

## 1. Existence of *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of Earlier Revelation) Today

Some Muslims believe that modern-day Jews and Christians should not be regarded as "*Ahl al-Kitab* (People of Earlier Revelation)" because of the corruption of their scriptures and their belief in the Trinity, the sonship, divinity and crucifixion of Jesus, etc. If they are not the same communities referred to as *Ahl al-Kitab* in the Qur'an and Hadith, then it implies that the Jews and Christians of today are to be regarded as polytheists (*mushrikun*) and Muslims are not allowed to eat the animals they slaughter nor are they allowed to marry their women. As such, any such marriages are to be regarded as Islamically unacceptable!

Do the "People of the Earlier Revelation" (*Ahl al-Kitab*) still exist today? And should contemporary Jews and Christians be regarded as belonging to the *Ahl al-Kitab* referred to in the Qur'an and Hadith?

According to the majority of Muslim scholars and the major Schools of Islamic Jurisprudence, the Jews and Christians that existed after the time of the Prophet (p) and his Companions until the present day are still members of the religious community described or referred to in the Qur'an and Hadith as *Ahl al-Kitab*<sup>1</sup>, and should be honoured as such.

Some Muslim scholars, however, have tried to argue that the *Ahl al-Kitab* ("People of the Book", or "People of Earlier Revelation") referred to in the Qur'an and Hadith

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<sup>1</sup> Quran 2:105,109; 3:64,65,69,70,71,72,75,98,99,113,199; 4:123,153,159,171; 5:15,19,59,65,68,77; 29:46; 33:26; 59:2; 59:11; 6:98.

are no longer in existence. They also claim that present-day Christians and Jews - unlike those of the time of the Prophet Muhammad (p) - are not the same as those described in the Qur'an and Hadith as *Ahl al-Kitab*, because (among other reasons), they follow corrupted teachings of their scriptures and that their scriptures are no longer authentic.

However, other scholars argue that the Qur'an speaks of the Christians at the time of the Prophet (p) as having already believed in the Trinity (Qur'an 4:171, 5:73), the divine Sonship of Jesus (Qur'an 9:30)<sup>2</sup>, the crucifixion of Jesus (Qur'an 4:157)<sup>3</sup>, the belief that he and his mother (Mary) were divine or to be worshipped (Qur'an 5:116)<sup>4</sup>, etc. The Qur'an also states that some of the Arab Jews believed that *Uzair* (Ezra) was a son of God (Qur'an 9:30)<sup>5</sup>, and that some of the *Ahl al-Kitab* had corrupted their scriptures (Qur'an 2:79)<sup>6</sup>. These beliefs, though amounting to *shirk*

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<sup>2</sup> Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami'u al-Bayan fi Ta'wil al-Qur'an*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, vol.10. p.481; Abu al-Fida' Ismail bin Umar Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar Tayba li al-Nashr wa Tawzi', Medina, 1999, vol.3, p.157; Abdrahman bin Nasir al-Sa'dy, *Taysir Karim al-Rahman*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, p.239.

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami'u al-Bayan fi Tawili al-Quran*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, vol.10. p.367; Ibn Kathir, Abu al-Fida' Ismail bin Umar Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar Tayba li al-Nashr wa Tawzi', Medina, 1999, vol.3, p.447; Abdrahman bin Nasir al-Sa'dy, *Taysir Karim al-Rahman*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, p.213

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami'u al-Bayan fi Tawili al-Quran*, Muassasatu Risala, 2000, vol.10. p.233; Ibn Kathir, Abu al-Fida' Ismail bin Umar Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar Tayba li al-Nashr wa Tawzi', Medina, 1999, vol.3, p.232; Abdrahman bin Nasir al-Sa'dy, *Taysir Karim al-Rahman*, Muassasatu Risala, 2000, p.243.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami'u al-Bayan fi Tawili al-Quran*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, vol.10. p.201; Abu al-Fida' Ismail bin Umar Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar Tayba li al-Nashr wa Tawzi', Medina, 1999, vol.3, p.134; Abdrahman bin Nasir al-Sa'dy, *Taysir Karim al-Rahman*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, p.334

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami'u al-Bayan fi Tawili al-Quran*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, vol.10. p.267; Abu al-Fida' Ismail bin Umar Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar Tayba li al-Nashr wa Tawzi', Medina, 1999, vol.3, p.310; Abdrahman bin Nasir al-Sa'dy, *Taysir Karim al-Rahman*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, p.56

(associating partners with Allah) and *kufr* (disbelief), are therefore not new or recent teachings of Judaism or Christianity, but existed before and during the period of Muhammad's prophethood (p). In spite of all these, the Qur'an and the Prophet (p) still considered those Christians and Jews as *Ahl al-Kitab* (People of Earlier Revelations) and permitted conditional intermarriage and eating of what they slaughter, etc. (Qur'an 22:17; 5:5).

To believe that there are no more *Ahl al-Kitab* existing today would also indirectly imply an abrogation or even irrelevance for all present and practical purposes, of all references in the Qur'an and Hadith to *Ahl al-Kitab* (Qur'an 3:64; 5:82; 22:17 etc.)! In fact, among the hadith literature on the Signs of the Last Day are some that indicate the continued presence of Jews and Christians.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, all the major classical literature of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) that discuss issues related to the *Ahl al-Kitab* – such as eating their food<sup>8</sup>, marriage to them<sup>9</sup>, etc. - have assumed their continued existence throughout Islamic history to this day.

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<sup>7</sup> Muslim, *Sahih Muslim*, Darul Jeel, Beirut, vol.8, p.188, hadith no. 7523; *Musnad Ahmad*, vol. 15, p.233, hadith no. 9398.

<sup>8</sup> Quran 5:5; Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami'u al-Bayan fi Tawili al-Quran*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, vol.10. p.581; Abu al-Fida' Ismail bin Umar Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar Tayba li al-Nashr wa Tawzi', Medina, 1999, vol.3, p.39; Abdrahman bin Nasir al-Sa'dy, *Taysir Karim al-Rahman*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, p.221; Ibn Qayyim, Muhammad bin Abi Bakr, *Ahkam ahl al-Dhimma*, vol.1 p.528.

<sup>9</sup> Quran 5:5; Muhammad bin Jarir Al-Tabari, *Jami'u al-Bayan fi Tawili al-Quran*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, vol.10. p.581; Abu al-Fida' Ismail bin Umar Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*, Dar Tayba li al-Nashr wa Tawzi', Medina, 1999, vol.3, p.39; Abdrahman bin Nasir al-Sa'dy, *Taysir Karim al-Rahman*, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, Beirut, 2000, p.221; Muhammad bin Abi Bakr Ibn Qayyim, *Ahkam ahl al-Dhimma*, vol.1 p.528.

The Jews and Christians of today therefore, are still members of the religious community described in the Qur'an and Hadith as *Ahl al-Kitab*, and should be honoured as such, in recognition of their association with earlier divine revealed scriptures (or Books) and genuine prophets of Allah such as Musa and Isa (peace be upon them).