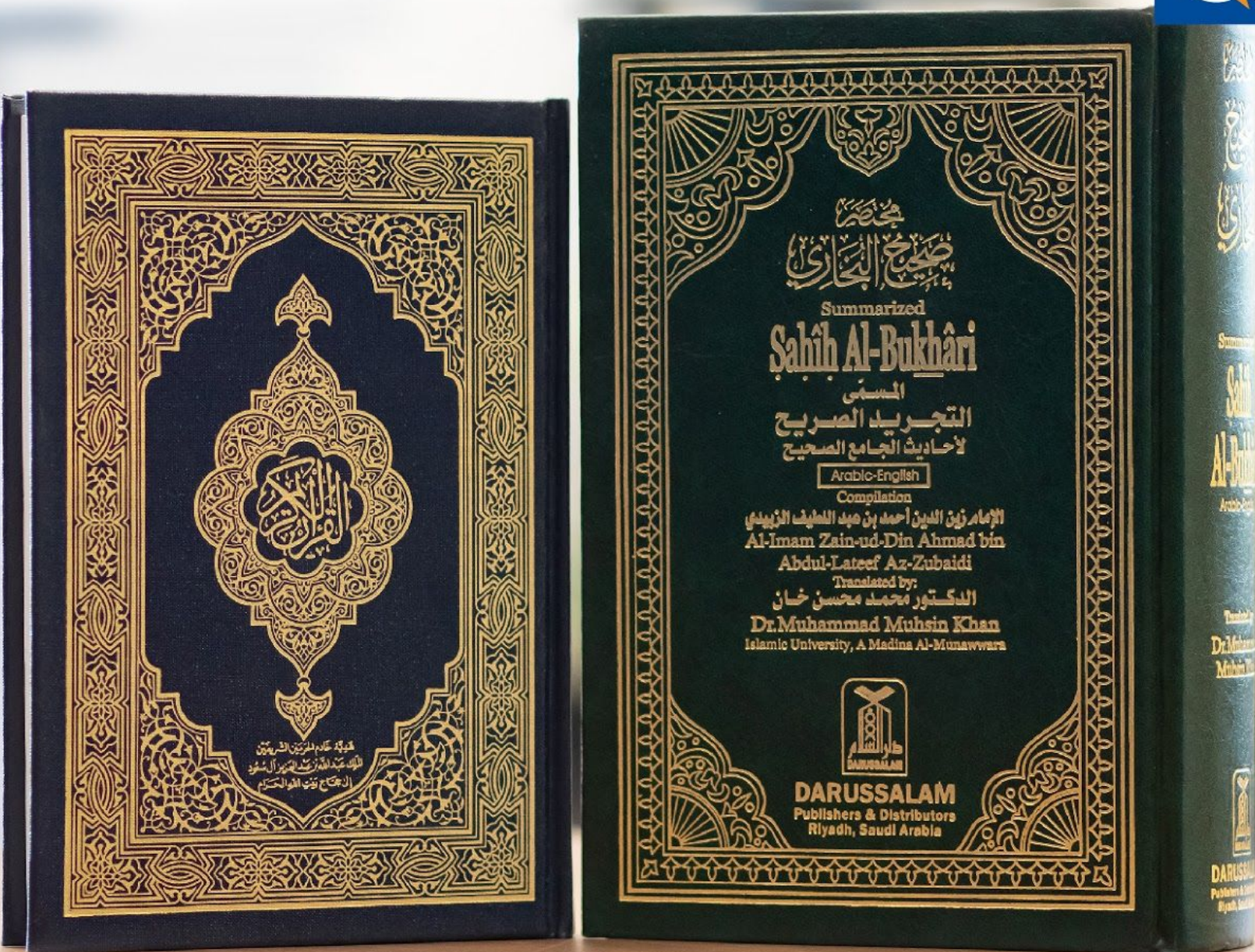




Are Hadith Necessary? An Examination of the Authority of Hadith in Islam

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Introduction

The Qur'ān and the Sunnah have served as the primary sources of Islam. Together with the Qur'ān, the statements and actions of the Prophet ﷺ form the basis of Islamic law and theology. Historically, all Islamic sects have acknowledged the necessity of at least some ḥadīths, even if few, to understand the Qur'ān. Despite their many theological and legal differences, Muslim sects have all drawn from these two primary sources: the Qur'ān, which is considered to be the direct word of God revealed to the Prophet ﷺ, and the Sunnah, which consists of the words and actions of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ inspired by God. In other words, the ḥadīth are reports about what the Prophet ﷺ said and did. Muslim jurists and ḥadīth scholars use these reports (i.e., ḥadīth) to understand the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ, which are called the Sunnah. Each ḥadīth is a piece of data about the Prophet ﷺ; when collected, these data points paint a larger picture which is the Sunnah.

All Muslim groups consider the Qur'ān to be the most authentic and authoritative source, followed by the Sunnah. Because the Sunnah is needed in order to contextualize the Qur'ān, all Muslim groups have accepted the necessity of following *at least some* ḥadīth alongside the Qur'ān. This view has been held by all known Muslim groups, including all strands of both Sunnism and Shi'ism. This is important because the theory of consensus (*ijmā'*) holds that it is inconceivable for the entire Muslim community to agree upon falsehood. Whenever all living jurists agreed on a particular formulation of Islamic law, this consensus raised the formulation to an infallible representation of divine will. The possibility of error concerning formulations of law only existed when jurists disagreed. When they agreed on an issue, the fallibility of individual jurists was erased through the supervening principle of the infallibility of consensus. Consensus set boundaries on disagreement in the formulation of the law, and the authority of the Sunnah was outside of those boundaries.¹ Because dissent is the norm in matters of Islamic law, it makes any consensus all the more credible and binding when it occurs. In other

¹ Bernard Weiss, "Interpretation in Islamic Law: The Theory of Ijtihād," *The American Journal of Comparative Law*, 2:26 (1978), 201.

words, the unanimity of opinion (*ijmāʿ*)—in a religion that has countenanced in its history a vast array of differences—is considered one of the strongest proofs for the formulation of law or creed. Ḥadīth, therefore, form a necessary component of the religion (*al-maʿlūm min al-dīn bi ʿadārūra*).

It was not until the nineteenth century that a movement emerged that rejected the entire corpus of ḥadīth and the authority of the Prophet ﷺ. This rejection of the entire ḥadīth corpus stems from a mistrust in the historical preservation of ḥadīth when compared to the Qurʾān or the fact that many ḥadīth clash with modern sensibilities. In an attempt to bypass any fabrications and ḥadīth that might contain discomfiting material, some have attempted to understand the Qurʾān on its own, without ḥadīth.

Reasons for ḥadīth rejection

Questions about the authenticity of the Sunnah have long been of central importance in the study of ḥadīth. Ḥadīth scholars attempted to decipher the Prophet's authentic statements from the inauthentic ones. Although Muslim scholars differ about the authenticity of certain statements attributed to the Prophet ﷺ, there have been very few cases in Islamic history where groups completely rejected the authenticity or authority of the Prophet's statements.² It is primarily in the last two centuries that a group has emerged who completely reject the Sunnah as an authoritative source. They not only reject the Prophet's statements because they believe them to be inauthentic, but their rejection is based on the belief that the Prophet ﷺ has no authority beyond delivering the Qurʾān.³

² This group was mentioned by al-Shāfiʿī in his *Kitāb al-Umm*, but he makes no mention of names. Several scholars have discussed who this early group was. See Muhammad Mustafa al-Azami, *On Schacht's Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies and The Islamic Texts Society, 1985), 73-74. Also see ʿAlī Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿĀshima, 1968) 254-257. Jilāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Miftāḥ al-Janna fī-l-Iḥtijāj bi-l-Sunna* (Cairo: Idārat al-Ṭibāʿa al-Munayriyya, 1974), 3-4.

³ For more information on these groups, see Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Among the most famous responses to the rise of Qurʾān-only movements in the Muslim world, see Muṣṭafā al-Sibāʿī, *Al-Sunna wa Makānatuha fī al-Tashrīʿ al-Islāmī* (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2006); ʿAbd al-Ghanī ʿAbd al-Khāliq, *Ḥujjiyyat al-Sunna* (Virginia: al-Maʿhad al-ʿĀlamī lil-Fikr al-Islāmī, 1994).

A more common trend is the rejection of ḥadīth due to doubt concerning the preservation of ḥadīth. There might be a recognition that the Qur'ān requires that the Prophet ﷺ be followed, but the concern is that his words have not been preserved in a similar manner as the Qur'ān. This argument is based on the assumption that, unlike the Qur'ān, some ḥadīth books contain inauthentic statements that are unreliable and often contain conflicting narrations.

This perspective implies that Muslims are commanded to follow the Prophet ﷺ but that the reports about him are unreliable. The Andalusian scholar Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) disputes this argument by saying that doubting the authenticity of the entire ḥadīth corpus involves contending that God made it mandatory to obey the Messenger but made it impossible to do so. It does not befit God that He would command Muslims to follow something that is not accurately preserved; otherwise God would be requiring them to follow something that does not exist or to follow a falsified report about the religion.⁴

Another reason some people tend to reject ḥadīth is a result of their encountering a ḥadīth that appears to have a problematic meaning or that conflicts with modern sensibilities. Ḥadīth literature contain reports that vary in their degree of authenticity. Some are authentic while others are complete fabrications. The science of ḥadīth was established with the aim of separating authentic from the weak and fabricated. There are ḥadīth that are problematic, and these were usually highlighted by early ḥadīth scholars. However, not every apparently problematic ḥadīth is actually problematic. It is often the case that the individual misunderstands or lacks the knowledge to contextualize the ḥadīth. It is important to keep in mind that ḥadīth literature was compiled by scholars *for* scholars. In other words, they were compiled by scholars with other scholars in mind as their main readers, not the untrained layperson. In our current era of information overload, everyone has access to texts and data that can be read and interpreted without consulting experts. Hence, ḥadīth are often accessed without scholarly explanation, in translation, and/or decontextualized. This results in confusion and

⁴ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, 121-124.

doubt concerning the preservation of ḥadīth and whether or not they accurately represent the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ. It is important to note that access to ḥadīth, or any text, is not the same thing as understanding the text. There are many cases where individuals might reject a ḥadīth simply based on a shallow reading of it.

In his introduction to Bukhārī's *Adab al-Mufrad*, Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo argues that very few people are equipped to deal with Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, a work that is readily available online in Arabic and translation. He points out that, in traditional learning circles, study of *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* comes only after a student has spent years learning the classical disciplines such as Arabic, rhetoric, literature, the rational sciences of logic, Islamic legal theory, the many Qur'ānic sciences from elocution (*tajwīd*) to Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), and study of the principles of ḥadīth. Only after students have demonstrated mastery of these subjects are they allowed to attend the lessons, which were usually given by the most learned and respected of all teachers, on the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī.⁵

DeLorenzo goes on to state that, in the traditional educational scheme, there were many reasons for this postponement. The status accorded to Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* was so elevated that only those who had mastered the classical disciplines were considered prepared to take on its study. The *Ṣaḥīḥ* is so full of technical nuances related to principles of ḥadīth (*uṣūl al-ḥadīth*) and the biographical handbooks (*ilm al-rijāl*) that a thorough understanding of those subjects is required if they are to be appropriately appreciated. Similarly, unless one has mastered other classical disciplines, there is much learning and meaning that will be overlooked.⁶ Bypassing a teacher and studying texts directly leads to a limited understanding of primary texts. DeLorenzo writes:

The word I recall the shaykh using to describe what results when the unprepared non-scholar attempts to read the hadith literature was fitnah, or a trial, in the sense that the person would be so confused and overcome after undertaking such an uninformed and one-dimensional

⁵ Yusuf Talal DeLorenzo, *Imam Bukhari's Book of Muslim Morals and Manners* (Alexandria: Al-Saadawi Publications, 1997), i-iii.

⁶ Y. DeLorenzo, *Imam Bukhari's*, ii.

*reading of that literature (i.e., in translation without the presence of a shaykh to guide him/her through the obstacles) that he or she would face a crisis in their religion, a trial of spiritual proportions.*⁷

Ḥadīth compilations such as *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* can be compared to advanced texts that are studied at the graduate level. They are not intended to be read, analyzed, and interpreted without the necessary tools for proper understanding. Studying ḥadīth online or through self-study often produces more confusion than knowledge. In his excellent book, *The Death of Expertise*, Tom Nichols highlights how the internet challenges actual learning. Although people may think they are learning when they search the internet, they are more likely to be immersed in yet more data they do not understand. What often happens online is an avoidance of reading in the traditional sense. Instead of reading with the aim of learning, it often involves reading to win an argument or to confirm a pre-existing belief.⁸ Doubt concerning ḥadīth has increased over the last several decades because ḥadīth experts who insist on a systematic method of learning and logic cannot compete with a machine that always gives readers their preferred answers. The internet created a space where laypeople are exposed to ḥadīth that would typically only be taught at later stages of Islamic studies. This results in misunderstanding and doubt concerning ḥadīth as accurate and authentic sources of Islam. To remedy this problem, it is important to reexamine the status of ḥadīth in light of the Qur'ān.

The necessity of ḥadīth

What does it mean to follow only the Qur'ān? Can the Qur'ān be understood entirely on its own without relying on any other sources? One of the primary problems of attempting to follow only the Qur'ān is that without any assistance or background from the Sunnah, the Qur'ān loses its meaning. Many of the Qur'ānic injunctions concerning prayer, pilgrimage, and commercial transactions require clarification. The Prophet ﷺ expounded on these injunctions verbally and demonstrated them in practice. These explanations had the force of law and

⁷ Y. DeLorenzo, *Imam Bukhari's*, ii-iii.

⁸ T. Nichols, *Death of Expertise*, 115-120.

Muslims understood them to be another form of revelation, which they called the Sunnah. Thus, the Sunnah as a concept came into existence simultaneously with the revelation of the Qur'ān and was part of the process of the creation of an Islamic system of jurisprudence.⁹

The rituals of Islam are prominent examples that demonstrate the challenges that ensue when trying to understand the Qur'ān without the Sunnah. Hadith rejecters have arrived at many different conclusions concerning Islamic law and rituals. What does *ṣalāh* mean? How often does one perform it, what does one say in it, and how many units does it contain? Muslims also differ over the details of prayer, but the fundamentals of prayer such as the number of prayers per day, the physical format, and certain core elements are agreed upon. Ḥadīth rejecters differ significantly with each other on fundamental aspects of the prayer, how it is performed, and the number of prayers each day. They argue that all the details are found in the Qur'ān, but in fact must resort to ḥadīth to understand these rituals in the Qur'ān.¹⁰

The rituals are but one example; even the meanings of particular words in the Qur'ān require the Sunnah to be understood. For example, some ḥadīth rejecters such as Edip Yuksel have attempted to translate and understand the Qur'ān using only the Qur'ān.¹¹ However, they still rely on extra-Qur'ānic material and ḥadīth tradition because they consult Arabic dictionaries. The earliest Arabic dictionary, *Kitāb al-ʿAyn* was written by al-Khalīl b. Aḥmad (d. 175/795). This dictionary and others like it were passed down by the same scholars who preserved ḥadīth.¹² How do we know the authenticity of this dictionary? It has been ultimately passed down through the same generations that passed down ḥadīth. If scholars gathered *en masse* to fabricate sayings about the Prophet ﷺ, then everything in Islamic

⁹ M.M. Azami, *On Schacht's Origins*, 20.

¹⁰ For examples of the extent of differences on the fundamentals of prayer see D. Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*, 47-50. Also see E. Hamdeh, *The Necessity of Ḥadīth*, 129-147.

¹¹ See Edip Yuksel's *Quran: A Reformist Translation* (Brainbow Press, 2007).

¹² Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad The Challenge and Choices of Interpreting Muhammad's Legacy* (London: Oneworld, 2014), 204-208.

history, including Arabic dictionaries and the Qur'ān, must be similarly suspect to be false and fabricated.¹³

The idea that one can use only the Qur'ān to understand and translate the Qur'ān does not work without resorting to extra-Qur'ānic texts. For instance, the word *ḡihār* is found in chapter 58 verses 2-4. Ḥadīth literature defines *ḡihār* as a husband's saying to his wife, "You are like the back of my mother to me," which was a statement of irrevocable divorce. Yuksel translates *ḡihār* according to this traditional understanding. However, the verb *ḡāhara* does not appear anywhere else in the Qur'ān with this meaning; throughout the rest of the Qur'ān it means to aid or give help.¹⁴ Jonathan Brown states, "By the *Reformist Translation*'s stated methodology, the verse should be read, awkwardly if at all, 'He did not make your wives to whom you granted aid from as your mothers.'"¹⁵ The Sunnah is therefore necessary in order to uphold the Qur'ān as a meaningful text.

Texts do not speak for themselves; readers always provide context and bring their assumptions to their understanding of texts. The Sunnah is meant to provide context to the Qur'ān to ensure it is interpreted within certain boundaries; without it, the Qur'ān would be decontextualized, vague, and meaningless. When one encounters any text, there is a process of interpretation that takes place, and this is no different for the Qur'ān.

Extra-Qur'ānic sources are necessary to understand the Qur'ān. If the Qur'ān is stripped of all context, it becomes a text that is full of vague meanings. For instance, the historical context of the Qur'ān is only found outside of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān makes no mention of the time period in which it was revealed, it makes references to Badr, Uhud, and Hunayn, and the Prophet's wives, expecting the reader to know what these are. The Qur'ān presupposes that the reader is aware of the context in which it was revealed. There are universal parts of the Qur'ān, such as the nature of God, that can be understood independently of the historical context

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, 206.

¹⁵ Ibid.

in which it was revealed. However, there are other parts of the Qur'ān that are bound to the Prophet's life and historical context. The Qur'ān speaks of Zayd, the companion of the Prophet ﷺ and it presupposes that the reader knows who Zayd is so that the legal implications of the Prophet's marriage to Zayd's ex-wife are understood. Without this history, we would not be able to understand the Qur'ān itself.

Early Muslims only knew what constituted the Qur'ān because they relied on the Prophet's words. They only knew what the Qur'ān is because of his declaring it as such. When the Prophet ﷺ spoke, how did people around him distinguish between what parts of his speech were his own and which were Qur'ān? This could have only been distinguished by the Prophet's indication that a particular verse was the speech of God and not his own. One must, therefore, depend on the declarations of the Prophet to know what the Qur'ān is. Otherwise, there is no way to differentiate between the Qur'ān and the Prophet's words. This means his declaring something as part of the Qur'ān is authoritative and the declaration itself is extra-Qur'ānic. Without it, we would not know what the Qur'ān is.

When the Qur'ān states, “Surely We have revealed the *dhikr* and We will most surely be its guardian” (Qur'ān 15:9), it includes the Sunnah. Ibn Ḥazm notes that scholars are in agreement that all revelation is called *dhikr*. He argues that the preservation is not limited to the text of the Qur'ān, but it extends to its meaning as well. If the Prophet's explanation is needed in order to understand the Qur'ān, then it is necessary that this explanation be preserved as well.¹⁶ Without ḥadīth, the Qur'ān would be a text without meaning, which would mean it was not preserved. For example, the verses that address intoxication give contradictory advice:

- The Qur'ān states that dates and grapes provide intoxicants and good provision (Qur'ān 16:67);
- Wine has some benefits, but its harm outweighs its benefits (Qur'ān 2:219);
- Muslims should not approach prayer while intoxicated (Qur'ān 4:43); and
- Muslims should completely abstain from wine. (Qur'ān 5:90-91).

¹⁶ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, 135-136.

Without the ḥadīth to provide context, how does the reader know which of these verses was revealed first? Were intoxicants prohibited at first and then gradually allowed except when one was praying or were they allowed at first and then gradually prohibited? The Sunnah provides the necessary context to these verses and others like them. Muslims differ over the interpretation of the Qur'ān, but the Sunnah provides a context that limits the boundaries of interpretation.

The Sunnah as revelation

Muslim scholars have responded to anti-ḥadīth tendencies by noting that the Qur'ān makes it evident that revelation is not limited to the scriptural revelation of books, but includes the Sunnah as well. The Qur'ān itself makes this evident by highlighting that God “revealed” to certain Prophets who did not have books: “Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the book of Psalms” (Qur'ān 4:163). Because the vast majority of these Prophets did not have books, there must have been a non-scriptural form of revelation. Despite these Prophets not having scriptures, people were still required to obey them. Of the many verses that establish a non-Qur'ānic form of revelation are the following:

And it was revealed to Noah: None of your people will believe except those who have believed already, so be not sad because of what they used to do (Qur'ān 11:36).

And We revealed to him [Joseph]: Indeed, you shall inform them of their affair, when they know not (Qur'ān 12:15).

And We gave Moses the Scripture, after We had destroyed the former generations, as enlightenment for the people and guidance and mercy that they might be reminded (Qur'ān 28:43).

Moses was given scripture after Pharaoh was destroyed. This means that even when Moses did not have scripture his people were still required to follow him.

The Qur'an also makes no mention of Prophet Noah or Joseph receiving any scripture. These verses established that revelation is not limited to a book but can take different forms. Several scholars have highlighted examples from the Qur'ān that establish extra-Qur'ānic revelation (i.e., ḥadīth/sunnah). Muhammad Luqmān al-Salafī notes that the changing of the *qibla* from Jerusalem to Mecca is mentioned in the Qur'ān. However, the original command to face Jerusalem during prayer is not found in the Qur'ān. Arguing that the decision to face Jerusalem during prayer was based on reason is not convincing, especially while keeping in mind that the Prophet ﷺ wanted to face Mecca.¹⁷ Additionally, the *adhān* (call to prayer) is another example of a fundamental ritual mentioned in the Qur'ān only as a sanctioned action without a command to perform it. The command to perform the *adhān* must have come in the form of extra-Qur'ānic revelation.¹⁸ The late Indian scholar Habib-ur-Rahman Azami (d. 1992) notes that funeral prayer is similarly mentioned in the Qur'ān, but its legislation is absent from the Qur'ān: “Never pray for any of them who dies, nor stand at his grave” (Qur'ān 9:84). Azami goes on to state:

*The verse implies that such funeral services had begun to be performed and that the Prophet used to offer prayers at the burial of the dead before this particular verse was revealed; yet no verse revealed earlier than this one can be cited as enjoining such services or prayers upon the Prophet and the Muslims. It must, therefore, be conceded that the command for the burial service was given through the sunnah.*¹⁹

The Prophet ﷺ as a teacher

The Qur'an explains that the Prophet's job is to teach the Qur'ān: “Verily Allah has bestowed grace on the believers by sending to them a Messenger from among themselves who recites to them His revelations, and purifies them, and teaches

¹⁷ Muḥammad Luqmān al-Salafī, *Makānat Al-Sunnah fil-Tashrī‘ al-Islāmī wa Daḥḍ Mazā‘im al-Munkirīn wal-Mulḥidīn* (India: Dār al-Dā‘ī lil Nashr wal-Tawzī‘, 1999), 63.

¹⁸ See M. Usmani, *The Authority of Sunnah*, 26-32.

¹⁹ Habib-ur-Rahman al-A‘zami, *The Sunnah in Islam: The Eternal Relevance of the Teaching and Example of the Prophet Muhammad* (United Kingdom: UK Islamic Academy, 1989), 32.

them the book and wisdom; although before they were in manifest error” (Qur’ān 3:164). If the Prophet’s authority was limited to delivering the Qur’ān, the Qur’ān would have made that explicit. However, it emphasizes that the Prophet ﷺ is to teach the Qur’ān and “the wisdom.” Since one teaches by word and example, there must be a source along with the Qur’an that tells us about the Prophet’s actions. Imām al-Shāfi‘ī explains that “the wisdom” must mean the Sunnah. The term “wisdom” cannot refer to the Qur’ān itself, because it is being taught alongside the Qur’ān.

The concept of the Prophet ﷺ as an expounder on the Qur’ān is advanced by the following verse: “And We sent down to you the reminder so that you may explain to people what was revealed to them and so they may reflect” (Qur’ān 16:44). Upon closer examination, we notice that the verse mentions the revelation of two distinct things. First is the reminder (*dhikr*) that was revealed only to the Prophet ﷺ in order to guide him in explaining the revelation of the Qur’an. Second is that which was already been revealed to the people; i.e., the Qur’ān.

The Arabs of the seventh century excelled in all aspects of the Arabic language. They competed in poetry and delivered eloquent speeches, all of which are the main sources of Arabic literature today. They did not need anyone to translate the Qur’ān for them. Because it was revealed in their mother tongue, the Prophet’s explanation was more than merely the literal meaning. Instead, it must mean that he explained the deeper meanings, implications, and details of the Qur’ānic verses that were not mentioned in the Qur’ān itself. Muhammad Mustafa Al-Azami (d. 2017) writes:

Many of the Qur’ānic injunctions—such as those dealing with prayer, zakāt, hajj, usury, and other commercial transactions—needed careful explanation. The Prophet, as an expounder of the Qur’ān, must have both explained them verbally and demonstrated them in practice. These explanations had the force of law and came under the heading of the sunnah of the Prophet. Thus, the sunnah came into existence simultaneously with the

*revelation of the Qur'ān and were part of the process of the creation of an Islamic system of jurisprudence.*²⁰

“Obey God and obey the Messenger”

In over forty different places, the Qur'ān instructs Muslims to obey both God and the Messenger. There is not a single instance where “obey God” appears by itself; it is always coupled with “and obey the Messenger.” There are several cases where “obey the Messenger” appears alone without “obey God” before it.²¹ Those who reject ḥadīth might interpret the command to obey the Messenger as obedience to the Qur'ān. This idea conflicts with other verses in the Qur'ān: “And when it is said to them ‘Come to what Allah has revealed and to the Messenger’, you see the hypocrites turning away from you with aversion” (Qur'ān 4:61). It is important to highlight that the verse does not say “come to what Allah revealed *to the* Messenger, but rather “come to what Allah revealed *and* come to the Messenger.” This makes it evident that the Qur'ān and the Messenger are two separate things, each of which is authoritative in and of itself.

One of the most famous verses used by Muslim scholars to establish the authority of the Prophet ﷺ is chapter 4 verse 49: “O you who believe, obey Allah and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. If you differ in anything, then refer it to Allah and His Messenger if you believe in Allah and the last day; that is better and the best interpretation.”

Ibn al-Qayyim (d. 751/1350) explained that the word “obey” is only mentioned before the words Allah and the Messenger. It is absent before “those in authority,” making obedience to them based on the condition that it conforms with obedience to God and the Messenger. It then goes on to say that if a dispute arises, it should

²⁰ M.M. Al-Azami, *On Schacht's Origins*, 20.

²¹ Qur'ān 24:54, 24:56, and 4:42.

be referred to God and His Messenger. The only way that disputes can be taken back to the Prophet ﷺ after his death is by returning to the Sunnah and Hadith.²²

How does one refer to God and His Messenger? One might argue that this verse was limited to the time of the Prophet ﷺ when people could have physically referred to him. Ibn Ḥazm convincingly explains that this interpretation is untenable because the same cannot be said about God. In other words, if the term “refer” means meeting and consulting with the Prophet ﷺ, this cannot be the case with God because doing so with God is impossible. He goes on to explain that the command “refer” in this verse means to return to the speech of God which is the Qur’ān, and the speech of the Messenger that is only available in the form of ḥadīths. There is nothing in this verse that indicates the necessity of meeting the Messenger. What is meant by referring to him is to return to the words of God and His Messenger, not their beings.²³

Another part of the Qur’ān maintains that the Messenger is a legislator: “It is not befitting for a believing male or believing female, if Allah and His Messenger decide a matter, that they have a choice in the matter. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has gone astray into manifest error” (Qur’ān 33:36). Commenting on this verse, Muhammad Taqī Usmanī says:

Here, the decisions of Allah and the Messenger both have been declared binding on the believers. It is worth noting that the word ‘and’ occurring between ‘Allah’ and ‘His Messenger’ carries both conjunctive and disjunctive meanings. It cannot be held to give conjunctive sense only, because in that case it will exclude the decision of Allah unless it is combined with the decision of the Messenger—a construction too fallacious to be imagined in the divine expression. The only reasonable construction, therefore, is to take the word ‘and’ in both conjunctive and disjunctive meanings. The sense is that whatever Allah or His

²² Muḥammad ibn Abū Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *I lām al-Muwaqī’in ‘ar-Rab al-‘ālamīn* (Cairo: al-Maktabah at-Tijāriyyah, 1955), 48. Also see Muhammad Asad, “Social and Cultural Realities of the Sunnah.” In *Hadith and Sunnah - Ideals and Realities*. Edited by P. K. Koya (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1996), 236.

²³ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, 87-88.

*Messenger, any one or both of them, decide a matter, the believers have no choice except to submit to their decision.*²⁴

Muḥammad Ismā‘īl al-Salafī explains that the Qur’ān notes that Muslims must not separate or distinguish between God and His Messengers: “Surely those who disbelieve in Allah and His messengers and wish to separate between Allah and His messengers and say: We believe in some and disbelieve in others, and desire to take a course in between that. These are truly unbelievers, and We have prepared for the unbelievers a disgraceful punishment” (Qur’ān 4:150-151). What does it mean to separate between God and His Messengers? God and His Messengers are not one in their being; God is the Creator and the Messengers are part of His creation. Therefore, separation does not mean split up in their beings, because it is obvious that the two are completely different and separate. Rather it refers to separating between them with regards to obedience or stating that one will obey God but not the Messengers.²⁵

Conclusion

In this article, I set out to demonstrate two important points that establish the absolute necessity of ḥadīth in Islam. First, without the context provided by ḥadīth literature, the Qur’ān itself loses all meaning. Previous attempts to understand the Qur’ān completely stripped of the context provided by ḥadīth literature have been unsuccessful because they always resorted to ḥadīth, even if a few. This is because the Qur’ān, by its nature, was intended to be read within the context in which it was revealed and is closely bound to the life of the Prophet ﷺ. While some people claim to follow only the Qur’ān, the Qur’ān’s nature is such that it requires the reader to consult with the Sunnah.

Second, the authority of the Prophet ﷺ and the obligation to follow him were not invented by Muslim scholars. Rather, the Qur’ān makes it unequivocally clear

²⁴ M. Usmani, *The Authority of Sunnah*, pp. 48-49.

²⁵ Muḥammad Ismā‘īl al-Salafī. *Ḥujjiyyat al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī Majmū‘ Maqālāt Nafīsa fil-Difā‘ ‘an al-Sunnah al-Sharīfa*. Edited by Ḥasan Muqtaḍa. (Kuwait: Ghirās, 2007), 51-52.

that there were two forms of revelation: the Qur'ān and the Sunnah. It also establishes the role of the Prophet ﷺ as a teacher, legislator, and expounder on the Qur'ān.