

Tafsīr and Fatwas of the Successors (*Tābi'ūn*)

SUMMARY

The Successors (the generation after the Companions) also exercised *tafsīr*. The method they employed to interpret the Qur'an involved:

- a) using the Qur'an to explain the Qur'an
- b) referring to the Sunnah of the Prophet
- c) referring to the Hadith
- d) their knowledge of Arabic (whether grammar, linguistics, poetry)
- e) Personal opinion / *ijtihād*.

To what extent does their *tafsīr* have definitive authority, that is, is considered binding? This and their differing exegesis on Qur'anic verses and other issues is explored.

IS THE INTERPRETATION of the *Tābi'ūn* (Successors) also considered binding or not? Our primary concern here is its legal status. A second concern is determining the characteristic and the nature of the *Tābi'ūn's* interpretation. Unfortunately, the historical materials devoted to the discussion of this issue are not extensive as in the case of the Companions – it naturally following that scholars who did not believe the exegesis of the Prophet's Companions to be binding (i.e. al-Ghazālī, Ibn Ḥazm and others) showed no interest in discussing the authority of the *Tābi'ūn's* interpretation. Even scholars such as Ibn Qayyim, who upheld the *Tābi'ūn's tafsīr* as binding proof, did not elaborate much on the position of this interpretation.

Before elaborating on the nature of the *Tābi'ūn's* exegesis we begin with a definition of the word *Tābi'ūn*, both linguistically and Islamically.

Tābi'ūn is the plural of *Tābi'*. The word *tābi'*, an active participle, is derived from the verbal noun *taba'a*, meaning to follow. Thus, *tābi'ī* means a person, or a generation, that comes after another one that has gone by; someone, or a generation, that follows or succeeds a previous one – a follower, a successor. Technically, *Tābi'* refers to a Muslim who had no direct contact with the Prophet Muhammad (did not see him), but did have direct contact with one of his Companions (meeting him) and died as a Muslim.¹ The *Tābi'ūn*, or Successors, are considered the second generation of Islam, and the best following the Companions.

Debate on the Binding Character of the Successors' Interpretation

The majority of Sunni scholars have agreed upon the fact that the *ijmā'* of the Successors is a binding proof (*hujjah*). The question then arises as to whether the interpretation or religious fatwa of a single Successor should also be recognized as such. As usual, scholars are divided into two camps concerning this proposition.

The first group, which includes Abū Ḥanīfah, believe the interpretation of the Successors and their religious decrees to be not binding, simply because they did not have the chance of seeing the Prophet or witnessing the Revelation. Abū Ḥanīfah for instance states his position very clearly, “Whatever comes to us from God and the Prophet we accept it without any reservation, but whatever ideas come to us from *Tābi'ūn* they are men just as we are.”²

Ibn Taymiyyah quotes Shu'bah ibn al-ʿAjjāj (160–778)³ to have said, “If the opinion of the *Tābi'ī* in the secondary matters (i.e. judicial issues) is not binding (*hujjah*), how then can it be binding in *tafsīr*?”⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah supports this opinion by saying “*Wa hātha ṣaḥīḥ*” (and this is correct).⁵ For Abū Ḥayyān to accept the *Tābi'ūn*'s interpretation is intellectual or scholarly suicide.⁶

The second group includes – according to some reports – Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal and some Mālikī jurists, who believed interpretation by the immediate Successors to be binding.⁷ However, according to a modern Ḥanbalī jurist, Abd Allah ibn Muhsin al-Turki, most of the Ḥanbalī jurists seemed to believe that the most authentic report to have come from Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal indicates that the opinions of the *Tābi‘ūn* are not binding.⁸

In his *Al-Ṣawā‘iq al-Mursalāh*, Ibn Qayyim reasons that the Companions had learned the full meanings and text of the Qur’ān from the Prophet, and that as the Successors had then learned the meanings and the words from the Companions, ergo the interpretation of both the Companions and the Successors are equally binding.⁹

Al-Zarkashī points out that although scholars like Shu‘bah ibn al-‘Ajjāj and others viewed the *tafsīr* of the *Tābi‘ūn* to be non-binding, their own exegesis and that of other commentators was flawed because they nevertheless relied heavily on the opinions of the *Tābi‘ūn*, who received most of their *tafsīr* from the Companions.¹⁰

Prominent Tābi‘ūn and Tafsīr

Muslims believe that God has commanded them to seek knowledge and to teach it. Thus, in Islam, learning and teaching are equally important and inseparable. In this respect, verse 9:122 states:

With all this, it is not desirable that all of the believers take the field [in time of war]. From within every group in their midst, some shall refrain from going forth to war, and shall devote themselves [instead] to acquiring a deeper knowledge of the Faith and [thus be able to] teach their home-coming brethren, so that these [too] might guard themselves against evil.

A popular hadith relevant to the matter under discussion is “*khayrukum man ta‘allama al-Qur’ān wa ‘allamah*” (The best among

you are those who have learned the Qur'an and teach it (to others)). From this perspective, the *Tābi'ūn*'s commitment is clear.

Having stated a possible reason for the involvement of the *Tābi'ūn* in interpretation, it is appropriate at this point to present examples of the *tafsīr* of some of the most prominent among them.

Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. 104-722 AH)

Mujāhid was one of the most outstanding students of Ibn 'Abbās, and claimed to have thoroughly gone through the whole Qur'an three times with Ibn 'Abbās.¹¹ Despite this claim, one can easily observe by reading al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAẓīm*, and Mujāhid's alleged *tafsīr* (recently printed), that Mujāhid made much less use of Ibn 'Abbās's commentary than did his other students such as 'Ikrimah al-Barbarī, Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, and al-Daḥḥak ibn Muzāḥim. Mujāhid seems to be more dependent on his own opinion. Hence, he disagreed with the Companions's interpretation of some verses. One example concerns verse 2:30:

And Lo! Thy Sustainer said unto the angels: "Behold, I am about to establish upon earth a vicegerent." They said: "Wilt Thou place on it such as will spread corruption thereon and shed blood -whereas it is we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?" [God] answered: "Verily, I know that which you do not know."

Mujāhid explained "we who extol Thy limitless glory, and praise Thee, and hallow Thy name?" as *nu'azzimuk wa nukabbiruk* (we aggrandize and magnify You).¹² Similar was his explanation of verses 75:22-23: "Some faces, that Day, will beam (in brightness and beauty); Looking towards their Lord." According to Ibn Kathīr, the Companions and *Tābi'ūn* were unanimously agreed that those dwelling in *Jannah* (Paradise) will see God with their own eyes, using 75:22-23 among the verses referenced to support this opinion.¹³

Mujāhid, on the other hand, interprets these verses as “Muslims will be looking forward to the reward from God.” He considered the letter *ilā* (the preposition ‘to’) as a singular of *ālā* (‘bounties’, ‘favors’, etc.)¹⁴ and not as the term was read by most scholars.

Another example of Mujāhid’s *tafsīr* of the Qur’an is his interpretation of verse 2:108 which reads: “Would you, perchance, ask of the Apostle who has been sent unto you what was asked aforetime of Moses?” He explains this verse using the Qur’anic verse 4:153 which states: “And an even greater thing than this did they (the Jews) demand of Moses when they said, ‘Make us see God face to face’.”

According to Muslim sources on Mujāhid’s biography, he is said to have written a *tafsīr* of the entire Qur’an. This alleged manuscript has been published twice recently. Firstly in 1976, under the title *Tafsīr Mujāhid* by Abd al-Rahman al-Surti, a member of *Majma‘ al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyyah* (The Islamic Research Institute), Pakistan, the first scholar to edit the manuscript. Secondly in 1989, by Muhammad Abd al-Salam Muhammad Ali who chose it as the subject of his Ph.D thesis, undertaken at Dār al-‘Ulūm University, Cairo. Incidentally, Muhammad Abd al-Salam claimed his work to be more scholarly and accurate, recognizing al-Surti’s efforts, but stating that he had found many mistakes.¹⁵ Both scholars depended on the manuscript of Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyyah.

Western scholars such as Fred Leemhuis and Wansbrough in contrast express doubts as to the authenticity of the manuscript, even rejecting totally the authenticity of any work attributed not only to Mujāhid but to any first century Islamic scholar or *‘ālim*. Wansbrough compared the Cairo manuscript to Mujāhid’s opinion in al-Ṭabarī’s *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, examining in addition Mujāhid’s method in the context of his own work. It was the discovery of two problems that led him to reject the authenticity of the *tafsīr* ascribed to Mujāhid. These were firstly, that it contained a defective *isnād* (chain of transmission); and secondly, the existence of a conflicting judgment based on a single authority.¹⁶

Leemhuis seemed to be more critical in this respect than Wansbrough. He examined the Cairo manuscript carefully together with his colleagues and their analysis led them to find that the narration of Abū Nājiḥ, the immediate narrator from Mujaḥid, must have taken place around the middle of the second century AH. Lemmhuus comments, “These findings were based on the chain of transmissions as well as textual analyses of the different Mujaḥid transmissions.”¹⁷

It seems that Leemhuis undertook this serious examination of Mujaḥid’s work to refute or challenge Fuat Sezgin’s assertion that al-Ṭabarī’s work can be used as evidence of an early first century written work because of its dependency on first century literature such as that of *Tafsīr Mujaḥid*. (Note, Fuat Sezgin is professor emeritus of the History of Natural Science at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt, and the assertion that he made was that al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr* can be used to prove the existence of early first century *tafsīr* because Mujaḥid heavily depended on the *Ṣaḥābah*’s and *Tābi‘ūn*’s *tafsīrs*).

Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr (d. 95-714 AH)

Sa‘īd was also one of Ibn ‘Abbās’s most outstanding students, so much so in fact that Ibn ‘Abbās would even refer people to him with regards to issuing fatwas. This recognition by Ibn ‘Abbās has caused scholars to hold Sa‘īd in very high esteem.

According to Ibn Khallikāns’s report, Sa‘īd disliked writing exegeses. On one occasion when a certain man who admired Sa‘īd’s knowledge of the Qur’an asked him to write a book on exegeses, he became angry remarking, “*la-an yasquṭ shiqqī Aḥabb ilayya min dhālik*” (I would rather lose a part or half of my body than do that).

Sa‘īd would refer to Ibn ‘Abbās when it came to understanding the meaning of the Qur’an or knowledge of the occasions of revelation. For example, concerning verse 8:1: “They will ask thee about the spoils of war” he asks Ibn ‘Abbās as to the occasion of its revelation, with Ibn ‘Abbās responding that the verse referred to the booty

gained by the Muslims following the Makkans' defeat in the battle of Badr.¹⁸ Another example is in regard to verse 2:243:

Art thou not aware of those who forsook their homelands in their thousands for fear of death-whereupon God said unto them, "Die," and later brought them back to life? Behold, God is indeed limitless in His bounty unto man - but most people are ungrateful.

According to Sa'īd, Ibn 'Abbās numbered the people referred to in this verse as four thousand, stating that they had left their homes out of fear of the plague, and that when they had reached a certain place, God took their souls.¹⁹

Yet, despite Sa'īd's dependency on Ibn 'Abbās's *tafsīr*, he also exercises his own opinion in exegesis an example of which can be seen in reference to verse 2:178:

O you who have attained to faith! Just retribution is ordained for you in cases of killing: the free for the free, and the slave for the slave, and the woman for the woman.

Sa'īd states the *qiṣāṣ* 'victim retribution' is to be applied only in the case of intentional murder. He furthermore, gives an account of the background of the verse commenting that it concerned two Arab tribes who shortly before the arrival of Islam had fought with each other leaving many innocents, including women and slaves, killed. As the dispute continued despite the emergence of Islam and their conversion to it thus, God thus revealed this verse which discusses of *al-qiṣāṣ*.

ʿIkrimah al-Barbarī (d. 105-723 AH)

ʿIkrimah was one of the students of Ibn 'Abbās who claimed that there was no verse in the Qur'an whose meaning he did not know. He transmitted a considerable portion of Ibn 'Abbās's knowledge.²⁰

Below are Qur'anic interpretations of three verses showing 'Ikrimah's relationship to Ibn 'Abass.

The first refers to Qur'anic verse 2:198: "And when you surge downward in multitudes from Arafat, remember God at the holy place." 'Ikrimah narrates that Ibn 'Abbās stated a specific time that Muslims should depart from 'Arafāt to Muzdalifah" (two sacred places).²¹ He attributes to Ibn 'Abbās the following statement: "During the days of *Jāhiliyyah* (pre-Islam days) the people of *al-Jāhiliyyah* used to stand at 'Arafāt until the sun was about to set, then they departed."²²

He also narrates that Ibn 'Abbās indicated the actual number of the People of the Cave mentioned in Qur'anic verse 18:22 although, the Qur'an is silent on this: "Say: 'My Sustainer knows best how many they were. None but a few have any [real] knowledge of them...'" 'Ikrimah reports Ibn 'Abbās as stating, "I am one of those few who know the exact number of the People of the Cave, they were seven." Ibn Kathīr regards this transmission from Ibn 'Abbās as authentic.²³

With regards to the meaning of verse 65:1: "O Prophet! When you [intend to divorce women, divorce them with a view to the waiting period appointed for them ('*iddah*)," 'Ikrimah comments that *al-ḥayḍ* is *ṭuhr* "purification" (when a women finishes her monthly period). He further elaborates: "One should divorce his wife when her pregnancy is clear without doubt."²⁴

Qatādah ibn Du'āmah al-Sadūsī (d.110-728 AH)

Qatādah was one of the most outstanding exegetes among the immediate successors. Indeed, Ibn Kathīr quotes Qatādah heavily in his *tafsīr*, his name appearing in almost every page of *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*. It seems that Qatādah relied more on his own opinion than those of the Prophet's Companions. His mastery of the Arabic language was reflected in his exegesis. For example, we find him using in his explanation of some Qur'anic passages the terms *taqdīm*

‘preposition’ and *ta’khīr* ‘a subject placed in delayed position’. These are terms or concepts which have been developed by later generations, mainly by ‘Abd Al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī, al-Zamakhsharī and others and used as one of the tools to illustrate ‘*Ijāz al-Qur’ān* (the inimitability of the Qur’an).²⁵ An example of this can be seen in relation to verse 9:55: “Let not, then, their worldly goods or [the happiness which they may derive from] their children excite thy admiration: God but wants to chastise them by these means in this worldly life...” Qatādah explains the verse by stating that there is *taqdīm* and *ta’khīr* in the verse. He places worldly life earlier up in the *āyah* due to the principle of *taqdīm* and *ta’khīr*, thus, rephrasing the verse as: “Let not, then, their worldly goods or [the happiness which they may derive from] their children excite thy admiration in this worldly life. God wants only to punish them by means of their wealth and children.”²⁶

Qatādah also occasionally referred to the Arab metaphorical expression to support the meaning of a Qur’anic word he intended to explain. For example, concerning verse 74:4: “And thy garments keep free from stain!” he states, “*wa kānat al-‘Arab tusammī al-rajul idhā nakatha wa lam yaḥī bi ‘ahd Allāh innahu ladanis al-thiyāb*” (Arabs brand a person who violates his oath and does not fulfill the covenant of God as a person with a dirty garment).²⁷

Concerning Qur’anic verse 2:37: “Thereupon Adam received words [of guidance] (*kalimāt*) from his Sustainer, and He accepted his repentance: for, verily, He alone is the-Acceptor of Repentance, the Dispenser of Grace.” Qatādah quotes another Qur’anic passage to explain the meaning of *kalimāt* “words.” This is verse 7:23: “The two replied: ‘O our Sustainer! We have sinned against ourselves – and unless Thou grant us forgiveness and bestow Thy mercy upon us, we shall most certainly be lost!’”

Qatādah and other Successors to the Prophet sometimes made a comment concerning the meaning or implication of a verse without interpreting it. For example, regarding verse 43:5: “[O you who

deny the truth!] Should We, perchance, withdraw this reminder (Qur'an) from you altogether, seeing that you are people bent on wasting your own selves?" Qatādah states: "I swear, had God turned away His Book when the first few of this community rejected it, they could have been perished, but Allah, The Exalted, out of His mercy, did not do so, instead He called them to it for the period of twenty-three years."²⁸

Masrūq al-Ajda^c (d. 63-681 AH)

Masrūq was one of the recognized scholars of the Iraqi school of *tafsīr* and *fiqh*. He studied under several of the Prophet's Companions and stated that he found the knowledge of the Companions to be like "a river. A river quenches one man's thirst, a river quenches two men's thirst, a river quenches ten men's thirst, a river quenches a hundred men's thirst, and a river can quench the thirst of the whole of mankind. That is 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd."²⁹

After establishing his position as a student under 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd, he further went on to explain how long they would sometimes spend in learning from him, "'Abd Allāh used to take a whole day to explain to us a chapter of the Qur'an."³⁰

Ibn 'Abbās was one of the Companions that Masrūq learned from. One of the verses, which Ibn 'Abbās commented on for Masrūq pertained to a verse discussed in Ibn 'Abbās's exegesis, which mentions someone whom God had blessed with knowledge of signs [*āyāt*], but who did not use the gift of that knowledge. The verse 7:175: "And tell them what happens to him to whom We vouchsafe Our messages and who then discards them: Satan catches up with him, and he strays, like so many others, into grievous error." Masrūq quotes Ibn 'Abbās as naming the person, although the Qur'an and hadith are silent on this. The name of the person according to Masrūq's narration is Bal'am ibn Na'tira.³¹

Masrūq also narrated from 'Ā'ishah, the wife of the Prophet. An instance of this concerns verse 2:275 and the prohibition of selling alcohol:

Those who gorge themselves on usury behave but as he might behave whom Satan has confounded with his touch; for they say, “Buying and selling is but a kind of usury” – the while God has made buying and selling lawful and usury unlawful..

The Prophet went to the Mosque where he read the verse to his Companions. Then, he forbade the selling of alcohol.

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110-728 AH)

Al-Ḥasan was known as an influential preacher. He was pious, trustworthy and knowledgeable in both the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir described his speech to be just like that of the Prophet's.³² Al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr and other *mufasssīrūn* depended immensely on his *tafsīr*. Like his contemporaries, al-Ḥasan seemed to use much of his own opinion in his *tafsīr*. For example, in interpreting verse 25:63, “And the servants of (Allah) Most Gracious are those who walk on the earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say, ‘Peace!’” al-Ḥasan states:

When Islam came to the believers (the Companions) from God, they believed in it and certainly took it into their hearts; thus, their hearts, their bodies, and their eyes became humble. I swear, when I saw them, it seemed to me that I had actually seen that the description of the verse matched them. I swear by God they were neither argumentative people nor corrupt. When the command of God came to them, they accepted it and applied it. As a result, God identified them with a beautiful description. If the ignorant people addressed them foolishly, they were very gentle. In the morning, they accompanied the servants of God. At night, they spent most of the time praying, crying out of the fear of God.

Other examples: One day al-Ḥasan was asked about the meaning of verse 78:22-23: “For the transgressors a place of destination: They

will dwell therein for ages.” He answered “*amma ma‘nā al-aḥqāb fa laysa lahu ‘iddah illā al-khulūd fī al-nār*” (As for the meaning of *aḥqāb*, it does not have a specific period of time except dwelling in hell fire forever). In relation to the meaning of verse 2:30: “Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: ‘I will create a vicegerent on earth.’ They said: ‘Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood...’?”

Al-Ḥasan merely interpreted this verse using his own opinion stating: “God said to the angels I will create a vicegerent on earth, which means that he informed them about it and inspired them to predict that mankind would make mischief therein and shed blood because there had already existed on the earth the *Jinn* who had actually made mischief and shed blood.” Hence, the angels’ question, “Wilt Thou place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood...?” We also find al-Ḥasan, like many *Tābi‘ūn* giving an account on the occasions of a revelation without making any reference to his source. For example, concerning the context of the revelation of verse 31:6: “But there are, among men, those who purchase idle tales, without knowledge (or meaning), to mislead (men) from the Path of Allah and throw ridicule (on the Path),” al-Ḥasan indicates that the verse was revealed concerning music and the flute.³³

Zayd ibn Aslam (d. 136-754 AH)

Zayd was an outstanding exegete of the Madinah school of *tafsīr*. His reputation lies in the fact that he heavily relied on his independent opinion (al-*Ra’y*) in his *tafsīr*. This notion was documented in major books containing his biography.³⁴ But when we read major works of exegesis such as al-Ṭabarī’s *Jāmi‘ al-Bayān*, Ibn Kathīr’s *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān Al-‘Aẓīm*, al-Rāzī’s *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, al-Qurṭubī’s *Al-Jāmi‘ li Ahkām al-Qur’ān*, and others, we find comparatively fewer quotations from Zayd. I found Zayd’s son, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, mentioned more than his father in Ibn Kathīr’s *tafsīr*. Does this mean Zayd’s

exegeses were lost? Or was it that they were very brief? Or was it that his students did not quote extensively from his *tafsīr*? Perhaps the last assumption is the most likely.

Nevertheless, Zayd was considered as one of the leading exegetes of the *Tābī'ūn*. In one of his interpretations, Zayd states in regard to the meaning of verse 2:195: "And spend of your substance in the cause of Allah, and make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction; but do good; for Allah loveth those who do goods," that there existed a group of men in the Prophet's army who did not spend anything from their own wealth. Hence, God commanded them to spend their money for the Jihad.³⁵ To note is that Zayd mentions here the background of the verse, without mentioning his source. In relation to the meaning of verse 6:65: "Say: 'He hath power to send calamities on you..'" Zayd quotes the Prophet Muhammad to have explained it saying: "*lā tarjī'ū ba'dī kuffār yaḍrib ba'dukum riqāb ba'd bi al-sayf*" (Do not become after my death disbelievers, some of you killing others with swords).³⁶

Needless to say, Zayd never met the Prophet; therefore, he should have mentioned his source of information. This type of transmission is technically called *hadith mursāl*.³⁷ More light on Zayd's interpretations will be shed along with those of other *Tābī'ūn* to the Prophet when their different opinions in exegeses is discussed.

Rāfi' ibn Maḥram Abū al-Āliyah (d. 90-708 AH)

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Abū al-Āliyah appeared to depend massively on the narrations of others in his exegesis,³⁸ especially Ubay ibn Ka'b, who was one of his teachers. For instance Abū al-Āliyah quotes from Ubay concerning the *tafsīr* of verse 7:172:

When thy Lord drew forth from the Children of Adam – from their loins – their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?" – They said: "Yea! We do testify!"

According to Ubay, “[Before this life] God gathered all the children of Adam that will be on earth until the Day of Judgment and created them in their physical nature [and asked them the question as in the verse].”

Concerning the meaning of calamities in verse 6:65: “Say: ‘He hath power to send calamities on you..’” Abū al-^ʿĀliyah quotes Ubay to have said:

There are four calamities. Two of them have already occurred after twenty-five years of the death of the Prophet and others will undoubtedly happen. The two that have not yet occurred are *al-rajm* (stoning from the heaven) and *al-khasf* (swallowing up by the earth).³⁹

Despite his massive dependence on the transmission from the Companions, Abū al-^ʿĀliyah utilized his own opinion in interpreting some Qur’anic passages. For example, he comments on verse 2:27: “Those who break Allah’s Covenant after it is ratified, and who sunder what Allah Has ordered to be joined...” stating that, “this verse referred to the hypocrites.” He further states that there exist six types of hypocritical behaviors which the hypocrites display when they are victorious: when they talk they lie; when they make a promise they do not fulfill it; when they are entrusted with something they practice betrayal; they break God’s covenant; they sunder what God commands to be joined together; and they cause mischief on earth.

Having introduced some of the prominent exegetes among the *Tābiʿūn*, and their work, examined next is differences between them in five key areas: fiqh, theology, Qur’anic historical personages, linguistics, and Qur’anic phrases.

Differences in the Qur'anic Interpretations of the *Tābi'ūn*

Fiqh

Differences among the issues in the legal implications of verses may have been caused by differing understandings of the implication of those verses, a lack of knowledge of the Prophet's sayings concerning related issues, or dependence on weak hadith.

One example illustrating lack of knowledge of the Prophet's saying on a specific issue can be seen in relation to verse 2:196: "And complete the Hajj or *ʿumrah* in the service of Allah. But if ye are prevented (From completing it), send an offering for sacrifice, such as ye may find, and do not shave your heads until the offering reaches the place of sacrifice."⁴⁰

The Prophet has specified in hadith (agreed upon by al-Bukhārī and Muslim) how many days one should fast and how many poor people one should feed when one is prevented from performing Hajj or *ʿumrah*. However, we find the *Tābi'ūn* differing concerning the number of days one should fast and the number of poor people one should feed. Mujāhid adhered to the saying of the Prophet which was to fast three days and feed six poor people, while al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and ʿIkrimah stated that one should fast ten days and feed ten poor people.⁴¹ Perhaps both al-Ḥasan and ʿIkrimah did not have the knowledge of the Prophet's hadith in this regard or they were confused with the case of one who is performing the Hajj but cannot afford to offer a sacrifice. In such a situation one must fast ten days.

Another example involving lack of knowledge of certain hadith concerns Qur'anic verse 2:158: "Behold! Safa and Marwa are among the Symbols of Allah. So if those who visit the House in the Season or at other times, should compass them round, it is no sin in them."

The majority of the *Tābi'ūn* believed compassing al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah to be one of the principles of the Hajj, with failure to circumambulate them rendering the pilgrimage invalid, supporting their understanding of the verse with many hadith, including: "*isʿaw*

fa inna Allāh kataba ‘alaykum al-sa‘y” (Walk between al-Ṣafā and al-Marwāh because the *sa‘y* [special running movement] is prescribed for you by Allah).⁴² Mujāhid, al-Ḥasan, and Qatādah held *al-sa‘y* to be not obligatory in support of which opinion they quote verse 2:158 stressing that God did not say one must circumambulate them, but that He stated there is no blame on someone if he does so.⁴³

Qur’anic Historical Personages and Places

This concerns Qur’anic references to individual personalities whose actual names are not given. The *Tābi‘ūn* nevertheless tried to identify them in one way or another (probably referring to the Torah and the New Testament) and not surprisingly differed as to who they were. An example of this concerns verse 2:246:

Hast thou not Turned thy vision to the Chiefs of the Children of Israel after (the time of) Moses? they said to a prophet (That was) among them: “Appoint for us a king,...”

The Qur’an does not mention the name of this prophet of Israel, but some of the *Tābi‘ūn*, i.e. Mujāhid, Qatādah, al-Suddī and others, tried to do so, with Mujāhid stating it was Ṣāmwīl ibn Bālī, Qatādah that it was Yūsha‘ ibn Nūn, and al-Suddī naming him as Shām‘ūn.⁴⁴

Another example is verse 27:40: “Said one who had knowledge of the Book: ‘I will bring it to thee within the twinkling of an eye!’” meaning the throne of the Queen of Sheba. Who offered to bring the throne? Although the Qur’an does not mention a name Qatādah nevertheless indicates that it was Āṣif or Balkh, while according to Mujāhid it was Asṭūm.⁴⁵

Theology

This aspect of exegetical variance refers to the *Tābi‘ūns*’ own understanding of a Qur’anic verse and its interpretation without depending

on a hadith or statement from the *Ṣaḥābah*. An example of this interpretation can be seen in verse 4:159: “And there is none of the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) but must believe in him [Jesus] before his death (*qabla mawtihi*).” The *damīr* pronoun “*hi*” meaning *his* in the phrase *qabla mawtihi* (before his death) can refer to an individual of the People of the Book or to Jesus. If the pronoun “he” refers to an individual of the People of the Book, the meaning of the verse would be that all of the People of the Book must certainly believe in Jesus as a Messenger of God before he (the individual) dies. If, however, the pronoun refers to Jesus, then the meaning would be that there are “none of the People of the Book but must believe in him before his death.”

Qatādah and Mujaḥid were of the former opinion. However, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī restricted People of the Book to refer to the Negus (king of Abyssinia) and his people, whilst ‘Ikrimah interpreted the verse to mean that each member of the People of the Book had to believe in the Prophet Muhammad before his death (*lā yamūt al-Naṣrānī wa lā-al-yahūdī ḥattā yu’min bi Muḥammad*). Both al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr rejected al-Ḥasan and ‘Ikrimah’s interpretation whilst confirming Qatādah’s.⁴⁶

Another difference of interpretation relates to the meaning of Qur’anic verse 6:103: “No vision can grasp Him, but His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things.” ‘Ikrimah interprets this to mean that one can see God “in the hereafter,” but one cannot grasp Him, similar to the way in which one sees a cloud, but cannot grasp it. According to al-Suddī and Mujaḥid however nothing and no one can see God.⁴⁷

Another example of differences in opinion concerning theological issues can be seen in relation to verse 13:39: “Allah doth blot out or confirm what He pleaseth: with Him is the Mother of the Book.” Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr uses another Qur’anic verse to explain the meaning of this one, namely verse 2:284: “He forgiveth whom He pleaseth, and punisheth whom He pleaseth.” Qatādah on the other hand

indicates that verse 13:39 is similar to verse 2:106: “None of Our revelations do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar.”⁴⁸

Linguistics

This concerns individual words or terms which the *Tābi‘ūn* understood differently according to their own varying linguistic backgrounds. More interestingly, they also differed in terms of the origin of some Qur’anic words allegedly derived from foreign languages. For example, the word “*al-Ṣamad*” in verse 112:2 has been interpreted in a variety of ways: Zayd ibn Aslam sees it as *al-Sayyid* (the master), Qatādah understands it as *al-Bāqī ba‘d khalqih* (one who outlasts His creation), ‘Ikrimah explains it as *alladhī lam yakhruj minhu shay’ wa lā yuṭ‘am* (one who does not expel waste or needs to be fed),⁴⁹ al-Rabī‘ ibn Anas states it to mean *alladhī lam yalid wa lam yūlad* (He who begets not, nor has been begotten),⁵⁰ and finally according to Mujāhid, Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr, al-Suddī, and al-Dahhāk *al-Ṣamad* is *nūr yatala’la’* (a light that shines).⁵¹

Another example of linguistic difference in understanding is verse 36:1: “*Yāsīn.*” What does this word mean? ‘Ikrimah, al-Dahhāk and al-Ḥasan explained it as *Yā insān* (O man), with Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr (who was of Abyssinian background) confirming this meaning stating *hu wa kadhālika fī lughat al-ḥabashiyyah* (it is so in the language of Abyssinia). Zayd ibn Aslam on the other hand indicates that it is *ism min asmā’ Allāh Ta‘alā* (it is one of Allah’s names).⁵²

Then there is the word *al-zaytūn* in Qur’anic verse 95:1. Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and Qatadah believe it to refer to the sacred Mosque in Jerusalem, while Mujāhid and ‘Ikrimah indicate that it is the olive that is known.⁵³

Finally we look at the meaning and linguistic origin of the Qur’anic phrase “*hayt lak*” in verse 12:23. According to Mujāhid and others it means seduction, whilst ‘Ikrimah, al-Ḥasan, and Qatādah state it is of the Syrian dialect or language and means *‘alayka* (come

on). Al-Suddī mentions it is from the Coptic language and means “come on.”⁵⁴ Al-Bukhārī attributes to ‘Ikrimah the idea that it means “come on” in the language of the *Hurān*.⁵⁵

Qur’anic Phrases

This category relates to terms in the Qur’an which the *Tābi‘ūn* have interpreted differently due to a lack of knowledge of hadith that mentions the meaning of these phrases or because there were no hadith concerning difficult phrases, leading to each individual using his own opinion or knowledge in explaining the meaning. Thus the phrase in verse 15:87: “And, indeed, We have bestowed upon thee seven of the oft repeated [verses], and [have, thus, laid open before thee] this sublime Qur’an,” has been interpreted differently. For students of Ibn ‘Abbās, mainly Mujāhid, Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr and al-Daḥḥāk, along with their teacher Ibn ‘Abbās, it meant the seven longest chapters of the Qur’an. On the other hand, for al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatādah, and eventually also Mujāhid (as he once held the former opinion), *al-sab‘ al-mathānī* meant *al-fātiḥah* (the first *sūrah* of the Qur’an) only. They quote a hadith found in *al-Bukhārī* to support this interpretation, whilst those holding the former opinion did not refer to any hadith.⁵⁶

Ibn Kathīr supported the latter interpretation, referring also to the hadith in *al-Bukhārī*, and stating in regards to the meaning of *al-sab‘ al-mathānī* that “*hādha naṣṣ fī anna al-fātiḥah, (huwa) al-sab‘ al-mathānī wa al-Qur’ān al-‘aẓīm*” (this is a clear statement that *al-fātiḥah* is the *al-sab‘ al-mathānī* and the sublime Qur’an).⁵⁷

Al-Daḥḥāk explains the meaning of verse 75:29: “And one leg will be joined with another” as two things that come together for someone who has died, these two things being the people who prepare the body for burial and the angels preparing his soul. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, on the other hand, interprets it literally stating “*humā sāqāka idhā iltaffatā*” (they are your legs when they are joined). In other

narrations, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī states: “They are your two legs when they are wrapped in the sheet.” ‘Ikrimah understands the meaning of verse 75:29 as *al-amr al-‘azīm bi al-amr al-‘azīm* (“a significant matter is joined with another significant matter”), and as for Mujaḥid, the verse means calamity joined with another calamity.⁵⁸

Having introduced some of the interpretations and exegesis of the *Tābi‘ūn*, including their differences, we now turn to the characteristics, sources, and methodology of their exegesis.

Principal Characteristics of the *Tābi‘ūns’* *Tafsīr*, Sources, and Methodology

Despite the claims that some *Tābi‘ūn* such as Mujaḥid, Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr and others wrote exegeses, their texts did not cover all the verses of the Qur’an. Generally speaking, the *tafsīr* of the *Tābi‘ūn* was simple and clear. It included very few quotations from poetry to support the definition of Qur’anic text, and whilst grammatical analyses are lacking, some of them, such as Qatādah did provide rhetorical and linguistic observations of some verses. They also explained a considerable number of individual words (the scope and purposes of which lie outside the purpose of this research).⁵⁹

The *Tābi‘ūn* primarily used three sources for their exegesis. One was the Qur’an. Sometimes they used Qur’anic verses to explain other Qur’anic verses, as pointed out earlier in Sa‘īd ibn Jubayr’s and Qatadah’s interpretation of Qur’anic verses 13:39, and 2:37.

The second source was the *Ṣaḥābah*, to whom the Successors referred extensively in their exegeses. All the hadiths they employed came from the Prophet’s Companions, and almost all their *tafsīr* quoted the *Ṣaḥābah*.

The third source was independent opinion. Although the *Tābi‘ūn* relied heavily on the Companions for their *tafsīr*, they also employed their own independent opinion (as already illustrated), because of which they differed in their understanding of some verses.

One other source they utilized for their interpretation of the Qur'an was the *isrā'iliyyāt*, especially the students of Ibn 'Abbās. Thus, in his *Fajr al-Islām*, Ahmed Amin states that the *tafsīr* of the *Tābi'ūn* was especially influenced by *isrā'iliyyāt*.⁶⁰ Al-Dhahabi and Adnan Nana list the most prominent sources of the *Isrā'iliyyāt* at the time of the *Ṣaḥābah* and the *Tābi'ūn* as being Ka'b al-Aḥbār, who was of Jewish origin, and Wahb ibn Munabih who had a Christian background.⁶¹

In many cases, the *Tābi'ūn* did not mention their sources when discussing *asbāb al-nuzūl*. Islamic methodology requires that sources of information be stated. This was particularly important for the generation of the *Tābi'ūn*, who were dependent on narratives and cautious about their authenticity. This caution was necessary due to the heavy fabrication in hadith which took place after the assassination of the third Caliph 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān. The *Tābi'ūn* sometimes used Qur'anic verses to explain other Qur'anic verses and also used hadith as a support in explaining the Qur'anic verses. They also quoted their teachers and the Companions, although, they occasionally differed with their teachers' interpretations.

Conclusion

Realistically speaking, it is not easy to give a true concept or picture of the exegetical works of the *Tābi'ūn*. The existing works of some individuals, like that of the *tafsīr* of Mujāhid, are still questionable. Thus, the exegeses of the *Tābi'ūn* found in classical works of *tafsīr*, such as al-Ṭabarī's *Jāmi' al-Bayān* and Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ʿAzīm*, were never critically analyzed to determine their authenticity. Such is the case with the *tafsīr* of the *Ṣaḥābah*. This is why one finds two or sometimes more than two contradictory reports or interpretations ascribed to the same exegete.

Muslim scholars are divided into two groups in terms of the binding authority of the *Tābi'ūn* exegesis. Most believe their exegesis to

be not *ḥujjah* as they did not meet the Prophet in person or witness the circumstances surrounding the revelation.

Others hold that as the exegetical works of the *Tābi'ūn* are based on the knowledge they acquired from the *Ṣaḥābah* they thus have equal standing with the work of the *Ṣaḥābah* as binding proof, because whatever knowledge the *Tābi'ūn* acquired would have been the same as that of their teachers.

Ultimately, it seems that the justifications and reasons provided by both sides hardly rest on scholastic credentials, but rather are based solely on the fact or merit of having lived at the time of the Prophet and having had contact with him.