurṭubī mentions that this was the opinion of the majority of the Qur’anic commentators.⁵ He mentions another interpretation which is mentioned by others, namely, that Jesus was called ‘Word’ because the people were guided by him as they were guided by the word of Allah.⁶ Al-Ṭabarī favours the view that the meaning of ‘word from Allah’ is that Allah sent a message of glad tidings of Jesus to Mary and this message is the word of

¹ Q. 17:85.

² One also notes that ‘Spirit’ in the New Testament is used in different senses. The New Testament uses this word sometimes to point to the wind (John 3:8, and Hebrews 1:7). The New Testament also uses ‘Spirit’ to point to animals’ life of which the breath is the most obvious sign (James 2:26). Some times the term spirit stands for the spiritual side of man’s being (Corinthians 2:11). Within the New Testament we also find the following expressions: spirit of Faith (2 Corinthians 4:13), spirit of holiness (Roman 1:4) and spirit of wisdom (Ephesians 1:17). Swete mentions that in the New Testament the expression of ‘Holy Spirit’ is mentioned eighty-eight times, and the expressions of ‘Spirit of God’ and ‘Spirit of Lord’ are mentioned twenty-five times. See Swete, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 286.

³ Q. 3:39, 3:45 and 4:171.

⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*’, 4/77.

⁵ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*’, 4/77. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/319-320.

⁶ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*’, 4/77.

Allah.¹ Riḍā suggests that Jesus was called ‘Word’ because he was known by the word revealed from Allah to his prophet John, *Yahyā*, before the coming of Jesus.²

Within the Qur’an we find that each of the two prophets Adam and Jesus is mentioned twenty five times. The Qur’an draws a comparison between the creation of Jesus and that of Adam. The Qur’an says:

The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam, He created him (Adam) from dust, then said to him: ‘Be’, and he was.³

It seems that Allah created some of his people in order to show his omnipotence, and, therefore, the Qur’an three times mentions that Jesus was a sign to mankind.⁴ Ibn Kathīr mentions that the one who created Adam from dust without mother or father was able to create Jesus from his mother Mary, without father.⁵ He adds that if one claims that Jesus is the son of God because of his creation without a father, then to apply the same title to Adam is more appropriate.⁶ Robinson refers to Zaehner that because the Qur’an mentions that Allah had ordered his angels to prostrate in front of Adam, then he is regarded as being a divine being in the Qur’an, for it is not lawful to fall down in obeisance to any but God.⁷ Zaehner extends his view to say that Jesus, who was sinless, was worthy of worship from the moment that Allah breathed His spirit upon Mary, just as Adam was before him. Zaehner asserts that Adam lost the divine spirit by

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 3/268.

² Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 3/304.

³ Q. 3:59. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/323. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 3/293.

⁴ Q. 19:21, 21:91 and 23:50. The Qur’an however mentions that not only Jesus was a sign to mankind but also his mother Mary (see Q. 21:91, 23:50). The Qur’an mentions that the people of Noah who were rescued by the Ark were also a sign to mankind (see, Q. 25:37). Al-Qurṭubī remarks that the whole story of Jesus and his mother is a sign and a miracle for all mankind. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 11/338.

⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/323.

⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/323.

⁷ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 12.

sin; Jesus did not and was accordingly raised up to God's own presence where Adam must remain a legitimate object of worship for all time.¹ Zaehner builds his conclusion on his own interpretation of the word prostration, *sujūd*, and, therefore, he concludes that Adam is regarded in the Qur'an as a divine being. However, the word *sujūd* in the Qur'an also does mean respect and tribute.² Therefore, the prostration of angels to Adam need mean nothing but respect and tribute and this is similar to Muslim prostrations before the Ka'ba.³ The Qur'an also uses the word *sujūd* to mean respect and tribute when it mentions the prostration of Joseph's family before him, 'And he raised his parents high on the throne, and they fell down in prostration before him.'⁴ One remarks here that the Qur'an uses the two words 'throne' and 'prostration' to mean nothing more than respect, honour and dignity.

Robinson also refers to Ledit's assertion that because the Qur'an refers to Jesus as being *min al-muqarrabīn*, then it proclaims the incarnation of the 'Word of God' who was with God from the beginning and assisted him in the act of creation. Ledit bases this claim on verse 3:45 which describes Jesus as a 'word' and 'one of those who are near to Allah', *min al-muqarrabīn*. The implication for Ledit is that Jesus was an incarnation of one of the spirits who stand in God's presence.⁵ However, within the Qur'an, the word *muqarrabūn* is mentioned eight times; once only linked with Jesus,⁶ twice linked with

¹ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 12.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi, al-Bayān*, 1/266. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/67. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1/333.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 1/333.

⁴ Q. 12:100.

⁵ Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity*, p. 11.

⁶ Q. 3:45.

the angels,¹ and three times linked with the true believers.² These links suggest that this description is no more than a title which is given in the Qur'an to describe the rank of certain people in the sight of their Lord, whether they are angels, normal humans or prophets, and nothing to do with the incarnation of the 'Word'.³

The crucifixion of Jesus

There are many references in the Qur'an to Jesus' fate:

Verse 19:31-33

And He (Allah) has made me blessed wherever I be, and has enjoined on me prayer and to pay charity, as long as I live. He has made me kind to my mother, and not overbearing or miserable. And peace be upon me the day I was born, the day that I die and the day that I shall be raised up alive.⁴

These verses show that the statement of Jesus regarding his death while he was in the cradle contains no indication of his future destiny because it was Jesus who spoke about himself, and he, as a human, did not know about his destiny; therefore he regarded himself as any other human being and mentioned the normal fate of all humans. Ibn Kathīr supports this view when he believes that the previous verse, verse 19:33, illustrates the stages of human life as created by Allah, stating that Jesus will be in peace

¹ Q. 4:172 and 83:21.

² Q. 56:11, 56:88 and 83:28.

³ Al-Ṭabarī mentions that Jesus will be one of those who are near to Allah in the Hereafter. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/270.

⁴ Q. 19:31-33.

in all of these stages.¹ In the same *sūra*, verse 15, Allah speaks of John's fate, 'And peace be upon him (John) the day he was born, the day he dies, and the day he will be raised up alive again.' The difference between these above mentioned verses is that in verse 33, Jesus spoke of himself, saying, 'Peace be upon me', but in verse 15, Allah spoke about John, saying, 'Peace be upon him.' This difference indicates that Jesus did not know about his fate, and, therefore spoke about his death while he was in the cradle, whereas in the case of John, Allah spoke about the destiny of John implying that Allah knows what will happen to him in the future. Jesus, then, considered himself like other humans, mentioning all the stages of human life, and he did not know that he would be raised up to heaven. Ibn Kathīr compares verse 19:31, which confirms the destiny of John, with verse 15:99, which confirms the destiny of the Prophet, 'O Muhammad, worship your Lord until the coming of your death.'²

Verse: 5:117, 3:54-55 and 4:156-157

But when you took me (Jesus) up (*tawaffaytanī*), you were the watcher over them. And you are witness to all things.

And:

And they plotted, and Allah plotted too, and Allah is the best of plotters. And remember when Allah says: 'O Jesus, I will take you (*mutawaffika*) and raise you to me (*rāfi'uka*) and cleanse you of those who disbelieve and place those who follow you over those who disbelieve.'

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 3/ 120.

² Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 3/120.

And:

That was because of their (the Jews) disbelief and uttering against Mary a grave false charge. And because of their saying: ‘We killed Messiah Jesus, son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.’ But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but a semblance was made to them (*shubbiha lahum*). And those who differ therein are indeed in doubt about it. They have no knowledge, for they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely, they killed him not, but Allah raised him up unto Him. And Allah is All-Powerful, All Wise.

Three terms should be discussed with regard to these three references mentioned above: *mutawaffika*, *rāfi‘uka* and *shubbiha lahum*.

1. The word *mutawaffika* in the second and the third verses mentioned above, which is the fifth form active participle of the Arabic root WFY, occurs in the Qur’an more than twenty-five times, mostly, in connection with death. Once this word *mutawaffika* is used with reference to sleep.¹ Al-Qurṭubī relates that al-Ḥasan mentions that the verb *tawaffā* in the Qur’an has three meanings: firstly, death, as in verse 39:42; secondly, sleep, as in verse 6:60; thirdly, rising up, as in verse 3:55.² Al-Qurṭubī also relates that al-Hasan and Ibn Jurayj and many others mention that the meaning of *mutawaffika* is to grasp, which denotes grasping hold of and receiving in full a sum of money which you are owed.³ Other verses show that the meaning of *yatawaffāka* could mean to receive completely or to bring to completion which, in connection with Jesus,

¹ Q. 6:60.

² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 6/348.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 3/288. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 4/100. Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr*, 8/72.

means the completion of the prophetic mission of Jesus.¹ This interpretation means that Allah promised Jesus that he would protect him till he completed his mission.² These previous meanings of the word *mutawaffika*, which occurs twice in the Qur'an, in connection with Jesus' destiny, leave the door open for several meanings, and not only death.

The favourite interpretation of al-Ṭabarī and the majority of the Qur'anic commentators is that the meaning of *mutawaffika* is to grasp or collect Jesus from this world alive, raising him up to heaven.³ Al-Ṭabarī attributes this interpretation to six early authorities. Al-Ṭabarī considers this interpretation as his favourite because of the well-attested *ḥadīths* in which the Prophet is said to have mentioned that Jesus would die after returning to earth and killing the Antichrist.⁴

However, concerning the third reference mentioned above which mentions *mutawaffika* before *rāfi'uka*, al-Ṭabarī notes that it could be understood as follows, 'And remember when Allah said to Jesus, 'I will take you and raise you to myself, and purify you of those who disbelieve, and I will put you to death after your second coming to this world in the future, before the Hour,' considering this as an instance in which what is mentioned first happens last and what happens last is mentioned first.'⁵

2. The word *rāfi'uka* according to many exegetes means that Allah grasped (or collected) Jesus from the earth and raised him up to Himself and that he will descend again to earth before the Hour, killing the Antichrist, breaking the cross and killing pigs.

¹ Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-Kabīr*, 8/71.

² Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-Kabīr*, 8/71.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/101. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/290.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/286.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/289-290. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/100. McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, p. 138.

Jesus will then die and the Muslims will bury him.¹ However, some other writers interpret this being raised to heaven in the sense of exaltation and glorification.² These writers agree that Jesus was not crucified.³ This group support their arguments by mentioning that many verses in the Qur'an use the same word 'rising up' in this sense.⁴ For example, verse 19:57 says, 'And We raised him (*Idrīs*) to a high station.'⁵ One would thus argue that if Jesus was raised to heaven in soul only then there would be no significance to the word *rāfi'uka* since the Qur'an mentions that Allah raised *Idrīs* to a high station.⁶

Ibn al-Jawzī stresses that Jesus's being raised up to heaven does not preclude his death at some future date.⁷ Ridā, therefore gives another interpretation and believes that Jesus died normally, so that the meaning of *mutawaffika* according to his view is 'causing to die' in the usual sense of death. Ridā argues that there is no reason for the Qur'an to put the word *mutawaffika* before the word *rāfi'uka* unless the word *rāfi'uka* is necessary to express the positive act of granting Jesus life and high position.⁸ This raising, according to Ridā, was a raising of the soul not of the body.⁹ This latter opinion argues that the *ḥadīths* that talk about the return of Jesus and his descent from heaven do not mention that Jesus was raised alive in both soul and body, and that Allah can cause

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/289-291. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/ 99-100.

² Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, 2/46-47. Shalabī mentions that many Muslim writers interpret this raising up of Jesus to heaven in the sense of exaltation and glorification only. See Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, 2/46-57.

³ Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, 2/43.

⁴ Q. 6:83, 19:25, 24:36, 58:11, and 94:4. See also 3:169.

⁵ Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, 2/46-47.

⁶ Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, 2/46-47.

⁷ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr*, 1/397.

⁸ Ridā, *al-Manār*, 3/ 316-317.

⁹ Ridā, *al-Manār*, 3/ 316-317.

him to live again and send him down again even after he has died.¹ Al-Tabarī reasons that Jesus would not die twice while all other human beings die once, supporting his argument from verse 30:40 which states that Allah told his creatures that each of them would die only once.²

3. The third phrase which we should discuss in connection with the fourth reference mentioned above is the phrase *shubbiha lahum*. Al-Tabarī mentions two interpretations of this phrase of which can be put under two headings:

- (i) That all the disciples of Jesus were made to look like Jesus and that the Jews killed one of these disciples thinking that he was Jesus.³
- (ii) That Jesus himself asked his companions to do him a favour in accepting to have Jesus' semblance projected on him and to be killed instead of Jesus.⁴

To know the one who was made to look like Jesus is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the phrase *shubbiha lahum* suggests that the one who was killed was not Jesus. However, some western writers mention that the Qur'an possibly denies the idea that it was the Jews who killed Jesus. These writers, regarding the verse 4:157 of the fourth reference mentioned above, suggest that the words of this verse may be read in the sense that 'killing the Messiah would not be essentially a Jewish act, but God's doing.'⁵ These writers mention that this interpretation corresponds with the Qur'anic comment on the victory at Badr, 'You killed them not, but Allah killed them.'⁶ They

¹ Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adiān*, 2/ 47-48.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/291. See Q. 44:56 and 37:59.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/351. Al-Ṭabarī prefers the view that all the disciples of Jesus were made to look like Jesus. See al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/351.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/352.

⁵ Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, p. 169. See also Brown, *Jesus and God in the Christian Scriptures*, p. 35.

⁶ Q. 8:17.

believe that this verse shows that Allah denies the statement made by men ‘We killed’ because only Allah himself could kill the Messiah, and men could not do so against his will, as is often said, ‘God is the best of plotters.’¹ However, if we follow this interpretation, we note that the phrase that talks about the plan of Allah in the fourth reference mentioned above has no meaning, since the plan of Allah appeared in the form of a resemblance of Jesus which was put on another person.

Verse 5:17

Say (Muhammad): ‘Who avail ought against Allah if He were to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, his mother and all those who are on the earth together?’

Some writers argue that according to this verse Jesus will die, which suggests the human nature of Jesus and means that he will die like other humans.² However, al-Tabarī mentions that according to this verse if Jesus were God then why he did not prevent his mother from death.³ He mentions that this verse shows that if Allah were to decide to destroy all those who are on earth, including Jesus and his mother, he would.⁴

2. The People of the Book and the belief in angels

The Qur’an, two times, refers to the attitude of the People of the Book towards the angels, in particular Gabriel:

¹ Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslim*, pp. 169-170. See also Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, p. 108. Brown, *Jesus and God in the Christian Scriptures*, p. 35.

² Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an*, p. 107. See also Shalabī, *Muqaranat al-Adyān*, pp. 50-56. McAuliffe mentions many Muslim commentator views regarding the fate of Jesus. See McAuliffe, *Qur’anic Christians*, pp. 129-143.

³ Al-Tabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 4/504.

⁴ Al-Tabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 4/504.

Say (Muhammad): ‘Whoever is an enemy to Gabriel, then know that he indeed has brought it down on your heart by Allah’s will, confirming what came before it, and as a guidance and glad tidings for the believers.’ Whoever is an enemy to Allah, His angels, His messengers, Gabriel and Michael, then verily, Allah is an enemy to the disbelievers.’¹

Al-Ṭabarī mentions that all the commentators agree that these verses were revealed as a reply to the Jews when they said that Gabriel was their enemy and Michael was their friend.² Muslim writers mentions that their hatred to the Prophet caused the Jews to hate the angel Gabriel who brought the revelation down to the Prophet, asserting that Gabriel inspired fear and brought violence.³

3. The People of the Book and the belief in the Hereafter

This section will not investigate the belief of the People of the Book about the Hereafter but only mentions what the Qur’an says about it. The Qur’an points to a debate which took place in Madina when the Jews argued with the Prophet claiming that the fire of Hell would not touch them but for a few numbered days.⁴ There are two verses that mention this claim and both come in a context that talk about the Jews.

The first verse is:

¹ Q. 2:97-98.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 1/476.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 255. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 1/477. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/113-116. It seems that this Jewish statement about Gabriel was based on Daniel 8:16-17 which mentions that the vision of Gabriel inspired fear. In Daniel 12:1, one also finds that Michael was called the great prince who stands for the Children of Israel.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 252. See also al-Qurtūbi, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/13.

And they (The Jews) say: ‘The fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days.’¹

The second verse is:

This is because they (The Jews) say: ‘The fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days.’²

The Qur’an also mentions that some of the People of the Book do not believe in the Hereafter:

Fight against those who believe not in Allah, nor in the Last Day.³

This verse could be understood as a reference to the total denial of the Hereafter. Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the Jews and the Christians do not believe in Paradise or Hell Fire.⁴ These references mentioned above suggest that there are differences in the perception of beliefs in the life after death between the Muslims and the People of the Book.⁵

As this chapter comes to its end, one concludes that although there are differences between Muslim beliefs and the beliefs of the People of the Book, they both can be brought closer together. The differences in beliefs should not lead to hatred and hostility. Even the quarrel with the People of the Book during the Prophet’s time was not extended to those who lived side by side with the Muslims in peace. The Qur’an points to this:

¹ Q. 2:80. Many commentators say that those who said: ‘The fire shall not touch us but for a few numbered days,’ were the Jews. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 1/424-425. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/103. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/13-14.

² Q. 3:24. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 3/219. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/312.

³ Q. 9:29.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 6/349.

⁵ Katsh, for example, relates that the Talmud states that the trial of the transgressors in hell lasts twelve months. See Katsh, *Judaism in Islam*, p. 77. Newby mentions that appointing days to punishments is from the teaching of the Midrash that originated in the Jewish community of the Ḥijāz. See Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, pp. 63-64.

But if they incline to peace, you also incline to it and trust in Allah.¹

The Qur'an recognises differences in beliefs when states:

And if your Lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one community, but they will not cease to disagree except him on whom your Lord has bestowed His mercy, and for that (diversity) He did create them.²

This suggests that the Qur'an recognises the fact that there will be Muslims, Jews, Christians and others who will continue to live on this earth till the end of this world.³

Many writers from the Muslims and the People of the Book may search for reconciliation and compromise in belief in order to close the gap between them. However, the next chapter would show that regardless of differences in beliefs between the Muslims and the People of the Book, the Muslims are able to live with them in peace.

¹ Q. 8:61.

² Q. 11:118-119. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 7/139. See also al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 9/99.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 7/139.

Chapter Three: The Qur'anic attitude to the scriptures of the People of the Book

According to the Qur'an, Muslims should believe in all the books which have been revealed by Allah to His messengers.¹ This means that all the revealed books are Allah's word.² The Qur'an mentions four books which He revealed to His messengers, namely: the Torah which was revealed to Moses;³ the Psalms which were revealed to David;⁴ the Injīl which was revealed to Jesus;⁵ and the Qur'an which was revealed to Muhammad.⁶ The Qur'an also mentions that there were some Sheets which were revealed to Abraham.⁷

Some commentators attempt to mention the meanings of these previous books, in particular the meaning of the words *Tawrāh* and *Injīl* given to Torah and Gospel. Some commentators prefer not to derive the meaning of the words *Tawrāh* and *Injīl* from any Arabic root since they mention that these names are not Arabic words but Hebrew or Syriac. Al-Zamakhsharī mentions that the word *Tawrāh* is a Hebrew word which means the law, and the word *Injīl* is a Greek word which means glad tidings.⁸ However, al-Ṭabarī mentions that the word *Tawrāh* is derived from the Arabic root WRA which means to show something while meaning something else, to mean that

¹ Q. 2:285.

² Q. 3:3.

³ Q. 32:23. The Qur'an in this previous verse does not mention the name of the Book directly. The other verses of the Qur'an show that the book which revealed on Moses was the Torah.

⁴ Q. 4:163.

⁵ Q. 5:46.

⁶ Q. 42:7.

⁷ Q. 87:19.

⁸ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, 1/4101.

most of the content of the Torah is not distinct.¹ Although al-Qurtubī relates that some commentators believe that these names are not Arabic words but Hebrew or Syriac, he mentions that the meaning of the word *Tawrāh* is light and the meaning of the word *Injīl* is: principle or foundation since it is the foundation of wisdom and knowledge.² Al-Qurtubī bases his view on an etymological consideration of these two words.³

In the Qur'an, the Torah is mentioned eighteen times in seven *sūras*, in eight of which it is mentioned alongside the Injīl. The Book of Psalms, which is called the Psalms in the Qur'an is mentioned nine times in eight *sūras*. The Injīl is mentioned twelve times in six *sūras*. The Qur'an is mentioned sixty eight times, and only once in combination with the Torah and the Injīl.⁴ It seems that some Arabs knew the Injīl before the coming of Islam, such as Waraqa. Some poets also mention the Injīl in their poems, such as 'Adī ibn Zayd who mentioned the Injīl in his poems.⁵

1. Are the present scriptures unaltered?

The Qur'an mentions that each Book of Allah confirmed the previous Book. For instance, the Injīl confirmed the Torah,⁶ and the Qur'an confirmed the Injīl.⁷ On sixteen occasions, the Qur'an mentions that it is a confirmation of revelations that went before it, using the word *muṣaddiq* or *taṣdīq* or some related derivative.⁸

¹ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/9.

² Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/9.

³ Al-Qurtubī also here mentions the roots and derivations of the Arabic words '*Tawrāh*' and '*Injīl*'. See al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/9-10.

⁴ Q. 9:111.

⁵ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab*, 6/680.

⁶ Q. 5:46, 3:50 and 61:6. See al-Shahrīstānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 2/16-20.

⁷ Q. 5:48. See also Q. 2:89, 3:3, 6:92 and 10:37.

⁸ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, articles *taṣdīq* and *muṣaddiq*, pp. 515-516.

The Qur'an uses the following verbs to show that the present scriptures are not the revealed Torah and Injil:

- (i) *Yuharrifūn*
- (ii) *Yaktubūn*
- (iii) *Yaktumūn* and *yukhfūn*
- (iv) *Yalbisūn* and *yalwūn*

1. The verb *Yuharrif* is mentioned four times in the Qur'an, all of them in connection with the Jews.¹ Regarding the word *tahrīf*, al-Rāzī mentions three types of *tahrīf*: firstly, changing the words and replacing them by others; secondly, interpreting the meaning incorrectly and tricking others; thirdly, changing statements which they used to hear from the Prophet.² Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr mention that *tahrīf* happened by using intentionally false interpretation.³ Al-Qurṭubī refers to al-Suddī and Mujāhid saying that the Jewish rabbis used to change some rules of the Torah by making prohibitions permissible and vice versa.⁴ The Qur'an mentions the following types of *tahrīf* happening to the scriptures: firstly, there are parts of the scriptures which have been disappeared;⁵ secondly, there are some other parts which have been deliberately interpreted incorrectly by monks and rabbis according to their own interests.⁶

2. The Qur'an uses the verb *yaktub*, to write, to mean that the Jews wrote the Book with their own hands by using intentionally false interpretation, and then claimed that this is from Allah:

¹ Q. 2:75, 4:46, 5:13 and 5:41.

² Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 10/118?

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/412. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/449.

⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2/6.

⁵ Q. 5:15. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/502.

⁶ Q. 5:41. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/591.

Woe to those who write the Book with their own hands and say, ‘This is from Allah.’¹

3. The Qur’an uses the verbs *yaktum* and *yukhfi*, both meaning to conceal, meaning that there are some verses within the scriptures that have been hidden by people.² According to the commentators, the Qur’an many times warns the People of the Book, the Jews in particular, against mixing truth with falsehood or concealing the truth:

And do not mix truth with falsehood, and conceal the truth while you know.³

According to the Qur’an, the Jews used to conceal some parts of the Torah.⁴ It says:

Who then sent down the Book which Moses brought, a light and guidance to mankind which you have made into (separate) sheets, disclosing (some of it) and concealing much?⁵

The Jews used to come to the Prophet to judge between them in their affairs, sometimes to ridicule whatever the Prophet said, and some times to snatch a favourable decision from the Prophet which would suit their interests. For example, once a Jew committed adultery. Following this, the Jews came to the Prophet asking him to judge between them. When the Prophet inquired about the penalty of adulterers in the Torah, they concealed the verse of the Torah which deals with stoning.⁶

4. The Qur’an uses the verb *yalbis*, to deceive, to show that the Jews also used to cover the truth with falsehood:

¹ Q. 2:79. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 1/422.

² Q. 2:42, 2:146 and 3:3:71.

³ Q. 2:140. See also Q. 2:159 and 2:174.

⁴ Q. 5:15.

⁵ Q. 6:91.

⁶ Q. 5:43. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/55-56.

O People of the Book, Why do you mix truth with falsehood and conceal the truth while you know?¹

The Qur'an also uses the verb *yawwī*, to twist, to give the same accusation:

There is among them (the People of the Book) a section who distort, *yawwī*, the Book with their tongues, so that you may think it is a part of the Book, but it is not a part of the Book, and they say: 'This is from Allah' but it is not from Allah.' They tell a lie against Allah while they know it.²

The Prophet, in response to these references, reminded his Companions that they should neither believe nor reject whatever the People of the Book related to them. The Prophet also mentions that Muslims should accept anything in the scriptures that agrees with the Qur'an, and reject what is contrary to the Qur'an. When the Prophet saw the Torah with 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, he said to him, 'O son of al-Khaṭṭāb, by Allah, the verses of the Qur'an were brought to you white and pure, so do not ask them (the People of the Book) about anything. They will tell you something true and you will disbelieve it, or something false and you will believe it. By Allah, even if Moses were alive, nothing would be open to him but to follow me.'³ This statement of the Prophet suggests that the Prophet, by telling Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb not to read the Torah, did not mean a total rejection of it but firstly, he wanted to tell 'Umar that because he had the Qur'an, which was a confirmation of all the Books before it, then all sound knowledge, described here as white and pure, could be gained from it and, therefore, there was no need for 'Umar

¹ Q3:71. See also 2:42.

² Q. 3:78.

³ See the introduction of *Tafsīr* Ibn Kathīr.

to go to another book. Secondly, the Prophet did not want Muslims to make mistakes and falsify any true teachings of the Torah.

The Qur'an many times describes the Torah and the Injil as light and guidance:
...and He sent down the Torah and the Injil aforetime, as guidance to mankind...¹

The Qur'an also says:

If they had adhered to the Torah and the Injil and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have eaten from above them and from beneath their feet.²

According to the commentators, these verses show that the Qur'an is praising the Torah and the Injil in their original form and not the five Books of the Old Testament, or the four Books of the New Testament.³ One notes that if these verses were praising the present scriptures, then the mentioning of terms, such as *tahrif*, *kitabah*, *kitman*, *ikhfa'* and *talbis*, which referred to what happened to the Torah and the Injil in the course of time, would be meaningless. One also notes that adherence to the Torah and the Injil and what was sent down to the People of the Book from their Lord includes believing in the Prophet who is foretold in these revealed Books. The previous verse also could be understood as a reminder to the People of the Book that if they had not corrupted their Books and had adhered to their original ones, they would have enjoyed happiness from every side.

¹ Q. 3:3-4. See also 5:44, 5:46 and 32:23.

² Q. 5:66.

³ See Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Appendix 2 and 3, pp. 288-290 and pp. 291-292. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/644. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/72.

Daniel however argues that according to the Qur'an, the Torah and the Injil are not corrupt.¹ He comments on some verses of the Qur'an which invite the People of the Book to judge justly between themselves by using the law of their Books:

But how do they come to you for decision while they have the torah in which is the decision of Allah?²

He concludes that the Jews had a law capable of containing the true judgment of God, and, therefore, was not corrupt.³ Watt mentions that the Qur'anic attitude to the scriptures develops over time. He asserts that in the beginning the Qur'an confirms the previous revelations and accepts the Torah and the Injil, but the Muslims changed this attitude when they discovered that there were serious differences between these scriptures and the Qur'an, in particular, those Qur'anic verses which state that Muhammad is foretold in the scriptures.⁴ McAuliffe, in her comments on the previous verse, follows Watt's view when she mentions that some Qur'anic commentators hint that the scriptures contained ethical norms worthy of adherence, but the commentators' charge of scriptural alteration or corruption had to be balanced against the assertion that there had been sufficient intimation of the Prophet's advent in the revelation that is mentioned in the Qur'an.⁵ However, al-Ṭabarī mentions that the Jews used to conceal

¹ Daniel, *Islam and the West*, p. 50.

² See Q. 5:43.

³ Daniel, *Islam and the West*, pp. 50-51. However, al-Qurṭubī mentions that verse 5:43 which is discussed by Daniel, talks about the penalty of stoning. Al-Qurṭubī refers to Abū 'Alī that this penalty was not abrogated and, therefore, he calls it the command of Allah. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/178. The two verses before this verse show that the Qur'an gave the Prophet the choice to judge or not to judge between the People of the Book in their own affair as part of the tolerance of Islam when he gave them the right to judge between themselves according to their law in their own affairs. As al-Qurṭubī mentions, these verses also show that the Jews came to the Prophet to judge between them seeking an easier penalty. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/178 and 6/169-171.

⁴ Watt, *Early Islam*, pp. 77-83.

⁵ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, p. 202. See also Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, p. 151.

not only the Prophet's advent but also much of what they had written on sheets.¹ Watt again attempts to find another explanation for the development of the Qur'anic attitude towards the scriptures. He asserts that occidental scholars assume that the reason for the Qur'an attacking Christian beliefs and accusing the scriptures of corruption and alteration was the hostile attitude of Islam towards the Christians in the closing years of the Prophet's life when he was about to face military opposition from the Christian tribes towards the Syrian border.² When we deal with this accusation of Watt, we find that the main verses which accuse the scriptures of alteration and changes are 2:42, 2:75, 2:79, 2:146, 3:71, 3:78, 4:46, 5:13, 5:15, 5:41 and 6:91, and the main verses which praise the scriptures are 3:3-4, 5:44, 5:46, 5:66 and 32:23. Looking into these verses suggest that we cannot draw a line between the periods of their revelation. These verses indicate that there is no line between the period when the Qur'an praised the scriptures and the period when the Qur'an accused them of changes and alterations but, rather, within the same passage there is a verse that praises the scriptures and another which accuses them of alterations.

2. Is Muhammad foretold in the Torah and the Injil?

It is difficult to close our eyes and pass over hundreds of stories and incidents that are mentioned in many Islamic sources which mention that the People of the Book knew about the coming of the Prophet. There are many references in the Qur'an, in the *ḥadīth*

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 5/265.

² Watt, *Early Islam*, p. 67.

and in the books which deal with the Prophet's biography which mention prophecies about the advent of Muhammad in the Torah and the Injil.¹

Within the Qur'an there are many verses which indicate that the People of the Book knew Muhammad as they knew their own sons. The Qur'an says:

Those to whom We have given the Book know him or it as they know their own sons, but some of them conceal the truth which they themselves know.²

In another verse, we also read:

Those to whom We have given the Book know (him or it) as they know their own sons, those who have lost their own souls refuse therefore to believe.³

Ibn Kathīr believes that the pronoun 'him/it' in the first verse refers to the Prophet's message which means that the People of the Book know that the message of Muhammad is the truth.⁴ Al-Qurṭubī mentions that the pronoun 'him/it' in these two verses, refers to the Prophet.⁵ He relates that some others believe that the pronoun here refers to the change of the *qibla*, which means that the People of the Book knew that the change of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to the Ka'ba was the truth.⁶ Whether the pronoun in the above-mentioned verses refers to the Prophet's message or to the change of the *qibla* or to the

¹ It is beyond the scope of this study to gather all narratives regarding the Bible prophecies about the Prophet simply because they are too many.

² Q. 2:146.

³ Q. 6:20. See also Q. 2:89 and 5:83. When explaining verse 2:89, Ibn Taymyyia mentions many stories and incidents to show that one of the reasons which caused the Aws and the Khazraj to accept Islam easily was what they heard about the Prophet from the Jews in Madina. See Ibn Taymyyia, *al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, 3/283.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/169.

⁵ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2/158. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 5/163-164.

⁶ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 2/158. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 2/28-29.

Prophet himself, these verses remain as a reference to the knowledge of the advent of Muhammad and show that the People of the Book should have known (him or it) as well as they knew their own sons, as their teaching should have made them receptive of the new message of Muhammad.

The Qur'an confirms not only that the Prophet is mentioned in the Torah and the Injil but also his description as the unlettered prophet:

Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they find written with them in the Torah and the Injil.¹

The Qur'an also emphasises the mentioning of the Prophet in the Torah and the Injil:

Sufficient as a witness between me and you is Allah and those who have knowledge of the Book.²

Al-Qurtubī states that this verse considers the testimony of the learned scholars of the Children of Israel about the advent of the Prophet as evidence against the pagans.³ The Qur'an also refers to the same point that the learned people of the Children of Israel knew about the coming of the Prophet:

Is it not a sign to them that the learned scholars of the Children of Israel knew it?⁴

¹ Q. 7:157. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/84. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/233-235. Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 7/263.

² Q. 13:43. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 7/410.

³ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 9/285.

⁴ Q. 26:197. The pronoun 'It' in this verse refers to the Qur'an, as the context of the verse speaks of the Qur'an. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 9/476-477. Al-Qurtubī mentions that the pronoun here refers to the Prophet. See al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 13/126.

According to the Qur'an, Jesus himself announced good tidings of a messenger who would come after him bearing the name Ahmad:

And (remember) when Jesus, son of Mary, said: 'O Children of Israel, I am the messenger of Allah unto you, confirming the *Tawrah* which came before me, and giving glad tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.'¹

Al-Qurṭubī mentions that Ahmad is a name of the Prophet. The name Ahmad is derived from an adjective of preference which means the one who most praised Allah, and the name Muhammad is also comes from an adjective which means the most praised.² Al-Qurṭubī argues that the Prophet was first Ahmad, because of his praising Allah, and second, Muhammad, when his Lord and people praised him. Jesus mentions the Prophet by the first state which was Ahmad.³ Al-Bukhārī relates that the Prophet mentioned that he had five names: Muhammad, Ahmad, al-Māhī, al-Ḥāshir, and al-Āqib.⁴ Within the Qur'an it is not only Muhammad who is given more than one name: Jacob is called Israel;⁵ Jonah is given the name Dhū-al-Nūn;⁶ and Jesus is called al-Masīh, the Messiah.⁷

Ibn al-Qayyim cites the following reasons to support the view that the Prophet is foretold in the Torah and the Injīl:⁸

¹ Q. 61:6.

² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 18/75.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 18/75.

⁴ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4/482.

⁵ Q. 3:93. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/131.

⁶ Q. 21:87.

⁷ Q. 3:45.

⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā*, pp. 99-109. These reasons are only a summary of what Ibn al-Qayyim mentions in his Book.

- (i) There is evidence in the Qur'an that indicates that the Prophet is foretold in the Torah and the Injil.
- (ii) There was no reason for the Prophet to cite mention of his name in the Torah and the Injil as proof of his prophethood unless he was sure about his claim. The people at the time of the Prophet were aware of the statements of the Qur'an and the sayings of the Prophet. There is evidence that the Prophet mentioned these glad tidings to the non-believers, to the People of the Book and to the Muslims, and if this evidence was untrue then it would be a weapon at the hands of those who were eager to falsify the Prophet.
- (iii) Some converts among the Jews and Christians confessed that the People of the Book knew about the coming of a prophet. Within the Qur'an there are many verses which show that the doctors of the People of the Book witnessed the truth of Muhammad's prophethood.¹
- (iv) Even some of those who rejected the prophethood of Muhammad did not deny the coming of a prophet but argued that it was not Muhammad.
- (v) There is evidence that some Jews and Christians recognised the Prophet in their inner selves and told their close friends about him but declared hostility towards him regardless of this recognition.
- (vi) It is possible that Moses and Jesus spoke about the prophethood of Muhammad but this did not reach most of their people because not all the sayings of them are recorded in the scriptures.

¹ Ibn al-Qayyim refers to Q. 13:43, 28:52-54 and 46:10. See also Q. 26:197.

- (vii) It is possible that there are other copies of the scriptures which do mention the prophethood of the Prophet, but not the present scriptures.
- (viii) It is unreasonable that the scriptures did not mention the coming of the Prophet, meanwhile the Scriptures mention many news regarding things not as big and important as the coming of the Prophet.

The following verses of the Old and New Testament are among many verses considered by many Writers as references to the prophecies of the advent of the Prophet:¹

Deuteronomy 18, verse 18

I will raise up for them a prophet from among their brethren like unto you, and I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.²

The question arises here is, to whom does the prophecy in this verse refer? Muslim writers believe that the prophecy here refers to Muhammad since he was like the Prophet Moses: both Moses and Muhammad had a father and mother; both were born in the normal course; both married and begat children; both were prophets and statesmen and brought new laws for their people; both died natural deaths and lie buried in the earth. According to Muslim writers Muhammad was the descendant of Ishmael, the brother of Isaac, and therefore Muhammad, not Jesus, is from among the Ishmaelite, the brethren of the Israelites, otherwise, the word 'brethren' here is meaningless and the verse would

¹ See John 14:16, John 16:7, Acts 3:22, Deuteronomy 33:1-3, Genesis 16:8 and 16:7-12, Genesis 21:12-13, Genesis 17:15-20.

² Deuteronomy is accepted by both the Jews and the Christians.

need to be changed to be ‘from among the Children of Israel’ or ‘from among themselves’ instead of ‘from among their brethren’.¹ In order to dismiss this prophecy of Moses, Muir assumes that some perverted Jews adduced this prophecy of Moses in favour of the Arabian prophet.²

John, 14:25-26

All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Comforter (Paraclete) whom the father will send in my name will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

According to Muslim writers, Muhammad is the Paraclete (Counsellor or Comforter) of the fourth Gospel.³ Here one is confronted with the difficulty of translation from the language of Jesus and his disciples, the Aramaic language, into other language, such as Greek which was the language of the fourth Gospel. Therefore, one asks what word did Jesus use in his native tongue to express what the fourth Gospel has translated as ‘Paraclete’ which has been translated as ‘Comforter’ or ‘Protector’ or ‘Counsellor’ in the English versions of that Gospel?⁴

Deuteronomy, 33:1-2

The Lord came from Sinai and dawned over them from Se‘īr; he shone forth from Mount Pārān.

¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā*, pp. 110-112 and pp. 120-124. Macdonald discusses further this Biblical statement regarding the phrase ‘A prophet from among their brethren’ when refers to some comments of one of the theologian Muslims, al-Bīrūnī. See Macdonald, *Aspects of Islam*, pp. 234-237.

² Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 157-158.

³ Dawūd, *Muhammad in the Bible*, pp. 198-222. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā*, pp. 117-118. Ibn Ishāq mentions that the word Paraclete is the Greek word but the Syriac word is *munahhemana*. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 104.

⁴ John 14:26.

Muslim writers also believe that the Prophet is foretold in the controversial verse of Deuteronomy when it combines references to Moses, Jesus and Muhammad in one of its verses. It speaks of Allah's coming from Sinai, rising from Sa'ir and shining forth from Pārān.¹ Macdonald refers to al-Bīrūnī who comments on this verse saying that Allah does not come from one place to another. This coming according to al-Bīrūnī must mean that certain manifestations or messengers from Allah came from those three places.² According to Genesis, the wilderness of Pārān was also the place where Ishmael settled.³ Ibn al-Qayyim believes that this is similar to the first three Qur'anic verses of *Sūrat al-Tīn*, when it combines between the three prophets: Moses, Jesus and Muhammad, saying:

By the fig and the olive, by the Mount of Sinai, and by this City of Security.⁴

According to Ibn al-Qayyim, the fig and the olive in this verse are symbols for the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, which stands for Jesus, Mount Sinai is the mountain on which Allah spoke to Moses, which stands for Moses, and the sacred city of Makka stands for Muhammad.⁵ As stated in another verse, one of the signs of the Prophet coming from Pārān is that he will come with ten thousand saints.⁶ According to Muslim writers, this verse points to the number of those who will accompany the Prophet to Pārān in his victorious bloodless return to his birthplace, Makka.⁷

¹ Deuteronomy 33:1-2. See also al-Shahristanī, *al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, 2/15-16.

² Macdonald, *Aspects of Islam*, p. 235.

³ Genesis 21:21.

⁴ Q. 95:1-3.

⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hidāyat al-Ḥayārā*, p. 113. See also Macdonald, *Aspects of Islam*, pp. 235-136.

⁶ Deuteronomy 33:2.

⁷ Macdonald refers this discussion to al-Bīrūnī. See Macdonald, *Aspects of Islam*, p. 236.

Many Muslim and non-Muslim writers turn their attention to the meaning of many verses in the Old and the New Testament which have been taken by Muslim scholars as references to the Prophet.¹ As McAuliffe mentions, the Qur'anic promise in verse 61:6 of a messenger to follow Jesus whose name is Ahmad was tied to the several passages in the Gospel of John in which the coming of the Paraclete is foretold.² However, she thinks that there is confusion in the translation of the word Paraclete as to whether it is the Greek word *parakletos* (comforter or protector), or *periklutos* (illustrious) which is then equated with Ahmad (highly praised).³ Parrinder argues that the comforter was the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, which was to come to the disciples from the day of Pentecost onwards, bear witness to Christ, and lead into more truth. While Parrinder believes that this is the primary meaning of comforter, he allows that the Holy Spirit's coming down on latter messengers cannot be denied, since the idea of a succession of prophets is found both in the Bible and the Qur'an.⁴ Parrinder also believes that the word Paraclete is difficult to understand and therefore many versions transmit the word without translating it.⁵

¹ Macdonald, *Aspects of Islam*, pp. 234-237. See Andrae, *Muhammad: The Man and His Faith*, trans. Menzel, pp. 44-45. Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p.73.

² McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, note No. 10, p. 183.

³ McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, note No. 10 p. 183. McAuliffe points to three articles in which the argument regarding the word Paraclete took place: firstly, L. Bevan Jones, in an article entitled 'The Paraclete or Muhammad', *The Muslim World*, 10, (1920), pp. 112-125. Secondly, A. Guthrie and E. F. Bishop, in an article entitled 'The Paraclete, Almunhamanna and Ahmad', *The Muslim World*, 43, (1953), pp. 110-117. Thirdly, Watt summarized his view on this matter in an article entitled, 'The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible', *Transactions of The Glasgow University Oriental Society*, 16, (1955-1956), pp. 50-62. See McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, p. 183. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The life of Muhammad*, trans. Guillaume, p. 104. Cragg also discusses the term Paraclete asserting that this term does not mean a successor. See Cragg, *Jesus and the Muslims*, p. 264.

⁴ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, p. 100. See Acts 7:37.

⁵ Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, p. 98.

The interpretations of the above mentioned statements indicate that there is a possibility of finding references in the New and the Old Testament to the Prophet which put Muhammad alongside his two brothers, Moses and Jesus. The above mentioned discussion appeals to the scholars of both the Muslims and the People of the Book to study this essential matter further lest they falsify this great quantity of materials which are mentioned in both the scriptures and the Qur'an.

Chapter Four: The attitude of the People of the Book to the Muslims as depicted in the Qur'an

Most writers put their focus on the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book, but what about the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims? Is the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book a reflection of their attitude to the Muslims? Is the diversity in beliefs between the People of the Book and the Muslims preventing the Muslims from dealing peacefully with them? This chapter will attempt to answer these questions. It, therefore, highlights the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims as mentioned in the Qur'an and then the next chapter will explore the Qur'anic response to this attitude.

Within the Qur'an there are some verses which refer to the attitude of the People of the Book to the Muslims in both a moral and a physical way. According to Muslims, these verses remain as sound references which draw a picture of the approach of the People of the Book to the Muslims and unveil the reasons behind it. Muslim historians and analysts may differ on the reliability of some historical events and incidents which are mentioned in books of history concerning the nature of the approach of the People of the Book towards the Muslims, but they would not differ regarding the reliability of those mentioned in the Qur'an.

1. The Qur'an differentiates between the attitude of the Jews and that of the Christians towards the Muslims

The Qur'an distinguishes between the attitude of the Jews and that of the Christians towards the Muslims:

You will find the strongest among men in enmity to the believers to be the Jews and pagans, and you will find the nearest among them in love to the believers to be those who say: ‘We are Christians.’ That is because amongst them are priests and monks, and they are not arrogant. And when they listen to what has been sent down to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflowing with tears because of the truth they have recognized.¹ They say: ‘Our Lord, we believe, so write us down among those who witness.’ And (they also) say: ‘Why should we not believe in Allah and in that which has come to us of the truth? And we wish that our Lord will admit us along with the righteous people.’²

This passage categorizes the attitude of the three groups: the Jews, the Christians and the pagans. It puts the Jews alongside the pagans as the strongest in hostility to the Muslims, and even mentions the Jews first, while it considers the Christians as the nearest in love to the believers.

Al-Ṭabarī believes that the Qur’an considers the Christians as the nearest in love to the Muslims because they are humble enough to listen to the truth and are not arrogant.³ Ibn Kathīr mentions that the Qur’an places the level of hostility of the Jews towards the Muslims on an equal footing with that of the pagans.⁴ He believes that, unlike the Christians, the Jews rejected Islam out of obstinacy and denial of the truth.⁵ Al-Rāzī sees that the Jews were more hostile towards Muslims for they were

¹ “The truth” in this verse, according to Ibn Kathīr, is the knowledge of the coming of the Prophet and his message. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/81.

² Q. 5:82.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 5/6.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/81.

⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/81.

greedy, and those who are greedy for worldly things discard their religious duty in pursuit of worldly pleasures.¹ Riḍā in his attempt to explain why the Qur'an places the Jews along with the pagans in their hostility towards the Muslims, lists some characteristics which were shared by the Jews and the pagans, such as insolence, injustice, love of preeminence, racial solidarity and ethnic protectiveness, egoism, and weakness of sympathetic and compassionate feeling.² Riḍā states that the pagans were less culpable than the Jews, as well as being far more liberal in thinking and more independent than the Jews.³ Riḍā also remarks that even when the Jews sided with the Muslims it was solely for financial and strategic motives.⁴

Ṭanṭāwī mentions the following reasons to show why the Qur'an places the level of hostility of the Jews towards the Muslims as equal to that of the pagans:

- (i) The Jews began to feel that their glory and triumph in trade and politics would fade away following the unity of the Arabs, who had been divided before the arrival of Islam in Madina.
- (ii) The Jews saw that the Muslims had their own independent law and did not need to rely on the Jews in any matter.
- (iii) The Jews were greedier for life and wealth than the idolaters since they wanted to monopolize the markets trade in Madina, and, therefore when the Jews saw that the Muslims had begun to compete with them, they worried about their position and became hostile to the Muslims.

¹ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 12/66-67. McAuliffe, in her *Qur'anic Christians* cites several views of many commentators regarding the Qur'anic verse which differentiates between the attitude of the Jews and that of the Christians. See McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians*, pp. 204-239.

² Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 7/6.

³ Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 7/6.

⁴ Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 7/7.

- (iv) When the Jews saw that the Prophet had included them in his invitation although he was not one of the Children of Israel, they realized that their religious position in Madina had begun to fade away, especially after the Prophet became the religious leader of the state.
- (v) Under Islam, all people in Madina and from all races became equal except in piety, and this belief did not fit with the Jewish belief of the idea of 'The Chosen People of God.'¹

Regarding the Christians who are described in the previous verse as the nearest in love to the believers, there are several views. Some commentators associate these Christians with the Negus and his men.² Others associate these Christians with the Christian delegations that used to come to Madina from Ethiopia, Najrān and Syria.³ Yet others, such as Ridā, believe that the Christians who are described as the nearest to the believers are not only those of Ethiopia and Najrān, but also some Christian rulers who accepted Islam or showed respect towards it, such as Heraclius, the Byzantine ruler, and Muqawqis, the Coptic ruler of Egypt and others.⁴ Ridā, in order to justify this view, remarks that because the Christians were friendlier to the Muslims than the Jews, one finds that a large number of Christians embraced Islam whereas only a small number of Jews did so.⁵ Ibn al-Jawzī and some other commentators believe that those who are described as the nearest to the believers are only those Christians who believe and become Muslims.⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, after mentioning four views regarding those who say, 'We are Christians' in the

¹ Ṭantāwī, *Banū Israel*, 139-141.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 5/3.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 5/3. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/80. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/239-240.

⁴ Ridā, *al-Manār*, 7/9.

⁵ Ridā, *al-Manār*, 7/9.

⁶ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr*, 2/409.

previous verse, he prefers the view that those who say, ‘We are Christians’ are those whom Allah describes as Christians without specifying any group or mentioning any names.¹ Ibn Kathīr agrees with al-Ṭabarī when the latter includes more groups of Christians as the nearest to the Muslims regardless of whether they were from Ethiopia or elsewhere.² Ibn Kathīr believes that the Christians who follow Jesus are friendly to Muslims because there is kindness and sympathy in their hearts. He also believes that their priests and monks have soft hearts and sympathy, and are not arrogant.³ Ibn Kathīr argues that Christians are friendly to Muslims in the sense that this friendship is in their hearts since kindness and compassion are part of their Gospel.⁴ He refers to a verse in *Sūrat al-Ḥadīd* which says, ‘We put compassion and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him (Jesus).’⁵

2. The Qur’anic references to the attitude of the People of the Book towards Muslims

In this section we deal with some verses which highlight the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims as mentioned in the Qur’an and as interpreted by some of its commentators. These verses can be divided into two categories:

- (i) Verses which show the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims on the moral way.
- (ii) Verses that show the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims on the physical way.

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 5/5.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 5/5. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/80.

³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/80.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/81.

⁵ Q. 57:27. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/81. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 11/690.

a. The moral way

The following verses show how the People of the Book think of Muslims:

1. In the context of talking about the People of the Book, the Qur'an mentions that the hearts of some of the People of the Book are full of hatred and enmity towards the Muslims:

Hatred has already appeared from their mouths, but what their breasts conceal is far worse.¹

The Qur'an also says:

If some good befalls you, it grieves them, and if some misfortune overlooks you, they rejoice at it.²

Al-Ṭabarī, in his commentary on these verses, mentions that these verses are about the hypocrites as well as their friends among the Jews of Madina,³ while al-Qurtubī mentions that the majority of commentators believe that these verses refer to the Jews alone.⁴

2. Some of the People of the Book hold ill wishes towards the Muslims to the extent that if some good fortune were to befall them it would grieve them, but if some misfortune were to befall them they would rejoice at it:

Neither those who disbelieve among the People of the Book nor of the pagans like that there should be sent down unto you any good from your Lord.⁵

¹ Q. 3:118.

² Q. 3:120.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/410-412.

⁴ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/175 and 178.

⁵ Q. 2:105. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/520. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/129.

3. The Qur'an mentions that whatever the Prophet does to attain the satisfaction of the Jews and the Christians, they will not be satisfied till he becomes a Jew or a Christian:¹

Never will the Jews and the Christians be pleased with you until you follow their form of religion.²

This verse shows that the People of the Book wish that the Muslims will lose their right way; and they wish that they could turn the Muslims back and lead Muslims astray:

The Qur'an also says:

It is the wish of a section of the People of the Book to lead you astray, but they only lead themselves astray (not you), and they do not perceive.³

4. The Qur'an explains that the People of the Book hold a selfish envy towards the Muslims, especially when they see Islam flourishing and overwhelming their own religion:

Many of the People of the Book wish they could turn you back to infidelity after you have believed out of selfish envy, after the truth has become manifest unto them.⁴

5. The Qur'an mentions that the Jews and the Christians will not tolerate the Muslims and acknowledge Islam, and therefore the only way for the Muslims to satisfy them would be to follow their religion:

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/565.

² Q. 2:120.

³ Q. 3:69. See also Q. 2:109, 3:172 and 4:44.

⁴ Q. 2:109. Al-Ṭabarī relates that those who used to wish that the Muslims would turn back to infidelity after they have believed out of selfish envy were Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab and his brother Abū Yāsir. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/534. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/133.

Never will the Jews and the Christians be pleased with you unless you follow their religion.¹

Al-Ṭabarī relates on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās that the Muslims acknowledge the Scriptures of the People of the Book but the People of the Book deny the Qur’an.²

The Qur’an points to this:

You are the ones who love them but they love you not, and you believe in all the scriptures (while they deny your Book, the Qur’an).³

b. The physical way

There are many verses that show the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims on the physical way:

1. The Qur’an mentions that some of the People of the Book believe that there is no blame on them if they betray the Muslims:

Among the People of the Book are some who, if entrusted with a hoard of gold, will (readily) pay it back; and others who, if entrusted with a single silver coin, will not repay it unless you constantly stand over them demanding it. This is because they say: ‘There is no blame on us if we betray and take the property of the illiterates.’ But they tell a lie against Allah while they know it.⁴

Al-Ṭabarī mentions that this verse refers to the Jews and classifies them into honest ones and those who betray.⁵ However, the verse here does not talk only about the

¹ Q. 2:120.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 3/411. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/351.

³ Q. 3:119.

⁴ Q. 3:75.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 3/315.

matter of betrayal. It also rejects the claim that the Torah itself has ordered them to betray the illiterates, the *ummiyyūn*. Al-Qurṭubī relates that some Jews had taken a loan from some Arabs and, when these Arabs became Muslims and asked the Jews to pay them back, the Jews told them that, as the Torah has mentioned, there would be no blame on them if they did not pay back the Arabs, because the Arabs were polytheists and had another religion.¹

2. Some of the People of the Book, when the Muslims proclaimed the call to prayer, took it as mockery and sport, which shows that even the Islamic rituals had become a target for their attack against the Muslims. The Qur'an says:

O you who believe, take not as friends and protectors those who take your religion for a mockery whether among those who received the scriptures before you or among those who reject faith... When you proclaim your call to prayer, they take it (but) as mockery and sport.... Say: 'O People of the Book, do you disapprove of us for no other reason than that we believe in Allah and the revelation which has come to us and that which came before (us)?'²

3. The Qur'an mentions that some of the People of the Book used to obstruct those who became Muslims from Islam:

¹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/117. Al-Qurṭubī relates that some Muslims thought that it was their right to treat the People of the Book as they had treated them. Al-Qurṭubī relates that once a man told Ibn Abbās that he might intentionally steal some sheep and hens from the People of the Book. The man justified his action by saying that there would be no blame on him if he was to betray and take the property of the People of the Book. Ibn Abbās told the man that this claim was the same as the claim of the People of the Book when they said, 'There is no blame on us if we betray and take the property of the illiterates.' See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/117. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/316.

² Q. 5:57-58. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/629.

Say (Muhammad): ‘O People of the Book, why do you obstruct those who believe from the path of Allah, seeking to make it crooked?’¹

Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the People of the Book used to create trouble among the Muslims in order to divide them and turn them away.² They also used to conceal the news about the coming of the Prophet in their scriptures whenever somebody asked them about the prophethood of Muhammad.³ Some Jews worked against Islam and tried to hinder Muslims from Islam.⁴ In order to achieve this objective, the Jews asked their accomplices to join the Muslims and then to repudiate them. The Qur’an refers to this plan in the following verse:

And a section of the People of the Book says: ‘Believe in the morning in what is revealed to the believers, but reject it at the end of the day, that perchance they (the believers) may turn back.’⁵

Al-Ṭabarī in his commentary on this verse mentions two ways in which the Jews tried to spread doubt in the hearts of Muslims about Islam: firstly, to believe openly in the Prophet in the morning and then deny him in their hearts in the evening;⁶ and secondly, to pray with the Muslims in the morning and then not to do so in the evening.⁷ Ridā mentions that this Jewish plan was to convince those who had recently become Muslims that they (i.e. the Jews) were searching for the truth. They had no enmity against the Prophet, but when they accepted Islam and studied it, they found it to be a false religion, and they did not turn back until they had examined it

¹ Q. 3:99.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 3/371.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 3/372.

⁴ Q. 3:99. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 3/371.

⁵ Q. 3:72. See al-Nisābūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, p. 75. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 3/309-311. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 4/110-111.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 3/309.

⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 3/310.

closely.¹ One also concludes that this verse shows that the Jews considered their scriptures as a reference and judged the Qur'an according to them. Holt points to this when he speaks of differences between passages in the Qur'an and those of the ancient scriptures of the Jews which drove the Jews to criticise and endeavour to spread doubt in the mind of some people with regard to the Prophet's message.²

4. The Qur'an condemns the attitude of the Jews when they tell the unbelievers that their religion is better than Islam and therefore the unbelievers are better guided in the right way than the Muslims:

Have you not seen those who were given a portion of the Book?
They believe in sorcery and evil, and say to the unbelievers that
they are better guided in the right way than the believers.³

Al-Qurtūbī relates that this verse was revealed when Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf went to Makka with seventy Jewish riders to ally with the Quraysh against the Prophet. Abū Sufyān asked Ka'b, 'You were a man who could read the Book while we were illiterates and had no knowledge about the Book. Would you tell us who is better guided in the right way, us or the Prophet?' K'ab replied, 'You, by God, are better guided than the Prophet.'⁴ Al-Ṭabarī relates on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, 'Ikrima, al-Suddī and Mujāhid that this is about Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf.⁵ He also refers to some other authorities who mention that this verse speaks of a group of the Jews, such as Huyayy ibn Akhṭab, Sallām, al-Rabī' ibn abī al-Ḥuqayq and other such Jews.⁶ One

¹ Riḍā, *al-Manār*, 3/333.

² Holt, *The Cambridge History*, Vol. 1A, p. 44.

³ Q. 4:51.

⁴ Al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi'*, 5/239.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/136-137.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/138.

notes that commentators, such as al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr and al-Qurṭubī, when commenting on the previous verse, do not include the Christians in this affair.

5. The Qur'an mentions that a section of the People of the Book will not fail to do their utmost to harm the Muslims severely and spread corruption among them:

O you who believe, take not into your intimacy those outside your religion since they will not fail to do their best to corrupt you. They desire to harm you severely.¹

The Qur'an states that the People of the Book put on two faces to the outside world and therefore it is not easy for the Muslims to know the motives behind their attitude:

And when they meet you they say: 'We believe.' But when they are alone, they bite the tips of their fingers at you in rage.²

6. Some Jews used to twist their tongues and insult the Prophet. The Qur'an points to this:

Among those who are Jews, there are some who displace words from their right places and say: 'We hear and we disobey, and hear and let you hear nothing, and *rā'ina*,³ with a twist of their tongues and a slander to faith.'⁴

¹ Q. 3:118.

² Q. 3:119.

³ The word '*rā'ina*' in Arabic means: be careful, listen to us and we listen to you, whereas in Hebrew means an insult. See Muhammad Taqī-ud-Dīn al-Hilālī and Muhammad Muḥsin Khān, *Interpretation of the Meaning of the Noble Qur'an*, footnote 2, p. 150.

⁴ Q. 4:46. See also Q. 2:104. The word disapproved here is *rā'ina*, which as used by the Muslims meant: 'Please look at us or attend to us.' However, some Jews used it, with a little twist, to suggest some insulting meaning, ridiculed this word. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/121-123. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 5/232 and 2/56.

Similar to this twist of words is what some Jews used to do when they greeted the Prophet. They used to distort the word *al-salāmu* 'alayka, which means 'May peace be on you' into *al-sāmu* 'alayka, which means 'May death be upon you.'¹

On the whole, one observes that many Qur'anic verses show that not all the People of the Book were involved in activities against the Muslims. Sometimes the Qur'an points to a section of the People of the Book to mean some of the Jews and Christians.² At other times, the Qur'an points to the Jews only.³ In some other cases the Qur'an points to the majority among the People of the Book.⁴ Most of the Qur'anic commentators, when they explain the verses which talk about the People of the Book, mention that these verses refer to the Jews in particular.

The previous references to the attitude of the People of the Book also show the extent to which the People of the book hold enmity towards Muslims. How does the Qur'an respond to this attitude? This will be explained in the next chapter.

¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/409.

² Q. 2:105, 3:69, 3:72, and 3:75.

³ Q. 4:51 and 3:72.

⁴ Q. 2:109.

Chapter Five: The Qur'anic attitude towards dealings with the People of the Book

1. Introduction

Before proceeding in this chapter, we highlight the following three Qur'anic themes:

Zulm, aggression

The Qur'an mentions the word *zulm* and its derivatives two hundred and eighty-nine times.¹ This great number suggests that the Qur'an denounces aggression and aggressors and confirm the importance of this principle in the Qur'anic law, *sharī'a*.² Both the domestic and the foreign policy of the Islamic state should not be an aggressive policy. The Qur'an warns Muslims not to transgress the limits which have been ordained by Allah which includes the limits ordained in dealings between Muslims and non-Muslims.³ It confirms that Allah is just and does not deny anyone's right, even of the weight of an atom.⁴ This means that the worshippers of Allah should also be just and not be aggressive towards His dependants. The Qur'an warns its followers that aggression will result in destruction, as happened to many nations before them.⁵ It warns its followers not to remain silent when they see aggression, since Allah warns that He will destroy not only the aggressors but also those who accept them:

¹ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, pp. 551-557.

² Kamālī, "Siāsa Shar'iyya or the Policies of Islamic Government", *The American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1989, pp. 64-66. See also Raḥmān, *Muhammad: Blessing for Mankind*, pp. 105-107.

³ Q. 2:229, 4:14 and 65:1. See Kamālī, "Source, Nature and Objectives of Shari'a", *The Islamic Quarterly*, fourth quarter, 1989, p. 227. See also Raḥmān, *Muhammad: Blessing for Mankind*, p. 231.

⁴ Q. 4:40. See also Q. 3:117, 10:44, 11:101, 16:33, 16:118, 29:40 and 43:76.

⁵ Q. 2:59, 6:45, 7:165, 10:13, 11:67, 18:59 and 21:11.

And fear an affliction and trial which will not only affect those of you who do wrong.¹

The Qur'an warns that aggressors will never be successful.² It mentions that Allah does not like aggressors.³ It mentions that the curse of Allah is on the wrongdoers.⁴ The Qur'an refers to many types of aggression, such as wrong to one's self, wrong to others and inventing lies against Allah.⁵

'Adl, justice

The Qur'an mentions the word '*adl*' and its derivatives twenty-five times and mostly in connection with dealings and transactions.⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim emphasises the strong link between Islam and justice when mentions that any path which leads to justice and fairness is an integral part of the religion and never contrary to it.⁷ To illustrate this theme, we take *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* as an example to show how the Qur'an promotes justice in dealing with others regardless of their attitude and beliefs.⁸ Within *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, there are many verses which mention both the attitude of the People of the Book to the Muslims and the attitude of the Qur'an towards their beliefs. Before mentioning the beliefs of the People of the Book and their attitude towards the Muslims, this *sūra* twice directs the attention of the Muslims towards just dealings with others:⁹

¹ Q. 8:25. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/217. See also al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 7/343-344.

² Q. 6:135, 12:23 and 28:37.

³ Q. 3:57, 3:140 and 42:40.

⁴ Q. 11:18.

⁵ See the examples of these three types of aggression in the Q. 2:231, 2:279 and 6:21 respectively.

⁶ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, pp. 569-570.

⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Turuq al-Hukmiyya fī al-Siāsa al-Shar'iyya*, p. 16.

⁸ Raḥmān, *Muhammad: Blessing for Mankind*, pp. 105-106.

⁹ Q. 5:2 and 5:8.

1. Muslims should abide by the limits which are ordained by Allah and, therefore, they should be just even when dealing with the pagan Arabs. Verse 2 of the *sūra* reads:

And let not the hatred of some people in (once) shutting you out of the Sacred Mosque lead you to transgression.¹

This verse points to the event which happened in the sixth year of the emigration when the pagan Arabs prevented the Muslims from access to the Sacred Mosque in Makka. When the Muslims were re-established in Makka, some of them wanted to retaliate and exclude the pagans, who continued to perform their pilgrimage at that time, or in some way interfere with them during the pilgrimage. This is condemned.²

2. The *sūra* emphasises justice when dealing with all people, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, friends or enemies, which also includes the Jews and the Christians:³

O you who believe, stand firmly for Allah as witnesses to fair dealing and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice.⁴

According to the above-mentioned verses, Muslims must not retaliate or return evil for evil. Muslims may fight and put down evil when required but never in a spirit of malice or hatred, but rather in a spirit of justice and righteousness.⁵ The *sūra* also mentions the beliefs of the People of the Book and their attitude to the Muslims, and

¹ Q. 5:2.

² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/44-45. See also Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, commentary No. 690, p. 244. Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the rule which is mentioned by this verse is not abrogated. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/405.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/482.

⁴ Q. 5:8.

⁵ Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, commentary No. 690, p. 244, and commentary No. 707, p. 248.

introduces some rules which facilitate good relations with them by allowing Muslims to marry Christian and Jewish women and eat their slaughtered animals.¹

Jizya²

When studying the Qur'anic verses which deal with the People of the Book, one may conclude that there is a contradiction between the invitation to fight against the People of the Book until they pay the *jizya*, and the conclusion that the Qur'an opens the door for just dealings and a good relationship with them. This picture of contradiction would be strengthened when studying the views of some writers, such as Bat Ye'or and Lewis, who talk about institution of *dhimma* and *jizya*. These writers attempt to draw a picture that shows the humiliation of paying the *jizya*. This picture has probably been taken from various individual practices throughout periods. These writers assert that *jizya* was to be paid by the *dhimmī* at a humiliating public ceremony in which the *dhimmī* was struck either on the head or on the nape of the neck.³ The receipt for the *jizya*, according to these writers, was to seal the *dhimmī* on the wrist or on the chest which enabled him to move from place to place, and if the *dhimmī* was travelling without this receipt, he could be put in jail.⁴ These writers collected various stories regarding the *jizya* which most Muslim commentators and writers have rejected.⁵ However, al-Qaradāwī, for example, gives the word *dhimma* three meanings: pledge, *al-'ahd*, guarantee, *al-Damān* and safety, *al-Amān*.⁶ These literal meanings of the word indicate the rights of the *dhimmī* in Muslim society. The

¹ Q. 5:5.

² *Jizya* is a head tax imposed by the Qur'an on the People of the Book living under the protection of an Islamic state.

³ Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi*, p. 53. See also Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, p. 14.

⁴ Bat Ye'or, *The Dhimmi*, p. 53. See also Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, p. 14.

⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/120. See also Abū 'Ubayd, *al-Amwāl*, p. 53ff. Abū Yūsuf, *al-Kharāj*, p. 123. Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 8/106.

⁶ Al-Qaradāwī, *Ḡayr al-Muslimin fī Mujtama' al-Islam*, p. 7.

pledge of guarantee and security given to the *dhimmi* is like the political nationality given in the modern times on the basis of which people acquire all their rights as the nationals of a certain country and become liable to responsibilities. Abū Zahra also mentions that *dhimmi*s enjoy complete religious, administrative and political freedom. These rights are guaranteed to them in return for their loyalty and the payment of a reasonable tax called *jizya* which is utilized in the defence and administration of the state.¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, when commenting on verse 9:29 which refers to *jizya*, rejects the notion that the word *sāghirūn* is to be interpreted as humiliation.² He states that the right interpretation for the word *sāghirūn* is that the People of the Book should abide by Islamic law and pay the *jizya*.³ Abū ‘Ubayd mentions eleven *hadīths* to show that the payers of the *jizya* should be treated gently and leniently while they pay it.⁴ Abū ‘Ubayd relates that once Hishām ibn Hakim ibn Hizām passed by some Christians who were punished while paying the *jizya* in Palestine; seeing this Hishām reminded them that he had heard the Prophet saying, ‘Allah will punish in the Hereafter those who punish people in this world.’⁵ Abū ‘Ubayd relates that during the time of ‘Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, some Muslim collectors of the *jizya* collected a large amount of money. Seeing this, ‘Umar thought that the collectors might have taken from the People of the Book more than they were supposed to pay which led ‘Umar to inspect the collectors of the *jizya* to see whether they had taken too much. The collectors replied that they had not taken a penny by force. ‘Umar asked, ‘And also without using lashes? They replied, ‘Yes, without

¹ Abū Zahra, *al-Jarīma wa al-‘Uqūba fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, p. 189.

² Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/120.

³ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/120-121.

⁴ Abū ‘Ubayd, *al-Amwāl*, pp. 53ff. See also Abū Yūsuf, *al-Kharāj*, p. 123. See also Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/137-146.

⁵ Abū ‘Ubayd, *al-Amwāl*, p. 52. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/137.

using any lashes.’ Hearing the reply, ‘Umar said: ‘Praise be to Allah that this has not happened during my reign.’¹ Abū Dāwūd also relates that the Prophet said:

If anyone oppresses a person who has entered into a covenant (which includes the *dhimmī*), or degrades him, or overtasks him, or takes anything from him without his satisfaction, I will be his opponent on the Day of Judgement.²

Al-Māwardī and other Muslim writers mention that those who pay the *jizya* are only those males above puberty who can afford it.³ *Dhimmi*s must not be burdened with oppressive *jizya* which subject them to poverty and degradation.⁴ This *jizya* also guarantees the *dhimmī* many fundamental rights. Firstly, it gives them protection from all external threats; and, secondly, it gives them protection from all internal tyranny and persecution. These types of protection are the same as in the case of Muslims.⁵ It is the duty of the Muslim ruler to look after the interest of all citizens, and using all his force to secure these rights of protections. The famous Mālikite scholar, al-Qarāfī quotes the statement of Ibn Hazm, from his book *Marātib al-Ijmā‘*:

¹ Abū ‘Ubayd, *al-Amwāl*, p. 53. See also Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ahkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/139. Some writers, such as Bat Ye’or and Lewis dismiss these stories and many others regarding the gentleness of taking the *jizya* from the People of *dhimma*. To see more stories regarding the way in which Muslims treated the *dhimmi* see Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ahkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/137-145. Abū ‘Ubayd, *al-Amwāl*, pp. 53ff. However, one finds great contradiction between these stories mentioned by Abū ‘Ubayd and Ibn al-Qayyim, and those are mentioned by Bat Ya’or who mentions that even the dead people sometimes were constrained to pay the *jizya*. See Bat Ya’or, *the Dhimmi*, note No. 4, p. 74.

² Abū Dāwūd, al-Sunan, *ḥadīth* No.3052, See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 8/106.

³ Al-Māwardī, *al-Ahkām al-Sultāniyya*, trans. Yate, p. 209. See also Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ahkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/149-156. Bat Ya’or, however, exaggerates when talking about the *jizya* to the extent that she mentions that even the dead sometimes were constrained to pay the *jizya*. See Bat Ya’or, *The Dhimmi*, note No. 4, p. 74.

⁴ Tāj, *al-Siāsa al-Shar‘iyya wa al-Fiqh al-Islami*, pp. 40-41.

⁵ Verse 103 of *Sūrat al Tawba* mentions that the Prophet should collect the alms giving, *Zakāt*, from the Muslims, and this *Zakāt* paid by the Muslims considers as a contribution towards the public treasury. Thus, the *jizya* perhaps also considers as an obligation on *dhimmi*s towards the public treasury.

If enemies at war come to our country aiming to attack a *dhimmī*, it is essential for us that we come out to fight them with all our might and weapons since he is under the protection of Allah and His Messenger. If we do anything less than this, it means we have failed in our agreement of protection.¹

This statement assures the *dhimmī* external protection. And, as we mentioned above, it is the duty of Muslims to restrain their hands and tongues from hurting a *dhimmī* or wronging him. According to the teaching of the Qur'an, Allah does not like wrongdoers.² Therefore, the Prophet warned Muslims against treating *dhimmīs* badly, saying:

If anyone persecutes a *dhimmī*, or asks him to do work beyond his capacity, or takes something from him without his permission, I shall be a complainant against him on the Day of Judgement.³

Ibn 'Ābidīn concludes that because Muslims are given the responsibility of protecting the blood and property of non-Muslims, and because the persecution of the weak at the hands of the strong is considered one of the greatest crimes, the persecution of non-Muslims in an Islamic state is considered greater than the persecution of Muslims by non-Muslims.⁴ Therefore, one finds that the Prophet warned Muslims against any high handedness towards non-Muslim citizens saying:

¹ Raḥmān, *Sharī'a: the Islamic Law*, p. 429.

² Q. 3:57, 3:140 and 42:40.

³ See some other *hadīths* in Raḥmān, *Sharī'a: the Islamic Law*, p. 430. See also Atabānī, "Islamic Sharī'a and the Status of Non-Muslims", *Religion Law and Society: A Christian-Muslim Discussion*, ed. T. Mitri, (1995), pp. 65-67.

⁴ Regarding the reference to Ibn Ḥazm's statement, see Raḥmān, *Sharī'a: the Islamic Law*, p. 430.

Whoever hurts a *dhimmi*, hurts me; and whoever hurts me, hurts Allah.¹

However, as we have mentioned, some writers describe the *jizya* as an oppressive tax and deny many stories and *ḥadīths* regarding the way in which the Muslims used to take the *jizya* from the People of the Book.² It is worth mentioning that some *dhimmi*s during some periods of history may have been treated badly, but we cannot judge the history of a nation by the faults and conduct of individuals while many verses and *ḥadīths* insist on Muslims to refrain from aggression. It may be that when weakness overtook some Muslim governors, they forgot the injunctions of Allah and became ignorant of the Islamic faith.

From the aforementioned *ḥadīths*, one concludes that any type of atrocity that might be committed in the name of religion is unacceptable, and Islam rejects any type of discrimination against any citizen who lives in an Islamic state even if it is given a religious colouring.

2. The Qur’anic response to the attitude of the People of the Book

The following nine verses emphasize some of the major Qur’anic foundation in dealing with the People of the Book:

a. Verse 4:86

When you are greeted with a greeting, greet in return with what is better than it, or return it equally. Allah takes a careful account of all things.

¹ Raḥmān, *Sharī’a: the Islamic Law*, p. 430.

² Bat Ye’or, *The Dhimmi*, pp. 53-54.

This verse shows the way of communication in which the Muslims should deal with one another, or with others, including the People of the Book. Greeting includes all types of courtesy and etiquette when dealing with others.¹ Within the *ḥadīths* one finds that the Prophet gives great attention to all types of amiable treatment and courteousness, such as greeting, visiting, consolation, exchanging gifts, and congratulation.² Muslims are required to present Islam to others and meet them and keep good contact with them whether they are Muslims or non-Muslims. The Qur'an urges its followers to present Islam to all people which means that among the Muslims there is no room for isolation. None expects that when Muslims deal with others, they stop being courteous. Al-Ṭabarī mentions two views regarding the return of greeting in the previous verse. The first view is that this verse concerns Muslims only.³ The second view is that if the one who greets a Muslim is a Muslim, the greeting in return should be better than it or at least equal to it, and if a non-Muslim greets a Muslim, then the greeting in return should be only equal to it.⁴ Another view regarding the return of a greeting is that when a non-Muslim greets a Muslim, the latter should reply *wa 'alaykum* only, due to the Prophet's teaching.⁵ However, the Prophet's teaching regarding this reply should be understood as a rule which applied to certain Jews in Madina who used to abuse the greeting and used it as a word to mean 'May death be on you' instead of 'Peace be on you'.⁶ Therefore, Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that if a *dhimmī* salutes a Muslim and clearly says, 'Peace be on

¹ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 5/284.

² For the acceptance of presents from non-Muslims, see al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtasar Saḥīh al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1168, p. 547.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/191.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/191-192.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/191. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/472.

⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ahkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/409.

you' the Muslim should return the greeting saying, 'Peace be on you.'¹ Ibn 'Abbās mentions that when any of the creation of Allah greets you, you should return his greeting, even if he is a Zoroastrian.² Al-Qurṭubī relates on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, al-Sha'bī and Qatāda that the verse in question treats the Muslims and the People of the Book equally because the Qur'an generalises the rule of greeting others and does not specify the Muslims only.³

But, does Islam allow a Muslim to greet a non-Muslim? Al-Qurṭubī argues that it is permissible to salute non-Muslims by saying, 'Peace be on you.' When Ibn 'Uyayna was asked, 'Is it permissible to salute a non-Muslim by saying, 'Peace be on you?' He replied, 'Yes.'⁴ Ibn 'Uyayna supports his view by linking together three verses, namely, Q. 60:4, 60:8 and 19:47. Ibn 'Uyayna mentions that verse 60:4 considers Abraham as an excellent example for the Muslims; verse 60:8 states that Allah does not forbid Muslims to deal justly and kindly with those who do not fight them; and verse 19:47 mentions that Abraham greeted his father while his father was not a believer, saying, 'Peace be on you.'⁵ There are two sound *ḥadīths* concerning a Muslim being the first to greet a non-Muslim with the greeting 'Peace be on you.' The first *ḥadīth*, which is narrated by Abū Hurayra, says, 'Do not be the first when greeting the Jews and the Christians.'⁶ The second *ḥadīth* is narrated by Usāma ibn Zayd who relates that once the Prophet passed by a gathering of people which included Muslims and non-Muslims and he saluted them, saying, 'Peace be on you.'⁷ Al-Qurṭubī believes that there is no contradiction between these two *ḥadīths* since

¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/425.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/191.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 5/290.

⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 11/103.

⁵ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 11/103.

⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/472.

⁷ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 11/104.

the second one is general and the first one is specific.¹ Al-Qurṭubī refers to many Muslim scholars and commentators, such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥasan al-Basrī, al-Awzā‘ī, Abū Usāma, al-Nakha‘ī and Ibn Mas‘ūd who all agree with the permissibility of saluting non-Muslims with the greeting ‘Peace be on you.’² Sābiq supports the view that a Muslim can start and salute a non-Muslim with the greeting ‘Peace be on you,’ by a *ḥadīth* which says, ‘Allah made the salutation as a greeting for our nation, and made it as protection for the *dhimmis*.’³ If, during war, a non-Muslim fighter greets the Muslims saying, ‘Peace be on you’, the Muslims should grant him protection.⁴

Muslims may also exchange visits with the People of the Book. When Ahmad ibn Hanbal was asked about visiting relatives and neighbours during their illnesses if they were Christians, he replied, ‘Yes.’⁵ Many *ḥadīths* also show that the Prophet used to visit Jews and Christians.⁶ Once a Jewish boy fell ill, and the Prophet visited him and sat by his head.⁷ Some People of the Book were also neighbours of the Prophet. He treated them kindly and exchanged gifts with them.⁸

b. Verse 5:5

The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. And (lawful for you in marriage) are chaste women from among the believers, and chaste women from among those who were given the Scripture before you.

¹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 11/104.

² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 11/104.

³ Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna*, 3/6.

⁴ Q. 4:94. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 5/321. See also Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna*, 3/6.

⁵ Al-Khallāl, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Milal*, p. 598.

⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/427.

⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/428.

⁸ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1169, p. 548.

Muslims agree that ‘food’ here means the slaughtered eatable animals of the People of the Book.¹ As al-Ṭabarī mentions, the ‘People of the Book’ in this verse includes the Jews and the Christians, regardless of whether they are the Children of Israel, such as the Christians of the Banū Taghlib who were originally pagan Arabs before they became Christians.²

Islam differentiates between the position of the People of the Book and other non-Muslims and makes their food lawful for the Muslims in order to bring them closer to the Muslims. The Qur’an strengthens the link between the Muslims and the People of the Book by allowing Muslims to visit them and eat their food, which is the custom of close friends. The difference of creed should not stand in the way of doing a good turn and good treatment of blood relations and entertaining each other should be encouraged.

Not only is the food of the People of the Book lawful, but also marrying their womenfolk is lawful. Some Companions, such as ‘Uthmān, Ṭalḥa and Hudhayfa, married Jewish and Christian women.³ By this Islam allows the relationship to grow closer by permitting inter-marriage, the strongest social bond, between Muslims and the People of the Book. Ibn al-Qayyim refers to Ibn Ḥanbal who even allows Muslims to permit their Christian wives to put a cross in their homes.⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that Muslims should permit their wives from among the People of the Book to practice their rites of worship, such as fasting, praying and facing the east, and not to break the Sabbath and not to eat what the law

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 4/442-443. See also Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 1/502.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 4/442.

³ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 2/795. See also al-Khallāl, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Milal*, p. 448.

⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 2/822.

of Torah and Injil prohibits.¹ Muslims should not prevent their Jewish or Christian wives from worshipping in synagogues and churches.² However, it is recommended for a Muslim to introduce Islam to his wife, but he should argue with her in the best way and not to compel her to become a Muslim.³

c. Verse 4:58

Allah commands that you should render back trusts to those to whom they are due, and that when you judge between people, you judge with justice.⁴

According to this verse, all people, regardless of their race, colour, or social status are equal in the sight of Allah, and the only distinction which Allah recognises is the distinction in piety and goodness.⁵ This means that all people are equal in the sight of the law and the law holds sway over and is superior to them all. Muslims believe that Allah creates all people, and all of them belong to the human race and share equally in the common parentage of Adam and Eve. No one brings anything with him when he is born, and when he dies he takes back nothing of his worldly belongings with him, and Allah judges every person according to his own deeds. The verse in question orders Muslims to judge between people justly, which means that it does not allow oppression because of race, colour, or religion since the verse uses the word ‘*al-nās*’, ‘people’ which includes everybody, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Al-Qurtubī mentions that rendering trusts to those to whom they are due and judging justly between people is a must on Muslims, whether those people are Muslims or

¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 2/822-823.

² Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna*, 3/14.

³ Q. 29:46 and 2:256.

⁴ See Q. 4:135, 7:29, 16:90 and 57:25.

⁵ Q. 49:13.

non-Muslims.¹ Al-Māwardī mentions that one of the duties of a Muslim ruler is to execute legal judgements between two contestants and bring to an end any dispute between two litigants so that equity prevails, the tyrant does not transgress, and the weak are not oppressed.² So, to judge justly between all citizens of an Islamic state is a Qur'anic duty and a devotional act:

We have sent our Messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance that mankind may stand forth in justice, and We brought forth iron wherein is mighty power as well as many benefits for mankind.³

This verse mentions three elements as gifts from Allah to mankind:

- (i) The Book.
- (ii) The Balance.
- (iii) Iron.

The Book commands good and justice and forbids evil and aggression; Balance pledges that justice gives to every citizen his due; and iron points to the power of the law which maintains sanctions for aggressors.

There is evidence that the Prophet accepted the oath of a Jew against a Muslim in a case which was brought to him. The Qur'an points to this incident saying:

As for those who sell the faith they owe to Allah and their oaths for a small price, they shall have no portion in the hereafter...⁴

¹ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 5/246 and 248. See also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/458.

² Al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-Sultāniyya*, trans. Yate, p. 28.

³ Q. 57:25.

⁴ Q. 3:77.

Regarding this verse al-Bukhārī relates that al-Ash‘ath ibn Qays said that once there was a dispute between him and a Jew when the Jew denied his land. When al-Ash‘ath reported this dispute to the Prophet, the Prophet asked him to produce evidence. Because al-Ash‘ath had no evidence, the Prophet asked the Jew to swear an oath. Al-Ash‘ath, when heard this said that the Jew would swear an oath and as a result would take the land. Then Allah revealed the above-mentioned verse to threaten those who might swear a false oath. This incident indicates that the Prophet accepted the oath from the Jew, for al-Ash‘ath had no evidence that he could produce.¹ Therefore, none can accept what some writers suggest to the effect that the oath of a *dhimmī* was unacceptable in an Islamic court and his Muslim opponent could not easily be condemned.² Justice, according to the Qur’an, must be done equally to every human even if it is to be done against one’s self.³

d. Verse 22:40

For had it not been that Allah checks one set of people by means of another, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques wherein the name of Allah is mentioned much would surely have been pulled down.⁴

This verse suggests that the places of worship of the People of the Book are to be respected and that their defence and support are as important as that of mosques. Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that this verse shows that if people do not fight to protect one

¹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 4/118.

² Bat Ye’or, *The Dhimmī*, p. 56.

³ See Q. 4:135.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the places of worship which are mentioned in this verse are: the monasteries of monks, the churches of Christians, the synagogues of Jews and the mosques of Muslims. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 9/166. See also Q. 2:251.

another from evil, then many places of worship will be demolished.¹ Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that Allah protects the places and rights of worship of the People of the Book which are mentioned in the previous verse although He does not accept them.² Ibn al-Qayyim adds that although Allah does not like these places of worship, except mosques, He likes to grant them protection and not allow them to be pulled down.³ Al-Ṭabarī extends this defence to include defence against every evil and mentions that without this defence many people would be wronged.⁴ The Prophet, even though he conquered Khaybar by force, left its synagogues and did not demolish them.⁵ The Companions also did not demolish synagogues or churches when they conquered them.⁶ What supports this view is that there were many synagogues and churches which remained as they were for long periods of time. When ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz came to power he wrote to his governors and ordered them not to pull down any churches or synagogues.⁷ Concerning the lands which were surrendered to Muslims peacefully, it is even clearer amongst Muslim scholars that the Jews and the Christians can keep their places of worship as well as build more churches and synagogues if necessary. Abū Dāwūd relates that the Prophet made a truce with the Christian of Najrān and did not impose any condition on them as to whether they could build new churches or not.⁸ Ibn al-Qayyim believes that it is up to the Muslim ruler to decide what is necessary or best for both the Muslims and the People of the Book.⁹

¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 3/1169.

² Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 3/1169.

³ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 3/1160-1170.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 9/163.

⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 3/1199.

⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 3/1199-1200.

⁷ Abū ‘Ubayd, *al-Amwāl*, p. 262.

⁸ Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, No. 3041.

⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 3/1199-1200.

e. Verse 60:8

Allah forbids you not with regard to those who do not fight you because of your faith nor drive you out of your homes from dealing kindly and justly with them (*an tabarrūhum wa tuqsitū ilayhim*), for Allah loves those who are just.

This verse leaves no room for the belief that the relationship with non-Muslims is based on a definite ideology that Islam will annihilate the non-Islamic elements within its fold. Al-Ṭabarī mentions that this verse guarantees both *birr* and *qist* to all people regardless of their faith, as long as they do not fight the Muslims or drive them out of their homes.¹

The word *tabarrūhum* in the previous verse means to deal with somebody in a kind way. Ibn Manzūr refers to al-Fazārī as saying that the word '*birr*' means courteousness.² He also refers to Ibn al-A'rābī who mentions that the word '*birr*' refers to every type of good deed. He also mentions that this word means hospitability and kindness.³ The Qur'an uses this expression, *birr*, to explain the highest degree of honour and gentleness in relations between a person and his parents.⁴

The word *tuqsitū ilayhim* in the previous verse does not refer to justice only, because justice is a duty on Muslims and should be offered to Muslims and non-Muslims alike whether they are friends or enemies, and during both peace and war. *Qist* according to al-Qurtubī means to offer non-Muslims a portion of sustenance by

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 12/63.

² Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 4/54.

³ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 4/54.

⁴ Q. 19:14, and 19:32.

way of friendship or gifts.¹ Ibn Manẓūr also gives several meanings to the word *qist*. One of them is that the word *qist* means the portion of sustenance which is the share of every creature.²

One observes that the previous verse belongs to *Sūrat al-Mumtaḥana* which begins with a verse that prohibits Muslims from taking non-Muslims as protectors, *awliyā'*.³ Because Muslims might think that this prohibition includes kind dealings and fair relationship with non-Muslims, this latter verse mentions that Allah loves those who are just, and He allows Muslims to deal kindly with non-Muslims unless they are fighting against the Muslims or drive them out of their homes. However, Donner finds that the verses of the Qur'an which order Muslims not to take the non-believers as protectors, *awliyā'*, emphasise the separation of the Muslims from others, and lead them to sever relations with others.⁴ It seems that Donner and other writers misinterpret verses which order Muslims not to take the non-believers as *awliyā'*. Ibn Manẓūr relates that Ibn al-Sikkīt and Ibn Barrī both mention that the word *muwālāh* means *nusra*, or support. Sayyid Sābiq explains that the meaning of *muwālāh* is taking non-Muslims as protectors and allies against Muslims and being satisfied with their beliefs. He mentions that on the other hand, the Qur'an invites Muslims to make good friendships and deal gently with non-Muslims, and to exchange benefits and cooperate with them for the welfare of both sides.⁵ Sābiq mentions that this is the normal relationship with non-Muslims unless they show hostility to the Muslims and stand against them.⁶

¹ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 18/54.

² Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, 7/377.

³ See Q. 60:1.

⁴ Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 57.

⁵ Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna*, 3/13.

⁶ Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna*, 3/15.

Many commentators mention that, according to most Muslim scholars, this previous verse has not been abrogated and they support their views by mentioning several incidents, one of which states that once Aṣmā', Abū Bakr's daughter, asked the Prophet if she should keep up good relations with her mother although she was a polytheist, and the Prophet permitted her to deal and communicate kindly with her mother. And this was after the truce of Hudaibiya.¹

f. Verse 29:46

And do not argue with the People of the Book unless it be in (a way) that is better, except for those from among them who inflict wrong.

Al-Ṭabarī mentions that there is no evidence to believe that this verse is abrogated.² This verse shows the way in which Muslims should argue with the People of the Book unless they inflict injury and deliberately try to wrong the Muslims. This verse shows that the Qur'an protects their rights to express their views and allows them to hold debates with Muslims. This debate should be in ways that are best and most gracious, with limits of dignity, serenity and respect. The Qur'an does not permit Muslims to behave rudely with their adversaries, or to revile the idolaters on the ground of their false creed:

Do not insult those whom they worship besides Allah, lest they insult Allah wrongfully without knowledge.³

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 12/63. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 18/54. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 4/315.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 10/150.

³ Q. 6:108.

g. Verse 17:70

We have honoured the sons of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with good things and preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preferment.

Although the Qur'an distinguishes between those who believe and those who disbelieve, it grants protection to every human, protection to his soul, property, wealth, dignity, freedom of worship and belief. It is a right for the hungry to be fed, for the sick to be cured, and the frightened to be protected and secured. Within the Qur'an, one finds that Islam prevents Muslims from waging a war for causes of mischief on earth, or to fight with a spirit of malice or hatred.¹ The Qur'an mentions that all men have been born from a single pair, Adam and Eve.² After that and from this origin people became divided into tribes, countries and classes.³ However, within the human family, those who hold the same faith will naturally feel the greatest nearness and affinity towards each other. But at the same time all human beings are brothers in humanity, and, therefore, the same obligation of kindness and fairness is due to them all. The Qur'an brings all people together on a purely human basis and at the same time guarantees them freedom to adopt the religion of their choice, under its own care and protection. Muslims base a friendly relationship with others on their attitude towards the existence of Islam, not on religion. Therefore, one expects that Muslims should sympathise with their brothers in humanity and extend a helping hand to them when calamities befall, regardless of their faith. The Prophet sent compassion money to the pagans of Makka during a spell of drought, a gesture

¹ Q. 28:83, 7:56 and 5:2.

² Q. 4:1.

³ Q. 49:13.

that looks similar to the humanitarian relief efforts of today.¹ In *Sūrat al-Tawba*, one also finds that Muslims should grant asylum to those seeking it even if they are idolaters.²

h. Verse 4:36

Worship Allah and join none with Him and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor and needy, neighbours who are near of kin, neighbours who are strangers, companions by your side, wayfarers and those whom your right hands possess. Verily, Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful.

This verse shows that the essence of the religion of Islam is to worship Allah alone and behave well to one's fellow-creatures. Scholars point out that this verse includes Muslims and non-Muslims.³ Al-Qurṭubī mentions that all scholars agree that this verse is not abrogated.⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that there is a duty on Muslims towards all types of people who are mentioned in this verse including non-Muslims.⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that it is a must to support relatives financially when they are in need regardless of their religion, which includes the People of the Book.⁶

i. Verse 2:190

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, and do not transgress limits, for Allah loves not transgressors.

¹ Atabanī, "Islamic Sharī'a and the Status of Non-Muslims", *Religion Law and Society: A Christian-Muslim Discussion*, edited by T. Mitri, (1995), p. 64.

² Q. 9:6.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/82.

⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 5/171.

⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 2/793. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 5/176-177.

⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Aḥkām Ahl al-Dhimma*, 2/791-793.

Some Muslim commentators believe that this verse has been abrogated by verse 9:5 which orders Muslims to fight all the polytheists, and by verse 9:29 which orders Muslims to fight the People of the Book until they pay the *jizya*.¹ However, many commentators are of the opinion that this verse is not abrogated.² Al-Qurtubī, on the authority of Ibn Abbās, Ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and Mujāhid, relates that this previous verse is not abrogated. Al-Qurtubī refers to al-Nahḥās who says that this view of Ibn Abbās is the more acceptable according to both the *hadīth* and analogy.³

Within the Qur’an there are some unconditional verses which command the Muslims to fight against disbelievers, such as, ‘O Prophet, fight the disbelievers and hypocrites and be stern against them.’⁴ This verse shows that there is no condition attached to fighting against disbelievers, and, therefore, it means that Islam fully instructs the Muslims to fight against them and the Muslims must never be in a state of peace with them. However, there are many other conditional verses which show that there are conditions attached to fighting, such as in the verse of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, ‘And fight in the path of God with those who are fighting with you and do not transgress, God loves not those who transgress.’⁵ In the light of these two types of verses, i.e. conditional and unconditional verses, one finds that when there is an instruction that in one place is unconditional but in another place has a condition attached, then, the unconditional must be interpreted as the conditional. However, some Muslim scholars have brought up the matter of abrogation in order to solve the problem of conditional and unconditional verses. They agree that many verses of the Qur’an set conditions for fighting against the non-Muslims, but they say that other

¹ Q. 9:29. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 2/195-196.

² See, for example, al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 2/196. See also al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 2/345.

³ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’*, 2/345. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 2/196.

⁴ Q. 9:73.

⁵ Q. 2:190.

verses have been revealed that abrogate all those instructions and conditions. As example, they think that the first two verses of *Sūrat al-Tawba* has abrogated all the instructions about fighting that were previously revealed, since this *sūra* was revealed in the ninth year of the *Hijra* which appointed a fix period for the disbelievers to stay in Makka after which they had to leave and the Muslims were to besiege them in their hiding places and kill them. However, when we consider all the verses of *Sūrat al-Tawba* collectively, we see that they tell us to fight the polytheists because they do not observe their truces with the Muslims and they started aggression against the Muslims.¹ Moreover, this *sūra* shows that these polytheists, whenever they find the opportunity to violate their truce, they would do so and strive to destroy and annihilate the Muslims.²

According to the principle of *fiqh*, there is no generality that is without an exception. According to this principle, the unconditional command for fighting is a general command and the conditional one is the exceptional. The Qur'an says, 'And fight in the way of God with those who are fighting with you and do not transgress, God loves not those who transgress.'³ One notes that the reason why Allah orders Muslims not to start fighting is because Allah does not like Muslims to transgress the limits, and to observe the limits ordained by Allah is one of the most basic conceptions of Islam and this conception is valid until the Day of Judgement, and this is not something that permits abrogation.

According to the Qur'an, the common rule for dealing with non-Muslims is to keep up good relation and peace with them, and the exception is to fight them. The Qur'an mentions that when others do not fight the Muslims and instead sends them a

¹ Q. 9:13.

² Q. 9:8.

³ Q. 2:190.

guarantee of peace, then Allah orders the Muslims to stop fighting against them.¹ When the Muslim's enemies incline towards peace, the Muslims should also do so.² It is incorrect to imagine a Muslim as a warlord, brandishing his sword in order to impose Islam on people of other faiths by force. The Qur'an mentions that the Prophet is a mercy for all mankind.³ Mercy is perhaps a poor translation of the Arabic word '*rahma*' which conveys compassion, kindness, goodwill and beneficence.⁴ This mercy requires that relations between the Muslims and non-Muslims should be based on peace, and only peace creates the best environment for delivering the message of Islam to non-Muslims. However, when once war has been thrust on Muslims, it is their duty to counter their enemies but to keep in mind the principles of war at all times.

According to the Qur'an, one of the main objectives of fighting is to stop non-Muslims from oppressing Muslims or driving them from their homes, and when they cease, Muslims should not harm them with further fighting.⁵ Another aim of fighting is that Muslims should fight in the cause of Allah in order to protect the weak, the ill-treated and the oppressed.⁶ The Qur'an, therefore, differentiates between fighting for the cause of Allah and fighting for the cause of evil.⁷

The Qur'an also rejects any use of force to compel people to believe in its teachings because there is no compulsion in religion.⁸ Khaddūrī refers to Abū Hanīfa and Ahmad, who agree that the reason behind fighting in Islam is not unbelief, but

¹ Q. 4:90.

² Q. 8:61. See Raḥmān, *Muhammad: Blessing for Mankind*, pp. 229-230.

³ Q. 21:107.

⁴ Kamālī, "Source, Nature and Objectives of Sharī'a", *The Islamic Quarterly*, fourth quarter, 1989, p. 215.

⁵ Q. 8:39.

⁶ Q. 4:75.

⁷ Q. 4:76.

⁸ Q. 2:256.

the aggression of the non-Muslims.¹ However, al-Shāfi‘ī was the one who formulated the doctrine that *jihād* had for its intent the waging of war on unbelievers for their disbelief and not only when they entered into conflict with the Muslims.² One notes that al-Tahāwī a Shāfi‘ī, disagrees with the Shāfi‘is’ view and agrees with that of Abū Hanīfa and Ibn Hanbal.³ Ibn Taymiyya also concludes that fighting in Islam is a defensive war against those who threaten Islam. He states, ‘If an unbeliever were to be killed unless he became a Muslim.... such an action would constitute the greatest compulsion.’⁴ This saying of Ibn Taymiyya is in line with the Qur’an when it emphasises the freedom of people in choosing their own faiths:

And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed, all of them together. So, will you (Muhammad) then compel mankind until they become believers?⁵

Thus the Qur’an mentions that all the people on earth will not follow one faith, and they will not cease to disagree:

And if your Lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one community, but they will not cease to disagree.⁶

According to Muslim scholars, civilians should not be killed in any way unless they fight against the Muslims.⁷ Once the Prophet passed by a woman who had been killed. When he saw her he said, ‘This woman should not have been fought

¹ Khaddurī, *The Islamic Conception of Justice*, p. 165.

² Al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Umm*, 4/84-85.

³ Al-Tahāwī, *al-Mukhtasar*, p. 281.

⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, ‘Qā‘ida fī Qitāl al-Kuffār,’ *Majmū‘at Rasā‘il*, pp. 115-146. See also Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Siyāsa al-Shar‘iyya*, pp. 125-153. Raḥmān, *Muhammad: Blessing for Mankind*, pp. 157-164.

⁵ Q. 10:99.

⁶ Q. 11:118.

⁷ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 5/346-347. See also Abū Dāwūd, *al-Sunan*, No. 2669. Mālik, *al-Muwatta‘*, 2/447, No. 10.

or killed,' and he ordered that women and children should not be killed.'¹ Thus Stewart, for example, concludes that the way the Muslims treat prisoners, women, slaves, and children was a complete break with the Arab tradition of exacting vengeance from any member of the enemy's tribe since there was not to be any violence against any person not believed to be at war with Islam.² Muir also points to the kind treatment of the prisoners of Badr. He mentions that one of the prisoners of Badr in later days described this treatment, saying:

Blessings on the men of Madina. They made us ride while they themselves walked afoot; they gave us wheaten bread to eat when there was little of it, contenting themselves with dates.³

3. General observations

After discussing the attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims as mentioned in the Qur'an, and mentioning how the Qur'an responds to it through an analysis of nine of its verses, one can make the following observations:

1. Regardless of the hostile attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims, the Qur'an recognises the validity of the Jewish prophets, but the rabbis of Madina did not accept the Prophet as a prophet. Muslims respect the Bible, but the Jews had no use whatever for the Qur'an. The Qur'an allows intermarriage and the sharing of food, but Judaism requires its followers to keep to themselves.⁴ Although the People of the Book deny Muhammad's prophethood, the Qur'an opens the door for dialogue with them and sets up the bases for a good relationship with them unless they fight the Muslims:

¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, NO. 3015.

² Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 76.

³ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 233. See also Armstrong, *Muhammad*, pp. 179-180.

⁴ Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 73.

Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) faith, nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them, for Allah loves those who are just.¹

2. Cragg considers that the reason behind the negative attitude of the Christians towards the Muslims was the military dimensions of original Islam and its uninhibited embrace of the political arm.² Cragg raises the factor of martyrdom as another factor which caused the Christians to be hostile towards the Muslims.³ It seems that some Christian writers find no room for war. Therefore, Borrmans, as example, mentions that all historians today agree that there is no place for war and considers it a form of violence committed in the name of religion.⁴ However, there is deference between violence and just war. The Qur'an shows that there are causes for war. A just war is necessary to counter attacks and remove aggression. The conception of martyrdom in the Qur'an is a description given to those who killed during a just war for a just cause. One also observes that war is not an Islamic innovation. The Qur'an mentions a reference to fighting and martyrdom in both the Torah and the Injil, since fighting existed during the time of Moses.⁵ To investigate the existence of war in the Bible is beyond the scope of this paper.⁶ The Qur'an points out that war and martyrdom are not the doctrine of the Qur'an only but of the earlier revelations as well:

¹ Q. 60:8.

² Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian*, p. 31.

³ Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian*, p. 32.

⁴ Borrmans, *Guidelines for Dialogue between Christians and Muslims*, p. 74.

⁵ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 8/245.

⁶ As examples, see Deuteronomy 20:10- 18, Numbers 33:50-56, Exodus 23:22-24. See also Matthew, 10:34-36.

They (the believers) fight in Allah's cause, and kill (others) and are killed. It is a promise in truth which is binding on Him in the Torah, the Injīl and the Qur'an.¹

3. Regardless of the generally hostile attitude of the Jews in the Qur'an to the Muslims, the Qur'an pays great attention to justice. Within the Qur'an, there is a passage which was revealed to remind the Prophet about the right of a Jew who was accused of stealing a set of armour.² This incident happened when Ibn Ubayriq, one of the hypocrites, stole a set of armour and accused a Jew of stealing it. While the trail was hot, Ibn Ubayriq planted the stolen armour in the house of a Jew where it was found. The Jew denied the charge, and accused Ibn Ubayriq of plotting against him. When the case was brought to the Prophet, he acquitted the Jew because the armour was found in his house since the Prophet had dealt with the case according to the evidence available. Afterwards, the Qur'an revealed a full passage to demonstrate the innocence of the Jew, and to show that there had been a plot to prejudice the Prophet and deceive him in order to charge the Jew. This passage of *Sūrat al-Nisā'*, i.e. verse 105 to 109, remains as a charter to ensure that every human being must be treated justly, and he is of concern in the sight of Allah regardless of his belief.³

4. Despite the hostile attitude of the People of the Book to the Muslims, the Qur'an directs the Muslims to forgive them and overlook their faults, and commands the Muslims not to counter hostility with the same.⁴ However, following the hostile attitude and activities against the Muslims, the Qur'an reminds the Muslims neither to take them as bitāna, protectors or advisors, nor to associate with them nor to share

¹ Q. 9:111.

² Q. 4:105-109.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/267.

⁴ Q. 2:109 and 5:13.

their counsels.¹ The Qur'an made this decision because the People of the Book were more likely to combine against the Muslims than to help and comfort them. The Qur'an with regard to this says, 'They (the Jews and the Christians) are but friends and protectors to each other.'² The Qur'an many times reminds Muslims to be patient but cautious, and to show tolerance and not to return their hatred with hatred unless they have started the fight:

Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who did not fight you for your faith, or drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them, for Allah loves those who are just.³

5. The Qur'an mentions that all the revealed religions have sprung from the same fountainhead.⁴ It states that all the prophets and messengers are equal in the aspect of prophecy itself, and a Muslim should believe in them and honour them all.⁵ Many verses in the Qur'an confirm the right of freedom of belief and that there is no compulsion in religion.⁶ The Qur'an pays its respect to all places of worship, whether they are mosques, churches or synagogues.⁷ The Qur'an recognises the differences between people in belief, and, therefore it is not permitted for anyone to kill another or oppress him on religious grounds.⁸ It declares that differences of belief should not stand in the way of their being a good relationship between the people of different creeds.⁹ The Qur'an mentions that peoples of different faiths may hold debates but in ways that are best and most gracious, and this debate needs to be with respect and

¹ Q. 5:57. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/629.

² Q. 5:51.

³ Q. 60:8.

⁴ Q. 42:13.

⁵ Q. 2:136.

⁶ Q. 2:256.

⁷ Q. 22:40.

⁸ Q. 11:118.

⁹ Q. 5:5 and 60:8.

serenity.¹ It does not, therefore, permit its followers to revile their adversaries on religious grounds even if they are idolaters.² The Qur'an, however, allows the Muslims to defend themselves against the mischief of the oppressors when they are being oppressed until they can put an end to it,³ and, when the Muslims dominate people of other faiths who had formerly adopted an aggressive attitude towards them, they should not take revenge or perpetrate violence against them.

¹ Q. 29:46.

² Q. 6:108.

³ Q. 2:193 and 60:9.

Chapter Six: The Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book as practised by the Prophet during his life

After mentioning the inter-communal attitude between the Muslims and the People of the book as depicted in the Qur'an, this chapter intends to sketch the practical picture of this inter-communal attitude through highlighting the Prophet's relationship with the People of the Book during his life. In this way, this study combines both the theoretical attitude towards the People of the Book highlighted by the previous four chapters, and the practical attitude towards them which will be explored in this chapter. The relationship achieved during the Prophet's life provides a complete example of this inter-relation as well as it represents the core relationship between Muslims and the People of the Book till this day.¹ This chapter also illustrates how the Prophet exercised his power after the establishment of a fully-functioning Islamic state in Madina and challenges the notion that the Qur'anic attitude practiced by the Prophet developed as a result of the growth in the Muslim power.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section highlights the time from the start of the call till the emigration to Madina. The second section explores the time from emigration to the Battle of Badr which was the turning point in relation

¹ What makes the study of the practical attitude of the Prophet towards the People of the Book easy is the availability of sources which record the Prophet's biography and history. Lewis refers to Ernest Renan who mentions that the life of Muhammad is as well known to us as those of the reformers of the sixteenth century. See Lewis, *The Arabs in History*, p. 36.

between Muslims and the People of the Book.¹ The third section studies the period from the Battle of Badr till the Prophet's death.

Section A: The relationship with the People of the Book before the emigration to Madina

1. The People of the Book in the Makkan verses

The Qur'anic verses concerning the People of the Book could be divided into four main categories:

- (i) Those verses that deal with the history of the relationship between the People of the Book and their prophets.
- (ii) Those verses which deal with the Qur'anic attitude towards the beliefs of the People of the Book.
- (iii) Those verses which deal with the Qur'anic attitude towards dealing with the People of the Book.
- (iv) Those verses which explain the general attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims.

In the Makkan *sūras* one finds that the following verses were revealed in connection with the People of the Book:²

- (i) One verse mentions the method of dialogue with the People of the Book.³

¹ The Qur'an calls the Battle of Badr the Day of Criterion (between right and wrong), *Yawm al-Furqān*.

² One notes that about one-third of the Qur'an concerns the People of the Book.

³ Q. 29:46.

- (ii) Two verses relate to the Jews concerning the prohibition of eating certain animals.¹
- (iii) One verse mentions the People of the Book in connection with the angels of the Fire.²
- (iv) The Torah and the Injil are mentioned only once, and that is to confirm that prophecies about Muhammad are found in them.³
- (v) The prophet Moses is mentioned about one hundred and nine times, mainly concerning his encounter with his opponent, the Pharaoh of Egypt.⁴
- (vi) Jesus only four times is mentioned by name, and twice the Qur'an calls him Ibn Maryam.⁵ The Qur'an twice puts him in with the long line of the Prophets.⁶ In a Makkan passage of *Sūrat Maryam*, the Qur'an gives some details regarding Jesus' birth and creation, giving Muslims an early explanation regarding him.⁷ This also suggests that there was an early debate between Muslims and Christians regarding Jesus which needed an early explanation of his birth, nature and teachings. Later this debate increased with more details about the Christian creed and some other rules concerning the relation between the Muslims and the Christians. For an example of this debate, in *Sūrat al-Zukhruf*, Jesus is mentioned once by name and once as *Ibn Maryam*, son of Mary. Al-Qurtubī and many commentators believe that this verse of *Sūrat al-Zukhruf* was revealed when there was a debate about

¹ Q. 6:146 and 16:118.

² Q. 74:31.

³ Q. 7:157.

⁴ Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, pp. 854-855.

⁵ Q. 6:85, 19:34, 42:13 and 43:63.

⁶ Q. 6:85 and 19:34.

⁷ Q. 19:16-36.

Jesus between the Prophet and the idolaters. They said to Muhammad, ‘Would you like to be taken as a god in the same manner that the Christians took Jesus as a god?’¹

The Qur’an cites the reason for the amount of verses regarding the messengers, and, in particular regarding Moses and Jesus:

And all that we relate to you of the news of the messengers is in order that we may make strong and firm your heart thereby, and in this has come to you the truth, as well as an admonition and a reminder for the believers.²

This verse indicates that the stories of the Qur’an explain to the Prophet how the messengers before him dealt with their people, and how their people responded to them. This would strengthen his heart and make him firm. These stories also give the Prophet the truth about the messengers before him, as well as being an admonition and a reminder for the believers.

The Qur’an states another purpose for mentioning stories of some prophets including the prophets of the Children of Israel, ‘Verily, this Qur’an narrates to the Children of Israel most of the matters in which they disagree.’³ As this verse shows, the mention of the prophets is considered for the Muslims as a lesson and reminder, but for the People of the Book it is a form of correction and critical revision.

¹ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 16/89.

² Q. 11:120. See also 3:62, 7:101, 7:176 and 12:111.

³ Q. 27:76.

2. A learned Christian was the first to recognize Muhammad's prophethood

When Khadija, the Prophet's wife, told her cousin, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, of what the Prophet had experienced in the cave of Hira', Waraqa, with confidence, said, 'Verily, by Him in whose hand is Waraqa's soul, if you have spoken to me the truth, there has come unto him the greatest *nāmūs* who came to Moses, and he is the prophet of this people. Bid him be of good heart.'¹

Later, the Prophet met Waraqa near the Ka'ba whilst he was finishing his seclusion and returning to Makka. Waraqa said to the Prophet, 'O son of my brother, tell me what you have seen and heard.'² When the Prophet told him about what he had heard, Waraqa replied, 'Surely, by Him in whose hand is Waraqa's soul, you are the prophet of this people. There has come unto you the greatest *nāmūs* who came unto Moses.' Waraqa warned Muhammad saying, 'You will be called a liar, and your people will use you despitefully and cast you out and fight against you.' Then Waraqa gave a promise that if he lived to see that day, he would help Allah in such wise, as He knows.³

Al-Bukhārī gives more details, mentioning that when Waraqa and the Prophet met for the first time near the Ka'ba, Waraqa said, 'I wish I were younger, and I could

¹ *Nāmūs* is a name given to the angel who is entrusted with divine secrets. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 107. It seems that Khadija knew about angels, and when she heard from the Prophet of what had happened to him in the cave of Hira', she recognised that an angel had come to him and not Satan. She, therefore, chose to tell her cousin Waraqa first, because she knew that Waraqa was one of the People of the Book, and he might know what had happened to Muhammad. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 107. See also Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 85.

² Waraqa was not actually an uncle of the Prophet, but they belonged to the same branch of the Quraysh. However, it is an Arab custom to address an old and respected man as uncle.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 107. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/531-533. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/195. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/8. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 1/576.

live up to the time when your people will turn you out.’ The Prophet asked, ‘Will they drive me out?’ Waraqa replied, ‘Anyone who brings something similar to what you have brought will be treated with hostility, and if I should be alive till that day, then I would support you strongly.’¹ The previous statements bring to light the early words of a learned Christian, who had studied the Torah and the Injīl, to the Prophet.² It seems that Waraqa knew that there were indications of the coming of a prophet in the scriptures, and also he must have been convinced that this prophet could be Muhammad who possessed the character which qualified him to be a prophet.

One notes here that the contact between the Prophet and Waraqa was the first contact between Muhammad and the People of the Book in Makka after his prophethood.³ This contact resulted in Waraqa becoming a Muslim as he fulfilled the promise which he had made that when the prophethood of Muhammad became true, he would support the Prophet and believe in him.⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that Waraqa became a Muslim. He supports his arguments by mentioning many *ḥadīths* which confirm the access of Waraqa to paradise and show Waraqa’s acceptance of Islam.⁵ Because Waraqa died very soon after his testimony about the Prophet, Ibn Kathīr believes that all the *ḥadīths* which confirm the access of Waraqa to paradise suggest that

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 107. See also al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 3, p. 51.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 107. See also Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter encyclopaedia*, article Waraqa, p. 631.

³ Some writers assert that Waraqa influenced Muhammad in the first years of his mission. See Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 123. See also Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter encyclopaedia*, p. 631.

⁴ Ibn Sa’d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/195.

⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma’ād*, 3/21.

he believed and made a sound intention to follow the Prophet if he remained alive.¹ However, Waraqa's early death caused many Muslim historians not to count him with those who earlier on accepted Islam.

3. Muhammad's early debate with some Christians in Makka

In one of the Makkan *sūras*, there is a verse which shows that there was a debate between the Prophet and the People of the Book before the emigration:

And dispute you not with the People of the Book except with better means, unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong (and injury), but say: 'We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you, and our God and your God is one, and it is to Him we bow.'²

Although the number of the People of the Book in Makka was small, this Makkan verse prepared the Prophet for dealing with the People of the Book, and put the basis of dialogue between them from the beginning. The Qur'anic commentators relate that the Prophet used to sit with some Christian slaves in Makka, such as Yasār, Jabr and Ya'īsh discussing belief in God and His message, which caused some Makkans to say that one of these Christians taught Muhammad the Qur'an.³

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/9. However, some writers are of the opinion that Waraqa did not become a Muslim because Waraqa died in the second or third year of the Prophet's mission, and before the Prophet had been ordered to preach Islam. See, for example, Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 56. See also Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter encyclopaedia*, article Waraqa, p. 631.

² Q. 29:46. Al-Qurtubī mentions that there are some commentators who consider this verse a Makkan verse. He also supports the opinion of Mujāhid and Ibn al-'Arabī that this verse has not been abrogated. See al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 13/311.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 7/648-649. See also al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 10/158-159.

Because the Prophet concealed his prophethood for nearly three years, only a few people apart from his relatives and friends embraced Islam within these years of his call. Some of these early converts were Christian slaves brought up in a Christian environment, such as Bilāl ibn Rabāḥ al-Ḥabashī, the Ethiopian,¹ and Ṣuhayb ibn Sinān, the Greek.² There is no record to show whether these slaves studied the Torah and the Injil. It seems that for Bilāl and Suhayb to embrace Islam was easier than Abū Lahab, the Prophet's uncle who was brought up in a pagan environment.

There was another contact with a Christian which took place shortly before the emigration to Madina. It took place at Ṭā'if where the generals rejected the Prophet's call to Islam and insulted him. The Prophet and his companion Zayd ibn Hāritha took refuge in an orchard to rest. The owners of the orchard saw what had happened to him, and were moved with compassion, and called a young Christian slave of theirs, called 'Addās, to take him a bunch of grapes on a platter. When the Prophet started to eat he said, 'In the name of Allah.' 'Addās was amazed at what he heard and said, 'By God, this is not the way the people of this country speak.' Then the Prophet inquired about the country from where he came. 'Addās answered, 'I am a Christian from Nineveh.' The Prophet added, 'Then you are from the town of the righteous man Jonah.' When 'Addās inquired about how he knew Jonah, the Prophet answered, 'He was a prophet and I am a prophet.' Immediately, 'Addās bent over him and kissed his head, hands and feet while both of his masters watched. When 'Addās returned they inquired why he had done so, and he replied that he was the best man in the country who had told him things that only

¹ Al-Mubārakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq*, trans. Dār al-Salām, p. 78.

² Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1/324.

a prophet could know. They did not appreciate his attitude saying, ‘You rascal, do not let him seduce you from your religion, for it is better than his.’¹

4. The contact between the Prophet and the Jews in Makka

There is no evidence of any direct contact between the Prophet and the Jews before the Emigration.² However, there were trade contacts between Makka and Madina. The Jews traded in Makka, and the people of Makka traded in Khaybar and bought jewellery from there.³ There were also religious contacts between Makka and Madina since the people of Madina worshipped in Makka and honoured the Ka‘ba.⁴

When the Prophet’s message began to be known abroad, he was frequently mentioned in Madina. Ibn Ishāq mentions that no tribe amongst the Arabs knew more about the Prophet before he was known in Madina than the tribes of the Aws and the Khazraj.⁵ The reason for this was that the Madinan tribes were well acquainted with the sayings of Jewish rabbis. They lived side by side with them and frequently heard about the long line of prophets, making it easier for the people of Madina to believe in the Prophet. When the news of the Prophet reached the Jews in Madina it was not rejected in the beginning.⁶ When Quraysh sent al-Naḍr ibn al-Ḥārith and ‘Uqba ibn Abī Mu‘ayt to Madina to ask the Jewish rabbis – as People of the Book - about the Prophet, the Jewish

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 192-193. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/554-555.

² Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 195.

³ Al-Khaṭrāwī, *al-Madina fī al-‘Aṣr al-Jāhili*, pp. 125-128. Al-Ṭabarī mentions many incidents which support the idea that there were trade contacts between Makka and Madina. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/501-502.

⁴ Al-Khaṭrāwī, *al-Madina fī al-‘Aṣr al-Jāhili*, pp. 254-255. See also al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, 1/79.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 128.

⁶ Watt asserts that the Jews did not accept Muhammad’s religious claim. See Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 196.

rabbis advised them to ask Muhammad some questions and if he gives them the right answers then he is an authentic prophet.¹

5. Muslims and Christians side by side in Ethiopia

Muslims in Makka, regardless of their status, found themselves rootless without any social and personal protection and liable to be killed or persecuted by their own people. The only way in order to live among the pagans at that time was to seek the protection of a strong man of another clan, for even the Prophet himself, who was protected by his own clan, could not protect them.² When the Prophet saw the inflicted affliction of his companions, and saw that he could not protect them from Quraysh in Makka, he sought a safe shelter for his Companions and advised them to emigrate to Ethiopia.³ The Prophet said to his followers:

If you were to go to Ethiopia until such time as Allah shall relieve you from your distress, it would be better for you, for its king will not tolerate injustice and it is a friendly country.⁴

This statement reflects the early Prophet's attitude towards the People of the Book, and indicates that the Prophet expected no harm to be inflicted upon his companions.

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 136.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 146.

³ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/204.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 146. Bell mentions the possibility of communication between Arabia and Ethiopia, as there was shipping in the Red Sea during that time. See Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 29.

a. The emigration to Ethiopia (Abyssinia)

The first group to go to Ethiopia consisted of only ten or eleven people.¹ Ibn Hishām adds a note to the effect that the leader of this group was ‘Uthmān ibn Maz‘ūn. The list, which is stated by Ibn Ishaq, shows that the emigrants were from important clans and families.² On hearing news that the situation of the Muslims had improved, probably by the conversion of ‘Umar and Hamza, the emigrants decided to return to Makka.³ They believed that the extraordinary personality of these two new converts would prevent the Makkans from persecuting them.⁴ When ‘Umar became a Muslim, the Muslims were so fortified by him that they got the upper hand of Quraysh.⁵ The Muslims could not pray at the Ka‘ba until ‘Umar became a Muslim.⁶ Therefore, Ibn Mas‘ūd considered ‘Umar’s conversion to Islam as a victory for the Muslims.⁷ However, when the emigrants reached Makka they found that the polytheists had redoubled their efforts to crush the Muslims, so some of them returned to Ethiopia immediately, leaving others to stay in Makka under the protection of individuals or by stealth.⁸ A second group of Muslims decided to

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 146. Ibn Sa‘d mentions that the first group to emigrated to Ethiopia was eleven men and four women. See Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/204.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 146-147. See also Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/204. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma‘ād*, 3/23.

³ Muslim historians are of the opinion that when ‘Umar and Hamza both became Muslims the Quraysh began to fear the Muslims which caused them to double their effort to stop further conversions to Islam, therefore the Quraysh boycotted the Muslims just after their conversion. See Muir, *The Life of the Prophet*, p. 93. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/549. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, p. 86. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 1/604. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma‘ād*, 3/29. Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 183.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 155. Ibn Kathīr mentions that ‘Umar was converted to Islam after the emigrants went to Ethiopia. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/79. See also Asad, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, the early years of Islam*, p. 174. See also Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 175. Glubb, *The Life and the Time of Muhammad*, p. 125.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 155

⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 155.

⁷ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 155.

⁸ Asad, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Early Years of Islam*, p. 174.

join those who returned to Ethiopia and to seek refuge there.¹ It seems that Ja'far, who took his wife with him, became the leader of all the emigrants, as he was the one who spoke to the king on behalf of them. When the emigrants heard that the Prophet had emigrated to Madina, thirty-three men and eight women among them returned to Makka and some of these emigrants later emigrated to Madina and were present at Badr and Uḥud.² Other emigrants stayed in Ethiopia until the year of the expedition to Khaybar, and the Prophet gave them a portion of the spoils of Khaybar.³

b. The satanic verses

Some historians, such as al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Sa'd, mention that the satanic verses were the reason behind the return of the first group of the emigrants from Ethiopia.⁴ The story claims that when the Prophet attached great veneration to the idols of Quraysh and ascribed the power of desirable intercession, they accepted Islam.⁵ When this news reached the emigrants, they returned to Makka but found the Makkans had changed their attitude because of the Prophet's retraction of his statement regarding their idols.⁶ Armstrong remarks that this story of satanic verses offers some writers the opportunity to illustrate the Prophet's manifest insincerity.⁷

¹ Ibn Ishāq mentions that the total number of those who emigrated to Ethiopia was eighty-three. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 148. Ibn Sa'd mentions that the total number was eighty-three men and eighteen women, eleven from among the women were from the Quraysh. See Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/207.

² Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/207.

³ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/25 and 3/27. See also Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/207.

⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/205-206. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 9/174-176. Armstrong, *Muhammad*, pp. 108-133.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 9/174-176. See also Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/205-206.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/551. See also Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/205.

⁷ Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 111.

The following observations, however, challenge the authenticity of this story:

1. Many Muslim writers and commentators mention that all the *ḥadīths* which have been recorded regarding the story of the satanic verses, are unsound.¹ Al-Qurṭubī, for example, argues that none of the famous Muslim traditionists, *muhaddithūn*, mention the story of the satanic verses in their books.²

2. Armstrong mentions that al-Ṭabarī, although he gives different versions of the story of the satanic verses, does not necessarily endorse all the traditions he records, and he, therefore, expects the reader to compare them with others and to make up his or her own mind about their validity.³ She also mentions that many Muslims believe this story to be apocryphal.⁴ She mentions that many Muslims believe that there is no clear reference to this story in the Qur'an, or in Ibn Ishaq's *Sīra*, the earliest and most reliable account of the Prophet's life, or in the great collections of traditions about Muhammad which were compiled in the ninth century by al-Bukhārī and Muslim. She believes that Muslims do not reject the story because it could be interpreted critically, but because it is insufficiently attested.⁵

3. The verse which caused the controversy regarding the possibility that the Prophet could deliver the satanic verses is that of *Sūrat al-Ḥajj* which states:

Never did We send a messenger or a prophet before you but when he did recite the revelation or narrated or spoke, Satan threw (some

¹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 12/76.

² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 12/76-77.

³ Armstrong, *Muhammad*, pp. 112-113.

⁴ Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 111.

⁵ Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 111.

falsehood) in it. But Allah abolishes that which Satan throws in. then Allah establishes His revelation.¹

Al-Qurṭubī in commenting on this verse, argues that if we accept that Satan could add some words from his own, this means no more than that Satan just copied the Prophet's voice and said words by his own while the Prophet was reciting the Qur'an.² This means that the people who were present with the Prophet while he was reading *Sūrat al-Najm* heard the words of Satan but not of the Prophet.³

4. The structure of *Sūrat al-Najm* which is a cause of mentioning the satanic verses, suggests the falsity of the story of the satanic verse. The first few verses of this *sūra* state:

The Prophet has neither gone astray nor has erred, nor does he speak of his own desire.⁴

Therefore, no one would expect such a contradiction, and at one place and time between the opening verses of this *sūra* and the heart of it and the satanic verses.

5. The Qur'an mentions that Satan has no authority over man whatsoever which indicates that Satan has no authority to force the Prophet to say something he did not like to say.⁵

6. Al-Mawdūdī suggests that the people of Makka fabricated this story. He mentions that when the Prophet recited some verses from *Sūrat al-Najm* towards the end

¹ Q. 22:52.

² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 12/78.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 12/78. The major Muslim investigators of *ḥadīths*, *muḥaqqiqūn*, deny totally the soundness of the story of the satanic verses. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 3/217.

⁴ Q. 53:2-6.

⁵ See Q. 14:22. Al-Qurṭubī also refers to verse 73 *Sūrat al-Isrā'*, and verse 113 *Sūrat al-Nisā'*. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 12/79.

of this *sūra*, the idolaters present there unconsciously prostrated themselves in fearing. The Makkan people who heard about this and were not present there reproached them. Consequently they fabricated this story and calumniated the Prophet, adding to the same *sūra* another two verses alleging that the Prophet had praised their idols.¹

7. Haykal rejects the story of the satanic verses. He cites the following reasons for the rejection:

- (i) This story is contradicted with the principle that prophets were infallible and were
- (ii) When Ibn Ishāq was asked about the story of the satanic verses he said that the atheists fabricated this story.
- (iii) The Qur'an mentions that if Muhammad inclined to the unbelievers a little, Allah would double his punishment in the Hereafter, and the story of the satanic verses, if sound, indicates that the Prophet did incline to idolaters.²
- (iv) There are more than five different narrations which are mentioned by narrators which show the falsity of the story.
- (v) Haykal refers to Muhammad 'Abdu who mentions that there is no evidence to confirm that the Arabs used the word *gharānīq* as a description of their idols, and the word *gharnīq* or *gharnūq* was mentioned as the name of a bird which used to live in water, or as a description of a beautiful young man, and none of these fit as a description of idols.³

¹ Al-Mubārkpūrī, *al-Raḥīq*, trans. Dār al-Salām, p. 101.

² Q. 17:74-75. See Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 179. See also Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 113.

³ Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, pp. 175-182. See also Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Nihāya fī Gharīb al-Ḥadīth*, 3/364.

8. The story as written by Watt, for example, shows that he admits that these idols were not the idols of the Quraysh but the idols of the neighbourhood of Makka which means that there was no reason for the Prophet to praise them.¹ It is also worth mentioning that Watt mentions that there was no opposition to the Prophet that had as yet developed in Makka at that early time. Therefore, one asks, what was the need for Muhammad to compromise with the Quraysh?²

9. As Muir mentions, Gabriel corrected Muhammad in the evening of the same day when Muhammad made his compromise with the Quraysh.³ This shows that the cancellation of the satanic verses was made in the evening of the same day on which the Prophet praised the idols. This means that the Prophet must have withdrawn the satanic verses immediately, and if so, one assumes that no news regarding the event would have been reported to the emigrants in Ethiopia during that short period.

c. The Prophet's early attitude to Christianity

Bell mentions that, so far as is known to him, the Prophet's early attitude towards the Jews and the Christians during the whole of the Makkan period of his activity was consistently friendly.⁴ However, some Orientalists made use of this peaceful early attitude of the Prophet towards the Jews and Christians by saying that this peaceful attitude only existed at the time of Muhammad's weakness, and that when the Muslims became strong in Madina the Prophet changed his attitude.

¹ Watt, *Muhammad at Makka*, pp. 103-104. As Watt mentions, al-Lāt, al-'Uzzā and Manāt, the primary reference of the satanic verses, were to be the worship of Ṭā'if, Nakhla and Qudayd respectively. See Watt, *Muhammad at Makka*, pp. 103-104. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 11/520-521.

² Watt, *Muhammad at Makka*, p. 105.

³ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 81.

⁴ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p147. See also Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad*, p. 118.

Not only was the Prophet's attitude towards Christians a peaceful one, but also there were Christians who had a peaceful attitude towards Muslims at that time. Therefore, when the Prophet chose Ethiopia, it seems that the Prophet expected that non-idolatrous country would tolerate his Companions more than the idolatrous society of his own. The Prophet could have chosen the Byzantines but the conflict between the Byzantines and the Persians left no room for the Muslims to emigrate to Byzantium. But, the Prophet was confident that the king of Ethiopia was a just king. The Prophet's judgment that the king was just was presumably not based on a conjecture. Probably he had heard about his just dealings in trade, since Ethiopia was a land with which the Banū Hāshim and the Banū 'Abd al-Muttalib had been carrying on trade before the coming of Islam.¹

The Prophet's regard for the Ethiopians seems to have been justified, and therefore, some of the emigrant Muslims stayed and lived peacefully in Ethiopia for about fifteen years.² As the Prophet expected, the king welcomed the emigrants. 'Abd Allah Ibn al-Hārith, one of the emigrants, praised the Ethiopian king for his support and hospitality saying:

O rider, take a message from me
to those who hope for the demonstration of God and religion,
to everyone of God's persecuted servants,
mistreated and hard tried in Makka's vale,

¹ Al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, 2/202. See also al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-Ashrāf*, p. 59.

² The emigration happened in the month of Rajab, the fifth year of the prophethood, and the emigrants stayed in Ethiopia until they finally returned to Madina after the conquest of Khaybar in the year 7 A.H. See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/23-27.

namely, that we have found God's country spacious,
giving security from humiliation, shame and low-repute.¹

However, Newby argues that the reason for the Prophet sending some of his Companions to Ethiopia was to put Islam into the Byzantine-Ethiopian axis since the Quraysh were willing to trade with the Persians.² Newby states that the Negus would have welcomed an opportunity to regain a foothold in Arabia which he had lost by supporting the Makkans' enemy.³ Shaban also builds his view regarding this emigration on the matter of trade. He agrees with Watt's view and concludes that the Prophet, after the boycott of his clan, sent some of his followers to Ethiopia to establish independent trade relations there, but the Quraysh were quick to foil his attempt.⁴

There are four points to make with regard to the view of Shaban and many other writers who attempt to relate at least part of the Prophet's move to materialistic causes:

- (i) Muslim historians mention that the boycott occurred after the emigration to Ethiopia.⁵
- (ii) It is regarded that the full statement of Ja'far includes nothing about trade deals with the Negus.⁶

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 148.

² Newby, *A History of the Jews*, pp. 78-79.

³ Newby, *A History of the Jews*, pp. 78-79.

⁴ Shaban, *Islamic History*, p. 10. See also Watt, *Muhammad at Makka*, pp. 114-115.

⁵ Ibn Kathīr rejects the view of Mūsā ibn 'Uqba who claimed that the emigration was happened during the boycott time. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/67. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/208. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/29-30. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 1/604. See also Glubb, *The Life and The Time of Muhammad*, p. 125.

⁶ See Ja'far's statement in Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 150-152.

- (iii) One notes that the Ethiopian generals revolted against the king, accusing him of leaving their religion but not signing a trade deal.¹ This conflict between the king and the Ethiopian generals was not related to the engagement of the king with the emigrants in trade or because they rejected supporting Muhammad militarily.²
- (iv) There was no need for the Prophet to choose the hardship of the Muslims by sending them to Ethiopia to seek a trade deal with their king; instead the Prophet could have accepted the Quraysh's offer when they sent their delegation to him and offered him three options if he would give up his religion, one of which was to make him the richest man in Makka.³

Some writers state that the emigration to Ethiopia turned the attention of the Prophet more closely and more favourably to the Christian religion.⁴ Muir, for example, points to the influence on the Prophet by the Christianity of Ethiopia, which he considers a heresy.⁵ However, the Prophet already knew about the hospitality of the Ethiopian Christians before the emigration. His attitude to Jesus did not change before and after the emigration.⁶ If the Ethiopians influenced the Prophet, one asks which Ethiopian party influenced Muhammad: the king and his followers, or the opposition who revolted against the king when he agreed with what Ja'far read out regarding Jesus?

¹ Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 178. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p154.

² Watt thinks that the emigrants went to Ethiopia to seek military help against the Qraysh. See *Muhammad at Makka*, p. 114.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/550.

⁴ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 70. See also Fueck, "The Originality of the Arabian Prophet", *Studies on Islam*, ed. Swartz, p. 95.

⁵ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 70. However, Muir in the same book says, 'we do not find a single ceremony or doctrine of Islam in any degree moulded, or even tinged, by the peculiar tenets of Christianity.' See Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 148.

⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 152.

d. The Christians' attitude towards the emigrants

Although the emigrants caused internal opposition to the king of Ethiopia, the emigrants suffered no wrong in word or deed in his country.¹ Some emigrants stayed in Ethiopia for many years which illustrates that there was a peaceful co-existence with the local people. It was for the Muslims a good opportunity to introduce Islam and convey it beyond the boundary of Arabia. For the king was not a fanatical man opposing people of other faiths without reasons, when he heard the statement of the men of the Quraysh who asked him to return the emigrants to Makka he refused to surrender them until he had summoned them and asked them about what the two men had alleged. The king informed the men of the Quraysh that if the emigrants were as they alleged he would send them back to Makka, otherwise he would protect them.² The king's attitude did not change when he summoned the Muslims and asked Ja'far about Jesus. Instead, when Ja'far explained the Qur'anic view about Jesus, the king confirmed that this statement of Ja'far and what Jesus had brought have come from 'the same niche'.³ However, those who were present with the king seemed to have differed regarding the statement of Ja'far which caused some of them to rebel against the king and his supporters.⁴

¹ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/204.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 151-152.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 152.

⁴ According to the Islamic point of view, there were some Christians who stayed faithful to their Book. Asad in his comments on the *Sahīh al-Bukhārī* states that it was possible that the Negus, before he became a Muslim, inclined towards the theological Christian movement known as Aryanism. See Asad, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Early Years of Islam*, p. 179. Bell speaks of the existing Arians in Ethiopia. Bell remarks that Arians extended their influence especially in about 356 A.D. See Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 31.

e. The achievements of the emigration to Ethiopia

The expansion of Islam outside the Hijāz

Many narratives suggest that some Ethiopian groups were to come to Makka to know about Islam. Muslim sources mention that some Christians used to come to the Prophet from Ethiopia when they heard news about him to enquire about Islam.¹ Al-Qurṭubī mentions that once twenty Ethiopians came to the Prophet when they heard about Islam. They found him at the mosque and sat and talked with him asking him questions. When they heard parts of the Qur'an by the Prophet, they accepted Islam.² Al-Qurṭubī also refers to al-Māwardī who mentions that there were forty Ethiopians who became Muslims and went to Madina with Ja'far when he returned from Ethiopia.³

The firmness of the emigrants

According to all major sources available, there were no conversions among the emigrants except that of 'Ubayd Allah ibn Jahsh.⁴ It is worth mentioning here that the wife of ibn Jaḥsh, Umm Ḥabība Ramla bint Abī Sufyān, who emigrated with him to Ethiopia, refused to follow her husband and remained faithful to Islam. Shortly after her husband's death the Prophet requested her in marriage as reward for her firmness.⁵ The Prophet sent a letter to the Negus asking him to perform the ceremony himself, and later

¹ Al-Qurṭubī relates on the authority of 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr that there were twelve men sent by the Negus to Makka to enquire about Islam, and they immediately accepted it. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 13/263. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/82.

² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 13/263. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/82.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 13/263.

⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/208. See also Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 52.

⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/26. See also Asad, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Early Years of Islam*, p. 177.

when she returned to Madina she joined the Prophet as his wife.¹ Muir mentions that although the emigrants were only few, the part they played was of great importance.² Muir believes that this emigration convinced the Quraysh of the sincerity of the new converts, and proved the readiness of the Muslims to undergo any loss and hardship rather than abjure Islam.³

One expects that the Prophet might have feared that most of these emigrants would convert to Christianity as they were strongly persecuted in Makka and welcomed by the Ethiopian king and lived peacefully in Ethiopia. However, it seems that although the emigrants stayed for many years in this Christian country, only one of them converted to Christianity.⁴ Watt considers that one of the reasons for the emigration to Ethiopia was that Muhammad wanted to remove his followers from the danger of apostasy, so that they would not deny the new faith.⁵ However, the same reason could presumably have prevented the Prophet from sending his Companions to Ethiopia lest they might be attracted by its religion.

The conversion of the Ethiopian king to Islam

Islamic sources reveal that Negus himself became a Muslim as a result of this emigration. Negus accepted Islam after he heard the statement of Ja'far regarding Jesus and the teachings of Muhammad. When the Prophet sent 'Amr ibn Umayya with a letter to Negus inviting him to embrace Islam, the Negus's reply contained an explicit

¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/26. See also Asad, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Early Years of Islam*, p. 177.

² Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 69.

³ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 69.

⁴ Only Ibn al-Huwayrith converted to Christianity. See Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/208. About the conversion of Ibn al-Huwayrith see Ch. 1, pp. 37-38.

⁵ Watt, *Muhammad at Makka*, p. 114.

declaration of Islam and recognition of the Prophet. His reply indicates that the Negus had become a Muslim under the influence of the Muslim emigrants whom he had so hospitably received.¹ When the Negus died, the Prophet informed the companions of his death and went towards the praying place, and the people stood behind him in rows to offer the funeral prayer, which means that the Prophet regarded Negus as a Muslim.² The king also became a caller for Islam, and he was the one who invited ‘Amr Ibn al-‘Āṣ to Islam.³

Section B: The relationship with the People of the Book from the Emigration to the Battle of Badr

1. Introduction

During the advent of Islam, the inhabitants of Madina were mainly pagan Arabs, but there were also a number of Jewish clans who had diminished in power.⁴ The Jews also were divided among themselves, not forming a compact body.⁵ However, the growing conflict between the Aws and the Khazraj gave the Jews the opportunity to take advantage and cause dissension between these two tribes. The Jewish clans had combined with other clans, and were sometimes on opposing sides.⁶ As a result, the Arab tribes of Madina recognised the need for reconciliation and total independence, and

¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma‘ād*, 3/689-690.

² When the Negus died the Prophet prayed for him. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/77. See also al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/79.

³ The Quraysh sent ‘Amr to Ethiopia twice to urge the Negus to return the emigrant Muslims to Makka. This conversion was took place in the second time. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 484.

⁴ Holt, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 39.

⁵ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 116. See also Watt, *Muhammad Prophet and Statesman*, p. 98.

⁶ Holt, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 39.

each tribe appointed one of its elders as a leader; the Khazraj appointed ‘Abd Allah ibn Ubayy, and the Aws appointed Abū ‘Āmir al-Rāhib.¹

In Makka, the Prophet preached to many tribes, such as Kinda, Kalb, the Banū Hanīfa, the Banū ‘Āmir, Thaḳīf and others.² The Prophet used to stop by the Arab encampments and convey his message.³ The earliest contact with a Madinan man was that of Suwayd ibn al-Sāmit. When Suwayd arrived in Makka to visit the Ka‘ba the Prophet met him and told him about Islam. Suwayd did not become a Muslim but he praised what he heard of the Qur’an. Suwayd returned to Madina with a good impression of the Prophet and was shortly afterward killed before the emigration.⁴ Another early contact with the people of Madina was that of Abū al-Ḥaysar and Anas ibn Rāfi‘. This contact happened when these two men arrived in Makka with some members of the Banū ‘Abd al-Ashhal, including Iyās ibn Mu‘ādh, seeking an alliance with the Quraysh against the Khazraj.⁵ On coming to know of their arrival in Makka, the Prophet met them and invited them to Islam. As a result, Iyās accepted Islam although Abū al-Ḥaysar tried to convince him that they had not come to Makka for this reason, but Iyās kept silent.⁶

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 278. See also Lings, *Muhammad*, pp. 108-128. Watt, *Muhammad Prophet and Statesman*, p. 89. Muir mentions that both the Aws and the Khazraj respected Ibn Ubayy. See Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 115-116.

² Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/216-217. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 192-196.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/557. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 195.

⁴ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 1/609. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 196. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/147.

⁵ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 1/610.

⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 197. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/148. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 1/610.

Three years before the emigration, the Prophet met six people from the tribe of the Khazraj at 'Aqaba just outside Mina, near Makka, when they came to perform pilgrimage. When the Prophet invited them to Islam they accepted it and said, 'We have left our people, for no tribe is so divided by hatred and rancour as they, and perhaps God will unite them through you.'¹ It seems that these men were desperate to resolve the situation of their people in Madina.² Therefore, when these men returned to Madina they told their people about Islam. During the following year, another twelve accepted Islam.³ The year after, another seventy men and two women went to meet the Prophet in Mina and made a covenant with him which was known as the second pledge of Aqaba.⁴

A year later, the Prophet decided that he would emigrate to Madina due to his suffering in Makka. The Qur'an mentions that what caused the Muslims to emigrate were reasons related to religion ground, such as the Muslims being oppressed because of their faith, being driven out of their lands, or being persecuted due to their beliefs.⁵ It seems that all of these previous causes occurred in Makka, and therefore the Prophet gave his permission to the Muslims to emigrate to Madina which then became a new home for Islam.

The foremost among the reasons for the success of the Prophet in Madina was the attractiveness of Islam and its relevance as a religious and social system to the

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/558. Ibn Kathīr mentions that they were eight men, see *al-Bidāya*, 3/149. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 198.

² Haykal, *Hayāt Muhammad*, p. 215.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/559. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 198. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/219.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1/562-563. Ibn Kathīr relates that those who joined the second pledge of Aqaba were seventy-three men and two women. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/160. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/48.

⁵ See Q. 3:195, 16:41, 16:110 and 59:8.

people.¹ Therefore, among the reasons for the people of Madina accepting Islam was the existence of civil wars in Madina which devastated the relationship between the Aws and the Khazraj. ‘Ā’isha, the Prophet’s wife, related that the Day of Bu‘āth was a day granted by Allah to his Prophet since it prepared the people of Madina to accept Islam.² This *ḥadīth* indicates that the people of Madina realised the urgent need of peace after periods of devastating tribal wars. Some writers also, such as Margoliouth and Muir, support the view that it was the influence of the Jews along with the effect of the civil war that prepared the ground for the acceptance of Islam in Madina.³ Holt also suggests that there had been a degree of readiness to accept Islam in Madina at the religious level.⁴

Some writers attempt to find material reasons in order to explain the acceptance of the Madinans of Islam. They suggest that trade was the main viable reason for the people of Madina accepting the Prophet and his followers.⁵ It was settled with the Prophet that he should have enough authority in Madina to organise a Madinan commonwealth.⁶ However, as the sources show, the two leaders of the clan of the Banū ‘Abd al-Ashhal of the tribe of the Aws were S‘ad Ibn Mu‘ādh and Usayd Ibn Hudayr. These two men only had autonomy on the economical and political issues at that time.⁷ This leads to the conclusion that if the emigration was based on a trade deal, then these

¹ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 69.

² Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, No. 3847.

³ Margoliouth, *Mohammad and the Rise of Islam*, pp. 196-198. See also Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 116.

⁴ Holt, *The Cambridge History*, Vol. 1A, p. 39. In Islamic political theory there is no separation between politics and religion. See, for example, Choudhury, *The Prophet Muhammad*, pp. 63-72.

⁵ Shaban, *Islamic History*, pp. 10-11.

⁶ Shaban, *Islamic History*, pp. 10-11. See also Watt, *Muhammad at Makka*, pp. 114-115.

⁷ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/152. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 200.

two leaders would have played a major role and arranged with Muhammad for such a deal. Moreover, one finds that these two leaders became Muslims only later on.

Newby asserts that for the Aws and the Khazraj, linking their fate with Muhammad's rising fortunes would have been seen as a means toward further independence from the Jewish control of the city of Madina.¹ It seems that Newby supports the view of Holt who also considers the main reason for the acceptance of the Madinans of Islam was to seek independence from the Jews.² However, it has been noted that the Jews of Madina during the advent of Islam had divided and declined in power. The tribes of the Aws and the Khazraj overshadowed the three main Jewish tribes in Madina which indicates that the Aws and the Khazraj accepted Islam not because they were seeking independence from the Jews who were already divided but to find solution for their situation. One also remarks that even if this reason was emerged in the head of the Aws and the Khazraj, the Prophet did not emigrate to Madina to challenge the Jews since he did not expect them to become his enemy in the first place.

When the Prophet emigrated to Madina, most of its people did freely accept Islam. However, unlike the general public of Madina, 'Abd Allah ibn Ubayy, the leader of the Khazraj, and Abū 'Āmir al-Rāhib, the leader of the Aws, continued to oppose the Prophet at all times because they considered such drastic changes as a threat to their prestige and status.³ A few Madinans hesitated to become Muslims because they were unsure and sceptical about Islam, and the Muslims did not force them to accept it. This

¹ Newby, *A History of the Jews*, p. 79.

² Holt, *The Cambridge History*, Vol. 1A, p. 39. Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, pp. 193-194. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 25.

³ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 181.

included some people from the clans of Banū Umayya ibn Zayd, Khatma Wā'il and Wāqif of Aws ibn Hāritha. Abū Qays ibn al-Aslat was the leader of these clans and he dissuaded them from Islam until the Battle of the Ditch, after which they accepted Islam.

In Abū Qays's poem, he explains why his people stayed back from Islam saying:

Lord of mankind, serious things have happened,

the difficult and the simple are involved.

Lord of mankind, if we have erred

guide us to the good path.

Were it not for our Lord we should be Jews

and the religion of Jews is not convenient.

Were it not for our Lord we should be Christians

along with the monks on Mount Jalīl.

But when we were created we were created

ḥanīfs, our religion is from all generations.

We bring the sacrificial camels walking in fetters

covered with clothes but their shoulders bare.¹

This poem illustrates the following points:

- (i) There were some *ḥunaḥā'* in Madina, as in Makka, and Ibn al-Aṣlat was one of them. Another *ḥanīf* was Abū Qays ibn Abū Anas who nearly became a Christian but later changed his mind and secluded himself from other doctrines, allowing no heretic to enter his home, while saying, 'I worship the Lord of Abraham.'²

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 201.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 236-237.

- (ii) These *ḥunafā'* could not easily decide to accept Islam, or Judaism. However, it seems that the monks were not living within the confines of Madina, but rather in cells on Mount Jalīl which is nearby Madina, and not the Mount Galilee of Palestine.¹ These *ḥunafā'* practised some rites of Abraham, such as sacrifice. Although they lived alongside the Jews, these *ḥunafā'* did not accept Judaism but they later hastened to embrace Islam.
- (iii) The Prophet did not compel the people of Madina to accept Islam. Therefore, some people from the aforementioned clans refrained from becoming Muslims till after the Battle of the Ditch.

2. The early reaction of the Jews to the emigration

The Jews had often told the Aws and the Khazraj about a prophet, who would be sent soon saying, 'We shall kill you by his aid as 'Ad and Iram perished.'² However, when the Prophet came they rejected him. The Qur'an indicates this:

And when there came to them (the Jews) a book from Allah confirming what is with them (the Torah), although aforetime they had invoked Allah in order to gain victory over those who disbelieved, Then when there came to them that which they had recognised, they disbelieved in it.³

¹ See Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, 3/131-132.

² Muir admits that there is truth in the narrative which indicates that the Jews had often told the Aws and Khazraj about a prophet who would be sent soon. However, he attempts to link the expectation of a prophet with the expectation of a messiah. See Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 116. See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/44. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 198. See also al-Nīsābūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, p. 21.

³ Q. 2:89. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/454-457. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1/108.

Al-Ṭabarī mentions that this verse indicates that the Jews told the Arabs about the coming of a prophet.¹ He supports his commentary with fifteen *ḥadīths*. This expectation of the coming of a prophet caused the Jews to observe the moves of the Prophet, especially the rapid spread of Islam in Madina. The people of Madina were expecting his arrival any time as they used to go out beyond Madina to await him. The first man to see the Prophet when he reached Madina was a Jew.² This suggests that the Jews perhaps joined with the masses of Madina who went out to greet and welcome the Prophet.³ If so, one assumes that the Jews preferred to join the people of Madina who went out to greet the Prophet in order to win him for their side. The Jews probably believed that it was a wise move to join the masses in Madina at this crucial time. But one asks, did this early reaction continue?

The following testimony of Safiyya, the daughter of the leader of the tribe of Banū al-Nadīr, shows the early attitude of some of the Jews in Madina towards the Prophet:

I was the favourite child of my father and my uncle Abū Yāsir. When the Prophet was staying in Qubā' with the Banū 'Amr ibn 'Awf, the two (her father Huyayy ibn Akhtab and Abū Yāsir) went to see the Prophet before daybreak and did not return until after nightfall, weary, worn out, drooping and feeble. I went up to them in childish pleasure as I always did, and they were so sunk in their gloom that they took no notice of me.

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/454-457.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 227. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/196. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 3/233.

³ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/196. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 227.

I heard my uncle say to my father. 'Is it him? Do you recognise him, and can you be sure?' Huyayy replied: 'Yes.' Abū Yāsir asked: 'And what do you feel about him?' Huyayy answered: 'By God I shall be his enemy as long as I live.'¹

Ibn Kathīr also relates, on the authority of al-Zuhrī, that Abū Yāsir, the brother of Huyayy ibn Akḥṭab, went to see the Prophet after he had emigrated to Madina. When Abū Yāsir returned to his people, he advised them that they were already expecting his coming and, therefore, it would be better if they followed him and did not turn away from him. When his brother Huyayy, the leader of the Banū al-Nadīr, heard what Abū Yāsir said, he went to see the Prophet himself. When he returned, he declared that he would be the Prophet's enemy as long as he lived.²

The previous incidents show that some Jews were concealing their hostility towards the Prophet from an early stage. However, in Madina, it was not wise for the Jews, or for those who did not convert to Islam, to openly declare their attitude due to the fact that the majority of the people of Madina were supportive of the Prophet and considered him as a guide. Therefore, those who opposed the Prophet chose to leave Madina from the time when the Prophet emigrated to it, such as Abū 'Āmir al-Rāhib and his followers who preferred not to oppose Muhammad at that particular time and went to Makka.³

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 241-242.

² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/212.

³ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 180.

Shortly after his arrival in Makka, the Prophet instituted brotherhood between the emigrants and the helpers. They both made a covenant, which strengthened the ties between them. Although the Jews were declining in power in Madina, the Prophet gave them great regard when he wrote the constitution of Madina. The Jews, however, expected that the Prophet would not introduce teachings which differed from that of the Torah. They witnessed him facing the same direction that they faced in prayers and he fasted the same day that they used to fast.¹ The Jews also expected Muhammad to unite the whole of Arabia in order to help them oppose the Roman Christians who had driven them away from their promised land.² Consequently, they tried to align with the Prophet with the intention of regaining their former glory via his support against the Aws and the Khazraj.

3. The Prophet's attitude to the Jews

Unlike in Makka, the Muslims in Madina were more autonomous in their daily affairs. They were somewhat at ease, and were able to deal with the challenges of construction, their means of living, economics, politics, government administration, war and peace, codification of the questions of the permissible and prohibited, different aspects of worship, and other relevant issues. The Prophet established the foundations of the

¹ The day is called 'Āshūrā'. Ghunaym, after considering the evidence provided by the Qur'an, the *hadith*, the Bible and its commentary, concludes that the day of 'Āshūrā' is a day which Allah established for people of all times as a day of receiving His forgiveness. He argues that it was neither an innovation of the pre-Islamic period, nor was it specifically attributed to the Jews. Ghunaym mentions many *hadiths* arguing that 'Āshūrā' was a day on which the Quraysh also fasted during the pre-Islamic period, and it also was the day on which the Ka'ba was covered. See Ghunaym, "Āshūrā", *The Islamic Quarterly*, fourth quarter, (1986), pp. 267-279.

² Haykal, *Muhammad al-Mathal al-Kāmil*, p. 236. See also Margoliouth, *Mohammad and the Rise of Islam*, pp. 196-197.

relationship between all the factions of the new society. As a result, the rights of the Jews were not ignored or denied. He ratified a treaty with them and gave them full freedom in faith and wealth. The Prophet's attitude towards the People of the Book residing in Madina was friendly at the time.¹ The Prophet established his community on an equal footing with the Jews.² The Prophet did not intend to intimidate anyone to convert to the religion of Islam. Hence, there was a possibility for Muslims and Jews to co-operate and collaborate in building a state which would offer peace and security to its society.

The Prophet, as ruler of Madina, would have been able to deny the rights of the Jews and exclude them from the new constitution of Madina had he wanted to do so. There is no doubt that the Prophet hoped that the Jews of Madina would recognise him as a prophet, or at least that they would respect him and co-operate with him.³ He based this conclusion on the principle that all the religions of God are one, and that his message was the last in the sequence of those presented to earlier generations.⁴ The Prophet did not expect the Jews to be his enemy because he offered them a treaty which provided peace and prosperity to the whole society, and brought a spirit of rapport and harmony to the region regardless of the people's beliefs. Its foundations enabled the construction of a multi-cultural and multi-religious nation. However, the Prophet would have been able to declare war against the Jews on the first day he entered Madina had he wanted to do so. And the people of Madina were ready to fight against the Jews if the

¹ Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 147.

² Bell, *The Origin of Islam*, p. 147.

³ Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 70.

⁴ Q. 46:9.

Prophet ordered them to fight. This readiness to fight against the Jews was made during the second treaty of ‘Aqaba when the new converts of Madina gave their allegiance and said, ‘We are men of war possessing arms which have been passed on from father to son.’¹

4. The constitution of Madina

The constitution of Madina is a document to which scholars have paid great attention. Most historians and bibliographers of the Prophet’s life have referred to this constitution. However, it seems that there is a dispute regarding this constitution whether it consists of one completed account or of many; thus the document’s date and unity is disputed.² It seems that when the Prophet came to Madina he desired to make peace and have a treaty with all factions in Madina.³ However, the point that the three main Jewish tribes were not mentioned in the constitution has resulted in conflict of opinion with regard to its date and led some scholars to assign it to the fifth year of the migration following the expulsion of the Banū Qurayza.⁴ Regarding this point, one notes that it would not have been appropriate for the Prophet to have made a covenant with smaller groups of Jews whilst excluding the main clans of al-Nadir, Qaynuqā’ and Qurayza.⁵ And if so, why did the Prophet accuse these clans of breaking their covenant with him whenever they

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/161. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 203. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 1/613. Al-Haythamī, *Majma’ al-Zawā’id*, 6/47.

² Serjeant, “An Analysis and Translation of the Documents Comprising in the so-called the Constitution of Madina”, *The Life of Muhammad*, ed. Rubin, p. 151. Glubb agrees that the Constitution was written immediately on the arrival of the Prophet in Madina. See Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad*, p. 163.

³ Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/184.

⁴ Ahmad, *Muhammad and the Jews*, p. 40.

⁵ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 227.

entered into conflicts with them?¹ One also notes that the Prophet mentioned the three main Jewish tribes not by their names but by the names of their allies the Aws and the Khazraj. Despite the argument regarding the date and unity of the Constitution, most scholars agree that the document is authentic.²

The following principles are the most important part of the constitution of Madina regarding the relationship with the Jews:³

- (i) To the Jew who follows Islam belong help and equality, and he shall not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided.
- (ii) The Jews shall contribute to the cost of war so long as they are fighting alongside the Muslims.
- (iii) The Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs.⁴
- (iv) The Jews shall bear their expenses and the Muslims theirs.
- (v) Each party shall help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this treaty.
- (vi) Both parties shall seek mutual advice and consultation, and loyalty is a protection against treachery.
- (vii) The wronged must be helped.

¹ Watt discusses the Constitution of Madina and raises some points regarding its authenticity, date and unity. See Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, pp. 225-228.

² Hamīd Allah, *The First Written Constitution in the World*, pp. 38-40. Serjeant, "The Constitution of Madina" *The Islamic Quarterly*, first quarter, published by the Islamic Cultural Centre, London, 1964, p. 3. Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 225. Stewart agrees that this document is almost certainly authentic. See Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 70.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 231-233. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/224-226.

⁴ Saunders claims that the Jews of Madina were destined to pay heavily for their refusal to accept the Qur'an as the new scripture and Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah. See Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 27. However, the Constitution of Madina rejects this claim and grants the Jews the right of religious freedom.

- (viii) The Quraysh and their helpers shall not be given protection.
- (ix) Madina shall remain sacred and inviolable for all those who join this treaty.
- (x) Each party shall contribute to defending Madina, in the case of a foreign attack, in its respective area.
- (xi) The one who goes forth is safe and the one who stays in Madina is safe unless he has been unjust and sinned.
- (xii) If any controversy should arise which is likely to cause trouble, then it must be referred to Allah and the Prophet, who will solve it according to the law of Allah.

The above-mentioned principles indicate that the Constitution guarantees security for Muslims and Jews equally. The Jews are members of the community, the *ummah*, and for them there will be complete freedom to practise their religious rites as they see fit. Muslims and Jews will share the responsibility of defending Madina in the case of a foreign attack. The covenanted Jew shall not be wronged or his enemy be aided. The dealings with the Jews shall be based on equality, and law shall be enforced to prevent crime and punish criminals. There is no protection of any sort to rebels or criminals in Madina, nor can anyone shelter them or render assistance to them. This Constitution sets up the rights and obligations of every citizen in Madina. It also emphasises personal responsibility, which was an important break from the tribal conception of collective responsibility which existed before Islam. Although the Constitution did not refer to any trade dealings, the equality given by the Constitution offered every citizen the right to carry out commercial and economic activities and to carry on his day-to-day living. This Constitution provided the state of Madina with a political and legal framework. It gave birth to a unified and multi-cultural community

under the leadership of the Prophet, since any dispute was to be referred to him to be solved according to the law of Allah.¹ As a result of the above-mentioned privileges given to the Jews, one remarks that the Jews were free to join in building a new state which recognized the rights of its citizens. They also could keep their religion and enjoy the same rights which the Muslims enjoyed.²

On the other hand, one notes that the constitution of Madina excludes idolaters and Christians from the community. It seems that there were no Christian community in Madina at that time but some individuals since there was no mention of the Christians in its constitution. Regarding the idolaters and those who did not accept Islam, one notes that some of them kept quiet;³ others left Madina, such as Abū ‘Āmir al-Rāhib and his followers;⁴ and some others converted hypocritically, such as ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Ubayy and his followers.

5. Direct contacts between Muslims and Jews in Madina

Muslim historians mention many incidents regarding the different forms of contact between Muslims and Jews. The next pages will illustrate how this contact developed

¹ Some writers believe that the Constitution of Madina gives no special power or authority to the Prophet except in disputed matters which means that the Prophet was far from being a ruler of Madina. See Holt, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, p. 41. See also Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 228. Shaban, *Islamic History*, p. 11. However, one understands that to refer disputes to the Prophet means that the Prophet was the highest authority in Madina. Watt asserts that, according to the Constitution, the *ummah* was based on religion and not on kinship. See Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 239. However, it seems that the *ummah* was based neither on religion, nor on kinship but included every citizen who would accept the Constitution.

² Levonian, although the document guaranteed the same rights for both Muslims and Jews, he denies that the Jews shared exactly the same rights of the Muslims. See Levonian, *Studies in the Relationship Between Islam and Christianity*, pp. 111-112.

³ Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 236.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 277. See also Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 180.

and gradually led to dispute, controversy, hostility and conflict between Jews and Muslims.

a. Dialogue with the Jews

The Prophet hoped that the Jews would become Muslims. The Qur'an points to this, 'Can you entertain the hope that they (the Jews) will believe in you?'¹ The Prophet invited the Jews to Islam because he considered himself a prophet for all mankind from the beginning of his call in Makka.² No prophet before Muhammad proclaimed that his mission is universal. Neither the Old Testament, nor the New mention the universality of the mission of Moses or that of Jesus. The proclamation of the Prophet's universal mission is frequently mentioned in the Qur'an, Say (O Muhammad) 'O men, I am sent unto you all, as the messenger of Allah.'³

The Qur'anic methodology in inviting the People of the Book is based on the following principles:

1. The Qur'an mentions that Muhammad is the Prophet who the People of the Book find mentioned in their own scriptures.⁴ He is the Prophet whose coming Jesus gave glad tidings about.⁵ And he is the Prophet with whose coming the Jews used to threaten the People of Madina.⁶

¹ Q. 2:75.

² See the following Makkan verses of the Qur'an: 6:90, 12:104, 21:107, 25:1, 38:87, 68:52, 81:27. It appears that these Makkan verses address Muslims and non-Muslims, 'O you men (*yā ayyuha al-nās*).'³ This indicates that the Prophet from the beginning of his call considered himself as a messenger for all mankind. See also Q. 7:158, 10:23, 10:57, 10:104, 10:108, 14:1, 28:43, 31:33, 34:28, 35:3, 35:5, 35:15, 45:20, 14:52 and 16:44.

³ Q. 7:158.

⁴ Q. 7:157.

⁵ Q. 61:6.

⁶ Q. 2:89. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 197-198.

2. The Qur'an, in twenty occasions, mentions that the Prophet's message confirms the scriptures that came before it.¹ Therefore, there was no reason why the Jews should not believe in it.

3. The Qur'an reminds the Jews that all the prophets, including Muhammad, were inviting to the same religious principles, and Muhammad taught what the prophets before him had taught. It also reminds them that the religion of Allah is the same in essence, whether given to Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus or Muhammad:

He has ordained for you the same religion which He ordained for Noah, and that which We have revealed to you, and that which We ordained for Abraham, Moses and Jesus: that you should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein.²

4. The Qur'an sets up common terms between Muslims and the People of the Book, preparing a suitable and common ground of dialogue between them:

O People of the Book, come to common terms between us and you that we worship none but Allah, and associate no partners with Him, and that none of us shall take others as lords besides Allah.³

5. The Qur'an, from the Makkan period, emphasises the way which the Prophet shall follow when inviting others to his call:

Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching, and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious.⁴

¹ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, article '*muṣaddiq*' pp. 515-516, and '*muhaymin*' p. 907.

² Q. 42:13. See also Q. 3:84.

³ Q. 3:64.

⁴ Q. 16:125.

The Qur'an stresses this manner of invitation additionally, saying:

And dispute not with the People of the Book except with better means, unless it be with those of them who inflict wrong, and say: 'We believe in the revelation which has come down to us and in that which came down to you, and our God and your God is one.'¹

6. The Qur'an warns the Jews as well as the unbelievers of a punishment from Allah, both in this world and in the Hereafter if they reject the message.² Muir asserts that Muhammad's hostility began as early as the advent of Islam in the Makkan period for they consider all verses that point to the worldly punishment of non-believers as a sign of the Prophet's hostility.³ Marshall, for example, mentions that biographers did not pay much attention to the idea that Muhammad preached worldly punishments in Makka if its people continued in unbelief in his message.⁴ Marshall, therefore, thinks that the punishment-narratives of the Qur'an show that the threat of the Makkan verses of the Qur'an to the unbelievers of divine punishment in this world was fulfilled later in Madina. However, all the prophets of the Qur'an warned their people of a divine punishment.⁵ The Qur'an frequently refers to the prophets as warners, 'And We send not the messengers but as givers of glad tidings and as warners.'⁶ One agrees that the warning of a punishment in the Qur'an involves this life and the hereafter.⁷ The punishment in this world is to be fulfilled by Allah's law, or by a direct punishment from

¹ Q. 29:46.

² Q. 2:61, 2:79, 2:85, 17:5-8 and many more.

³ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 203.

⁴ Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, pp. 187-189.

⁵ Q. 71:2, 26:115, 35:24 and 46:21.

⁶ Q. 6:48.

⁷ Q. 2:85, 5:41, 16:26-27 and 41:16.

Allah, such as what happened to some ancient nations when they rejected the message of their prophets.¹ Therefore, this warning of a punishment does not mean that those prophets prepared for fulfilling the warning by being hostile towards the unbelievers. The Qur'an describes the Prophet as nearly killing himself in grief over the unbelievers because they did not believe in the Qur'an.² This indicates that the Prophet strived not to fulfil the warning of a worldly punishment but to avoid it and save people from it. What Marshall mentions is also contradicted by the Prophet's conduct when he gained supremacy over the polytheists of Makka, when, instead of punishing them, he told them to go free.³

b. The Prophet's visit to a Jewish school (*bayt al-midrās*) in Madina

The Prophet visited a Jewish school in Madina.⁴ There were some rabbis such as al-Nu'mān ibn 'Amr and al-Ḥārith ibn Zayd who took the opportunity to ask the Prophet questions regarding Islam. The Prophet told them that Islam was the same as the religion of Abraham. One day some Jewish rabbis gathered in their school, and decided to send one of them to ask the Prophet a question regarding the penalty of a married adulterer. The Prophet instead preferred to meet the rabbis at the *midrās* in order to discuss the penalty with them.⁵ It was not only the Prophet who visited a Jewish school but also some of his companions, such as Abū Bakr who once went into a Jewish school and

¹ See Q. 6:65 and Q. 2:178 respectively. See also 40:21-22.

² Q. 18:6.

³ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/301. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 553.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 260. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/573. Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/164.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/573. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 266.

invited a Jew called Finhās to become a Muslim.¹ These incidents show the extent to which Muhammad was concerned to establish a constructive dialogue with the Jews, and tried to remove barriers and build bridges of understanding between Muslims and Jews through a constructive dialogue.

c. The conversion of some Jews to Islam

Although there were direct contacts between Muslims and Jews, only a few Jews converted to Islam. Islamic sources mention that what caused these Jewish converts to become Muslims was their expectation that a prophet would come, as in the case of Ibn Sallām.² However, some of the Jews accepted Islam hypocritically.³ Al-Ṭabarī relates that the first hundred verses of the *Sūrat al-Baqara*, the Cow, are about the hypocrites of Madina among both the Jews and the Arabs.⁴

From the Islamic sources available one observes that the following Jews became Muslims:

‘Abd Allah ibn Sallām

He was one of the learned rabbis of the Jews. Ibn Sallām became a Muslim immediately after the Prophet’s arrival at Madina, which implies that he was ready to accept the Prophet due to his knowledge of a prophet to come.⁵ Ibn Sallām tried to convince the Jews that Muhammad was the Prophet who had been described in the Torah.⁶ As a

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 3/535. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 263.

² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/210-211.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 246-247.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 1/141. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 247.

⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/210.

⁶ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/210-212. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 240-241.

result, the Jews denied his claim about the Prophet, but his family, his brother Tha'laba ibn Sallām and his aunt Khālida all accepted Islam.¹

Mukhayrīq

He was also a learned rabbi. He was a rich man. He recognised the Prophet by his description and through his own investigation. When the Battle of Uḥud started, he reminded the Jews that they were bound to help the Prophet, pointing to their covenant with the Prophet.² They objected to this proposition because it was the Sabbath. Mukhayrīq rejected their reply and took up arms and joined the Muslims in Uḥud and was martyred. He told his people that if he was killed in the battle, then his wealth should go to the Prophet for its distribution in the way of Allah.³

Others

There were some other Jews who converted to Islam, such as Tha'laba ibn Sa'ya, Usayd ibn Sa'ya and Asad ibn 'Ubayd.⁴ After the expulsion of al-Nadīr three other Jews became Muslims, Yāmīn ibn 'Umayr, Abū Ka'b ibn 'Amr ibn Jihāsh and Abū Sa'd ibn Wahb.⁵

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/211. See also al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/399.

² This reminder of Mukhayrīq to the Jews, that they were bound to help the Prophet, suggests that the constitution of Madīna between Muslims and the Jews was written before Uḥud which gives the indication of the early date of the Constitution.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 241.

⁴ Al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/398. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 262.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 438. See also al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/397-400. Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/172.

d. The challenging questions of the Jews

The Prophet was in open contact with the Jews. Therefore, the Jews did not hesitate to ask the Prophet various questions regarding many issues. Some of these questions were utilised to embarrass the Prophet in front of his companions in order to annoy him in confusing truth with falsehood.¹ The Prophet used to persuade them to swear a solemn oath that if he gave them the correct answers, they would acknowledge the truth.² During the Prophet's life, the Jews asked him many questions. Although he knew that they were asking these questions to challenge him, the Prophet answered them.

Below are some of the questions which are mentioned within the Qur'an and the *hadīth*:

- (i) Why does a boy resemble his mother when the semen comes from the man?³
- (ii) Tell us about your asleep?⁴
- (iii) Tell us about what Israel voluntarily forbade himself?⁵
- (iv) Tell us about the Spirit?⁶
- (v) What is your religion?⁷
- (vi) Tell us when the Hour will be if you are a prophet as you say?⁸

¹ Glubb concludes that the Jews asked questions in order to make the Prophet appear ridiculous. See Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad*, p. 164. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 256. Holt, *The Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 1A, pp. 43-44.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 255.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 255.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 255.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/352. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p.255.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 8/142. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 255. Al-Nisābūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, p. 202.

⁷ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 255.

⁸ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 260. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/136.

- (vii) Who are the prophets whom you believe in?¹
- (viii) Is it true, Muhammad, that what you have brought is the truth from God?²
- (ix) How can we follow you when you have abandoned our *qibla* and you do not allege that ‘Uzayr is the son of god’?³
- (x) Who created Allah?⁴
- (xi) Describe Allah’s shape, his forearm and his upper arm; what do they resemble?⁵

The Qur’an also cites some of these questions:

The People of the Book ask you to cause a book to descend to them from heaven. Indeed, they asked Moses for something even greater than that when they said: ‘Show us Allah openly,’ but they were dazed for their presumption, by thunder and lightening. Yet they worshipped the calf even after clear signs had come to them.⁶

e. The intensifying debate between the Prophet and the Jews

The Qur’an mentions the story of the Cow which is acknowledged in Jewish tradition.⁷

The story is that when Moses announced the sacrifice to the Israelites, they treated it as a jest. They dissuaded him with one pretext or another, deliberately asking questions

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 4/632. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 268.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 269.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 269.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 270.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 270.

⁶ Q. 4:153. See also 17:85, 18:83. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-Bayān*, 4/346. Al-Qurtūbī, *al-Jāmi’*, 6/9-10.

⁷ Numbers xix, 1-10.

which they could have answered themselves if they had listened to the instruction at the first instance. It seems that the Qur'an wants to show that these questions were carping criticisms rather than the result of a desire for information. Furthermore, argument for the sake of argument leads to hatred and division, and reduces the opportunity of mutual understanding. Therefore, debates between the Prophet and the Jews were deficient in their fundamental principles and later led to ill feeling and hostility.¹

The following passages outline four areas where conflicting arguments took place:

Controversy about Abraham's religion

The Qur'an emphasises that the religion of Muhammad is the same as the religion of Abraham.² Therefore, the Qur'an pays great attention to Abraham. Fifty-five *sūras* in the Qur'an mention Abraham.³ Abraham is mentioned sixty-nine times in the Qur'an, thirty-two times in the Makkan *sūras* and thirty-seven in the Madinan *sūras*.⁴ This suggests that from the early time of revelation, the Qur'an confirms the association between the Prophet and Abraham. The Qur'an mentions that there were several meetings in which arguments regarding Abraham took place between the Muslims and the Jews and, later, the Christians of Najrān who also joined the argument.⁵ The main dispute which arose was about the religious identity of Abraham and whether he was a Jew, a Christian or a Muslim.⁶ The Qur'an addresses this argument:

¹ Glubb, *The Life and Times of Muhammad*, p. 164.

² Q. 3:67, 6:161, 16:123 and 22:78.

³ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, under Ibrāhīm, pp. 2-3.

⁴ 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam*, under Ibrāhīm, pp. 2-3.

⁵ Q. 3:66. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/303.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/303.

O People of the Book, why do you dispute about Abraham, while the Torah and the Injīl were not revealed till after him?¹

Again the Qur'an argues that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian:

Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was true in faith, and bowed his will to Allah, and joined not gods with Allah. Verily, among mankind those who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him and this Prophet and those who have believed.²

This verse constitutes a warning to everyone, including Jews and Christians, that the good of this world and of the next cannot be earned except by giving up the disobedience of Allah and observing his path.

Controversy about the prophethood of Jesus

Ibn Ishāq relates that one day Abū Yāsir ibn Akhtab, Nāfi' ibn Abū Nāfi', 'Āzar ibn Abū 'Āzar, Khālīd, Zayd, Izār and Ashya' came to the Prophet and asked him about the prophets whom he believed in. The Prophet read a verse from the Qur'an as a reply to the question:

We believe in Allah and what He has sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes, and what was given to Moses and Jesus, and what was given to the prophets

¹ Q. 3:66. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/304.

² Q. 3:67-68. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/302-306. See also al-Nisābūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, pp. 72-74.

from their Lord; we make no difference between any one of them, and we are submissive unto Him.¹

Hearing this, the Jews argued that Jesus was not a prophet, claiming that they did not believe in him and in anyone who believed in him.² The Qur'an in reply to this says:

Say (Muhammad): 'O people of the Book, do you disapprove of us for no other reason than that we believe in Allah, and the revelation that has come to us and that which came before us, and most of you are disobedient?''³

Another example of the dispute regarding Jesus is that pertaining to Sukayn and 'Adī ibn Zayd when they came to the Prophet and enquired whether any prophet had come after Moses, arguing that they do not know of God having sent down anything to humans after Moses.⁴ This included the denial of Jesus as well as the Prophet.

Controversy about Muhammad's prophethood

When the Prophet invited the Jews to accept Islam, they began to question his prophethood. It is well known among Muslim historians that the Jews expected that a prophet would come among the Arabs, and used to hope that the foretold Prophet would help them against the Aws and the Khazraj.⁵ When Allah sent the Prophet from among

¹ Q. 2:136. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 268. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/619.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/632.

³ Q. 5:59. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 4/632.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 265.

⁵ Even some Orientalists admit that there is truth in the narrative which indicates that the Jews had often told the Aws and the Khazraj about a prophet who would be sent soon. But they attempt to link the expectation of the coming of a prophet with the expectation of a messiah. See, for example, Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 116.

the Arabs they disbelieved in him and contradicted what they had formerly said about him, and denied his prophethood.¹

The Jews also argued that they did not believe in the Prophet because he did not bring any manifest signs or miracles, as the previous prophets had done. The Qur'an mentions that this Jewish request was only to justify their rejection of the Prophet:

They said: 'Allah took our promise not to believe in a messenger unless he showed us a sacrifice consumed by fire (from heaven).' Say (Muhammad): 'there came to you messengers before me, with clear signs and even with what you ask for: why then did you slay them if you are speaking the truth?'²

Controversy about changing the *qibla*

The Prophet offered his prayers facing Jerusalem for sixteen or seventeen months in Madina.³ During this period, the Prophet desired if he would offer his prayer in the direction of the Ka'ba for it was the direction of Abraham.⁴ At first, the Jews were pleased to see the Prophet facing their *qibla*, but when he changed the direction of his prayers towards Makka, they seriously disapproved of it.⁵ Accordingly, some Jews came to the Prophet arguing with him why he had changed his *qibla*, trying to persuade him that if he was to return to their *qibla*, they would follow him.⁶

¹ Q. 2:89, 7:157 and 61:6. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 257.

² Q. 3:183. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/538-539. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 4/287.

³ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/66. See also Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/241. Al-Ṭabarī mentions several views regarding the period of facing Jerusalem. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 2/5-6.

⁴ Q. 2:144.

⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 38, p. 71.

⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 258-259.

There are several views regarding the reason of choosing Jerusalem as a *qibla* in the beginning:

- (i) Al-Ḥasan and ‘Ikrima are of the opinion that the Prophet chose the *qibla* by his own judgment.¹
- (ii) Abū al-‘Āliya thinks that the Prophet chose Jerusalem to attract the hearts of the Jews to his religion.² However, one can not agree with this view because following the Jewish *qibla* could lead the Jews to believe that the Prophet would follow their religion and that the Prophet’s religion was an imitation of Judaism. This also would give the Jews the impression that there was no need to convert to Islam while Muhammad himself adopted Jewish belief.
- (iii) Al-Zajjāj thinks that the Prophet chose Jerusalem to examine the strength of faith of the Makkan Muslims, especially when he saw that they were in favour of facing the Ka‘ba, which represented the sacred house of their father, Abraham.³
- (iv) Ibn Abbās and the majority of the scholars mention that the Prophet was ordered to face Jerusalem by Allah’s decree which was later abrogated.⁴

Some writers insist that the sanctuary of Makka was a result of the Prophet’s rejection by the Jews.⁵ However, Hawting challenges this notion and cites many

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 2/6. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/146.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 2/6. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/146. The view of Abū al-‘Āliya mentioned above, seems to have attracted the attention of many writers. See Andrea, *Muhammad: The Man and His Faith*, p. 191.

³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/146.

⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/146. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 2/6. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma‘ād*, 3/67. Ibn Kathīr states that the first rule to be abrogated was the change of the *qibla*. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/252.

⁵ Newby, *A History of the Jews*, pp. 83-85. Andrae speaks of the enmity of the Jews to Muhammad, and considers that this enmity was the reason behind the change of the *qibla*. See Andrae, *Mohammad: The Man and His Faith*, p. 192. However, Ibn ‘Abbās points to the fact that the Prophet was looking forward to such a change since he was longing to face the Abraham’s *qibla*. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 2/23.

traditions to prove that the sanctuary of Makka cannot be dated to the time of conflicts with the Jews.¹

On reply to this assertion one also can cite the following details:

- (i) The Prophet, from the beginning, considered his religion as the same as Abraham's, and, therefore, he looked for a change during the period when he was facing Jerusalem.² The Qur'an shows the desire of the Prophet to get divine guidance in the matter of the *qibla*.³
- (ii) Muslim sources mention that the Prophet faced Jerusalem as the *qibla* in Makka. For example, Ibn Ishāq mentions that when some of the people of Madina went to Makka to conclude with the Prophet the agreement concerning his Emigration, their leader al-Barā' ibn Ma'rūr refused to offer his prayer in the direction of Jerusalem instead of the Ka'ba, while the Prophet and his Companions offered their prayers facing Jerusalem.⁴
- (iii) One expects that the Prophet would have kept the Ka'ba in favour of the Quraysh since the aim of his emigration to Madina was to take Makka.

The above-mentioned details suggest that the Jews of Madina had nothing to do with the change of the *qibla*, and that there is no way to think that the Prophet had at any time given up the Ka'ba in favour of any other place.

¹ Hawting, "The Origins of the Muslim Sanctuary", *Studies on First Century of Islamic Society*, Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 1982, p. 28-29.

² Q. 2:144. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, trans., 1/35. Andrae states that from the beginning the temple of Muhammad's native city was for him the House of Allah. See Andrae, *Muhammad the Man and His Faith*, p. 193.

³ Q. 2:144. This verse shows the sincere desire of the Prophet to seek light from above in the matter of the *qibla*, 'We see the turning of your face (for guidance) to the heavens.' Q. 2:144. See also Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, comments No. 147, p. 59.

⁴ Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1/318.

Studying of the event of the change of the *qibla* shows that the people were divided into several groups regarding this change:

- (i) The believers rejoiced and felt relieved and welcomed the new *qibla*.¹
- (ii) The hypocrites became stronger when they found something with which to accuse the Prophet of hesitation and doubt.²
- (iii) The polytheists of Makka thought that this change was a type of hesitation and thought that the Prophet would return to their *qibla*, the Ka'ba.³
- (iv) The Jews in Madina took this opportunity to say that if Jerusalem was the right *qibla* then the Prophet had left the right one, and if it was the false *qibla* then his previous prayers were all in vain.⁴ It seems that this change of the *qibla* was a good opportunity for Muhammad's opposition to spread doubts, especially regarding the acceptance of the previous prayers of the Muslims.⁵

The above discussion of some areas of controversy aims to demonstrate the growing number of controversial cases between Muhammad and the Jews in Madina which led to more hostility, and embittered their relationship.

f. Other causes of hostility between Muslims and Jews

The Jews witnessed the continuing rapid spread of Islam throughout the clans of Madina day by day. They saw that the tribes of Madina who had engaged in civil wars were now

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 2/14.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 2/14.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 2/15.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 2/15.

⁵ The Qur'an calls those who employed the change of the *qibla* to spread doubt among the Muslims *sufahā'*. Al-Ṭabarī mentions many *hadīths* to support the view that the *sufahā'* were from the Jews and the hypocrites of Madina. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 2/3-4. See also al-Nīsābūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, p. 30.

one unified community. They also realised that the Prophet was not willing to compromise his religion with theirs, especially after the change of the *qibla*. The emigrants started to compete with the Jews in the markets and in their trading, which threatened Jewish trade in Madina since the Makkans were experienced traders.¹ They saw that the Prophet was inviting them to Islam although he was not from among the Children of Israel. The Jews saw that their allies, the Aws and the Khazraj, had turned away from them and become the allies of Muhammad. They saw that the Prophet had started to teach the doctrine that all human beings are sprung from the same parents and belong to one brotherhood, and that they are all equal and no one can claim superiority over others.² When they saw all of these radical changes in Madina, they began to argue with the Prophet and his companions, posing challenging questions in the presence of his companions, and trying to throw obstacles in the way of the Muslim community. It seems that, to stop the further progress of Islam, the total communications media of the time were employed against the Prophet, especially poems.

The following are some examples of these attempted obstacles:

1. Muslim historians report that one day a Jew called Shās ibn Qays passed by a number of the people from the tribes of the Aws and the Khazraj who had gathered in a meeting to discuss some affairs. When Shās saw their amity and unity due to Islam in contrast to their past enmity in pagan times, he became enraged and said, ‘The chiefs of

¹ Bashier refers to this fear of the Jews regarding their trades in Madina. He mentions that the presence of some experience Companions who emigrated to Madina, such as ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, must have indicated to the Jews of Banū Qaynuqā’ that they had, from that time on, to put up with some measure of competition from the equally trade-oriented Makkans. See Bashier, *Sunshine at Madina*, p. 67. Regarding the experiences of the Makkans in the field of trade, Haykal remarks that the Makkans could, by trade, convert the sand of desert into gold. See Haykal, *Muhammad al-Mathal al-Kāmil*, p. 237.

² Q. 4:1, 21:92, 2:213, 39:6 and 49:13.

Banū Qayla in this country having united, there will be no firm place for us with them.’ Shās issued an order to a Jewish youth, who was with him, to go to them and sit with them and mention the Battle of Bu‘āth, a civil war that took place between the Aws and the Khazraj. Thereupon, the people began to quarrel and boast among one another until two men of the two clans leapt up, Aws ibn Qayzī from the Aws, and Jabbār ibn Sakhr from the Khazraj. They began to quarrel and challenge one another until one of them said, ‘If you wish we will do the same again.’ Thereupon both sides became enraged and said, ‘We will; your meeting-place is outside.’ Then they shouted, ‘To arms’ and they went out to fight. The news then reached the Prophet, and he pacified the whole situation. Concerning this civil strife, the Qur’an reminds the Muslims not to obey some of the People of the Book who desire division among the united Muslim community.¹

2. The Jews employed poets to accuse the Muslims in Madina of dishonouring by submitting to an outsider, i.e. Muhammad. Many poets, such as Abū ‘Aḥak, ‘Aṣmā’, the daughter of Marwān, Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf and others, used their poems to insult the Prophet and the helpers of Madina. For example, Abū ‘Aḥak taunted the Aws and the Khazraj in the following way:

A rider who came to them split them in two,
(He says): ‘This is permitted, this is forbidden’
to all kinds of things.
Had you believed in glory or kinship

¹ Q. 3:100-101. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 3/371. See also al-Nīsābūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, pp. 79-80. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 4/152-153.

You would have followed Tubba‘.¹

The last verse shows that Abū ‘Afak criticises the Aws and the Khazraj, asking, ‘Why you did not accept the *tubba‘* of the Yemen and now you accept the claim of a Makkan refugee?’ ‘Aṣmā’, who also followed in the footsteps of Abū ‘Afak, insulted the men of the Aws and the Khazraj because of their following the Prophet, and put them to shame.² Ka‘b ibn al-Ashraf also used to sing erotic prologues to the Prophet’s wives as well as insulting the newly converted Muslim women.³

3. When ‘Abd Allah ibn Sallām, became a Muslim, Huyayy ibn Akhtab, Ka‘b ibn Asad, Abū Nāfi‘ and others approached him, saying, ‘There is no prophethood amongst the Arabs and Muhammad is no more than a king,’ persuading Ibn Sallām to return to his previous religion, Judaism.⁴

4. When Islam became widespread in Madina and the Jews a minority, they were compelled to feign its acceptance, but their outward manners and morals were anti-Islamic. The Jews were known to be hypocrites by the Muslims of Madina because they covertly and overtly opposed the Muslims.⁵ Watt mentions that the Jewish tribe of Qaynuqā‘ were the confederates of Ibn Ubayy.⁶ Holt also mentions that many Jews had close links with ‘Abd Allah ibn Ubayy, the potential prince of Madina. Holt notes that

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 675.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 75-76. See also Robinson, *Mohammed*, trans. Anne Carter, New York: Pantheon Books, 1971. pp. 157-158.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 366-377. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/6-7. Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 246. Muhammad ibn Sallām al-Jumaḥī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu‘arā’*. p. 71.

⁴ Ḥabannaka, *Makā'id Yahūdiyya*, p. 42.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq mentions many names of hypocrites from the Arabs and the Jews who joined one another in taking opportunities to attack the Prophet. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 242-247.

⁶ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 181.

the Jews hoped to increase their political influence if ‘Abd Allah ibn Ubayy became ruler.¹ He also mentions that the Jews were unwilling and hesitant to admit that a non-Jew could be a prophet; therefore instead of accepting Muhammad, they began to criticise him.² In Makka, the convert Muslims had no worldly gains, and in many cases much to lose. However, in Madina, there were certain worldly reasons for entering the new religion, and these were steadily on the increase. Therefore, hypocrisy among some of the people of Madina including the Jews was becoming more evident as the political and financial status of the Muslims improved.

It is worth mentioning that some Jewish groups had committed themselves to the Prophet’s alliance and lived peacefully in Madina. It seems that at least three Jewish tribes, the confederates of Banū Sā‘ida, Banū Jusham and Banū Aws kept their covenant with the Prophet, as there is no reporting of a conflict with the Prophet from among these aforementioned groups.³

g. The Prophet’s response to the above-mentioned obstacles

The Prophet’s initial reaction to the presence of the Jews in Madina was one of acceptance and pleasure. He was eager to win their confidence, acceptance, and even friendship. He did his best to reach out to them. He visited their leading rabbis and chiefs, going to great pains to call upon them in their homes in their various settlements outside the centre of Madina. The Prophet even adopted the Jewish fashion of dividing

¹ Holt, *The Cambridge History*, Vol. 1A/43-44.

² Holt, *The Cambridge History*, Vol. 1A/43-44.

³ See, for example, Bashier, *Sunshine at Madina*, p. 101.

hair in the middle of the head.¹ There were some common practices between them since the Prophet prayed towards Jerusalem as they faced, and fasted the day of ‘*Āshūrā*’ as they fasted. The Prophet tried to reach some degree of mutual understanding and co-operation with them, giving them liberal terms in the pact of the constitution of Madina. Regardless of the effort of the Prophet to win them, the Jews continued to oppose him.

One concludes that the Prophet must have been quite dismayed by the unexpected unfriendly and harsh rejection that he got from the Jews. Nevertheless, the Prophet maintained his patience against the mockery of those who did not accept his message in Madina, but he remained cautious, in particular when he saw that the dispute with the Jews had increased rapidly. The Qur’an warned the Prophet to beware of those who worked against Islam from among the Jews and the hypocrites and to beware of those who tried to divide their unity.²

6. “Permission to fight has been given to the Muslims”

Permission to fight is given to those who are fought against, because they have been wronged, and surely, Allah is able to give them victory. Those who have been expelled from their homes unjustly only because they said: ‘Our Lord is Allah.’ For had it not been that Allah checks one set of people by means of another, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which the name of Allah is

¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1490, p. 699.

² Q. 63:4, and 5:49 respectively. See also 5:92, 4:71 and 4:102. Q. 3:100-106.

commemorated in abundant measure would surely have been pulled down.¹

This permission was the first occasion on which fighting was permitted.² There are several readings with regard to this verse:

- (i) *Udhina lilladhīna yuqāṭalūna* which means that permission to fight is given to those who are fought against.
- (ii) *Udhina lilladhīna yuqāṭilūna* which means that permission to fight is given to those who are fighting the polytheists.
- (iii) *Adhina lilladhīna yuqāṭilūna* which means that Allah has given permission to fight to those who are fighting the polytheists.

Al-Ṭabarī prefers the third reading but he suggests that the meanings of these three readings are close to one another.³ However, the historical context as we will mention in the next pages relates the permission to self-defence. Therefore, some commentators prefer the first reading, the reading of the People of Madina.⁴

To justify the permission to fight against those who wronged the Muslims, the verse points to the situation of the Muslims when they were wronged and persecuted for thirteen years in Makka after which they were forced to flee their homes and abandon their wealth. The Qur'an also justifies fighting when fighting is to remove oppression from those who are weak, ill treated and oppressed among men, women and children.⁵

¹ Q. 22:39-40. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 9/160.

² See, for example, Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, commentary No. 2816, p. 832.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 9/160.

⁴ See, for example, Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, commentary No. 2816, p. 832.

⁵ Q. 4:75.

Thus, the refusal of accepting Islam would not be a valid justification for war. Otherwise, Muslims would become oppressors of religious freedom, since the Qur'an confirms that there is no compulsion in religion.¹ However, some writers including Muslims define the term *qitāl* as the spread of Islam by arms. They believe that it is a duty on every Muslim to fight until the world is under the rule of Islam and must be controlled by a Muslim sovereign. These writers also believe that the unbelievers have only two choices, Islam or death.²

There are two major views regarding the date of this Qur'anic permission:

1. That this permission to fight was given just before the emigration to Madina and after the second 'Aqaba, when some people of Madina had made a pledge with the Prophet and agreed to fight against his enemy.³ Ibn Ishāq supports this opinion by mentioning that when the Madinan Muslims gave their pledge to the Prophet, he ordered them to return to their caravans. One of them, called al-'Abbās ibn 'Ubāda, said to the Prophet, 'By Allah, if you wish it we will fall on the people of Minā tomorrow with our swords.' The Prophet replied, 'We have not been commanded to do that.'⁴

2. That the exact date of this permission was after the Emigration and before the constitution of Madina. Al-Qurṭubī agrees with Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Jubayr who relate that this permission was given in Madina as this verse was the very first which spoke

¹ Q. 2:256. Saunders points to the tolerance of Islam when he comments on this verse. See Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 35. See also Ibn Zayd al-Mahmūd, *Majmū'at Rasā'il*, 2/625-678. Sayyid Sābiq, *Fiqh al-Sunna*, pp. 53-54.

² Gibb and Kramers, *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, article *jihād*, p. 89.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 213. Bashier argues that this permission has been given shortly afterwards before the emigration to Madina. See Bashier, *Sunshine at Madina*, pp. 88-89. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3/169. Cook, *Muhammad*, p. 53.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 204.

about fighting.¹ Ibn al-Qayyim argues that this permission was not given before the emigration because there was no *shawka* (power) for the Muslims in Makka. He also notes that verse 40 of *Sūrat al-Ḥajj* refers to those who had been expelled from their homes in defiance of their rights, which suggests that this permission was given after the emigration to Madina.²

The permission for war was given at a time when the Makkans had indiscriminately opposed the Muslims by all means possible. The Makkans did not give up their pursuit of the defenceless Muslims even when they were in Madina. Abū Dawūd relates that the Makkans sent ‘Abd Allah ibn Ubayy a strongly worded ultimatum ordering him to fight or expel the Prophet from Madina, otherwise they would launch a widespread military campaign that would exterminate his people.³ The Makkans also sent a threatening note to the Prophet himself which drove his companions to put personal security guards around his house for some period of time.⁴ All these incidents illustrate that, after the emigration to Madina, counter attack against the Makkans became a necessary means to defend the new state of the Muslims in Madina.⁵

¹ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 12/66.

² Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma‘ād*, 3/70. Many writers agree that this permission has been given after the emigration to Madina, such as Lings and al-Mubārakpūrī. See al-Mubārakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq*, trans. Dār al-Salām, pp. 200-201. Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 135.

³ Al-Mubārakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq*, trans. Dār al-Salām, pp. 199-201.

⁴ Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 6/230.

⁵ Cook notes that the emigration in itself did not have to lead to war. See Cook, *Muhammad*, p. 53. However, one notes that the attitude of the Quraysh towards the emigration to Madina shows that the Quraysh considered the emigration in itself as a dangerous move of the Prophet. They realised that the emigration would strengthen the position of the Prophet in Madina, and, therefore, they strived to catch the Prophet before he reached Madina. When they failed to do so, they followed every possible way to go after him even in Madina.

However, this permission had little if any significance in relation to the Jews in terms of the increasing hostility against them.¹ They were supposed to share responsibility with the Muslims in defending Madina against any intending enemy as was stated in the constitution. The Jews also were expected to aid the monotheistic Muslims against the polytheistic Makkans.

Section C: The relationship with the People of the Book from the Battle of Badr till the Prophet's death

As we mentioned above, the permission had little if any significance in relation to the Jews in terms of the increasing hostility against them. This section shows all major developments which caused conflicts between the Muslims and the People of the Book:

1. The relationship with the Jews from the Battle of Badr till the Prophet's death

The forthcoming passages highlight the main developments in relations between the Muslims and the Jews from the Battle of Badr till the Prophet's death, and illustrate the reasons why the relationship between them deteriorated:

a. The reaction of the Jews to the Battle of Badr

One cannot date the start of hostility between the Jews and the Muslims to a specific date. One cannot imagine that hostility in Madina began to flow within a few days, or

¹ Donner assumes that the Prophet from the beginning put in his head the idea that the Jews of Madina should be exiled in order to consolidate his control over Madina. See Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 62. As we mentioned above, events which happened before the Battle of Badr, however, show that the Prophet at the beginning showed a peaceful attitude towards the Jews and included them in the Constitution of Madina which would enable them to join the *umma* and exercise freely their religion.

after a particular incident, such as the Battle of Badr. What we know is that the Prophet, before the Battle of Badr, wrote a Constitution in which one finds no intention of hostility towards the Jews. It seems that the combination of Jewish public expression against the Prophet and secret contacts with his enemies demanded that the Prophet respond in a determined manner. However, one notes that conflicts began to appear between the Muslims and the Jews around the time of Badr, therefore we would consider that Badr was a turning point in the relationship between the two groups. The following episodes explain why the Battle of Badr was a turning point in the relationship between the Muslims and the Jews:

1. Just before Badr took place, during the sacred month of Rajab, the Prophet sent ‘Abd Allah ibn Jahsh to a place called Nakhla, between Makka and Ṭā’if, to find out what the people of the Quraysh were doing. As a result, one of the men of the Quraysh called Ibn al-Ḥadramī was killed.¹ Following this accident, the Quraysh started to spread fallacious rumours that the Muslims had violated the sacred month and shed blood therein. Some Jews, who were involved in this matter, hoping that this incident would bring war on the Prophet, punned and mocked the Prophet by making a connection between the name of ‘Amr ibn al-Ḥadramī and his killer Wāqid ibn ‘Abd Allah. They linked the name ‘Amr with the Arabic word ‘*amarat al-ḥarb*’ which means

¹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi*’, 3/40-43. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 286-289. The Qur’an points to the killing of Ibn al-Ḥadramī and mentions the reason why the Muslims breached the Arab customs with regard to the ‘Sacred Months’:

They ask you concerning fighting in the Sacred Months. Say: ‘Fighting therein is a great (transgression) but a greater (transgression) with Allah is to prevent people from following the way of Allah, to disbelieve in Him, to prevent access to al-Harām Mosque and to drive out its inhabitants. And the *fitnah* (i.e. doing any act of the previous acts) is worse than killing.’

Q. 2:217. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi* ‘*al-Bayān*, 2/359-365.

war has come to life, the name Ḥadramī with the Arabic word ‘*ḥadārat al-ḥarb*’ which means war is presented and linked the name Wāqid with the Arabic word ‘*waqadat al-ḥarb*’ which means war is kindled.¹

2. When ‘Abd Allah ibn Rawāha and Zayd ibn Ḥāritha were despatched to Madina to convey the glad tidings of the victory at Badr, some Jews with some other hypocrites yet again spread false reports to the effect that the Prophet had been killed. When they saw Zayd riding the Prophet’s she-camel al-Qaṣwā’, they further impressed their fabrication that Muhammad had been killed and that the Muslims had been defeated.² Some of them expressed their sorrow over the men of the Quraysh, saying, ‘Death is better than life, for the noblest of Arabs have been killed.’³

3. Islamic sources do not mention the presence of any Jews with the people of Madina at a place called al-Rawhā’ outside Madina where the latter welcomed the victorious Muslims. One would expect the Jews, as monotheists, to be delighted about this victory over the pagans. However, it seems that this victory brought discomfort and anxiety to the three main Jewish tribes in Madina and also to the hypocrites.⁴

4. It is reported that the Jews sent some poets to Makka bewailing those polytheists who were killed in Badr, whilst persuading them to take revenge on the Prophet.⁵

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 288. See also Andrae, *Muhammad, The Man and His Faith*, p. 199.

² Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/115.

³ Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 283. See also al-Mubārakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq*, trans. Dār al-Salām, p. 228. Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/121-122.

⁴ Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 176.

⁵ Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 182. See also Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, p. 256.

b. Banū Qaynuqā' (2 A.H.)

There are three assertions regarding the objectives of the Prophet's attack on the Jews of Banū Qaynuqā':

- (i) That some of the objectives of the Prophet's attack on the Qaynuqā' were to reward Sa'd ibn Mu'ādh and 'Ubāda ibn al-Sāmit, who were rivals or jealous of Ibn Ubayy, and to teach a lesson to Ibn Ubayy himself who was the friend of Qaynuqā'.¹
- (ii) That the victory in Badr led the Prophet to threaten the Jews with the same fate as the Quraysh if they did not respond to his message.²
- (iii) That the objective behind the campaign against the Jewish tribes in Madina was to have full control over trade in Madina.³

However, as has been discussed above, there are indications that the Jews after Badr became anxious and restless.⁴ The Prophet, likewise, became alert and concerned about the growing hostility of the Jews. The Qur'an reminded the Prophet:

If you fear treachery from any people, throw back (their covenant) to them, for Allah likes not the treacherous.⁵

Al-Zurqānī states that this verse refers to the Jews of Qaynuqā' and reminded the Prophet to be warned of their treachery. He mentions that the Jews of Banū Qaynuqā' were the bravest, the richest and the strongest in their hatred towards Muslims at that

¹ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 181.

² Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 209. See also Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 239. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests*, p. 63.

³ See, for example, Shaban, *Islamic History*, pp. 13-14.

⁴ Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/121. See also Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 2/33. Jandora, *The March From Madina*, p. 34. Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 182.

⁵ Q. 8:58. See al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/121-122.

time, which explains why they opposed the Prophet and expressed vehemently their ill feelings towards him.¹ Seeing this, the Prophet went to their assembly in their market place to remind them of the seriousness of breaking their covenant. The Jews' reply was as follows:

O Muhammad, you seem to think that we are your people (the Makkans). Do not deceive yourself because you encountered a people with no knowledge of war and got the better of them, for by God if we fight you, you will find that we are real men.²

A few days later, in the same market place where the meeting with the Prophet was held, another incident occurred which brought things to a climax. A Muslim woman who had come to sell or exchange some goods was grossly insulted. A Jewish goldsmith provoked a Muslim woman whose private parts become uncovered when he tied the edge of her garment to her back. A Helper who happened to be present came to her rescue and as a result the offender was killed in the midst of a fight. Thereupon, the Jews avenged their companion by killing the Muslim. His family then demanded vengeance and proceeded to rouse up the Helpers against the Qaynuqā'. As a result, blood had been shed on both sides.³

An important question that arises is why did not the Prophet solve this conflict by other means? It seems that there were cumulative reasons which caused the Prophet to solve the problematic issue from its root like this. He believed that any danger which

¹ Al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib*, 2/455.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 363. Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/176. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/192. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/3. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 2/33.

³ Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/176-177. See also Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 3/70.

occurred in Madina in those critical days would weaken the Muslims and enable the opposition to overpower them. Moreover, it is well known that the Arabs used to deal with matters of women's dignity and honour very seriously. Lings mentions that this affair could easily have been settled and reduced to its true proportions if the Jews had accepted the arbitration of the Prophet in accordance with the covenant of Madina.¹ When this incident happened the Muslims believed that the Jews had violated the covenant and began to act against Muslims. It seems that the Jews had finally decided to show the Prophet that their recent threats had not been empty words, since they had the ability to muster an army of seven hundred men which was more than double the Muslims' army at Badr.²

The Jews of Qaynuqā' as well as the hypocrites indeed became increasingly active in their opposition to the Muslims after the Battle of Badr.³ Lings, after citing the verse, 'If good befall you, it is evil in their eyes, and if evil befall you they rejoice thereat,'⁴ remarks that this was demonstrated by the Jews' reaction to the victory at Badr.⁵ The contact between the hypocrites and the Jews at that time was strong. Therefore, when the Prophet decided to take action against the Jews of Qaynuqā', the one who asked the Prophet to deal kindly with them was 'Abd Allah ibn Ubayy, although he showed no sign of allegiance to the Jews except some promises. He, at that time, expressed his concerns, asking the Prophet to deal kindly with them because they

¹ Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 161.

² Francesco Gabrieli considers the incident which happened in the market of Banū Qaynuqā' to a Muslim woman was a trivial but Muhammad took advantage of it to besiege them. See Gabrieli, *Muhammad and The Conquest of Islam*, p. 70.

³ Watt, *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*, p. 97.

⁴ Q. 3:120.

⁵ Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 160.

had protected him from his enemies, and he feared that circumstances might change.¹ He tried again to convince the Prophet to allow the Jews to remain in Madina but the Prophet ordered them to leave Madina.²

‘Ubāda ibn al-Ṣāmit took charge of the Jews of Qaynuqā’ and went with them until they reached a mountain called Dhubāb near Madina, and then told them to go as far as they could.³ Ibn Ubayy upbraided ‘Ubāda for the part he had taken in abandoning their allies and aiding in their exile, which indicates the strong link between the Jews and the hypocrites in Madina.⁴ The Jews went to Wādī al-Qurā and stayed there and later on some of them departed to a town called Adhri‘āt in al-Balqā’ near Amman.⁵

c. Banū al-Nadir (4 A.H.)

As we mentioned, the Battle of Badr drove the people of Arabia to increase their pressure on the Muslims. As a result, the Muslims suffered three losses after Badr, the defeat at Uhud, the massacre of at least four Muslims or perhaps more on the day of al-Rajī’,⁶ and the massacre of at least forty or seventy Muslims at Bi’r Ma‘ūna.⁷ The setback at Uhud left a bad impact on the reputation of the Muslims. The dignity of the Muslims in people’s eyes was impaired. This situation led the Jews of Madina as well as

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/480. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 363-364. Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/178-179. Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 241-242.

² Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 292. It seems that the Jews of Qaynuqā’ were confident at that time that Ibn Ubayy no longer had any power to help them. See Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 185.

³ Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/179.

⁴ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, pp. 242-243.

⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/481. See also al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/180.

⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 426-433. See also al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/346. Ibn al-Athīr and al-Haythamī mention that they were six men. See Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 2/59. Al-Haythamī, *Majma’ al-Zawā’id*, 6/202.

⁷ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 433-437. Al-Wāqidī believes that forty Muslims were killed at Bi’r Ma‘ūna. See al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/346. Al-Haythamī mention that seventy men were killed at Bi’r Ma‘ūna. See al-Haythamī, *Majma’ al-Zawā’id*, 6/128.

the Makkans to declare publicly their enmity to the Muslims and to prepare to attack them soon.¹

The following examples illustrate how the Jews of al-Nadir reacted to these events, and show their attitude towards the Muslims during that period:

1. When Abū Sufyān returned to Makka and the Quraysh fugitives returned from Badr, he swore that he would abstain from sexual intercourse until he had raided the Prophet. He sallied forth with two hundred riders from the Quraysh to fulfil his vow. He took the Najd road and stopped by the upper part of a watercourse which led to a mountain called Thayb about one post distance from Madina. Then he sallied forth by night and came to the Jewish tribe of al-Nadīr under the cover of darkness. He came to Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab and knocked on his door, but as Ḥuyayy was afraid of him he refused to open the door. Seeing this, Abū Sufyān went to Sallām ibn Mishkam who was their chief at that time and keeper of the public purse. Sallām gave him permission to come in and entertained him with food and drink. Sallām, knowing about the mission of Abū Sufyān, gave him secret information about the Muslims in Madina. Abū Sufyān rejoined his people at the end of the night and sent some of them to Madina. They came to an outlying district called al-‘Urayḍ, and there, they burnt some young palm-trees, killed a Muslim and an ally of his, and then returned. In describing the good relationship

¹ Armstrong in her book mentions that the expulsion of Qaynuqā‘ was political, since it was a dangerous time for the Muslims in Madina who knew that they had to expect a massive attack from Makka and simply could not afford to harbour an enemy within. See Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 185.

between the Quraysh and the Jews, Abū Sufyān in his poem mentions that Sallām gave him a good type of wine and refreshed him in full measure despite his haste.¹

2. The Prophet himself went to the Banū al-Nadīr to ask for their help in paying the blood wit for the two men of the Banū ‘Āmir whom ‘Āmir ibn Umayya al-Ḍamrī had killed in revenge. The Banū ‘Āmir were the allies of the Banū al-Nadīr. There was a certain procedure in sharing the blood wit amongst allies at that time. Therefore, the Prophet expected that the Jews would help him. They answered courteously, promised assistance, and invited him to sit down while they made ready a meal. At that time, the Jews took counsel with one another and decided that they would get rid of the Prophet. In order to do so, one of them was asked to go on the top of the house and drop a rock on the Prophet while he was sitting by the wall of one of their houses.² The Prophet received news of their decision from heaven which led him to return to Madina, prepare for war and march against them.³

Being satisfied that the expedition against al-Nadir was justified, the Prophet sent Muhammad ibn Maslama to inform them of their treachery and give them ten days

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 361. See also Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 79.

² The one who was asked to go on the top of the house and drop a rock on the Prophet was ‘Amr ibn Jihāsh. See al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/364-365. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma‘ād*, 3/127. The Qur’an also points to this incident of Banū al-Nadīr:

O you who believe, remember the favour of Allah unto you when some people desired to stretch out their hands against you, but Allah held back their hands from you.

See Q. 5: 11. Regarding the reason of the revelation of this verse al-Nisābūrī relates on the authority of Mujāhid, al-Kalbī and ‘Ikrima that this verse has revealed in connection to the Banū al-Nadīr who planned to kill Muhammad when he went to them and ask them to help the Muslims in paying the blood wit of the two men who were killed accidentally by a Muslim. See al-Nisābūrī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, p. 132. Al-Tabarī also supports the view that this verse refers to Banū al-Nadīr and related many *hadīths* on the authority of ‘Āsim ibn ‘Amr, ‘Abd Allah ibn Abū Bakr, Mujāhid, Yazīd ibn Abī Ziyād, ‘Abd Allah ibn Kathīr and ‘Ikrima. See al-Tabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 4/487. See also Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 2/64-65. However, Muir mentions that there is no mention in the Qur’an about the incident when the Jews of al-Nadīr planned to kill the Prophet. See Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 281.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 437. See also al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/364-365.

to leave.¹ Because the relation between Ibn Ubayy and the Jews was strong, Ibn Ubayy sent two of his men, Suwayd and Dā'is, to the Jews advising them not to surrender, as he would fight with them.² The Jews waited for the help of Ibn Ubayy which they were promised but they got nothing. The Qur'an points to this:

Have you not observed the hypocrites who say to their disbelieving friends among the People of the Book: 'If you are expelled we too will go out with you, and we will never hearken to any one in your affair, and if you are attacked we will help you... If they are expelled they will never go out with them, and if they are attacked they will never help them.'³

Afterwards, the Muslims attacked the Jews and caused them to take refuge in their forts. The Prophet agreed to deport them and spare their lives on condition that they would retain all the property they could carry on their camels, except for their armour.⁴ They loaded their camels, and destroyed their houses. Some headed to Khaybar and others to Syria.⁵

After the expulsion of al-Nadir, the Muslims regained some of their glory in Madina which allowed them a feeling of greater security. However, the Jews, having been expelled to Khaybar and other far areas, were keen to take revenge on Muhammad. They continued to incite and rally the confederates against the Muslims.⁶ Some chiefs of

¹ See al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/3366.

² Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/368.

³ Q. 59:11-12.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 437-439.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 439.

⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/90.

al-Nadir and Banū Wā'il, such as Ḥuyayy ibn Akhtab, Sallām ibn Abī al-Huqayq and Hawdha ibn Qays al-Wā'ilī, went to Makka and invited the Makkans to join them in an attack against Madina.¹ An incident which happened when the Jewish delegates went to Makka also shows the hostile attitude of al-Nadir towards Muhammad at that time. The Makkans asked the Jews, 'You are a people of the scripture and know the nature of our dispute with Muhammad. Is our religion best or his?' The Jews replied, 'Certainly yours is better than his.'

After they had made their agreement with Quraysh they went to Ghatafān who also agreed to join. Quraysh and Ghatafān and their allies from among the Banū Kināna, as well as the people of Tihāma with their followers from Najd, prepared themselves for battle. Ḥuyayy ibn Akhtab of al-Nadir visited the Banū Qurayza to encourage their leader to join them. Huyayy told their leader, Ka'b ibn Asad al-Qurazī, that Quraysh and Ghatafān were gathered to fight Muhammad and they promised that they would not depart until they had made an end of the Prophet and his followers. In the beginning Ka'b refused and said that he was in treaty with the Prophet. Ḥuyayy kept wheedling Ka'b until he agreed to break his covenant with Muhammad and to fight beside the confederates. As a result, a great army of ten thousand soldiers, and may have outnumbered all the Muslims in Madina, was gathered around Madina.²

¹ Q. 4:51. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/94. See also Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/90. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 450. Al-Qurṭubī mentions that those who went to Makka from the Jews were seventy riders. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 5/239. Watt also remarks that the Jews of al-Nadir played a considerable part in the formation of the great confederacy to besiege Madina. See Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 212.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 452-453. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/93. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/103.

In conclusion, one finds that those Jews who were expelled from Madina played the main part of bringing a large army to fight the Prophet, and later caused the Banū Qurayṣa to break their covenant with him. Therefore, the Prophet seems to have learnt a lesson from the behaviour of al-Nadir, and would later deal with the Jews of Qurayṣa differently when they broke their covenant.

d. Banū Qurayṣa (5 A.H.)¹

As we mentioned above, the Jews of Qurayṣa had agreed to confederate with Quraysh and the tribe of Ghatafān at the moment of crisis, and had been on the verge of attacking the Muslims in their rear while the confederates were desperate to find access to enter Madina. They had been listening to Ḥuyayy ibn Akhtab, the leader of Banū al-Nadir, who was in exile in Khaybar at that time. He convinced their leader Ka'b to be ready in order to fight the Prophet and that they would rid themselves of him once and for all.² When the news of breaking their covenant reached the Prophet, he sent Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, who was the chief of Aws, and Sa'd ibn 'Ubāda, who was the chief of the Khazraj, together with 'Abd Allah ibn Rawāḥa and Khawwāt ibn Jubayr to investigate whether Banū Qurayṣa were still loyal to their covenant or not. When they reached there, they found that the situation was even more deplorable than they had heard it would be. Both sides entered in great dispute and began to be insulting towards each other.³ Lings mentions that the Banū Qurayṣa did not pay attention to them because they

¹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/135.

² Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 2/71.

³ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/103. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 453. Al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/93.

were too confident of the victory of the Quraysh according to the misjudgement of Huyayy, the leader of Banū al-Nadīr.¹

As the troops gathered around Madīna, the situation became serious, and fear began to be felt by the Muslims which worsened the situation of them in Madīna. The Qur'an points to this critical situation of the Muslims at that time:

Remember when they came upon you from above you and from below you, and when the eyes grew wild and the hearts reached to the throats, and you were harbouring doubts about Allah.²

While the confederates were surrounding Madīna from all sides except that of Qurayza, a Jew acted as a spy for Quraysh inside Madīna. Ṣafīyya, the daughter of 'Abd al-Muttalib, noticed that a Jew came along one of the forts of Madīna and began to look round as Banū Qurayza were at war. When Safīyya feared that this Jew would carry their news to the enemy she managed to kill him.³

The ditch, the stormy weather and the plan which was carried out by Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd, were the factors which played a great role in the defeat of the confederates.⁴ After their defeat, Quraysh and Ghatafān returned home with a feeling - created by Nu'aym - that Qurayza had disappointed them. Meanwhile, Qurayza realised that they

¹ Lings, *Muhammad*, pp. 121-122.

² Q. 33:10. See al-Tabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 10/265-268. Al-Qurtubī refers to Mālik who mentions that those who came from above were the Jews of Qurayza. See al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 14/117.

³ Al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/96. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/108-109. Al-Haythamī, *Majma' al-Zawā'id*, 6/136. Guillaume's translation to this incident does not give the same meaning of Safīyya's statement. Guillaume mentioned that Safīyya said, 'The Banū Qurayza had gone to war and cut our communications with the apostle, and there was no one to protect us.' However, the translation of the original statement of Safīyya would be as follows, 'The Banū Qurayza had gone to war and broken what is in between them and the Prophet, i.e. the covenant, and, at the time, there was no one to protect us.' See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans. p. 458.

⁴ See the plan of Nu'aym in Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 458. See also al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/96-97. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/111-113.

were in great trouble when found that they had breached their covenant with the Prophet. Ḥuyayy ibn Akḥṭab, the leader of Banū al-Nadīr, also had to face the same fate as Qurayza since he stayed with them in their forts so as to fulfil his promise to Ka‘b, the leader of Qurayza. As a result, the Prophet besieged them for twenty-five days. When Ka‘b realised that the Prophet would not leave them without a punishment, he gave his people three alternatives, to accept Islam, to kill their wives and children and go to fight leaving no encumbrances behind, or to surprise Muhammad on the day of the Sabbath when he would not expect the Jews to attack him. They did not agree with any of these alternatives.¹ Therefore, Ka‘b sent a message to the Prophet to send them Abū Lubāba, from the tribe of Aws, to consult him about their situation since maybe he would know about the Prophet’s reaction towards them. Abū Lubāba made a gesture indicating that the Prophet would kill them.² Abū Lubāba’s estimation of their punishment became true since he knew that treachery like this would lead to the killing of all the Muslims present in Madina. However, this hint from Abū Lubāba led Qurayza not to surrender to the Prophet until their situation had worsened and they saw that there was no flight. After twenty days, they surrendered to the judgement of the Prophet. The Qur’an points to their end:

And those of the People of the Book who backed them (the confederates) Allah brought them down from their forts and cast

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 462.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 462.

terror into their hearts, (so that) a group of them you killed, and a group you made captives.¹

The Prophet asked Sa'd ibn Mu'adh, the leader of the Aws and ally of Qurayza before he became a Muslim, to decide their fate. Sa'd gave the judgement that the men should be killed, their property divided and their women and children taken captive.²

The Prophet strongly supported this judgement of Sa'd who had acknowledged the danger of their act and probably asked himself what if the plan of Banū Qurayza succeeded and devastated the Muslims? The Prophet probably knew that leaving one of their allies to judge their fate would be more acceptable to them as well as to the Muslims who had suffered the consequence of the attack on Madina. It seems that Sa'd, who decided their fate, had learnt a lesson from the Banū al-Nadir. Therefore he gave a severe judgement. It is worth mentioning that Sa'd had been one of those who were sent to Qurayza at the moment of crisis and during the siege of Madina, and had, himself, seen their treachery.³ He saw that their move with Huyayy was an attempt to annihilate the Muslims, and he was therefore confident that his judgement was justified and based, firstly on true information and, secondly on the previous experience of their struggle with the Banū al-Nadir.

Lings makes a comparison between Sa'd ibn Mu'adh and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb when 'Umar opposed the decision which spared the lives of the prisoners at Badr. The opinion of 'Umar had been praised by the Qur'an which indicates that sometimes the

¹ Q. 33:26. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 10/283.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 424.

³ Ṭanṭāwī, *Banū Israel*, p. 290. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 453.

Qur'an urges the Muslims to make a hard decision.¹ Therefore, one notes that many of those who had been ransomed at Badr had come out against the Muslims at the Battle of Uḥud, and again at the Battle of the Trench. Similarly, the Battle of the Trench was another example which shows that the strength of the invaders had been largely due to the hostile activities of the exiled Jews of Banū al-Nadir. One therefore asks, 'What would have happened if the Prophet had put to death those among the Banū al-Nadir who were active in opposing him?' Lings answers this question saying, 'If these had been put to death instead of being allowed to go into exile, the invading army might have been halved, and Banū Qurayza would no doubt have remained faithful to their pact with the Prophet.'² Stewart mentions that there was no element of ethnic hatred in the treatment of Qurayza, and the men were killed not as Jews but as traitors in war.³ However, the life of the Prophet shows that at the conquest of Makka, the Prophet tolerated the Quraysh and said, 'Go your way for you are the freed ones.'⁴ The Prophet thus considered the avoidance of bloodshed as a virtue in itself. Therefore, he tolerated the other Jewish tribes.⁵

However, some writers are of the opinion that the Prophetic attitude towards the People of the Book developed as a result of the growth in Muslim power. Therefore,

¹ Q. 8:67. Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 231.

² Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 231.

³ Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, 83. Stewart mentions that fiercer punishments are reported in the Bible. Stewart refers to 1 Kings, 18:40 and 18:19. He also refers to Numbers, 31:14-18 and Deuteronomy, 20:10-18. See Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, P. 83. See also, Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, commentary No. 1362, p. 470.

⁴ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 553.

⁵ When the Prophet expelled Banū al-Nadīr, they left with a caravan of six hundred camels, carrying great amounts of their wealth and even taking with them their door-lintels. This shows that, although the Prophet decided to exile the Jews, this decision did not prevent him to tolerate the Jews and allowed them to take with them whatever they like from their belonging. See Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 81. See also Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 204.

they mention that the Prophet, realising that, after the failure of the Makkans to destroy Madina, his position was stronger, was not prepared to tolerate such conduct, and determined to remove this source of weakness from Madina and to teach a lesson to all enemies as well as potential enemies.¹

One remarks that although Qurayṣa were more loyal to the Prophet than the other two tribes of al-Nadīr and Qaynuqā', the Prophet's judgement on them was the hardest. His treatment of Qurayṣa indicates that there was a specific reason which caused the Prophet to accept the judgement of Sa'd and put four hundred fighters or more to death.² Therefore, the Prophet issued a quick order to his army that none should pray the afternoon prayer until they had reached Banū Qurayṣa territory. The Prophet in expelling the two Jewish tribes of al-Nadīr and Qaynuqā' seemed to have realised that he should not leave Banū Qurayṣa creating trouble around Madina, and become a suitable base to be used by the exiled Jews. The other reason which caused the Prophet to support the decision of Sa'd is that the dangerous treachery which Qurayṣa had harboured against Muslims that time was considered as greater than that of al-Nadīr and Qaynuqā', and it could lead to the destruction of Madina.³

¹ See, for example, Watt, *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*, p. 172.

² There are some doubts regarding the number of those who were put to death among the Qurayṣa. Ibn Ishāq mentions that 600 or 700 men from Qurayṣa were killed. However, some writers put the figure as high as 800 or 900. See Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, note No. 1, p. 309. Ibn Kathīr records a *ḥadīth* transmitted by al-Layth on the authority of Abū al-Zubayr saying that Jābir mentioned that only four hundred from the Qurayṣa were killed since the Muslims killed only the fighters of Qurayṣa. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/122-124.

³ See Q. 33:10. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 10/265-268. Armstrong, *Muhammad*, pp. 208.

One notes that this tragic event did not permanently colour the Qur'anic attitude to the Jews, therefore, during the time of the Prophet, some other small Jewish groups who remained in Madina were allowed to live in peace. It is also worth mentioning that three men from the Banū Hadl, who were not related to Qurayṣa or al-Nadir and who were staying with the Banū Qurayṣa at that time, accepted Islam on the night on which they surrendered to the Prophet.¹ The Prophet ordered that four hundred of the adult men including Huyayy and Ka'b, the two leaders of al-Nadir and Qurayṣa, be killed.² The Prophet excluded everyone under the age of adulthood, and all the women and children. Only a woman from Qurayṣa was killed because she had killed a Muslim called Khallād ibn Suwayd by flinging a grinding-stone upon him.³

e. The killing of some individual Jews

It appears that the Prophet issued permission to his companions to kill some Jews who actively instigated the people around Madina against the Muslims. Thus, the verbal insult on the Muslims was not a just cause to justify the killings of some individuals. As Stewart mentions all the victims presented a real danger to Islam.⁴ Armstrong also mentions that when the Jews of al-Nadir went to Muhammad to complain that he had killed one of their chiefs, Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, he told them that he could tolerate dissident thoughts and opinions but not seditious action.⁵ One finds that those who were killed individually by the Muslims were only a few people who were active in

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 463.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 464. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/124.

³ Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 3/335. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/126.

⁴ Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 79.

⁵ Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 185.

persuading the tribes against Muhammad and igniting war against him, such as Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf, Abū Rāfi', 'Aṣmā' the daughter of Marwān and Ibn Sunayna.¹ Moreover, Stewart notes that all the killings of individuals took place from the end of 2 A.H. to the end of 6 A.H., and they ceased completely afterwards, and these four years were critical for the Muslims.²

The next pages highlight the killing of the two Jews, Ibn al-Ashraf and Abū Rāfi':

Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf³

One of those who were killed by the Muslims was Ka'b ibn al-Ashraf. Many Muslim writers believe that the killing of Ibn al-Ashraf was justified. By contrast, others believe that this killing was unjustifiable considers his killing as one of the acts of cruelty which darken the pages of the Prophet's life.⁴ However, Muslim sources states the following reasons to justify his killing:

1. On hearing the news of the Muslims' victory at Badr, Ibn al-Ashraf got exasperated and swore that he would prefer death to life if the news were true.⁵ The Prophet did not take any notice of what Ibn al-Ashraf felt when hearing the news of Badr until this led him to entice the Makkans against the Muslims and kindle rancour

¹ Haykal, *Hayāt Muhammad*, pp. 289-290.

² Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 79.

³ Ibn al-Ashraf belonged to the tribe of Tayyi' but his mother belonged to Banū al-Nadir. As Watt mentions, Ibn al-Ashraf behaved as if he belonged to his mother's clan of al-Nadir. He was very rich man and a poet living in luxury in his fort south east of Madina at the rear of Banū al-Nadir's inhabitation. Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 210. See also al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib*, 2/8.

⁴ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 245.

⁵ Al-Wāqidi, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/121-122. See also Haykal, *Hayāt Muhammad*, p. 290.

against them.¹ Once Ibn al-Ashraf went to Makka to stay with al-Muttalib ibn Abī Wada‘a al-Sahmī. There, he tried to rekindle war and spurred them to fight against Muhammad by reciting some poems in which he bewailed the Makkans who had been thrown into the pit after being slain at Badr.² Watt also mentions that Ibn al-Ashraf went to Makka after Badr and composed anti-Muslim verses which had a wide circulation.³ As Stewart and Newby mention, for the Arabs, poetry could be as powerful as physical action.⁴

2. Ibn al-Ashraf composed amatory poems of an insulting nature about Muslim women, such as the insult of Umm al-Faḍl.⁵

3. The Prophet wanted to clean Madina at a hard time from the fifth column, particularly after the defeat of the Makkans at Badr and the growth of hostility towards the Muslims by their enemies who laid ambushes against the Muslims. To prevent Madina from becoming an easy target for the tribes of Arabia, the Prophet gave permission to the Muslims to kill some Jews who had caused trouble and ignited the fire of war.⁶ There were a few Jewish activists who deliberately joined a hostile campaign

¹ Al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib*, 2/8. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 365.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 365. See also al-Wāqidi, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/185. Stewart describes Ibn al-Ashraf as an important go-between, pointing to his communication with the Makkans. See *Unfolding Islam*, p. 79. Gabrieli, *Muhammad and the Conquests of Islam*, p. 70. Armstrong, *Muhammad*, pp. 182-183.

³ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 210. See also Armstrong, *Muhammad*, pp. 182-183.

⁴ Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 79. Newby agrees that the poetic word was often thought to have magical powers and served as the opening shots in any battle. See Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, p. 88.

⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/6-7. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 367. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 2/38. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, p. 88.

⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 369.

against the Muslims, such as Abū ‘Afik,¹ ‘Aṣmā’ the daughter of Marwān of the Banū Umayya ibn Zayd,² and Ibn Sunayna from the tribe of Banū Hāritha.³

4. Moreover, many *ḥadīths* state that there was a covenant between Ibn al-Ashraf and the Prophet that the latter would not support anyone against the Muslims. Instead, Ibn al-Ashraf broke his covenant which caused the Prophet to act against him.⁴

Abū Rāfi‘, Sallām ibn Abī al-Ḥuqayq

Sallām, as we mentioned, was one of those who mustered the troops of the confederates and later provided them with weapons and supplies.⁵ The hostility of Sallam seems to be great which caused the Companions to ask, ‘What man was as hostile to the Prophet as Sallām?’⁶ On seeing his hostile acts against the Muslims, the Companions asked the Prophet for permission to kill Sallām. It seems that it was not the normal Muslim way to kill individuals even if they were criminals. The Muslims in Madina were strong enough to kill any non-Muslims in the surrounding area of Madina at that time but there were rules which controlled this serious matter. It seems that the Islamic law does not allow the Muslims to take any soul without justification. If killing is justified, the head of the state, the Prophet at that time, should permit the Muslims to carry out the killing but not for the individuals to decide. One therefore concludes that the motive behind the killing of Sallām and some others was not because they were Jews or had a faith other than

¹ Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*. 1/174-175.

² Al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*. 1/172-173. See also Haykal, *Ḥayāt Muhammad*, p. 292. Al-Wāqidī mentions that when ‘Umayr ibn ‘Adi heard some poems of ‘Aṣmā’ against Islam he vowed to kill her which shows the hostile attitude of ‘Aṣmā’ towards Muslims. See al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*. 1/172-173

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 369. See also al-Wāqidī, *al-Maghāzī*, 1/191-192.

⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Sārīm al-Maslūl*, p. 71.

⁵ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 212.

⁶ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 482.

Islam but because they were actively involved in instigating people against the Muslims.¹

f. The expedition to Khaybar (7 A.H.)

After the raid on Qurayza, Madina became secure and the Muslims expected no more trouble from the inside in the way that the main three Jewish tribes had caused it before. However, there were two opponent groups who remained in power, and threatened its security, the Makkans to the south, and the Jewish inhabitants of Khaybar along with its neighbours, such as Fadak, Wādī al-Qura and Taymā' to the north. By the treaty of al-Ḥudaybiya, the Prophet had reached an agreement with the Makkans, and signed a peace treaty with them lasting ten years.² Only Ghatafān and Khaybar constituted a threat at the time. The three Jewish tribes, after being banished from Madina, resorted to Khaybar to change it into a hotbed of intrigue against the Prophet. The Prophet made war with them a first priority on his agenda shortly after the Hudaybiya treaty. This decision was for the following reasons:

- (i) The presence of some Jews from Khaybar who incited Quraysh to fight Muhammad in the Battle of the Ditch.³
- (ii) The Jews of Khaybar had united by an old alliance with the confederates, maintained contacts with Ghatafān and encouraged Qurayza to break their covenant with the Prophet

¹ Al-Ṭabarī relates that Sallām was one of those who went to Makka and Ghatafān before the Battle of the Ditch to incite them against the Muslims. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 11/ 265.

² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/164. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 499.

³ The Jews from Khaybar who incited the Quraysh the most to fight Muhammad in the Battle of the Ditch were Sallām ibn Abī al-Huqayq, Sallām ibn Mishkam and Kināna ibn al-Rabi'. See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/270.

- (iii) The Jews of Khaybar, living not far from the Arab tribes of the north, would lead the Jews to seek their help and vice versa.

For these reasons the Prophet came to the conclusion that he should lead a military campaign in order to forestall their threat and hostility.¹ There is also some evidence which illustrates the relationship between the Jews of Khaybar, the Jews of northern Arabia, Ghaṭafān and the hypocrites of Madina at that time:

- (i) That the Jews of Wādī al-Qurā, Taymā' and Khaybar gathered to constitute one army under the leadership of Asīr ibn Rizām to invade Madina while the Muslims were preparing to go to Makka in order to perform 'umra (the lesser pilgrimage) with the intention that they would take revenge for the killing of Qurayza.²
- (ii) That 'Abd Allah ibn Ubayy delegated an envoy to Khaybar warning them against the Muslims and inciting them to resist them since they outnumbered the Muslims and were better equipped. This made the Jews send Kināna ibn Abī al-Huqayq and Hawdha ibn Qays to seek help from Ghaṭafān, and give them half the yield of the fruit of their orchards if they managed to beat the Muslims.³
- (iii) That when Ghaṭafān heard that Muhammad had gone to conquer Khaybar, they gathered their men and went out to support the Jews of Khaybar.⁴ What supports

¹ Al-Qurṭubī in his comment on verses 18-20 of *Sūrat al-Faḥ*, mentions that the Qur'an makes connection between the treaty of the Ḥudaybiya and the raid on Khaybar. He thinks that this is to show that peace would not give its fruit unless the threat from other direction ceased which was the threat of Khaybar. Al-Qurṭubī relates that the spoils and the victory, which are mentioned in these three verses, are a reference to Khaybar. He also mentions that Allah gave his promise to those who attended at Ḥudaybiya that they would conquer Khaybar. See al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 16/236 and 16/230. Watt mentions that the Prophet had a straightforward reason for attacking Khaybar because they used their wealth to induce the neighbouring Arabs, in particular the strong tribe of Ghatafān, to join them against the Muslims. See Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 217.

² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/221. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/360.

³ Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 81. See also al-Mubārakpūrī, *al-Raḥīq*, trans. Dār al-Salām, P. 367

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/135.

this evidence is that when the Prophet marched from Madina he went with his army until he halted in Wadī al-Rajī‘, a place between Ghatafān and Khaybar, in which Ghatafān would gather to help the Jews. By doing this, the Prophet succeeded in preventing Ghatafān from joining the Jews which left Khaybar in isolation.

The Muslims came to Khaybar at night but did not attack it till morning. The Prophet gave the banner to ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib who asked the Prophet about the objective of fighting against the Jews at that moment. The Prophet mentioned to him that he should convey the message of Allah to the Jews first, ‘O ‘Ali, if Allah guides one person by your effort that would be better for you than to possessing the best type of camels.’¹ This prophet’s address shows that the Muslims should not use force whenever any other possible way was available to avoid bloodshed. The Prophet did not accept the intention of killing people because they had a different belief. He did not fight them to force them to become Muslims but only to stop their aggression against the Muslims. The Prophet did not fight the Jews because they were Jews but because he was responding to their confederacy with the polytheists of Arabia against him.² Instead of killing the Jews of Khaybar, the Prophet allowed them to remain in their homes, and give half of the produce to the Muslims.³ Because the Prophet was aware of their treachery he put a condition that they might have to evacuate Khaybar at any time.⁴ The Prophet appointed

¹ See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/1185.

² When the Prophet marched from Madina to Khaybar he went with the army until he halted in a valley called al-Rajī‘, halting between the men of Khaybar and their supporters the tribe of Ghatafān. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 511.

³ Lings mentions that giving half of the produce of Khaybar to the Muslims is considered as a contribution towards the Muslim state. See Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 267.

⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/138.

‘Abd Allah ibn Rawāha to collect the half of the produce.¹ When Ibn Rawāha was killed in the battle of Mu’ta, the Prophet appointed Jabbār ibn Sakhr ibn Khansā’ to collect it.²

The Jews of Khaybar seem to have continued to keep their promise for only a short time. The Muslims found ‘Abd Allah ibn Sahl in a pool among the dwellings of the Jews, with his neck broken. The Jews denied this murder, and the Prophet accepted their claim and paid the blood wit of Ibn Sahl.³ The Jews of Khaybar escaped the murder of Ibn Sahl but could not escape the attempt of the killing of the Prophet by a Jewish woman called Zaynab, the daughter of al-Hārith and the wife of Sallām ibn Mishkam. She offered the Prophet a roasted sheep she had poisoned. He took a mouthful of it but he did not like it, and therefore spat it out. After investigation, Zaynab confessed that she had poisoned it on the basis that if the eater was a king, she would rid herself of him, but should he be a prophet, he would be bound to learn about it. The Prophet, being satisfied with the truth of her allegation, connived at her treacherous attempt, but later on, he ordered that she be killed when one of the Muslims called Bishr ibn al-Barā’ died of the same poison.⁴

g. Fadak, Wādī al-Qurā and Taymā’

As a result of Khaybar, the Jews of Fadak (a village to the north of Khaybar), seeing that Khaybar had surrendered to the Prophet, hastened to make peace with him. He accepted their offer that they would keep half of their produce and the other half would go to the

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 525.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/140.

³ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/140. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 523-524.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/208-212. Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/138. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 470. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *kitāb al-Jizya*. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma’ād*, 3/335-336. Al-Haythamī, *Majma’ al-Zawā’id*, 6/156.

Muslims.¹ The question that arises here is why did Fadak send the Prophet an offer of surrender on the same terms as that of Khaybar? To answer the question one assumes that the Prophet intended to extend his campaign to reach all the Jews of the north who were involved with Khaybar in hostile activities against Madina. Therefore, Fadak, realising their close relation with Khaybar, expected that the Prophet would come to them soon and it would be better for them to surrender peacefully.

As mentioned above, the Jews of Wādī al-Qurā and Taymā' had agreed with the Jews of Khaybar to fight against the Muslims. Therefore, the Prophet, after the affair of Khaybar, moved to Wādī al-Qurā where the Jews, along with some pagan Arabs, were gathered together to defend their land. Prior to fighting, the Prophet first invited them to embrace Islam. Afterwards, fighting went on ceaselessly for nearly two days. As a result, Wādī al-Qurā surrendered to the Muslims, eleven men were killed and the Prophet agreed that its people would cultivate the land and give half of the produce to the Muslims.² When the Jews of Taymā' saw what had happened to their neighbours, the Jews of Khaybar, Fadak and Wādī al-Qurā, they accepted the same terms as Fadak did.³ In this way, the authority of the Prophet was established over all the Jewish tribes north of Madina.

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 523. See also al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/138.

² Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/354-355. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/212-213 and 4/218. Al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/138. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 516.

³ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/355. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/218.

2. General observations

Reaching the end of this section regarding the relation between the Muslims and the Jews permits us to cite the following observations:

1. The Constitution of Madina shows that at least three Jewish tribes committed themselves to the alliance of the Muslims and kept their covenant with the Prophet, they were the confederates of the Banū Sā'ida, the Banū Jusham and the Banū al-Aws. These tribes seem to have made full use of the rights and privileges accorded to them in the Constitution.¹ The sources do not indicate that there was any general exodus of the Jews during the Prophet's life, since the presence of the Jews in Madina after the expulsion of the three main Jewish clans from Madina seems to be supported by many references. Al-Qurtubī mentions that *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* was revealed after the Ḥudaybiya and prior to the expedition against the Jews of Khaybar. He mentions some *ḥadīths* to show that this *sūra* is among the last *sūras* which were revealed to the Prophet.² Ibn Kathīr also reports that this *sūra* is the last *sūra* which was revealed as a whole to the Prophet.³ This means that the references to the Jews, i.e. verses 46 and 47 of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, seeking the Prophet's judgement in their affairs and disputes would be meaningless if there were no Jews in Madina. There are many other pieces of information which show that some Jews continued to live in Madina till the death of the Prophet:

¹ Bashier, *Sunshine at Madina*, p. 101. Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 219.

² Al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/30-31.

³ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/3. Ibn Kathīr mentions many *ḥadīths* to support the view that *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* was revealed altogether to the Prophet in the last of his days. See Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 2/3.

- (i) Al-Qurṭubī reports that once a Jew from Fadak committed adultery and the Jews of Fadak wrote a letter to the Jews of Madina to ask the Prophet regarding his penalty;¹
- (ii) Ibn Sa'd mentions that the Prophet's expedition to Khaybar was very painful to the Jews who remained in Madina;²
- (iii) Al-Bukhārī records that the Prophet died while his iron armour was mortgaged to a Jew for some amount of barley.³
- (iv) Ibn Kathīr mentions that the Jews continued to live in Madina after Hudaibiya and supports his view by mentioning the incident when Labīd ibn A'sam from the Banū Zurayq bewitched the Prophet.⁴
- (v) It seems that some of these remaining Jews continued to offer opposition to the Muslims. Ibn Hishām also reports that when the Prophet ordered his Companions to prepare for an expedition against the Byzantines at Tabūk, the hypocrites assembled in the house of a Jew called Suwaylim, planning to encourage disaffection. When the Prophet learnt about their plan, he sent some of his Companions, under the leadership of Talha, to punish them.⁵
- (vi) Al-Wāqidi records another event showing that some Jews preferred to live with the Muslims in Madina even after the killing of Qurayza. He states that when 'Abd Allah ibn Ubayy became ill the Jews of Madina went to visit him and sat

¹ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 6/169.

² Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/106.

³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 4/106. See also Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/488.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Ṭafsīr*, 4/524. See also Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 384.

⁵ Ibn Hishām, *Sira*, 4/217-218.

close to him trying to comfort him. When he died, the Jews attended his funeral procession and became grieved.¹

These various incidents indicate that there were some Jews who continued to live alongside the Muslims in Madina, and that some of them were politically active and continued to offer opposition to the Muslims.

2. The Qur'an mentions that the killing of one person with no sacred cause is unacceptable and strongly rejected:

.... if anyone kills a person not in retaliation for murder, or to spread mischief in the land it is as if he has killed all mankind.²

Yūsuf Ali in his commentary on this verse mentions that nothing could be a stronger condemnation of individual assassination and revenge than this.³

Raḥmān mentions that, during the Prophet's life, the loss of life was insignificant as compared with his achievements.⁴ According to Raḥmān, the total loss of life in about 27 battles and 61 to 73 expeditions was three-hundred and four Muslims and seven-hundred and forty-eight non-Muslims.⁵ This number indicates that the Prophet although he had great power at the time, he managed to avoid killing in most of his raids on his enemies. The Prophet also imposed many restrictions on his warriors. There was not to be any violence against any person not believed to be at war against Islam.⁶ Therefore, Stewart considers the conduct of the Muslims in war as a complete

¹ Jawād, *al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-Arab*, 6/548. Ibn Ubayy died in Madina after the expedition to Tabūk in the year 9 A.H. See Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī al-Tārīkh*, 2/161.

² Q. 5:32.

³ Yūsuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, commentary No. 737, p. 257.

⁴ Raḥmān, *Muhammad: Blessing for Mankind*, p. 297.

⁵ Raḥmān, *Muhammad: Blessing for Mankind*, p. 297.

⁶ Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, pp. 75-76.

break with the Arab tradition of exacting vengeance from any member of the enemy's tribe.¹

3. Some writers criticise the killing of the Qurayza and consider it as an inhumane act.² Some writers, whilst commenting on the killing of the men of Qurayza, mention that the punishment of Qurayza at the hand of Muslims was milder than that prescribed for a vanquished foe in their own scripture.³ Israel Wilfonson remarks that the Muslims never hurt the feelings of the Jews or burnt their Book as the Romans did when they conquered Jerusalem in 70 A.D., or even as the Roman Catholic Church did in the seventh century in its treatment of the Jews in Spain.⁴ In contrast, in Spain, the Jews' situation flourished when the Muslims flourished, and diminished when the Muslims dwindled.⁵ Regardless of the Prophet's attempt to win the Jews, the Jews, as Watt remarks, had opposed the Muslims to the utmost of their ability.⁶ Therefore, one asks, if the confederates had succeeded in entering Madina with the help of the Qurayza and other Jewish tribes, would they have treated the Muslims differently and would they leave them to enjoy their peaceful life? On the other hand, one also asks what would have happened if the Jews had come to terms with the Prophet and kept their covenant instead of opposing him? And what was wiser for the Jews, to keep the covenant with the Prophet, ally with him and keep their own religion, or to be allied with the pagans and hypocrites of Arabia?

¹ Stewart, *Unfolding Islam*, p. 76.

² Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 215. See also Andrae, *Muhammad, The Man and His Faith*, p. 218.

³ See Deuteronomy, 20:12. See Lings, *Muhammad*, p. 232. Muhammad Ali, *Muhammad the Prophet*, pp. 163-164.

⁴ Wilfonson, *Tārīkh al-Yahūd*, p. 170.

⁵ Rivikin, Ellis, *The Shaping of Jewish History*, p. 138. See also Thomson, *Islam in Andalus*, pp. 139-158.

⁶ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 219. See also Andrae, *Muhammad, The Man and His Faith*, p. 218.

4. The Qur'an gives great respect for treaties held with non-Muslims in general.¹ The first 28 verses of *Sūrat al-Tawba*, which were revealed after the expedition to Tabūk when the position of the Prophet was strong, shows this respect for treaties, and explains the Qur'anic intention of avoiding killing even when dealing with the polytheists of Makka. Although these verses declare war against the polytheists, it pays great consideration for treaties and covenants. These verses show that Muslims must fulfil all treaties and covenants made with the polytheists till the end of their terms.² The Qur'an also opened the doors to these polytheists to become Muslims.³ If any polytheist seeks protection from the Muslims, they must grant him it, and then escort him to where he can be secure without, as al-Ṭabarī mentions, forcing him to become a Muslim.⁴

These verses mentioned above illustrate that the Prophet did not start war against the polytheists.⁵ Therefore, when the Qur'an declared war against the polytheists, it mentions the following justifications for declaring war against them:

- (i) The failure of these polytheists in fulfilling their treaties with the Muslims.⁶
- (ii) The violation of the covenants which the polytheists had made, as well as their attacks against Islam with disapproval and criticism.⁷
- (iii) The polytheists had expelled the Prophet from Makka, and attacked the Muslims first.¹ Even from the very beginning of the start of the Prophet's mission in Makka, they persecuted many Muslims for no justification other than their beliefs.

¹ Q. 2:177, 9:4, 9:7, 17:34 and 23:8.

² Q. 9:4 and 9:7. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/323.

³ Q. 9:5 and 9:11.

⁴ Q. 9:6. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/321.

⁵ Q. 9:13.

⁶ Q. 9:4, 9:12 and 9:13.

⁷ Q. 9:12.

3: The relationship with the Christians from the Battle of Badr till the Prophet's death

As mentioned in Section A, during the Makkan period the Prophet used to meet some individual Christians. When the emigrant Muslims went to Ethiopia, they also had the opportunity to come in contact with Christians and learn about Christianity since some of the emigrants lived alongside the Christians for years. Although the number of the Christians in the Ḥijāz was small, we find that the relationship between them and the Muslims was based on mutual respect and no conflicts are recorded.

During the Madinan period, there was also no conflict between the Muslims and the Christians until the Battle of Mu'ta took place in 7 A.H., which was the first encounter with the Christians of the north who were under the command of the Byzantines.

The next pages illustrate how and why this and other encounters happened:

a. Madina becomes the centre of dialogue

When Islam started to spread in Arabia, dialogue between Muslims and the People of the Book started to become a part of the daily life of Madina. This dialogue was held with delegations and individuals alike. One interesting dialogue was that with the Christians of Najrān who sent their delegations to Madina to meet the Prophet and discuss with him matters related to Jesus and Christianity. When this delegation arrived in Madina, they were allowed to stay at the Mosque, whereas other delegations were lodged in some Muslims' houses. They were also allowed to hold their service in the Mosque in

¹ Q. 9:13. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/331.

accordance with their religion.¹ Abū Ḥāritha, their bishop, spoke of Muhammad's hospitality mentioning that when they went to Madina, the Muslims honoured them and paid them subsidies.² Ibn Ishāq points to this delegation and mentions that sixty riders from the Christians of Najrān came to the Prophet, including fourteen nobles of whom three were in control of affairs. These three leaders were the 'Āqib, Abd al-Masīḥ, who was their chief adviser and whose opinion governed their policy, the Sayyid, whose name was al-Ayham, and who was their administrator, and Abū Ḥāritha ibn 'Alqama, from the tribe of Banū Bakr ibn Wā'il, who occupied a position of honour among his people as well as with the Christian emperor of Byzantium. Abū Ḥāritha had been granted this honour because he had a good knowledge of Christianity which enabled him to control their religious affairs and be their bishop. This deputation entered in a long debate with the Prophet regarding various issues.³ When the debate came to end, the Prophet invited them to resort to mutual invocation of a curse on those who were in the wrong but they rejected it and feared that this invocation of a curse would lead to their destruction.⁴ The Qur'an points to this:

Then whoever disputes with you concerning him (Jesus) after (all this) knowledge that has come to you, say (Muhammad): 'Come, let us summon our sons and your sons, our wives and your wives,

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 271. See also Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/357.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 271.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 271-277. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/293-294.

⁴ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/357-358.

ourselves and yourselves, then let us pray earnestly and invoke Allah's curse upon the liars.'¹

This delegation of Najrān also had the opportunity to meet some Jewish rabbis while they were with the Prophet. One can cite the following occasions of disputes taken place in Madina between the Jews and the Christians:

1. There was a big dispute which took place between the Jews and the Christians which caused a Jew called Rāfi' ibn Huraymala to say to a Christian, 'You have no standing,' and then denied Jesus and the Injīl. Hearing this, the Christian replied, 'You have no standing,' and then denied that Moses was a prophet, and also denied the Torah.² The Qur'an points to this argument:

The Jews say: 'The Christians have no standing;' and the Christians say: 'The Jews have no standing,' yet they read the scriptures. They do not know what they are talking about. Allah will judge between them on the day of resurrection concerning their controversy.'³

This verse mentions that each party denies what the other says. According to this verse, both the denial of Jesus and the denial of Moses are unreasonable, in particular, as both parties study the same scriptures.

¹ Q. 3:61. The pronoun 'fihī' in the above-mentioned verse, i.e. verse 3:61, refers to Jesus. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/295-296. Al-Ṭabarī also mentions that this previous verse has revealed in connection with the debate between the Prophet and the Christians of Najrān. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 3/293.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 258. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 1/542.

³ Q. 2:113.

2. Another example of a dispute between the Jews and the Christians when each party claimed entrance to paradise saying, ‘None shall enter paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian,’¹ and thinks that its religion is authentic and true.²

3. *Sūrat al-Baqara* points to another dispute when the Jews and the Christians say, ‘Become Jews or Christians and you will be following the right path,’³ with each party claiming that they are the rightly-guided ones.⁴

4. Once when Jewish rabbis and the Christians of Najrān were together in the presence of the Prophet, they broke into disputing. The rabbis claimed that Abraham was nothing but a Jew, and the Christians claimed that Abraham was a Christian.⁵ The Qur’an, however, explained that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian but a *hanīf* and that the nearest people to Abraham are those who follow his teachings.⁶ The Qur’an also points to another possibility that the Jews and the Christians might claim that not only was Abraham a Jew or a Christian but also his immediate descendants, ‘Do you say that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes were Jews or Christians?’⁷

The aforementioned examples suggest that the Jews and the Christians not only denied one another but also denied the religion of Islam since they pay no regard for it when it was said, ‘Become Jews or Christians and you will be following the right path.’

¹ Q. 2:111.

² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/73.

³ Q. 2:135.

⁴ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 2/136.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 260.

⁶ Q. 3:65-68. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 3/305-306.

⁷ Q. 2:140.

It seems that the Prophet used to listen to them and ask them to give evidence to prove their claim.¹

Before this delegation of Najrān left Madina, they asked the Prophet to send with them a man to judge between them in their affairs.² The Prophet sent with them Abū ‘Ubayda ‘Āmir ibn al-Jarrāh, advising him to judge between them faithfully in matters they disputed about.³ As a result of this dialogue, some of Najrani Christians converted to Islam, such as al-Sayyid, and al-‘Āqib.⁴ Others changed their attitude towards it, such as what happened with Abū Ḥāritha when he swore by God that Muhammad was the Prophet he was waiting for, but found it difficult to accept his prophethood while his people rejected it.⁵

The Prophet also granted the Christians of Najrān protection for their religion, churches and monastic institutions, as well as for their bishops and hermits, none of whom was to be removed from his abode.⁶ This spirit of tolerance towards the Christians continued even after the revelation of *Sūrat al-Tawba* which declared war against the polytheists, as well as against those who did not believe in Allah and the Day of Judgement among the People of the Book.⁷ The Muslims were tolerant of the People of

¹ Q. 2:111. See also Q. 2:135, 2:139, 3:20, 3:61, 3:64, 3:98-99, 5:59 and 5:68.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 3/298.

³ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 277. See also al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, No. 1689, p. 805.

⁴ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/358.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 271.

⁶ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/358. See also, Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma‘ād*, 3/636-637. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 2/162.

⁷ Levonian refers to Butler’s comment in his book, *The Arab Conquest of Egypt*, that even the Caliphs who came after the Prophet showed tolerance to the Christians. Butler relates that a Nestorian bishop wrote in A.D. 649 about the tolerance of the Muslims towards the Christians of Arabia at that time. See Levonian, *Islam and Christianity*, pp. 116-117.

the Book even though they possessed great power and triumph over the Makkans at that time.

b. Muslim contacts with surrounding rulers

The earliest contact between the Muslims and the neighbouring countries outside Arabia was that with Ethiopia when some Muslims made their way to seek refuge there. After the emigration to Madina, the news of Islam started to bloom. Madina accepted Islam, and the Quraysh entered into a peace treaty with the Prophet for ten years. The Prophet started to send envoys to convey his letters to the surrounding rulers, summoning them to accept Islam.

The Prophet proclaimed from the beginning that he had been sent to all mankind, and it is must on him to convey his message to them all.¹ Therefore, when he saw that the treaty of Ḥudaybiya had given him a taste of peace, he decided that the time had come to carry the message of Islam to the sovereigns of the neighbouring lands.² Many Islamic sources agree that the Prophet began to send his envoys to the monarchs of the neighbouring lands just after the truce of the Hudaybiya.³ However, Muir sheds

¹ See, for example, Q. 7:158.

² Watt and some other writers argue that all traditions regarding the Prophet's letters to the surrounding rulers are unreliable. They mention that the reason for introducing this tradition by Muslim historians was to show that Islam is a universal religion, and to justify the wars against Persia and Byzantine as wars that were fought only after these empires had been summoned to Islam. Nevertheless, Watt, regardless of his doubt about the reliability of all traditions regarding the Prophet's contacts with the surrounding rulers, mentions some of the contents of some letters sent to them. See Watt, *Muhammad, Prophet and Statesman*, p. 194-195.

³ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/258. Ibn Ishāq mentions that the Prophet sent the letters to the rulers of surrounding countries in the period between the Hudaybiya and the Prophet's death. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 653. Al-Bukhārī relates that the letters were sent abroad at the time when the Prophet had truce with the Quraysh which means that it happened after the Hudaybiya. See al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1/7. Ibn Kathīr mentions that there is no contradiction between the previous opinions. He mentions that the letters could be sent in the period between the Ḥudaybiya and the conquest of Makka. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/262.

doubts on the certainty of the letters sent by the Prophet to the rulers of surrounding countries.¹ Watt also does not accept that Muhammad sent any letter to the rulers of the surrounding lands simply because this move was not the move of a wise man like Muhammad.² He argues that because Muhammad was a wise man, he would have lost his head and sent letters abroad after the measure he obtained at al-Ḥudaybiya.³ Watt thinks that to appeal to these rulers at this period to accept Islam would have done more harm than good.⁴ However, one might ask, did Muhammad lose his head when he sent an army, just after Ḥudaybiya, to Mu'ta and Tabūk, and engaged in treaties with the people of the north? Did he lose his head when decided to send an army to Syria under the leadership of Usāma just shortly before his death?

Ibn Sa'd mentions that the Prophet sent letters to more than one hundred rulers or tribal heads and mentions their names.⁵ It seems that the Prophet only sent expeditions against those who attacked the Muslims and led campaigns against them, and restricted his activities to political contacts with those who did not do so. As part of this contact, the Prophet sent in one day the following six envoys:

- (i) 'Amr ibn Umayya al-Ḍamrī to the Negus of Ethiopia.
- (ii) Hātib ibn Abī Balta'a to Muqawqis, the ruler of Alexandria.⁶
- (iii) Diḥya al-Kalbī to Caesar, who was Heraclius the ruler of Rome.
- (iv) Shujā' ibn Wahp to al-Ḥārith, the king of the Ghassānids.

¹ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, note No. 1, p. 369. See also Armstrong, *Muhammad*, p. 211.

² Watt, *Muhammad at Madīna*, p. 345.

³ Watt, *Muhammad at Madīna*, p. 345.

⁴ Watt, *Muhammad at Madīna*, p. 345.

⁵ Ibn Sa'd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/258-291.

⁶ The name of this ruler is Jurayj ibn Mīnā al-Qibṭy. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4272.

- (v) ‘Abd Allah ibn Ḥudhāfa to the king of Persia.
- (vi) Salīt ibn ‘Amr al-‘Āmirī to Hawdha the chief of Yamāma.¹

c. The reaction of some surrounding rulers to the Prophet’s letters

The Negus

As we mentioned before, the Negus of the first emigration to Ethiopia became a Muslim at the hand of Ja‘far, but probably this letter was sent to different Negus.² If this was the same Negus, one assumes that at this time the Negus sent the Prophet a confirmation of his conversion to Islam. Ibn al-Athīr mentions that when the Negus received the letter, he sent sixty people with his son to Madina to meet the Prophet.³

The Muqawqis

The letter which was sent to the Muqawqis has been preserved to this day in the original, and a facsimile of it has been published and reads exactly as reported in the tradition.⁴ Regardless of disputes about the authenticity of the letter to the Muqawqis, Islamic sources relate that the Muqawqis accepted the letter of the Prophet and honoured it, and sent some presents to the Prophet though he did not accept Islam. The presents were a mule on which the Prophet would ride in person, and three slave girls: Mary, who was

¹ Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1/258-262. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/180. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 4/338. Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 2/95.

² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/262. Ibn Kathīr states that the Negus died well before the conquest of Makka. He mentions that this Negus was not a Muslim but was a different one. See Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/277.

³ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 2/97.

⁴ Muhammad ‘Ali, *Muhammad*, p. 182.

later married to the Prophet; Sīrīn who was married to Hassān ibn Thābit and another unnamed slave who was given to Muhammad ibn Qays al-‘Abdī.¹

Heraclius

The ruler of Rome, Heraclius, showed some interest in Islam when he received the Prophet’s letter. Heraclius carried the letter with respect and consulted one of his bishops about the Prophet and his letter. The bishop informed Heraclius that, according to his knowledge, Muhammad could be a prophet. Following this consultation, Heraclius assembled his men and told them that he would accept the Prophet’s invitation and believe in his prophethood. Heraclius tried to win his men over to his view of the Prophet and to persuade them to accept Islam for it would promote their welfare, but when saw that they disliked his idea of denouncing their religion, he pacified their resentment by assuring them that he only wanted to test their constancy to their old religion.

Heraclius continued to investigate the truth of the letter. He had sent a messenger to Abū Sufyān ibn Ḥarb while he was accompanying a caravan from the Quraysh. They were merchants doing business in Syria at the time when the Prophet had a truce with the Quraysh. When Heraclius invited Abū Sufyān and his men, they went to Jerusalem to meet him at his assembly. He called for his translator. Heraclius wanted to talk to the closest one to the Prophet among the Arabs who was Abū Sufyān, to make sure that he knew the Prophet well. Heraclius asked Abū Sufyān questions in front of the other Arabs and asked them to correct him if he told any lies. Abū Sufyān was in deadly

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/272.

hostility to Islam, but he believed that it was shameful to tell lies about Muhammad, especially in front of his Arab friends who knew Muhammad well. After finishing his questions, Heraclius was impressed with the account given by Abū Sufyān and declared that if Abū Sufyān was telling the truth, then Muhammad was a prophet, and if he could reach him then he would go immediately to meet him.¹ Heraclius could not afford to confess Islam openly, and passed away in the same state. Al-‘Asqalānī therefore was not sure whether Heraclius believed in Islam secretly, or remained in doubt until he passed away.²

Al-Ḥārith ibn Shammar

Al-Ḥārith, who was the governor of Busra in southern Syria, opposed and rejected the Prophet’s letter. When al-Ḥārith read the Prophet’s letter which was sent to him by Shujā‘ ibn Wahb he feared that Muhammad, by sending him this letter, wanted to take over his rule. He consulted Heraclius as to whether he should fight against Muhammad or not. Heraclius, who was celebrating his victory in Jerusalem over the Persians, gave no attention to him.

From the previous examples, one concludes that most of the independent Christian rulers treated the Prophet’s letters kindly. However, the Ghassānid ruler, al-Ḥārith, rejected the Prophet’s letter. As Watt suggests, the tribes along the road to Syria were less open to conversion than most of the tribes with whom the Prophet had to deal with.³ According to Watt, this related to the reason that they were largely or wholly

¹ See, for example, al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtasar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 7, p. 53-56.

² Al-‘Asqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, 1/44.

³ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 218.

Christian, and they also had a long tradition of association with the Byzantine Empire, and the prestige of the Byzantine Empire stood higher than ever before after its recovery and victory over the Persians.¹

When the Prophet sent al-Ḥārith ibn ‘Umayr to Shuraḥbīl ibn ‘Amr, one of the Arab chiefs on the Syrian border, Shuraḥbīl killed al-Ḥārith, disregarding all the laws of inter-tribal morality. This attitude of the Arab chiefs caused the Prophet to reject the killing of his messenger and decided to advance against him before they gathered their forces to fall upon the Muslims.

In order to know about their intentions, the Prophet sent Ka‘b ibn ‘Umayr al-Ghifārī with fifteen men to Dhāt al-Ṭalḥ, on the Syrian border. There, they found a great multitude assembled who were invited to Islam. A shower of arrows was the answer, and only one man survived.² Afterward, the Prophet became confident that the Arab tribes of the Syrian border represented a real threat to his messengers, and they might think of crushing the Muslims as they had recently crushed the Persians. This reason alongside the previous one caused the Prophet to advance against them, although this advance would bring new conflict not only with the Christian Arabs of the north but also with their masters, the Byzantines.

d. The start of conflict between Muslims and Christian

The forthcoming passages highlight the developments in relations between the Muslims and the Christians, and illustrate the reasons why the relationship between them had

¹ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 218.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/145.

deteriorated. It also shows that some of Syrian tribes had entered into peace treaties with the Muslims. These treaties paved the road for Islam to reach the masses of these tribes peacefully, and granted the Muslims some success in detaching tribes from the Byzantine Emperor.¹ A few years later, Islam became a vast empire. Among the reasons for the success of the Muslims was not the sword but, as Watt suggests, the attractiveness of Islam and its relevance as a religious and social system to the religious and social needs of people.²

The Battle of Mu'ta (7 A. H.)

This was the first battle to bring the Muslims and the Christians face to face in war.³ As we mentioned, after the brutal killing of al-Ḥārith ibn 'Umayr al-Azdī, the Prophet's envoy to the ruler of Busra, the Prophet found no excuse to disregard this killing of his envoy.⁴ He therefore prepared his army to march against the Byzantine vassal, Shuraḥbīl ibn 'Amr al-Ghassānī. The Arab chief Shuraḥbīl sought support from Heraclius who provided him with about one hundred thousand fighters to be added to another one hundred fighters from among the Arab tribes of Lakham, Judhām, al-Qayn, Baḥrā' and Balī.⁵ Because these tribes acknowledged the power of the Muslims, they gathered this huge number of troops. One of the Muslim commanders, 'Abd Allah ibn Rawāḥa, when he saw that the Muslims were worried about the huge army which was gathered there,

¹ Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, p. 224.

² Watt, *Muhammad at Madina*, pp. 69-70.

³ Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 32.

⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/381.

⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/382. Muir calls these tribes 'semi-Christians tribes of the desert.' See Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, note No. 2, p. 394.

reminded them about the Battle of Badr and how they gained victory over the Quraysh although the latter were three times as many as the Muslims.¹

After the killing of three Muslim leaders in the battle, Khālid ibn al-Walīd became the fourth leader who succeeded in ending the battle and managed to escape and return to Madina with little loss.²

When the Prophet knew about the huge number of the enemy compared to his army, he felt that these Arab tribes would not leave him alone after they had seen how the Muslims had managed to escape from Mu'ta with little loss. Meanwhile, the Prophet wanted his envoys to go on safely in their mission to convey Islam beyond the borders of Arabia. He realised that the Byzantines were controlling these tribes by force although Syria did not belong to Byzantium but was merely under their control. One asks, are the Muslims to be blamed for carrying their message peacefully to the Syrian, the Arabs or the Byzantines, who controlled them? The Prophet also did not accept to see their vassal chiefs killing his envoys. Therefore, he sent 'Amr ibn al-'Ās to some Arab tribes, such as the tribes of 'Abd Allah and Balī of north Arabia, encouraging them to stand against the other Arab tribes of Syria, and to collect some information about what they thought of the Muslims, especially after the Battle of Mu'ta.³

The Byzantines now started to think of Arabia and the Muslims. Their concern for their trade routes which crossed Arabia from north to south increased. They also thought that they would lose some of their client tribes in Syria, especially when some of

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 533.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 537.

³ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/273. See also Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 2/110. Al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/146.

these tribes began to make treaties with the Prophet or became Muslims. As a result, the Byzantines did not like to lose the support of their vassal Arabs in securing the south border of their Empire. They wanted to have full access for their armies when they advanced to attack the Persians, their enemy. The Byzantines thought that if the Prophet united the Arab tribes of Syria as well as the tribes of northern Arabia, he would threaten their rule. As a result, an attack upon the Muslims would at least hamper the spread of Islam and secure their borders. All in all, politically, the Byzantines worried about their relationship with the Ghassānids; economically they worried about their trade routes; and religiously they worried about their religion, in particular when they saw the new faith coming closer to their vassals.

The expedition to Tabūk (9 A. H.)

The Byzantines did not accept the result of Mu'ta when three thousand Muslim fighters managed to fight and then escape safely after losing only twelve men.¹ The Byzantines saw that Islam would spread among the people of Syria if they gave it the opportunity to do so, especially after the Prophet's envoys had carried the message to most rulers and governors in the Byzantine territories. One of those who converted to Islam was Farwa ibn 'Amr ibn al-Nāfira, the Byzantine governor of the tribe of Judhām. He sent a message to the Prophet that he had become Muslim. He also sent a white female mule to the Prophet as a gift. When the emperor heard about this contact with the Prophet, he ordered al-Hārith, the Ghassānid leader, to arrest him, and he did so. The emperor

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 4/259. Ibn Ishāq mentions that nine Muslims only have been killed in Mu'ta and mentions their names. See Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 540.

himself tried to convince Farwa to return to Christianity but Farwa refused to do so which resulted in his being crucified in Palestine as a penalty.¹

The Byzantines now started to deal seriously with the growing religion of Islam, in particular after the conquest of Makka. They decided to gather as many men as they could from the tribes of Lakhm, Judhām, ‘Āmila and others in a place called al-Balqā’ in the south of Jordan, and then to attack the Muslims in their own territory.

The following incidents indicate that at that time, there was some interference from the Byzantines in some Muslim affairs:

1. The first incident that illustrated this interference is that when Ka‘b ibn Mālik abstained from the raid on Tabūk with other two Muslims, the Prophet forbade any Muslim to speak to them. This continued for fifty days. Ka‘b however continued to pray with the Muslims in congregation and go round the markets of Madina. One day, while he was in the market, one of the Nabatean traders from Syria, who came to sell goods in Madina, asked for Ka‘b. When he found Ka‘b, the Nabatean gave him a letter from the king of Ghassān which read as follows:

We hear that your master has treated you badly. God has not put you in a house of humiliation and loss, so come to us and we will provide for you.²

Ka‘b took the letter and burned it.³ But it remained a witness that the Byzantines were alert to what was going on in Madina at that time. This incident shows that, after the

¹ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 5/86.

² Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 6/507. See also Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 5/86.

³ Al-Bukhārī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, trans. Khān, No. 1699, p. 815. See also Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, pp. 610-614. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, 6/507. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*,

Battle of Mu'ta, Islam alarmed the Byzantines who started to pay more attention to the Muslims.

2. The second incident is that after he left Madina and went to Syria, Abū 'Āmir al-Rāhib went to the Emperor of the Byzantines and asked for support against the Muslims. The Emperor promised him help and support and granted him citizenship. When Abū 'Āmir knew that the Prophet was preparing the Muslims to go to Tabūk, he contacted his friends among the hypocrites of Madina to build a mosque that would be a centre for attacking the Muslims and creating trouble among them. He told them that he would bring a huge army to fight against Muhammad. He chose the time when the Muslims were preparing themselves to leave for Tabūk because he expected that, this time, the Prophet would not return to Madina alive. When the Prophet did return back from Tabūk, the first thing he did in Madina was to order some of his companions to go and destroy this mosque of opposition.¹ The Qur'an refers to this plot:

Those who chose a mosque in opposition and unbelief, and to cause division among the believers and as an outpost for those who warred against Allah and His Messenger aforetime.²

Al-Ṭabarī relates on the authority of Abū Ja'far, Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, Ibn Jubayr, Qatāda, al-Ḍahhāk, Ibn Zayd and al-Layth that some hypocrites in Madina built this mosque in order for it to be a base for Abū 'Āmir al-Rāhib -when he returned to

5/25. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/581. Ibn al-Qayyim mentions that at that time of the story of Ka'b, the Ghassānids were preparing themselves to attack the Muslims. See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/581.

¹ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 609-610. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/470-471. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 5/21. Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'*, 8/231 and 8/235.

² Q. 9:107-110.

Madina- to cause division among the Muslims.¹ This incident shows that there was a good relationship between the Byzantines and the hypocrites of Madina at that time, i.e. just before the raid on Tabūk.

In response to the Byzantines' intervention and the growing threat from the north, the Prophet had two options: to stay in Madina till their enemy came and destroyed them, or to march against their enemy in self-defence and keep them outside the boundaries of Arabia. The Prophet would have chosen another suitable time to march against the Byzantines if he was the one who decided the battle in the first place. This was because at that time there were many difficulties that stood in the way, such as the hot weather at that time of the year, which meant that there was no water supply, the lengthy of journey, the shortage of weapons and armour, the fear of facing the well trained forces of the Byzantine Empire lurking in many hearts, and the lack of transportation which meant that there were many who could not afford to provide themselves with horses or camels.²

The Prophet, having chosen to march against the Byzantines, went with his army till he reached Tabūk, in the north of Arabia, but then found that the Byzantine army was not there. The Prophet stayed for ten days in Tabūk.³ The Muslims were then informed that when their enemy had heard about the coming of the Muslims, they preferred not to proceed but to stay in their lands and fortresses. The Prophet consulted his men about whether he should march against the Byzantines and attack them in their

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, 6/470-473.

² Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 5/3.

³ Ibn Sa'd mentions that the Prophet stayed for twenty days in Tabūk. See *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2/168.

territories, or to return to Madina. The Prophet, after a halt of twenty days and despite all the expenses and difficulties, returned safely to Madina. The Prophet could at that time have entertained his army by attacking a number of petty Christian tribes around Tabūk, but his mind was free from passion for territorial conquest as well as of conversion by force. This Prophet's conduct goes with what Robinson states regarding him when refers to some evidence which proves how successful the Prophet was in promoting religious tolerance.¹

But what caused the Christian tribes of Syria not to attack the Muslim army in Tabūk? It seems that the news of the Muslims and their growth in power, coupled with a recollection of the daring of the three thousand in facing two hundred thousand in the previous Battle of Mu'ta, dampened the spirit of the Ghassānids and caused the emperor himself to drop the idea of attacking the Muslims. As a result, some Arab tribes of the north hastened to make treaties with the Prophet and pay *jizya*. The first to come was Yūhanna ibn Ru'ba, the governor of Ayla in the Gulf of 'Aqaba.² The people of Adhruh and Jarbā' also came to make a treaty and agreed to pay *jizya*.³ Having agreed to pay the *jizya*, the Prophet granted these tribes protection and made several written agreements with them.⁴

After deciding to return home, the Prophet sent Khālīd ibn al-Walīd with five hundred fighters to Dūmat al-Jandal.⁵ The Prophet expected that the Ukaydir ibn 'Abd

¹ Robinson, *Islam*, p. 20.

² Al-Zurqānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāhib*, 3/360. See also Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-Buldān*, 4/422. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-Buldān*, p. 71.

³ Al-Maqrīzī, *Imtā' al-Asmā'*, 1/468. See also Ibn 'Asākir, *Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 1/421.

⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 5/16-17.

⁵ Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 607. Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 5/17. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Zād al-Ma'ād*, 3/538.

al-Malik, a man of Kinda and the governor of Dūmat al-Jandal, would move to support the Byzantine army if they decided to attack the Muslims from his side, which would threaten the return of the Muslims to Madina.

The expedition to Tabūk was the last undertaken during the Prophet's lifetime. The authority of the Prophet was now unquestioned northward to the Syrian border as it was to the south as far as al-Ṭā'if.¹ As a result, at the end of the ninth year of the *hijra* and the beginning of the tenth, numerous embassies from all quarters of Arabia flowed towards Madina to embrace Islam.² Those who were Jews or Christians were taken under Muslim protection and guaranteed security of their goods and property and the free exercise of their religion.³

Muir concludes that, after the expedition of Tabūk, the need for fighting had passed.⁴ In contrast, one notes that this expedition, as well as the coming of embassies to Madina to embrace Islam, would open the eyes of the Byzantines as well as the Persians to the new growing power of Islam. Therefore, when the life of the Prophet was drawing to a close, he appointed Usāma ibn Zayd to lead the army to be sent to the Syrian frontier to prevent attacks from the Byzantines and their vassal Arabs.⁵ But this campaign was delayed due to the illness of the Prophet which was followed by his

¹ See, for example, Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 448.

² Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 636. See also Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 447.

³ Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam*, p. 33.

⁴ Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 448.

⁵ Muir mentions that this campaign of Usāma intended to strike terror into the tribes of the border and wipe out the memory of the disaster which still rankled in the Prophet's heart (referring to the Battle of Mu'ta), and considers the appointment of Usāma the son of Zayd, who was killed at Mu'ta, as proof of his conclusion. See Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. 480. However, the Battle of Mu'ta was a great victory for the three thousand Muslims who fought against two hundred thousand heavily armed troops. See Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 652.

death.¹ This decision of the Prophet indicates that he, and to the last minute of his life, believed that these scattered tribes under Byzantine rule would continue to represent a real threat to Islam. However, the threat of the Byzantines indirectly prepared the way for the expansion of Islam outside Arabia, and helped in carrying the message of Islam to reach as far as the Byzantium territories.

¹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 2/225. Ibn Ishāq, *The Life of Muhammad*, trans., Guillaume, p. 652.

Conclusion

One of the main factors which help in understanding the Qur'an is the existence of a practical picture which demonstrates a complete example of the implementation of the Qur'an in the actual life. This practical picture as explored in the sixth chapter shows that the Prophet had the opportunity to practice the Qur'an as a whole and provide a comprehensive picture of its teachings since the Qur'an was completed during his life. The Qur'an mentions that the Prophet is a good example to follow. Therefore, the majority of Muslims consider the Prophet's practice of the Qur'an as a true reflection of its teachings. Thus there are two harmonised aspects of the Islamic approach to the People of the Book, the theory as presented in the Qur'an and the practical as practised by the Prophet.

In the light of these two aspects and after completing the previous six chapters, we can reaffirm a broader perspective of the main characteristics of the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book and cite them as follows:

The first characteristic is that the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book does not show enmity towards them because they are Jews and Christians who refuse to become Muslims. The Qur'an denounces aggression and aggressors and confirms the importance of this principle in the Qur'anic law, *sharī'a*. Both the domestic and the foreign policy of the Islamic state should not be an aggressive policy. The Qur'an warns Muslims not to transgress the limits which have been ordained by Allah which includes the limits ordained in dealings between Muslims and the People of the Book. It confirms that Allah is just and does not deny anyone's right, even of the weight of an atom. Justice must be observed when dealing with all people, whether Muslims or non-Muslims, friends or enemies, which also includes

the Jews and the Christians. Within the Qur'an there is no question of race, or of a "chosen people", or of "the seed of Abraham". Thus the Qur'an recognises Moses and Jesus and other prophets of the Children of Israel and their relation with Abraham and shows that among mankind who have the best claim to Abraham are those who followed him. The Qur'an puts the Prophet in the long line of the prophets and praises them all. None can imagine that the Qur'an praises Moses and Jesus and at the same time holds a hostile attitude towards their Books or their followers. The Qur'an, therefore, desires to invite them and argue with them in a better way in order to convince them that the monotheism of Abraham, Moses and Jesus is restored at the hands of the Prophet. This monotheism is described by the Qur'an as a '*kalima sawā*'. The Prophet realises his position in the prophetic line and mentions that the association between him and the former prophets is similar to a fine building with a place for a missing corner brick. The people admired it and desired that brick to be laid, and he is that brick.

The second characteristic is that the Qur'an does not base its attitude towards the People of the Book on seeking their satisfaction. From the beginning, while the Prophet was living side by side with the Makkans, the Qur'an declared that the pagan Arabs were wrong in being idolaters and described the Prophet as a *ḥanīf* and his religion as a straight path. When he emigrated to Madina and came into direct contact with the People of the Book the Qur'an also continued to criticise them as they failed to keep the religion of Abraham straight. Before the Emigration when the Prophet was living in Makka, he faced Jerusalem and that was not to break relations with the pagans and appease the Jews of Madina. In the same manner, we find that the change of *qibla* in Madina from Jerusalem to Makka was neither a result

of any break with the Jews, nor to appease the Makkans. It, therefore, issued a strong reminder to the Prophet that he must stand firm and resist any temptations not to incline to the desires of those who would attempt to tempt him away from the Way of Allah.

The third characteristic is that the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book is not a result of any Judeo-Christian or pagan influence. The thrust of many studies is the influence of Judeo-Christian culture and even pagans on the Qur'an and the Prophet. However, we find that the assertion that the Qur'an drew heavily on Judaism and Christianity in formulating its teachings is challenged by a lot of evidence. Firstly, studying the environment of the Ḥijāz shows that there is no evidence of any deep Judeo-Christian influence on its people. It also shows that the presence of Jews and Christians in the Ḥijāz and the surrounding lands could not inspire the religious life of the Ḥijāz. Its people retained their own religion which originated from the religion of Abraham but had developed through time till it had become corrupt. The inhabitants of Madina in particular by staying away from becoming Jews have attracted the attention of many writers since there was some Jewish presence there. The *ḥunafā'*, who had great concern for Abraham and his religion and who asked the Jews and Christians about him, also stayed away from becoming Jews or Christians except in some cases. Secondly, there are problems in the assumption that the Qur'an borrowed most of its teachings from Jews and Christians since the assumed Christian environment is itself accused in the Qur'an and even by writers of heresies and sectarianism. In the case of Judaism, we find that some writers consider the Jews of the Ḥijāz to be not as pure as the Jews of other lands and having a different creed from them. This has led some writers to justify the

notion that the Qur'anic teachings which are borrowed from Jews and Christians are no more than heresies. However, the Qur'an insists that the contemporary Jews and Christians were mistaken and misguided and had deviated from the straight path of their original scriptures. This raises the following two questions: how can the Qur'an formulate its monotheism from heresies and impure doctrines? And, how can the Qur'an borrow heavily from doctrines which are accused of deviation from the path of Moses and Jesus by the Qur'an itself?

The pagan influence also is denied by all major Muslim sources. In contrast, the evidence proves that Abraham left great influence on the religious life of the Arabs. The Qur'an and all major Muslim sources recognise his coming to Makka with his wife Hājar and son Ishmael and his effort alongside the effort of Ishmael in building the Ka'ba. The foundations of the religion of Abraham seem to have become distorted gradually till the time when the Qur'an put it on the right track again. The presence of the *ḥunafā'* in the Ḥijāz and their searching for the religion of Abraham, the knowledge of one supreme God, the role of Ka'ba in the religious life of the people of the Ḥijāz, the rituals of the pilgrimage including the sacrifice, the practicing of circumcision, and many other practices of Abraham remain as a witness of Abraham's influence on the religion of the Arabs. It is then expected that the Qur'an from the Makkan period claimed a strong relation with Abraham as the arch-monotheist. This relation with Abraham was not caused by any break with the People of the Book since the Qur'an puts the Prophet in the long line of the prophets including the prophets of the Children of Israel. Thus we find that the Qur'an does not forsake Moses and Jesus to Jews and Christians. Therefore, when we examine the Qur'an we find that Moses and Jesus loom large in Makka as well as doing so later.

The study of similarities and differences between the Qur'an and the scriptures is also evidence against Judeo-Christian culture influence. For the Muslims, the similarities between the Qur'an and the scriptures represent the unity of the origin of all the revealed Books. Muslims believe that the differences between the Qur'an and the scriptures in the principles of creed in particular are the results of the alterations and the changes which occurred to the original scriptures throughout history. Some of these changes might have occurred accidentally through translation from ancient languages into current languages. Some others, however, have occurred deliberately as mentioned in the Qur'an. The Qur'an relates what happened to the scriptures throughout history to many factors by using the following themes: '*yuharrifūn*' which means to change or to alter; '*yaktubūn*' which indicates the deliberate writing of the scriptures with their own hands which they then claimed to be the words of Allah; '*yalwūn*' which mean to twist or to distort; '*yukhfūn*' which means to cover or to conceal; and '*yalbisūn*' which means to mix the truth with falsehood.

The fourth characteristic is that the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book distinguishes between the attitudes of non-Muslims to the Muslims. The Qur'an, although it rejects the major beliefs of the Christians, considers their attitude as the most peaceful attitude of non-Muslims towards Muslims. The rejected beliefs of Christianity do not prevent the Qur'an from classifying them as the nearest in love to the Muslims. This suggests that the Qur'an does not fight the People of the Book on religious grounds. Within the historical materials which deal with Muslim history during the life of the Prophet, there are many incidents which refer to Jewish activities against the Muslims and mention that the Jews were more active than the

Christians in opposing the Prophet and the Muslims. However, this did not prevent the Prophet from dealing kindly with them and treat them justly. Moreover, the Prophet continued to deal with them till the last moment of his life.

If the People of the Book incline to peace, then Muslims should also incline to peace, and if they carry out an assault against the Muslims, then the only choice is to counter their attack. Many verses in the Qur'an draw the picture of this Qur'anic characteristic. The Prophet's encounter with the People of the Book is also another witness which testifies to this characteristic since we find that the Prophet did not start any assault against Jews and Christians. Consequently, the level of amity or enmity between the Muslims and the People of the Book relied on the attitude of the latter.

The fifth characteristic is that the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book is not a reflection of the growth of Muslim power. It is true to say that the permission to fight was given when the Muslims became capable of fighting, but the Qur'an justifies this permission by mentioning that the Muslims were persecuted, driven from their homes and land, and some were even killed. When the Prophet established his state in Madina and had power he implemented the rule of the Qur'an concerning the use of power. Studying the life of the Prophet shows that although the Prophet exercised power in Madina, no consequences occurred as a result of this exercise. The growth of Muslim power by itself was not a justification of any attack against Jews, Christians or even pagans but it was necessary to protect the new state. This growth of Muslim power, on the other hand, had opened the eyes of their opponents to rid of them in early stage when the confederates advanced against Madina in the hope that they might destroy Madina and exterminate the Muslim

power. In the case of the Jews, we find that the Prophet's biography, as mentioned by all the major historians, including non-Muslims, shows that when the Prophet emigrated to Madina, the Jews at first showed some restraint. However, soon after the emigration, hostility against the Prophet began to grow. Some declared enmity against him. They began to ask the Prophet challenging questions in order to embarrass him in front of his Companions. Controversies began to grow regarding several issues. The Prophet's association with Abraham, his prophethood and the validity of his new *qibla* were questioned by them. Soon after, this hostility developed and adopted a new aspect when the Jews began to encourage division among the Muslims. Poems were also employed against the Prophet and the Muslims, even including verses about the Prophet's wives and insulting the newly converted Muslims. In addition to this, the Jews became the associates of the hypocrites of Madina, in particular with their leader Ibn Ubayy. There is evidence that the Jews engaged themselves in igniting the polytheists against the Muslims and offered help and support to the polytheists against the Muslims. In the case of the Christians, we also find that there is no record of conflict between the Muslims and the Christians before the truce of Ḥudaybiya. After Ḥudaybiya, the Prophet extended dialogue with the surrounding lands, sending envoys with letters to their rulers. Their reaction was varied. Some became Muslims, some paid respect or stayed neutral and some opposed and became furious. The first encounter with the Christians was at Mu'ta which seems to be as a result of the Prophet's letters. After Mu'ta, hostility seems to have increased and the attention of the Byzantines began to be directed towards Madina. The political and economical factors began to play a part in

directing the attitude of the main powerful empires, the Byzantine and the Persian, towards the growing faith in a land which had not yet fallen under either of them.

The above-mentioned examples indicate that a defensive war to counter enemy assaults was needed. This war according to the Qur'an must not violate justice or endure mischief and aggressions. This war also differs from the wars of history, and even from the biblical wars. According to the Qur'an, war is conditionally justified in cases, such as in the cases of countering attacks and removing aggression. Therefore, neither the Qur'an, nor the Prophet agree with those who believe in the notion that Muslims should carry their sword against Jews or Christians without validation and say to them, 'be a Muslim or be killed.'

However, when some writers deal with the Prophet's use of power against the People of the Book, they do not place it in a broader context or look properly into the motives behind it. In contrast, they consider that the Prophet exercised his power to get rid of his adversaries, asserting that power only caused the Prophet to conflict with the People of the Book, casting doubt on the authenticity of the historical records of the motives and causes behind the conflict.

The sixth characteristic is that the Qur'an, although it mentions the hostile attitude of the People of the Book towards the Muslims, does not return their hostility with the same but tolerates it and distinguishes between moral assaults and physical assaults. So the Qur'an, by allowing freedom of beliefs, accepts and tolerates moral opposition, but when the opposition uses force or physical assault then war is justified. The killing of Ibn al-Ashraf also was not permitted unless there was enough evidence showed his involvement in inciting and inflaming polytheists against the Muslims in critical days.

The Qur'an places the level of hostility of the Jews towards the Muslims on an equal footing with that of the pagans. However, regardless of that hostile attitude towards the Muslims, the Qur'an all the time reminds the Muslims against aggression of any type, confirming that themes such as *qist*, *birr*, *'adl*, *ihsān* and *sabr* are still in use and should not be abused, disturbed or vanished even during conflicts. The Qur'an also allows the relationship between the Muslims and the People of the Book, including the Jews, to grow closer by permitting inter-marriage - the strongest social bond - between them, to eat their food and exchange greetings and visits with them. The difference of creed should not stand in the way of doing a good turn. Good treatment of blood relations and entertaining each other should be encouraged. Places of worship of the People of the Book fallen under the Muslims, peacefully or by force, are to be respected, and that their defence and support are as important as that of mosques. The debate with the People of the Book should be in ways that are best and most gracious, with limits of dignity, serenity and respect. The Qur'an does not permit Muslims to behave rudely with their adversaries, or to revile even idolaters on the ground of their false creed.

The seventh characteristic is that the Qur'anic attitude towards the People of the Book is balanced. Thus, the Qur'an confirms, 'We have sent our Messengers with clear signs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance that mankind may stand forth in justice, and We brought forth iron wherein is mighty power as well as many benefits for mankind.'¹ The 'Book', the 'Balance' and 'iron' are the elements which protect justice and counter aggression. The need of one of these elements to another is as the need of human for respiration. The 'Book' commands

¹ Q. 57:27.

good and justice and forbids evil and aggression. The 'Balance' pledges that justice gives to every citizen his due. And 'iron' points to the power of the law which maintains sanctions for aggressors.

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