

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



*Stories of the*  
**PROPHETS** ﷺ

*A Rendering from*  
**IBN KATHĪR**



*Stories of the*  
**PROPHETS** ﷺ

*A Rendering from*  
**IBN KATHĪR**



*Translation*  
**SHOAIB SHAH**



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*Author* Ibn Kathir

*Translator* Shoaib Shah

*Editors* Nabihah Ghufoor, Najmus-Seher Ghufoor

*General Editors* Yahya & Safira Batha

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وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ  
رَّسُولًا أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الزَّلَّاتِ

*We did raise a messenger among  
every people with the message,  
'Worship Allah and stay away  
from the Rebel (Shayṭān)'*















(16:36)







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## *Introduction*

All praise is for Allah, Lord of the worlds, the One True God, and may His peace and blessings be showered on His beloved slave and Messenger, Muḥammad, his family, his Companions ﷺ and all of the Prophets of Allah ﷺ.

Allah ﷻ created all things and then guided them with their functions and purposes. He then singled out and further guided humans and jinn with free will, so they can distinguish right from wrong and choose to accept or reject the message. Thereafter, Allah ﷻ guided His slaves, revealing to them His expectations with the rewards for fulfilling them and punishments for failing to do so. Allah ﷻ does not reveal to every human and jinn directly but He selects righteous slaves to act as intermediaries between Him and the rest of His slaves. These chosen slaves of Allah ﷻ are His Prophets and Messengers ﷺ; they are sincere, trustworthy and infallible by consensus; ideal to convey Allah's message and lead His slaves.

When Allah ﷻ sent His final Messenger, Muḥammad ﷺ, to the world, He included in the revelation accounts and stories of these blessed Prophets ﷺ. They brought the same fundamental message of belief in one God and belief in His messengers; some accepted the message while others did not, eventually suffering as a consequence of that. The people of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ too, were stumbling down the same path, with many initially disbelieving, so Allah ﷻ related these stories, serving primarily as a lesson for the community (Ummah) of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. Allah ﷻ tells his Prophet ﷺ, *'We sent Messengers before you, some of whom We have told you about and some We have not. It was not given to any Messenger to bring a Sign except by leave*

*of Allah; but when the Command from Allah came, (the matter) was judged with Truth, and there and then the followers of falsehood were lost.’ (40:78)*

#### PURPOSE OF THE STORIES

There are a number of reasons for relating stories in the Qur’an which scholars have discussed at length. Firstly, to bless this community with previously hidden knowledge. Allah ﷻ informs the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ of fascinating and insightful incidents of the past and he passed those incidents on to his community, adding to the rich history and legacy of the world.

Another purpose for including stories in the Qur’an is to correct false narratives. There are many stories in the Torah and the Evangel (Christian gospel) which are true, as confirmed by the Qur’an, but certain details are questionable to say the least. The Qur’an was sent to correct these mistakes. One such example is the claim by Christians that ‘Īsā ﷺ was crucified. Allah ﷻ enlightens them: *‘They did not kill him or crucify him, but it appeared so to them; and those who argue about him are in doubt about it; they have no knowledge of it, only conjecture; and most certainly they did not kill him. But Allah took him up to Himself. Allah is Almighty, All-Wise.’ (4:157–158)*

One of the main purposes of these stories is in establishing the prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. These stories demonstrated to the disbelievers that he had indeed received revelation from Allah ﷻ, since they were familiar with the same incidents. The Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ did not study the previous scriptures and his people, who witnessed him day in and day out, knew that. The only One Who could have informed him of these stories is Allah ﷻ. This is all the more true with stories in the Qur’an that have never been discussed before in any previous scripture, such as the story of Maryam ﷺ as a child. Allah ﷻ tells the Prophet ﷺ, after relating her story: *‘This is tidings of the Unseen which We reveal to you. You were not with them when they threw their pens (to decide) which of them should be Maryam’s guardian, nor were you with them when they quarrelled (over it).’ (3:44)*

Another purpose is consolation of the Prophet ﷺ. The Makkans

accused him of being a liar, a sorcerer and a poet, so Allah ﷻ relates to him the taunts and abuse previous Prophets ﷺ suffered in order to comfort him with the knowledge that he is not alone in his suffering; a burden shared is a burden lightened after all. Allah ﷻ says, ‘Messengers before you were also denied’ (6:34) and ‘Likewise, no Messenger came to those before them without them saying, “A wizard or a Madman!”’ (51:52). In another verse, Allah ﷻ reassures the Prophet ﷺ: ‘All that We relate to you of the story of the Messengers is in order that We may make your heart firm with it.’ (11:120)

Another purpose of relating the stories is in establishing the prophethood of previous Prophets ﷺ and their books. In many verses Allah ﷻ stipulates that along with the Qur’an, Muslims must also believe in previous Prophets ﷺ and their scriptures; these are tenets of our belief. The Qur’an not only affirms the prophethood of Prophets ﷺ mentioned in the Torah but it also defends and endorses ‘Īsā ﷺ, who was rejected by the Jews. The Prophet ﷺ once said, ‘Whoever testifies that there is no god but Allah alone with no partner and that Muḥammad is His slave and Messenger, that ‘Īsā is the slave of Allah and His Messenger and a Word which He cast into Maryam and a spirit from Him, and that Paradise is real and the Fire is real will enter Paradise whatever his actions.’<sup>1</sup>

In addition to establishing the prophethood of previous Prophets ﷺ, these stories also serve the purpose of restoring their honour. Allah ﷻ says about the Prophets ﷺ, ‘It is those whom Allah has guided, so follow their guidance’ (6:90) and ‘We made them leaders guiding by Our command, and We revealed to them how to do good deeds, establish the prayer and give zakat; and they were worshippers of Us (alone)’ (2:73). It is a position of consensus among the Muslims that Prophets ﷺ are infallible, but their image was tainted by the Torah and certain Judaeo-Christian narrations that attribute despicable actions and sins to them. The Qur’an restores their rightful honour and stresses, again and again, their closeness to Allah ﷻ. For example, Allah ﷻ defends Prophet Sulaymān ﷺ against

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1 Bukhārī (3435). Muslim has a slight variation (46).

the accusations that he dabbled in unlawful magic: ‘*Sulaymān did not disbelieve; but the devils disbelieved, teaching mankind sorcery.*’ (2:102)

Another purpose of these stories is to instil in us fear of the punishment of Allah ﷻ and hope for His reward. Ibn Kathīr has included in his book a section on perished nations mentioned in the Qur’an, which should motivate us to desist from our evil ways and relent to Allah ﷻ. The Qur’an also discusses honoured slaves of Allah ﷻ who were rewarded with countless blessings in this life and the next to encourage us to also work towards that goal. Allah ﷻ says after relating the story of Prophet Yūsuf ﷺ, ‘*In their story there is truly a lesson for people of understanding*’ (12:111). The stories of the Prophets ﷺ serve many other purposes besides these reasons, but we will suffice on these most crucial ones.

#### REPETITION OF THE STORIES

The Qur’an is a book unlike any other book; it excels every other book, and yet it does not conform to established laws and rules of books. A common problem that orientalist encounter when reading the Qur’an is that it often repeats itself, presenting the same story multiple times; for example, the story of Prophet Mūsā ﷺ is mentioned no less than twenty times in the Qur’an.

The reality is that although all these verses discuss the same story, no two sections are pointless repetitions. There are a number of different reasons for these repetitions: firstly, there is extra detail mentioned about a prophet in one instance while that detail is left out in another instance, because of its irrelevance to the context there. Secondly, a sign of eloquence is the ability to be concise or to elaborate in instances that demand it, and this is what the Qur’an does when relating stories; elaborating a story in one instance and then using concision for the same story in a different instance, again due to the demands of the context.

For example, in *Sūrat ad-Dhāriyāt*, Allah ﷻ highlights the habit of nations in the past who denied their Messengers ﷺ, presenting story after story, all in brief, merely to show their denial and the conse-

quence of it, so that community of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ may take head. He ﷻ mentions stories of Prophet Ibrāhīm ؑ, the people of Prophet Lūṭ ؑ, Prophet Mūsā ؑ, ‘Ād and Thamūd and Prophet Nūḥ ؑ, all in the space of twenty-two short verses.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, in *Sūrah Yūsuf*, Allah ﷻ presents the story of Prophet Yūsuf ؑ in absolute detail, encompassing the whole chapter and giving the *sūrah* its name. The purpose of the context of *Sūrah Yūsuf* is to actually relate the story.

Writing a story is difficult enough, but writing it eloquently and skilfully is hard to come by. Furthermore, writing it again and again, each time suited to its particular context and with a different purpose and an unmatched flavour of literary brilliance is unheard of; this is what the Qur’an achieves. Finally, Allah ﷻ intends various different purposes when relating the same stories, as mentioned above; in one instance, He ﷻ relates a story, highlighting His punishment in order to warn people, while in another instance, He ﷻ relates the same story but to console the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

#### SOURCES OF THE STORIES

Ibn Kathīr uses three sources for the stories of the Prophets ؑ. First and foremost is the Qur’an; it is a Muslim’s first source in every field, and Ibn Kathīr starts every story with all of the verses of the Qur’an connected to its respective prophet. He also constantly highlights the inaccuracies of any source that contradicts the Qur’anic version of events.

After the Qur’an, the second source of information for these stories is the exegesis of the Qur’an (*tafsīr*). This includes statements of the Companions ؓ, their students and the scholars of Islam, explaining and elaborating the stories mentioned in the Qur’an. He also makes constant reference to his famous book *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*, where further details can be found. He also quotes leading scholars of history, such as Ibn Hishām, Ṭabarī and Ibn ‘Asākir.

Following exegesis, Ibn Kathīr extracts information from hadiths,

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1 See 51:24–46.

either directly from the Prophet ﷺ or from *āthār* of the Companions ﷺ and scholars from the earliest generations. Ibn Kathīr is a master of Hadith, and is therefore perfectly suited to present hadiths on the stories of the Prophets ﷺ and discuss their authenticity.

#### ISRĀ'ĪLIYĀT

Ibn Kathīr has also fairly and impartially included other sources but within reason. Derived from the name of Ya'qūb (Isrā'īl) ﷺ, Isrā'īliyāt are Judaeo-Christian anecdotes, often used as another source of the stories of the Prophets ﷺ. Islam shares common stories, personalities and names of places etc. with its two Abrahamic counterparts, Judaism and Christianity. After Islam emerged, many Jews and Christians embraced Islam, and whilst studying the Qur'an and the words of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, they noticed familiar accounts of the Prophets ﷺ.

Thereafter, when they became teachers in their own right and began disseminating knowledge of the Qur'an and Hadith, they would supplement it with prior knowledge they had from the previous books. There are certain notable personalities who did this, such as 'Abdullāh ibn Salām ﷺ, the Jewish Rabbi who reverted to Islam, and students of the Companions ﷺ like Ka'b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih. 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ﷺ too was known to relate Isrā'īliyāt after he found scriptures belonging to the Jews. Now we find these Isrā'īliyāt in books of Hadith, and very few books of exegesis are free from them. Even Ibn Kathīr includes some of them.

Relating Isrā'īliyāt becomes a problem when the narrations contradict principles of our sharia, such as the honour and infallibility of the Prophets ﷺ, as we have discussed above. These narrations that speak about the Prophets ﷺ in a disrespectful way resemble the Old Testament, which paints a troubling picture of them, whereas Islam came to restore their honour after they were accused of damning sins. So the question is posed: can we, as Muslims, relate Isrā'īliyāt?

Scholars have differing opinions on this matter; some outright reject every such narration, while others accept every narration with-



out qualification. The most acceptable explanation, however, is that these narrations are categorised into three types, as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Ḥajar and others have stated: first, those narrations detailing stories that conform to our sharia; second, those that contain stories that do not conform to our sharia; and finally, those narrations of stories which our sharia does not speak about. We affirm and relate the first type, we reject the second type and do not relate them (unless it is for educational purposes) and we neither deny nor affirm the third type. The Prophet ﷺ said regarding the third type, ‘Do not affirm the People of the Book nor deny them.’<sup>1</sup>

In *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’*, Ibn Kathīr follows the third opinion. He has included many *Isrā’īliyāt* but, to his credit, he clearly states which ones can be trusted and which ones cannot. There are also narrations, clearly of the second type, which he does not even mention because one would feel ashamed and embarrassed to, but he simply makes reference to them in passing. We have mentioned some of the problematic narrations in the footnotes only to educate and to equip readers with the necessary knowledge to defend the Prophets of Allah ﷺ.

#### MIRACLES

A miracle (*muʿjizah*) is a phenomenon that transcends natural order, performed by a prophet by the permission of Allah ﷻ. Every prophet was given miracles; each of them according to the needs of their time. The Qur’an and Hadith are filled with stories of these miracles. They are completely rational and possible since Allah ﷻ has power to do all things, as He ﷻ reiterates again and again in the Qur’an.

Our acceptance of a narration that mentions miracles is based on the veracity of the report; how it was related and by whom. We must not blindly endorse and accept every miracle reported to us; if the source is questionable or if it is a solitary report then these are valid reasons for scepticism regarding the miracle. However, the overall majority of scholars of *Ahl as-Sunnah wa’l-Jamā’ah* agree that there is

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<sup>1</sup> Bukhārī (4485).

no excuse for denying a miracle that is established through definitive proofs purely based on the excuse that it does not align with one's understanding of logic.

The reports of these miracles are established through varying sources with varying strengths. Hence, a miracle related in a weak solitary report can be questioned because of the weakness of the source. The Qur'an and mass-transmitted hadiths, on the other hand, are definitive proofs and anyone who intentionally rejects a definitive proof has forfeited his place in Islam. The white-washing of miracles seems to be a trend among orientalists, and some Muslims—in an effort to find sympathy and acceptance in academia—have also resorted to watering down the miracles with far-fetched and unlikely interpretations.

An example of this is the claim that the splitting of the sea by Prophet Mūsā ﷺ was purely a natural phenomenon and a result of multiple natural disasters, seeking to strip it of any divine, miraculous intervention. There are natural and observable causes for many of the phenomena we witness, but we state emphatically that the ultimate cause is the Will and Decree of Allah ﷻ. Furthermore, acceptance of miracles established through definitive proofs is not contingent on science or someone's logic; it is based on merit of the report. If the report of a miracle is authentic and mass-transmitted, then belief in it is necessary.

The refusal to believe in miracles has even driven some to completely deny the historicity of the Prophets ﷺ, claiming that they are fictional characters presented in stories merely to serve as lessons with morals. A true Muslim must believe that the Qur'an is the word of Allah ﷻ and everything it contains is absolute truth, free from fiction and fabrications. Allah ﷻ says, *'That which We have sent to you of the Scripture is indeed the truth'*<sup>1</sup> and *'We will relate to you the truth of their story.'*<sup>2</sup>

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1 35:31.

2 18:13.



## IBN KATHĪR

He is Abū 'l-Fidā' 'Imād ad-Dīn Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr ibn Ḍaw' ibn Kathīr ibn Zar' al-Qurashī ash-Shāfi'ī al-Baṣrī ad-Dimashqī. He was born in 700 AH in Basra but moved to Damascus when his father passed away. Both his parents had memorised the Qur'an and they instilled in him a love for knowledge and the Religion of Allah ﷻ from a very young age.

His father, who was the Imam of his town, passed away when Ibn Kathīr was 7 years old, so his brother 'Abd al-Wahhāb took care of him and set him on the quest for knowledge. He memorised the Qur'an at the age of 11 with his teacher Shams ad-Dīn al-Baḥlabakkī. Once he had memorised the Qur'an, he began his studies of Hadith, reading *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* with Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Azdī. He then studied the readings of the Qur'an and its exegesis, jurisprudence, history, narrators of hadith, grammar, poetry and many other sciences. He had many notable teachers, such as Ibn 'Asākir, Ibn ash-Shīrāzī, Mizzī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Dhahabī, Qarāfi and many others.

After his formal studies, he began teaching in many seminaries and masjids, most notably in al-Jāmi' al-Umawī in Damascus. In addition to teaching, he also served the public by issuing legal verdicts. He carried on in these noble endeavours until his last breath. Many scholars studied under him, the most notable being Zarkashī, Irāqī and others. He authored many famous books, such as *al-Bidāyah wa'n-Nihāyah*, from which *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* is extracted, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, *Faḍā'il al-Qur'ān*, *al-Bā'ith al-Ḥathīth fī Ikhtisār 'Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, *Musnad al-Fārūq* and others. He is a master in the field of Qur'anic exegesis, Hadith, Jurisprudence, Arabic language and history.

He passed away on Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> of Sha'ban in the year 774 AH after losing his eyesight and was buried alongside his teacher Ibn Taymiyyah. He was 74 years old when he died.

Dhahabī said of him, 'He is the Imam, the Muftī, the exceptional scholar of Hadith, the jurist, the narrator of exegesis, and he has authored many useful books.'

Ibn Ḥajar Said about him, ‘He has discussed the texts of hadiths and their narrators in great length. He produced many fruitful books that were widely used while he was still alive, and after he passed people have continued to benefit from them.’

His student Shihāb ad-Dīn said, ‘From all the people we have met, he was the one who had memorised the most hadiths with their references, their narrators and their authenticity, and his contemporaries acknowledged that.’

Suyūṭī said, ‘He is the great Imam, the master of Hadith, possessor of many excellences, Imād ad-Dīn Abū ’l-Fidā’ Ismā’īl ibn ‘Umar ibn Kathīr ibn Ḍaw’ ibn Kathīr al-Qaysī al-Baṣrawī.’

#### METHODOLOGY

The book *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* is actually taken from his famous and widely accepted work *al-Bidāyah wa’n-Nihāyah*. The first volume of this voluminous book discusses the history of the Prophets ﷺ, beginning with Ādam ﷺ and ending with ‘Īsā ﷺ. Following that is a detailed study of the life of the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. These sections have since been published as separate books, focusing on a limited time span and preventing the reader from becoming daunted by the length of the complete book.

Our primary focus with this rendering of Ibn Kathīr’s *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* is to present a story book with a flowing narrative. To this end, we were unfortunately forced to abridge certain sections and remove repetitions. Ideally, these rich and lesson-filled stories should be studied in light of the Qur’an, exegesis and the Hadith to truly be appreciated. Additionally, stories which apparently seem to be repetitions should not be skipped or glossed over, since nothing in the Qur’an is redundant and without cause, as discussed above. That notwithstanding, we have chosen to remove detailed discussions and repetitions that digress from the narrative of the stories.

In Ibn Kathīr’s book, every chapter begins with a full list of verses of the Qur’an, detailing the story, then he proceeds to explain and reiterate the story in his own words. In this version, however, we

have sufficed on Ibn Kathīr’s narrative but with the Qur’anic verses flowing through. Again, this is to remove repetitions and to focus on the progression of the story. That notwithstanding, we do not wish for this book to be bereft of the blessings of the words of Allah ﷻ so we have included at the end of every chapter all of the verses connected to each specific prophet in Arabic with their translations.

Furthermore, we have added the occasional sub-heading to help organise the sections and break up lengthy paragraphs. We have also removed detailed scholarly discussions or relegated them to footnotes for the same reason. There are instances, however, where including some discussion was unavoidable. Another change made in this version of *Qaṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’* is that we have moved certain sections around, again, to serve the chronological narrative. Finally, we have supplemented the book with explanatory notes and hadiths, along with their references, in the footnotes.

May Allah ﷻ create in us a renewed love, respect and veneration for the beloved Prophets of Allah ﷻ through this book. May we heed their advices to obey Allah ﷻ and accept their glad-tidings of eternal good fortune. *Whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger shall be with those to whom Allah has been bountiful: the Prophets, those of perfected sincerity, the martyrs and the righteous. What excellent company are they!*<sup>1</sup>

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1 4:69.



*Bismi 'llāhi 'r-Raḥmāni 'r-Raḥīm*

## *The Story of Ādam ﷺ*

﴿رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا وَإِن لَّمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ﴾

*Our Lord we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us  
and have mercy on us, we will be among the lost. (7:23)*

The story of Adam ﷺ begins when Allah ﷻ told the angels ﷺ, ‘I am putting a deputy on the Earth,’<sup>1</sup> intending to make Ādam ﷺ and his offspring viceroys, following one after the other.<sup>2</sup> He ﷻ informed them, not asking their opinion on the matter, to exalt the creation of Ādam ﷺ and his offspring, like a king who presents his plans for a momentous decree before he delivers it. The angels, curious to know more, asked, ‘Why put there one who will cause corruption and shed blood?’<sup>3</sup> Their question was not an objection nor was it borne out of criticism of and hate for Ādam ﷺ and his offspring.

Why would the angels presume this about Ādam ﷺ and his offspring? Because they had already experienced something similar with a prior creation of Allah ﷻ. The Jinn,<sup>4</sup> who were created before Ādam ﷺ, shed much blood, so Allah ﷻ sent an army of angels to drive them away to the seas and remote islands. The angels thought that if the purpose of creating this new creation was so that they worship Allah

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1 2:30.

2 See 6:165 and 27:62.

3 2:30.

4 Ibn Kathīr also quotes an opinion that there was another race of creatures called the Binn, who also spread corruption and killed, but this cannot be verified through any reliable source.