

The Salafī Imām and Mufasssir, Qatādah (118H): The Religion of the Khārijites is Alien to Islām and is an Innovation Like Judaism and Christianity

Some Western orientalists and academics claim that the Khārijites of ISIS are following clear injunctions in the Qur’ān and Sunnah thereby conveying the notion that Islām validates and justifies their activities. They ignore, dismiss or downplay other factors (such as faulty interpretation, distortion of texts, grievances, political aspirations or personal motivations).¹ This perception feeds right-wing elements and helps to scaremonger about Muslims. On the basis of this claim, they can all be treated as potential terrorists who may flip and join ISIS at any moment because the basic ideas and activities of ISIS have direct justification and support in the Qur’ān. Others amongst them claim that the ‘conceptual expressions’ of ‘Salafism’ are pervasive within the ISIS ideology and its practical applications.² One thing that is prominent in their writings is that they either fail to mention the ‘Khārijite’ sect completely or if they mention it and acknowledge that a sect known as the ‘Khārijites’ has been mentioned in the Prophetic traditions they persist in ascribing the label of ‘Salafism’ or ‘Jihādī-Salafism’ to groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS. Both of these erroneous claims by orientalists and academics support ISIS and serve as marketing propaganda for the extremists and terrorists.

Anyone who manifests the traits, characteristics, doctrines and activities of the Khārijites, is by definition outside ‘Salafism’, or to put

¹ See for example Graeme Wood and his flawed, inaccurate and much critiqued piece for the Atlantic, *What ISIS Really Wants*. March 2015.

² Such as Joas Wagemakers in his August 2016 lecture for the Afro-Middle East Centre titled *Salafism and/in the Islamic State*.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrDH0iZhGkk>.

it another way, has deviated and departed from the Islām of the Prophet and his Companions. Thus it is impossible for them to be upon ‘Salafism’ by definition. Their misinterpretations of Qur’ānic texts pertaining to faith, disbelief, sin, disobedience, war, jihād expelled them from mainstream Islām and these affairs have been given extensive treatment by Muslim scholars from the time of Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنه), the expert on the Qur’ān’s interpretation, till this day of ours. Further, the Khārijites are motivated by worldly reasons such as grievances pertaining to wealth and positions of authority as is also made clear in the Prophetic traditions and analysis and commentary of Muslim scholars. It is further indicated in the Prophetic traditions that the Khārijites appear after periods of civil strife and turmoil, waiting for the right opportunity to come out and implement their agendas.

Whilst Western academics argue and debate about what ISIS is, what it wants and what it is motivated by, the answers are already present in the Prophetic traditions in a very explicit manner. The answer lies in a combination of latent, hidden desire for wealth and authority [amongst their leaders] coupled with personal grievances, ignorance in religious matters [ignorance of the Qur’ān and not qualifying their understanding (in their basic principles and doctrines) through the Sunnah], the presence of a certain political situation, particularly where there is strife and chaos, ripe for their appearance and mobilisation of confused masses, the use of clever marketing propaganda in the form of religious rhetoric [beautified, alluring speech] and the use of lofty slogans by which falsehood is intended. All of this is clearly indicated in the Prophetic traditions. This leads us to the statement of Qatādāh (رضي الله عنه) which clarifies the Salafī position towards the Khārijites.

Qatādah (118H) is a famous Qur’anic commentator who studied with some of the Prophet’s Companions and also with the students of Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنه), the greatest scholar of the Qur’ān. He said regarding the verse: **“It is He who has sent down to you the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise - they are the foundation of the Book - and others unspecific. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them]. And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allāh and those deeply-rooted in knowledge...”** (3:7), “If they are not the Ḥarūrītes [Khārijites] or the Saba’ites, then I do not know who they are.” He continued to say: “The Khārijites emerged whilst the Companions of Allāh’s Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) were plentiful in Madīnah, Shām and ‘Irāq, and his wives were still alive. By Allāh, none of them (the Companions), male or female, came out as a [Khārijite] ever, and they were not pleased with what they were upon, nor did they support them in that. Rather, they used to convey the criticism of Allāh’s Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم) of them and the descriptions with which he described them. They used to hate them with their hearts and would show enmity towards them with their tongues. By Allāh, their hands would be severe against them whenever they came across them...”

By Allāh if they were upon guidance, Allāh would have made it manifest and granted it support and success. But they were upon falsehood, Allāh falsified it and repelled it. So they, as you can see, every time a faction of them emerges, Allāh invalidates their proof, falsifies their fables, and makes their blood to flow. If they conceal [what they are upon] it is a wound afflicting their hearts and grief for them. And if they manifest it, Allāh makes their blood to flow. That, by Allāh, is an evil religion, so shun it. By Allāh, Judaism is an innovation, Christianity is an innovation, Saba’ism is an innovation

and Ḥarūrism (Khārījism) is an innovation. No Book was revealed with them and no Prophet established them.”³

There are numerous points and benefits to be taken from this statement of Qatādah. These points and benefits in turn comprise a rebuttal of claims of Western academics such as Graeme Wood, Joas Wagemakers and others like them.⁴

Notes

1. The Qur’ān is considered by Muslims as Allāh’s knowledge and speech. From that which He revealed in His book with His foreknowledge is the emergence of those with diseases in their hearts who pursue ambiguous matters, seeking faulty interpretations and seeking tribulations. Hence, the verse, **“It is He who has sent down to you the Book; in it are verses [that are] precise - they are the foundation of the Book - and others unspecific. As for those in whose hearts is deviation [from truth], they will follow that of it which is unspecific, seeking discord and seeking an interpretation [suitable to them]. And no one knows its [true] interpretation except Allāh and those deeply-rooted in knowledge.”** (3:7). The Prophet (ﷺ) warned from such people explicitly in his Sunnah and noted that they will appear and should be shunned. He said to ‘Ā’ishah (رضي الله عنها) when she asked about this verse, “When you see those who follow the ambiguous verses [and in a narration – argue about them] they are

³ *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, Dar Ihya al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1421H, 3/209.

⁴ Keeping in mind that they are non-Muslims doubt the Qur’ān and the veracity of the Prophetic traditions. Thus, many of the points presented here require them to dispute with us first about the Qur’ān, Muḥammad’s prophethood and the transmission of the Prophetic traditions.

the ones Allāh named, so beware of them.”⁵ This trait, though not unique to the Khārijites amongst the various sects that appeared, was recognised and identified by the Companions when they encountered their arguments. Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنه) was sent by ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib (رضي الله عنه) to debate them and it became clear that they were following ambiguous verses whose meanings were not clear to them and were interpreting them with their own opinions. From that time, the leaders of the Muslims and their scholars holding fast to the way of the Salaf have continued to point out this prominent trait of theirs. The doctrines and activities of the Khārijites are based upon corrupt foundations and corrupt readings of Qur’ānic texts. The fact they are a tiny minority and are opposed by the overwhelming majority of Muslims who do not agree with their interpretations of texts is a clear indication that they are not following specific, decisive verses but that which is ambiguous or unspecific, or they are not following specific, decisive verses in their proper context which they would have known if they had taken knowledge from the Prophet’s Companions or from the scholars who inherited that knowledge. Thus, the claim of Graeme Wood which essentially amounts to the statement that ISIS are Islāmic and their inspiration and justification comes directly from the Qur’ān is deceptive and dishonest. Rather, al-Qaeda, ISIS and factions similar to them, distort the Qur’ān, follow the ambiguous, do not rely on the Sunnah to qualify and explain the Qur’ān, assume independence in their alleged scholarship and isolate themselves from the people of firm knowledge.

2. In continuation of the above point, numerous verses in the Qur’ān were revealed through Allāh’s foreknowledge with respect to the

⁵ Related by Aḥmad in al-Musnad (6/48), al-Bukhārī in Khalq Af’āl al-‘ibād (p. 30), Abū Dāwūd (no. 4958), al-Tirmidhī (no. 2993) and others.

Khārijites. The Companions applied those verses to the Khārijites and stated that they were revealed in relation to the Khārijites. Al-Shāṭibī explains, “Then the scholars from the Righteous Salaf interpreted verses [and applied them to factions] on account of issues that [those factions] brought which came under the wording [of those verses], such as the Khārijites, for these verses are very clearly general [in their application].”⁶ Ibn ‘Abbās (رضي الله عنه) applied the aforementioned verse (about ambiguous passages) to the Khārijites as did Abū Umāmah al-Bāhilī (رضي الله عنه).⁷ The verse, **“Do not be like those who split and differed after clear proofs had come to them.”** (3:105), Abū Umāmah al-Bāhilī said, “They are the Harūrites [Khārijites].”⁸ He also said regarding the verse, **“Verily, those who split their religion and divide into sects, you [O Muḥammad] are not from them in anything.”** (6:159), “They are the Khārijites.”⁹ And Abū Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) explained the verse, **“And do not be of those who associate others with Allah, of those who split up their religion and became sects, each sect rejoicing in what it has.”** (30:31-32) in reference to the Khārijites.¹⁰ Abū Umāmah also said regarding the verse, **“On the Day [some] faces will turn white and [some] faces will turn black.”** (3:106), “They are those [the Khārijites].” Other verses applied to the Khārijites by the Companions include the saying of Allāh (عز وجل), **“Say: Shall we inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? Those whose efforts have been wasted in this life while they thought that they were acquiring good by their deeds!”** (18:103-104).¹¹ Also, the

⁶ Refer to al-Shāṭibī in al-I’tiṣām (1/74).

⁷ Refer to al-Ājurrī in al-Sharīḥ (1413H) p. 46 and Ibn Abī Shaybah in al-Muṣannaf (15/313).

⁸ Refer to al-Shāṭibī in al-I’tiṣām (1/74).

⁹ Al-Durr al-Manthūr (8/402), refer to al-Shāṭibī in al-I’tiṣām (1/74).

¹⁰ al-Shāṭibī in al-I’tiṣām (1/85).

¹¹ Imām al-Ṭabarī relates this application of the verse to the Khārijites from ‘Alī bin Abī Ṭālib (رضي الله عنه) in his exegesis.

saying of Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ), “Some faces, that Day, will be humiliated. Labouring (hard in the worldly life), weary (in the Hereafter with humility and disgrace).” (88:2-3).¹² Also the saying of Allāh (عَزَّوَجَلَّ), “And when they deviated, Allāh caused their hearts to deviate.” (61:8).¹³ And also, “Those who break Allāh’s Covenant after ratifying it, and sever what Allāh has ordered to be joined and do mischief on earth, it is they who are the losers.” (2:27).¹⁴

From the above it is clear that the Khārijites followed the ambiguous due to a perversion in their hearts, sought faulty interpretations and tribulations, split from the main body of Muslims [the Prophet’s Companions] on account of their ignorance and desires and passed through Islām like and arrow passes swiftly through its prey. They laboured hard in their falsehood, thinking they will be rewarded when in reality they will be the greatest losers as to their deeds. Their efforts will have been wasted, their faces will be black on the Day of Judgement, humiliated.

Thus, whilst they may rely upon the Qur’ān, their interpretations, absolutions and generalisations are false. The matter is one of interpretation, there is not to be found any well-known, recognized personality from any school of thought in Islām today whom the Khārijites of al-Qaeda and ISIS can point to as their scholarly authority in their distortion of the Qur’ān, distortion of Islām and distortion of its doctrines and rulings.¹⁵

¹² This application of the verse is mentioned by Imām al-Qurṭubī in his exegesis and he relates it from ‘Alī.

¹³ Refer to *al-I’tisām* of al-Shāṭibī (1/89).

¹⁴ Refer to *al-I’tisām* of al-Shāṭibī (1/90).

¹⁵ An example of their distortion in the topic of jihād is that all the verses of jihād are within the contextual framework of repelling aggressive violence so that the message of Islām can be peacefully conveyed and whereby non-

3. Qatādah said, “The Khārijites emerged whilst the Companions of Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) were plentiful in al-Madīnah, Shām and ‘Irāq, and his wives were still alive. By Allāh, none of them (the Companions), male or female, came out as a [Khārijite] ever.” The carriers of Islām, the Prophetic traditions and the Islāmic legislation, the Companions, were in one valley and the Khārijite renegades were in an altogether separate valley. The latter announced and waged war against the former. This war is on the basis of faulty interpretation. Thus, the heritage that was passed through the Companions does not know of the doctrines, activities and methodologies of the Khārijites, which are but perversions and misinterpretations.

The Prophet fought against the pagans of Quraysh after displaying years of patience in the face of their oppression, unjust killing of his Companions and numerous assassination attempts. This war was fought around the issue of the Qur’ān being genuine revelation (tanzīl) from Allāh which they denied. ‘Alī (رضي الله عنه) fought the Khārijites after doing everything in his means to rectify their beliefs and actions. His eventual war against the Khārijites [after they waged it

Muslims are able to grasp the reality of what Islām calls to. In contrast, the Khārijites’ contextual framework is one in which they have expelled Muslims from Islām on account of sin and declared ruling authorities as apostate because they have erred in the subject of ruling by what Allāh revealed. Because, in their view, the ruling upon the subjects follows on from the ruling of the ruler and his government, all Muslim societies are societies of disbelief. Because of this, the people of Islām have reverted to jāhiliyyah (pre-Islāmic ignorance) and thus need to be called afresh to Islām, and hence, jihād in the path of Allāh. The abodes of Muslim societies are lands of war whereas the lands of the Khārijites are lands of Islām. The Khārijites will cite from the verses of jihād but their use and application are invalid because they are completely and horrendously out of context. As for their citations from Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, this is the subject of a separate study and in short, both of these scholars are innocent and free of the Khārijites.

first] was around the issue of the interpretation (ta'wīl) of the Qur'ān. Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (رضي الله عنه) relates, "The Messenger came out from one of his wife's apartments and one of the straps of his shoe broke. So 'Alī (صلى الله عليه وسلم) took it and remained behind repairing it. [As we were sitting and waiting] the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) stood up looking and we stood up with him and he said, 'Amongst you is one who will fight for the interpretation (ta'wīl) of the Qur'ān just as I fought for the revelation (tanzīl) of the Qur'ān.' The people then began to look around and amongst them was Abū Bakr and 'Umar (صلى الله عليه وسلم). The Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) then said, 'No, but it is the person with the shoe.' So we came to him ('Alī) to give him glad tidings, but he did not even raise his head, as if he it was something he had already heard before."¹⁶

Thus, the war against the Khārijites for **the correct interpretation (ta'wīl) of the Qur'ān** was prophesied by the Messenger (صلى الله عليه وسلم). And it is established that 'Alī fought and killed the Khārijites after contending with their false interpretations. He had sent Ibn 'Abbās (رضي الله عنه) to them to remove their misconceptions. When he saw stubborn refusal from a large number of them and after they had oppressively killed some of the Companions of the Prophet, he waged war against them. 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib described the Khārijites, "They are not reciters of the Qur'ān, nor jurists (fuqahā) of the religion, nor scholars of interpretation (ta'wīl). Nor do they have any precedence in Islām of being worthy of this affair [of rule]. By Allāh, if they were to gain authority over you, they would enact upon you the deeds of Chosroes [Persians] and Heraclius [Romans]."¹⁷

¹⁶ Related by a large number of authorites including Aḥmad, al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Ṭaḥāwī, al-Ḥākim, Ibn Abī Shaybah, al-Bayḥaqī, al-Ājurri and it is declared ṣaḥīḥ by al-Albānī in al-Silsilah al-Ṣaḥīḥah (no. 2487).

¹⁷ Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī (3/117).

Thus, the war against the Khārijites is a war for the correct interpretation of the Qur’ān. That which the Khārijites clung to of the Qur’ān in foundation of their innovation is **“Whoever does not judge by what Allāh has revealed, they are the disbelievers.”** (5:44) and **“Judgement belongs to none but Allāh.”** (6:57) and then they distort many other verses or misapply them on the basis of this corrupt foundation.

From the above, the fallacious and deceptive claim of Graeme Wood regarding ISIS and Islām is made clear. It is surprising that in his entire article, as lengthy as it is, he never made a single reference to the ‘Khārijites’. The reason is clear and obvious. If you point to this very clear, explicit and large body of literature, [whether in the Prophetic traditions, the history books, the books of creed authored by the Salaf, or the extensive treatment of the Khārijites and refutation of their ideology found in the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah or Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb and his offspring, or in the writings of Salafi scholars, past or present], you can’t portray ISIS as a legitimate rendering of Islām (or of Salafism). You would be forced to refer to them as ‘Khārijite renegades’ who have passed through Islām like the arrow passes right through its prey. This would help to marginalise ISIS and counter their marketing propaganda – an unwanted outcome it appears.

4. Qatādah said, “And they [the Companions] were not pleased with what they [the Khārijites] were upon, nor did they support them in that. Rather, they used to convey the criticism by Allāh’s Messenger (ﷺ) of them and the descriptions with which he described them. They used to hate them with their hearts and would show enmity towards them with their tongues. By Allāh, their hands would be severe against them whenever they came across them...”

‘Salafism’ is defined as, in accordance with a Prophetic tradition, ‘That which I and my Companions are upon.’ The Prophet’s Companions are the Salaf. To follow the Salaf means to follow them in creed (‘aqīdah) and methodology (manhaj) and both of these are inseparable. The separation between creed and methodology is an invention of the Ikhwānīs in the 20th century to help justify methodologies that clash directly with the Sunnah and to acquire recruits from different backgrounds to help implement these methodologies of political, agitation, revolution and chaos.¹⁸ This separation is not known to the Salaf who spoke of the foundations (uṣūl) of the Sunnah which comprised both matters of creed and methodology. The Khārijites opposed the Salaf in creed by declaring sinful Muslims to be disbelievers and formulated corrupt methodologies on the basis of this creed by misinterpreting many Qur’ānic verses. They opposed many foundations (uṣūl) of Islām that the Salaf conveyed via the Prophetic traditions. The position of the the Salaf towards the Khārijites is made clear in the statement of Qatādah. They conveyed the Prophetic traditions regarding the Khārijites, hated them, showed verbal enmity towards them and also fought and killed them.

4. Qatādah said, “By Allāh if they were upon guidance, Allāh would have made it manifest and granted it support and success. But they

¹⁸ Shaykh Rabī bin Hādī said: “The people of desires, some of them differentiate between creed and methodology for partisan, political objectives. They deceive many Salafīs and say, ‘You can remain upon your creed, but as for methodology we are in need of your cooperation.’ Thus, there is nothing to stop you from saying, ‘I am Salafī in creed but Ikhwānī in methodology.’ And it is known that the methodology of Ikhwān is a war against the Salafī creed”. He also said: “Creed and methodology and completely mutually binding... the people of innovation have spread this differentiation between creed and methodology so they can laugh at the Salafī youth. So their innovation commenced with this idea, meaning, that you say, ‘I am Salafī in belief and Ikhwānī in methodology’.” See his Fatāwā (1431H, Dār al-Imām Aḥmad), 1/490-493.

were upon falsehood, Allāh falsified it and repelled it. So they, as you can see, every time a faction of them emerges, Allāh invalidates their proof, falsifies their fables, and makes their blood to flow. If they conceal [what they are upon] it is a wound afflicting their hearts and grief upon them. And if they manifest it, Allāh makes their blood to flow.” It is known through the judgement of textual evidence (al-ḥukm al-shar‘iyy) and through the judgement of divine decree (al-ḥukm al-kawnī) that the Khārijites are not upon the truth. Their outcome is always the spilling of their own blood and being severed and cut off. Whenever the Khārijites conceal themselves amongst populations, they do so whilst they have wounds in their hearts, grieving, as if this is a punishment for them in their despicable condition of harbouring hatred of Muslim societies. And if they come out and manifest their doctrine and methodology openly, their end affair is that they will be terminated.

5. Qatādah finished by saying, “That, by Allāh, is an evil religion, so shun it. By Allāh, Judaism is an innovation, Christianity is an innovation, Saba’ism is an innovation and Ḥarūrism (Khārijism) is an innovation. No Book was revealed with them and no Prophet established them.” One can note that due to their departure from the spirit of Islām, departure from the main body of Muslims and distortion of the Qur’ān, the Salaf and their followers like Qatādah considered the Khārijites to be upon an evil religion and they equated this innovated religion, in terms of its synthesis, to Judaism and Christianity. They considered them to be innovations, not having a basis in revealed knowledge. For what are known today as Judaism and Christianity are not what Moses and Jesus called to and nor was any Book revealed calling to the core specific teachings they comprise which oppose the genuine, original teachings of the Torah and Gospel and which have come clearly explained in the Qur’ān. So Qatādah

resembles the religion of the Khārijites (in the way that it appeared through distortion of texts) with that of Judaism and Christianity. Incidentally, amongst the Muslim scholars are those who hold that the Khārijites are in fact disbelievers and have left the fold of Islām completely. They include the late Salafī scholar, Shaykh ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Bin Bāz (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ).

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