Exegesis of the Qurʾān with the biblical and post-biblical literature

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No single collection of biblical or Midrashic writings has ever been explicitly cited as a direct source for the Qurʾān. However, as the final divine scripture in the historical continuum of monotheistic religions, the Qurʾān exhibits a clear textual and chronological relationship to the biblical traditions of Judaism and Christianity. Its stories are intertwined with narratives that evoke biblical and Midrashic sources. This connection has motivated some Muslim scholars, particularly narrative exegetes such as Ibn Kathīr, al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī, to interpret the Qurʾānic text by drawing on biblical and post-biblical knowledge, often referred to as Isrāʾīliyyāt.

Contribution: With its treatment of this connection, this article will show that biblical lore has played a crucial role in exegesis of the Qurʾānic scripture, helping the exegetes provide meaning to obscure Qurʾānic verses, uncover its ambiguous figures and expand its stories.

Keywords: The Qurʾān; the Bible; Midrash; Talmud; exegesis; *Isrāʾīliyyāt*.

Introduction

Qurʾānic expositors have based their interpretations on various approaches, including mystical insights, linguistic principles, historical data, scientific findings, rational and logical analysis, and traditional narratives [*ḥadith* and *riwāya*]. Among these expositors, the first group, who employed mystical and spiritual insights, made esoteric interpretations of the Qurʾān, assuming that its letters and words convey meanings not explicitly stated in the text. Viewing Qurʾānic verses as speaking to realities beyond their literal meanings, they sought to uncover deeper, hidden messages. This approach focusses on extracting inner meanings from the Qurʾānic text, based on the belief that the Qurʾān contains secret knowledge.

The second group emphasised linguistic principles – such as morphology, eloquence, syntax and rhetoric – as the foundation for understanding and interpreting the Qurʾān. They interpreted Qurʾānic words through the lens of rhetorical and grammatical rules. The third group regarded historical data as a supplementary source for exegesis, interpreting verses in light of their historical contexts and the circumstances of their revelation [*asbāb al-nuzūl*].

The fourth group interpreted the Qurʾān in alignment with contemporary scientific knowledge, asserting that the truths of religion cannot contradict scientific understanding. The fifth group placed rational and logical principles at the core of their exegesis, using philosophical and logical reasoning to support their interpretations.

The final group adhered to the traditional method of Qurʾānic exegesis, known as narrative exegesis [*tafsīr bi al-riwāya*], which relies on transmitted reports. This method has been the most commonly employed in classical *tafsīr* since the early development of Islamic exegesis.

All the aforementioned groups of expositors, particularly those employing the traditional commentary method [*tafsīr bi al-riwāya*], have drawn upon biblical sources – such as the Tanakh (comprising the Torah, Prophets and Writings, which together form the Hebrew Bible) – as well as Midrashic and Talmudic lore. However, only a few, like Ibn Kathīr, explicitly acknowledged

their use of these sources.[1] The use of biblical, Midrashic, and Talmudic literature as sources for Qurʾānic commentary has been limited to certain verses. Not all Qurʾānic narratives with clear connections to the Bible were interpreted through these sources [Isrāʾīliyyāt] in classical exegesis. This restraint likely stems from the fact that the Bible was not regarded as reliable as other sources, such as linguistic, scientific, historical or mystical approaches. The classical charge of textual corruption of the Bible cast doubt on its divine origin and validity in the eyes of Muslim scholars. Consequently, biblical and Midrashic material was not considered a trustworthy tool for interpreting the Qurʾān, and commentary works rarely relied on the Bible, whose authenticity and sanctity were viewed with suspicion. Thus, exegesis through biblical material was not deemed a secure method for Qurʾānic interpretation.

Despite accusations of the Bible's textual corruption, some exegetes did partially employ biblical material in their Qurʾānic interpretations. Al-Biqāʿī, for instance, incorporated a significant amount of what he considered unaltered biblical content into his commentary *Naẓm al-Durar*. However, as he remained cautious about the reliability of certain biblical texts, he applied this method selectively. Al-Biqāʿī used biblical passages that aligned with the Qurʾān to clarify its narratives, such as the story of Noah's flood, which did not conflict with the Qurʾānic version. In contrast, he rejected the biblical account of Abraham's sacrifice, which he believed contradicted the Qurʾānic narrative. For al-Biqāʿī, biblical material was valuable only when it harmonised with the Qurʾānic text. In conclusion, while he applied the method of using biblical sources for Qurʾānic exegesis, he did so cautiously and selectively.

Consequently, by acknowledging biblical lore as an integral part of Qurʾānic interpretation, this article proposes the comprehensive application of a hermeneutic method based on the Bible to the study of Qurʾānic revelation. It will also explore the place of this method in relation to others, such as mystical, historical, traditional, linguistic and scientific approaches, highlighting its advantages and contributions to a deeper understanding of Islamic traditional exegesis.

1.See Ibn Kathīr's commentary on Q 38:34. After recounting the story of the seal of Solomon passing into the hands of Asmodeus [*Āṣaf*], he remarks, 'I see all of these from Isrāʾīliyyāt'. Additionally, Ibn Kathīr cites another variant of the story from Ibn ʿAbbās, noting, 'The reference of the narration to Ibn ʿAbbās is strong, but it is clear that he received it from the people of the Book … the entire parable that the predecessors [*mutaqaddimūn/salaf*] reported was drawn from the literature of the people of the Book'. See Ibn Kathīr (1999:69). In contrast, many classical commentators, including al-Ṭabarī, contended that their narratives [*riwāyāt*] regarding the Qurʾānic stories did not originate from Isrāʾīliyyāt, but were derived from Islamic culture and revelation. Consequently, they often referred to the Muslim predecessors – disciples of the Prophet (*al-Ṣaḥāba*), their followers [*al-Tābiʿūn*] and those who followed them [*al-Tabaʿ al-Tābiʿūn*] – attributing biblical explanatory details to these prominent figures, despite their lack of authentic authority on these narratives. For instance, in his commentary on Q 7:189, al-Ṭabarī narrates the biblical account of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, stating: 'According to the citation from Qatāda through Bishr, Yazīd, and Saʿīd regarding the verse "and He [*God*] made of it its spouse", the wife is Eve, created from one of his ribs so that he may find comfort in her'. Here, al-Ṭabarī unequivocally cites biblical information, as neither the name of Adam's wife nor her creation from his rib is mentioned in the Qurʾān. However, he refrains from referencing the Bible directly, instead attributing this information to the successor of the disciples (*al-Tābiʿūn*), Qatāda, along with his followers, Bishr and Saʿīd. See Ibn Kathīr (1999:68–69); Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī, Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Dār Hijr, 2001), p. 617.

The divine protection of the Bible and its scriptural authenticity

Among Muslims, there is a common accusation that the earlier scriptures (the Torah and the Gospel) were tampered with by Jewish Rabbis (Aḥbār) and Christian clergy (Ruhbān). Muslim scholars argue that these groups distorted the integrity of the holy texts, erasing, for example, references to the prophecy of Muḥammad and the precept of stoning. To support their claims, they reference 'the tampering verses' *[al-āyāt fī al-taḥrīf]*,[2] including phrases like ʾ*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima ʿan mawāḍiʿihī'* [there are those who displace words from their rightful places], ʾ*yaktubūna al-kitāb'* [they write the Scripture] *and* ʾ*febaddala al-leḏīne ẓalamū qawlan'* [those who did wrong changed the word]. Based on these verses, leading Muslim scholars have accused the Bible of falsification (Adang 2006:305):

1. and 2. *Sūrah al-Baqara* 2:42: 'Do not *cover up* ([*talbisū*] cf. Q 3:71) the truth with falsehood and *conceal* [*taktumū*] cf. Q 2:140, 146, 159, 174; 3:71, 187) the truth, while you know it'.
2. *Sūrah al-Baqara* 2:79: 'Woe to those who *write* [*yaktubūna*] revelation [*al-kitā*] with their hands [*biaydīhim*]' and then say, 'This is from God'.
3. *Sūrah āl-ʿImrān* 3:78: 'Among them is a group who *twist their tongues* [*yalwūna alsinatahum / layyan bi-alsinatihim*] with the revelation'. (cf. Q 4:46).
4. *Sūrah al-Nisāʾ* 4:46: 'Among the Jews are those who *shift* ([*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima ʿan mawāḍiʿihī*] cf. Q 2:75; 5:13, 41) words out of their contexts'.
5. *Sūrah al-Māʿida* 5: 13–14: 'Because they have violated their covenant We cursed them and made their hearts hard. They *shift words* out of their contexts. They *forgot* [*nasū*] a portion of what was recounted to them. … As for those who say, "We are Christian [*naṣārā*]" we made a covenant with them but they forgot [*nasū*] a portion of what was recounted to them'. (cf. 7:53, 165).
6. *Sūrah al-Māʿida* 5: 15: 'O People of the Book, our messenger has come to you to present much of what you were *hiding* [*tukhfūna*] of the truth …'

Major medieval Muslim scholars, adhering to the classical Islamic view that rejects the authenticity of Christianity and Judaism, interpreted these verses as evidence of the corruption of earlier divine scriptures, namely the Torah and the Gospel. For instance, in his commentary on Sūrah al-Baqara 2:79, al-Ṭabarī, one of the foremost classical Islamic exegetes, stated: 'The phrase "*yaktubūna al-kitāb biaydīhim*" refers to the Jews (the Children of Israel) who corrupted Allah's word by writing another book that contradicted the original divine text (the Torah)'. He supported this interpretation with a citation from Mujāhid: 'It means the Jews mutilated the Torah, despite knowing it was divinely revealed'. Al-Ṭabarī also quoted Abū al-ʿĀliya: 'It means they targeted the revelation in their scripture, which described the characteristics of Muḥammad, and erased it' (Ṭabarī 2001:270).

2.*The tampering verses [al-āyāt fī al-taḥrīf]:* they are the phrases frequently used in Muslims' arguments to show the Qurʾānic references of the corruption of the Bible. See Q 2:140; 2:79.

In his commentary *al-Kashshāf* on Sūrah al-Baqara 2:42, al-Zamakhsharī wrote:

> Covering up the truth with falsehood [*talbisū al-ḥaq bi al-bāṭil*] refers to inserting into the Torah what was never originally part of it. Concealing the truth [*taktumū al-ḥaq*] refers to their claim that they could not find the attributes of Muḥammad in the Torah, or to their deletion of his traits from it.

He interprets 'covering up' [*talbisū*] as adding human words [*taktubūn fi al-Tawrāt ma laysa minhā / al-bāṭil*] into the Torah to obscure the truth [*al-ḥaq*], while 'concealing' [*taktumū*] refers to hiding the truth, particularly the name and attributes of Muḥammad and certain divine laws, such as stoning [*rajm*]. According to al-Zamakhsharī, the Bible, falsified by Rabbis [*Aḥbār*] and Monks [*Ruhbān*], became a tool for misleading the Jewish and Christian communities. His view aligns with the prevalent medieval Islamic belief that the original Bible was significantly corrupted, leading Rabbis and Christian leaders to no longer guide their followers towards the straight path (Zamaḫsharī 2009:74).

In his commentary on *Q* 3:78, al-Ṭabarī interpreted the phrase 'They twist their tongues [*yalwūna alsinatahum*]' as the fabrication of words resembling God's word, which were then incorporated into the Torah. He cited a narration from Ibn ʿAbbās: 'Those mentioned in the verse are Jews, who attempted to add to the Torah what God never revealed to His prophets'. He also referenced Qatāda, who said: 'They are Jews, adversaries of Allah, who altered the sacred book, tampering with it'. Additionally, his transmission from Mujāhid aligned with these earlier narrations (Ṭabarī 2001:535–537). Al-Zamaḫsharī suggested that it indicates a group of Jews (Kaʾb b. al-Ashraf, Mālik b. al-Ṣayf, Ḥuyay b. Aḫṭab), who changed pronunciation and/or recitation of the words by twisting their tongues (Zamaḫsharī 2009:178).

In *Sūrah al-Nisāʾ* 4:46, al-Rāzī presented three interpretations of the phrase 'shifting words [*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima*]'. Firstly, it refers to replacing words with others [*taġyīr al-lafẓ*], such as substituting the attribute of Muḥammad 'rubʾa' [a man of middle height] with 'ādam ṭawīl'[tall man] or 'rajm' [stoning] with 'al-ḥad' [penalty]. In this way, the Jews erased the divine words, replacing them with their own. However, al-Rāzī considered such changes unrealistic for the Torah, which was widely known across the region, making tampering difficult. Secondly, it denotes the distortion of the meaning of the words through verbal tricks [*al-ḥiyal al-lafizyya*] and misinterpretation [*al-taʾwīlāt al-fāsida*], which led to doubts about the revelation of the Torah. Thirdly, it may refer to the Jews' attitude of regularly falsifying the exhortations of Muḥammad, even while asking him to admonish them. Al-Rāzī favoured the second interpretation, as the first seemed unrealistic and the last was unrelated to the context of the tampering verses (Rāzī 1981:8:117–118, 10:120–122).

In *Sūrah al-Māʾida* 5:13–14, while analysing the phrase 'They shift words out of their contexts', al-Rāzī insisted on his earlier interpretation that the verse refers to two possible meanings: the former being the misinterpretation of the Bible [*al-taʾwīl al-bāṭil/fāsid*], and the latter being the corruption of its text [*taġyīr al-lafẓ*]. He argued that the first meaning is more fitting for the status of the Bible, as corruption could hardly occur in a text that has been transmitted continuously [*bi al-tawātur*] by the communities of the book (Jews and Christians), who could not collectively agree on a lie against God. Thus, he believes that Q 5:13–14 pertains to the misinterpretation of the Bible [*al-taʾwīl al-bāṭil*]. Al-Qurṭubī appears to share this view of *al-taʾwīl al-bāṭil* as well, understanding 'They shift words out of their contexts' to mean 'They interpret the words incorrectly [*yataʾawwalūnahū ʿalā ġayri tavīlihī*]' (Qurṭubī 2006:381).

Al-Ṭabarsī offered a more inclusive interpretation of Q 5:13–14, viewing both possibilities as equally valid; for him, both textual and exegetical corruption occurred in the Torah. He wrote:

> The Jews both interpreted God's word while distorting its literal meaning and corrupted its text by replacing the attributes of Muḥammad. Therefore, the corruption of the Torah can be categorized into two types: the first is exegetical corruption [*sūʾuta'wīl*], and the second is textual corruption, which is conceptualized in Islamic sources as 'alteration' [*al-taġyīr*] and 'substitution' [*al-tabdīl*]. (Ṭabarsī 2006:247)

As for al-Samarqandī, he understood 'They shift words out of their contexts [*yuḥarrifūna al-kalima*]' to be alteration of Muḥammad's attributes, thus interpreting the corruption of the Bible [*al-taḥrīf*] as textual falsification (Samarqandī 1993:422–423).

After extensive examination of the commentaries, it has been clearly shown that almost all Muslim commentators agreed on the 'corruption' [*al-taḥrīf*] of the earlier books and transmitted traditions and narratives regarding it from the companions of Muḥammad [*al-Ṣaḥāba*, e.g. Ibn ʿAbbās] and the followers of the companions (*al-Tābiʿūn*, e.g. Mujāhid, Qatāda, ʿIkrima, etc.). However, they disagreed on how the corruption occurred. Some exegetes (e.g. al-Zamaḫsharī, al-Samarqandī, al-Suyūṭī, etc.) understood 'al-taḥrīf' to signify textual corruption, while others (e.g. al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī) considered it to be exegetical corruption [*tabdīlu al-qasd*] (Qurṭubī 2006:381; Rāzī 1981:117–118, X:120–122). Besides, there are, though a limited number, other commentators (e.g. al-Ṭabarsī and al-Shawkānī) who interpreted 'al-taḥrīf' to refer to both textual and exegetical corruption. From all these descriptions, one can hardly conclude that the Bible is unequivocally a corrupted and unreliable source, as there is considerable uncertainty among the exegetes regarding the textual falsification of the Bible.

In addition, the Qurʾān makes no explicit accusation of the textual corruption of earlier scriptures; in other words, there is no clear indication in the Qurʾānic revelation that any of

the earlier revelations ([*Torah*] and *Gospel*) exist in an altered state. Gordon Nickel (2015) stated, 'There is no hint in any of these verses that the earlier scriptures exist in a corrupt or falsified state' (p. 5). Similarly, W.M. Watt concluded:

> [T]he Qurʾān does not put forward any general view of the corruption of the text of the Old and New Testaments … there is absolutely no suggestion in the Qurʾān that the whole Bible has been mutilated at some time in the distant past. (Watt 1990:77–86, 1991:32)

Instead, there are verses explicitly confirming the previous revelation. Another piece of evidence supporting the claim that it has not been textually corrupted is the language of confirmation in the Qurʾān (e.g. Q 2:41, 97; 3:3). It directly confirms the Bible 'we sent to you the book in truth, confirming [*muṣaddiq* – مُصَدِّق] what is before it from the book, and guarding it in safety [*muhaymin* – مُهَيْمِن]'.[3] It also does so indirectly: 'bring the Torah and recite any passage of it if you are truthful',[4] 'but how is it that they come to you for judgement while they have the Torah, in which is the judgement of Allah?'[5] and 'If you are in doubt regarding what we have sent down to you, ask those who recite the book before you'.[6] It seems that Qurʾān clearly reflects an attitude of confirmation towards the earlier scriptures, thus vouching for their authenticity and immunity from corruption.

In this sense, divine protection of the earlier scriptures might be plausible, too. Namely, while God guards the Qurʾān from corruption,[7] why would he let the Bible – it is his own word too – to be corrupted at the hand of humans? If it was corrupted, why would the Qurʾān share many biblical figures and narrations, as well as confirming Bible's authenticity? Apparently, it still admits that the Bible, being still at hand in its day, was revealed and safeguarded by God.[8] In other words, it appears it was protected from corruption in the custody of God, just as the Qurʾān was protected.

Additionally, there is a consistently positive and reverent tone in the Qurʾān towards the earlier scriptures. For example, in *Q 6:154*, the book given to Moses is described as a guidance [*hudan* – هُدًى] and a mercy [*raḥma* – رَحْمَة]. In other verses, it is characterised as light [*nūr* – نور] and manifesting [*mustabīn* – مُسْتَبِين]. Furthermore, the Qurʾān acknowledges the authority of the *Torah*, describing it as the judgement of Allah [*ḥukm* – حكم] and a standard [*imāman* – إِمَامًا] for the audiences.[9] The Gospel is also dubbed as guidance and light as well as admonition [*Mawʿiẓa* – مَوْعِظَة]. As seen earlier, the Qurʾān contains no denigrating or accusatory remarks about

the earlier scriptures; rather, it offers respectful and positive expressions towards them. In this sense, Nickel stated:

> From the survey of the contents of the Qurʾān, it is clear that in all of the verses in which the earlier scriptures are actually named, the Qurʾān has only positive and respectful things to say about them. It is hard to support the Muslim accusation of the corruption of the Bible with verses from the Qurʾān that actually name the earlier scriptures. Further, any honest reading of all of the Qurʾānic verses that can reasonably be assumed to refer to the earlier scriptures, must acknowledge the overwhelmingly positive and respectful tone of this material … In fact, as many scholars have observed, both Muslim and non-Muslim, the Qurʾān speaks of the earlier scriptures only in the most positive and respectful way. (Nickel 2015:14)

From all this, one can conclude that the Qurʾān respects the earlier books while affirming their sanctity and validity.

Regarding the positive verses affirming the soundness and divinity of the earlier scriptures, Hava Lazarus-Yafeh (2000) wrote:

> The Qurʾān accepts the Tawrāt and Injīl as genuine divine revelations taken from the same Guarded Tablets as the Qurʾān itself and brought by true messengers to both Jews and Christians respectively. (p. 111).

Similarly, Nickel (2015) noted:

> Qurʾānic descriptions of the earlier scriptures are uniformly positive and respectful. The most natural impression for a reader to take from these verses would be that the Qurʾān assumes the earlier scriptures are available and intact. (p. 13)

It should be noted that the Qurʾān's position on the authenticity of the Bible significantly differs from that of Muslim scholars. There is a clear discrepancy regarding the veracity of the Bible between Muslim authorities and the Qurʾān. John Burton highlights this distinction by differentiating between what the Qurʾān actually states about the earlier scriptures and how Muslims have interpreted these statements. He agrees with the straightforward observation that the Qurʾān does not accuse Jews and Christians of having falsified the Bible. Contrary to the general Islamic view and exegesis, the Qurʾān does not assert that Jews and Christians altered the text of their scriptures, but rather that they altered the truth contained within those scriptures (Nickel 2015:13). In this sense, Reynolds suggested: 'There is a distinct contrast between the evidence of the Qurʾān itself and the position of later Islamic literature'. And after analysing the 'the tampering verses' in the Qurʾān, he added: 'In none of these examples does the Qurʾān insist that passages of the Bible have been rewritten or destroyed' (Reynolds 2010:190). In this context, Martin Accad said:

> In the Qurʾānic context, *al-taḥrīf* is principally an ambiguous accusation raised against the Jews. Moreover, (all four verses containing the verb [*ḥarrafa*]) more readily lend themselves to being understood as accusations of misinterpretation, *taḥrīf maʿna*, rather than textual corruption, *taḥrīf lafẓ*. One should not therefore too quickly conclude, as most do today, that these verses were automatically understood in the sense of textual corruption of the whole Bible, for this would represent an anachronism. (Accad 2003:71)

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3. Q 5:48.

4. Q 3:93.

5. Q 5:43.

6. Q 10:94.

7. 'We have, without doubt, sent down the Message [*Qurʾān*]; and We will assuredly guard it [*from corruption*]' (see Q 15:9).

8. 'He has sent down upon you, [*O Muhammad*], the Book in truth [*Qurʾān*], confirming what was before it. And He revealed the Torah and the Gospel' (see Q 3:3).

9. Q 11: 17; 46:12; 5:43.

Given the Qurʾān's confirmation of the earlier scriptures and the uncertainty among exegetes regarding their falsification, it can be inferred that it would be a strained interpretation to argue that the Bible is a corrupted and unreliable source. In this context, one can conclude that the Bible is a reliable source to the extent that it is utilised in Qurʾānic exegesis.

Comparison of the Bible with other exegetical sources

In the previous section, it has been established that the Bible can be considered a valuable source for Qurʾānic exegesis, given the ongoing controversy among commentators regarding its alteration. Additionally, with its extensive narratives that elucidate Qurʾānic revelations, the Bible offers certain advantages over other exegesis sources (e.g. traditions such as ḥadith and riwāya, linguistics, history, science, philosophy, and logic). Thus, one can regard the exegetical method based on biblical sources as a reliable approach, comparable to others. Now, let us compare it with these other methods of exegesis to examine its advantages and contributions to the Qurʾānic exegetical tradition.

Firstly, consider the esoteric exegesis method, which seeks to unveil the inner meaning of verses, moving beyond the apparent [ẓāhir] aspects of revelations. In other words, it connects the Qurʾānic verses to their inner (bāṭin) significations and the metaphysical dimensions of existence. This method is more suggestive than declarative, offering allusions rather than clear explanations. Practitioners of this method, often mystics, provide spiritual interpretations of the verses, using Sufi terminology that can be perplexing for readers. Their attempts to extract hidden meanings from the Qurʾānic text, which are not overtly stated, often lead to obscurity, making it challenging for those unfamiliar with Sufi concepts to fully grasp their interpretations.

Regarding allegorical-mystical interpretation, consider the commentary of al-Tustarī, one of the most distinguished Ṣūfī commentators, on Aʿrāf 148 'The people of Moses made, in his absence, out of their ornaments, the image of calf, (for worship): it seemed to low'. In his commentary, *al-Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm*, he wrote:

> Everything that turns people away from God, such as family and children, is a human's calf. Man can get rid of it only if he can destroy the causes and flavors that produce it. As a matter of fact, the Jews were able to get rid of the worship of the calf by killing their souls [*nafs*] (Tustarī 2004:150).

al-Sulamī, who wrote *Ḥaqāiq al-Tafsīr*, cited the same quotation (Sulamī 2001:244). Najmuddīn al-Kubrā, author of *Taʾwīlāt al-Najmiyya*, understood 'the making of calf from the ornaments' to be return to the mundane world and its ornament (Najmuddīn al-Kubrā 2009:68–70).

Consider another example, Naml 7–8. In this verse, Moses sees a fire and tells his family he will bring them information or warmth. Upon approaching, he hears a voice blessing those around the fire. Ibn ʿArabī interprets 'whoever is around it' as spiritual powers and angels with divine knowledge. Najmuddīn al-Kubrā sees 'I have perceived a fire' as his heart uncovering truths during a spiritual struggle, interpreting 'family' as 'soul', so it becomes 'Moses said to himself'. He suggests 'you may warm yourselves' means the fire will help overcome stagnation and darkness. He also describes the tree as a 'spiritual tree' and the fire as 'the fire of love'. Bursawī notes that Moses transitions from love to confusion, with God using the tree and fire to reflect his majesty and beauty to him (Bursawī 1979:321; Ibn ʿArabī 2018:325, 569).

Cross-references to this verse are found in Qaṣaṣ 29–30 and Ṭāhā 11–12, where Moses sees a fire while travelling with his family and hears God's voice from a tree in the sacred valley of Tuwa, commanding him to remove his sandals. Sulamī notes that Ibn ʿAṭaʾ saw Moses' journey as a metaphor for his closeness to God, while Jaʿfar viewed the fire as representing divine light. Al-Qushayrī described the tree as symbolic of reunion with God, and Ibn ʿArabī interpreted 'the right bank of the valley' as the right side of Moses' heart, with 'hallowed ground' symbolising his perfect heart (Qushayrī 1983:65; Ibn ʿArabī 2018:590; Sulamī 2001:104).

As is evident, Ṣūfī commentators interpreted the aforementioned verses within the framework of Ṣūfī understanding and terminology. Consequently, their attempts to go beyond what God apparently meant in the text by deriving deeper meanings from the Qurʾānic scripture resulted in some degree of obscurity regarding the divine message. Specifically, the meanings of the verses became shrouded in uncertainty and disconnected from their contexts because of their intensive use of Ṣūfī exegesis methods and concepts, making it difficult for readers to understand the verses. For example, in *Naml* 27:7–8, their spiritual interpretation of 'the family' as 'the soul' and 'the fire' as 'the fire of love', among others, led to ambiguity in the meaning of the verse.

While the aforementioned verses have been obscured by Ṣūfī commentators, the Bible aids in understanding them, allowing for a proper interpretation of their text. When examining the Torah,[10] one can see that these verses actually refer to historical events occurring just before the beginning of revelation to Moses, rather than focussing on his spiritual status or communication with the Lord. In other words, they do not primarily address Moses' spiritual journey but rather his physical journey to the place of reunion.[11] Therefore, it appears challenging to comprehend the verses in *Naml* 27:7–8, *Qaṣaṣ* 28:29–30 and *Ṭāhā* 20:11–12 through the lens of Ṣūfī hermeneutics and terminology.

10. Even though the biblical version of the story of Moses' journey to the place of meeting slightly differs from the Qurʾānic version, its plotline is tantamount to the Qurʾānic story (See Q 20:11–12; 27:7–8; 28: 29–30; cf. Ex 3:1–5).

11. Exodus 3:1–5 reads: 'Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. Therefore, Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush does not burn up." When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Do not come any closer," God said. Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground'.

However, the Torah, which contains the extended versions of these verses and narratives, aids Muslim commentators in gaining a deeper understanding of them. Given these biblical contributions to the interpretation of the Qurʾānic verses, one can conclude that the Torah can serve as a reliable resource for the exegesis of the Qurʾān, and that the hermeneutic method based on biblical knowledge can also be considered sound.[12]

Secondly, consider the linguistic exegesis method, which seeks to understand the Qurʾān based on rhetorical and grammatical rules (e.g. morphology, eloquence, syntax, etc.). In Arabic, the meaning of any word can be discerned by knowing its root and the form from which it is derived. Thus, a word must be understood through the most basic meaning held by its root. In Islamic literature, works that explore the roots of Qurʾānic words and reveal their fundamental meanings are regarded as important exegetical sources. Literary elements of the Arabic language are seen as integral to tafsīr, as they form the foundation for understanding and interpreting the Qurʾān. Additionally, poetry plays a crucial role in the linguistic exegesis method. Expositors frequently cite pre-Islamic Arabic poetry to support their arguments, providing valuable insights into word meanings and etymology.

Prominent figures in this method include al-Farrāʾ, ʾAbū ʾUbayda, al-Zajjāj and *Ibn Qutayba*. Furthermore, commentators such as *al-Zamaḫsharī, Bayḍāwī, Nasafī, ʾAbū Ḥayyān al-Andalūsī* and *Rāġīb al-Isfahānī*, who employ independent reasoning [*ijtihād*] to create opinion-oriented interpretations [*tafsīr bi al-dirāyah*], can also be considered part of the linguistic expositors, as they linguistically paraphrase Qurʾānic words in their commentaries.[13]

The issue with this method is that it does not provide comprehensive information about the historical and biblical background of the Qurʾān's revelation; instead, it offers only specific grammatical paraphrases to explain the lexical meanings of certain words. It fails to adequately reference parallel texts in the Bible or consider the historical contexts of the verses found in the books detailing the occasions of revelation [*asbāb al-nuzūl*][14] and in works of Qurʾānic narratives [*qaṣaṣ al-Qurʾān*].[15] This lack of historical context and biblical references ultimately renders the method inadequate for explaining the text of the Qurʾān.

For example, exegetes have applied this method to al-Baqara 31: 'And He taught Adam all the names …' Al-Zamakhsharī's linguistic analysis explains that 'Adam' comes from *adamah* [skin] or *adīm al-arḍ* [earth's surface], similar to other names like Yaʿqūb (Jacob) from ʿaqab [lineage], and Iblīs from *iblas*

[hopelessness]. He interprets 'the names' (al-ʾasmāʾ) as the names of species taught to Adam, suggesting God taught him the names of each creature (e.g. horse, camel). This interpretation was also followed by Bayḍāwī and Nasafī (Bayḍāwī 2000:84; Nasafī 1998:78–79; Zamaḫsharī 2009:71). Al-Farrāʾ focusses on the phrase 'God showed them to the angels' [ʿaraḍahum], explaining that the pronoun 'hum' refers to intelligent beings like humans, angels and genies. If the names did not refer to intelligent beings, the pronouns 'hunna' or 'hā' would have been used. Similarly, al-Zajjaj agrees and adds that the names taught to Adam are the names of species (Zajjāj 1988:110–111).

As noted, the linguistic commentators mentioned earlier were more focussed on the linguistic and grammatical aspects of verse Q 2:31 than on providing a historical explanation of its context. Consequently, this verse remains somewhat obscured. In this case, the Torah and Midrash come into play, helping exegetes clarify this obscurity with their detailed explanations of such common verses and narratives.

According to the Torah and Midrash, after the creation of Adam, God deemed it not good for him to be alone and decided to find a suitable helper. To do this, he brought every creature (e.g. horse, camel, etc.) before Adam for him to choose a companion, but none was found to be a fitting match. Then, God created Eve from Adam's rib and presented her to him. During this process, God allowed Adam to name every creature he encountered; he even named his wife, stating, 'Adam called his wife's name Eve' (Gn 3:20). The Midrash elaborates that when the angels objected to God's creation of humanity, he presented the beings to them, asking, 'Tell the names of these things'. They replied, 'We have no knowledge about them'. When God turned to Adam and asked for their names, Adam responded, 'This is horse [*sus*], this is camel [*gamal*], this is ox [*shor*] and this is donkey [*chamor*], and so on'. Adam also named himself and God: 'And you, (He said), what is your name?' Adam replied, 'It is right to be called Adam, since I was created from the ground [*adama*]'. God then asked, 'And what is my name?' Adam responded, 'It is fitting for you to be called my Lord [*Adonai*], since you are the lord [*adon*] of all creatures' (Freedman & Simon 1939:135; see also Gn 2:18–20).

In Q 2:31, the biblical and Midrashic explanations provide insight into the phrase 'And He taught Adam all the names'. Referring to these interpretations, 'the names [*al-ʾasmāʾ*]' may signify attributes or characteristics [*al-sifāt/al-maʿānī*] of the beings rather than their actual names, because it was Adam who named the beings, not God, as noted in the biblical text. Thus, in Q 2:31, what God taught Adam must refer to the characteristics of the beings rather than their names. Al-Rāzī supports this interpretation in his commentary, stating: 'If the word '*al-ʾasmāʾ*' derives from '*al-sumuw*' or '*al-sama*' [meaning feature, attribute, or distinguishing quality], then the term '*al-ʾasmāʾ*' denotes attributes or characteristics' (Rāzī 1981:192).

12. Exodus 3:1–5.

13. Zamaḫsharī (2009:178); Bayḍāwī (2000:1–25); Nasafī (1998:14–16); Andalūsī (1993:4–8); Rāġıb al-Isfahānī (2001:6); Farrāʾ (1983:1–3); ʾAbū ʾUbayda (1954:16–19); Zajjāj (1988:18–22), and Ibn Qutayba (1973:1–33); for more information see al-Ḏahabī (2000:108–109, 216–218, 313).

14. The historical context in which Qurʾānic verses were revealed from the perspective of traditional Islam. For more information of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, see Rippin (1988:1–20).

15. For more details see ʾAbū ʾUbayda (1954:19); Zajjāj (1988:23).

Thirdly, consider the scientific exegesis method, which seeks to elucidate the Qurʾānic verses based on scientific findings. Originating with *al-Ġazzālī* and further developed by *al-Rāzī*, this method is one of the most controversial approaches to tafsīr today.[16] Lustrous examples of works employing this exegetical method include *Mafātīḥ al-Ġayb by Faḥraddīn al-Rāzī, al-Jawāhir fī Tafsīr al-Qurʾān by Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, Kashfu Asrār al-Nurāniyya al-Qurʾāniyya by al-Iskandarānī* and *Ṭabāiʿ al-Istibdād wa Maṣāriʿ al-Istiʿbād by al-Kawākibī*. According to this method, the Qurʾān contains a substantial number of scientific truths (e.g. embryology, dermatology, the Big Bang Theory, the meeting of two seas, expansion of the universe, etc.),[17] that were discovered only in modern times, many centuries after the Qurʾān's revelation. The primary objective of the expositors is to uncover these scientific truths through their interpretations. A number of Muslim scholars have actively engaged with the Qurʾān, motivated by a commitment to uncover its truths and enhance its status, in order to demonstrate that the Qurʾān anticipated many of the scientific discoveries made in contemporary times (Zafar Ishaq 2001:91–104). Furthermore, proponents of this method increasingly assert that the Qurʾān serves as a reliable source of scientific knowledge, containing numerous scientific facts and principles. This perspective has led to the development of scientific interpretations of Qurʾānic verses, particularly those related to cosmology, thereby giving rise to the scientific exegesis method.

As a necessary result of this method, modern scientific exegetes endeavoured to relate almost every verse to a scientific finding or theory. They, for example, connected the verse, Q 25:53,[18] which mentions the merging of two seas (kinds of water), one pure and drinkable, the other saline and brackish, without mixing, to the scientific discovery made by Jacque Cousteau in the strait of Gibraltar in 20th century. According to them, when the Mediterranean Sea meets the Atlantic Ocean they do not mix, because of the barrier, the difference in density of two seas, which prevents them from mixing. In support of this, they referred to the contemporary studies on oceanography, for example, Richard Davis' *Principles of Oceanography* where he wrote:

> Perhaps the best example of how a water mass retains its distinctiveness is illustrated by the Mediterranean Sea as it enters the Atlantic via strait of Gibraltar. The Mediterranean Sea is warm and saline compared to Atlantic Ocean. (Davis 1972:93–94)

This interpretation, however, appears not to be fitted for the context of the verse, for it claims both seas are salty, though the verse, Q 25:53, reads two seas, one is fresh and drinkable, and the other is saline and brackish. Therefore, in this sense, the claim that two seas denote Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea seems not to be a dependable argument.

Afterwards, some contemporary Muslim intellectuals dealt with the verse, Q 25:53. A doctor and specialist in the field of gastroenterology, Maurice Bucaille, who converted to Islam in 1980s wrote:

> [T]he phenomenon is well known and often seen whereby the immediate mixing of salty seawater and fresh river water does not occur. The Qurʾān refers to this in the case of what is thought to be the estuary of the Tigris and Euphrates where they unite to form what one might call a 'sea' over 100 miles long, the Shatt al-Arab … the mixing of the fresh water with the salty water of the sea does not often occur until very far out at sea.

However, his position is questionable in the sense that he admits *the massive mixing* of waters at some distance from the sea shore at the end of the process. However, the relevant verses name a barrier [*barzaḫ / ḥāġız*] that two sea waters could not transgress [*lā yabġıyān*], and because of which they could not mix in a large amount and change one another's water quality massively.

But, relatively sufficient and plausible explanation apparently comes from the Bible:

> He said to me, this water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. *But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they are to be left for salt*. (Ezekiel 47:8–11).

In the light of these biblical passages, one can infer that the two seas represent the Sea of Galilee (Tiberias Lake) and the Dead Sea. While the former is fresh and drinkable water, the latter is salty and brackish. Despite the groundwater and surface waters (e.g., the river of Sharia) connecting the two seas, there is a land barrier between them, which prevents them from *massively mixing* and *completely changing* one another's water quality. In this sense, the barrier [*barzaḫ / ḥāġız*] that both seas could not transgress [*lā yabġıyān*] signifies the terrestrial region stretching from the Sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea.

The inspiration we took from the passage of the Bible is that the Qurʾānic verse 25:53 (cf. Q 27:61; 35:12; 55:19–20) refers to the fact that despite the connection of the fresh terrestrial waters to the salty waters (i.e., seas and salty lakes) through running groundwater (e.g., underground streams) or surface waters (e.g., rivers), the massively mixing never occurs for presence of the land barrier (e.g., mountain, hill, valley, rock, soil, etc.) lying between both water bodies. Frankly speaking, God separated all the fresh water on the earth from salty

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16. Opponents of the scientific exegesis method proposed the argument that the Qurʾān was not meant to be a book of science. Drawing on Abū Isḥāq al-Shāṭıbī's critique of scientific exegesis [*tafsīr ʿilmī*], Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ḏahabī remarked that the Qurʾān was not sent down to serve as a compendium of medicine, astronomy, geometry, chemistry or necromancy, but as a book of guidance that would lead humanity out of darkness and into light. The other prominent opponents of the scientific exegesis are represented by Shayḫ Maḥmūd Shaltūt, Amīn al-Ḫūlī and Sayyid Qutub (see Ismail & Asnawi 2021:69; Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ḏahabī 1976:86–87; Mir 2004:36). Of these exegetes, Amīn al-Ḫūlī was an authoritative critic of *tafsīr ʿilmī*. He proposed many methodologically focussed arguments against scientific exegesis in the 1930s that remained unanswered by his contemporaries. He admonished the scientific exegetes of his time for using technical language and ascribing to the Qurʾān ideas and concepts that were not only inappropriate, but also incomprehensible in the original context. He maintained that as scientific knowledge is in a constant state of flux, it is not an appropriate anchor for Qurʾānic meaning (al-Ḫūlī 1961:194; for more information of al-Ḫūlī' view, see Naguib [1979:57–88]; see also Daneshgar 2015:32–66; Telliel 2019:528–542; Shāṭıbī 1997:128–131).

17. Q 23:12–14; 55:19–20; 21:30; 51:47.

18. It is He who holds the two oceans together; one very pure (i.e. potable) and the other saline and bitter. And He made between them a veil and an inviolable barrier (cf. 55:19:20; 27:61; 35:12).

water, as he separated the Sea of Galilee from the Dead Sea, in order to supply fresh water with his people. If he did not separate them through the land barrier consisting of range of mountains, hills and valleys, they would mix completely in the course of time, and living beings will become extinct for they could not access the fresh water. Therefore, although the verse in question refers specifically to these two seas (i.e., Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea), it refers generally to the entire body of fresh water on the lands and to the entire body of salt water on the seas and lakes.

Fourthly, consider the narrative exegesis method that attempts to elucidate the Qurʾānic verses on the basis of traditions [hadith], transmissions [riwāya] and historical narrations (i.e., stories 'qaṣaṣ'). Classical expositors are holding to the traditional method of commenting on the Qurʾān, that is, narrative exegesis [tafsīr bi al-riwāya].[19] It is one of the most used methods in the classical tafsīr since the emergence of Islamic exegesis tradition. This method addressed the terms and passages of the Qurʾān within the scope of narratives and traditions transmitted from disciples of the Prophet, al- Ṣaḥāba, their followers, al-Tābiʿūn. Take, for example, the term 'iqraʾ', one of the most polemical words, occurred in Q 96:1 and derived from 'qaraʾa'. Taking into consideration of the traditions from the early authorities, classical expositors interpreted it to refer to the reciting of the text of the Qurʾān. For instance, the traditionalist exegetes (e.g., al-Qurṭubī, al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī) mostly understood the 'iqraʾ' to begin to read or recite the Qurʾān with mentioning the name of God (Qurṭubī 2006:374–376; Ṭabarī 2001:527–530). This interpretation, however, seems incoherent with the view they narrated in their commentaries, that the verse, Q 96:1, is the first verse revealed to the prophet (Ṭabarī 2001:528, 530). Namely, there was no Qurʾānic passage sent down earlier than this verse so that the prophet could read it; for it is itself already the first verse or message. At this point, to look at the biblical knowledge can help commentators to utterly understand the meaning of the term. Consider the example, namely, Jonah 1:2 'Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh. Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are'. The term 'announce' was translated from the original verb, 'וּקְרָא [ūqarā]', which comes from the root qaraʾa (קְרָא / قرأ) from which the Arabic verb 'iqraʾ' derives, too, and means 'to call, to proclaim, to announce, to cry out, and etc'.[20] Since the Arabic verb 'iqraʾ' is tantamount to the Hebrew verb 'וּקְרָא [ūqarā]' in terms of root, derivation and meaning, it must import Hebrew verb's meanings, such as 'to call, to proclaim, to announce'. In this context, at 96:1, one can conclude that God addressed Muḥammad as he addressed Jonah, and that the term 'iqraʾ' means 'Lo prophet get up [qum / קום] and announce [וּקְרָא / iqraʾ] to the people in the name of God'.[21]

Consequently, it appeared that the biblical knowledge plays crucial role in the interpretation of the Qurʾānic revelation by helping one to interpret the verses that they had difficulty explaining them. Therefore, the biblical knowledge can be deemed as one of the vital parameters of Qurʾānic exegesis.

Exegesis of the Qurʾānic stories with the biblical lore

The Qurʾānic revelation shares notable similarities with the Bible, particularly in the context of certain stories, which reflect common themes. Additionally, there are overlaps in the textual structure of both scriptures. Thus, in terms of story context and textual structure, its engagement with biblical literature is evident. The Qurʾān that comes from the same source of revelation as the Bible presents these shared stories in its own unique way, often adapting them to align with its distinctive linguistic style, theological vision and narrative approach. The Qurʾān, for instance, conveys many stories in a concise manner, summarising them to emphasise specific messages in line with its overall purpose. As a result, some details present in other versions of the stories may be presented differently and more briefly, reflecting the Qurʾān's particular method of storytelling and emphasis on direct moral and spiritual guidance.

The Qurʾānic stories are often dispersed across various surahs, sometimes with different wording, creating a fragmented or evocative narrative style. This can offer readers an invitation to explore the text more deeply, though it may also present challenges in forming a comprehensive view of a single story.[22] Additionally, certain figures and phrases within these stories are presented in a way that may require further interpretation, inviting readers to engage in deeper reflection and, at times, seek external exegetical material to gain a comprehensive understanding of the context and meaning.[23]

For these reasons, additional explanatory materials may be helpful in fully understanding Qurʾānic stories. At this point, biblical elements, which contain parallel versions of stories shared with the Qurʾān, can offer valuable insights. They can assist in clarifying unclear passages, connecting the parts of stories found throughout the Qurʾān and providing a more extended version of the narrative. The Bible thus illuminates the interpretative approaches of commentators regarding the messages embedded in the Qurʾān's narratives. Throughout Islamic scholarship, it is well-documented that the Prophet's disciples – such as Ibn ʿAbbās, ʾAbū Hurayra and ʿAbdullah b. Salam – and the followers of the Prophet's companions, including figures like Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, Wahb b. Munabbih, Saʿīd b. Jubayr, Qatāda, ʿIkrima, Ḥasan al-Basrī and Ḍaḥḥāk

19.Tafsīr bi al-riwāya refers to the transmission of exegesis from early authorities, such as the Companions of the Prophet. This type of exegesis of the formative period features edifying narratives, generally enhanced by folklore from the Near East. For more details, see Gilliot (2002:105).

20.Hebrew and Arabic are cognate languages, both belonging to the Semitic language family, which is why both verbs [וּקְרָא and [iqraʾ] have the same meaning. For meaning and etymology of the verb 'קְרָא', see Brown, Driver & Briggs (2004:894).

21.Cf. Q 73:2; 74:2.

22.For the example of fragmented story, see the parable of Jonah in the following verses: Q 10:98; 21: 87–88; 37: 139–148; 68: 48–50.

23.For the example of unknown figures, see the story of Du al-Qarnayn (Q 18: 86); for the example of obscure phrases, see the phrase of Du al-Qarnayn's parable 'he found the sun setting in a muddy spring' (Q 18: 86), and the verse of Solomon's parable 'We placed on his throne a body' (Q 38:34); and for the example of ambiguous significations, see the parable of Abraham's offering of his son as a sacrifice to God (Q 37:101).

b. Muzāḥim, frequently utilised biblical knowledge to comprehend the stories and their underlying messages during and after the period of revelation. Their references to biblical and Midrashic literature can be found in both dirāya and riwāya commentaries, which are considered reliable sources within the Islamic tradition. For instance, in his commentary on Q 38:34, Ibn Kathīr notes a variant of the narrative concerning the transfer of Solomon's seal to Asmodeus [Āṣaf], stating:

> The attribution of this narration to Ibn ʿAbbās is robust; however, it is evident that he received it from the People of the Book … the entire parable reported by the predecessors [mutaqaddimūn/ salaf] is derived from the literature of the People of the Book.[24]

Another example can be found in the commentaries of figures such as al-Rāzī and Ibn Kathīr, where the assertion that Isaac was the son offered to God as a sacrifice is attributed to Kaʾb al-Aḥbār, a well-known transmitter of biblical knowledge (Ibn Kathīr 1999:29–31; Rāzī 1981:153). Additionally, in a narration attributed to ʾAbū Hurayra, it is reported that God alleviated Isaac's distress regarding the impending sacrifice (Ibn Kathīr 1999:30).

In this context, consider the parable of Jonah as presented in Q 37:139–148. The Qurʾānic narrative begins with Jonah's flight to a laden ship and details the events that transpired at sea. However, it notably omits the introductory elements that would clarify the reasons for his flight, such as why he fled, to where he escaped and from whom he was evading. This synoptic narrative approach also results in the exclusion of certain details within the story itself. For instance, Q 37:141 states: 'And he drew lots and was among the losers', but it does not elaborate on the context or reasons for the lottery. Similarly, the conclusion of the story lacks critical information; Q 37:146 mentions, 'And We caused to grow over him a gourd vine', yet fails to explain the rationale behind this divine act. It seems that the Qurʾān's concise storytelling style, designed to deliver its messages more directly, sometimes shortens the longer prophetic stories. In doing so, some parts of the stories may be left out. Additionally, by summarising parables and trimming down their content, the flow between the verses can occasionally feel less connected, making it harder to follow the cause-and-effect relationships within the stories. The Qurʾān's style undoubtedly stems from the fact that it is the final link in the chain of divine revelation. The Qurʾān, which confirms the Torah and the Bible that were revealed before it, bears witness to the divine origin of the stories found in them. Accordingly, when it needs to reference these stories, it does not need to recount them in full; it is sufficient to mention only the relevant parts, and for the rest of the story, it directs the reader to consult the Bible.

Sometimes the Qurʾān narrates a story in a very scattered manner; in other words, a prophetic story can be found in more than one surah. Take, for example, the aforementioned

story of Jonah in Q 37:139–148. Because of the disconnection between the verses of this parable, one may encounter challenges in grasping the deeper significations embedded within the overall narrative. Similarly, in another rendition of the parable found in Q 21:87–88, which states, 'And (mention) the man of the fish, when he went off in anger…', certain phrases are obscured by the disjointedness of the passages. For instance, the phrase 'when he went off in anger' is particularly unclear, as the text does not provide the context for Jonah's anger, thereby necessitating external interpretation to understand this aspect of the story.[25]

As a result, the parable of Jonah in the Qurʾānic version becomes obscured, making it challenging to ascertain its intended significations. However, the biblical account provides clarity by connecting the neglected elements of the story and addressing its ambiguities. For instance, the Bible elucidates the reasons behind Jonah's flight: he fled in anger because of the LORD's compassion for the people, despite their wickedness. The text states:

> So he prayed to the LORD, and said, Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, One who relents from doing harm.[26]

This context answers crucial questions about Jonah's motivations and the circumstances of his actions.[26] Jonah fled from Nineveh, as indicated by the command, 'Get up and go to the great city of Nineveh'.[27] He sought to escape his responsibility to announce God's judgement against the wicked inhabitants of that city: 'Announce my judgment against it because I have seen how wicked its people are'.[28] The lottery was cast to identify who was responsible for the calamity – a terrible storm that had struck their ship: 'And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us". So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah'.[29] Additionally, God caused a gourd vine to grow to ease Jonah's discomfort, as he was angered by God's compassion for the wicked people:

> And the LORD God arranged for a leafy plant to grow there, and soon it spread its broad leaves over Jonah's head, shading him from the sun. This eased his discomfort, and Jonah was very grateful for the plant.[30]

Notably, some exegetes, such as Ibn Kathīr, drew upon these biblical insights in their commentaries, interpreting the place from which Jonah fled as Nineveh (Ibn Kathīr 1999:366).

24.For more information of his narrations, see Ibn Kathīr (1999:69); for the narrations Ibn ʿAbbās received from the people of the book, see also Goldziher (1920:65–70).

25.al-Qurṭubī cited a tradition from Saʿīd b. Jubayr, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Shaʿbī that 'He fled in anger to God'. So far as he reported al-Ṭabarī and al-Qutabiyyu liked this tradition imputed to Ibn Masʿūd. See al-Qurṭubī (2006:266). For Ṭabarī's interpretation of the verse in question, see al-Ṭabarī (2001:374–378).

26.Jonah 4:2.

27.Jonah 1:2.

28.Jonah 1:2.

29.Jonah 1:7.

30.Jonah 4:6.

Similarly, numerous examples exist of stories rendered obscure by the Qurʾānic language. For instance, in the following parables, crucial details regarding the identities of key figures and the motivations behind their actions have been omitted. In the parable of Adam in Q 7:206, the name of his wife is not mentioned. In the narrative of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron in Q 20:87, the identity of Sāmirī, who allegedly crafted an idol in the shape of a calf from gold earrings, remains undisclosed. Likewise, in the parable of Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son in Q 37:101, the identity of the son being offered is obscured. In Q 38:34, concerning the story of Solomon's ring, the identity of the individual who sat on his throne is similarly left unclear.

Moreover, the reasons behind certain actions in these Qurʾānic stories are also ambiguous. For example, in the parable of the queen of Sheba in Q 27:44, the rationale for Solomon's invitation to her into his palace, which was made of glass, is uncertain. Additionally, the motives prompting David and Solomon to seek forgiveness from God and turn to him in repentance remain obscure, even though they appear to have committed no wrongdoing.

Biblical versions of the stories, however, help commentators have a greater understanding of the ambiguous Qurʾānic parables, dispelling the obscurity that shrouded their messages by illuminating the ambiguous expressions and the identities of the anonymous figures, and elucidating the causes behind some prophetic acts and events. For example, from the Bible one can learn about the name of Adam's wife and how she was created from him: 'Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib' (Gn 2:22) and 'Adam named his wife Eve' (Gn 3:20). About the identity of Sāmirī, from the Bible again, one can find out that Sāmirī represents the concept of belief of the Samaria community (the tribe of Israel in the northern region), who forsook all the commands of the Lord their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole, and they bowed down to all the starry hosts and worshiped Baal.[31] Likewise, about the identity of the son of Abraham offered as a sacrifice to God, one can read the whole story from the Bible, concluding that Isaac is the son offered as a sacrifice to God:

> Take your son, your only son – yes, Isaac, whom you love so much – and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you (Gn 22:2)

About the identity of the person (Ginzberg 1968:165–170) who sat in Solomon's throne, one can look to the Midrashic knowledge and learn the whole story between the demon Asmodeus and the King Solomon, and figuring out the one who sat in Solomon's throne is the Asmodeus (Ginzberg 1968:169–170). When it comes to the ambiguous expressions and missed parts of the stories in the Qurʾān, when looking to the translation of the Bible, Targum Sheni, one can understand

the reason for the expression 'She was asked to enter the lofty Palace' to be Solomon's eagerness to see her legs whether or not they are hairy. Because he thinks 'Thy beauty is the beauty of women, and thy hair is the hair of men; hair is becoming to a man, but to a woman it is a shame'. As for David and Solomon's begging for forgiveness from God, the Bible has peculiar stories for each one. The former, David, turned to God in repentance for he lay with Bathsheba and got her pregnant, sending her husband Uriah to the frontlines of the fiercest fighting to be killed.[32] The latter, Solomon, asked for forgiveness from God for his love of women from different nations (e.g., Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites), those who turned his heart away from God, and leading him astray.[33]

Indeed, prominent medieval Muslim exegetes, such as Ibn Kathīr, who employed narrative exegesis, often referenced biblical accounts to interpret relevant ambiguous Qurʾānic verses. For instance, in discussing the story of David seeking forgiveness and turning to God in repentance, Ibn Kathīr stated, 'The commentators have mentioned here a story, most of which was transmitted from the Isrāʾīliyyāt' (Ibn Kathīr 1999:366). This indicates that biblical and Midrashic literature was regarded as sufficiently reliable for classical Muslim scholars, who frequently utilised it in their interpretations. Therefore, it is imperative for contemporary exegetes to engage with both literary traditions to gain a deeper understanding of the Qurʾān's verses.

Conclusion

The Qurʾān distinctly resonates with numerous themes present in the biblical and Midrashic writings of Judaism and Christianity, particularly through narratives that parallel specific biblical accounts and their Midrashic embellishments. Consequently, these narratives were interpreted by early disciples such as Ibn ʿAbbās and ʾAbū Hurayra, as well as successors like Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, ʿIkrima, and Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim, within the frameworks provided by the texts of the Bible and various Midrashic compositions. Numerous Muslim exegetes, both from the early '*mutaqaddimūn*' and later '*khalaf*' traditions, also relied on these sources when interpreting the Qurʾānic text and its narratives.

This historical engagement illustrates that Qurʾānic exegesis, which draws upon biblical and post-biblical sources, is a well-established paradigm within the Muslim exegetical tradition. Such an approach not only enriches the understanding of the Qurʾān but also aligns with the practices of revered classical scholars.

Moreover, as contemporary exegetes seek to interpret the Qurʾān, it becomes imperative to revisit the methodologies of classical commentators. By engaging with both the Qurʾān and the relevant biblical texts, scholars can uncover deeper meanings and contextual nuances that may otherwise remain

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31. II Kings 17:16.

32. 2 Samuel 11:1–15.

33. 1 Kings 11:1–7.

obscured. This integrative approach not only honours the historical legacy of Islamic scholarship but also fosters a more comprehensive understanding of the Qurʾān's message.

In conclusion, the interplay between the Qurʾān and the biblical tradition not only enhances the exegetical landscape but also serves as a testament to the rich intertextual dialogue that has characterised religious thought throughout history. By embracing this dialogue, contemporary scholars can cultivate a more nuanced and informed engagement with the sacred texts, ultimately leading to a more profound understanding of their theological and ethical implications.

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