

Glimpses of Shiism in the Musnad of Ibn Hanbal

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Publisher(s):

Ahlul Bayt World Assembly [4]

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Category:

Sunni & Shi'a [6]

Journal:

General (Message of Thaqalayn) [7]

The Musnad of Ibn Hanbal is considered among the most comprehensive and early collections of hadith of the Sunni sect. One of the characteristics of this work is the wide space given to hadith concerning the merits of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt. Compared to the other hadith compendiums of the Sunnis, the Musnad's emphasis on this subject is so pronounced that it has attracted the attention of orientalists and other researchers. The writer of this article has attempted to focus on this particular point of the Musnad and its author by selecting some of the hadith mentioned about topics such as Tashayyu', Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, Hadith Compendiums, Merits of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a), Hadith al-Ghadir, Hadith al-Thaqalayn, Hadith al-Manzilah.

Topic Tags:

Narrations [8]

Sunni [9]

Shia [10]

Hadith [11]

Abstract

Abu ‘Abdillah Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Hanbal Shaybani (166–241 AH/780–855 CE)¹ is the founder of one of the four schools of Sunni jurisprudence and his book al–Musnad² is considered among the most comprehensive and early collections of hadith. It contains some 30,000 sayings attributed to the Prophet and the period of its writing makes it among the foremost of the *sihah al–sittah* (six authentic books) of the Sunni sect.

One of the characteristics of this work is the wide space given to hadith concerning the merits of the Prophet’s Ahl al–Bayt, most of which are confirmed from the viewpoint of Shi‘ite Muslims as well. Compared to the other hadith compendiums of the Sunnis, the Musnad’s emphasis on this subject is so pronounced that it has attracted the attention of orientalist and other researchers. The writer of this article has attempted to focus on this particular point of the Musnad and its author by selecting some of the hadith mentioned in this bulky compendium with a short explanation wherever necessary.

The key words of this brief article are Tashayyu‘, Ibn Hanbal, Musnad, Hadith Compendiums, Merits of the Ahl al–Bayt (‘a), Hadith al–Ghadir, Hadith al–Thaqalayn, Hadith al–Manzilah.

1. He is popularly known as Ibn Hanbal. Born in Baghdad or in Merv in Khurasan (presently the city is in the Republic of Turkmenistan), he started learning hadith at the age of 16 and travelled to different places in collecting from scholars the sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad (S). Among his prominent teachers, mention could be made of Sufyan bin ‘Uyaynah, ‘Abd al–Razzaq bin Hammam al–San‘ani and Muhammad bin Idris al–Shafi‘i.

He left behind many works, the most famous of which is the hadith compendium titled al–Musnad. His biographers have credited him with such characteristics as sharp memory, patience, purity of heart and thought, sincerity, courage and intellect. For further familiarity on his life, viewpoints and bases of thought, refer to the contemporary Egyptian scholar Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zuhrah’s work titled: *Ibn Hanbal – Hayatuhu wa ‘Asruhu, Ara’uhu wa Fiqhuh* (Ibn Hanbal – His Life and Times, His Views and His Fiqh), Egypt, Dar al–Fikr al–‘Arabi, 1367 AH/1947 CE.

2. Musnad (pl. Masanid) is the name given to works where the hadith are arranged in order of the names of the companions who after the Prophet are regarded as the prime source by the Sunnis. Several books were compiled under this title, of which Ahmad bin Hanbal’s Musnad is the most famous one.

Introduction

The Musnad of Ibn Hanbal is probably the first of the six books of hadith considered authentic by Sunni Muslims, since its author died 15 years before the death of the senior-most of the six hadith compilers, Muhammad bin Isma'īl al-Bukhari (d. 256 AH), and 62 years before the last of them, Ahmad bin Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, passed away (303 AH). Throughout history, Sunni scholars have attached great importance to Ibn Hanbal's Musnad and eulogized it. Hafiz Abu Musa Madyani (581 AH), writes:

This book is a great source and a reliable reference work for researchers of hadith. The author has selected from the bulky hadith literature, a large number of narrations to serve as guidelines and support for the people so that when differences arise they take refuge in them and cite them as authentic. ¹

Shams al-Din Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Dhahabi (748 AH) writes:

This book focuses on the hadith of the Prophet. There are very few hadith not included (in this collection) whose authenticity has been confirmed...One of the fortunate things about the Musnad is that we find very few hadith which are considered inauthentic. ²

Ibn al-Jazari (833 AH) is even more ecstatic about Ibn Hanbal's Musnad, and says:

On the face of the earth no better book of hadith has been compiled. ³

Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani writes in *Tajrid Zawa'id al-Musnad al-Bazzaz*:

If a hadith is mentioned in Musnad Ibn Hanbal, other Masanid are not cited for its sources.

Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (849–911 AH) ⁴ says:

Even the weak hadith found in it are near to hasan (fair). ⁵

Although these expressions are a clear exaggeration, they nonetheless confirm the importance of this book for the Sunnis. In the light of historical accounts, it was a habit among the Sunnis of the past to recite this book in the presence of scholars of hadith, and at times such a recitation would be held in a sacred place. For instance, during the first half of the 9th century AH, Ibn Hanbal's Musnad was recited in the presence of Shams al-Din Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Jazari in the Masjid al-Haram of Mecca with the last session ending in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal 828 AH. ⁶ It is also reported that during the 12th century AH (18th century CE), a group of pious Sunnis gathered in the Prophet's Mosque in Medina to recite Ibn Hanbal's Musnad in 56 sessions. ⁷

However, the most outstanding characteristic of the Musnad is that it contains several eye catching hadith on the merits of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt ('a), whereas most of the compilers of the other masanid, sihah and sunan, have either ignored these ahadith or related only a few of them. Ibn Hanbal

got into trouble with the authorities for having related these ahadith on the merits of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and his house was searched on the orders of the 'Abbasid caliph Mutawakkil on suspicion of supporting the Alawid cause.⁸

It is a well known fact that Ahmad bin Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i, the last of the six Sunni compilers of the *sihah al-sittah*, relied on Ahmad bin Hanbal's narrations for writing his excellent work titled *Khasa'is Amir al-Mu'minin 'Ali bin Abi Talib ('a)*.⁹ In short, the *Musnad* contains narrations, many of which are considered authentic from the Shi'ite point of view.

These are so pronounced when compared to the other Sunni collections of hadith that orientalist and researchers have attempted to investigate the cause, and after drawing a comparison between Ahmad bin Hanbal and his contemporary compilers of the *sihah al-sittah*, have come to the conclusion that Muhammad bin Isma'il al-Bukhari and Muslim bin Hajjaj al-Qushayri, for fear of the 'Abbasids, left out these ahadith but since Ahmad was courageous he showed no fear in relating the ahadith on the merits of Imam 'Ali ('a) and the Ahl al-Bayt ('a).¹⁰

Ibn Hanbal did not confine the merits of the Prophet's Ahl al-Bayt ('a) to his book, but whenever necessary he opened his mouth to speak about these virtues. Despite the fact that he held all the companions of the Prophet in great esteem and considered those who cursed them to be outside the pale of Islam,¹¹ he strongly defended the superiority of the Prophet's immediate family against their enemies, especially against Mutawakkil who left no stone unturned in his enmity to the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). His son 'Abdullah bin Ahmad relates:

Once, when I was sitting with my father, a group of the people of Karkh (a locality of Baghdad) came and started a discussion on the caliphate of Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and (Imam) 'Ali ('a). My father raised his head and facing them said:

O people, you have said enough concerning (Imam) 'Ali ('a) and the caliphate. Be informed that the caliphate did not embellish (Imam) 'Ali ('a) but it was (Imam) 'Ali ('a) who embellished the caliphate.

Ibn Abi al-Hadid Mu'tazili (d. 655 AH), commenting on the above remarks of Ahmad bin Hanbal says:¹²

The meaning of this statement is that the other caliphs adorned themselves with the caliphate and the caliphate covered their flaws, but there was no shortcoming or deficiency in (Imam) 'Ali ('a) to be made up by the caliphate.¹³

'Abdullah bin Ahmad bin Hanbal also quotes his father as saying:

No narration with genuine isnad (chain of authority) has been related on the merits of anyone else (of the companions), as in the case of (Imam) 'Ali ('a).¹⁴

He further states:

I asked my father what credence he had concerning the preferential merits of the companions? He replied:

In the matter of caliphate, Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman are superior to all others.

I asked him what about (Imam) 'Ali ('a)? He answered:

O my son! (Imam) 'Ali bin Abi Talib ('a) is from a family concerning whom (whose merits) no one can deliberate.¹⁵

One of the students of Ibn Hanbal narrates:

We were in the presence of Ahmad bin Hanbal when a person asked:

O Aba 'Abdillah! What is your opinion about the hadith which says that (Imam) 'Ali ('a) stated:

“I am the distributor of hell?”

Ibn Hanbal replied:

From what aspect do you doubt its credence? Has it not been related that the Prophet told (Imam) 'Ali ('a): “None will love you but the faithful believer and none will hate you but the hypocrite?”

We said: Yes.

He asked: Where is the place of the faithful believer?

“In paradise”, we answered.

He asked: Where is the place of the hypocrite?

“In hell”, we replied.

He said: 'Ali is thus the distributor of hell.¹⁶

Ibn Hanbal's belief thus bears close resemblance to that of his teacher, Shafi'i, who also recorded the merits and virtues of Imam 'Ali ('a) and his descendants and considered himself their devotee. When Ibn Hanbal was asked about the battle between Imam 'Ali ('a) and Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan, he said regarding them he knew nothing but good,¹⁷ but added that in the field of jurisprudential studies he found Imam 'Ali ('a) to be linked to the truth.

For instance, when in his presence Shafi'i was accused of tashayyu for listing Imam 'Ali's ('a) battles with Mu'awiyah and the Khawarij under the rules of transgressors, he replied that among the companions of the Prophet, Imam 'Ali ('a) was the first leader who had to deal with the sedition and revolt of opponents.

This reply makes it clear that Shafi'i's categorizing of the battles between Imam 'Ali ('a) and Mu'awiyah under rules for transgressors, does not expose him to the fault-finding of his critics. In fact, for any fair observer, the verdict between Shafi'i and his critics is that Mu'awiyah was a transgressor, as could be further confirmed by the famous saying of the Prophet to his companion 'Ammar bin Yasir: "taqtuluka al-fi'ah al-baghiyah" (you will be killed by a party of transgressors).¹⁸

No one can deny that 'Ammar, while fighting on the side of Imam 'Ali ('a), was killed by the forces of Mu'awiyah during one of the battles of the Siffin War, and thus in the light of this hadith, beyond an iota of doubt, Mu'awiyah is a transgressor.¹⁹

Ibn Hanbal was a contemporary of four of the infallible Imams of the Prophet's Household – Imam Musa al-Kazim ('a), Imam 'Ali bin Musa al-Ridha' ('a), Imam Muhammad al-Jawad ('a) and Imam 'Ali al-Hadi ('a). The author of *Rawzat al-Jannat* relates on the authority of Daylami's *Irshad al-Qulub* that Ahmad bin Hanbal was a student of Imam al-Kazim ('a).²⁰

Shaykh al-Ta'ifah Tusi considers him among the students of Imam al-Ridha' ('a).²¹ A contemporary researcher pointing out Ibn Hanbal's links with Imami scholars, writes that he studied under many of those known to be followers of the school of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq ('a), and for this reason he has often been criticized by the enemies of the Shi'ites.²²

In view of the above facts it could be said that since Ahmad bin Hanbal was under the influence of the Infallible Imams ('a) or their disciples or that he had a spirit of courage and fair-mindedness, he did not hesitate to include in his *Musnad* many of the hadith on the virtues and merits of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a). These hadith are so eye-catching that one of the contemporary scholars has collected them in an exclusive work titled *Musnad al-Manaqib*.²³

In this article the writer has selected some hadith from the *Musnad* and highlighted them with brief explanations.

1. Abu Musa al-Madyani, *Khasa'is al-Musnad* (This treatise has been published at the beginning of Ibn Hanbal's *Musnad* by Ahmad Muhammad Shakir), p. 21.

2. Al-Jazari, Muhammad bin Muhammad, *al-Mus'ad al-Ahmad fi Khatm-i Musnad al-Imam Ahmad*, p. 39. This treatise has also been included by Shakir in his introduction to the *Musnad*.

3. *Ibid*, p. 28.

4. Al-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din, *Jami' al-Ahadith*, compiled and arranged by 'Abbas Ahmad Saqar and Ahmad 'Abd al-Jawad, published in 21 volumes by Dar al-Fikr, Beirut, 1994.

5. Hasan or fair, according to Sunni traditionists is the term used to classify a hadith which is traced to the Prophet or his companions or the second generation of Muslims, on the authority (sanad) of a person of short memory but considered reliable. This type of hadith is also free of shadh, which means a tradition of reliable isnad but contrary to another similarly attested tradition.

6. Ibn al-Jazari, *al-Mus'ad al-Ahmad fi khatm Musnad al-Imam Ahmad*, pp. 53-55.

7. Al-Muradi, *Silk al-Durar*, vol. 4, p. 160

8. On Ibn Hanbal's accusation of support for the Alawids refer to Abu al-Faraj 'Abd al-Rahman bin 'Ali bin al-Jawzi's *Manaqib al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal* with a foreword by 'Adil Nuwayhiz, Dar al-Afaq al-Jadidah Publishers, Beirut, pp. 359-362, 1973.
9. This work brought about the death of al-Nasa'i. It is said that when on a trip to Damascus he found the people of Syria ignorant of the lofty personality of Imam 'Ali ('a), he decided to write a book on the merits of the Commander of the Faithful. When al-Nasa'i started reading his work from the pulpit of the Mosque of Damascus, the enemies of the Prophet's Household pulled him down and beat him so severely that he succumbed to his injuries in Palestine.
10. Ahmad Amin, *Zuha al-Islam*, 6th edition, vol. 2, pp. 122-123, published by Maktabah al-Nihzat al-Misriyyah, 1961.
11. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Manaqib al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 165.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibn Abi al-Hadid, *Sharh Nahj al-Balaghah*, vol. 1, p. 17.
14. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Manaqib al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 163.
15. Ibid.
16. Abu al-Husayn Muhammad bin Abi Ya'la, *Tabaqat al-Hanabilah*, vol. 1, p. 320, edited by Muhammad Hamid al-Faqi, Cairo, 1952. It is interesting to note that Ibn Hanbal's reply bears close resemblance to the answer given by Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq ('a) to Mufazzal bin 'Umar concerning this same hadith. Imam 'Ali bin Musa al-Ridha' ('a) also gave a similar reply to Ma'mun; refer to 'Allamah Majlisi: *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 39, pp. 193-194, Dar al-Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut. It is essential to know that according to many narrations, Imam 'Ali ('a) has stated: "I am the distributor of heaven and hell", *Bihar al-Anwar*, vol. 39, p. 199.
17. Ibn al-Jawzi, *Manaqib al-Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal*, p. 164.
18. Baghi is used to describe a person who on the basis of a wrong cause rebels against and fights the just leader. In the view of Imami scholars, such a baghi is a kafir. Refer to al-Miqdad bin 'Abdullah al-Suyuri's *Kanz al-'Irfan fi fiqh al-Qur'an*, edited by Muhammad Baqir Behbudi, al-Maktabah al-Murtazawiyyah, vol. 1, p. 386, Tehran 1384 AH.
19. For more details refer to Shaykh Muhammad Abu Zuhrah's book *Ibn Hanbal: Hayatuhu wa 'Asruhu, Ara'uhu wa Fiqhuh*, pp. 148-149.
20. Muhammad Baqir al-Musawi al-Khwansari, *Rawzat al-Jannat*, vol. 1, p. 187, Maktabah Isma'iliyan, Tehran, 1390 AH.
21. Al-Tusi, *Muhammad bin al-Hasan, al-Rijal*, p. 367, edited by Muhammad Sadiq Al-i Bahr al-'Ulum, 1st edition, Najaf, 1381/1961. Also refer to Sayyid Abu al-Qasim al-Khu'i: *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith*, vol. 2, p. 260, 3rd edition, Dar al-Zahra', Beirut, 1403/1983.
22. Asad Haydar, *al-Imam al-Sadiq wa al-Madhahib al-Arba'ah*, vol. 2, pp. 503-506, 2nd edition, Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1392/1971. The author has listed the names of Ibn Hanbal's teachers, who according to him had Shi'ite tendencies, but a review of Shi'ite narrators in Sayyid al-Khu'i's *Mu'jam Rijal al-Hadith* shows that no hadith has been related from Ahmad bin Hanbal in authoritative Shi'ite books of hadith.
23. Ustadi, *Ridha', Musnad al-Ridha' ('a)* in 40 articles, p. 154, 1st edition, published by Kitab-Khaneh Ayatullah Mar'ashi Najafi, Qum, 1413/1371.

1) Admonition to Kinsmen and Nomination of Imam 'Ali ('a)

Ahmad bin Hanbal says:

Aswad bin 'Amir has related to us from Sharik from A'mash from Minhal from 'Abdullah bin Asadi, that

(Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) said:

When the ayah “***And warn your relatives of nearest kin***” (26:214) was revealed, the Prophet gathered his family around him and treated 30 of them to a meal and then said:

“Who is willing to guarantee my debts and commitments so that he should be with me in paradise and should be my successor from among my family.”

A person whom Shurayk did not name, answered:

O Messenger of Allah you are like a sea,¹ who can take charge of this responsibility.

The Prophet repeated his statement to his relatives, and (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) replied:

“I will undertake this responsibility.”²

Ahmad Muhammad Shakir the annotator of the Musnad has enumerated the isnad of this hadith as ha Ahmad bin Hanbal, al-Musnad, annotated by Ahmad Muhammad Shakir in 15 volumes, Dar al-Ma‘arif, Cairo, 1949–1958, hadith no. 883. san or fair. The same event has been narrated in greater detail in the words of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) in hadith no. 1371 of the Musnad (vol. 2, pp. 352–353) and the annotator has termed its isnad as sahih (authoritative).

1. Reference to the great generosity and munificence of the Prophet, Ahmad Shakir’s explanation on the margins of this hadith.

2. Ahmad bin Hanbal, al-Musnad, annotated by Ahmad Muhammad Shakir in 15 volumes, Dar al-Ma‘arif, Cairo, 1949–1958, hadith no. 883.

2) Hadith al-Manzilah

In 9 AH the Prophet prepared to march for the expedition against the Romans, and according to Shaykh Mufid and Shaykh Tusi since he was concerned of the evil intentions of the enemies, he told Imam ‘Ali (‘a): “It is not advisable to leave Medina without me or you.” He subsequently placed Imam ‘Ali (‘a) in charge of Medina before departing for the expedition to Tabuk, and in order to quell the hypocrites’ ill-speaking of his cousin, he said the latter’s position to him was like that of Aaron to Prophet Moses (‘a). This saying is known as Hadith al-Manzilah and has been reported by all scholars. Ibn Hanbal has recorded it in the Musnad twenty times through different chains of isnad on the authority of several companions of the Prophet including Jabir bin ‘Abdullah al-Ansari, Asma’ bint ‘Umays, ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abbas, Abi Sa‘id al-Khidri and Sa‘d bin Abi Waqqas.¹ The last named has related it ten times and one

of the versions reads as follows:

Abi Ahmad Zubayri quotes ‘Abdullah bin Habib bin Abi Thabit from Hamzah bin ‘Abdullah from his father and from Sa‘d (bin Abi Waqqas) who narrating this hadith for us, said:

When the Messenger of Allah left Medina for Tabuk he placed (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) as his vicegerent in Medina. (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) asked the Prophet:

“Are you making me your vicegerent?”

The Prophet replied:

“Are you not happy that your position to me is that of Aaron to Moses, except that there is no Prophet after me?”²

Ahmad Shakir has termed the isnad of this hadith as fair.

1. Hamdi ‘Abd al-Majid al-Salafi, *Murshid al-Muhtar*, vol. 1, p. 239, 2nd edition, Beirut, 1407/1987.

2. *Al-Musnad*, hadith no. 1600 (Ahmad Shakir).

3) Abu Bakr’s Dismissal from leading the Hajj and the Entrustment to Imam ‘Ali (‘a) to Convey Surah al-Bara’ah

Ibn Hanbal says of the event which occurred in the month of Dhi al-Hijjah, 9 AH:

Waki‘has related to us from Isra’il from Abi Ishaq from Zayd bin Yuthay‘ from Abu Bakr:

The Prophet sent him (Abu Bakr) with Surah al-Bara’ah to the people of Mecca (to proclaim) that after this year no polytheist will be allowed at the Hajj, neither should the nude circumambulate the Ka‘bah, none will enter paradise except the person who has become Muslim, whoever has a pact between him and the Messenger of Allah it is valid until the specified period, and Allah and His Messenger are free from any obligation to the polytheists. After a while, he told (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a), may Allah be pleased with him:

Overtake Abu Bakr and send him back to me and you proclaim (the Surah to the Meccans).

(Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) acted as per the instructions and when Abu Bakr returned to the Prophet he cried and said:

O Messenger of Allah, did anything happen?

He replied:

Nothing has happened concerning you except good, but I have been commanded (by Allah) that these (commandments) should either be conveyed by my or by a man who is from me. 1

Ahmad Shakir, the annotator of the Musnad has considered the isnad of this hadith as sahih (authoritative) and has said that Zayd bin Yuthay‘ was a trustworthy person of the first generation of Muslims after the Prophet and the name of his father has also been mentioned as Uthay‘.

Habashi bin Junadah al-Suluki who took part in the Farewell Pilgrimage of the Prophet, has recorded four hadith with a similar text in his own Musnad which confirms Ibn Hanbal’s narration of the above hadith. Habashi quotes Abu Bakr that the Messenger of Allah (S) said:

‘Ali is from me and I am from him. My words will not be conveyed except by me or by ‘Ali.2

1. Al-Musnad, hadith no. 4.

2. Ibn Hanbal’s Musnad published in 6 volumes by Matba‘ah al-Maymaniyyah, vol. 4, pp. 164–165, 1st edition, Egypt, 1313 AH.

4) The Prophet’s Declaration of Imam ‘Ali’s (‘a) Vicegerency

Ahmad bin Hanbal says:

Burayrah (Aslami) has related: The Prophet (S) dispatched two regiments towards Yemen, one under the command of (Imam) ‘Ali bin Abi Talib (‘a) and the other led by Khalid bin Walid with instructions that when the two regiments are with each other they should be under the sole command of (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a), and when they are separate they will remain under different commanders. We the Muslim forces, encountered the Yemeni tribe of Bani Zayd and fought and defeated these infidels. When their men had died fighting, the families surrendered and from among the captives, (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) chose a maid for himself.

Burayrah continues:

Khalid bin Walid sent me to the Prophet with a letter informing him of this matter. I submitted the letter to the Prophet and when he had read it I saw signs of anger appear on his face. I said:

O Messenger of Allah (S), you sent me with a man instructing me to obey him, and accordingly I performed whatever duty I was ordered to do.

The Messenger of Allah (S) said:

La taqa' fi 'Aliyyin fa innahu minni wa ana minhu wa huwa waliyyukum ba'di wa innahu minni wa ana minhu wa huwa waliyyukum ba'di (Don't try to find faults with 'Ali, he is indeed from me and I am from him, he is your leader after me. He is from me and I am from him, he is your leader after me).¹

1. Ibn Hanbal's Musnad, vol. 5, 356, Matba'ah al-Maymaniyyah.

5) Hadith al-Thaqalayn

Ahmad bin Hanbal says:

Aswad bin 'Amir has related from Abi Isra'il, i.e. Isma'il bin Abi Ishaq Malaie, from 'Atiyah from Abi Sa'id who quotes the Prophet as saying:

“Inni tarikun fikum al-thaqalayn, ahaduhuma akbaru min al-akhar, Kitaballah hablun mamdudun min al-sama'-i ila al-arz wa 'itrati Ahl-i Bayti, wa annahuma lan yaftaraqa hatta yarida 'alayya al-hawz”

*I am leaving among you two precious things, one of which is greater than the other. The Book of Allah which is the rope extending from the sky to the earth and my progeny my Ahl al-Bayt. And the two will never part with each other until they return to me at the pool (of kawthar in paradise).*¹

1. Ibid, vol. 3, p. 14. Hadith al-Thaqalayn has been recorded extensively in the Musnad, e.g. vol. 3, pp. 17, 26 & 59; vol. 4, p. 367; vol. 5, pp. 181, 189, 190.

6) Hadith al-Ghadir

Ahmad bin Hanbal says:

‘Abdullah bin Ahmad relates from ‘Ali bin Hakim Awdi from Sharik from Abi Ishaq from Sa‘id bin Wahab and Zayd bin Yuyhay‘ both of whom have narrated:

(Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) complained and addressed the people at Rahbah, saying:

“All those who had heard the Prophet’s words at Ghadir Khum, stand up.”

The narrator says:

Six persons on behalf of Sa‘id and six persons on behalf of Zayd stood up and bore testimony that they heard the Prophet say on the Day of Ghadir:

“A laysa Allahu awla bi al-mu‘minin? Qalu: Bala. Qala: Allahumma man kuntu mawlah fa ‘Aliyyun mawlah. Allahumma wali man walah wa ‘adi man ‘adah (Is not God superior to the faithful?

Yes! said the gathering. He said:

O Allah! For whomsoever I am master ‘Ali is his master. O Allah! befriend his friends and despise his enemies).¹

Ibn Hanbal has recorded the event of Ghadir over 30 times in his Musnad through different isnad or chains of authority and in the words of more than 10 companions of the Prophet.²

The version of Hadith al-Ghadir mentioned above is from the notes of Ibn Hanbal’s son ‘Abdullah on his father’s work. Ahmad Shakir the annotator of the Musnad has described as sahih the isnad of this hadith and has said about Sa‘id bin Wahab Khaywani that he was among the trustworthy and experienced Muslims of the first generation after the Prophet.³

1. Al-Musnad, hadith no. 950 (Ahmad Shakir).

2. Al-Salafi, Murshid al-Muhtar, vol. 3, pp. 156–157.

3. Ahmad Shakir’s explanation on Hadith al-Ghadir.

7) Preventing the Prophet from Writing the Will

Ahmad bin Hanbal says:

Wahab bin Jarir has related from his father from Yunus from Zuhari from ‘Ubaydullah that ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abbas narrated a hadith to us that the Prophet said in his last days:

“Come, I will write for you a text so that you will never go astray after me”.

Several persons including ‘Umar bin al-Khattab were present and ‘Umar told the gathering:

Pain has prevailed upon the Prophet. The Qur’an is with you and the Book of Allah is sufficient for us.

The gathering disputed with each other in this matter, with some repeating ‘Umar’s words and others telling him (‘Umar):

Hearken, so that the Prophet may write something for you.

Since voices were raised and disputes arose the Prophet felt distressed and told them firmly:

“Get up and leave my presence”.

Ibn ‘Abbas added:

The great tragedy is that, by their dispute and clamour, they prevented the Prophet from writing the will for them.¹

Ahmad Shakir describing the isnad of this hadith as sahih,²writes: This hadith has been repeated in this book (Musnad) in the same words or in a summarized form in several places.³

1. Al-Musnad, hadith no. 2992 (Ahmad Shakir)

2. Refer to footnotes of the same hadith

3. Al-Musnad, hadith nos. 2676 & 31111; also refer to Musnad, Matba‘ah al-Maymaniyyah, vol. 3, p. 346 (Musnad Jabir bin ‘Abdullah al-Ansari).

8) Three Merits of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) in One Hadith

Ahmad bin Hanbal says:

Qutaybah bin Sa'id has related to us from Hatam bin Isma'il from Bukayr bin Mismar from 'Amir bin Sa'd from his father (Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas) who narrated the hadith that when the Prophet on leaving for a campaign asked (Imam) 'Ali ('a) to stay (behind in the city) in his place, the latter said:

“Are you leaving me with the women and children?”

I heard the Prophet reply to him:

“Ya 'Ali ama tarza 'an takuna minni bi manzilati Harun min Musa illa annahu la nabiyya ba'di (O 'Ali! Are you not pleased that your position to me is similar to that of Aaron to Moses, except that prophethood will cease after me?).”

(Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas says) I also heard (the Prophet say) on the Day of Khaybar:

“La-u'tiyanna al-riyah rajulan yuhibbu Allaha wa Rasulahu wa yuhibbuhu Allahu wa Rasuluh” (I will give the standard to the man who loves Allah and His Prophet and who is loved (in turn) by Allah and His Prophet).”

All of us raised our necks (to see). He said:

“Call 'Ali to me.”

On hearing this instruction (Imam) 'Ali ('a) was brought to the Prophet with sore eyes. The Prophet rubbed his eyes with his saliva and gave him the standard and through his hands Allah conquered Khaybar for the Muslims. And when the ayah “Call our sons and your sons, and our women and your women and ourselves and yourselves” (3:61) was revealed, the Messenger of Allah called 'Ali ('a), Fatimah ('a), Hasan ('a) and Husayn ('a) and said:

“Allahumma haula'i ahli (O Allah these [persons] are my family).”¹

The annotator of the Musnad considers the isnad of this hadith as sahih (authoritative) and writes:

This hadith has also been recorded through Qutaybah on the same chain of authority by Muslim and Tirmidhi in their books. At the beginning of this hadith, it is mentioned in the two books (Sahih Muslim and Sahih Tirmidhi) that Mu'awiyah (bin Abi Sufyan) ordered Sa'd (bin Abi Waqqas) to curse (Imam) 'Ali ('a), saying:

What prevents you from cursing Abu Turab?

Sa'd replied:

“I remember three things which the Messenger of Allah said to (Imam) 'Ali ('a) and accordingly I will never curse him. If only one of these virtues was for me I would have considered it better than possessing red-haired camels.”

Then he related the three virtues (of Imam ‘Ali) for Mu‘awiyah as said before.²

1. Al-Musnad, hadith no. 1608 (Ahmad Shakir).

2. Muslim bin Hajjaj, al-Jami‘ al-Sahih, vol. 2, pp. 236–237, Bulaq Press, Cairo, 1290 AH; Muhammad bin ‘Isa Tirmidhi: al-Sunan (al-Jami‘ al-Sahih), vol. 4, pp. 329–330, printed in India, 1328.

9) The merits of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) According to Ibn ‘Abbas

Ahmad bin Hanbal says:

Yahya bin Hammad has related to us from Abi ‘Awwanah from Abi Balj from ‘Amr bin Maymunah who narrated the hadith, saying:

“I was sitting with (‘Abdullah) bin ‘Abbas when nine parties approached him and said:

Either get up and come with us or leave this place for us.

Ibn ‘Abbas who at that time had not yet lost his eyesight, answered:

I will come with you.

They conferred with him in slow tones and we did not understand what they spoke about. Ibn ‘Abbas then returned to his place and while shaking his clothes said:

Alas, alas! They are trying to fault with a man who has ten privileges (which he recounted as follows):

A. The Prophet (on the day of the conquest of Khaybar) said: “I will send the one whom God will never turn back distressed; he loves Allah and His Prophet.” Then he enquired: “Where is ‘Ali?” They answered that he was at home writhing in pain.

He said: “May none of you be afflicted with pain.” Then ‘Ali came with his sore eyes in a state that he was almost unable to see a thing or the way. The Prophet blew his breath into his eyes and after shaking the standard thrice, handed it to ‘Ali, who returned victorious from this mission and brought with him (for the Prophet) Safiyyah bint Ibn Akhtab.¹

B. The Prophet had sent someone (Abu Bakr) for conveying Surah al-Bara’ah (to the people of Mecca). Then he sent (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) after him to take charge of the Surah and said: “This Surah should not be

conveyed except by him who is from me and I am from him.”

C. He told his near of kin (children of ‘Abdul–Muttalib): “Who among you is ready to accept my wilayah in this world and the hereafter?” They did not reply to him. ‘Ali (‘a) who was sitting near him said: “I am your friend in this world and the hereafter.” The Prophet said: “You are (indeed) my friend in this world and the hereafter.” The Prophet again turned to the gathering and asked: “Who among you will choose my friendship in the world and the hereafter?” They did not reply but ‘Ali said: “O Messenger of Allah! I choose your friendship in this world and hereafter.” He said: “You are certainly my friend in this world and the hereafter.”

D. He is the first one after Khadijah to practice the Muslim faith.

E. The Prophet raised his cloak and covering ‘Ali, Fatimah, Hasan and Husayn with it, said:

“Indeed, Allah desires to remove uncleanness from you O Ahl al-Bayt and keep you pure as pure can be.” (Holy Qur’an 33:33)

F. (Imam) ‘Ali sold (risked) his life, put on the Prophet’s clothes and slept in his place when the infidels (of Mecca) intended to make the Prophet the target of their malevolence. ‘Ali (‘a) was sleeping when Abu Bakr approached him thinking him to be the Prophet. (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) told him: “The Prophet has gone towards the well of Maymun, go and join him.” Abu Bakr left and entered the Cave of Thaur with him. The infidels started pelting (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) with stones (mistaking him to be the Prophet). He flexed himself, writhed in pain but did not remove the cloth covering his head. Only with the break of dawn did he remove aside the cloth covering his head.

G. When the Prophet was leaving Medina with the people for the Tabuk expedition, (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) asked him: “Am I not accompanying you?” The Prophet replied in the negative. (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) sighed and the Prophet told him: “Are you not pleased that your position to me is similar to that of Aaron to Moses, except that you are not a Prophet? Is it not proper for me to leave and you should stay as my vicegerent?”

H. The Prophet told him: “After me you are the Master and Leader of all faithful people.”

I. The Prophet said: “Close all doors (of houses) leading into the Mosque (of Medina) except that of the house of ‘Ali.” As a result he could enter the mosque in any state, since except for this passage there was no other entrance to his house.

J. The Prophet said: “For whomsoever I am Master, ‘Ali is his Master.”²

1. The conquest of Khaybar by Imam ‘Ali (‘a) is among the widely related hadith. Ibn Hanbal has recorded this several times in his Musnad, e.g. refer to vol. 3, p. 116 and vol. 4, p. 52, al–Maymuniyyah print.

2. We have mentioned this hadith in brief because of its length. For the full text refer to Musnad, hadith 3062 (Ahmad

Shakir), and also hadith no. 3063 recorded through different isnad. Ahmad Shakir considers the isnad of both the hadith as sahih.

10) The Canonical Meaning of Ahl al-Bayt (‘a)

Ibn Hanbal says:

A. Ahmad has related from Muhammad bin Mas‘ab from Awza‘i from Shaddad Abi ‘Ammar who narrates:

I approached Wathilah bin Asqa‘while a group of people was with him and were speaking about (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a). When they got up and left, Wathilah said:

Do you want me to inform you what I had seen of the Messenger of Allah (S).

I replied in the affirmative. Wathilah said:

I went to Fatimah (‘a) to enquire about (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) and she said that he had gone to the Messenger of Allah (S). I waited for him to come and saw the Messenger of Allah (S) approaching with ‘Ali, Hasan and Husayn. The Prophet entered with Hasan and Husayn holding either of his hands, and he went near to ‘Ali and Fatimah and made them sit on their knees in front of him and Hasan and Husayn. Then he covered them with his cloak and recited this ayah:

إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمُ الرِّجْسَ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ وَيُطَهِّرَكُمْ تَطْهِيرًا

“Indeed, Allah desires to remove uncleanness from you O Ahl al-Bayt and keep you pure as pure can be.” (Holy Qur’an 33:33)

Then he said:

“Allahumma haula’i Ahlu Bayti wa Ahlu Bayti ahaqq (O Allah these the people of my house and the people of my house are [certainly] most meritorious).”¹

B. Aswad bin ‘Amir has related to us from Hammad bin Salamah from ‘Ali bin Zayd from Anas bin Malik who narrates that for six months every morning when the Prophet came out (of his house), he would pass by the doorstep of Fatimah’s house and say:

“To prayer O Ahl al-Bayt, Indeed, Allah desires to remove uncleanness from you O Ahl al-Bayt and

keep you pure as pure can be.”²

The above description reveals that the word Ahl al-Bayt in the context of this ayah is a canonical term established by the Holy Qur'an and elucidated by the Prophet who determined the identity of this group. The Prophet by gathering his daughter Fatimah ('a), her husband Imam 'Ali ('a) and the couple's two sons Imam Hasan ('a) and Imam Husayn ('a) under his cloak and reciting this ayah which was revealed in praise of this group, made it clear that who actually are the Ahl al-Bayt and who are not included in the concept of this ayah.³

An interesting point to note here is that although Ibn Hanbal's narrations of the above ahadith have made clear the concept of the Ahl al-Bayt in Ayah al-Tathir (Verse of Purity), he has recorded under the section Musnad Ahl al-Bayt several hadith not only from Imam Hasan and Imam Husayn ('a) but from their uncles 'Aqil bin Abi Talib and Ja'far bin Abi Talib as well as from their cousin 'Abdullah bin Ja'far.⁴

It is worth noting that the last three persons, despite being the meritorious scions of the Prophet's clan, the Bani Hashim, are not members of the Ahl al-Bayt in view of the canonical term of the Qur'anic ayah. This slip on the part of Ibn Hanbal can be explained by the ahadith concerning Imam 'Ali ('a) which he has included in the so-called group 'Asharah al-Mubashshirah and also mixed up ahadith on the merits of Hazrat Fatimah al-Zahra' ('a) in the section titled Musnad al-Nisa'.⁵

1. Musnad, vol. 4, p. 107 (Musnad Wathilah bin Asqa'), Matba'ah al-Maymaniyyah; also refer to vol. 6, pp. 292, 298, 304, 323 (Musnad Umm-i Salamah).

2. Ibid, vol. 3, p. 259 (Musnad Anas bin Malik); also refer to vol. 3, p. 286.

3. On the identity of the Ahl al-Bayt.

4. Al-Musnad, vol. 3, pp. 167, 199 (Ahmad Shakir)

5. For hadith on Hazrat Fatimah al-Zahra' ('a) refer to al-Musnad, vol. 6, p. 282, Matba'ah al-Maymaniyyah.

11) Friendship with the Ahl al-Bayt ('a)

Ibn Hanbal says:

A. Ahmad has related from Ibn Numayr from A'mash from 'Adiyy bin Thabit from Zirr bin Husbaish from (Imam) 'Ali ('a) who narrates:

By Allah! One of the covenants which the Messenger of Allah (S) bound me with is this:

“None will bear enmity towards me but the hypocrite and none will love me but the faithful believer.”¹

Ahmad Shakir regards the isnad of this hadith as sahih and says about ‘Adiyy bin Thabit al–Ansari al–Kufi:

He was one of the trustworthy persons of the first generation of Muslims after the Prophet and his being a Shi‘ah does not affect his narrations since he was trustworthy and truthful.

B. ‘Abdullah bin Ahmad has recorded: Nasr bin ‘Ali Azdi narrates from ‘Ali bin Ja‘far from his brother (Imam) Musa bin Ja‘far (‘a) from his father (Imam) Ja‘far bin Muhammad (al–Sadiq) from his father (Muhammad bin ‘Ali al–Baqir), and he from (his father Imam) ‘Ali bin al–Husayn (‘a), who from his father (Imam Husayn), and grandfather (Imam ‘Ali), who narrates the hadith that the Messenger of Allah (S) holding the hands of Hasan and Husayn said:

“Man ahabbani wa ahabba hadhayn wa abahuma wa ummahuma kana ma‘i fi darajati yawm al–qiyamah” (Anyone who loves me and these two and their father and mother will be with me and on my station on the Day of Resurrection).²

Ahmad Shakir considers the isnad of this hadith as sahih. It is also worth noting that when Nasr bin ‘Ali Azdi narrated this hadith he was subjected to 1000 whiplashes on the orders of the ‘Abbasid caliph al–Mutawakkil.³

C. Abu Ahmad (Muhammad bin ‘Abdullah bin Zubayr Asadi) has related to us from Sufyan (Thawri) from Abi Jihaf from Abi Hazim from Abi Hurayrah who quotes a hadith from the Messenger of Allah (S), saying:

“Man ahabbahuma faqad ahabbani wa man abghazahuma faqad abghazani, ya‘ni Hasanan wa Husaynan” (Anyone who loves them, I mean Hasan and Husayn, indeed loves me, and anyone who hates them, surely hates me).⁴

Ahmad Shakir considers the isnad of this hadith as sahih.

1. Al–Musnad, hadith no. 642 (Ahmad Shakir). This hadith has been recorded through a slightly different chain of authority (isnad) on pages 102 & 236 of the same book.

2. Ibid, hadith no. 576. This hadith has been added by Ibn Hanbal’s son ‘Abdullah.

3. Ibn Hajar ‘Asqalani, Tahdhib al–Tahdhib, vol. 1, p. 430, printed by Da‘irat al–Ma‘arif al–‘Uthmaniyyah, Haiderabad Deccan (India).

4. Al–Musnad, hadith no. 7863 (Ahmad Shakir); also refer to hadith nos. 6406 & 7392 of the same edition.

12) Imam ‘Ali’s (‘a) Comparison with Prophet Jesus (‘a)

Ibn Hanbal says:

‘Abdullah bin Ahmad has related to us from Abu al-Harth Surayj bin Yunus from Abu Hafs Abbar from Hakam bin ‘Abd al-Malik from Harth bin Hasirah from Abi Sadiq from Rabi‘ah bin Najidh from (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a), who narrates:

The Messenger of Allah (S) told me:

“Fika mathalun min ‘Isa, abghazathu al-Yahud hatta bahatu ummahu, wa ahabbathu al-Nasara hatta anzaluhu bi al-manzilati allati laysa bih (You are like Jesus. The Jews hated him so much that they slandered his mother, and the Christians because of their extreme devotion to him placed him in a position which was not his.”

Then (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) said:

“Yuhliku fiyya rajulan, muhibbun mufritun yuqarrizuni bi ma laysa fiyya, wa mubghizun yahmiluhu shan’ani ‘ala an yabhatani (Two persons [groups] are doomed concerning me; the devoted extremist exalting me to what I am not, and the spiteful hater bearing malice towards me and slandering me).¹

The annotator of the Musnad considers the isnad of this hadith as hasan (fair).

1. Al-Musnad, hadith no. 1376 and also hadith no. 1377 with a slight variation in its text and a different chain of authority (Ahmad Shakir).

13) Sadaqah Forbidden to the Prophet’s Progeny

Ibn Hanbal says:

Muhammad bin Ja‘far has related from Shu‘bah from Burayd bin Abi Maryam from Abi Hawra’ who narrates the hadith that he told (Imam) Hasan bin ‘Ali (‘a):

“What memories do you have of (your grandfather) the Messenger of Allah (S).”

He replied:

“I remember that once when I picked up a date from the dates that were part of zakat and placed it in my mouth, the Messenger of Allah (S) pulled it out of my mouth together with the saliva around it and threw it among the rest of the dates. He was asked (by his companions):

O Messenger of Allah (S)! What would have happened if you had not taken from the child this one date?

He replied:

Inna Al-a Muhammad la tahillu lana al-sadaqah... (For us the progeny of Muhammad, sadaqah [alms] is not permissible).”¹

According to Ahmad Shakir the isnad of this hadith are sahih. This hadith with slight variation in its text or chain of authority has been repeated over fifteen times in the Musnad.²

1. Al-Musnad, hadith no. 1727 (Ahmad Shakir)

2. Among these mention could be made of Hadith nos. 1723, 1725, 1731, & 7744 of Musnad. Also refer to al-Salafi: Murshid al-Muhtar, vol. 1, p. 177 for similar hadith.

14) Imam ‘Ali (‘a) will Fight for Interpretation of the Qur’an

Ibn Hanbal says:

Waki‘has related to us from Fitr from Isma‘il bin Raja’ from his father from Abi Sa‘id who narrates that the Messenger of Allah (S) said (addressing his companions):

“Inna minkum man yuqatilu ‘ala ta’wilih kama qataltu ‘ala tanzilih” (Who among you will fight for the interpretation [of the Qur’an] as I fought on its revelation)?

Abi Sa‘id says:

At this Abu Bakr and ‘Umar got up but the Messenger of Allah (S) said:

“la, wa lakin khasif al-na‘l (No [not you] but the one who is busy mending the shoe).”

(Abi Sa‘id adds):

Wa ‘Aliyun yakhsifu na‘lahu (And [Imam] ‘Ali (‘a) was mending his shoes).¹

It is recorded that during the Battle of Siffin the Prophet’s loyal companion ‘Ammar bin Yasir who was on the side of Imam ‘Ali (‘a), referred to this famous hadith of the Prophet in favour of Imam ‘Ali (‘a) while facing the Syrian army of the rebel Mu‘awiyah bin Abi Sufyan, and recited the following epic verses (rajaz):

Nahnu darabnakum ‘ala tanzilih

Wa al–yawm nadribukum ‘ala ta’wilih

(We had fought you on the revelation [of the Qur’an] and today we are fighting you on its correct interpretation).²

1. Al–Musnad, Matba‘ah al–Maymaniyyah, vol. 3, pp. 31 & 33; also refer to p. 82 of the same volume where the hadith says Imam ‘Ali (‘a) was mending the Prophet’s shoes.

2. Taha Husayn, al–Fitnah al–Kubra (‘Ali and Prophethood), vol. 2, p. 77, 6th edition, Dar al–Ma‘arif, Egypt, 1969.

15) ‘Ammar would be killed by Transgressors

Ibn Hanbal says:

Abu Mu‘awiyah has related to us from A‘mash from ‘Abd al–Rahman bin Ziyad who quotes ‘Abdullah bin Harth as saying:

I was with Mu‘awiyah (ibn Abi Sufyan) when he was returning from (the Battle of) Siffin and I was riding between him and ‘Amr bin ‘As, when ‘Abdullah the son of ‘Amr bin ‘As said:

Don’t you remember the Messenger of Allah had told ‘Ammar

“Waihaka ya ibn al–Sumayyah, taqtuluka al–fi’ah al–baghiyah (Bravo O son of Sumayyah! You will be killed by a group of transgressors).”

‘Amr bin ‘As turned to Mu‘awiyah and said:

Did you not hear what he says?

Mu‘awiyah replied:

You find fault with us! Did we kill him? Those who brought him here are responsible for his death! 1

This hadith has been recorded over twenty times in the Musnad on the authority of eight companions of the Prophet with variations in its text.² Ahmad Shakir considers this hadith not only sahih but mutawatir (regularly transmitted throughout the first three generations of Muslims by a large number of transmitters) and says that scholars have never doubted its veracity. Explaining the word hannahu (finding fault) as used by Mu'awiyah, he writes:

It is clear that Mu'awiyah is not disputing this hadith but is censuring 'Abdullah bin 'Amr (bin 'As) for remembering it in this situation (when 'Ammar has been killed by his troops), since he fears that if his army knows that he is on the wrong track they would desert him. In view of this fact, Mu'awiyah was trying to misinterpret and give a wrong connotation to this hadith by saying that the killers of 'Ammar are those that brought him to the battlefield.

Ahmad Shakir, quoting Ibn Hajar 'Asqalani's comments in Fath al-Bari fi Tafsir Sahih al-Bukhari (vol. 1, p. 452), further writes:

This hadith has been related by several companions of the Prophet including Qatadah bin Nu'man, Umm Salamah, Abi Hurayrah, 'Abdullah bin 'Amr bin 'As, 'Uthman bin 'Affan, Hudhayfah al-Yamani, Abu Ayyub al-Ansari, Abu Rafi', Khuzaymah bin Thabit, Mu'awiyah, 'Amr bin 'As, Abu al-Yasar and 'Ammar bin Yasir himself. This hadith is a firm proof of the virtues of (Imam) 'Ali ('a) and 'Ammar and their standing with the Prophet. It is also a fitting reply to the enemies of (Imam) 'Ali (nawasib pl. of nasib) who accuse him of error in his wars (during his caliphate).³

1. Al-Musnad, hadith no. 6499 (Ahmad Shakir).

2. Also refer to hadith nos. 6500, 6926, 6927. For other instances of its recording in the Musnad refer to al-Salafi: Murshid al-Muhtar, vol. 2, p. 39. For details on the Prophet's prophecy and 'Ammar's martyrdom refer to Muhammad bin Jarir al-Tabari: Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Muluk, vol. 5, pp. 38 to 42, annotated by Muhammad Abu al-Fazl Ibrahim, 2nd edition, Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 1971.

3. Al-Musnad, hadith nos. 209, 210.

16) Prophecy of the Martyrdom of Imam Husayn ('a)

Ibn Hanbal says:

Muhammad bin 'Ubayd has related to us from Sharhabil bin Madrak from 'Abdullah bin Nujayy from his father who narrates that he was marching with (Imam) 'Ali ('a) towards Siffin and when we reached

Ninevah, (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a) cried in a loud voice:

“O Aba ‘Abdillah! Be patient. O Aba ‘Abdillah! Be patient beside the River Euphrates.”

I asked him:

For what?

He said:

“Once when I went to the Prophet I saw tears in his eyes and asked him:

O Messenger of Allah (S) who has made you upset? Why are your eyes moist with tears?

He said:

Bal qama min ‘indi Jibra’ilu qabl, fahaddathani anna al-Husayn yuqtulu bishatt al-Furat. Qala: Hal laka an ushimaka min turbatih? Qala: Qultu: Na‘am. Famadda yadahu faqabaza qabzatan min turabin fa a‘taniha. falam amliku ‘ayni an fazata (A while ago [the Archangel] Gabriel left. He has informed me that indeed Husayn will be killed beside the River Euphrates.

Then he [the Prophet] said:

Do you like to smell part of his soil [where Imam Husayn (‘a) will be killed].

I said:

Yes.

He stretched his hand and taking a fistful of soil gave it to me. As a result, tears started rolling down uncontrollably from my eyes.)”¹

The annotator of the Musnad regards the isnad of this hadith as sahih and writes that Nujayy is not the only one to narrate this from Imam ‘Ali (‘a).

1. Ibid, hadith no. 6480 (Ahmad Shakir).

17) The Number of the Prophet's Righteous Successors

Ibn Hanbal says:

A. Hasan bin Musa has related to us from Hammad bin Zayd from Mujalid from Sha'bi from Masruq who says that in Kufa 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud was giving us lessons from the Holy Qur'an when a person asked:

O Aba 'Abd al-Rahman! Did you not ask the Prophet how many caliphs would this ummah have?

'Abdullah bin Mas'ud said:

Since my coming to Iraq no one has posed me this question so far except you.

Then he added:

Yes! We did ask the Messenger of Allah (S) about this matter and he said:

"Ithna-'Ashara ka 'iddati nuqaba' Bani Isra'il (Twelve, equal to the number of the Chieftans of Bani Isra'il)."1

The isnad of this hadith are sahih according to Ahmad Shakir.

Ibn Hanbal says:

B. Sufyan bin 'Uyaynah has related to us from 'Abd al-Malik bin 'Umayr from Jabir bin Samrah al-Suwa'i who narrates that he heard the Messenger of Allah (S) say:

"La yazal hadha al-amr maziyan hatta yaqum ithna-'ashara amiran (This affair [religion] will continue until twelve leaders [Amir] will rise)."

Then he mentioned something which I did not hear, so I asked my father (who was sitting beside me), who said:

"All of whom will be from the Quraysh."2

This hadith has been recorded over 40 times in Ibn Hanbal's Musnad³ and in some versions the word Khalifah is found instead of Amir.⁴The version which I have selected here has the shortest chain of authority and reaches the Prophet through the medium of three narrators. Sunni scholars and exegetes of hadith have rather been perplexed and come up with unconvincing comments in their explanation of this particular hadith of the Prophet. They have been unable to reconcile with their beliefs the meaning of

the figure of “twelve caliphs” as used by the Prophet. As a result we find conflicting and self-contradictory answers in their explanations.⁵

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1. Ibid, hadith no. 3781. Refer to Holy Qur’an (5:12) regarding the Nuqaba’ (Chieftans) of Bani Isra’il.
 2. Al-Musnad, vol. 5, p. 101. Also refer to al-Safarini, Shams al-Din Muhammad: Sharh Thulathiyat Ahmad, vol. 1, p. 539, first edition, 1380, Damascus.
 3. Al-Salafi, Murshad al-Muhtar, vol. 3, p. 380.
 4. E.g. refer to Musnad, al-Maymaniyyah print.
 5. For more information on the views of the Sunnis refer to al-Safarini: Sharh Thulathiyat Ahmad, vol. 2, pp. 540–566. Also see al-‘Askari, Sayyid Murtaza: Naqsh-e A’immah dar Ihya’-e Din, vol. 11, pp. 74–84.

18) The Uprising of the Mahdi (‘a)

Ibn Hanbal says:

A. Hajjaj and Abu Na‘im have related from Fitr from Qasim bin Abi Bazzah from Abi al-Tufayl from (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a), who quoted the Messenger of Allah (S) as saying:

Law lam yabqa mina al-dunya illa yawmun laba’atha Allahu rajulan minna yamla’uha ‘adlan kama muli’at jawran (If only a day were to remain for the end of the world, Allah will raise a man from my progeny who will fill it [the earth] with justice as it was filled with oppression)”¹

Ibn Hanbal says:

B. Fazl bin Dukayn has related to us from Yasin al-‘Ijli from Ibrahim bin Muhammad bin Hanafiyyah from his father (Imam) ‘Ali (‘a), who quoted the Messenger of Allah (S) as saying:

“al-Mahdi minna Ahla al-Bayt yuslihu Allahu fi laylatin (The Mahdi is from us the Ahl al-Bayt, Allah will set right his affairs in [the course of] one night).”²

Ibn Hanbal says:

C. Sufyan bin ‘Uyaynah has related to us from ‘Asim (bin Abi al-Najud) from Zirr (bin Hubaysh) from ‘Abdullah (bin Mas‘ud) who narrates from the Messenger of Allah (S):

“La taqum al-sa‘ah hatta yalia rajulan min Ahli Bayti yuwatiu ismuhu ismi (The Day of Resurrection will not come until a man who is from my Ahl Bayt and whose name is my name, will rise).”³

Ahmad Shakir has termed the isnad of all three hadith as sahih, and has criticised the North African

scholar ‘Abd al-Rahman bin Muhammad bin Khaldun (1332–1406) for rejecting the reports concerning the Mahdi (‘a). It is worth noting that Ibn Khaldun in his famous Muqaddimah or Introduction to History has embarked on a lengthy discussion on the ahadith concerning the Mahdi (‘a), and writes:

It has been well known (and generally accepted) by all Muslims in every epoch, that at the end of time a man from the Ahl al-Bayt (of the Prophet) will without fail make his appearance, one who will strengthen the religion and make justice triumph. The Muslims will follow him, and he will gain domination over the Muslim realm. He will be called the Mahdi...Evidence for this matter has been found in the ahadith that religious leaders have published. They have been discussed by those who disapprove of (the matter) and have often been refuted by means of certain (other) akhbar.⁴

Ibn Khaldun in his discussion on the ahadith concerning the Mahdi (‘a) says that those who reject the coming of the Mahdi have criticized these reports, which he acknowledges have been narrated on the authority of some of the prominent companions of the Prophet and have been recorded in all authoritative Sunni books, whose names he has mentioned.

He writes:

Hadith scholars acknowledge negative criticism to have precedence over positive criticism. If we find that some person in the chain of transmitters is accused of negligence, poor memory, weakness or poor judgement, it affects and weakens the soundness of the hadith. It should not be said that the same faults often affect the persons (mentioned as authorities) in the two Sahihs (Bukhari and Muslim).

The general consensus of hadith transmitters confirms the soundness of the contents (of the two Sahihs) as presented by Bukhari and Muslim. The uninterrupted general consensus in Islam also confirms the acceptability of (the two Sahihs) and the necessity of acting in accordance with their contents. General consensus is the best protection and defense. Works other than the two Sahihs are not on the same level with them in this respect...⁵

He goes on to quote, one after another, several of the ahadith from the Prophet concerning the Mahdi (‘a), along with the chain of transmitters as found in the original sources, and tries to find fault with them in a manner which is clearly artificial. One of the ahadith which he criticizes is the narration that Ibn Hanbal has recorded on the authority of ‘Abdullah bin Mas‘ud. Ibn Khaldun then directs his attack at ‘Asim bin Abi al-Najud even after acknowledging him to be “one of the seven authoritative Qur’an readers.”⁶ To deflect criticism from his assumption, he writes:

Were someone to argue that (Bukhari and Muslim) published traditions of his, (we should reply that) they published them when there were also other (authorities for the same tradition), and that they did not use him as their basic authority.⁷

The annotator of the Musnad, Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, finds the criticism of Ibn Khaldun unconvincing and rejecting it, writes:

Ibn Khaldun attempted something for which he was not qualified and ventured into an arena which was not his domain. His preoccupation with state and political affairs and his serving of kings and nobles dominated his thought and speech, and as a result induced him to imagine that the report of the uprising and revolution of the Mahdi (‘a), was a (purely) Shi‘ite belief.

However, it is worth noting that first Ibn Khaldun has not properly understood the statements of hadith compilers that negative criticism (jarh) takes precedence over positive criticism (ta‘dil). If he had properly understood their statements he would not have commented in this manner. It is also possible that he understood their purpose but since his thoughts were profoundly influenced by the political views of his times, he has tried to weaken the ahadith concerning the Mahdi (‘a).

Second, ‘Asim bin Abi al-Najud is considered one of the reputed reciters of the Holy Qur’an and is also regarded as a trustworthy transmitter of hadith. Maybe he has made mistakes in some ahadith but these are not to the extent that his narration should be rejected. The strongest criticism against him is that he was not of good memory.

But on the basis of such a single criticism, could we ignore him and consider this as a means of rejecting a report whose authenticity has been confirmed through various other chains and narrated in the words of several companions (of the Prophet)? The soundness of this report is to the extent that no one has any doubts about it, because among the transmitters could be seen just, truthful and candid persons. Moreover, since this hadith has been narrated by other transmitters as well, the likelihood of a slip concerning someone whose memory being sharp is somewhat under doubt, is completely eliminated.⁸

These were some of the examples of the large number of hadith concerning the virtues of the Prophet’s Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) found in the Musnad of Ahmad bin Hanbal. The writer of the article had to limit his selection in view of the space. It is hoped that this article would serve the purpose of bridging the gap between the Muslims and promote better understanding of each other.

1. Al-Musnad, hadith no. 773.

2. Ibid, hadith no. 645.

3. Ibid, hadith no. 3571. There are several other hadith in the Musnad concerning the uprising of the Mahdi (‘a), e.g. hadith nos. 3572, 3573, 4098, 4279 etc. Most of the isnad of these ahadith have been confirmed as sahih.

4. Ibn Khaldun, al-Muqaddimah, translated by Franz Rosenthal, vol. 2, pp. 156–157, published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1986.

5. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 158.

6. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 159.

7. Ibid, vol. 2, p. 162.

8. Shakir, Sharh al-Musnad, vol. 5, pp. 197–198.

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