

THE RULING ON  
THE NARRATION OF  
*ISRĀ'ILIYYĀT*

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## Introduction

The Islāmic Shari‘ah came and abrogated previous laws, reserving only the doctrines and reviving all the laws that are in agreement with it. Allāh Ta‘ālā explicitly declares in the Qur’ān that the People of the Book distorted their books and inserted baseless texts based on their own whims and desires. Thus, the usage of sources from older Abrahamic religions to understand Islām, that is, *Isrā’iliyyāt* sources (Judeo-Christian material), seems confusing and perplexing. It is well known that the two main sources of Islām are the Holy Qur’ān and the Prophetic Traditions. Narrations have been reported from the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ that strongly suggest the permissibility of reporting *Isrā’iliyyāt*. However, there are also reports from the Prophet ﷺ that remind the Muslims to remain wary and cautious in taking and reporting from the *Ahl al-Kitāb* (People of the Book). If we are prohibited from accepting, then what do we say regarding the great exegetes such as Imām Ibn Kathīr, Imām Ibn Jarīr at-Ṭabrī, and others who have included some *Isrā’iliyyāt* in their *Tafsīr* books? This article will analyse the definition of *Isrā’iliyyāt*, its categories, the positions on narrating *Isrā’iliyyāt*, as well as justifications for these positions. It will then present the views, rulings, verdicts and opinions of the scholars concerning *Isrā’iliyyāt*, before concluding with examples of famous companions and tābi’ūn who narrated *Isrā’iliyyāt*.

### The definition of *Isrā’iliyyāt*

The word *Isrā’iliyyāt* is the plural form of the word *Isrā’iliyyah*, which etymologically is the relational adjective (*an-Nisbah*) and genitive construction (*al-Idāfah*) to the word *Isrā’il*. *Isrā’il* refers to Prophet Ya’qūb ibn Ishāq ibn Ibrāhīm (*‘Alaihīs Salām*), the father of the twelve Jewish tribes. Thus, the Jews are known as *Banū Isrā’il* - the Children of *Isrā’il*. Allāh Ta‘ālā refers to them numerous times in the Qur’ān:

{O children of *Isrā’il*! Remember My favours upon you. Fulfil your covenant and I will fulfil Mine and stand in awe of Me <sup>alone</sup>.}<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 2:40.

{Cursed were those who disbelieved among the Children of Isrā’īl by the tongue of David and of Jesus, the son of Mary. That was because they disobeyed and [habitually] transgressed.}<sup>2</sup>

{Indeed, this Qur’ān clarifies for the Children of Isrā’īl most of what they differ over.}<sup>3</sup>

The word *Isrā’īliyyāt* refers to the stories and narratives from Jewish sources. These include:

- stories about prophets and their warnings;
- sins committed by the Children of Isrā’īl and the punishments inflicted on them;
- the sufferings of the righteous and pious and the reward granted to them by Allah Ta’ala;
- the utterances and sayings of sages and wise men;
- the supplications of prophets and pious men; and
- the speeches and wills of nobles, saints, and martyrs.

However, the scholars of *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* use the term in a general sense, such that their usage encompasses all non-Islāmic sources, be it sources from the Jews (*Isrā’īliyyāt*), the Christians (*Naṣrāniyyāt*), or others. Some *Mufassirūn* and *Muḥaddithūn* have broadened the scope of the definition and have included even baseless narrations that have been reported by the enemies of Islām which have been unknowingly inserted into the books of *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* to confuse the Muslims. The examples that have been given for this is the story of *al-Gharāiq* and the reason behind the marriage of the Prophet (*Sal Allāhu ‘alaihi wa Sallam*) with Zaynab bint Jahsh, etc.<sup>4</sup>

### **The division of *Isrā’īliyyāt***

*Isrā’īliyyāt* can be divided into three categories based on various factors. Firstly, in terms of authenticity, it can be divided into:

1. *Ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic); and

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<sup>2</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 5:78.

<sup>3</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 27:76.

<sup>4</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā’īliyyāt fi al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1990), 13.

2. *Dha'if* (weak), including *Mawdhu'āt* (fabrications).

An example for the category of *Ṣahīh* is what Imām Ibn Kathīr narrated in his *Tafsīr* from Jābir (*Radī Allāhu 'anhu*):

'Atā ibn Yasār said: "I met 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr and said: 'Inform me of the characteristics of the Prophet (*Sal Allāhu 'alāhi wa Sallam*) in the Taurāh. 'Yes,' he said, 'By Allāh, he is described in the Taurāh as he is described in the Qur'ān: O Prophet, We have sent you as a witness, a bearer of good news, and a warner and a protection to the unlettered. You are My slave and Messenger. I have called you the trusty one who is neither coarse nor harsh nor loud in the markets. Allāh Almighty will not take him until He has made the crooked community straight by him; so that they say: "There is no god but Allāh," and by it they will open blind eyes, deaf ears and covered hearts.'" 'Atā said: "Then I met Ka'b and asked him regarding that and he did not change a letter except that he said it in his dialect."

An example for the category of *Dha'if* is what Imām Abū Ḥātim ar-Rāzī narrated in the explanation of the first letter of Sūrah Qāf. The report is as follows:

"Ibn 'Abbās (*Radī Allāhu 'anhu*) said: 'Allāh created a sea that encompasses this earth and beyond this sea He created a mountain called Qāf, which is the heaven of this earth, and it encompasses the sea. Beyond this mountain, He created an earth like his earth but seven times bigger. Beyond that, He created a sea that encompasses that earth and then a mountain by the name Qāf, which is the second heaven, and it encompasses that sea. Then he continued his counting to seven earths, seven seas, seven mountains, and seven heavens, and added that this is the meaning of the verse "and the sea replenished with seven more seas."'"<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, in terms of its relation to the Sharī'ah, *Isrā'iliyyāt* can be divided into three categories:

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<sup>5</sup> Holy Qur'ān, 31:27.

## 1. *Muwāfiq* (corresponds with the Sharī‘ah)

An example of this is the narration narrated by Abū Sa‘īd Al-Khudrī (*Rađī Allāhu ‘anhu*):

The Prophet ﷺ said: “The (planet of) earth will be a bread on the Day of Resurrection, and the resistible (Allāh) will topple turn it with His Hand like anyone of you topple turns a bread with his hands while (preparing the bread) for a journey, and that bread will be the entertainment for the people of Paradise.” A man from the Jews came (to the Prophet) and said: “May the Beneficent (Allāh) bless you, O Abul Qāsim! Shall I tell you of the entertainment of the people of Paradise on the Day of Resurrection?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Yes.” The Jew said: “The earth will be a bread,” as the Prophet ﷺ had said. Thereupon the Prophet ﷺ looked at us and smiled till his premolar tooth became visible. Then the Jew further said, “Shall I tell you of the *udm* (additional food taken with bread) they will have with the bread?” He added, “That will be *Balam* and *Nun*.” The people asked, “What is that?” He said, “It is an ox and a fish, and seventy thousand people will eat of the caudate lobe (i.e., extra lobe) of their livers.”<sup>6</sup>

## 2. *Mukhālif* (contradictory)

An example of this is the report regarding Hārūn (*‘Alayhi Salām*) being the one responsible for making a calf for the Banū Isrā’il and calling the people towards its worship. From the Holy Qur’ān, we know that this was never the case. Rather, it was Sāmīrī who was responsible for creating the golden calf and misleading the people towards worshipping it. Likewise, another example is the report that Allāh Ta‘ālā completed all His work and rested on the seventh day. We may also take an example concerning what Imām Ibn Jarīr reported under Verse 34 of Sūrah Ṣād:

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<sup>6</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ as-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb at-Riqāq*, Ḥadīth #6520.

{And indeed, We tested Sulaimān while We threw on his throne a body after which he turned (to Us).} He said: “Prophet Sulaimān lost his throne to a demon named Sakhr al-Mārid. This demon would sleep with the wives of Sulaimān (*‘Alayhis Salām*) in his form whilst they were menstruating, and his wives would assume that he is in fact Sulaimān (*‘Alayhis Salām*). This is completely false as Allāh protects His prophets from all demons and their plots.

### 3. *Maskūt ‘Anhu* (unknown status of neither accepted nor refuted)

An example of this is the story that Imām Ibn Kathīr related under Verse 67 of Sūrah al-Baqarah:

{When Mūsā said to his people, “Allāh commands you to slaughter a cow”, they said, “Are you making fun of us?” He said, “I seek refuge with Allāh from being one of the ignorant.”}<sup>7</sup>

He said: “Ibn Abi Hatim recorded ‘Ubaydah As-Salmani saying: “There was a man from among the Children of Israel who was impotent. He had substantial wealth, and only a nephew who would inherit from him. So, his nephew killed him and moved his body at night, placing it at the doorstep of a certain man. The next morning, the nephew cried out for revenge, and the people took up their weapons and almost fought each other. The wise men among them said, ‘Why would you kill each other, while the Messenger of Allāh is still among you.’ So, they went to Mūsā and mentioned the matter to him and Mūsā said, {“Verily, Allāh commands you that you slaughter a cow.”} They said, “Do you make fun of us?” He said, “I take Allāh's refuge from being among the ignorant.”} Had they not disputed, it would have been sufficient for them to slaughter any cow. However, they disputed, and the matter was made more difficult for them, until they ended up looking for the specific cow that they were later ordered to slaughter. They found the designated cow with the only man to own such a cow. He said, ‘By Allāh! I will only sell it for its skin's fill of

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<sup>7</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 2:67.

gold.' They paid the cow's fill of its skin in gold, slaughtered it, and touched the dead man with a part of it. He stood up, and they asked him, 'Who killed you?' He said, 'That man,' and pointed to his nephew. Saying that, he immediately fell dead again, and his nephew was not allowed to inherit him. Thereafter, whoever committed murder for the purpose of gaining inheritance was not allowed to inherit." Ibn Jarīr reported something like that. Allāh knows best."

Lastly, in terms of its contents, *Isrā'iliyyāt* can be divided into three categories:<sup>8</sup>

### 1. Aspects related to 'Aqā'id (Beliefs)

An example is the report narrated by 'Abdullāh:

"A (Jewish) Rabbi came to Allāh's Messenger ﷺ and said, 'O Muḥammad! We learn that Allāh will put all the heavens on one finger, and the earths on one finger, and the trees on one finger, and the water and the dust on one finger, and all the other created beings on one finger. Then He will say, "I am the King." Thereupon the Prophet ﷺ smiled so that his pre-molar teeth became visible. That was the confirmation of the Rabbi. Then Allāh's Messenger ﷺ recited: 'They made not a just estimate of Allāh such as is due to Him. And on the Day of Resurrection the whole of the earth will be grasped by His Hand and the heavens will be rolled up in His Right Hand. Glorified is He, and High is He above all that they associate as partners with Him.'" [Qur'ān 39:67]<sup>9</sup>

### 2. Aspects related to *Aḥkām* (laws)

This may be seen from the report narrated by 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar:

"The Jews brought to the Prophet ﷺ a man and a woman from among them who had committed illegal sexual intercourse. The Prophet ﷺ said to them, 'How do you

<sup>8</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā'iliyyāt fi al-Tafsir wa al-Hadīth* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1990), pp. 35-40.

<sup>9</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' as-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb at-Tafsir*, Ḥadīth #4811.

usually punish the one amongst you who has committed illegal sexual intercourse?’ They replied, ‘We blacken their faces with coal and beat them,’ He said, ‘Don’t you find the order of *Ar-Rajm* (i.e., stoning to death) in the Taurāh?’ They replied, ‘We do not find anything in it.’ ‘Abdullāh ibn Salām (after hearing this conversation) said to them. ‘You have told a lie! Bring here the Taurāh and recite it if you are truthful.’ (So, the Jews brought the Taurāh) and the religious teacher who was teaching it to them, put his hand over the Verse of *Ar-Rajm* and started reading what was written above and below the place hidden with his hand, but he did not read the verse of *Ar-Rajm*. ‘Abdullāh ibn Salām removed his (i.e., the teacher’s) hand from the verse of *Ar-Rajm* and said, ‘What is this?’ So, when the Jews saw that verse, they said, ‘This is the verse of *Ar-Rajm*.’ So, the Prophet ﷺ ordered the two adulterers to be stoned to death, and they were stoned to death near the place where biers used to be placed near the Mosque. I saw her companion (i.e., the adulterer) bowing over her to protect her from the stones.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Remaining Aspects related to history, advice, stories, etc.

For example, Imām Ibn Kathīr mentions under Verse 37 of Sūrah Hūd:

{And construct the ship under Our Eyes and with Our revelation and address Me not on behalf of those who did wrong; they are surely to be drowned.}

He says: “Muhammad ibn Ishāq mentioned from the Taurāh, “Allāh commanded him (Nūh) to make it (the ship) from Indian oak wood. Then He commanded him to make its length eighty cubits and its width fifty cubits. Allāh then commanded him to coat its interior and exterior with tar and to make it with a slanted bow to part the water (as it sailed). Its height was thirty cubits into the sky. It had three levels and each level was ten cubits high. The lowest level was for the animals, both tame and wild, the second level was for the human beings and the highest level was for the birds. Its door was in the center of it, and it had a cover on top of it that covered the entire ship.”<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi’ as-Ṣahīh*, *Kitāb at-Tafsīr*, Ḥadīth #4556.

<sup>11</sup> Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*.

## Evidence for and against narrating *Isrā’iliyyāt*

Islāmic sources contain evidence both in support and against using the narrations of *Isrā’iliyyāt*. Let us first inspect the texts presented by the scholars which demonstrate prohibition of their use:

1. The verses of the Qur’ān that mention how the Jews and Christians altered their books, distorted its verses, and concealed many things from it, thus making them unreliable sources which should not be transmitted:

{O people of the Book, there has come to you Our Messenger disclosing to you much of what you have been concealing of the Book, while He overlooks much. There has come to you, from Allah, a Light and a clear Book.}<sup>12</sup>

{When Allah took a pledge from those who were given the Book: “You shall make it known to people, and you shall not conceal it,” they threw it away behind their backs, and acquired a small price for it. So, evil is what they acquire.}<sup>13</sup>

2. Imām Al-Bukhari (*Raḥimahullāh*) narrated in his *al-Jāmi’ as-Ṣaḥīḥ* from Abū Hurairah (*Radī Allāhu ‘anhu*): “The people of the Book used to read the Taurāh in Hebrew and expound it in Arabic to the Muslims, so Allāh’s messenger said, “Neither believe nor disbelieve the People of the Book, but say, ‘We believe in Allāh and what has been sent down to us...’” [al-Baqarah, Verse 136]<sup>14</sup>
3. Jābir (*Radī Allāhu ‘anhu*) said that when ‘Umar came to the Prophet ﷺ saying, “We hear from Jew’s traditions which charm us, so do you think we should write down some of them?” The Prophet ﷺ replied, “Are you in a state of confusion as the

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<sup>12</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 5:15.

<sup>13</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 3:187.

<sup>14</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi’ as-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Imān*, Ḥadīth #7362.

Jews and the Christians were? I have brought them to you white and pure, and if Mūsā were alive, he would feel it absolutely necessary to follow me.”<sup>15</sup>

4. Ibn ‘Abbās (*Radī Allāhu ‘anhu*) said: “Why do you ask the people of the scripture about anything while your Book (Qur’ān) which has been revealed to Allāh's Messenger ﷺ is newer and the latest? You read it pure, undistorted, and unchanged, and Allāh has told you that the people of the scripture (Jews and Christians) changed their scripture and distorted it and wrote the scripture with their own hands and said, ‘It is from Allāh,’ to sell it for a little gain. Does not the knowledge which has come to you prevent you from asking them about anything? No, by Allāh, we have never seen any man from them asking you regarding what has been revealed to you!”<sup>16</sup>

On the other hand, the following are texts that permit using the narration of *Isrā’iliyyāt*:

1. The following verses of the Qur’ān permit referring to the People of the Book and enquiring from them regarding their scriptures:

The statement of Allāh Ta‘ālā when addressing the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ:  
{So, (O prophet,) even if you are in doubt about what We have sent down to you, ask those who read the Book (revealed) before you. Surely, truth has come to you from your Lord, so never be among those who are suspicious.}<sup>17</sup>

And the following verse which is an explicit text regarding the permissibility of referring to the Taurāh: {...Say: “Then, bring the Taurah and recite it, if you are true.”}<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ahmad ibn Hanbal, *Musnad Ahmad*.

<sup>16</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ as-Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-I’tiṣām bi as-Sunnah*, Ḥadīth #7363.

<sup>17</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 10:94.

<sup>18</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 3:93.

And the verse: {The disbelievers say: “You are not a messenger.” Say, “Allāh is sufficient as a witness between me and you, and those too (are my witnesses) who have the knowledge of the Book.”}<sup>19</sup> According to the preferred opinion of the exegetes, “Those who have the knowledge of the Book” is in reference to ‘Abdullāh ibn Salām, and whoever has knowledge of the Taurāh and Injīl from the People of the Book. This indicates the permissibility of referring to them.

2. Narrated by ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr: “The Prophet ﷺ said, ‘Convey (my teachings) to the people even if it were a single sentence and tell others the stories of Banū Isrā’īl for it is not sinful to do so. And whoever tells a lie on me intentionally, will surely take his place in the (Hell) Fire.’”<sup>20</sup>
3. Narrated by Faṭīma, daughter of Qais and sister of ad-Dahhak ibn Qais, and she was the first amongst the emigrant women: “The Prophet ﷺ said: ‘By Allāh! I have not made you assemble for exhortation or for a warning, but I have gathered you here, for Tamīm ad-Dārī, a Christian, who came and accepted Islām. He told me something, which agrees with what I was telling you about the Dajjal...’”<sup>21</sup>
4. Some of the Ṣahābah referred to certain people from the people of the Book and asked them regarding things that have been mentioned in their books, such as Abū Hurairah, Ibn ‘Abbās, Ibn Mas‘ūd, and others. It is also known that ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr discovered two loads of the Ahl al-Kitāb on the day of Yarmūk, and he would occasionally narrate from them.<sup>22</sup>

From the above Qur’ānic verses and traditions, we find permissive, prohibitive, and non-aligned commands. As a result, Muslim scholars have ruled that there are three main categories of Isrā’iliyyāt, in terms of its use in the Muslim scholarship. This categorization of

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<sup>19</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 13:43.

<sup>20</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi’ as-Ṣaḥīḥ*, Kitāb Aḥadīth al-Anbiyā, Ḥadīth #3461.

<sup>21</sup> Imām Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Kitāb al-Fitan wa Ashrāt as-Sā’ah, Ḥadīth #2942a.

<sup>22</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā’iliyyāt fī al-Tafsīr wa al-Ḥadīth* (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1990), p. 45.

the use of *Isrā’iliyyāt* in Muslim scholarship has been discussed extensively by many scholars, both classical and contemporary. Examples of these scholars are:

- Imām Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi’ī (d. 204 AH);
- Ibn Taimiyyah (d. 728AH);
- Ibn Kathīr (d. 774 AH);
- Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852 AH);
- Ramzī Na‘nā‘ah;
- Muḥammad Ḥusayn Al-Dhahabī (d. 1977); and
- Ṣalīḥ ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālidī (b.1947).<sup>23</sup>

### **The ruling on the narration of *Isrā’iliyyāt***

From the time of Prophet Adam (*‘Alayhi Salām*), Allāh Ta‘ālā revealed the same message of *Tawhīd* and *Risālah* to all the nations; to worship Allāh alone and to not take any partners with Him, and to follow the messenger sent to them. With regards to the laws, each nation received that which would draw the most benefit to them and repel the most harm from them, even if the laws slightly or significantly differed from one another. Thus, all the Abrahamic religions share a common concept and have similar scriptures, prophecies, stories, and laws. As such, we find many places in the Qur’ān in which Allāh Ta‘ālā instructs us to refer to the scholars of the *Ahl al-Kitāb* to ask them regarding certain realities that have been mentioned in their books, which Islām has either denounced or confirmed.

Some of these verses are:

{So, (O prophet,) even if you are in doubt about what We have sent down to you, ask those who read the Book (revealed) before you. Surely, truth has come to you from your Lord, so never be among those who are suspicious.}<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jaffary Awang, ‘Making Sense of The Use of *Isrā’iliyyāt* in Muslim Scholarship’, p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 10:94.

{Ask Our messengers whom We sent before you whether We had appointed gods to be worshipped besides Rahmān}.<sup>25</sup>

{Surely, we gave Mūsā nine clear signs. So, ask the children of Isrā’īl, when he came to them, Pharaoh said to him, “I am afraid, O Mūsā, you are under the spell of magic.”}<sup>26</sup>

All these instances in which Allāh Ta‘ālā instructs the Prophet ﷺ to refer to the Ahl al-Kitāb indicate to the permissibility of referring to them for knowledge. However, this permissibility is restricted to those things that are in conformity with the Qur’ān and Sunnah. It is a well-known fact that the Holy books of the Ahl al-Kitāb have been distorted and altered. If the Ahl al-Kitāb reveal from their books that which is consistent with the teachings of Islām, then it can be accepted, and we can understand the texts of permissibility in this light. On the other hand, if any of their texts are inconsistent with the teachings of Islām, then such narrations must be rejected and cannot be used as an authoritative source of knowledge in Islām. Consequently, the Aḥadīth which permit referring and narrating from Banū Isrā’īl are not inclusive of narrations that have either been fabricated or forged.

As for the *Isrā’iliyyāt* regarding which the Shari‘ah is silent about, such that nothing has been decisively narrated concerning them, then the ruling is that we make *Tawaqquf* (pause from passing a ruling). We neither accept nor reject such reports. One of the statements of the Prophet ﷺ that supports this is when the Prophet ﷺ said: “Neither believe nor disbelieve the people of the Book, but say, ‘We believe in God and what has been sent down to us...’”<sup>27</sup> As for narrating this category of *Isrā’iliyyāt*, then it is permissible just like any other story that can be related, based upon the general statement of the Prophet ﷺ: “Narrate from the Banū Isrā’īl, there is no issue in it.” Furthermore, if an Islāmic report is found that corroborates the *Isrā’ili* report in question, or a Ṣahābi made a statement in support of it through a reliable chain, then the *Isrā’ili* report ascends to the category of those reports which are accepted because they are in line with the Shari‘ah. The Ṣahābi, however, should neither be from

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<sup>25</sup> Holy Qur’ān, 43:45.

<sup>26</sup> Holy Qur’ān 17:101.

<sup>27</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ as-Ṣahīh*, Ḥadīth #7362.

amongst those Ṣahābah that were from the Ahl al-Kitāb prior to accepting Islām, nor from those who were known to take from the scholars of the Ahl al-Kitāb.

If the corroborating reports for any of the *Isrā’iliyyāt* come from the Tābi’ūn, then the ruling will remain as *Tawaqquf* (no verdict will be passed). Unlike the case of supporting reports originating from the Ṣahābah, when it is from the Tabi’ūn, the likelihood that they have heard it from the Ahl al-Kitāb is higher than the likelihood of them hearing it from the Prophet ﷺ. Thus, *Tawaqquf* will be made unless the scholars of *Tafsīr* agree on the soundness of the report.

### Opinion of the scholars

Imām Shafī’ī (*Rahimahullāh*) (d. 204 AH) said:

“It is well known that the Prophet ﷺ did not permit the narration of falsehood. Thus, the meaning of the Ḥadīth: “Narrate from Banū Isrā’īl,” refers to that which is not falsehood. And his statement “There is no sin in it” means that there is no restriction in you narrating from them now. This is because the reports of restriction and blame on narrating from them and looking into their books was in the beginning, then the ruling became relaxed. This is not for everyone, rather only for those that have a deep understanding of the religion and have the ability to distinguish between the truth and falsehood as ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr did when he discovered two loads from the Ahl al-Kitāb and would narrate from them only that which the Shari‘ah permits.”<sup>28</sup>

Imām Ibn Hajar (*Rahimahullāh*) (d. 852 AH) said in *Fath al-Bārī*:

“The prohibition was before the Islāmic laws and legal maxims were firmly established, out of the fear of mischief. However, when the fear no longer remained, then it was permitted for them.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ramzi Na’na’ah, *al-Isrā’iliyyāt wa Atharuha fī Fi Kutub at-Tafsīr*, (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam & Beirut: Dar ad-Dhiya, 1970), pp. 92-96.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Imām al-Ālusī (*Rahimahullāh*) (d. 1270 AH) in his *Tafsīr*, *Rūh al-Ma‘ānī*, commented after mentioning the Ḥadīth of Jābir (*Radī Allāhu ‘anhu*) when he asked the Prophet ﷺ if they could write down some of what they hear from the Ahl al-Kitāb:

“The Prophet ﷺ became angry from his question because the Taurāh which the Jews had during that time was distorted, and it was not the same Taurāh revealed to Mūsā (‘Alayhi Salām). Moreover, the people had recently left infidelity. If permission was given in the beginning to refer to the Taurāh and read it, it would have led to a greater calamity.”

Imām Ibn Kathīr (*Rahimahullāh*) (d. 774 AH) said in *al-Bidāyah wa an-Nihāyah*:

“The Sharī‘ah has permitted narrating from the Banū Isrā’īl as it comes in the statement of the Prophet ﷺ: “Narrate from Banū Isrā’īl, there is no sin.” This only applies to what has the possibility of being sound. As for what is known nor even doubted to be false, then that will be denounced completely.”<sup>30</sup>

Imām Ibn Taimiyyah (*Rahimahullāh*) (d. 728 AH) said in his *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl at-Tafsīr*:

“However, these Isra’īli traditions are quoted as supporting evidence and not as primary sources. These Isra’īli traditions are of three types: first, is authentic as attested by our own sources. Second, is false as attested by our own sources. And third, does not fall within two previous categories, where we can neither judge it to be authentic nor inauthentic. One is allowed to quote from this third type as justified previously above, and majority of these Isra’īli traditions are contained in matters with no immediate Islāmic religious benefit...”<sup>31</sup>

Imām al-Biqā‘ī (*Rahimahullāh*) (d. 885 AH) discussed this topic extensively in his book “*al-Aqwal al-Qawimah fī Ḥukm an-Naqīmin al-Kutub al-Qadimah*.” He concluded that narrating from previous books is permissible. He takes evidence from the incident of *ar-Rajm* and gives many further

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

examples of when the Prophet ﷺ used the Taurāh to support the validity of his own claims. He then says:

“The ruling on narrating from Banū Isrā’il, even in matters which our Sharī‘ah has kept silent on, is permissibility even if that report is not proven. Likewise for whatever else is transmitted from other false religions, because the purpose is that they are quoted as supporting evidence, and not as primary sources...”<sup>32</sup>

### **The most popular *Isrā’iliyyāt* narrators amongst the Ṣahābah and the Tabi’ūn**

The companions of the Prophet ﷺ were the most zealous when it came to following the commands and guidance of the Prophet ﷺ, especially in regard to their religious matters. Despite this, many Ṣahābah were known to refer to other companions who were from the Ahl al-Kitāb before they embraced Islām, in order to learn the details of many stories that the Qur’ān kept brief. However, the Ṣahābah were careful with what they took from them and ensured that it did not contradict the teachings of Islām. They would neither ask regarding everything, nor believe everything they were told, unless it was in line with the Qur’ān and Sunnah. In fact, they sometimes refuted the answers that they were given from the *Isrā’iliyyāt* and corrected them based upon the teachings of Islām. An example of this is the narration reported by Abū Hurairah (*Radī Allāhu ‘anhu*) that:

“The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ said while talking about the merits of Friday, ‘There is a time on Friday at which a Muslim, while he (or she) is performing Salah and is supplicating, will be granted whatever he (or she) is supplicating for.’ And he ﷺ pointed with his hand to indicate that this period is very short.”<sup>33</sup>

The scholars differ regarding this period: whether it occurs on only one Jumu‘ah every year, or on every Jumu‘ah. Thus, we find Abū Hurairah (*Radī Allāhu ‘anhu*) asking Ka'b al-Ahbār regarding this, to which he replies that it occurs on only one Jumu‘ah throughout the year. Abū Hurairah (*Radī Allāhu ‘anhu*) rejects his answer and clarifies that it occurs on every Jumu‘ah.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp. 100-104.

<sup>33</sup> Imām al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ as-Ṣahīh*, *Kitāb al-Jumu‘ah*, 2/13, (al-Khairiyah).

Thus, Ka'b al-Ahbār referred back to the Taurāh to verify this and found that it does indeed occur on every Jumu'ah.

Abū Hurairah (*Rađī Allāhu 'anhu*) is one of the companions who narrated *Isrā'īliyyāt*. He has been accused by some people of being deceived by Ka'b al-Ahbār and attributing lies to the Prophet ﷺ out of his naivety and ignorance, but these are blatant lies. An example of the accusers is Abū Rayyah, but his claims have been refuted by Shaykh Muḥammad Abū Shuhbah in his book *Difā' 'an as-Sunnah*.

'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās (*Rađī Allāhu 'anhu*) is another companion who referred to those who accepted Islām from the Ahl al-Kitāb and asked them regarding certain matters that were mentioned briefly in the Qur'ān but were mentioned in detail in the Taurāh or Injīl. The orientalist, Ignac Goldziher accuses 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās (*Rađī Allāhu 'anhu*) of being very lenient when taking from the Ahl al-Kitāb to the extent that he claims that it resulted in him including forgeries in the interpretations of the Qur'ān. However, without delving very deep into the counterevidence, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās (*Rađī Allāhu 'anhu*) is free from such accusations. Like Abū Hurairah (*Rađī Allāhu 'anhu*), he would ask the Jewish scholars regarding the details of matters that were already established in Islām and would not refer to them as primary sources.

'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr (*Rađī Allāhu 'anhu*) also narrated *Isrā'īliyyāt*. As mentioned previously, he discovered two loads of *Isrā'īliyyāt* of the Ahl al-Kitāb on the day of Yarmūk, and he occasionally narrated from them. He was known for his knowledge and virtues and would occupy himself in reading and writing. The author of *Usd al-Ghabah* says regarding him: "He accepted Islām before his father and was virtuous and knowledgeable. He had read the Qur'ān and the previous Holy books. He sought permission from the Prophet ﷺ to write his sayings and was granted permission. He said to the Prophet ﷺ: 'Shall I write what I heard from you despite your anger or pleasure?' to which the Prophet ﷺ replied: 'Write! For I do not speak except the truth.'"<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibn al-Athir, *Usd al-Ghabah fī Ma'rīfah as-Šāhībah*, 3/233, (al-Wahbiyyah).

Others amongst the companions who were known to narrate *Isrā’iliyyāt* are ‘Abdullāh ibn Salām and Tamīm ad-Dāri (*Radī Allāhu ‘anhumā*).

Amongst the Tabi‘un, the most well-known individuals who narrated *Isrā’iliyyāt* were Ka‘b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih (*Rahimahumallāh*).<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

*Isrā’iliyyāt* include Jewish and Christian sources and news from the *Taurāh*, *Zabūr* and *Injīl*. The sole reason for the debates and polemics on the use of *Isrā’iliyyāt* in Muslim scholarship is originally epistemological and can be traced to the different positions shown and taught by the Prophet ﷺ and the Ṣahābah. There are some verses and reports from the Prophet ﷺ and the Companions that prohibit reference to the *Isrā’iliyyāt*. Likewise, there are also some verses and traditions that permit the Muslims to refer to the *Isrā’iliyyāt*.

However, from these different reports, the scholars ruled that there are three main categories for *Isrā’iliyyāt*, regarding its use in the Muslim scholarship, which are: first, *Muwāfiq* (Consistent with Qur’ān and Sunnah), second, *Mukhālif* (contrary to Qur’ān and Sunnah) and lastly, *Maskūt ‘Anhu* (unknown status of neither accepted nor refuted). From this categorization, it is clear that in Muslim scholarship, neither all narrations from the People of the Book are to be rejected nor are they to be considered authentic from the viewpoint of Islāmic ruling. In sum, Muslims’ understanding of the narrations from the People of the Book is determined by the Qur’ān and the Prophetic traditions.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *al-Isrā’iliyyāt Fi al-Tafsir Wa al-Ḥadīth*, (Cairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1990), pp. 55-83.

<sup>36</sup> Jaffary Awang, *Making Sense of The Use of Isrā’iliyyāt in Muslim Scholarship*, p. 16.

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