

Critical Analysis of the Wahhabi Approach to the Hadith “Alī is the Divider of Paradise and Hellfire,” with Emphasis on Sunni and Shi‘i Sources

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ABSTRACT

The Wāḥḥābī movement has consistently exerted considerable effort in criticizing and repudiating the virtues attributed to Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib ('a). Among these virtues, the traditions that underscore his exalted status among the Companions have received particular attention and dispute. The ḥadīth 'Alī qasīm al-nār wa'l-janna (“‘Alī is the Divider of Paradise and Hellfire”) is one such narration that has become a central target of Wāḥḥābī critique. Contemporary Wāḥḥābī scholars regard this report as fabricated and lacking both textual and isnād authenticity. However, a close examination of authoritative Sunnī works in faḍā'il literature, historiography, 'ilm al-rijāl, kalām, and ḥadīth studies reveals a perspective contrary to Wāḥḥābī claims. Adopting a descriptive-analytical method and a critical approach, this article examines the objections and doubts raised by Wāḥḥābī scholars concerning this ḥadīth. The study concludes that the narration in question is indeed transmitted in reliable Sunnī sources, with numerous prominent scholars affirming the trustworthiness of its transmitters. Furthermore, additional evidence highlights the ḥadīth's indication of Imām 'Alī's ('a) exalted spiritual rank in distinguishing truth from falsehood, as well as his elevated metaphysical status.

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Introduction

The ḥadīth, "'Alī qasīm al-nār wa-al-jannah" ('Alī is the divider of Hellfire and Paradise), stands as a pivotal and widely discussed narration in Islamic sources, articulating the exalted status of Imām 'Alī ('a) as the criterion for distinguishing the believer from the hypocrite on the Day of Resurrection. This narration, transmitted in authoritative Sunnī ḥadīth collections such as *al-Mustadrak* by Ḥākim al-Nīshāpūrī, *Manāqib* by al-Khuwārazmī, and *Tārīkh Dimashq* by Ibn 'Asākir, has consistently garnered the attention of Muslim traditionists (*muḥaddithūn*) and theologians (*mutakallimūn*). In the contemporary era, the Wahhābī intellectual movement, motivated by a desire to diminish the standing of the Ahl al-Bayt ('a) and weaken the doctrinal foundations of Shī'ism, has intensely challenged this ḥadīth. They have assailed it on both narrational (*sanad*) and semantic (*dalālah*) grounds, variously labeling it as fabricated, weak, and even contradictory to the core principles of monotheism (*tawḥīd*). This research aims to conduct a critical examination of this perspective, offering a substantiated response based on the credible sources of both major Islamic schools of thought (*al-farīqayn*) through a rigorous scholarly methodology.

Methodology

This study employs a **descriptive-analytical method** with a **library-based approach**. Data has been systematically gathered through an in-depth study of primary sources in ḥadīth, biographical evaluation (*rijāl*), history, and theology (*kalām*) from both Shī'ī and Sunnī traditions. The analytical framework is bifurcated into two primary components:

1. **Sanad (Chain of Narration) Analysis:** The narrators of the ḥadīth, particularly figures such as 'Abāyah ibn Rib'ī and Mūsā ibn Ṭarīf, are scrutinized through the science of *rijāl* and the principles of narrator criticism and validation (*al-jarḥ wa-al-ta'dīl*). The scholarly opinions, both affirming and contesting their reliability, have been compiled and analyzed.
2. **Dalālah (Semantic) Analysis:** The content of the ḥadīth and its implications for the station of Imamate (*imāmah*) and spiritual authority (*wilāyah*) of Imām 'Alī ('a) are examined in accordance with established hermeneutical and theological principles. The objections (*shubuhāt*) raised by Wahhābism in this regard are systematically addressed.

Furthermore, the study utilizes both **refutational** (*naqdī*) arguments, which leverage the opponent's own premises, and **direct explanatory** (*ḥallī*) arguments to deconstruct and respond to the critiques.

Findings

The findings of this research can be categorized into several key areas:

1. Findings Pertaining to the *Sanad* (Chain of Narration)

- The ḥadīth "'Alī qasīm al-nār wa-al-jannah" is transmitted through **eight distinct chains of narration** (*turuq*) from numerous companions, including Abū Ṭufayl, Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī, Anas ibn Mālīk, Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān, and 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās. This multiplicity of chains, according to the principles of ḥadīth science accepted by Sunnī authorities like Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn 'Uthaymīn, mutually strengthens the narration, even if some individual chains are considered weak independently.
- The principal narrators, most notably 'Abāyah ibn Rib'ī, have been validated (*tawthīq*) by a host of eminent Sunnī scholars, including Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, Ibn Sa'd, Ibn Ḥibbān, and Ḥākim al-Nīshāpūrī. Ḥākim explicitly affirmed that 'Abāyah's narrations meet the rigorous criteria of al-Bukhārī and Muslim.
- The accusation of "**ghuluw**" (extremism) leveled against some narrators is not, in itself, a definitive cause for rejecting a narration according to many classical Sunnī scholars, unless substantiated by evidence of mendacity or a deficient memory. Numerous figures, such as Abān ibn Taghlib, were accused of *ghuluw*, yet their narrations were accepted and included in the *Ṣaḥīḥayn*.
- A clear methodological **inconsistency** is evident in the Wahhābī approach (particularly that of al-Albānī). On one hand, they reject ḥadīths concerning the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt due to the narrators' Shī'ī convictions; on the other, they concede that early traditionists did not typically disqualify narrators based on their theological school (*madhhab*).

2. Findings Pertaining to *Dalālah* (Content and Meaning)

Endorsement by Sunnī Scholars: Numerous leading Sunnī authorities have accepted not only the chain but also the meaning of the ḥadīth. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal explicitly declared it authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) and elucidated its meaning by citing the corollary ḥadīth, "None loves you except a believer..." Other scholars such as Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, al-Khuwārazmī, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, and al-Zamakhsharī have transmitted and interpreted the ḥadīth, viewing it as indicative of the ummah's division based on love and enmity towards Imām 'Alī ('a).

Resolution of the *Shirk* Objection: The expression "*qasīm al-nār*" does not imply partnership in divine Lordship (*rubūbiyyah*). Rather, it signifies the role of an "**apportioner**" (*musahhim*) who allocates

shares by divine permission (*bi-idhnillāh*) as a manifestation of divinely-bestowed creative authority (*wilāyah takwīniyyah*). This is analogous to responsibilities attributed to other companions in different narrations.

Coherence with Other Narrations: The content is fully consonant with numerous other ḥadīths that emphasize the centrality of Imām ‘Alī’s (‘a) *wilāyah* for eschatological salvation. This includes the "**ḥadīth of the permit to cross the *Ṣirāṭ***," which conditions entry into Paradise upon receiving permission from Imām ‘Alī (‘a), a narration also found in reliable Sunnī sources.

Addressing Chronological and Superiority Objections: The role of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) as "*qasīm al-nār*" is a trans-historical reality rooted in his station of *wilāyah takwīniyyah*. Consequently, those who attained salvation before his physical birth were, in essence, believers in the very reality of which he is the perfect earthly manifestation. Furthermore, this ḥadīth does not imply his superiority over the Prophet (ṣ), but rather describes a unique virtue and a specific function in the hereafter, just as the Prophet (ṣ) possesses exclusive virtues like finality of prophethood (*khātimiyyah*).

Findings Pertaining to the Research Gap

The literature review reveals that while many works have transmitted this ḥadīth and discussed the virtues of Imām ‘Alī (‘a), **no independent study has offered a comprehensive and structured critique** of the specific narrational and semantic objections raised by Wahhābīsm against this particular ḥadīth. This research aims to fill this scholarly void.

Conclusion

This research concludes that the claims advanced by the Wahhābī movement, which posit that the ḥadīth "*‘Alī qasīm al-nār wa-al-jannah*" is fabricated or weak, are devoid of scholarly support when measured against the established criteria of ḥadīth science. From a narrational perspective, the ḥadīth is **valid and defensible**, supported by its multiple chains of transmission and the validation of its narrators by preeminent Sunnī authorities. From a semantic perspective, its content presents **no contradiction with the principles of *tawḥīd***. Instead, it eloquently expresses the sublime station and pivotal role of Imām ‘Alī (‘a) within the cosmic order and Islamic eschatology. The denial of this ḥadīth appears to stem less from scientific critique and more from sectarian prejudice and the literalist hermeneutic that Wahhābīsm applies to the virtues of the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a). This study is presented as a contribution toward the rational defense and clarification of the shared ḥadīthic heritage between the two major Islamic schools and the elucidation of the true station of Imamate and *wilāyah*.

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