

The Salaf al-Ṣāliḥīn: Definition, Merit, and the Question of the Generation [al-Qarn]

Praise be to Allah, Lord of all the worlds, and may blessings and peace be upon the Messenger of Allah, his family, his Companions, and all those who follow them in excellence until the Day of Judgement.

The term al-Salaf al-Ṣāliḥīn — the Righteous Predecessors — occupies a position of supreme importance in the Islamic tradition. It refers, in its most authoritative and widely accepted usage, to the three blessed generations explicitly praised by the Prophet ﷺ in the well-known ḥadīth narrated by Ibn Mas‘ūd, ‘Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn and others, agreed upon by al-Bukhārī and Muslim: *"The best of people is my generation [qarnī], then those who come after them, then those who come after them."* This ḥadīth forms the doctrinal cornerstone upon which the Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a ground their reverence for the early community of Islam, and it is corroborated by the unambiguous testimony of the Qur’ān itself, wherein Allah Most High warns against departing from the path of the believers — *"And whoever opposes the Messenger after guidance has become clear to him and follows a path other than that of the believers — We will give him what he has chosen and drive him into Hell, and evil it is as a destination."* [Sura al-Nisā’: 115] — and to those who follow the Emigrants [al-Muhājirūn] and the Helpers [al-Anṣār] from amongst the Companions [al-Ṣaḥāba] in excellence: *"Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him."* [Sura al-Tawba: 100].

The three generations encompassed by this term are: first, the Companions [al-Ṣaḥāba] — every Muslim who saw the Prophet ﷺ even for a single hour, as affirmed by some scholars following the position of ‘Alī ibn al-Madīnī; second, the Successors [al-Tābi‘ūn] — those who met and learned from the Companions; and third, the Successors of the Successors [Atbā‘ al-Tābi‘īn] — those whose transmitted opinion is accepted up to approximately the year 220 AH, after which, as Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (d. 852 AH) and al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 AH) both noted, innovations [bida‘] spread widely, the Mu‘tazila gave free rein to their tongues, the philosophers raised their heads, and some scholars of knowledge were subjected to the trial (mihna) of affirming the createdness of the Qur’ān.

In this article, the statements of some major ḥadīth scholars will be presented in their own words, so that the reader may benefit directly from the transmitted scholarship of the Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a. The following scholars shall be quoted in due course: Imām Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī (676 AH), al-Ḥāfiẓ Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Abū Sa‘īd Khalīl ibn Kaykaldī al-‘Alā‘ī (761 AH),

al-Ḥāfiẓ Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī (852 AH) and al-Ḥāfiẓ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī (902 AH).

The article will further elaborate upon the scholarly discussion regarding the precise temporal span of the generation [al-qarn] — a question that occupied the scholars of ḥadīth and language alike. What can be established with certainty, however, is that the three generations praised by the Prophet ﷺ constitute the Salaf al-Ṣāliḥīn, and that adherence to their path — in creed, in methodology, and in practice — is a duty binding upon the Muslim community until the Day of Resurrection. It is within this framework that the present work proceeds, in fidelity to the Book of Allah and the Sunna of His Messenger ﷺ.

Imām al-Nawawī (d. 676 AH) said in his *al-Minhāj Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj* (16/84–86):

[٢٥٣٣] (عَنْ عبيدة السلماني) هُوَ يَفْتَحُ الْعَيْنَ وَالسِّينَ وَإِسْكَانَ اللَّامِ مَنْسُوبٌ إِلَى بَنِي سَلْمَانَ قَوْلُهُ ﷺ (خَيْرُكُمْ قَرْنِي) وَفِي رِوَايَةٍ خَيْرُ النَّاسِ قَرْنِي ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُومُهُمْ إِلَى آخِرِهِ اتَّفَقَ الْعُلَمَاءُ عَلَى أَنَّ خَيْرَ الْقُرُونِ قَرْنُهُ ﷺ وَالْمُرَادُ أَصْحَابُهُ وَقَدْ قَدَّمْنَا أَنَّ الصَّحِيحَ الَّذِي عَلَيْهِ الْجُمْهُورُ أَنَّ كُلَّ مُسْلِمٍ رَأَى النَّبِيَّ ﷺ وَلَوْ سَاعَةً فَهُوَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ وَرِوَايَةٌ خَيْرُ النَّاسِ عَلَى غُمُومِهَا وَالْمُرَادُ مِنْهُ جُمْلَةُ الْقَرْنِ وَلَا يَلْزَمُ مِنْهُ تَفْضِيلُ الصَّحَابِيِّ عَلَى الْأَنْبِيَاءِ صَلَوَاتُ اللَّهِ وَسَلَامُهُ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا أَفْرَادَ التِّسَاءِ عَلَى مَرْيَمَ وَأَسِيَةَ وَغَيْرِهِمَا بَلِ الْمُرَادُ جُمْلَةُ الْقَرْنِ بِالتَّسْبِيَةِ إِلَى كُلِّ قَرْنٍ بِجُمْلَتِهِ.

[2533] "(From ‘Ubayda al-Salmānī)" — pronounced with a *fatha* on the ‘ayn and the sīn and a *sukūn* on the lām, attributed to the tribe of Banū Salmān. His saying ﷺ: "The best of you is my generation [qarnī]" — and in one narration: "The best of people is my generation [qarnī], then those who come after them" — to the end of it. The scholars agreed that the best of generations [qurūn] is his generation [qarn] ﷺ, and what is meant are his Companions. We have previously stated that the correct view — upon which the majority stand — is that every Muslim who saw the Prophet ﷺ even for an hour is counted amongst his Companions. The narration ‘the best of people’ is to be understood in its general sense, and what is intended by it is the generation [qarn] as a whole. It does not follow from this that individual Companions are superior to the Prophets, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon them all, nor that individual women are superior to Maryam and Āsiya and others; rather what is intended is the generation [qarn] as a whole in relation to every other generation [qarn] as a whole.

قَالَ الْفَاضِي وَاخْتَلَفُوا فِي الْمُرَادِ بِالْقَرْنِ هُنَا فَقَالَ الْمُعْبِرَةُ قَرْنُهُ أَصْحَابُهُ وَالَّذِينَ يَلُومُهُمْ أَبْنَاؤُهُمْ وَالثَّلَاثُ أَبْنَاءُ أَبْنَائِهِمْ وَقَالَ شَهْرٌ قَرْنُهُ مَا بَقِيَتْ عَيْنٌ رَأَتْهُ وَالثَّلَاثِي مَا بَقِيَتْ عَيْنٌ رَأَتْ مَنْ رَأَهُ ثُمَّ كَذَلِكَ وَقَالَ غَيْرٌ وَاحِدِ الْقَرْنِ كُلُّ طَبَقَةٍ مُفْتَرَيْنِ فِي وَفْتٍ وَقِيلَ هُوَ لِأَهْلِ مَدَّةٍ بُعِثَ فِيهَا نَبِيٌّ طَالَتْ مَدَّتُهُ أَمْ قَصُرَتْ.

Al-Qāḍī said: The scholars disagreed regarding what is meant by the generation [qarn] here. Al-Mughīra said: his generation [qarn] are his Companions, those who come after them are their sons, and the third are the sons of their sons. Shahr said: his generation [qarn] is the period during which there remained an eye that had seen him, and the second is the period during which there remained an eye that had seen one who had seen him, and so on likewise. More than one scholar said: a generation [qarn] is every group living together at the same time. And it has been said: it refers to the people of a period in which a Prophet was sent, whether that period was long or short.

وَذَكَرَ الْحَرْبِيُّ الْإِخْتِلَافَ فِي قَدْرِهِ بِالسِّنِينَ مِنْ عَشْرٍ سِنِينَ إِلَى مِائَةٍ وَعِشْرِينَ ثُمَّ قَالَ وَلَيْسَ مِنْهُ شَيْءٌ وَاصِحٌّ وَرَأَى أَنَّ الْقَرْنَ كُلُّ أُمَّةٍ هَلَكَتْ فَلَمْ يَبْقَ مِنْهَا أَحَدٌ وَقَالَ الْحَسَنُ وَغَيْرُهُ الْقَرْنَ عَشْرُ سِنِينَ وَقَتَادَةُ سَبْعُونَ وَالتَّحَعِيُّ أَرْبَعُونَ وَزُرَّارَةُ بْنُ أَبِي أَوْفَى مِائَةٌ وَعِشْرُونَ وَعَبْدُ الْمَلِكِ بْنُ عُمَيْرٍ مِائَةٌ وَقَالَ ابْنُ الْأَعْرَابِيِّ هُوَ الْوَقْتُ هَذَا آخِرُ نَقْلِ الْقَاضِي

Al-Ḥarbī mentioned the disagreement regarding its duration in years – ranging from ten years to one hundred and twenty – then said: "None of these views is clear and evident." He held that a generation [qarn] is every community that has perished leaving none of them remaining. Al-Ḥasan and others said: a generation [qarn] is ten years. Qatāda said: seventy. Al-Nakhaī said: forty. Zurāra ibn Abī Awfā said: one hundred and twenty. ‘Abd al-Malik ibn ‘Umayr said: one hundred. And Ibn al-A‘rābī said: it is simply a period of time. This is the end of al-Qāḍī's transmitted reports.

وَالصَّحِيحُ أَنَّ قَرْنَهُ ﷺ الصَّحَابَةُ وَالتَّابِعُونَ وَالتَّالِثُ تَابِعُوهُمْ

The correct view is that his generation [qarn] ﷺ are the Companions, the second are the Successors [al-Tābi‘ūn], and the third are their Successors [Atbā‘ al-Tābi‘īn].

قَوْلُهُ ﷺ (ثُمَّ يَجِيءُ قَوْمٌ تَسْبِقُ شَهَادَةُ أَحَدِهِمْ يَمِينَهُ وَيَمِينُهُ شَهَادَتَهُ) هَذَا دَمٌّ لِمَنْ يَشْهَدُ وَيَحْلِفُ مَعَ شَهَادَتِهِ وَاحْتِجَّ بِهِ بَعْضُ الْمَالِكِيَّةِ فِي رَدِّ شَهَادَةِ مَنْ حَلَفَ مَعَهَا وَجَمْهُورُ الْعُلَمَاءِ أَمَّا لَا تُرَدُّ وَمَعْنَى الْحَدِيثِ أَنَّهُ يُجْمَعُ بَيْنَ الْيَمِينِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَتَارَةً تَسْبِقُ هَذِهِ وَتَارَةً هَذِهِ وَفِي الرَّوَايَةِ الْأُخْرَى تَبْدُرُ شَهَادَةُ أَحَدِهِمْ وَهُوَ يَعْنِي تَسْبِقُ

His saying ﷺ: "Then will come a people whose testimony precedes their oath and whose oath precedes their testimony" – this is a censure of one who bears witness and swears an oath alongside his testimony. Some of the Mālikīs cited this as evidence for rejecting the testimony of one who swears an oath along with it, though the majority of scholars hold that it is not to be rejected. The meaning of the ḥadīth is that the oath and the testimony are combined, sometimes the one preceding and sometimes the other. In another narration the wording is ‘the testimony of one of them rushes forth’ – meaning it precedes.

قَوْلُهُ يَنْهَوْنَنَا عَنِ الْعَهْدِ وَالشَّهَادَاتِ أَيِ الْجَمْعِ بَيْنَ الْيَمِينِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ وَقِيلَ الْمُرَادُ النَّهْيُ عَنِ قَوْلِهِ عَلَى عَهْدِ اللَّهِ أَوْ أَشْهَدُ بِاللَّهِ.

His saying: ‘They used to forbid us from pledges and testimonies’ – meaning from combining the oath with the testimony. And it has been said: what is meant is the prohibition from saying “by the covenant of Allah’ or ‘I bear witness by Allah.’

قَوْلُهُ ﷺ (تَمَّ يَتَخَلَّفُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ) هَكَذَا هُوَ فِي مُعْظَمِ النَّسَخِ يَتَخَلَّفُ وَفِي بَعْضِهَا يَخْلُفُ بِحَذْفِ التَّاءِ وَكِلَاهُمَا صَحِيحٌ أَيِ يَجِيءُ بَعْدَهُمْ خَلْفٌ بِإِسْكَانِ اللَّامِ هَكَذَا الرِّوَايَةُ وَالْمُرَادُ خَلْفٌ سُوءٌ قَالَ أَهْلُ اللُّغَةِ الخَلْفُ مَا صَارَ عَوَضًا عَنْ غَيْرِهِ وَيُسْتَعْمَلُ فِي مَنْ خَلَفَ بِخَيْرٍ أَوْ بِشَرٍّ لَكِنْ يُقَالُ فِي الخَيْرِ يَفْتَحُ اللَّامَ وَإِسْكَانَهَا لِعَنَّانِ الْفَتْحُ أَشْهَرُ وَأَجُودُ وَفِي الشَّرِّ بِإِسْكَانِهَا عَنِ الْجَمْهُورِ وَحِكْمِي أَيْضًا فَتَحُّهَا.

His saying ﷺ: ‘Then after them there will succeed a successor generation [khalaf]’ – this is the reading in most copies as *yatakhallaf*, whilst in some it is *yakhlufu* without the *tā*, and both are correct – meaning: after them will come a successor generation [khalaf] with a *sukūn* on the *lām*, and this is the transmitted reading. What is meant is a wicked successor generation [khalaf *sū*]. The linguists said: *khalaf* is that which takes the place of something else, and it is used of one who succeeds for good or for ill. However, in the case of succeeding for good, it is said with both a *fatha* and a *sukūn* on the *lām* – the *fatha* being more well-known and more correct – whilst in the case of succeeding for ill, it is said with a *sukūn* according to the majority, though the *fatha* has also been related.”

Al-Ḥāfiẓ Abū Sa‘īd al-‘Alā’ī (d. 761 AH) said in his *Taḥqīq Manīf al-Rutba li-man Thabata lahu Sharīf al-Ṣuḥba* (p. 32):

وَرَوَيْنَا مِنْ حَدِيثِ أَبِي مِسْهَرٍ عَبْدِ الْأَعْلَى بْنِ مِسْهَرٍ الْعَسَنِيِّ: ثَنَا صَدَقَةُ بْنُ خَالِدٍ، ثَنَا عَمْرُو بْنُ شَرَّاحِيلَ، عَنْ بِلَالِ بْنِ سَعْدٍ، عَنْ أَبِيهِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ قَالَ: قُلْنَا: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَيُّ أُمَّتِكَ خَيْرٌ؟ قَالَ: «أَنَا وَأَقْرَابِي». قَالَ: ثُمَّ مَاذَا؟ قَالَ: «تَمَّ الْقَرْنُ الثَّانِي». قَالَ: ثُمَّ مَاذَا؟ قَالَ: «تَمَّ الْقَرْنُ الثَّلَاثُ» (١)

وَسَعَدٌ هَذَا هُوَ ابْنُ تَمِيمٍ، مَشْهُورٌ مِنَ الصَّحَابَةِ، وَابْنُهُ بِلَالٌ مِنْ فَضَلَاءِ التَّابِعِينَ، وَعَمْرُو بْنُ شَرَّاحِيلَ وَتَقَهُ ابْنُ جَبَانَ (٢)، وَلَمْ يَتَكَلَّمْ فِيهِ أَحَدٌ، وَصَدَقَةُ بْنُ خَالِدٍ اخْتَجَّ بِهِ الْبُخَارِيُّ، وَأَبُو مِسْهَرٍ مَشْهُورٌ مِنْ رِجَالِ الصَّحَابَةِ.

“We have narrated, from the ḥadīth of Abū Mishar ‘Abd al-‘Alā ibn Mishar al-Ghassānī – Ṣadaqa ibn Khālīd narrated to us – ‘Amr ibn Sharāḥīl narrated to us – from Bilāl ibn Sa‘d – from his father, may Allah be pleased with him – who said: We asked: ‘O Messenger of Allah, which of your community is the best?’ **He said: ‘I and my contemporaries.’ He said: ‘Then who?’ He said: ‘Then the second generation.’ He said: ‘Then who?’ He said: ‘Then the third generation.’** (1)ⁱⁱ

This Sa'd is Ibn Tamīm, a well-known Companion, and his son Bilāl is among the foremost of the Successors [al-Tābi'īn]. 'Amr ibn Sharāhīl was declared reliable [thiqa] by Ibn Ḥibbān (2) and no one has criticised him. Ṣadaqa ibn Khālīd was used as a proof by al-Bukhārī, and Abū Mishar is a well-known figure among the narrators of the two Ṣaḥīḥ collections."

Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 852 AH) said in his *Fath al-Bārī* (7/90–94):

٦٢ - كِتَابُ فَضَائِلِ الصَّحَابَةِ ١ - بَابُ فَضَائِلِ أَصْحَابِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ، وَمَنْ صَحِبَ النَّبِيَّ أَوْ رَأَهُ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فَهُوَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ

Book 62: The Merits of the Companions. Chapter 1: The Merits of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ, and whoever accompanied the Prophet or saw him whilst being a Muslim is counted amongst his Companions.

٣٦٤٩ - حَدَّثَنَا عَلِيُّ بْنُ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ، حَدَّثَنَا سُفْيَانُ، عَنْ عَمْرٍو، قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ جَابِرَ بْنَ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا يَقُولُ: حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو سَعِيدٍ الْخُدْرِيُّ، قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: يَأْتِي عَلَى النَّاسِ زَمَانٌ فَيَغْزَوُ فِتَامَ مِنَ النَّاسِ، فَيَقُولُونَ: فِيكُمْ مَنْ صَاحَبَ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ؟، فَيَقُولُونَ لَهُمْ: نَعَمْ، فَيُفْتَحُ لَهُمْ، ثُمَّ يَأْتِي عَلَى النَّاسِ زَمَانٌ فَيَغْزَوُ فِتَامَ مِنَ النَّاسِ، فَيُقَالُ: فِيكُمْ مَنْ صَاحَبَ أَصْحَابَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ، فَيَقُولُونَ: نَعَمْ، فَيُفْتَحُ لَهُمْ، ثُمَّ يَأْتِي عَلَى النَّاسِ زَمَانٌ فَيَغْزَوُ فِتَامَ مِنَ النَّاسِ فَيُقَالُ: هَلْ فِيكُمْ مَنْ صَاحَبَ مَنْ صَاحَبَ أَصْحَابَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ؟ فَيَقُولُونَ: نَعَمْ، فَيُفْتَحُ لَهُمْ.

Ḥadīth 3649: 'Alī ibn 'Abd Allāh narrated to us; Sufyān narrated to us, from 'Amr, who said: I heard Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh, may Allah be pleased with them both, saying: Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī narrated to us, saying: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "A time will come upon the people when a multitude from amongst them will go out to fight, and they will be asked: 'Is there amongst you anyone who accompanied the Messenger of Allah ﷺ?' They will say: 'Yes,' and victory will be granted to them. Then a time will come upon the people when a multitude will go out to fight, and it will be said: 'Is there amongst you anyone who accompanied the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ?' They will say: 'Yes,' and victory will be granted to them. Then a time will come upon the people when a multitude will go out to fight and it will be said: 'Is there amongst you anyone who accompanied those who accompanied the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ?' They will say: 'Yes,' and victory will be granted to them."

٣٦٥٠ - حَدَّثَنِي إِسْحَاقُ حَدَّثَنَا النَّضْرُ أَخْبَرَنَا شُعْبَةُ عَنْ أَبِي جَمْرَةَ سَمِعْتُ زُهْدَمَ بْنَ مُضَرِّبٍ سَمِعْتُ عِمْرَانَ بْنَ حُصَيْنٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا يَقُولُ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «خَيْرُ أُمَّتِي قُرْبِي ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُوهُمْ ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُوهُمْ قَالَ عِمْرَانُ فَلَا أُدْرِي أَذَكَرَ بَعْدَ قَرْنَيْهِ قَرْنَيْنِ أَوْ «ثَلَاثًا ثُمَّ إِنَّ بَعْدَكُمْ قَوْمًا يَشْهَدُونَ وَلَا يُسْتَشْهَدُونَ وَيَحْتُونُونَ وَلَا يُؤْتَمَنُونَ وَيَنْدُرُونَ وَلَا يَفُونَ وَيَطْهَرُ فِيهِمُ السِّمْنُ

Ḥadīth 3650: Ishāq narrated to me; al-Naḍr narrated to us; Shu'ba informed us, from Abū Jamra, who said: I heard Zahdam ibn Muḍarrib, who said: I heard 'Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn, may Allah be pleased with them both, saying: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "The best of my community is my generation [qarnī], then those who come after them, then those who come after them."

‘Imrān said: "I do not know whether he mentioned two generations [qarnayn] or three after his own generation [qarn]. Then after you will come a people who bear witness without being called upon to do so, who betray and are not trusted, who make vows and do not fulfil them, and amongst whom obesity becomes widespread."

٣٦٥١ - حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ كَثِيرٍ أَخْبَرَنَا سُفْيَانُ عَنْ مَنْصُورٍ عَنْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ عَنْ عُبَيْدَةَ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ أَنَّ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ قَالَ «خَيْرُ النَّاسِ قُرْبِي ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُوكُهُمْ ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُوكُهُمْ ثُمَّ يَجِيءُ قَوْمٌ تَسْبِقُ شَهَادَةُ أَحَدِهِمْ يَمِينَهُ وَيَمِينُهُ شَهَادَتَهُ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ وَكَانُوا يَصْرُبُونَنَا «عَلَى الشَّهَادَةِ وَالْعَهْدِ وَتَحْنَ صِغَارًا»

Ḥadīth 3651: Muḥammad ibn Kathīr narrated to us; Sufyān informed us, from Manṣūr, from Ibrāhīm, from ‘Abīda, from ‘Abd Allāh, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Prophet ﷺ said: "The best of people is my generation [qarnī], then those who come after them, then those who come after them. Then will come a people whose testimony precedes their oath and whose oath precedes their testimony." Ibrāhīm said: "They used to strike us regarding testimony and pledges when we were young."

قَوْلُهُ: (بَابُ فَصَائِلِ أَصْحَابِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ، أَيِ بِطَرِيقِ الْإِجْمَالِ ثُمَّ التَّفْصِيلِ. أَمَّا الْإِجْمَالُ فَيَشْمَلُ جَمِيعَهُمْ، لَكِنَّهُ اقْتَصَرَ فِيهِ عَلَى شَيْءٍ بِمَا يُوَافِقُ شَرْطَهُ. وَأَمَّا التَّفْصِيلُ فَلِمَنْ وَرَدَ فِيهِ شَيْءٌ بِخُصُوصِهِ عَلَى شَرْطِهِ. وَسَقَطَ لَفْظُ بَابٍ مِنْ رِوَايَةِ أَبِي ذَرٍّ وَحَدِّهِ.

His saying: "Chapter on the Merits of the Companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ" – meaning by way of a general overview and then detailed treatment. As for the general overview, it encompasses all of them, though he restricted it to what accords with his stipulated criterion. As for the detailed treatment, it is for those regarding whom something has been reported specifically, in accordance with his criterion. The word ‘chapter’ [bāb] was omitted in the transmission of Abū Dharr alone.

قَوْلُهُ: (وَمَنْ صَحَبَ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ أَوْ رَأَاهُ مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فَهُوَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ) يَعْنِي أَنَّ اسْمَ صُحْبَةِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ مُسْتَحَقٌّ لِمَنْ صَحَبَهُ أَقَلَّ مَا يُطْلَقُ عَلَيْهِ اسْمُ صُحْبَةٍ لَعَنَهُ، وَإِنْ كَانَ الْعُرْفُ يُخْصُ ذَلِكَ بِبَعْضِ الْمَلَاذِمَةِ. وَيُطْلَقُ أَيْضًا عَلَى مَنْ رَأَاهُ رُؤْيَاهُ وَلَوْ عَلَى بَعْدٍ. وَهَذَا الَّذِي ذَكَرَهُ الْبُخَارِيُّ هُوَ الرَّاجِحُ، إِلَّا أَنَّهُ هَلْ يُشْتَرَطُ فِي الرَّأْيِ أَنْ يَكُونَ بِحَيْثُ يُمَيِّزُ مَا رَأَاهُ أَوْ يُكْتَفَى بِمُجَرَّدِ حُصُولِ الرُّؤْيَا؟ مَحَلُّ نَظَرٍ، وَعَمَلٍ مِنْ صَنَفٍ فِي الصَّحَابَةِ يَدُلُّ عَلَى الثَّانِي، فَإِنَّهُمْ ذَكَرُوا مِثْلَ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ أَبِي بَكْرٍ الصِّدِّيقِ، وَإِنَّمَا وُلِدَ قَبْلَ وَفَاةِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ بِثَلَاثَةِ أَشْهُرٍ وَأَيَّامٍ، كَمَا ثَبَتَ فِي الصَّحِيحِ أَنَّ أُمَّهُ أَسْمَاءَ بِنْتَ عُمَيْسٍ وَلَدَتْهُ فِي حَجَّةِ الْوَدَاعِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَدْخُلُوا مَكَّةَ، وَذَلِكَ فِي أَوَاخِرِ ذِي الْقَعْدَةِ سَنَةِ عَشْرٍ مِنَ الْهِجْرَةِ، وَمَعَ ذَلِكَ فَأَحَادِيثُ هَذَا الصَّرْبِ مَرَّاسِيلُ، وَالْخِلَافُ الْجَارِي بَيْنَ الْجُمْهُورِ وَبَيْنَ أَبِي إِسْحَاقَ الْأَسْفَرَايِينِي وَمَنْ وَاظَفَهُمْ عَلَى رَدِّ الْمَرَّاسِيلِ مُطْلَقًا حَتَّى مَرَّاسِيلِ الصَّحَابَةِ لَا يَجْرِي فِي أَحَادِيثِ هَؤُلَاءِ لِأَنَّ أَحَادِيثَهُمْ لَا مِنْ قَبِيلِ مَرَّاسِيلِ كِبَارِ التَّابِعِينَ، وَلَا مِنْ قَبِيلِ مَرَّاسِيلِ الصَّحَابَةِ الَّذِينَ سَمِعُوا مِنَ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ وَهَذَا جَمًّا يُلْعَزُ بِهِ فَيُقَالُ: صَحَابِيُّ حَدِيثُهُ مُرْسَلٌ لَا يَقْبَلُهُ مَنْ يَقْبَلُ مَرَّاسِيلَ الصَّحَابَةِ

His saying: "Whoever accompanied the Prophet ﷺ or saw him whilst being a Muslim is counted amongst his Companions" – meaning that the designation of companionship [ṣuḥba] with the Prophet ﷺ is deserved by whoever accompanied him for even the minimum duration to which the word

companionship [*ṣuḥba*] applies linguistically, even if convention restricts it to some degree of prolonged association. It also applies to whoever saw him, even from a distance. What al-Bukhārī has stated here is the preponderant opinion [*rājiḥ*], though there remains the question of whether it is required that the one who saw him be of an age to discern what he saw, or whether the mere occurrence of the sight suffices – and this is a matter for consideration. The practice of those who compiled works on the Companions indicates the latter, for they mentioned the like of Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr al-Ṣiddīq, who was born only three months and some days before the death of the Prophet ﷺ, as established in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* that his mother Asmā' bint 'Umayy gave birth to him during the Farewell Pilgrimage [*Ḥajjat al-Wadā*] before they entered Makka, in the latter part of Dhū al-Qa'da in the year ten of the Hijra. Nevertheless, the ḥadīths of this type are classed as disconnected [*marāsīl*]. The dispute that runs between the majority and Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī and those who agreed with him in rejecting all disconnected narrations [*marāsīl*] – including even the disconnected narrations of the Companions – does not apply to the ḥadīths of these individuals, because their ḥadīths are neither of the category of the disconnected narrations of the senior Successors [*kibār al-tābi'īn*] nor of the disconnected narrations of those Companions who actually heard from the Prophet ﷺ. This is one of the paradoxes posed as a riddle, it being said: "A Companion whose ḥadīth is disconnected [*mursal*], not accepted by one who accepts the disconnected narrations of the Companions."

وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ بَالَعَ فَكَانَ لَا يَعُدُّ فِي الصَّحَابَةِ إِلَّا مَنْ صَحِبَ الصُّحْبَةَ الْعُرْفِيَّةَ، كَمَا جَاءَ عَنْ عَاصِمِ الْأَخْوَلِ قَالَ: رَأَى عَبْدُ اللَّهِ بْنُ سَرْجَسٍ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ ﷺ غَيْرَ أَنَّهُ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ صُحْبَةٌ أَخْرَجَهُ أَحْمَدُ، هَذَا مَعَ كَوْنِ عَاصِمٍ قَدْ رَوَى عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ سَرْجَسٍ هَذَا عِدَّةَ أَحَادِيثَ، وَهِيَ عِنْدَ مُسْلِمٍ وَأَصْحَابِ السُّنَنِ، وَأَكْثَرُهَا مِنْ رِوَايَةِ عَاصِمٍ عَنْهُ، وَمَنْ جُمِّلَتْهَا قَوْلُهُ: إِنَّ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ اسْتَغْفَرَ لَهُ. فَهَذَا رَأْيُ عَاصِمٍ أَنَّ الصَّحَابِيَّ مَنْ يَكُونُ صَحِبَ الصُّحْبَةَ الْعُرْفِيَّةَ؛ وَكَذَا رُوِيَ عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ الْمُسَيَّبِ أَنَّهُ كَانَ لَا يَعُدُّ فِي الصَّحَابَةِ إِلَّا مَنْ أَقَامَ مَعَ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ سَنَةً فَصَاعِدًا أَوْ غَرًا مَعَهُ غَزْوَةً فَصَاعِدًا، وَالْعَمَلُ عَلَى خِلَافِ هَذَا الْقَوْلِ: لِأَنَّهُمْ اتَّفَقُوا عَلَى عَدِّ جَمْعٍ فِي الصَّحَابَةِ لَمْ يَجْتَمِعُوا بِالنَّبِيِّ ﷺ إِلَّا فِي حَجَّةِ الْوَدَاعِ.

Some of them went further and would not count anyone amongst the Companions except those who accompanied him in the customary sense [*al-ṣuḥba al-'urfiyya*], as has come from 'Aṣim al-Aḥwal, who said: "Abd Allāh ibn Sarjas saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, but he was not a Companion [*lam yakun lahu ṣuḥba*]" – recorded by Aḥmad (ibn Hanbal) – and this despite the fact that 'Aṣim narrated several ḥadīths from this same 'Abd Allāh ibn Sarjas, which are found in (Sahih) Muslim and the Sunan collections, most of them through 'Aṣim's transmission from him, including the report that the Prophet ﷺ sought forgiveness for him. This then was 'Aṣim's view that a Companion is one who accompanied him in the customary sense [*al-ṣuḥba al-'urfiyya*]. Likewise, it has been narrated from Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyab that he would not count anyone amongst the Companions except one who had resided with the Prophet ﷺ for a year or more, or had participated with him in at least one

military expedition. However, the accepted practice runs contrary to this view, for the scholars agreed upon counting a great multitude as Companions who never met the Prophet ﷺ except during the Farewell Pilgrimage [*Hajjat al-Wadā*].

وَمَنْ اشْتَرَطَ الصُّحْبَةَ الْعُرْفِيَّةَ أُخْرِجَ مِنْ لَهُ رُؤْيَا أَوْ مَنْ اجْتَمَعَ بِهِ لَكِنْ فَارَقَهُ عَنْ قُرْبٍ، كَمَا جَاءَ عَنْ أَنَسٍ أَنَّهُ قِيلَ لَهُ: هَلْ بَقِيَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ غَيْرُكَ؟ قَالَ: لَا، مَعَ أَنَّهُ كَانَ فِي ذَلِكَ الْوَقْتِ عَدَدٌ كَثِيرٌ مِمَّنْ لَقِيَهُ مِنَ الْأَعْرَابِ. وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ اشْتَرَطَ فِي ذَلِكَ أَنْ يَكُونَ حِينَ اجْتِمَاعِهِ بِهِ بِالْعَا، وَهُوَ مَرْدُودٌ أَيْضًا لِأَنَّهُ يُخْرِجُ مِثْلَ الْحَسَنِ بْنِ عَلِيٍّ وَنَحْوَهُ مِنْ أَحْدَاثِ الصَّحَابَةِ، وَالَّذِي جَزَمَ بِهِ الْبُخَارِيُّ هُوَ قَوْلُ أَحْمَدَ وَالْجُمْهُورِ مِنَ الْمُحَدِّثِينَ

Whoever stipulated companionship in the customary sense [*al-ṣuḥba al-'urfiyya*] would thereby exclude those who merely saw him or those who met him but parted from him shortly thereafter, as has come from Anas, who when asked: "Has anyone remained from the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ besides you?" replied: "No" — despite the fact that at that time there were many who had met him from amongst the Bedouins [*a'rāb*]. Some of them further stipulated that the person be of adult age [*bāligh*] at the time of meeting him, and this too is rejected, for it would exclude the like of al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī and others from the young Companions. What al-Bukhārī has stated with certainty is the position of Aḥmad (ibn Hanbal) and the majority of the ḥadīth scholars.

وَقَوْلُ الْبُخَارِيِّ: مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ فَيُخْرِجُ بِهِ مَنْ صَحِبَهُ أَوْ مَنْ رَأَاهُ مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ، فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَسْلَمَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِ مِنْهُمْ فَإِنْ كَانَ قَوْلُهُ: مِنَ الْمُسْلِمِينَ حَالًا خَرَجَ مِنْ هَذِهِ صِفَتِهِ وَهُوَ الْمُعْتَمَدُ. وَيُرَدُّ عَلَى التَّعْرِيفِ مَنْ صَحِبَهُ أَوْ رَأَاهُ مُؤْمِنًا بِهِ ثُمَّ ارْتَدَّ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ وَلَمْ يَعُدْ إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ فَإِنَّهُ لَيْسَ صَحَابِيًّا اتِّفَاقًا، فَيَنْبَغِي أَنْ يُزَادَ فِيهِ: وَمَاتَ عَلَى ذَلِكَ. وَقَدْ وَقَعَ فِي مُسْنَدِ أَحْمَدَ حَدِيثٌ رَبِيعَةَ بْنِ أُمَيَّةَ بْنِ خَلْفٍ الْجَمْحَوِيِّ وَهُوَ مِمَّنْ أَسْلَمَ فِي الْفَتْحِ وَشَهِدَ مَعَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ حِجَّةَ الْوَدَاعِ وَحَدَّثَ عَنْهُ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِ ثُمَّ لَحِقَهُ الْحِدْلَانُ فَلَحِقَ فِي خِلَافَةِ عُمَرَ بِالرُّومِ وَتَنَصَّرَ بِسَبَبِ شَيْءٍ أَعْضَبَهُ، وَإِخْرَاجُ حَدِيثٍ مِثْلَ هَذَا مُشْكَلٌ، وَلَعَلَّ مَنْ أَخْرَجَهُ لَمْ يَقِفْ عَلَى قِصَّةِ ارْتِدَائِهِ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ. فَلَوْ ارْتَدَّ ثُمَّ عَادَ إِلَى الْإِسْلَامِ لَكِنْ لَمْ يَرَهُ ثَانِيًا بَعْدَ عَوْدِهِ فَالصَّحِيحُ أَنَّهُ مَعْدُودٌ فِي الصَّحَابَةِ لِإِطْبَاقِ الْمُحَدِّثِينَ عَلَى عَدِّ الْأَشْعَثِ بْنِ قَيْسٍ، وَنَحْوِهِ مِمَّنْ وَقَعَ لَهُ ذَلِكَ، وَإِخْرَاجُهُمْ أَحَادِيثُهُمْ فِي الْمَسَانِيدِ، وَهَلْ يَخْتَصُّ جَمِيعُ ذَلِكَ بِنَبِيِّ آدَمَ أَوْ يَعْمُ غَيْرُهُمْ مِنَ الْعُقَلَاءِ، مَحَلُّ نَظَرٍ أَمَّا الْجُنُودُ فَالرَّاجِحُ دُخُولُهُمْ؛ لِأَنَّ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ بَعَثَ إِلَيْهِمْ قَطْعًا، وَهُمْ مُكَلَّفُونَ، فِيهِمُ الْعَصَاةُ وَالطَّانِعُونَ، فَمَنْ عَرَفَ اسْمَهُ مِنْهُمْ لَا يَنْبَغِي الِتَّرَدُّ فِي ذِكْرِهِ فِي الصَّحَابَةِ وَإِنْ كَانَ ابْنُ الْأَثِيرِ غَابَ ذَلِكَ عَلَى أَبِي مُوسَى فَلَمْ يَسْتَبِدَّ فِي ذَلِكَ إِلَى حُجَّةٍ

Al-Bukhārī's phrase "whilst being a Muslim" is a qualifying condition that excludes those who accompanied him or saw him whilst being disbelievers. As for those amongst them who embraced Islam after his death, if the phrase "whilst being a Muslim" is understood as a circumstantial qualifier [*ḥāl*], then such a person is excluded — and this is the relied-upon position. An objection arises in the definition regarding one who accompanied him or saw him whilst a believer but then apostatised and never returned to Islam, for by consensus such a person is not a Companion; the definition should therefore be supplemented with the words: "and died upon that." In the *Musnad* of Aḥmad there occurs the ḥadīth of Rabi'a ibn Umayya ibn Khalaf al-Jumahī, who was amongst those who embraced Islam at the Conquest [*al-fathḥ*],

witnessed the Farewell Pilgrimage with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, and narrated from him after his death; but then he was afflicted with wretchedness and in the caliphate of ‘Umar he joined the Byzantines and became a Christian on account of something that angered him.

The recording of a ḥadīth of one such as this is problematic, and perhaps whoever recorded it was unaware of the story of his apostasy – and Allah knows best. If someone apostatised and then returned to Islam but did not see the Prophet ﷺ again after his return, the correct view is that he is still counted amongst the Companions, given the consensus of the ḥadīth scholars on counting al-Ash‘ath ibn Qays and others like him who experienced that, and their inclusion of their ḥadīths in the *Masānīd*.ⁱⁱⁱ As for whether all of this is restricted to the children of Ādam or extends to other rational beings [‘*uqalā*’] – that is a matter for consideration. Regarding the jinn, the preponderant view is that they are included, for the Prophet ﷺ was certainly sent to them, they are morally accountable [*mukallafūn*], and amongst them are the disobedient and the obedient. Whoever among them is known by name should not hesitantly be mentioned amongst the Companions – even if Ibn al-Athīr criticised Abū Mūsā for that, he did not ground his criticism in any evidence.

، وَأَمَّا الْمَلَائِكَةُ فَيَتَوَقَّفُ عَدُّهُمْ فِيهِمْ عَلَى ثُبُوتِ بَعْتِهِ إِلَيْهِمْ، فَإِنَّ فِيهِ خِلَافًا بَيْنَ الْأَصُولِيِّينَ، حَتَّى نَقَلَ بَعْضُهُمُ الْإِجْمَاعَ عَلَى ثُبُوتِهِ وَعَكْسًا بَعْضُهُمْ، وَهَذَا كُلُّهُ فِيمَنْ رَأَهُ وَهُوَ فِي قَيْدِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَوِيَّةِ، أَمَا مَنْ رَأَهُ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهِ وَقَبْلَ دَفْنِهِ فَالرَّاجِحُ أَنَّهُ لَيْسَ بِصَحَابِيٍّ وَإِلَّا لَعُدَّ مَنْ اتَّفَقَ أَنْ يَرَى جَسَدَهُ الْمُكْرَمَ وَهُوَ فِي قَبْرِهِ الْمُعْظَمِ وَلَوْ فِي هَذِهِ الْأَعْصَارِ، وَكَذَلِكَ مَنْ كُشِفَ لَهُ عَنْهُ مِنَ الْأَوْلِيَاءِ فَرَأَهُ كَذَلِكَ عَلَى طَرِيقِ الْكِرَامَةِ، إِذْ حِجَّةٌ مَنْ أَثَبَتِ الصُّحْبَةَ لِمَنْ رَأَهُ قَبْلَ دَفْنِهِ أَنَّهُ مُسْتَمِرُّ الْحَيَاةِ، وَهَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ لَيْسَتْ دُنْيَوِيَّةً وَإِنَّمَا هِيَ أُخْرَوِيَّةٌ لَا تَتَعَلَّقُ بِمَا أَحْكَامُ الدُّنْيَا، فَإِنَّ الشُّهَدَاءَ أَحْيَاءَ وَمَعَ ذَلِكَ فَإِنَّ الْأَحْكَامَ الْمُتَعَلِّقَةَ بِهِمْ بَعْدَ الْقَتْلِ جَارِيَةٌ عَلَى أَحْكَامِ غَيْرِهِمْ مِنْ الْمَوْتَى، وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ.

As for the angels, counting them amongst the Companions depends on whether it is established that the Prophet ﷺ was sent to them – a matter on which the legal theorists [*uṣūliyyūn*] disagreed, some of them even transmitting a consensus affirming it whilst others held the contrary. All of this applies to one who saw him during his worldly life. As for one who saw him after his death and before his burial, the preponderant view is that such a person is not a Companion – otherwise one who happened to see his noble body whilst it lay in its venerated grave, even in these later times, would be counted as such, as would any of the saints [*awliyā*] to whom he was unveiled and who saw him in this way by way of a miraculous gift [*karāma*]. The argument of those who affirmed companionship for one who saw him before his burial is that he continued to be alive, but this life is not worldly life; rather it is the life of the hereafter, to which the rulings of this world do not apply – for the martyrs are alive, yet the rulings pertaining to them after their killing follow the rulings that apply to other deceased persons. And Allah knows best.

وَكَذَلِكَ الْمَرَادُ بِهَذِهِ الرَّؤْيِيَةِ مِنَ اتَّفَقَتْ لَهُ بِمَنْ تَقَدَّمَ شَرْحُهُ وَهُوَ يَفْطَانُ، أَمَا مَنْ رَأَاهُ فِي الْمَنَامِ وَإِنْ كَانَ قَدْ رَأَاهُ حَقًّا فَذَلِكَ بِمَا يَرْجِعُ إِلَى الْأُمُورِ الْمَعْنَوِيَّةِ لَا الْأَحْكَامِ الدُّنْيَوِيَّةِ فَلِذَلِكَ لَا يُعَدُّ صَحَابِيًّا وَلَا يَجِبُ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَعْمَلَ بِمَا أَمَرَهُ بِهِ فِي تِلْكَ الْحَالَةِ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ. وَقَدْ وَجَدْتُ مَا جَزَمَ بِهِ الْبُخَارِيُّ مِنْ تَعْرِيفِ الصَّحَابِيِّ فِي كَلَامِ شَيْخِهِ عَلِيِّ بْنِ الْمَدِينِيِّ، فَقَرَأْتُ فِي الْمُسْتَخْرَجِ لِأَبِي الْقَاسِمِ بْنِ مَنَدَةَ بِسَنَدِهِ إِلَى أَحْمَدَ بْنِ سَيَّارِ الْحَافِظِ الْمَرْوَزِيِّ قَالَ: سَمِعْتُ أَحْمَدَ بْنَ عَتِيكَ يَقُولُ: قَالَ عَلِيُّ بْنُ الْمَدِينِيِّ: مَنْ صَحَبَ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ أَوْ رَأَاهُ وَلَوْ سَاعَةً مِنْ نَهَارٍ فَهُوَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ وَقَدْ بَسَطْتُ هَذِهِ الْمَسْأَلَةَ فِيمَا جَمَعْتُهُ مِنْ عُلُومِ الْحَدِيثِ، وَهَذَا الْقَدْرُ فِي هَذَا الْمَكَانِ كَافٍ.

The sight referred to here likewise means that which occurred to those previously discussed whilst they were awake. As for one who saw him in a dream – and even though such a vision is indeed a true one – this pertains to spiritual matters rather than the legal rulings of this world; hence such a person is not counted as a Companion and is not obliged to act upon what the Prophet commanded him in that state. And Allah knows best. I have found what al-Bukhārī stated with certainty regarding the definition of a Companion in the words of his teacher ‘Alī ibn al-Madīnī: I read in the *Mustakhraj* of Abū al-Qāsim ibn Manda, through his chain to the Ḥāfiẓ Aḥmad ibn Sayyār al-Marwazī, who said: I heard Aḥmad ibn ‘Atīk say: ‘Alī ibn al-Madīnī said: "Whoever accompanied the Prophet ﷺ or saw him even for an hour of the day is counted amongst the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ." I have elaborated upon this question in what I have compiled from the sciences of ḥadīth, and this much here suffices.

ثم ذكر المصنف في الباب ثلاثة أحاديث أحدها حديث جابر بن عبد الله، عن أبي سعيد، وهو من رواية صحابي عن صحابي.

The author then mentioned three ḥadīths in this chapter, the first being the ḥadīth of Jābir ibn ‘Abd Allāh from Abū Sa‘īd, and it is a transmission of one Companion from another Companion.

قَوْلُهُ: (يَأْتِي عَلَى النَّاسِ زَمَانٌ فَيَعُزُّوْهُ فَيَمُوتُ) بِكَسْرِ الْقَاءِ ثُمَّ تَحْتَايِيَّةٌ بِهَمْزَةٍ، وَحُكْمِي فِيهِ تَرْكُ الْهَمْزَةِ أَيْ جَمَاعَةً، وَقَدْ تَقَدَّمَ ضَبْطُهُ فِي بَابِ مَنْ اسْتَعَانَ بِالضُّعْفَاءِ فِي أَوَائِلِ الْجِهَادِ، وَيُسْتَفَادُ مِنْهُ بُطْلَانُ قَوْلِ مَنْ ادَّعَى فِي هَذِهِ الْأَعْصَارِ الْمُنْتَاجِرَةِ الصُّحْبَةَ لِأَنَّ الْحَبَرَ يَتَّصِفُ اسْتِمْرَارَ الْجِهَادِ وَالْبُعُوثِ إِلَى بِلَادِ الْكُفَّارِ وَأَهْمُ يَسْأَلُونَ: هَلْ فِيكُمْ أَحَدٌ مِنْ أَصْحَابِهِ؟ فَيَقُولُونَ: لَا، وَكَذَلِكَ فِي التَّابِعِينَ وَفِي أَتْبَاعِ التَّابِعِينَ، وَقَدْ وَقَعَ كَلِمَةُ ذَلِكَ فِيمَا مَضَى وَانْتَقَطَعَتِ الْبُعُوثُ عَنْ بِلَادِ الْكُفَّارِ فِي هَذِهِ الْأَعْصَارِ، بَلِ انْعَكَسَ الْحَالُ فِي ذَلِكَ عَلَى مَا هُوَ مَعْلُومٌ مُشَاهِدٌ مِنْ مُدَّةٍ مُتَطَاوِلَةٍ وَلَا سِيَّمَا فِي بِلَادِ الْأَنْدَلُسِ.

His saying: "A time will come upon the people when a multitude [*fi`ām*] will go out to fight" – the word *fi`ām* is pronounced with a kasra on the *fā`* followed by a *yā`* with a hamza, and it has also been related without the hamza, meaning "a group." Its vocalisation was previously discussed in the chapter on seeking assistance from the weak at the beginning of the Book of Jihad. From this ḥadīth one derives the invalidity of the claim of anyone in these later times who claims companionship [*ṣuḥba*], for the report implies the continued occurrence of jihad and military expeditions to the lands of the disbelievers, with the question being asked: "Is there anyone among you from his Companions?" and the answer being: "No" – and likewise regarding the Successors [*tābi`īn*] and the Successors of the Successors [*atbā` al-tābi`īn*].

All of that occurred in times gone by, and the military expeditions to the lands of the disbelievers have ceased in these times; indeed the situation has been entirely reversed, as is well known and observable over a long period – especially in the lands of Andalusia [*bilād al-Andalus*].

وَصَبَطَ أَهْلُ الْحَدِيثِ آخِرَ مَنْ مَاتَ مِنَ الصَّحَابَةِ، وَهُوَ عَلَى الْإِطْلَاقِ، أَبُو الطَّفَيْلِ عَامِرُ بْنُ وَائِلَةَ اللَّيْثِيُّ كَمَا جَزَمَ بِهِ مُسْلِمٌ فِي صَحِيحِهِ، وَكَانَ مَوْتُهُ سَنَةَ مِائَةٍ وَقِيلَ: سَنَةَ سَبْعٍ وَمِائَةٍ، وَقِيلَ: سَنَةَ عَشْرِ وَمِائَةٍ، وَهُوَ مُطَابِقٌ لِقَوْلِهِ قَبْلَ وَفَاتِهِ بِشَهْرٍ: عَلَى رَأْسِ مِائَةِ سَنَةٍ لَا يَبْقَى عَلَى وَجْهِ الْأَرْضِ مِمَّنْ هُوَ عَلَيْهَا الْيَوْمَ أَحَدٌ، وَوَقَعَ فِي رِوَايَةِ أَبِي الزُّبَيْرِ، عَنْ جَابِرٍ عِنْدَ مُسْلِمٍ ذِكْرَ طَبَقَةِ رَابِعَةٍ وَلَفْظُهُ: يَأْتِي عَلَى النَّاسِ زَمَانٌ يُبْعَثُ مِنْهُمْ الْبَعْثُ فَيَقُولُونَ: انظُرُوا، هَلْ تَجِدُونَ فِيكُمْ أَحَدًا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ؟ فَيُوجَدُ الرَّجُلُ فَيُفْتَحَ لَهُمْ، ثُمَّ يُبْعَثُ الْبَعْثُ الثَّانِي فَيَقُولُونَ: انظُرُوا – إِلَى أَنْ قَالَ – ثُمَّ يَكُونُ الْبَعْثُ الرَّابِعُ، وَهَذِهِ الرِّوَايَةُ شَادَّةٌ، وَأَكْثَرُ الرِّوَايَاتِ مُقْتَصِرٌ عَلَى الثَّلَاثَةِ كَمَا سَأَوْضَحُ ذَلِكَ فِي الْحَدِيثِ الَّذِي بَعْدَهُ. وَمِثْلُهُ حَدِيثٌ وَائِلَةَ رَفَعَهُ: لَا تَزَالُونَ بِخَيْرٍ مَا دَامَ فِيكُمْ مَنْ رَأَى صَاحِبِي، وَاللَّهِ لَا تَزَالُونَ بِخَيْرٍ مَا دَامَ فِيكُمْ مَنْ رَأَى مِنْ رَأْيِي صَاحِبِي الْحَدِيثِ أَخْرَجَهُ ابْنُ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ وَإِسْنَادُهُ حَسَنٌ.

The ḥadīth scholars have precisely identified the last Companion to die – absolutely speaking – as Abū al-Ṭufayl ‘Āmir ibn Wāthila al-Laythī, as Muslim stated with certainty in his *Ṣaḥīḥ*. His death occurred in the year one hundred, though it has also been said: in the year one hundred and seven, and also: in the year one hundred and ten. This accords with his (Prophet ﷺ) statement a month before his death: "At the completion of one hundred years, none of those who are today upon the face of the earth will remain." In the narration of Abū al-Zubayr from Jābir in Muslim there occurs mention of a fourth generation [*ṭabaqa*], and its wording is: "A time will come upon the people when an expeditionary force will be sent out from them, and they will say: 'Look – do you find amongst you anyone from the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ?' A man will be found and victory will be granted to them. Then the second expedition will be sent and they will say: 'Look—' – until he said – "Then there will be the fourth expedition." This narration is anomalous [*shādhah*], and the majority of narrations are restricted to three, as I shall clarify in the ḥadīth that follows. Similar to it is the ḥadīth of Wāthila, attributed to the Prophet: "You will continue to be in good so long as there remains amongst you one who saw me and accompanied me. By Allah, you will continue to be in good so long as there remains amongst you one who saw one who saw me and accompanied me" – recorded by Ibn Abī Shayba, and its chain is good [*ḥasan*].

قَوْلُهُ: (حَدَّثَنَا إِسْحَاقُ) هُوَ ابْنُ رَاهَوَيْهِ وَبِذَلِكَ جَزَمَ ابْنُ السَّكَنِ، وَأَبُو نُعَيْمٍ فِي الْمُسْتَخْرَجِ وَالنَّصْرِيُّ هُوَ ابْنُ شَيْبَةَ، وَأَبُو جَمْرَةَ بِالْجِيمِ وَالرَّاءِ صَاحِبُ ابْنِ عَبَّاسٍ وَحَدَّثَ هُنَا عَنْ تَابِعِيِّ مِثْلَهُ.

His saying: "Ishāq narrated to me" – he is Ibn Rāhawayh, as Ibn al-Sakan and Abū Nu‘aym stated with certainty in the *Mustakhraj*. Al-Naḍr is Ibn Shumayl. Abū Jamra – with *jīm* and *rā* – is the companion of Ibn ‘Abbās, and he narrated here from a Successor [*tābi* ʿī] like himself.

قَوْلُهُ: (خَيْرُ أُمَّتِي قَرْنِي) أَيِ أَهْلِ قَرْنِي، وَالْقَرْنُ أَهْلُ زَمَانٍ وَاحِدٍ مُتَقَارِبٍ اشْتَرَكُوا فِي أَمْرٍ مِنَ الْأُمُورِ الْمُقْصُودَةِ، وَيُقَالُ: إِنَّ ذَلِكَ مَخْصُوصٌ بِمَا إِذَا اجْتَمَعُوا فِي زَمَنِ نَبِيِّ أَوْ رَئِيسٍ يَجْمَعُهُمْ عَلَى مِلَّةٍ أَوْ مَذْهَبٍ أَوْ عَمَلٍ، وَيُطْلَقُ الْقَرْنُ عَلَى مُدَّةٍ مِنَ الزَّمَانِ وَاجْتَلَفُوا فِي تَحْدِيدِهَا مِنْ عَشْرَةِ أَعْوَامٍ إِلَى مِائَةِ وَعِشْرِينَ لَكِنْ لَمْ أَرَ مَنْ صَرَّحَ بِالسَّبْعِينَ وَلَا بِمِائَةِ وَعِشْرَةٍ، وَمَا عَدَا ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ قَالَ بِهِ قَاتِلٌ. وَذَكَرَ الْجَوْهَرِيُّ بَيْنَ الثَّلَاثِينَ وَالْثَمَانِينَ، وَقَدْ وَقَعَ فِي حَدِيثِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ بُسْرِ عِنْدَ مُسْلِمٍ مَا يَدُلُّ عَلَى أَنَّ الْقَرْنَ مِائَةٌ وَهُوَ الْمَشْهُورُ، وَقَالَ صَاحِبُ الْمَطَالِعِ: الْقَرْنُ أُمَّةٌ هَلَكَتْ فَلَمْ يَبْقَ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدٌ، وَتَبَتِ الْمِائَةُ فِي حَدِيثِ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ بْنِ بُسْرِ وَهِيَ مَا عِنْدَ أَكْبَرِ أَهْلِ الْعِرَاقِ، وَلَمْ يَذْكُرْ صَاحِبُ الْمُحْكَمِ الْحَمْسِينَ وَذَكَرَ مِنْ عَشْرِ إِلَى سَبْعِينَ ثُمَّ قَالَ: هَذَا هُوَ الْقَدْرُ الْمُنْتَوِسِّطُ مِنْ أَعْمَارِ أَهْلِ كُلِّ زَمَنِ، وَهَذَا أَعْدَلُ الْأَقْوَالِ وَبِهِ صَرَّحَ ابْنُ الْأَعْرَابِيِّ وَقَالَ: إِنَّهُ مَا خُوذَ مِنَ الْأَقْرَانِ، وَيُمْكِنُ أَنْ يُحْمَلَ عَلَيْهِ الْمُخْتَلِفُ مِنَ الْأَقْوَالِ الْمُتَقَدِّمَةِ مِمَّنْ قَالَ: إِنَّ الْقَرْنَ أَرْبَعُونَ فَصَاعِدًا، أَمَا مَنْ قَالَ إِنَّهُ دُونَ ذَلِكَ فَلَا يَلْتَمِمْ عَلَى هَذَا الْقَوْلِ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ وَالْمُرَادُ بِقَرْنِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ فِي هَذَا الْحَدِيثِ الصَّحَابَةُ.

His saying: "The best of my community is my generation [qarnī]" — meaning the people of my generation [qarn]. A generation [qarn] is the people of a single closely proximate era who share in some intended common matter, and it is said that this is restricted to those who gathered in the time of a Prophet or a leader who unites them upon a creed, a legal school [madhhab], or a practice. The term generation [qarn] is also applied to a span of time, and the scholars disagreed in defining it — ranging from ten years to one hundred and twenty — though I have not found anyone who explicitly stated seventy or one hundred and ten, whilst every other figure has been held by someone. Al-Jawharī mentioned between thirty and eighty. In the ḥadīth of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Busr in (Sahih) Muslim there occurs what indicates that a generation [qarn] is one hundred years, and this is the well-known view. The author of *al-Maṭāli* said: "A generation [qarn] is a community that has perished leaving none of them remaining." One hundred years is established in the ḥadīth of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Busr, and this is the view held by most of the scholars of Iraq. The author of *al-Muḥkam* did not mention fifty, and mentioned from ten to seventy, then said: "This is the average lifespan of the people of every age," and this is the most balanced of the views — as explicitly stated by Ibn al-A‘rābī, who said it is derived from the word *aqrān* [contemporaries]. It is possible to reconcile the differing views cited above on this basis for those who said a generation [qarn] is forty years or more, though the view of those who said less than that cannot be harmonised in this way. And Allah knows best. What is meant by the generation [qarn] of the Prophet ﷺ in this ḥadīth is the Companions.

، وَقَدْ سَبَقَ فِي صِفَةِ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ قَوْلُهُ: وَبِعَثَ فِي خَيْرِ قُرُونِ بَنِي آدَمَ، وَفِي رِوَايَةِ بُرَيْدَةَ عِنْدَ أَحْمَدَ: خَيْرُ هَذِهِ الْأُمَّةِ الْقَرْنُ الَّذِينَ بُعِثَتْ فِيهِمْ وَقَدْ ظَهَرَ أَنَّ الَّذِي بَيْنَ الْبُعْثَةِ وَآخِرِ مَنْ مَاتَ مِنَ الصَّحَابَةِ مِائَةٌ سَنَةٌ وَعِشْرُونَ سَنَةً أَوْ دُونَهَا أَوْ فَوْقَهَا بِقَلِيلٍ عَلَى الْإِخْتِلَافِ فِي وَقَاةِ أَبِي الطُّفَيْلِ، وَإِنْ اعْتَبِرَ ذَلِكَ مِنْ بَعْدِ وَفَاتِهِ ﷺ فَيَكُونُ مِائَةٌ سَنَةً أَوْ تِسْعِينَ أَوْ سَبْعًا وَتِسْعِينَ، وَأَمَّا قَرْنُ التَّابِعِينَ فَإِنْ اعْتَبِرَ مِنْ سَنَةِ مِائَةٍ كَانَ نَحْوَ سَبْعِينَ أَوْ ثَمَانِينَ، وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ بَعْدَهُمْ فَإِنْ اعْتَبِرَ مِنْهَا كَانَ نَحْوًا مِنْ خَمْسِينَ، فَظَهَرَ بِذَلِكَ أَنَّ مُدَّةَ الْقَرْنِ تَخْتَلِفُ بِإِخْتِلَافِ أَعْمَارِ أَهْلِ كُلِّ زَمَانٍ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ. وَاتَّفَقُوا أَنَّ آخِرَ مَنْ كَانَ مِنْ أَتْبَاعِ التَّابِعِينَ مِمَّنْ يُقْبَلُ قَوْلُهُ مَنْ عَاشَ إِلَى حُدُودِ الْعِشْرِينَ وَمِائَتَيْنِ، وَفِي هَذَا الْوَقْتِ ظَهَرَتْ الْبِدْعُ ظُهُورًا فَاشِيًّا، وَأُطْلِقَتِ الْمُعْتَرِلةُ الْمَعْتَرِلةُ أَلْسِنَتُهَا، وَرَفَعَتِ الْفَلَاسِفةُ رُؤُوسَهَا، وَامْتَنَحَنَ أَهْلُ الْعِلْمِ

لِيَقُولُوا بِحَقِّ الْقُرْآنِ، وَتَغَيَّرَتِ الْأَحْوَالُ تَغَيُّرًا شَدِيدًا، وَلَمْ يَزَلِ الْأَمْرُ فِي نَقْصٍ إِلَى الْآنَ. وَظَهَرَ قَوْلُهُ ﷺ: ثُمَّ يَفْشُو الْكُذِبُ، ظُهُورًا
بَيْنًا حَتَّى يَشْمَلَ الْأَقْوَالِ وَالْأَفْعَالِ وَالْمُعْتَقَدَاتِ وَاللَّهِ الْمُسْتَعَانُ

It has preceded in the description of the Prophet ﷺ that "he was sent in the best of the generations [qurūn] of the children of Ādam," and in the narration of Burayda in Aḥmad: "The best of this community is the generation [qarn] in which I was sent." It has become apparent that the span between the Prophethood and the death of the last Companion is one hundred and twenty years, or slightly less or slightly more, depending on the disagreement regarding the death of Abū al-Ṭufayl. If reckoned from after the death of the Prophet ﷺ it would be one hundred, or ninety, or ninety-seven years. As for the generation [qarn] of the Successors [tābi'īn], if reckoned from the year one hundred it would be approximately seventy or eighty years; and as for those after them, if reckoned from the same point it would be approximately fifty years. This makes clear that the duration of a generation [qarn] varies according to the lifespans of the people of each age. And Allah knows best. **The scholars agreed that the last of the Successors of the Successors [atbā' al-tābi'īn] whose opinion is accepted are those who lived until approximately the year two hundred and twenty.** At this time innovations [bida'] appeared and spread widely, the Mu'tazila gave free rein to their tongues, the philosophers raised their heads, the scholars of knowledge were put to trial to make them say that the Qur'ān was created, and conditions changed drastically — and matters have continued to decline to this day. The saying of the Prophet ﷺ "then falsehood will spread" became clearly manifest to the point of encompassing statements, actions, and beliefs. And Allah alone is the One from Whom aid is sought.

قَوْلُهُ: (ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُومُهُمْ) أَيِ الْقَرْنِ الَّذِي بَعْدَهُمْ وَهُمْ التَّابِعُونَ (ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُومُهُمْ) وَهُمْ أَتْبَاعُ التَّابِعِينَ، وَاقْتَضَى هَذَا الْحَدِيثُ أَنْ تَكُونَ
الصَّحَابَةُ أَفْضَلَ مِنَ التَّابِعِينَ وَالتَّابِعُونَ أَفْضَلَ مِنْ أَتْبَاعِ التَّابِعِينَ، لَكِنْ هَلْ هَذِهِ الْأَفْضَالِيَّةُ بِالنِّسْبَةِ إِلَى الْمَجْمُوعِ أَوْ الْأَفْرَادِ؟ مَحَلُّ بَحْثٍ
وإِلَى الثَّانِي نَحْوِ الْجُمْهُورِ، وَالْأَوَّلُ قَوْلُ ابْنِ عَبْدِ الْبَرِّ، وَالَّذِي يَظْهَرُ أَنَّ مَنْ قَاتَلَ مَعَ النَّبِيِّ ﷺ أَوْ فِي زَمَانِهِ بِأَمْرِهِ أَوْ أَنْفَقَ شَيْئًا مِنْ مَالِهِ
بِسَبَبِهِ لَا يَعْدِلُهُ فِي الْفَضْلِ أَحَدٌ بَعْدَهُ كَاتِبًا مِنْ كَانَ، وَأَمَّا مَنْ لَمْ يَقْعْ لَهُ ذَلِكَ فَهُوَ مَحَلُّ الْبَحْثِ، وَالْأَصْلُ فِي ذَلِكَ قَوْلُهُ تَعَالَى: ﴿لَا
يَسْتَوِي مِنْكُمْ مَنْ أَنْفَقَ مِنْ قَبْلِ الْفَتْحِ وَقَاتَلَ أُولَئِكَ أَعْظَمُ دَرَجَةً مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ وَقَاتَلُوا﴾ الْآيَةَ

His saying: "Then those who come after them" — meaning the generation [qarn] after them, who are the Successors [tābi'īn]; "then those who come after them" — who are the Successors of the Successors [atbā' al-tābi'īn]. This ḥadīth entails that the Companions are superior to the Successors [tābi'īn], and the Successors [tābi'īn] superior to the Successors of the Successors [atbā' al-tābi'īn]. However, the question of whether this superiority is relative to the group collectively or to individuals is a matter of scholarly discussion. The majority inclined to the second view, whilst the first is the position of Ibn 'Abd al-Barr. What appears evident is that whoever fought alongside the Prophet ﷺ, or fought in his time by his command, or spent any of his wealth on account of him, is unmatched in merit by anyone

who comes after him, whoever that may be. As for one who did not experience any of that, that is where the scholarly debate lies. The basis for this is the saying of Allah, exalted be He: {Not equal among you are those who spent and fought before the Conquest – those are greater in degree than those who spent and fought afterwards}.

وَاحْتَجَّ ابْنُ عَبْدِ الْبَرِّ بِحَدِيثِ: مَثَلُ أُمَّتِي مَثَلُ الْمَطَرِ لَا يُدْرَى أَوْلُهُ خَيْرٌ أَمْ آخِرُهُ، وَهُوَ حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ لَهُ طُرُقٌ قَدْ يَرْتَقِي بِهَا إِلَى الصِّحْحَةِ، وَأَعْرَبَ النَّوَوِيُّ فَعَزَّاهُ فِي فَتَاوِيهِ إِلَى مُسْنَدِ أَبِي يَعْلَى مِنْ حَدِيثِ أَنَسٍ بِإِسْنَادٍ ضَعِيفٍ، مَعَ أَنَّهُ عِنْدَ التِّرْمِذِيِّ بِإِسْنَادٍ أَقْوَى مِنْهُ مِنْ حَدِيثِ أَنَسٍ، وَصَحَّحَهُ ابْنُ حَبَّانَ مِنْ حَدِيثِ عَمَّارٍ، وَأَجَابَ عَنْهُ النَّوَوِيُّ بِمَا حَاصِلُهُ: أَنَّ الْمُرَادَ مَنْ يَشْتَبِهَ عَلَيْهِ الْحَالُ فِي ذَلِكَ مِنْ أَهْلِ الزَّمَانِ الَّذِينَ يُدْرِكُونَ عَيْسَى ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ وَيَرَوْنَ فِي زَمَانِهِ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ وَالْبَرَكَةِ وَانْتِظَامِ كَلِمَةِ الْإِسْلَامِ وَدُخْوَانِ كَلِمَةِ الْكُفْرِ، فَيَشْتَبِهَ الْحَالُ عَلَى مَنْ شَاهَدَ ذَلِكَ أَيُّ الزَّمَانِينَ خَيْرٌ، وَهَذَا الْإِشْتِبَاهُ مُنْذَفِعٌ بِصَرِيحِ قَوْلِهِ ﷺ: خَيْرُ الْقُرُونِ قُرْبِي، وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ.

Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr also cited as evidence the ḥadīth: "The likeness of my community is the likeness of rain – one does not know whether its beginning or its end is better." This is a good [*ḥasan*] ḥadīth with chains of transmission that may elevate it to the level of authenticity [*ṣiḥḥa*]. Al-Nawawī made the curious move of attributing it in his legal opinions [*fatāwā*] to the *Musnad* of Abū Ya‘lā from the ḥadīth of Anas through a weak chain, even though it is found in al-Tirmidhī through a stronger chain from the ḥadīth of Anas, and Ibn Ḥibbān authenticated it from the ḥadīth of ‘Ammār. Al-Nawawī responded to this ḥadīth with a response whose essence is: that what is meant is those of the people of the age who would encounter ‘Isā ibn Maryam, peace be upon him, and would witness during his time the goodness, blessing, unity of the word of Islam, and the defeat of the word of disbelief – so that one who witnessed that would be confused as to which of the two times was better. But this confusion is dispelled by the explicit saying of the Prophet ﷺ: "The best of generations [*qurūn*] is my generation [*qarnī*]." And Allah knows best.

وَقَدْ رَوَى ابْنُ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ مِنْ حَدِيثِ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ جُبَيْرِ بْنِ نُفَيْرٍ أَحَدِ التَّابِعِينَ بِإِسْنَادٍ حَسَنٍ قَالَ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ لِيُدْرِكَنَّ الْمَسِيحُ أَقْوَامًا إِنَّهُمْ لَمِثْلُكُمْ أَوْ خَيْرٌ – ثَلَاثًا – وَلَنْ يُخْزِيَ اللَّهُ أُمَّةً أَنَا أَوْلَاهَا وَالْمَسِيحُ آخِرُهَا.

Ibn Abī Shayba narrated with a good [*ḥasan*] chain from the ḥadīth of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Jubayr ibn Nufayr – one of the Successors [*tābi‘īn*] – who said: The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "The Messiah will surely find communities who are just like you – or better" – saying this three times – "and Allah will never disgrace a community of which I am the first and the Messiah is the last."

وَرَوَى أَبُو دَاوُدَ، وَالتِّرْمِذِيُّ مِنْ حَدِيثِ أَبِي ثَعْلَبَةَ رَفَعَهُ: تَأْتِي أَيَّامٌ لِلْعَامِلِ فِيهِنَّ أَجْرُ حَمْسِينَ، قِيلَ: مِنْهُمْ أَوْ مِنَّا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ؟ قَالَ: بَلَى مِنْكُمْ وَهُوَ شَاهِدٌ لِحَدِيثِ: مَثَلُ أُمَّتِي مَثَلُ الْمَطَرِ، وَاحْتَجَّ ابْنُ عَبْدِ الْبَرِّ أَيْضًا بِحَدِيثِ عُمَرَ رَفَعَهُ: أَفْضَلُ الْخَلْقِ إِيمَانًا قَوْمٌ فِي أَصْلَابِ الرِّجَالِ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِي وَلَمْ يَرَوْنِي، الْحَدِيثُ أَخْرَجَهُ الطَّيَالِسِيُّ وَغَيْرُهُ، لَكِنْ إِسْنَادُهُ ضَعِيفٌ فَلَا حُجَّةَ فِيهِ.

Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī narrated from the ḥadīth of Abū Tha‘laba, attributed to the Prophet: "Days will come in which the reward of the one who acts [righteously] therein will be the reward of fifty." It was said: "Of them or of us, O Messenger of Allah?" He said: "Rather, of you." This serves as corroborating evidence for the ḥadīth "The likeness of my community is the likeness of rain." Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr also cited as evidence the ḥadīth of ‘Umar, attributed to the Prophet: "The most excellent of creation in faith are a people still in the loins of men who will believe in me without having seen me" — recorded by al-Ṭayālīsī and others, but its chain is weak and therefore it is not a valid proof.

وَرَوَى أَحْمَدُ، وَالِدَارِمِيُّ، وَالطَّبْرَانِيُّ مِنْ حَدِيثِ أَبِي جُمُعَةَ قَالَ: قَالَ أَبُو عُبَيْدَةَ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَحَدٌ خَيْرٌ مِنَّا؟ أَسَلَمْنَا مَعَكَ، وَجَاهَدْنَا مَعَكَ. قَالَ: قَوْمٌ يَكُونُونَ مِنْ بَعْدِكُمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِي وَلَمْ يَرَوْني، وَإِسْنَادُهُ حَسَنٌ وَقَدْ صَحَّحَهُ الْحَاكِمُ. وَاحْتَجَّ أَيْضًا بِأَنَّ السَّبَبَ فِي كَوْنِ الْقَرْنِ الْأَوَّلِ خَيْرَ الْقُرُونِ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا غُرَبَاءَ فِي إِيمَانِهِمْ لِكَثْرَةِ الْكُفَّارِ حِينَئِذٍ وَصَبَرَهُمْ عَلَى آذَانِهِمْ وَمَسْئَلِهِمْ بَدِينِهِمْ، قَالَ: فَكَذَلِكَ أَوَاحِرُهُمْ إِذَا أَقَامُوا الدِّينَ وَتَمَسَّكُوا بِهِ وَصَبَرُوا عَلَى الطَّاعَةِ حِينَ ظَهَرِ الْمَعَاصِي وَالْفِتَنِ كَانُوا أَيْضًا عِنْدَ ذَلِكَ غُرَبَاءَ، وَرَكَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فِي ذَلِكَ الزَّمَانِ كَمَا رَكَتْ أَعْمَالُ أَوْلَيْكَ. وَيَشْهَدُ لَهُ مَا رَوَاهُ مُسْلِمٌ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَفَعَهُ: بَدَأَ الْإِسْلَامُ غَرِيبًا وَسَيَعُودُ غَرِيبًا كَمَا بَدَأَ فَطُوبَى لِلْغُرَبَاءِ.

Aḥmad, al-Dārimī, and al-Ṭabarānī narrated from the ḥadīth of Abū Jum‘a, who said: Abū ‘Ubayda said: "O Messenger of Allah, is there anyone better than us? We embraced Islam with you and waged jihad with you." He said: "A people who will come after you, who will believe in me without having seen me." Its chain is good [*ḥasan*] and al-Ḥākim authenticated it. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr also argued that the reason the first generation [*qarn*] is the best of generations [*qurūn*] is that they were strangers [*ghurabā*] in their faith on account of the abundance of disbelievers at that time, and their patience in the face of harm, and their adherence to their religion. He said: Likewise, the later ones amongst them, if they uphold the religion, adhere to it, and are patient in obedience at a time when sins and trials are prevalent, they too will be strangers [*ghurabā*] in that regard, and their deeds will be pure in that time just as the deeds of those earlier ones were pure. Evidence for this is what Muslim narrated from Abū Hurayra, attributed to the Prophet: "Islam began as something strange and will return to being strange as it began — so glad tidings [*tūbā*] to the strangers [*ghurabā*]."

وَقَدْ تَعَبَّتْ كَلَامُ ابْنِ عَبْدِ الرَّبِّ بِأَنَّ مُفْتَضَى كَلَامِهِ أَنْ يَكُونَ فِيمَنْ يَأْتِي بَعْدَ الصَّحَابَةِ مَنْ يَكُونُ أَفْضَلَ مِنْ بَعْضِ الصَّحَابَةِ، وَبِذَلِكَ صَرَخَ الْفَرَطِيُّ، لَكِنَّ كَلَامَ ابْنِ عَبْدِ الرَّبِّ لَيْسَ عَلَى الْإِطْلَاقِ فِي حَقِّ جَمِيعِ الصَّحَابَةِ، فَإِنَّهُ صَرَخَ فِي كَلَامِهِ بِاسْتِنَاءِ أَهْلِ بَدْرِ وَالْحَدِيثِيَّةِ.

The position of Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr was objected to on the grounds that what his words entail is that amongst those who come after the Companions there would be those who are superior to some of the Companions — and this was explicitly stated by al-Qurṭubī. However, the words of Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr are not absolute with respect to all the Companions, for he explicitly stated in his

discussion that the People of Badr and the People of Ḥudaybiyya are excepted.

نَعَمْ وَالَّذِي ذَهَبَ إِلَيْهِ الْجُنْهُورُ أَنَّ فَضِيلَةَ الصُّحْبَةِ لَا يَغْدِلُهَا عَمَلٌ لِمُشَاهَدَةِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ ﷺ، وَأَمَّا مَنْ اتَّفَقَ لَهُ الذَّبُّ عَنْهُ وَالسَّبْقُ إِلَيْهِ بِالْهَجْرَةِ أَوْ النُّصْرَةِ وَصَبَطَ الشَّرْعَ الْمُتَلَقَّى عَنْهُ وَتَبَلَّغَهُ لِمَنْ بَعْدَهُ فَإِنَّهُ لَا يَغْدِلُهُ أَحَدٌ مِمَّنْ بَأْتِيَ بَعْدَهُ، لِأَنَّهُ مَا مِنْ حَصَلَةٍ مِنْ الْحِصَالِ الْمَذْكُورَةِ إِلَّا وَالَّذِي سَبَقَ بِهَا مِثْلُ أَجْرٍ مَنْ عَمِلَ بِهَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ، فَظَهَرَ فَضْلُهُمْ.

Indeed, what the majority held is that the merit of companionship [*ṣuḥba*] — on account of the direct witnessing of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ — is not matched by any deed. As for one who additionally had the distinction of defending him, of preceding others in emigration [*hijra*] or in giving victory [*nuṣra*], and of preserving and transmitting the revealed law to those who came after — no one who comes after him is equal to him, for there is not a single one of the aforementioned qualities except that the one who preceded in it receives the like of the reward of everyone who acted upon it after him. Thus, their superiority becomes manifest.

وَمُحْصَلُ النَّزَاعِ يَتَمَحَّضُ فِيمَنْ لَمْ يَحْضَلْ لَهُ إِلَّا مَجْرَدُ الْمَشَاهَدَةِ كَمَا تَقَدَّمَ، فَإِنْ جُمِعَ بَيْنَ مُخْتَلِفِ الْأَحَادِيثِ الْمَذْكُورَةِ كَانَ مُتَّحِجًا، عَلَى أَنَّ حَدِيثَ: لِلْعَامِلِ مِنْهُمْ أَجْرٌ خَمْسِينَ مِنْكُمْ، لَا يَدُلُّ عَلَى أَفْضَلِيَّةِ غَيْرِ الصَّحَابَةِ عَلَى الصَّحَابَةِ، لِأَنَّ مَجْرَدَ زِيَادَةِ الْأَجْرِ لَا يَسْتَلْزِمُ ثُبُوتَ الْأَفْضَلِيَّةِ الْمُطْلَقَةِ، وَأَيْضًا فَلِأَجْرِ إِمَّا يَقَعُ تَفَاضُلُهُ بِالنِّسْبَةِ إِلَى مَا يُمَاتِلُهُ فِي ذَلِكَ الْعَمَلِ فَأَمَّا مَا فَازَ بِهِ مَنْ شَاهَدَ النَّبِيَّ ﷺ مِنْ زِيَادَةِ فَضِيلَةِ الْمَشَاهَدَةِ فَلَا يَغْدِلُهُ فِيهَا أَحَدٌ، فَيَهْدِيهِ الطَّرِيقَ يُمَكِّنُ تَأْوِيلَ الْأَحَادِيثِ الْمُتَقَدِّمَةِ، وَأَمَّا حَدِيثُ أَبِي جُمُعَةَ فَلَمْ تَتَّفِقِ الرُّوَاةُ عَلَى لَفْظِهِ، فَقَدْ رَوَاهُ بَعْضُهُمْ بِلَفْظِ الْحَيْرِيَّةِ كَمَا تَقَدَّمَ، وَرَوَاهُ بَعْضُهُمْ بِلَفْظِ: فَلَنَا: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، هَلْ مِنْ قَوْمٍ أَعْظَمَ مِنَّا أَجْرًا؟ الْحَدِيثُ أَخْرَجَهُ الطَّبْرَائِيُّ وَإِسْنَادُ هَذِهِ الرِّوَايَةِ أَقْوَى مِنْ إِسْنَادِ الرِّوَايَةِ الْمُتَقَدِّمَةِ، وَهِيَ تُوَافِقُ حَدِيثَ أَبِي ثَعْلَبَةَ. وَقَدْ تَقَدَّمَ الْجَوَابُ عَنْهُ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ.

The crux of the dispute is therefore restricted to one for whom nothing occurred except the bare witnessing [*mushāhada*] alone, as previously stated. If a reconciliation is made between the various differing ḥadīths mentioned, that would be the appropriate approach — though the ḥadīth "the one who acts amongst them has the reward of fifty of you" does not indicate the superiority of non-Companions over the Companions, for a mere increase in reward does not necessarily establish absolute superiority. Moreover, the differential in reward occurs only in relation to that which resembles the given deed in that respect; as for what the one who witnessed the Prophet ﷺ gained by way of the additional merit of direct witnessing [*mushāhada*] — no one equals him in that. By this means it is possible to interpret [*tā'wīl*] the ḥadīths cited above. As for the ḥadīth of Abū Jum'a, the narrators did not agree on its wording — some narrated it with the word "better" [*khayriyya*] as previously mentioned, and some narrated it with the wording: "We said: O Messenger of Allah, is there any people with a greater reward than us?" — recorded by al-Ṭabarānī, and the chain of this narration is stronger than the chain of the earlier narration, and it accords with the ḥadīth of Abū Thā'laba. The response to it has already preceded. And Allah knows best.

قَوْلُهُ: (فَلَا أُدْرِي أَذَكَرَ بَعْدَ قَرْنِهِ قَرْنَيْنِ أَوْ ثَلَاثَةً) وَقَعَ مِثْلُ هَذَا الشَّكِّ فِي حَدِيثِ ابْنِ مَسْعُودٍ، وَأَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ عِنْدَ مُسْلِمٍ، وَفِي حَدِيثِ بُرَيْدَةَ عِنْدَ أَحْمَدَ، وَجَاءَ فِي أَكْثَرِ الطَّرِيقِ بَعِيرِ شَكِّ، مِنْهَا عَنِ الثُّعْمَانِ بْنِ بَشِيرٍ عِنْدَ أَحْمَدَ، وَعَنْ مَالِكٍ عِنْدَ مُسْلِمٍ عَنْ عَائِشَةَ قَالَتْ رَجُلٌ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَيُّ النَّاسِ خَيْرٌ؟ قَالَ: الْقَرْنُ الَّذِي أَنَا فِيهِ، ثُمَّ الثَّانِي، ثُمَّ الثَّلَاثُ، وَوَقَعَ فِي رِوَايَةِ الطَّبْرَانِيِّ، وَسَمَّوْهُ مَا يُفَسِّرُ بِهِ هَذَا السُّؤَالَ، وَهُوَ مَا أَخْرَجَاهُ مِنْ طَرِيقِ بِلَالِ بْنِ سَعْدِ بْنِ تَمِيمٍ عَنْ أَبِيهِ قَالَ: قُلْتُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَيُّ النَّاسِ خَيْرٌ؟ فَقَالَ: أَنَا وَقَرْنِي، فَذَكَرَ مِثْلَهُ. وَلِلطَّبْرَانِيِّ مِنْ حَدِيثِ عُمَرَ رَفَعَهُ: خَيْرُ أُمَّتِي الْقَرْنُ الَّذِي أَنَا مِنْهُمْ، ثُمَّ الثَّانِي، ثُمَّ الثَّلَاثُ، وَوَقَعَ فِي حَدِيثِ جَعْدَةَ بْنِ هُبَيْرَةَ عِنْدَ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ، وَالطَّبْرَانِيِّ إِثْبَاتِ الْقَرْنِ الرَّابِعِ وَلَفْظُهُ: خَيْرُ النَّاسِ قَرْنِي، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُوهُمْ، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُوهُمْ، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُوهُمْ، ثُمَّ الْآخَرُونَ أَرْدَأُ، وَرِجَالُهُ ثَقَاتٌ، إِلَّا أَنَّ جَعْدَةَ مُخْتَلَفٌ فِي صُحْبَتِهِ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ

His saying: "I do not know whether he mentioned two generations [*qarnayn*] or three after his own generation [*qarn*]" — a similar doubt occurred in the ḥadīths of Ibn Mas‘ūd and Abū Hurayra in (Sahih) Muslim, and in the ḥadīth of Burayda in Aḥmad. In most of the chains it is narrated without any doubt, amongst them from al-Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr in (Musnad) Aḥmad, and from Mālik in (Sahih) Muslim from ‘Ā’isha: "A man said: O Messenger of Allah, which people are the best? He said: The generation [*qarn*] in which I live, then the second, then the third." In the narration of al-Ṭabarānī and Sammawayh there occurs what explains this question, namely what they both recorded through the chain of Bilāl ibn Sa‘d ibn Tamīm from his father, who said: "I said: O Messenger of Allah, which people are the best? He said: I and my generation [*qarnī*]" — then mentioning the rest similarly. Al-Ṭayālīsī has from the ḥadīth of ‘Umar, attributed to the Prophet: "The best of my community is the generation [*qarn*] from which I am, then the second, then the third."

In the ḥadīth of Ja‘da ibn Hubayra in Ibn Abī Shayba and al-Ṭabarānī there occurs the affirmation of a fourth generation [*qarn*], and its wording is: "The best of people is my generation [*qarnī*], then those who come after them, then those who come after them, then those who come after them — then the last ones are the worst." Its narrators are trustworthy [*thiqāt*], though there is disagreement regarding Ja‘da's status as a Companion. And Allah knows best.^{iv}

قَوْلُهُ: (ثُمَّ إِنَّ بَعْدَهُمْ قَوْمًا) كَذَا لِلْأَكْثَرِ، وَبَعْضُهُمْ قَوْمٌ فَيَحْتَمِلُ أَنْ يَكُونَ مِنَ النَّاسِ عَلَى طَرِيقَةٍ مَنْ لَا يَكْتُبُ الْأَلِفَ فِي الْمَنْصُوبِ وَيَحْتَمِلُ أَنْ تَكُونَ إِنَّ تَقْرِيبِيَّةً بِمَعْنَى نَعَمْ وَفِيهِ بَعْدٌ وَتَكْلُفٌ. وَاسْتَدِلُّ بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ عَلَى تَعْدِيلِ أَهْلِ الْقُرُونِ الثَّلَاثَةِ وَإِنْ تَفَاوَتَتْ مَنَازِلُهُمْ فِي الْفَضْلِ، وَهَذَا مَحْمُولٌ عَلَى الْعَالِبِ وَالْأَكْثَرِيَّةِ، فَقَدْ وَجَدَ فِيمَنْ بَعْدَ الصَّحَابَةِ مِنَ الْقَرْنَيْنِ مَنْ وَجَدَتْ فِيهِ الصِّفَاتُ الْمَذْكُورَةُ الْمَذْمُومَةُ لَكِنْ بَقْلَةً، بِخِلَافِ مَنْ بَعْدَ الْقُرُونِ الثَّلَاثَةِ فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ كَثُرَ فِيهِمْ وَاسْتَهْرَ، وَفِيهِ بَيَانٌ مَنْ تَرُدُّ شَهَادَتُهُمْ وَهُمْ مِنَ اتَّصَفَ بِالصِّفَاتِ الْمَذْكُورَةِ، وَإِلَى ذَلِكَ الْإِشَارَةُ بِقَوْلِهِ: ثُمَّ يَفْشُو الْكُذِبُ أَيُّ يَكْثُرُ. وَاسْتَدِلُّ بِهِ عَلَى جَوَازِ الْمُفَاضَلَةِ بَيْنَ الصَّحَابَةِ قَالَهُ الْمَازِرِيُّ، وَقَدْ تَقَدَّمَ بَاقِي شَرْحِهِ فِي الشَّهَادَاتِ

His saying: "Then after them will come a people [*qawman*]" — this is the reading of the majority, whilst in some versions it is *qawmun*, which may be explained as a scribal convention of those who do not write the *alif* in the accusative, or it may be that *inna* here is affirmatory in the sense of "yes" — though this is far-fetched and contrived. This ḥadīth has been used as

evidence for the upright character [ta'dīl] of the people of the three generations [qurūn al-thalātha], even though their ranks in merit varied. This is to be understood as applying to the majority and the predominant condition, for amongst those of the two generations [qarnayn] after the Companions there were indeed some who exhibited the aforementioned blameworthy characteristics – though rarely; unlike those after the three generations [qurūn], amongst whom such characteristics became widespread and well-known. The ḥadīth also clarifies those whose testimony is to be rejected, namely those who are characterised by the said qualities. This is what is indicated by the saying "then falsehood will spread" – meaning it will become abundant. Al-Māzarī said that it has also been used as evidence for the permissibility of making distinctions in merit between individual Companions. The remainder of its commentary has preceded in the Book of Testimony.

الْحَدِيثُ الثَّلَاثُ حَدِيثُ ابْنِ مَسْعُودٍ فِي الْمَعْنَى وَقَدْ تَقَدَّمَ فِي الشَّهَادَاتِ سَنَدًا وَمَتْنًا، وَتَقَدَّمَ مِنْ شَرْحِهِ هُنَاكَ مَا يَتَعَلَّقُ بِالشَّهَادَاتِ، وَاللَّهُ
أَعْلَمُ.

The third ḥadīth is the ḥadīth of Ibn Mas'ūd, which is similar in meaning, and it has preceded in the Book of Testimony with its chain and text, along with the portion of its commentary related to testimony. And Allah knows best." (End of quote from *Faḥ al-Bārī*).

Al-Sakhāwī (d. 902 AH), the distinguished student of Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalānī, likewise confirmed this in his *Faḥ al-Muḡīth bi-Sharḥ Alfiyyat al-Ḥadīth li-l-'Irāqī* (4/152-153), stating:

(«خَيْرُ النَّاسِ قَرْنِي، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ، ثُمَّ الَّذِينَ يَلُونَهُمْ»). وَالْجُمْهُورُ عَلَى خِلَافِهِ فَيَمُنُّ بَعْدَ الصَّحَابَةِ، كَمَا تَقَدَّمَ فِي الْمُرْسَلِ، وَأَنَّهُ لَا بُدَّ مِنَ التَّنْصِيصِ عَلَى عَدَائِهِمْ كَعَدَائِهِمْ. قَالُوا: وَالْحَدِيثُ مَحْمُولٌ فِي الْقَرْنَيْنِ بَعْدَ الْأَوَّلِ عَلَى الْغَالِبِ وَالْأَكْثَرِيَّةِ؛ لِأَنَّهُ قَدْ وُجِدَ فِيهِمَا مَنْ وَجَدَتْ فِيهِ الصِّفَاتُ الْمَذْمُومَةُ، لَكِنْ بِقَلَّةٍ فِي أَوْطَانِهَا، بِخِلَافِ مَنْ بَعْدَهُ؛ فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ كَثُرَ فِيهِ وَاشْتَهَرَ، وَكَانَ، آخِرُ مَنْ كَانَ فِي أَتْبَاعِ التَّابِعِينَ مِمَّنْ يُقْبَلُ قَوْلُهُ مِنْ عَاشٍ إِلَى خُدُودِ الْعُشْرَيْنِ وَمَائَتَيْنِ، وَفِي هَذَا الْوَقْتِ ظَهَرَتِ الْبِدْعُ ظُهُورًا فَاشِيًا وَأَطْلَقَتِ الْمُعْتَرِئَةُ أَلْسِنَتَهَا، وَرَفَعَتِ الْفَلَاسِفَةُ رُءُوسَهَا، وَأَمْتَحَنَ أَهْلُ الْعِلْمِ لِيَقُولُوا بِخَلْقِ الْقُرْآنِ، وَتَغَيَّرَتِ الْأَحْوَالُ تَغَيَّرًا شَدِيدًا، وَلَمْ يَزَلِ الْأَمْرُ فِي نَقْصٍ إِلَى الْآنِ، نَسَأَلُ اللَّهَ السَّلَامَةَ

"The best of people is my generation [qarnī], then those who come after them, then those who come after them." The majority hold the contrary position regarding those who came after the Companions, as has preceded in the discussion of the disconnected narration [mursal], namely that their uprightness [adāla] must be explicitly established just as is the case with others. They said: The ḥadīth is to be understood, with regard to the two generations [qarnayn] after the first, as applying to the majority and the predominant condition, for there were indeed found amongst them those who exhibited the blameworthy characteristics – though rarely in the first of the two; unlike those who came after them, for such characteristics

became widespread and well-known amongst them. The last of the Successors of the Successors [Atbā' al-Tābi'in] whose opinion is accepted were those who lived until approximately the year 220 AH. At this time innovations [bida'] appeared and spread widely, the Mu'tazila gave free rein to their tongues, the philosophers raised their heads, the scholars of knowledge were put to trial to make them affirm the createdness of the Qur'an, and conditions changed drastically. Matters have continued to decline to this day – we ask Allah for safety [salāma].”

Conclusion:

The foregoing examination of the ḥadīth traditions concerning the blessed generations [al-qurūn al-mubāraka] has demonstrated, through an extensive survey of the primary sources and the statements of the leading scholars of ḥadīth, several important conclusions that may be drawn with a reasonable degree of scholarly confidence.

The predominant and best-established position – supported by the overwhelming majority of narrations from multiple Companions including Ibn Mas'ūd, Imrān ibn Ḥuşayn, 'Ā'isha, and 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, (may Allah be pleased with them all) and affirmed without any doubt or hesitation in the two Ṣaḥīḥ collections – is that the Prophet ﷺ praised three generations: his own generation [qarnī], then those who come after them, then those who come after them. This is the position upon which the scholars of ḥadīth settled, and it is the foundation upon which the definition of the Salaf al-Ṣāliḥīn rests. Imām al-Nawawī stated with clarity that the scholars are in agreement that the best of all generations [qurūn] is the generation of the Prophet ﷺ, and al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī further elaborated in Faḥḥ al-Bārī that this ḥadīth entails that the Companions are superior to the Successors [al-Tābi'ūn], and the Successors superior to the Successors of the Successors [Atbā' al-Tābi'in] – establishing a clear hierarchy of excellence across the three foundational generations of Islam.

Whilst certain narrations mention a fourth praiseworthy generation, the narrations affirming three praiseworthy generations are more numerous, more soundly transmitted, and more free from doubt – as is evident from the sheer breadth of chains recorded in the two Ṣaḥīḥ collections and the major Sunan and Masānīd ḥadīth collections from several Companions without any expression of uncertainty. The variation observed across different chains and narrators reflects the well-known phenomenon of transmission by meaning [riwāya bi-l-mā'nā] and the uncertainty of some narrators regarding the precise wording of the original ḥadīth, and does not in any way undermine the firmly established praise of the three blessed generations.

What emerges from this entire discussion is a picture of remarkable scholarly acceptance: that the Salaf al-Ṣāliḥīn are the three generations praised by the Prophet ﷺ – the Companions [al-Ṣaḥāba], the Successors [al-Tābi‘ūn], and the Successors of the Successors [Atbā‘ al-Tābi‘īn] – and that adherence to their path in creed, methodology, and practice is an obligation binding upon the Muslim community. As al-Sakhāwī noted, matters have continued in a state of decline since the close of the third generation, rendering the obligation of returning to the methodology of the Salaf not merely a scholarly preference but an urgent religious necessity for every Muslim who seeks the pleasure of Allah Most High.

It follows from this that the true inheritors and representatives of the Salaf al-Ṣāliḥīn after the three blessed generations are none other than the scholars and communities of the Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā‘a – the Ash‘arīs, the Māturīdīs, and the virtuous Atharīs^v – whose scholarly traditions have maintained unbroken chains of transmission [asānīd mutaṣṣila] in every generation going back to the Prophet ﷺ and his Companions. These are the communities that preserved the creed, the sciences of ḥadīth, the schools of jurisprudence [madhāhib], and the spiritual path of the Salaf across the centuries, transmitting them faithfully from teacher to student in an uninterrupted succession. Those who in recent times have appropriated the label of "Salafi" for themselves whilst severing or disregarding these chains of transmitted scholarship – and whilst departing from the established positions of the great Imāms of the Ahl al-Sunna – have no genuine claim to representing the Salaf al-Ṣāliḥīn. The true mark of connection to the Salaf is not a self-adopted name, but rather an unbroken and verifiable chain of transmitted knowledge, sound creed (‘aqīda), and fidelity to the methodology of the three praised generations in all its dimensions. And Allah alone grants success, and upon Him alone is reliance.

Compiled by:

Abul Hasan Hussain Ahmed

Friday 17th April 2026 / 29th Shawwal 1447 AH

https://t.me/Darul_Tahqiq

End notes:

ⁱ Meaning: Qāḍī ‘Iyād ibn Mūsā al-Yaḥṣubī (d. 544 AH), renowned for his celebrated *al-Shifā’ bi-Ta’rīf Huqūq al-Muṣṭafā*, also wrote a commentary on *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* that was later utilised by al-Nawawī.

ⁱⁱ Footnotes by the editor (Wā’il Muḥammad Bakr Zahrān):

(1) Narrated by al-Ṭaḥāwī in *Sharḥ Ma’ānī al-Āthār* (5669), and by al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Mu‘jam al-Kabīr* (6/44, no. 5460), via the route of Abū Mishar. It was also narrated by Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim in *al-Āḥād wa al-Mathānī* (4/406, no. 2456), and likewise by al-Ṭabarānī (6/44, no. 5460), via the route of Hishām ibn ‘Ammār from Ṣadaqa. Al-Haythamī said in *Majma‘ al-Zawā’id* (9/743): "Its narrators are reliable [thiqa]."

(2) *Al-Thiqāt* (7/224, no. 9783).

ⁱⁱⁱ A type of ḥadīth collection

^{iv} This narration, with the mention of four praiseworthy generations, is also found in *al-Mustadrak ‘alā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn* of Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī (321–405 AH), edited by Dār al-Risāla al-‘Ālamiyya (first edition, 1439 AH / 2018 CE, edited, referenced, and annotated by: ‘Ādil Murshid (vols. 1, 4, 7 jointly, 9), Aḥmad Barhūm (vol. 2), Muḥammad Kāmil Qara Balī (vols. 3, 5, 6), Sa‘īd al-Laḥḥām (vols. 7 jointly, 8). The Arabic text is available here - <https://app.turath.io/book/1424?page=3943>

From 5/801–805:

4932 – Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Amr al-Bazzāz narrated to us in Baghdad, confirming the soundness of what Muṣ‘ab mentioned; Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ju‘fī narrated to us; Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba narrated to us; ‘Abd Allāh ibn Idrīs narrated to us, from his father, from his grandfather, from Ja‘da ibn Hubayra, who said: I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say: "The best of people is my generation [qarnī], then those who come after them, then those who come after them, then those who come after them – then the last ones are the worst [ardā]."

(1) It is sound by virtue of corroborating narrations [ṣaḥīḥ li-ghayriḥ]. The narrators of this chain are acceptable, though there is disagreement regarding Ja‘da ibn Hubayra's status as a Companion. Nevertheless, he did see the Prophet ﷺ, for he is the son of Hubayra ibn Abī Wahb, who fled at the time of the Conquest of Makka to Najrān and died as a disbeliever, and Islam had separated him from Umm Hānī’ bint Abī Ṭālib – the mother of Ja‘da. There is therefore no doubt that Ja‘da was born before or just prior to the Conquest of Makka. For this reason, al-Ḥāfiẓ said in *al-Iṣāba* (1/527): "As for his having seen the Prophet ﷺ, that is certain, for he was born during the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ and is the son of the Prophet's cousin's daughter, and the particular closeness of Umm Hānī’ to the Prophet ﷺ is well known."

We say: What has occurred here of his explicitly stating that he heard directly from the Prophet ﷺ is certainly an error, for none of the students of Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba mentioned his hearing of this report from the Prophet ﷺ – and amongst them are major Ḥuffāz of greater seniority and standing than the one who narrated it from him here. Likewise, Abū Nu‘aym al-Faḍl ibn Dukayn narrated it from Dāwūd ibn Yazīd al-Awdī – the brother of Idrīs ibn Yazīd, father of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Idrīs – from his father, from Ja‘da, without mentioning his hearing it from the Prophet ﷺ.

There was also another disagreement regarding this Ja‘da. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in al-Isti‘āb, followed by al-Mizzī in Tahdhīb al-Kamāl (4/566) and al-‘Alā’ī in Jāmi‘ al-Taḥṣīl, held the view that this Ja‘da is Ibn Hubayra al-Ashja‘ī and not al-Makhzūmī the son of Umm Hānī’. Al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar said in al-Iṣāba (1/483): "However, I have not found amongst those who recorded it anyone who described him as al-Ashja‘ī. Indeed, Ibn Abī Shayba, Aḥmad ibn Mānī’, Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim, al-Baghawī, al-Bāwardī, Ibn Qānī’, and al-Ṭabarānī all recorded it in the biographical entry of Ja‘da ibn Hubayra al-Makhzūmī, and in the Muṣannaf of Ibn Abī Shayba it appears as 'Ja‘da ibn Hubayra ibn Abī Wahb' – and this is al-Makhzūmī – so it appears that Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr erred in treating him as a different person." We say: Al-Ḥāfiẓ likewise attributed to Ibn Abī Shayba that he named him in his Muṣannaf as Ja‘da ibn Hubayra ibn Abī Wahb, and Mughlaṭāy preceded al-Ḥāfiẓ in this in his Ikmāl Tahdhīb al-Kamāl – though this name does not appear in any of the currently available manuscripts of the Muṣannaf according to the editions of ‘Awwāma, al-Luḥayḍān, and al-Jum‘a. It may therefore be an addition by some copyists in certain manuscripts – and Allah knows best. What remains is the practice of those who compiled works on the Companions of recording this ḥadīth in the biographical entry of Ja‘da al-Makhzūmī, to which is added the statement of Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī in al-Marāsīl to his son, after Abū Ḥātim mentioned this ḥadīth: "Ja‘da ibn Hubayra is a Successor [tābi‘ī] and is the son of the sister of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib."

It is further noteworthy that al-Ḥākim in Tārīkh Naysābūr denied that he saw the Prophet ﷺ, as stated in Ikmāl Tahdhīb al-Kamāl by Mughlaṭāy (3/197) – and this is remarkable given that al-Ḥākim here in al-Mustadrak affirmed his Companionship [ṣuḥba]!

It is found in the Musnad of Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba as in al-Maṭālib al-‘Āliya of Ibn Ḥajar (1/4161), and in his Muṣannaf (12/176), though in the Muṣannaf it mentions three praiseworthy generations and not four – and likewise in all currently available manuscripts according to the editions of ‘Awwāma, al-Luḥayḍān, and al-Jum‘a.

It was also recorded by ‘Abd ibn Ḥumayd (383), Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim in al-Āḥād wa al-Mathānī (726) and in al-Sunna (1476), al-Ṭabarānī in al-Kabīr (2187) from Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥaḍramī, and Abū Nu‘aym in Ma‘rifat al-Ṣaḥāba (1673) through the route of Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Abī Shayba – all four of them [‘Abd ibn Ḥumayd, Ibn Abī ‘Āṣim, Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥaḍramī, and Muḥammad ibn ‘Uthmān ibn Abī Shayba] from Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba, corresponding to his narration in his Musnad which mentions four praiseworthy generations.

Ibn Abī Khaythama recorded it in the second volume of his *Tārīkh al-Kabīr* (3650); Ibn Qānī in *Muʿjam al-Ṣaḥāba* (1/154) from Muḥammad ibn al-ʿAbbās al-Muʿaddib; and Ibn al-Athīr in *Usd al-Ghāba* (1/340) through the route of Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim — all three of them [Ibn Abī Khaythama, Muḥammad ibn al-ʿAbbās, and Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim] from Abū Bakr ibn Abī Shayba, corresponding to his narration in the *Muṣannaf*, i.e. mentioning three praiseworthy generations only.

Abū Yaʿlā recorded it in his *Musnad al-Kabīr* as in *al-Maṭālib al-ʿĀliya* (4161/3), from Zakariyyā ibn Yaḥyā Zaḥmawayh al-Wāsiṭī, from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Idrīs, through this chain, corresponding to the narration of Ibn Abī Shayba in his *Musnad* — i.e. mentioning four praiseworthy generations — as is required by the practice of al-Ḥāfiẓ in *al-Maṭālib* where he referred back to what preceded, namely Ibn Abī Shayba and ʿAbd ibn Ḥumayd. And Allah knows best.

Al-Ṭabarānī recorded it in *al-Kabīr* (2188) through the route of Abū Kurayb Muḥammad ibn al-ʿAlāʾ, from ʿAbd Allāh ibn Idrīs, through the same chain, with the wording: "The best of people is my generation [qarnī], then those who come after them — then the last ones are the most vile [ardhalu]" — mentioning only two praiseworthy generations, and this is anomalous [gharīb].

Al-Bukhārī recorded it in his *Tārīkh al-Kabīr* (8/347); Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī in *Musnad al-Wuḥdān* as in *al-Marāsīl* of his son (70); Ibn Abī Ḥātim in *al-ʿIlal* (2643) from Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī; Abū al-Qāsim al-Baghawī in *al-Ṣaḥāba* as in *al-Ikmāl* of Mughlaṭāy (3/198) from Ibrāhīm ibn Hānīʾ; and the author [al-Ḥākim] in *Tārīkh Naysābūr* as in *al-Ikmāl* (3/197) through the route of Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Naṣr al-Labbād — all five of them [al-Bukhārī, Abū Ḥātim, Abū Zurʿa, Ibrāhīm ibn Hānīʾ, and al-Labbād] from Abū Nuʿaym al-Faḍl ibn Dukayn, from Dāwūd ibn Yazīd ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Awdī, from his father, from Jaʿda. Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī cited its wording, saying in his narration: "The best of people is my generation [qarnī] — those from whom I am — then those who come after them, then those who come after them; then the fourth is the most vile [ardhalu] until the Hour is established." Likewise, the narration of Abū Nuʿaym al-Faḍl ibn Dukayn mentions only three praiseworthy generations, corresponding to the narration of Ibn Abī Shayba in his *Muṣannaf*, and the narration of Abū Zurʿa al-Rāzī does not contain mention of the fourth and most vile generation.

Dāwūd ibn Yazīd is the brother of Idrīs ibn Yazīd, the father of ʿAbd Allāh — so they are two brothers who both narrated the ḥadīth from their father from Jaʿda. However, Yūnus ibn Bukayr disagreed with Abū Nuʿaym al-Faḍl ibn Dukayn in his narration from Dāwūd ibn Yazīd — as recorded by al-Bazzār (9661), Ibn Abī Ḥātim in *al-ʿIlal* (2643), and al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Awsaṭ* (5475) — narrating it from Dāwūd ibn Yazīd, from his father, from Abū Hurayra, substituting Abū Hurayra in place of Jaʿda ibn Hubayra. Abū Zurʿa said, as transmitted from him by Ibn Abī Ḥātim: "Abū Nuʿaym is more retentive [ahfaz] than Yūnus, and Jaʿda has no Companionship [ṣuḥba]" — meaning that he gave preference to the mention of Jaʿda. This is further supported by the narration of Idrīs ibn Yazīd al-Awdī from his father from Jaʿda ibn Hubayra, confirming that Yūnus ibn Bukayr erred. And Allah Most High knows best.

His saying "ardā" means "worse" [ardaʾ], with facilitation [tashīl] of the hamza.

Corroborating evidence for the mention of four praiseworthy generations is found in the ḥadīth of ‘Abd Allāh ibn Mas‘ūd in one of his narrations recorded by Aḥmad (6/3594), though in another narration of his in Muslim (2533), after mentioning three generations, the words occur: "I do not know whether it was the third or the fourth."

And the ḥadīth of al-Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr in Aḥmad (30/18349) and (18447). And the ḥadīth of ‘Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn in Aḥmad (33/19835), Muslim (2535), al-Nasā‘ī (4732), and Ibn Ḥibbān (7229) – though in all their narrations except Ibn Ḥibbān the words occur: "‘Imrān said: I do not know whether the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said two or three generations after his own."

And likewise in a narration of Burayda al-Aslamī in Aḥmad (38/23024).

In other narrations of Ibn Mas‘ūd mentioning three praiseworthy generations: Aḥmad (7/3963), (4130), (4173), (4217); al-Bukhārī (2652), (3651), (6429), (6658); Muslim (2533); Ibn Māja (2362); al-Tirmidhī (3859); al-Nasā‘ī (5987), (5988), (11750); and Ibn Ḥibbān (4328) and (7222) – though some narrations contain the phrase "three or four" or "I do not know whether he said the third or the fourth."

And likewise in other narrations of al-Nu‘mān ibn Bashīr mentioning three praiseworthy generations: Aḥmad (30/18348) and (18428), and Ibn Ḥibbān (6727). And likewise in other narrations of ‘Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn mentioning three praiseworthy generations: Aḥmad (33/19820), (19906), (19953); al-Bukhārī (2651), (3650), (6428), (6695); Abū Dāwūd (4657); al-Tirmidhī (2221) and (2302) – and in the narrations of most of them the words occur: "‘Imrān said: I do not know whether he mentioned two or three generations after his own generation." And in some narrations: "whether he mentioned the third or not."

What is observable from the citation of these narrations is that the mention of three praiseworthy generations is more frequent than the mention of four. And it has come in other narrations from other Companions mentioning three without any doubt – such as the ḥadīth of ‘Ā’isha in Muslim (2536) and the ḥadīth of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb in al-Ṭayālīsī (32). And Allah Most High knows best.

∨ Imām Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Ṣaffārīnī (d. 1188 AH) was a distinguished Ḥanbalī scholar of the Atharī creed, hailing from Nābulus in Palestine. In his *Lawāmi‘ al-Anwār al-Bahiyya* (1/20), he stated:

الْمُرَادُ بِمَذْهَبِ السَّلَفِ مَا كَانَ عَلَيْهِ الصَّحَابَةُ الْكِرَامُ – رِضْوَانُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْهِمْ – وَأَعْيَانُ التَّابِعِينَ هُمْ بِإِحْسَانٍ وَأَتْبَاعُهُمْ وَأَيْمَةُ الدِّينِ مِمَّنْ شُهِدَ لَهُ
بِالْإِمَامَةِ، وَعُرِفَ عَظْمُ شَأْنِهِ فِي الدِّينِ، وَتَلَقَّى النَّاسُ كَلَامَهُمْ خَلْفَ عَن سَلَفٍ، دُونَ مَنْ رُمِيَ بِبِدْعَةٍ، أَوْ شُهِرَ بِلَقَبٍ غَيْرِ مَرْضِيٍّ مِثْلِ الْخَوَارِجِ
وَالرُّوَافِضِ وَالْقَدْرِيَّةِ وَالْمُرْجِيَّةِ وَالْجُبَرِيَّةِ وَالْجُهْمِيَّةِ وَالْمُعْتَزِلَةَ وَالْكَرَامِيَّةَ، وَنَحْوِ هَؤُلَاءِ مِمَّا يَأْتِي ذِكْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ تَعْدَادِ الْفِرَقِ

“What is meant by the school [madhhab] of the predecessors [salaf] is what the noble Companions – may Allah be pleased with them all – were upon, along with the foremost of those who followed them in righteousness and their successors, and

the Imams of the religion from those whose leadership [Imāma] was attested, whose great standing in the religion was recognised, and whose words the people received generation after generation – excluding those accused of innovation [bid‘a] or known by a disapproved title, such as the Khawārij, the Rawāfiḍ, the Qadariyya, the Murji‘a, the Jabriyya, the Jahmiyya, the Mu‘tazila, the Karrāmiyya, and the like of these, who will be mentioned when the sects are enumerated.”

As for the definition of Ahl al-Sunna wa’l Jamā‘a he mentioned the following in his Lawāmi‘ al-Anwār (1/73):

(الرَّابِعَةُ): أَهْلُ السُّنَّةِ وَالْجَمَاعَةِ ثَلَاثُ فِرَقٍ: الْأَثَرِيَّةُ وَإِمَامُهُمْ أَحْمَدُ بْنُ حَنْبَلٍ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ، وَالْأَشْعَرِيَّةُ وَإِمَامُهُمْ أَبُو الْحَسَنِ الْأَشْعَرِيُّ - رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ، وَالْمَاتُرِيدِيَّةُ وَإِمَامُهُمْ أَبُو مَنْصُورٍ الْمَاتُرِيدِيُّ، وَأَمَّا فِرْقَةُ الضَّلَالِ فَكَثِيرَةٌ جَدًّا، وَهَذَا أَوَّلُ الشُّرُوعِ فِي الْمَقْصُودِ، وَبِاللَّهِ التَّوْفِيقُ

“(The fourth point): **The People of the Sunna and the Community [Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā‘a] comprise three factions: the Atharīs, whose Imām is Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal – may Allah be pleased with him; the Ash‘arīs, whose Imām is Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī – may Allah have mercy on him; and the Māturīdīs, whose Imām is Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī.** As for the sects of misguidance [firaq al-ḍalāl], they are exceedingly numerous. And this is the moment to embark upon the intended subject matter, and with Allah lies all success [wa-bi-llāhi al-tawfiq].”

Prior to al-Saffārīnī, the Ḥanbalī scholar Imām ‘Abd al-Bāqī al-Mawāhibī al-Ḥanbalī (d. 1071 AH) had likewise affirmed this classification, stating on p. 53 of his *al-‘Ayn wa-al-Athar fī ‘Aqā‘id Ahl al-Athar*:

وهي أن طوائف أهل السنة ثلاثة: أشاعرة، وحنابلة، وماتريدية. بدليل عطف العلماء الحنابلة على الأشاعرة في كثير من الكتب الكلامية، وجميع كتب الحنابلة، والعطف يقتضي المعايير

“The meaning of this is that the groups of Ahl al-Sunna are three: the Ashā‘ira, the Ḥanābila, and the Māturīdiyya. This is established by the fact that the Ḥanbalī scholars are conjoined with the Ashā‘ira by the coordinating particle in many works of kalām and in all the books of the Ḥanbalīs – and conjunction implies distinction.”

The Ḥanbalī scholar known as **Shaykh ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Awda al-Qadūmī** (d. 1331 AH) stated in his *Al-Manhaj al-Aḥmad fī Dar‘ al-Mathālib allatī Tunmā li-Madhhab al-Imām Aḥmad* (pp. 42–43):

أقول: قال بعض أهل العلم: هم؛ يعني: الناجية – أهل الحديث، المعبر عنهم بأهل الأثر، وإمامهم الإمام أحمد، والأشعرية والماتريدية. انتهى وهذا لا شبهة فيه؛ فإن هذه الفرق الثلاث هم المعبر عنهم بأهل السنة والجماعة، وهم أهل الظهور في جميع الأعصار والأمصار، وهم الطائفة قلت: لا! فإن قلت: إن لفظ الحديث ينافي التعدد، لأنه لا يصدق إلا على فرقة واحدة، والمذكورون ثلاث فرق؟ المنصورة، وهم السواد الأعظم منافاة؛ لأن أهل الحديث والأشعرية والماتريدية فرقة واحدة، متفقون في أصول الدين على التوحيد وتقدير الخير والشر، وفي شروط النبوة والرسالة، وفي موالاة الصحابة كلهم، وما جرى مجرى ذلك؛ كعدم وجوب الصلاح والأصلح، وفي إثبات الكسب، وإثبات الشفاعة، وخروج عصاة الموحدين من النار. والخلاف بينهم في مسائل قليلة؛ كتأويل آيات الصفات وأحاديثها؛ هل هو جائز أو ممتنع؟ ومن قال بجوازه من الخلف، فإنه يرى الفضل لمذهب أهل التفويض، مع التنزيه لسلامته، وكذلك الخلاف في صفات الأفعال، ونحوها

"Some of the people of knowledge said: they — meaning the Saved Sect [al-firqa al-nājiya] — are the People of Ḥadīth, expressed by the term People of Transmitted Reports [Ahl al-Athar], whose Imām is Imām Aḥmad, and the Ash‘arīs and the Māturīdīs." End quote.

I say: **there is no doubt about this, for these three factions are those expressed by the designation the People of the Sunna and the Community [Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā‘a]. They are the ones who have been manifest and predominant in all ages and all lands; they are the Victorious Group [al-ṭā‘ifa al-manṣūra]; and they are the great mass of believers [al-sawād al-a‘zam].**

If you were to say: the wording of the ḥadīth is incompatible with plurality, since it can only hold true of one single sect, yet those mentioned are three factions — **I say: there is no incompatibility, because the People of Ḥadīth, the Ash‘arīs, and the Māturīdīs are one single sect, agreed in the foundational principles of religion [uṣūl al-dīn] upon divine unity [tawḥīd] and the predetermination of good and evil [taqdīr al-khayr wa-l-sharr], upon the conditions of Prophethood [nubuwwa] and messengership [risāla], upon loyalty towards all the Companions [muwālāt al-ṣaḥāba], and upon what follows from that — such as the non-obligation of what is best and most beneficial [‘adam wujūb al-ṣalāh wa-l-aṣlah], the affirmation of acquisition [ithbāt al-kasb], the affirmation of intercession [ithbāt al-shafā‘a], and the exit of sinful monotheists from the Fire. The disagreement among them is on a few questions — such as the interpretation [ta‘wīl] of the verses and ḥadīths pertaining to the divine attributes: is it permissible or impermissible? Those among the later scholars [al-khalaf] who held its permissibility regarded the methodology of delegation [madhhab ahl al-tafwīḍ] as preferable, on account of its soundness in terms of declaring transcendence [al-tanzīh] — and likewise the disagreement regarding the attributes of acts [ṣifāt al-af‘āl] and similar matters.”**

The Ḥanbalī scholar **Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Yaḥyā al-Baṣrī** (d. after 1095 AH) stated in his creedal treatise *Al-Ṭarīqa al-Athariyya wa-l-‘Aqīda al-Sanniyya* (p. 170):

الثانية: المنتسبون في زماننا إلى أهل السنة والجماعة، من أتباع الأئمة الأربعة، ثلاث طوائف؛ أشعرية، وماتريدية، وأثرية، فجمهور المالكية وأكثر الشافعية أشعرية، وغالب الحنفية ماتريدية، وجمهور الخنبلية أثرية. فقدماء الأشاعرة على عدم التأويل، ومتأخروهم على التأويل إلا النادر، والماتريدية فبعضهم يفوض وبعضهم يؤول، والحنابلة فجمهورهم لا يؤول كالسلف، والله أعلم.

“The second: those affiliated in our age to the People of the Sunna and the Community [Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā‘a] from among the followers of the four Imāms comprise three groups: **the Ash‘arīs, the Māturīdīs, and the Atharīs.** The majority of the Mālikīs and most of the Shāfi‘īs are Ash‘arī; the majority of the Ḥanafīs are Māturīdī; and the majority of the Ḥanbalīs are Atharī. The early Ash‘arīs [qudamā‘ al-Ashā‘ira] held the position of non-interpretation [‘adam al-ta‘wīl], whilst the later ones [muta‘akhhirūhum] adopted interpretation [ta‘wīl] — with rare exceptions. Among the Māturīdīs, some practise delegation [tafwīḍ] and some practise interpretation [ta‘wīl]. As for the Ḥanbalīs, the majority of them do not engage in interpretation [ta‘wīl] — as was the way of the Salaf. And Allah knows best.”

Further corroboration of al-Saffārīnī's unambiguous inclusion of all three groups within Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā'a is furnished by the fact that he subsequently composed the following work after his earlier Lawāmi' al-Anwār: Lawā'ih al-Anwār al-Saniyya wa-Lawāqih al-Afkār al-Sunniyya: Sharḥ Qaṣīdat ibn Abī Dāwūd al-Ḥā'iyya. He said the following in his Lawā'ih al-Anwār:

1/259–260:

فالصفات الذاتية المتفق عليها عند أهل السنة من الأثرية والأشعرية والماتريدية: الحياة والعلم والكلام والقدرة والإرادة والسمع والبصر، فللعالم خالق واجب الوجود لذاته، متصف بهذه الصفات وبغيرها مما وصف الله تعالى به نفسه، ووصفه به نبيه -صلى الله عليه وسلم-، لكن الأشعرية ومن نحا نحوهم إنما يثبتون له تعالى الصفات (السبع) المتقدمة

The essential attributes [al-ṣifāt al-dhātiyya] upon which there is agreement **among the People of the Sunna [Ahl al-Sunna] – comprising the Atharīs, the Ash'arīs, and the Māturīdīs** – are: Life [al-Ḥayāt], Knowledge [al-'Ilm], Speech [al-Kalām], Power [al-Qudra], Will [al-Irāda], Hearing [al-Sam'], and Sight [al-Baṣar]. The universe has a Creator who is necessarily existent by virtue of His own essence [wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihi], characterised by these attributes and by others with which Allah the Exalted has described Himself and with which His Prophet – may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him – has described Him. However, the Ash'arīs and those who follow their approach affirm for Him the Exalted only the aforementioned seven attributes.”

2/14–15:

إشارة إلى الصحيح المعتمد من أن عثمان رضي الله عنه يلي وزيري النبي ﷺ في الفضيلة، فأفضل هذه الأمة بعد نبيها ﷺ أبو بكر الصديق رضي الله عنه، ثم عمر الفاروق رضي الله عنه، ثم عثمان ذو النورين (الأرجح) من غيره بعد أبي بكر وعمر رضي الله عنهما، فأرجح أفعال تفضيل من رجع الميزان يرجح مثلثة رجوحًا ورجحانًا: مال، أي فهو أفضل من غيره بعدهما رضي الله عنه، ثم علي بن أبي طالب رضي الله عنه كما يأتي الكلام عليه. وهذا قول عامة أهل السنة والجماعة من أهل الحديث والفقه، والكلام من الأثرية والأشعرية والماتريدية وغيرهم

“An indication of the sound and relied-upon position that 'Uthmān – may Allah be pleased with him – ranks next after the two ministers of the Prophet – may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him – in excellence. Thus, the most excellent of this community after its Prophet – may Allah's prayers and peace be upon him – is Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq – may Allah be pleased with him – then 'Umar al-Fārūq – may Allah be pleased with him – then 'Uthmān Dhū al-Nūrayn. (The weightier view [al-arjaḥ]): over others after Abū Bakr and 'Umar – may Allah be pleased with them both. For arjaḥ is the relative form [af'al al-tafḍīl] derived from rajaḥa al-mīzān, meaning the scale tipped – with its verbal noun forms rujūḥan and rujḥānan – signifying: it inclined; that is, he is more excellent than others after them both – may Allah be pleased with him – then 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib – may Allah be pleased with him – as the discussion of this shall follow. This is the position of the generality of the People of the Sunna and the Community [Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā'a] among the scholars of ḥadīth, jurisprudence [fiqh], and kalām theology, **comprising the Atharīs, the Ash'arīs, the Māturīdīs, and others.**”

قلنا: الممدوح أهل السنة والجماعة الذين هم الوسط ما بين الإفراط والتفريط فلم يفرطوا تفريط القدرية النفاة ولم يفرطوا إفراط الجبرية المحتجين بالقدر على معاصي الله، فمذهب أهل السنة كافة من السلف الأثرية والخلف الأشعرية والماتريدية أن جميع أنواع الطاعات المعاصي والكفر والفساد وكل عمل وفعل وقول واقع بقضاء الله وقدره وهو تعالى خالق ذلك كله لا خالق سواه فأفعال العباد مخلوقة لله تعالى خيرها وشرها حسنها وقبيحها. والعبد غير مجبور على أفعاله بل هو قادر عليها بإقدار الله تعالى له على ذلك. فهذا القدر باتفاق طوائف أهل السنة الثلاثة

“We say: those who are praiseworthy are the People of the Sunna and the Community [Ahl al-Sunna wa-l-Jamā‘a], who occupy the middle ground between excess and deficiency. They neither fell into the deficiency of the negating determinists [al-Qadariyya al-nufāt], nor into the excess of the compulsionists [al-Jabriyya] who use the divine decree [qadar] as a pretext for committing acts of disobedience to Allah. **For the doctrine of the entirety of the People of the Sunna – comprising the early Atharīs [al-Salaf al-Athariyya] and the later Ash‘arīs and Māturīdīs** – is that all categories of acts of obedience, disobedience [ma‘āṣī], unbelief [kufr], and corruption [fasād], and every deed, act, and utterance, occur by the decree and predetermination of Allah [qaḍā’ Allāh wa-qadaruḥu], and He the Exalted is the Creator of all of that – there is no creator other than Him. Thus, the acts of servants are created by Allah the Exalted, whether good or evil, beautiful or ugly. The servant, however, is not compelled in his actions; rather, he is capable of performing them by virtue of Allah the Exalted having granted him that capacity [bi-iqdār Allāh ta‘ālā lahu ‘alā dhālik]. This much is agreed upon by all three groups of the People of the Sunna [Ahl al-Sunna].”
