

## PROPHET SULAYMĀN VISITING MULTIPLE WIVES IN A SINGLE NIGHT: A STUDY OF ḤADĪTH NARRATION AND ITS RESPONSES

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### Abstract

*The ḥadīth on “Prophet Sulaymān Visiting Multiple Wives in A Single Night” has been given as an example of a contradiction between ḥadīth and logic. It tells the story of Prophet Sulaymān sleeping with an enormous number of wives in a single night. Being portrayed as carrying erotic message, the ḥadīth has also been deduced as an example of forgery committed by the ḥadīth scholars themselves. This study aims to clarify the problematic allegations, deduce a number of responses and compare the ideas from significant finding in Jewish and Christian sources. It suggests that such problematic ḥadīth implicitly implying a form of mu’jizāt and karāmah in such tradition. The data provided from the nine canonical ḥadīth books, traditional commentaries (sharh), Biblical sources and related articles. The data analysed in a descriptive and analytical manner using qualitative and quantitative method. The study concludes that the ḥadīth fulfils the criteria of a rigorously authenticated ḥadīth given its inclusion in the canonical works of ḥadīth and corroborated in other tradition and highly established in ḥadīth narrations. Hence, the claim of fabrication was categorically dismissed; the number of wives should be understood in general as indicating numerous wives while, ignoring the particular numbers. The study implicitly shows that the paragraph “single night” alluded to the narrative of mu’jizāt.*

**Keywords:** *Mushkil al-Ḥadīth, Miracles, Prophet Sulaymān, Forged Ḥadīth, Sanad Criticism*

### INTRODUCTION

Ḥadīth on “Prophet Sulayman Visiting Multiple Wives in A Single Night” has generated highly intense discussion among classical and medieval Muslim traditionists and theologians. The narration related in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, that Prophet Sulayman (as) has taken vow to sleep with a large number of his wives in a single night, was disputed by certain scholars. This

paper tries to elucidate the fact that this narration is rigorously authentic and legitimate on the ground of logic and rational proof.

The narrated number of wives as reported in authenticated traditions ranging from sixty to seventy to ninety (as reported by Shuayb bin Zinad and this is the most authentic report), to ninety-nine to a hundred in different chains of narration. The refutation by certain quarters deems it irrational that someone could have intercourse with a large number of women in one night. This study would demonstrate the falsity of their arguments.

Some have raised doubts on the peripheral aspect of the hadith without looking to the actual import of its meaning, and others have seen contradiction in its various versions. The authentic hadith as narrated by Abu Hurairah (rad), reported that the Prophet (saw) said:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، قَالَ " قَالَ سُلَيْمَانُ بْنُ دَاوُدَ - عَلَيْهِمَا السَّلَامُ - لِأَطُوفَنَّ اللَّيْلَةَ بِمِائَةِ امْرَأَةٍ، تَلِدُ كُلُّ امْرَأَةٍ غُلَامًا، يُقَاتِلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ، فَقَالَ لَهُ الْمَلَكُ قُلْ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ. فَلَمْ يَقُلْ وَنَسِيَ، فَأَطَافَ بِهِنَّ، وَلَمْ تَلِدْ مِنْهُنَّ إِلَّا امْرَأَةً نِصْفَ إِنْسَانٍ ". قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ " لَوْ قَالَ إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَمْ يَحْنَثْ، وَكَانَ أَرْجَى لِحَاجَتِهِ

(*Sahih Al-Bukhari*, Kitab al-Nikah, hadith 5242, Ahmad, *Musnad*, hadith 7715)

In another version on the authority of Abu Hurayrah, The Prophet (saw) said:

قال سليمان بن داود نبي الله : لأطوفنَّ الليلة على سبعين امرأة، كلهن تأتي بـغلامٍ يقاتل في سبيل الله، فقال له صاحبه، أو الملك: قل إن شاء الله، فلم يقل ونسي، فلم تأت واحدة من نسائه، إلا واحدة جاءت بشقِّ غلامٍ. فقال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: ولو قال: إن شاء الله، لم يحنث، وكان دركًا له في حاجته

“Sulayman the son of Daud, said: “Tonight, I will sleep with seventy ladies each of whom will conceive a child who will be a knight fighting for Allah’s cause.” His companion said: “If Allah wills.” But Sulayman did not say so, therefore none of those women got pregnant except one who gave birth to a half-child.” The Prophet (saw) further said: “If he [Prophet

Sulayman] had said it [i.e. ‘if Allah will’] he would have begotten children who would have fought in Allah’s cause.”<sup>1</sup>

Al-Mawdudi (d. 1399/1979) in his book *Rasa’il wa Masail* (vol. 2, 27) mentioned that this hadith was reported by al-Bukhari in kitab (chapter) *al-Anbiya’*, *al-Jihad* and *al-Ayman wa al-Nuzur*. The reports were inconsistency in defining the numbers of Prophet Sulayman’s wives, ranging from sixty to seventy to ninety, to ninety-nine to a hundred. According to him, from these different chains of narrations that arrive to the muhaddith, it is difficult to give a conclusion since it has no basis, and the confusion and mistake in the narration itself. Such assumption and argument were compellingly brought forth in his commentary of the Quran (38:35): “But the subject matter of the hadith is patently against reason, and proclaims aloud that such a thing could not have been said by the Holy Prophet (saw) as reported. But on the contrary, he might have probably mentioned it as an example of the foolish and nonsensical tale-telling of the Jews, and the hearer might have misunderstood that the Holy Prophet (saw) himself had stated it as an event. To force the people to accept such traditions only on the strength of their chain of transmitters would be making religion a matter of mockery and jest. Everyone can calculate for himself that even in the longest night of winter the interval between the ‘Isha and the Fajr prayers cannot be more than ten or eleven hours. If the minimum number of the wives were 60, it would mean that Prophet Sulayman (as) went on having intercourse with them continuously for 10 to 11 hours that night at the rate of six wives per hour, without having a moment’s rest. Is it practically possible? And can it be expected that the Holy Prophet (saw) might have related it as an event?”<sup>2</sup>

Realizing the fact that difference numbers could come through narrators and has no moral significance in the central theme of the hadith, Mawdudi articulate the subject in depth in a traditional approach to hadith scholarship that give resolution to the alleged problems: “Hadith reports on this subject are found in various chapters of *Sahih al-Bukhari*. These reports mention different numbers of Sulayman’s wives – sixty, seventy, ninety and hundred. The chain for authorities for all these reports are different. It is, therefore difficult to term something reported with numerous chain of authorities altogether baseless. However, it is possible that Abu Hurayrah made a mistake in understanding the saying of

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<sup>1</sup>Al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, translated by Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Maktabat Dar us-Salam, 1997), hadith 3424

<sup>2</sup>Al-Mawdudi, Abul A’la, *Tafhim al-Quran* (Lahore: Idara Tarjuman al-Qur’an, n.d.), vol. 4, 337.

the Prophet (saw) or that he did not listen to it completely. It may be that the Prophet (saw) said Sulayman (as) had numerous wives that Jews numbered as sixty, seventy, ninety, ninety-nine or hundred, and Abu Hurayrah thought the Prophet (saw) himself mentioned the number. Likewise it may be that the Holy Prophet (saw) mentioned Sulayman's saying as "I will go to my wives and each of them will bear a mujtahid" and Abu Hurayrah surmised that he mentioned this for one night. Such inadvertencies are found in various reports."<sup>3</sup> (*Rasa'il wa Masail*, vol. 2, 27)

Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani has answered in detail this allegation that questioning the authenticity of hadith and criticism of its origins and possible inadvertence of narrators in his commentary of *Sahih Muslim* (Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *Takmilah Fath al-Mulhim* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 2006) vol. 2, pp. 181, 185-187 and in his lectures on *Jami' al-Tirmidhi* (*Taqrir Tirmidhi*, vol. 2, pp. 184-185).<sup>4</sup>

In the occasion of uncertainty of these reports, Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d. 852/1449) cited all these versions in his commentary and reconciled them by explaining the difference in a logical spirit that establish the integrity of hadith: "In brief, the different versions mention the number (of the wives of Prophet Sulayman (may Allah exalt his mention) as sixty, seventy, ninety, ninety-nine, and one hundred. They can be reconciled in the sense that the wives were sixty free women and the rest were concubines or vice versa. Seventy denotes the large number as a form of exaggeration. Ninety and one hundred; they were less than one hundred and more than ninety. Those who say that they were ninety wives discarded the fraction and those who say they were one hundred rounded up the number."<sup>5</sup>

The varying numbers given in different traditions perhaps was due to the narrators, as remarked by Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani: "Abu Musa al-Madini (d. 571/1185) stated in his book [*al-Thamin fi Istithna' al-Yamin*] that in some manuscripts of *Sahih Muslim* after the story of Sulayman it is written that the different numbers [of wives] are not from the words of the Prophet (saw), rather they come from [later] narrators."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Al-Mawdudi, Abul A'la, *Rasa'il wa Masail*, (Lahore: Islamic Publications, n.d.) vol. 2, 27.

<sup>4</sup>Muhammad Taqi Usmani, *Takmilah Fath al-Mulhim* (Beirut: Dar Ihya al-Turath al-Arabi, 2006) vol. 2, pp. 181

<sup>5</sup>Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1379), vol. 11, 605

<sup>6</sup>Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, *Fath al-Bari* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, 1379), vol. 11, 606

It is reported in al-Bukhari saying one hundred wives (through the narration of ‘Abdur Razzaq, Ma‘mar, Ibn Tawus from Abu Hurayrah), and sixty (through the narration of Hammad ibn Zayd, Ayub, Muhammad Sirin from Abu Hurayrah) and in *Muslim* collection (hadith 4379) specifying ninety wives. In another report of al-Bukhari, by way of *mu‘allaq* chain of narration, in bab (book) *man talaba al-walad li al-jihad* it indicated ninety-nine wives. Ibn Kathir in his kitab *al-Bidayah wal Nihayah* reported the historical account of early scholars informing their numbers as one thousand. Since this account was related from the *Ahl al-Kitab*, the Muslim does not explicitly justify or denying it. There was also an authentic version of the report without any mention of a single night, found in Ibn Hibban, *al-Sahih* (Beirut: Al-Risalah Publications, 1998), hadith 4337,<sup>7</sup> and Ibn al-‘Arabi, *al-Mu‘jam* (Dammam: Dar Ibn al-Jawzi, 1997), hadith 1875<sup>8</sup> that conclusively rebutted the alleged problem of irrationality.

This speculative and skeptical arguments could be answered and reconciled with reason, as alluded by Shah Waliyullah al-Dehlawi (d. 1176/1762) “The majority of transmitters attended to the main ideas of the meaning, not the peripheral factors.”<sup>9</sup>

In a similar tone, the hadith was generally consistent with logic that Sulayman was given this ability assuming his incredible power and glory of conquering the world of jinn and angel and human in his hand. It was the gift and wisdom and explicit sign of prophethood that God provides for whoever He wish.

ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ

Such is God’s bounty: He grants it to anyone who is willing [to receive it]: for God is limitless in His great bounty. [62:4]<sup>10</sup> (*The Message of the Qur’an*, translated and explained by Muhammad Asad, 1980)

<sup>7</sup>Ibn Hibban, *al-Sahih* (Beirut: Al-Risalah Publications, 1998), hadith 4337

<sup>8</sup>Ibn al-‘Arabi, *al-Mu‘jam* (Dammam: Dar Ibn al-Jawzi, 1997), hadith 1875

<sup>9</sup> Shah Waliyullah al-Dehlawi (*Hujjat Allah al-Baligha*, [*The Conclusive Argument from God: Shah Wali Allah of Delhi’s Hujjat Allah al-Baligha*] translated by Marcia Hermansen (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 2003), 411-412)

<sup>10</sup> Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur’an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to fully appreciate the meaning and implication of the hadith it is worth to describe the ideas from the Abrahamic traditions, as brought forth in the Jewish and Christian sources – The Old and New Testament. In relation to the account as related from the *Abl al-Kitab*, it is interesting to note that in Islamic intellectual and historical tradition, the anecdote were generally regarded for its historical significance, without explicitly justifying or denying the anecdote.

The information derived from *Jewish Encyclopedia* has bring to light narrative and accounts of significant Jewish tradition. Featuring narrative from Jewish and Christian scriptures over the centuries – on significant historical anecdote relating to Prophet Sulayman (as). In 1 Kings 11 (New International Version) it is pronounced, in ancient epistles, concerning Solomon's wives: "King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter – Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been...On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods."<sup>11</sup>

Whilst in the commentaries of 1 Kings 11:1-8; Song of Solomon 6:8, it was remarked, concerning Solomon's wives and concubines: "In the law regulating the life and reign of a king, it was distinctly laid down that he must not multiply wives who would turn his heart away from God."<sup>12</sup> Solomon, above all other kings in Israel, sinned against this decree with disastrous consequences. The nameless daughter of Pharaoh who he married started him out on the downward course of idolatry.<sup>13</sup> He loved many "strange women," that is, women of different nationalities, apart from Israel, and he had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. His wives turned his heart toward other gods, and because of his idolatry accruing from such a strong female influence, God said that at his death He would rend

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Kings 11 (New International Version).

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 17:17 (New International Version).

<sup>13</sup> 1 Kings 3:1-3; 7:8 (New International Version).

Solomon's magnificent kingdom in two. While Solomon had built a magnificent temple for God, he likewise built heathen shrines for his idolatrous wives. "No man can serve two masters," said the Master Himself. "Ye cannot serve God and the idols of the world."<sup>14</sup>

Over the centuries, the account of Semitic people deeply influenced by the Biblical account of Jewish legend, myth and anecdotes. This can be attributed to the historiography of the Bible influenced by the Semitic and Israelites literature condemned by history. The anecdote carrying blasphemous account of Prophet Sulayman (as) in which, in its turn, demonstrates a narrative of Solomon, the King of Israel, who rebel against God, have forsaken Him, preferring other gods and succumbed to his sensual and erotic passion and lust, unbecoming of a prophet of God.

The critics says that the main contention of the Biblical narrative is the decree of God in history. It scrupulously asks why is it God allow Solomon to have one thousand wives and concubines, which was in direct violation of God's Law? The written Law and His instruction in the scripture counsel that: no amassing of horses, no multiplying of wives, and no accumulating of silver and gold (Deuteronomy 17:14-20).<sup>15</sup>

On what pretext that God allow Solomon to having one thousand wives and concubines and what is the consequences and price he paid for this act. At the conclusion we find an instructive end that Solomon wisely judged that he had not derived any pleasure and fulfilment from this act and that his life was meaningless without the grace of God.<sup>16</sup>

In the Book of Ecclesiastes he testified to this: "I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired...a harem as well – the delights of the heart of man...everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun...here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man."<sup>17</sup> (Ecclesiastes 2:8, 12:13).

In the context of historical interpretation, the anecdote was instructive for the reconstruction of the history of the Israelite and the Biblical account of Solomon life. This historical anecdote implying a common influence in the ages of Judaism and Christianity, and in the genealogy of religion - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - which share common

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<sup>14</sup> biblegateway.com/resources/all-women-bible/Solomon-8217-s-Wives (accessed June 17, 2021).

<sup>15</sup> Deuteronomy 17:14-20 (New Living Translation).

<sup>16</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:8 (New Living Translation).

<sup>17</sup> Ecclesiastes 2:8, 12:13 (New Living Translation).

monotheistic tradition, common narratives and historical anecdote, which is crucial for cultural exchange and understanding.

The extensive account of Bani Israil in the traditional works of tafsir (Qur'anic commentary) has brought to light historical anecdote embedded in the antiquities of Biblical history. Such anecdote was further developed and explicated in the literature of tafsir, spelled out in the tradition of Tabari, Zamakhshari, Baydawi, Ibn Atiyah, Khazin, Ibn Kathir, Maududi and etc., that set forth additional anecdote derived from the Torah and Injil and historical narratives of early ages – especially of Greek, Roman and Arabic origin. It is probably based on this early influential account that Ibn Kathir, in his voluminous work *al-Bidayah wal Nihayah* reported the anecdote informing their numbers [*i.e.* Prophet Sulayman's (as) wives] as one thousand.

The traditional tafsir does not specifically identify their source of historiography. The reliability of the literature needs to be established. Al-Ustadh Ahmad Amin (1886-1954), in his significant historical works *Fajr al-Islam*<sup>18</sup> (p. 251) and *Duba al-Islam*<sup>19</sup> (vol. 2, p. 143) has explicitly dismissed the ideas of *Isra'iliyyat* and its corrupt influence in the works of tafsir. This narrative would corrupt the cultural integrity and religious tradition of Islam, and tamper with common people and intellectuals.

In this regard, it is crucial to appreciate the fact of transcendental truth as set forth in the Qur'an, and introduced in its historical narratives, which is differed from the earlier revealed scriptures - the Four Gospels. The ideas of this transcendental truth was propounded by Muhammad Asad in his commentary of the Qur'an, *The Message of the Qur'an*, that revealed the influence of the Qur'an in the context of monotheistic faith, as reflected in his commentary on verse 3:3 *Al-Imran* [The House of 'Imran]: "and it is He who has bestowed [upon man] the standard by which to discern the true from the false": "It is to be borne in mind that the Gospel frequently mentioned in the Qur'an is not identical with what is known today as the Four Gospels, but refers to an original, since lost, revelation bestowed upon Jesus and known to his contemporaries under its Greek name of Evangelion ("Good Tidings"), on which the Arabicized form Injil is based. It was probably the source from which the Synoptic Gospels derived much of

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<sup>18</sup> Ahmad Amin, *Fajr al-Islam: Yubbath fi al-Hayah al-'Aqliyah fi Sadr al-Islam ila Awakhir al-Dawlah al-Umawiyah* (Bayrut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2004), 251.

<sup>19</sup> Ahmad Amin, *Duba al-Islam* (al-Qahirah: Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Misriyah, 1977), v. 2, 143.

their material and some of the teachings attributed to Jesus. The fact of its having been lost and forgotten is alluded to in the Qur'an in 5:14.<sup>20</sup>

## CONCLUSION

It can be rightly claimed that the ḥadīth has fulfilled the test of most rigorously authenticated tradition given its inclusion in the two canonical works of hadith (al-Bukhari and Muslim) and further substantiated and corroborated in other traditional and classical sources. The narrative also was highly established in prophetic traditions. The hadith was generally consistent with logic that Sulayman was given this ability assuming his incredible power and glory of conquering the world of jinn and angel and human in his hand. It was the gift and wisdom and explicit sign of prophethood that God provides for whoever He wish.

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<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), 106.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

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