

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī and His Approach on the Tafsīr of the Qur'ān

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Abstract

This article talks about one of the greatest scholars of *Tafsīr* who was given the title of The Scholar of the Scholars (*'Imām al-'A'immaḥ*) and *'Imām al-Mufasssirīn* due to his significant contribution to all the fields of knowledge in Islam, especially in *Tafsīr*. Thus, in this article, we will cover his biography from birth to death from a historical point view. Also, this article will highlight his approach for the process of conducting the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* based on his book *Tafsīr Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an T'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān* through a descriptive and an analytical methodological approach. This article results in significant facts about how Ibn Jarīr has been shaped in terms of his knowledge during his journey of seeking knowledge and how this has reflected on how he has presented his work of *Tafsīr* from which his methodological principles of *Tafsīr* have been extracted.

Key Words: *Tafsīr*, *Qur'ān*, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* approach, Qur'ānic Semantics

1. Introduction

This article is concerned with two main questions presented in the title of this article:

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- 1) Who is Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī?
- 2) What is his approach on the *tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān*?

Consequently, there are two main sections in the current article, the first section will answer the first proposed question in which an historical overview will be conducted on Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī which will enable the reader to know the background of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī on both the personal and scholastic level. While, the second section of the article will answer the second proposed question in which an analytical overview will be conducted on the *tafsīr* of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī in terms of the methodological principles used by him.

1- Who is Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī?

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's full name is Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Kathīr ibn Ghālib al-Ṭabarī al-'Āmulī and he is also known by the nickname of Abū Ja'far. He is one of the greatest scholars of Islam who has benefited the 'Ummah (the nation) of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*. He has been given the title, The Scholar of the Scholars 'Imām al-'A'immah and 'Imām al-Mufasssīrīn because he has contributed to all the fields of knowledge in Islam. This can be seen through his books, work, and publications, not only in the field of *Tafsīr*, but in all the fields of knowledge in Islam (al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, pp. 267-270). He lived during the third century of *al-Hijrah* about whom the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* has said: "the best generation is the generation to which I belong, then of the second generation (generation adjacent to my generation), then of the third generation (generation adjacent to the second generation)" (al-Bukhārī, 2002; al-Ḥajjāj, 2006).¹ He lived between 224 to 310 A.H, during the time of *al-Dawlah al-'Abāsiyyah* ('Abāsī Empire) in which he was a coeval of thirteen leaders of the leaders of *al-Dawlah al-*

¹ Note: The scholars have a dispute regarding the actual century the time period specified here refers to.

‘Abāsiyyah (al-Ṭabarī, 1387 A.H., vol 10, p. 139; al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 20). He was born and raised in the city of Āmul in the province of Tabaristan located in northern Iran, in 224 A.H. His father was his main supporter and encouraged and helped him to seek knowledge because of a dream that his father had where he saw the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* and his son together. In his dream, Ibn Jarīr’s father saw his son taking rocks and throwing them out of the bucket held by the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam*. This dream was interpreted to mean that Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī would benefit the *’Ummah* (the nation) of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* (al-Ḥamawy, 1993, vol 18, p. 40, 47, 49). So, Ibn Jarīr memorized the *Qur’ān* by the age of seven and started leading the prayers while people were behind him by the age of eight. He also started writing the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* and learning from the scholars of Tabaristan and Irāq in different fields of knowledge of Islam such as History, *Fiqh*, *Ḥadīth*, *Tafsīr* and so forth (al-Ḥamawy, 1993, p. 49). In addition to that, by the age of nine, he had written and memorized over 100,000 *Ḥadīth* from one scholar named Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd al-Rāzī al-Tamīmī before he reached the age of puberty (al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, pp. 275-277; al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 19-24). He did not travel outside of his region until after he had passed his puberty. Thus, it was at the age of sixteen that he traveled to meet al-’Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal; however, that meeting did not occur because of the death of al-’Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 23). Meanwhile, Ibn Jarīr’s father kept spending money on him for all his expenses for the sake of seeing him become a scholar who would benefit the *’Ummah* of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam*. Even after the death of his father, his father left a farm of ongoing trade so that Ibn Jarīr could get his allowance from it every year (al-Ḥamawy, 1993, vol 18, pp. 50-65).

a. Some of the Shuyūkh (Scholars) and Students of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

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Following is a list of some of Ibn Jarīr's most noteworthy scholars under whom he spent time studying many of the branches of knowledge in Islam:

1. Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd al-Rāzī al-Tamīmī who died in 248 A.H. This was the first scholar from whom Ibn Jarīr learned *Ḥadīth* and *Tafsīr* and memorized 100,000 *Ḥadīth*.
2. al-Rabī' ibn Sulaymān al-'Azadī.
3. Abū Hammām al-Walīd ibn Shujā' whom he met in al-Kūfah. This scholar is one of the narrators in the books of *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* and *al-Sunan*.
4. Aḥmad ibn Manī' al-Baghawī, from whom he has taken a lot of *Ḥadīth*.
5. Muḥammad al-Hamadānī, from whom he has taken many narrations.
6. Yūnis ibn 'Abdil'alā al-Ṣadafī al-Maṣrī.
7. Muḥammad ibn al-Muthannā.

And there are many other scholars that Ibn Jarīr has taken his knowledge from in *Fiqh*, History, Linguistics and so forth and he undertook many journeys to Iraq, Egypt, al-Shām, and others regions for the sake of seeking knowledge. Thus, he gained a lot of knowledge, which made students of knowledge from everywhere come and study under him (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 25-26; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 2001, vol 2, p. 548; al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, p. 269). Following is a list of some of the students who have learned and studied under him:

- Abū Bakir Aḥmad ibn Mūsā ibn Mujāhid.

- Abu al-Qāsim Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī who has learned the *Ḥadīth*, and the *Tafsīr* especially, and he is a known scholar in the science of narrators.
- Abū Bakir Aḥmad ibn Kāmil al-Baghdādī, who was the judge of al-Kūfah.
- Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdallah al-Shāfi‘ī.

And while there are many others, these are amongst the most well-known and note-worthy (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 26-27; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 2001, vol 2, p. 548).

b. His Belief and Creed

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī follows the creed, the understanding, and the orientation of the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* and the followers, and the followers of the followers, in relation to the fundamentals and the branches of all the concepts in Islam to the point that he has written a book on this subject demonstrating his beliefs and proving that he follows the beliefs of the ancestors. He did this after he was accused of not following the creed of the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* and the followers who have taken their beliefs directly from the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam*. Therefore, he wrote that book and titled it *Ṣarīḥ al-Sunnah* in which he mentioned the fundamental beliefs of *‘Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā‘ah* (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 40-42). And this can be seen in his *Tafsīr* regarding the names and the attributes of Allāh (al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, p. 280).

c. His School of Fiqh (Islamic Law)

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Al-Imām Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī has studied the four schools of opinions from the students of the founders of those schools. This means that he has learned the *al-Shāfi'ī* school of thought in Iraq and Egypt, and learned the *al-Mālikī* school of opinion, as well as the *al-Zāhirī* school of opinion. He has also studied the *Ḥanafī* and *Ḥanbalī* schools of opinions which resulted in that he became an independent scholar who did *'Ijtihād*, which means broadening the ways of seeking and analysing the Islamic situations without basing it on the principles of the previous *Imāms*. However, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī tended to the *al-Shāfi'ī* school of thought and practiced it and followed it after he settled down in Baghdād. Therefore, he is considered to be one of the *Imāms* of *al-Shāfi'iyyah* because of previous practice and because this is what he had died on (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 43).

His Knowledge and Some of His Work

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī has been known as a *mufasssīr*; however, his work and books in Islam show that he is a mastered scholar in every field of *Sharī'ah*.

- **In the science of the Qur'ān**, he has written and gained a lot of knowledge regarding the different types of *Qur'ānic* recitations and narrations. His knowledge in this field is so extensive that he wrote a book consisting of eighteen volumes focusing on the science of *Qirā'āt* (Qur'ānic recitations) and narrations. Also, according to al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī was known to have a beautiful voice in reciting the *Qur'ān*. Not only that, but he also memorized the *Qur'ān*, different types of *Qur'ānic* recitations, the interpretation of the *Qur'ān*, and the *Fiqh* rulings of the *Qur'ān* (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 2001, vol 2, p. 163; al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 27).

- **In the science of *Tafsīr***, he has written a book named *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an T'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān* which is also known as *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* (al-Ṭabarī, 2001). This book is very special compared to all the books of *Tafsīr* because it contains the opinions and the narrations of the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* and the followers with their full chain of narrations. It also notes the interpretation of the *āyah* conducted either through another *āyah* or a *Ḥadīth* with his chain of narration to the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*. Also, in his *Tafsīr*, he mentions the *Fiqh* opinions of the previous scholars or the scholars of his time. In addition to that, in his *Tafsīr*, he goes back to the linguistic principles and their disputes and the study of logics as well, while keeping the principles of *Tafsīr* into consideration. Therefore, his book of *Tafsīr* is indeed a comprehensive book which encompasses many major fields and principles all at once. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, there is no contradiction or tendency to one field over the other without a scientific proof identifying the inclination towards that tendency or *Tarjīh* (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 28; al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, p. 273).
- **In the science of *Ḥadīth***, he memorized many *'Aḥādīth* to the extent that he memorized 100,000 *'Aḥādīth* from Muḥammad ibn Ḥumayd al-Rāzī al-Tamīmī, as it has been mentioned before, and another 100,000 *'Aḥādīth* or even more from Muḥammad al-Hamadānī (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 23). Also, he has a high rank of chain of narrations to the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*. He learned the science of *Ḥadīth* from Aḥmad ibn Manī' al-Baghawī and Abū Hammām al-Walīd ibn Shujā' and many others which has resulted in publishing an amazing book named *Tahdhīb al-'Āthār*. As a result, his *Tafsīr* has a *ḥadīth* touch in it because of the style in which he has narrated the narrations that inter-

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pret the signs of the *Qur'ān* (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 32; al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, p. 273).

- **In the science of *Fiqh***, he had the knowledge of all the schools of opinions in Islam at his time which led him to not categorically follow any one in particular. Rather, he followed what he thought had the most accurate opinion based on the knowledge he had in the *Qur'ān* and *Sunnah*. He had also written a book talking about the disputes of the scholars of *fiqh* called *Ikhtilāf 'Ulamā' al-'Amṣār* as well as many other books in this field (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 32; al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, p. 273; al-Ḥamawī, 1993, vol 18, pp. 71-73).
- **In the science of the Concepts and the Principles of *Fiqh***, he has authored many books in this field as well, and one of them is known with the title of *Kitāb al-Laṭīf* which contains 2500 pages in which he has talked about the sources and the concepts of all the school of opinions in detail. Plus, it also contains his own principles regarding the concepts of *Fiqh* such as abrogation, the consensus, and so forth (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, vol 4, p. 465; al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, p. 273; al-Ḥamawī, 1993, vol 18, p. 73; al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 29).
- **In the science of History**, he was also a scholar in this field with his famous book titled *Tārīkh al-'Umam wa al-Mulūk* (al-Ṭabarī, 1387 A.H.) and known as *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī* which has become one of the main sources of Islamic history in which he recounted all the events and the incidences since the beginning of creation until the year 309 A.H.. However, in his books of history, there are some narrations that are weak and known to have inauthentic chains of narrations (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 32; al-Ḥamawī, 1993, vol 18, p. 44).

- **In the science of Linguistics and Arabic literature**, he was known to be a scholar in all the subfields of Linguistics and Arabic literature, such as Poetry of the Pre-Islamic times or era, Syntax, Morphology, Phonology, and the Linguistic Eloquence and Rhetoric. And all this can be seen in his book *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* while illustrating the interpretation of the *Qur'ān* because he would tend to mention and cover every field and science of knowledge mentioned above (al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, pp. 269-270).

His death

Al-Imām Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī died on Sunday the 27th of the month of *Shawwāl* in the year 310 A.H. in the city of Baghdād where he settled down at the end of his life. He was buried in his house (al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, p. 282; al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 45).

2- What is Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's Approach on the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān*?

The *Tafsīr* of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

The *Tafsīr of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī* is a book of *Tafsīr* that belongs to Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. And this book of *Tafsīr* is known with several titles such as *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an T'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān* (al-Ṭabarī, 2001), *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (al-Dhahabī, 1977, p. 46), *Jāmi' al-Bayān fī T'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān*, or *al-Tafsīr* (al-Dhahbī, 1996, vol 14, p. 270). Al-Imām al-Nawawī has stated that the *'Ummah* (the nation) has agreed that there is no book of *Tafsīr* that has been published or written as perfect as the *Tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 28). Also, al-Imām Ibn Khuzaymah has said after he looked into the *Tafsīr of al-Ṭabarī* that he did not know anyone on Earth more knowledgeable than Ibn Jarīr al-

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Ṭabarī (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 2001, vol 2, p. 164). The *Tafsīr of al-Ṭabarī* has been classified as a type of *al-Tafsīr al-Ma'thūr* (al-Dhahabī, 1977, p. 46). This *Tafsīr* contains twenty-five volumes (al-Ṭabarī, 2001, vol 25, p. 3). It has been stated that this book of *Tafsīr* took him forty years to complete, and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī used to write forty pages of the book of *Tafsīr* every day (al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, 2001, vol 2, p. 163). Therefore, Abū Muḥammad al-Farghānī has stated that if any scholar intended to publish ten books from the book of *al-Tafsīr*, each book would contain a distinctive field of knowledge that would be different from the other; they would be able to do so because of how rich this book of *Tafsīr* actually is (al-Dhahabī, 1996, vol 14, p. 273).

The Meaning of '*al-Tarjīh*' in the Tafsīr of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

As it has been known to students of knowledge specializing in *Sharī'ah*, the term '*al-Tarjīh*' varies in terms of meaning from one field to another. For example, in Arabic linguistics, the word '*al-Tarjīh*' comes from the root of *rajaha* which means 'exceeded in weight' (al-'Ifriqī al-Maṣrī, 1414 A.H., vol 2, p. 445; al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 51). And from the point of view of *al-'Uṣūlyūn* (a sub-field in *Sharī'ah* called '*Uṣūl al-Fiqh*'), they define *al-Tarjīh* as strengthening one sign over the other with a *dalīl* (proof) (al-Zarkashī, 1992, vol 6, p. 130; al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 51). However, in relation to the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī and the perspective of *al-Mufasssīrīn*, the word *al-Tarjīh* is defined as outweighing or strengthening one of the opinions in the *tafsīr* of an *āyah* over others with a *dalīl*; and this *dalīl* can be any *dalīl* by which the opinions of *tafsīr* can be strengthened. This can be through the semantics of the specific wordings used in the *'āyāt*, its context, the preceding and the following words or context, or an external *dalīl* such as a *ḥadīth* specifying the intended meaning. And all this should be in accordance to the concepts of *Sharī'ah* in order to protect the revelation from being distorted and misinterpreted (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 51). Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī has a unique approach of making *al-Tarjīh*, and this is not always done by strengthen-

ing one opinion over the other but by weakening the other opinions with different types of *'dillah* (proofs) without mentioning the most accurate opinion that he tends to, and this method would have the same result that the traditional method of *al-Tarjīh* would have had; but, it is done in the opposite way. Also, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī tends to *al-Tarjīh* only in the *'āyāt* in which disputes have occurred. This will lead us to another concept that Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī is known for in his *tafsīr* which is *al-Ikhtyār*.

The Meaning of *al-Ikhtyār* in the Tafsīr of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

As has been previously mentioned about the word *al-Tarjīh* in that it varies from one field to another, the word *al-Ikhtyār* also has the same feature which bears different meanings based on the context and the sub-field of *Sharī'ah* in which the word is used. However, in relation to the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *al-Ikhtyār* means to choose or, to tend to, one of the opinions in the *tafsīr* of an *āyah* without weakening the other opinions. Therefore, the word '*al-Tarjīh*' and '*al-Ikhtyār*' overlap in a way that every *Ikhtyār* is *Tarjīh* but not every *Tarjīh* is *Ikhtyār* because both of them involve choosing one meaning over the other but the only distinction between these two approaches is that *al-Tarjīh* involves weakening the other opinions whereas *al-Ikhtyār* does not. And this can be seen a lot in his book '*al-Tafsīr*' especially when Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī chooses one *qirā'ah* (recitation) over the other *qirā'āt* (recitations) in order to extract the intended meaning of the *āyah*. So for example, when he takes or tends to one recitation and leaves the other, without weakening them, this is called *al-Ikhtyār* from the perspective of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī; and, when he chooses one over the other by weakening the other recitations or opinions, this is called *al-Tarjīh* (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 57-59).

The Expressions and Statements Used for *al-Tarjīh* and *al-Ikhtyār* by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

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Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī used different terms and expressions expressing these two approaches of selection. For the *al-Tarjīḥ* approach, he uses the following statements:

- And the correct one from all the opinions is that...
- And this is the correct one in our view...
- The closer and the more similar opinions to the correct one...
- It is most likely for the essence (mind) to correct this opinion...
- And the more adequate (deserving) opinion in that to be correct is...
- And the more adequate (deserving) opinion in that to be accurate is...
- And this is the most similar to the truth in that is...
- And this is most dominant in the meaning of this wording...
- And the most likely from the apparent meaning is...
- And the apparent semantics of the wording is...
- The most apparent from the apparent of the speech is...
- The most appropriate based on the apparent revelation is... (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 61-62)

And, for the *al-Ikhtyār* approach, he uses the following statements:

- And we indeed chose the opinion which we chose in that...

- And what we say in that is...
- And this opinion is more appealing to me...
- And this is more similar to the meaning of the *āyah*...
- And this is the most similar opinion based on what is meant in the apparent revelation...
- And this is more similar to the Arabian schools of speech...

In addition to what has been mentioned above, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī uses some statements which indicate the degree of acceptance and rejection for the opinions in *tafsīr* which the students of knowledge of *Tafsīr* and translators must be aware of in order to not fall into misinterpretation either in Arabic or English (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 62-65). And those statements indicating the degree of acceptance and rejection for the opinions in *Tafsīr* sometimes take the approach of *al-Tarjīh*, and sometimes take the approach of *al-Ikhtiyār*.

The Approaches of *al-Tarjīh* and *al-Ikhtiyār* from Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī uses three different approaches in extrapolating the *tafsīr* in his book. **The first approach** is the approach in which Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī explicitly indicates and states the most accurate opinion in *Tafsīr* by providing all the proofs that support and strengthen the accuracy of his opinion. This approach is the most popular approach and is practiced by many *mufasssīrīn* (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 67). **The second approach** is the approach in which Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī outweighs one opinion over the others by refuting and nullifying the weak and the rejected opinions, and this is done by providing the proofs that show the accuracy of his rejection for those invalid and inaccurate opinions. **The third approach** is the approach in which Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī uses two different styles of speech. One of the styles of speech is *al-Jazm*, which is

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equivalent to the active voice in English as in 'he mentions'. The other style of speech used is *al-Tamrīd*, which is equivalent to the passive voice in English as in 'it has been mentioned'. And this third approach is usually used by the scholars of *Hadīth* to demonstrate the weak narrations by using the style of *al-Tamrīd* and the accurate narrations by using the style of *al-Jazm*.

However, this is not the case with Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. Which means that he might use the same style of speech to indicate weak opinions or accurate opinions. Also, Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī mentions almost all the opinions in his book *al-Tafsīr*, and he does not precede the most accurate opinions before the weak opinions nor does he only mention the accurate opinions as some of the contemporary scholars of *Tafsīr* do (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 67-74). Therefore, knowing the orientation, the style, the terminology and their specific semantics, the methodological framework, the creeds (beliefs), and the linguistic backgrounds and beliefs for any *mufasssīr* (an interpreter of the *Qur'ān*) is extremely and crucially important for the student of knowledge who attempts to get accurate results, especially after knowing the fact that the scholars of *Tafsīr* significantly vary in the way their work is conducted. The two major mistakes which the contemporary authors of *Tafsīr* and the translators of the *Qur'ān* fall into are; one, they compile their work of *Tafsīr* and Qur'ānic translations from different sources (books of *Tafsīr*) without knowing the methodological framework of those different *mufasssīrīn* nor the major differences between them in terms of linguistic beliefs and other factors mentioned above. For example, you will find two *mufasssīrīn* (interpreters) who both believe in the occurrence of the linguistic phenomenon of synonymy in the Arabic language; however, they differ in their understanding of its occurrence in the *Qur'ān*. One affirms it and the other negates such a phenomenon occurring in the *Qur'ān*, and each of them has strong proofs which they base their beliefs on. Thus, as a researcher in the science of the *Qur'ān* or in the Qur'ānic translation, you must be aware of the concepts and the branches which the scholars of *Tafsīr* differ in and agree upon in order to achieve a high level of accuracy.

The General Methodological Principles for the *Tafsīr of the Qur'ān* from Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī

The general methodological principles in the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* vary from one *mufasssir* to another based on many factors that play a big role in the way *al-mufasssir* extracts the intended meaning and the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān*. And the two main factors are the factor of *al-'Aqīdah* (creed) and the linguistic backgrounds, or beliefs, which can result in major changes in the meaning and the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān*.

- The general methodological principles are:
- **The first principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through one wording or more in the same *āyah*. And this is done by looking into the semantics and the lexical relations of the words used in the *āyah* in relation to sense and reference (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 77).
- **The second principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through another *āyah* or *'āyāt* in the *Qur'ān*. This method of *Tafsīr* is the most accurate method in which *al-Mufasssir* interprets the *Qur'ān* through the *Qur'ān* because in the *Qur'ān* there are no contradictions, and the *Tafsīr* of the *'āyāt* go along with each other. And this type of method has been used and practiced a lot by Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 79).
- **The third principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through the different *Qirā'āt* (*Qur'ānic* recitations). And in the work and the *Tafsīr* of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, there have been many narrations demonstrating distinctive and various *Qirā'āt* in order to extract the intended meaning that the most *Qirā'āt* agree on (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 81-84).

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- **The fourth principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through the semantics and the indication of the *Qur'ānic* context. This is done by looking at the preceding, the following, and the ending of the *āyah* with their sense (the relationship between words within the same *āyah*) and reference (the relationship between the words mentioned in the *āyah* in the outside world) which Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī thinks is extremely important. He also thinks that the *Qur'ān* has different styles when it comes to different themes presented in the *Qur'ān* which we should go back to and take into consideration in order to help extract the intended meaning (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 85-96).
- **The fifth principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through the indication of the script or the print of the *Qur'ān*'s copy called *al-Muṣḥaf*. The letters in the *Qur'ān* are put together with the consensus of all the companions of the Prophet (*ṣalalāhu 'alyh wa sallam*). Therefore, any *Qur'ānic* recitation will not be accepted unless it matches and goes along with what the companions of the Prophet (*ṣalalāhu 'alyh wa sallam*) have agreed upon from all the *Qur'ānic* recitations and the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ānic* wordings should also be based on the approved wordings in the *Qur'ān* (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 97-98).
- **The sixth principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through an authentic *ḥadīth* indicating one *tafsīr* or meaning of an *āyah* over another meaning or *tafsīr*. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī always gives a weight to the *'aḥādīth* of the Prophet (*ṣalalāhu 'alyh wa sallam*), and takes the *Tafsīr* of the Prophet (*ṣalalāhu 'alyh wa sallam*) over any *Tafsīr* as long as it is from authentic chains of narrations. Whereas some *mufasssīrīn* give less attention to this which has resulted in contradictions in the *Qur'ān*. And it is known and widely accepted that the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunnah* work side by side and along with one another and they

never contradict unless the *ḥadīth* is weak or the narration of a particular *Tafsīr* is weak (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 99-102).

- **The seventh principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through the consensus of the scholars of *Tafsīr*. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī believes that the consensus and the agreement can take place even if there are one or two disagreeing, and the dispute of one or two does not affect the consensus of the scholars of *Tafsīr* especially the classical scholars of *Tafsīr* (al-Zarkashī, 1992, vol 4, p. 476; al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 107).
- **The eighth principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through the reasons of revelation of the *Qur'ānic āyāt*. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī considers this with two conditions. The first condition is that the reason of revelation of the *āyah* should be proven with an accurate chain of narrations. The second condition is that there is no ambiguity in the reason of revelation of the *āyah* which both look into the clarity and the authenticity of the reason of revelation of the *āyah* (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 117).
- **The ninth principle** is *al-Tarjīh* through the indication of the date the *āyah* was revealed (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 118).
- **The tenth principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on the impeccability and infallibility of prophecy. And the best example illustrating this principle is the *tafsīr* of *āyah* number seven in the chapter of *al-Ṭalāq* (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 121-122; al-Ṭabarī, 2001, vol 17, p. 79).
- **The eleventh principle** is the silence and pause for what is ambiguous in the *Qur'ān*. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī does not intend to discover or uncover the ambiguity in the *Qur'ān* if it is from the unseen and there is a clear-cut proof for their specific meanings such as the name of the tree from which Ādam and Ḥawā' ate in the Jannah, the type of stick that Musā had,

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the place where the cave was located, or the color of the dog of the people of the cave, and the names of those people who have asked the Prophet (*ṣalalāhu 'alyh wa sallam*) about random things like the soul and the Hour. This is because Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī believes that determining the meanings for what is ambiguous in the *Qur'ān* cannot be through *ijtihād* but a clear proof from an authentic narration (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 123-124).

- **The twelfth principle** is *al-Tarjīh* in the abrogating and the abrogated in the *Qur'ān* which takes and follows the approaches and the methods of *al-Uṣūlyīn* which can be found in his book *al-Bayān 'an 'Uṣūl al-'Ḥkām* (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 129). And Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī restricts the phenomenon of abrogating and the abrogated in the *Qur'ān* into two categories. One is in the commands, and the second is in the prohibitions and what can fall into these two categories. And he negates that *al-'khabār* (the news) in the *Qur'ān* can undergo the phenomenon of abrogation unless it has commands or prohibitions in them (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 130; al-Ṭabarī, 2001, vol 2, p. 472).
- **The thirteenth principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through the speech of the Arabs and the usage of Arabic Linguistics in which Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī looks into the different Arabic varieties spoken and known among the Arabs in the Arabian Peninsula and makes sure that the meanings of the *Qur'ān* do not get driven away from what has been known and spoken by the Arabs (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 135). Also, he attempts to abide by the Arabic linguistic rules in relation to Semantics, Pragmatics, Syntax, Etymology, Morphology, Rhetoric, Lexical Semantics and so forth. in order to extract the intended meaning (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., pp. 139-156).

- **The fourteenth principle** is *al-Tarjīh* based on/through the derivation and the morphology of the words (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 157).
- **The fifteenth principle** is the unconditional and absolute *al-Tarjīh* which cannot be done except with the *Tafsīr* of the Prophet *ṣalalāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* and the *Tafsīr* that has been agreed upon by the scholars of *Tafsīr*. And any *Tarjīh* that comes from any source, or method, other than these two, opposing or contradicting the *Tafsīr* of the Prophet *ṣalalāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* and the *Tafsīr* that has been agreed upon by the scholars of *Tafsīr*, is rejected and invalid (al-Ḥarbī, 1429 A.H., p. 163).

3- Conclusion

This article begins by tracing Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī’s personal history and noting how closely intertwined it was to that of his scholastic history. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, with the encouragement of his father, dedicated his life to the pursuit of knowledge and his immense legacy within the canon of classical Islamic literature is proof of that aspiration. Having gained a solid understanding of the vastness of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī’s expertise in all aspects of Islamic knowledge; his work on *tafsīr* takes on greater importance. In the second half of this article, the focus was placed on Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī’s approach to undertaking the *tafsīr* of the *Qur’ān*. Readers will now understand what Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī’s approach was in regard to the *tafsīr*; the definitions of, and distinction between, ‘*al-Tarjīh*’ and ‘*al-Ikhtiyār*’ and how to identify them in Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī’s work; as well as the 15 general methodological principles for the *tafsīr* of the *Qur’ān*.

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