

A Survey of Wāhhabī Positions on Mahdism With an Emphasis on the Position of Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz

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Abstract

The belief in Mahdism, or the Islamic form of the belief in the divine promise and imminent coming of a universal savior, is a tenet which all Moslems believe in, in one form or another. Like other sects within Islam, the Wāhhabī sect also accepts the principle of Mahdism based on hadith reports which they consider to be *moterwāter*,³ as well as believing in the advent of the Mahdi at the end of time for the purposes of bringing about universal justice in the world. As one of the important figures in contemporary Wāhhabī thought, Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz has also proffered some views concerning the issue of Mahdism, although [these are] scattered [throughout his work]. The present paper is a descriptive and analytical work that examines the position of the Wāhhabīs on the issue of the promised universal savior, with a particular emphasis on the position of Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz. Ben-Bāz considers the hadith reports which are the basis for the belief in the principle of Mahdism to be *moterwāter*, and also considers anyone who denies this principle to be an unbeliever (*kāfir*). Ben-Bāz believes the Mahdi (universal savior) who is promised to

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3. *Motewāter* - The highest possible classification of reliability of a hadith report. A *hadīth* report is considered *motewāter* (having reached the threshold of *tawātor*) when it has been transmitted with a frequency of transmission through different chains of narrators in exactly the same way to the extent that there can remain no doubt concerning the authenticity and reliability of the text in question.

appear at the end of time will have the following attributes: the Mahdi's father will have the same name as the Apostle of God [i.e. Mohammad] (may God's peace and blessings be upon him and upon the purified and immaculate members of his House); the Mahdi will be a descendent of the Prophet and thus be a member of his household; the Mahdi will be a descendant of the Prophet through the Hasanid line; the Mahdi's advent will be for the purpose of bringing about universal peace and justice; the Mahdi will rule in accordance with the sacred law of Islam; the Mahdi's advent will be accompanied by the advent of the Christ Jesus, the son of Lady Mary; and so on. [All of these views are in accord with the consensus view of the Moslem community], but [nevertheless] there are some serious criticisms concerning his views and position, which we have striven to point out and refute mainly on the basis of sources which are acceptable to the Wahnābis themselves.

Keywords: Mahdism, the Imam al-Mahdi, Sunni, Wahnābi, Abd al-Aziz Ben-Baz

Introduction

One of the issues which has been posed within Islamic societies ever since the formative period of Islam and which has given rise to many events has been the issue of Mahdism or Islamic messianism. Most Moslem believe in the tenet of Mahdism and thus believe that his advent and insurrection [against the forces of the *tāghūt* or illegitimate authority] is something that is certain to happen. That having been said, it should also be noted that each group and sect within the greater Islamic community hold different beliefs concerning certain details of the promised messiah due to the differences in sectarian scriptural sources and also due to the influence of the prominent personalities within each group. The details on which these groups differ include the criteria for the determination of scriptural sources and proofs, the timing of the advent, the issue as to whether he has already been born or is yet to be born, and so on. The Wahhābi sect is one which has been a subject of discussion lately, and whose ideology has been the subject of the critical research of many scholars. But one aspect of their ideology which has not been the subject of a thorough and systematic exploration is the issue of Mahdism. Thus, this paper is a descriptive and analytical work that aims to examine the position of the Wahhābis on the issue of the promised universal savior, with a particular emphasis on the position of Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz, their Grand Mufti and former Sheikh. The aim of this paper is to establish the status of the issue of the promised universal savior in the ideology of the Wahhābis and in the thought of Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz in particular; and to determine the specific characteristics he attributes to the promised universal savior, and what valid criticism can be levelled against his views on the basis of scriptural sources which are acceptable to the prominent personalities within the Salafi movement.

1. The Wahhābi Position on Mahdism

Sunnis believe in the tenet of Mahdism, considering it to be an event whose occurrence at the end of time is certain; but most of them believe in the tenet of Mahdism as an abstract concept and do not believe that a specific person [has already been born who will fulfill the function of this divine promise].¹

The above conception is derived from the Sunnite collections of hadith reports in which a large number of reports are to be found concerning the Mahdi and his promised advent, many of which are considered to be *sahīh*² or *hasan*.³ What can be gleaned from the Sunnite collections of hadith reports is their belief in the advent of an individual from the House of the Apostle of God (unto whom be God's peace and blessings) at the end of time, who will be a harbinger of social justice at a time when iniquity and oppression are everywhere to be found, and whose advent is a [divinely promised] certainty.⁴

Given this brief introductory statement, let us now proceed to the background of this belief among the progenitors of the Wahhābi and Salafi movement. We must mention first and foremost the most important prominent personality for the Salafis, i.e. Ahmad b. Hanbal (241 HQ). Ahmad b. Hanbal has reported 136 hadith reports having to do with the Mahdi in his *Mosnad* collection, thereby establishing the tenet of

1. Taftāzāni, 1409 A H: 312; Ibn-e Hajar Heythami, 1428 A H: 39; Mubārakfuri, n. d., vol. 6: 401.

2. Sound or authentic; reliable.

3. *Hasan* meaning "good" is used to describe *hadith* whose authenticity is not as well-established as that of *sahīh hadith*, but sufficient for use as supporting evidence.

4. Refer to: Abu Dāwoud n. d., vol. 4: 174; Ibn-e Hbbān, 1414 A H, vol. 15: 238; Ibn-e Hanbal, n. d., vol. 3: 36 and 70; Tabrāni, 1404 A H, vol. 10: 133 – 136.

Mahdism and the advent of the Mahdi at the end of time.¹

The next important prominent personality is Eben Taymīya al-Harrānī (728 HQ), who is an important link in the chain that connects the Salafis of the present day to Ahmad b. Hanbal and the Moslems of the early era of Islam, and who is considered to be a preeminent Salafi among the Wahhābis. Like all other Moslems, Eben Taymīya also accepts the tenet of Mahdism, considering the hadith reports concerning this tenet which have been related by the likes of Abū-Dāwūd, Termedhī, and Ahmad b. Hanbal to be *sahīh*.² Eben Taymīya considers the *hadith* reports concerning the tenet of Mahdism to be generally accepted (*ma'rūf*) by Sunni scholars, and believes that one of his functions will be to spread social justice at a time when iniquity and oppression have become widespread.³

Eben Qayyem al-Jowzī (751 HQ), who was a student of Eben Taymīya, also mentions the promised Mahdi in his works. He has characterized hadith reports concerning the advent of the Mahdi as being hadith reports with the most *sahīh* provenance titles (*asnād*). He has classified some of these reports concerning the Mahdi under the heading of the establishment of social justice at a time when oppression and iniquity are ubiquitous, and has classified others as being *sahīh*.⁴ Like his master Eben Taymīya, Eben Qayyem al-Jowzī believes in the tenet of Mahdism.

Mohammad b. Abdol-Wahhāb, the founder of the Wahhābi sect, has devoted a section to reports which relate to the Mahdi in the chapter on seditions (*fetan*) and the events which are harbingers of the End Times,

1. Refr to: Ibn-e Hanbal, n. d., vol. 1: 376; Ibid, vol. 3: 26, 28, 36 and 70.

2. Ibn-e Teymiyyeh, 1406 A H, vol. 4: 211.

3. Ibid: 95; Hanbali al-Ba'li, 1406 A H: 250.

4. Ibn-e Qayyem, 1403 A h: 143 – 155.

in his collection of hadith reports, where he brings to bear a few reports which amount to a belief [on his part] in the [tenet of] the Mahdi and his advent at the end of time.⁵

The next prominent Wahhābi scholar, who is also considered by their faithful to be an expert in the science of hadith, is Mohammad Nāser od-Dīn al-Albānī (1420 HQ). Despite the fact that he is well known for considering a large number of hadith reports which other more preeminent scholars before him have considered to be *sahīh*, not to be reliable, he nevertheless considers a sufficient number of hadith reports having to do with the Mahdi and the tenet of Mahdism to be *sahīh* or authentic and reliable, and consequently believes: (1) that the advent of the Mahdi will be at the end of time, (2) that he will be a member of the Household of the Prophet, (3) that he will establish social justice at a time when oppression and iniquity are ubiquitous, (4) and that there will be a plethora of divine blessing during the era of his advent.⁶ Some of Albānī's contemporaries have denied the advent of the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, and the advent of the Mahdi (unto all of whom be God's peace); Albānī considers these denials to be a symptom of a lack of faith among the general Moslem populace [in the authenticity of the hadith report corpus], and considers this posture to be a mistake, despite the fact that such people's intentions are the reformation of the thought of the Moslem peoples.⁷

In a treatise which was well received among the Wahhābis,⁸ Abdol-Mohsen

5. Mohammad bin 'Abdulwahhāb, n. d.: 234 – 245.

6. Refer to: Al-Bāni, 1416 A H, vol. 2: 328; vol. 5: 372; vol. 6: 368.

7. Ibid, vol. 6: 368

8. This treatise is one of the few independent monographs which have been written specifically about the promised Mahdi among the Wahhābis. The text of the monograph is based on a speech which was delivered by Abbād at Medina University about issues having to do with

Eben Hamd al-‘Abbād (b. 1353 HQ), a professor at Medina University, has posited that the Mahdi is not the Mahdi which the Shī’a consider to be their Twelfth Imam; but has stated that the principle of Mahdism is to be accepted, that there should be no doubt about it, and that a denial of the tenet is a perilous act.¹

Solaymān b. Nāser Alwān (b. 1389 HQ), another Wahhābī scholar who is presently in one of the prisons of the Saudi regime, has written a short treatise in which he considers the Mahdi to be someone whose advent is to be expected and as someone who will be from the House of the Prophet. He has stated that the hadith reports concerning the tenet of Mahdism are *motewāter*.² He considers the Mahdi to be one of the Rightly Guided Caliphs whose advent will be at the end of time and whose most important activities will include reform and a reign in which equity and justice prevail, and the abolition of iniquity and injustice and oppression, and replacing non-Islamic laws with authentic Islamic ones, and a waging of a righteous battle against superstitions and false idols (*dajjāl*).³

In sum, it can be said that the majority of Wahhābi scholars agree on the principle of Mahdism despite the fact that they have different views on various other subjects. Like the majority of scholars within the Sunni community, these scholars believe in the tenet of Mahdism as an abstract concept and do not believe that a specific person has already been born

the promised Messiah, and about the transmitters of the reports about the tenet, and a survey of those who believe in it and those who do not. The text was published in 37 pages in 1969 in the third number of the university’s journal.

1. Al-‘bād, 1389 A H: 160 – 161.
2. See footnote above.
3. ‘Olwn, 1423 A H, 1

who will fulfill the function of this divine promise.¹In the section that follows, we shall subject the views of Shaykh Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz, the famous Wahhābi scholar in the contemporary era and their Grand Mufti and former Sheikh in Saudi Arabia, concerning the issue of Mahdism to a critical examination.

2. The Position of Shaykh Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz

Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz (1330 – 1420 HQ) was a doctor of jurisprudence, a judge, and the Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia prior to his death not long ago. Being the author of dozens of books on sacred jurisprudence (*feqh*) and creedal beliefs, he is considered to be one of the most prominent scholars within the Salafi movement generally, and within Wahhābism in particular. But his prolific output notwithstanding, it seems that he has not authored anything specifically on the issue of Mahdism. Nevertheless, he has expressed his views concerning the subject, which can be found in the body of some of his fatwas and orations. The research of this paper on the views of this Wahhābi personality on the issue of Mahdism is based on some of these fatwas as well as on *The Commentary of Ben-Bāz on the Treatise of Abdol-Mohsen al-Abbād*, a portion of which was published in the Journal of the University of Medina.

Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz considers the hadith reports concerning the issue of Mahdism to be *motewāter*, or *motewāter*² with respect to their content (*motewāter-e ma'navī*)³ [as opposed to the exact wording being *motewāter*]. Taking into consideration the fact that some scholars have stopped short of the anathematization (*takfīr*) of those who do not believe

1. Refer to: Taftāzāni, 1409 A H, vol. 5: 312; Ibn-e Hajar Hethami, 1428 A H: 39

2. Bin Bāz (a), n. d., vol. 1: 356

3. Al'ibād, 1389 A H: 162; Bin Bāz (b), n. d., vol. 4: 97, 98, 99.

in the tenet of Mahdism, Ben-Bāz does not stop short, but anathemizes such persons, but does so with caution (*bāehtīāt*). But he abandons such caution in favor of a definitive anathematization when it comes to the belief of the return of His Eminence the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, or with respect to the belief in the rise of the Dajjāl¹ [at the end of time].²

Like the scholars before him in the Wahhābi and Salafi line of thought, Ben-Bāz's evaluation of the hadith report corpus having to do with the issue of Mahdism is that this corpus contains the whole range of hadith, from those which are *sahīh*, to those which are *hasan*, and also, those which are *dhaīf*. And also in keeping with his predecessors, Ben-Bāz maintains that the strength of the *sahīh* and *hasan* hadiths are such that they compensate for those which are *dhaīf*.³ Ben-Bāz believes that there is a consensus among [Wahhābi] scholars concerning the veracity of the issue of the Mahdi and his advent at the end of time.⁴ It should be noted that Ben-Bāz's belief concerning the nature of the Mahdi is similar to the beliefs of the scholars of the Sunni sect in so far as he also believes in the tenet of Mahdism as an abstract concept and does not believe that a specific person has already been born who will fulfill the function of this divine promise. Thus, he believes that the determination of the exact identity of the person of the Mahdi is something that has to do with the domain that is beyond the ken of ordinary human perception (*alam al-ghayb*), before which there is a veil for ordinary human beings.⁵ Given this

1. An Islamic equivalent of the anti-Christ, against whose hoards the Mahdi and the Christ Jesus will jointly go to battle in the end times.

2. Bin Bāz (a), n. d., vol. 1: 356

3. Al'Ibād: Ibid.

4. Bin Bāz (b), n. d., vol. 4: 97.

5. Ibid, vol. 4: 90

position, Ben-Bāz believes that the only person who should be accepted as the Mahdi is one whose characteristics fit all of the attributes which have been stipulated in the hadith report corpus concerning the Mahdi.¹

The Grand Mufti of the Wahhābis stipulates the above-mentioned attributes of the Mahdi to be as follows: (1) He will have the same name as his father, as well as the Prophet; (2) He will be a descendent of the Prophet of God; (3) He will be a descendent of the Prophet of the Hasanid line; (4) He will rise up in insurrection against an oppressive social order in order to establish a reign of peace and justice; (5) The Mahdi will rule in accordance with the sacred law of Islam; and (6) the Mahdi's advent will be accompanied by the advent of the Christ Jesus, the son of Lady Mary.² Unlike some Wahhābi scholars who claim that the Sunnis do not refer to the Mahdi as The Awaited One (*al-montazer*), Ben-Bāz does indeed refer to the promised Mahdi as The Awaited One.³

In a commentary on the opinion of Eben Kathīr who recounted⁴ the opinion of a prominent scholar of the Israelites to the effect that it is possible that the Mahdi is one of the twelve imams [referred to the Sunni hadith collections who are not those of the Twelver Shi'a sect, according to Sunni and Wahhābi belief], Ben-Bāz considers this opinion to be worthy of pondering, but ultimately rejects it on its surface (*dar zāher nemīpazīrad*). The rationale for his position is that hadith reports tell us that the religion [of Islam] has not lost its efficacy and purchase [on society] during the time of the twelve caliphs, and that this [state of affairs] only corresponds with the era of the reign of the Omayyads, as

1. Ibid: 91

2. Ibid: 90, 91 and 98 – 102.

3. Bin Bāz (a), n. d., vol. 1: 355, Bin Bāz (b), n. d., vol. 4: 90.

4. Ibn-e Kathir, 1419 A H, vol. 3: 59.

it was after their reign that sedition and internal strife and differences of opinion concerning the legitimacy of the ruler took place, after which there have been numerous reigns [which fought with each other within the Islamic community, such that this civil war has lasted] up to our time. On the other hand, Ben-Bāz reasons that the advent of the Mahdi is not yet upon us, and that Islam does not have the efficacy and purchase on society which it enjoyed in the past. He therefore concludes that the Mahdi cannot be thought to have risen during the time of those twelve [Omayyad] caliphs.

Ben-Bāz believes that the caliphs who best conform to the description of the twelve caliphs [which have been prophesied by the Prophet] are the four “Rightly Guided” caliphs, Mu’āwiya, Yazīd, Abdol-Mālek b. Marwān and his four sons, and Omar b. Abdol-Azīz. He thus does not consider political differences such as that which arose after the death of Yazīd with the reign of Eben Zobayr in Mecca against Marwān’s reign in Shām (or the Levant) as a factor which affects the integrality of the uninterrupted reign of Islam; and believes that after these events, the people gathered around Abdol-Mālek b. Marwān and thus regained their [political] unity.¹

And finally, Ben-Bāz points to the certainty of the advent of the Christ Jesus, the son of Lady Mary, and of the false messiah (the Dajjāl) at the end of time, and their timing coinciding with the advent of the Mahdi, and refutes certain interpretations [which are opposed to this position].²

3. Critique of Shaykh Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz’s Position

At this juncture we will take the opportunity to provide a critique

1. Bin Bāz (b), n. d., vol. 4: 100.

2. Ibid: 101.

of some of the positions of Shaykh Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz which are at variance with that of the Moslem community at large, and some of which are even at variance with the views of the consensus among Salafi and Wahhābi scholarship.

1. The Mahdi having the same Name as the Prophet's Father

The first criticism that can be levelled against the views of Shaykh Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz is that he believes the name of the promised Mahdi to be Mohammad b. Abdollāh and none other than that name. This belief of his is based on a hadith report which is reported on the authority of Abdollāh b. Mas'ūd which states that the name of the Mahdi's father is the same as the name of the Prophet's father.

What can be said in this regard is that in numerous hadith reports which are available both in Sunni hadith collections as well as in the Shi'a hadith corpus, the Prophet of God is reported to have said that "the promised Mahdi who will rise in insurrection against the forces of tyranny and iniquity at the end of time will have the same name as me". Now the matter of the name of the Mahdi's father also being the same as that of the Prophet's father is an additional text which only appears in a limited number of the hadith (where it appears as "*esmabīhuesmabī*"), and this addition has drawn the attention of the Wahhābis and of Ben-Bāz. What these reports share in common is [the text of] the hadith report of Abdollāh b. Mas'ūd which Āsem has reported from Zar b. Habaysh, who reported it from [Abdollāh b.] Mas'ūd. So for example, Tabarānī cites the report which relates the Mahdi having the same Name as the Prophet nineteen times in his *al-Ma'jam al-Kabīr* (18 reports from Abdollāh b. Mas'ūd and one report from Qara), of which only three of the fifteen provenance titles (*asnād*) which terminate in Abdollāh b. Mas'ūd and the

one which terminates in Qara mention the stipulation of the two fathers being homonymous. One of the three reports which we mentioned is as follows:

Abdullah bin Mas'ud quoted the Prophet ^{PBUH} as: Even if there remains but one night from the world, God will lengthen that night so that a man from my household whose name is the same as my name and whose father's name is the same as my father's name rules and fills the earth with justice as it will have been filled with injustice.¹

It is interesting to note that the great scholars of hadith from among the Sunni community such as Ahmad b. Hanbal, Termedhī and others have refrained from reporting the additional text, but have even at times felt obligated to mention the fact that not only does the additional text not appear in the chain of custody (*tarīq*) in question (i.e. that which goes back from Āsem to Abdollāh b. Mas'ūd), but that the additional text does not appear in other chains of custody which go back to the likes of dignitaries such as Ali b. Abī-Tāleb, OmmSalama, Abū-Sa'īdKhedrī, and Abū Horayra. Moqadasī ash-Shāfe'ī points this out in his book and states that the leading scholars of the science of hadith reporting (*emāmān-e hadīth*) have not included this additional text [in their collections].² Another scholar, Qondūzī al-Hanafī, also considers the additional text as a superfluous accretion based on the fact of the number of reports which have been [authoritatively] related without it.³ Additionally, there

1. Tabarāni, 1404 A H, vol. 10: 135.

حدثنا الحسين إسحاق التستري حدثنا حميد بن محمد الرازي حدثنا هارون بن مغيرة عن عمرو بن قيس عن عاصم عن زر عن عبد الله [بن مسعود] قال: قال رسول الله (ص): لو لم يبق من الدنيا إلا ليلة لطول الله تلك الليلة حتى يملك رجل من أهل بيتي يواطئ اسمه اسمي واسم أبيه اسم أبي يملأها قسطا وعدلا كما ملئت ظلما وجورا.

2. Moqaddasi Shāfe'I, 1410 A H: 89 – 90.

3. Qanduzi Hanafi, 1422 A H, vol. 3: 394.

are reports with the same chain of transmission (*sanad*) from Āsem back to Abdollāh b. Mas'ūd in hadith collections such as Ahmad b. Hanbal's *Mosnad* which do not include the suspect additional text but rather end with the words “*esmahuemsi*” [= his name is the same as my name]; and in none of whose cited examples do the words appears as “*esmabīhuesmabī*”.¹

The following text is an example of the report which appears in Ahmad b. Hanbal's *Mosnad*:

Abdullah bin Mas'ud quoted the Prophet ^{PBUH} as: The world will not come to the end until an Arab man from my household whose name is the same as my name rules.²

Another hadith report is related by Na'im b. Hammād on his own authority in whose chain of transmission can be seen a person by the name of Rashdayn b. Sa'd al-Mehrī, who has been considered to be an unreliable reporter by the vast majority of hadith scholars and scholars of the science of *rejāl*, including Yahyā b. Ma'in,³ Ahmad b. Hanbal,⁴ Jozjānī,⁵ and Nesāī.⁶ These prominent scholars either rejected reports which were transmitted with a chain of custody which included Rashdayn b. Sa'd al-Mehrī as an authority, or failed to mention the report altogether [meaning that it was not worthy of their consideration].

1. Ibn-e Hanbal, n.d.: 376, 377, 430 and 448.

2. Ibid: 377

حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ حَدَّثَنِي أَبِي حَدَّثَنَا يَحْيَى بْنُ سَعِيدٍ عَنْ سُهَيْبَانَ حَدَّثَنِي عَاصِمٌ عَنْ زَيْدٍ عَنْ عَبْدِ اللَّهِ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ لَا تَذْهَبُ الدُّنْيَا أَوْ قَالَ لَا تَنْقُضِي الدُّنْيَا حَتَّى يَمْلِكَ الْعَرَبَ رَجُلٌ مِنْ أَهْلِ بَيْتِي وَيُؤَاتِي أَسْمَهُ اسْمِي.

3. Ibn-e Abi Hātam, 1271 A H, vol. 3: 513.

4. Al-Mazi, 1400 A H, vol. 9: 193.

5. Jowzjāni, 1405 A H: 156.

6. Nisā'i, 1369 A H: 41.

Therefore, it is clear that one cannot rely on hadith reports which contain such accretions and which the greatest hadith scholar who is held in high esteem by the Wahhābis, i.e. Ahmad b. Hanbal, has not paid any attention to. At the same time, one must also bear in mind the possibility of the Zaydīs wanting to forge such an addition to the hadith reports in order to conform the report about the Mahdī to the person of Mohammad b. Abdollāh b. Hasan, aka an-Nafs az-Zakīya; or to the possibility of the Abbāsids wanting to forge such an addition in order to conform such reports to the person of Mohammad b. Abdollāh al-Mansūr, who was known as al-Mahdī,¹ so that the evaluation of the additional phrase to the hadith report can be examined in the light of the greater political context. For example, we can point to a report that has been forged concerning the first of these two personages, and which presents the Mahdī as a person by the name of Mohammad b. Abdollāh who stuttered or had a speech impediment; whereas [the leader of the Zaydīs], an-Nafs az-Zakīya, also had a speech impediment.²

2. The Mahdi being a Hasanid Descendant of the Prophet

One of the characteristics which Shaykh Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz, following people such as Eben Taymīya,³ and Eben Qayyem al-Jowzī,⁴ attributes to the Mahdī is that he is said to be a descendant of the Prophet from the Hasanid line or from the line of Imam Hasan, the second Imam of the Shi'a, and that he will not be a descendant from the line of Imam Hosayn (the Third Imam). These writers reason that because Imam Hasan abandoned his investiture in the office of the caliphate for the sake of

1. Sāfi Golpay-egāni, 1433 A H, vol.2: 204.

2. Abu al-Faraj Isfahāni, 1416: 214 – 215.

3. Ibn-e Teymiyyah, 1406 A H, vol. 8: 258

4. Ibn-e Qayyem, 1403 A H: 152

seeking God's good pleasure [i.e. for the sake of keeping the peace and preventing the continuation of the civil war], that therefore, Almighty God has placed the Mahdi in the line of his progeny, so that someone from Imam Hasan's line will be tasked by Providence to rise up in insurrection against the forces of tyranny and oppression and to establish a reign of universal peace and social justice on earth. They further reason that this is part of God's Way to give something to a person (or to that person's progeny) who gives up a good for His sake, something as good if not better in its stead; and that it would go against this Divine Way for God to grant such a favor to Imam Hosayn who, contrary to his older brother, insisted on [investiture in the office of] the caliphate and went to battle for it but did not attain to it.¹ The claim of this rationale is one which has many detractors both within the Sunni community, as well as in that of the Shi'a's; and these objections are based on the Mahdi being a descendant of the Prophet from the line of Imam Hosayn [per scriptural proofs from the hadith report corpus of both sects]; and of course we shall limit our discussion here simply to the fact of the Mahdi being a descendant of the Prophet from the line of Imam Hosayn [as this fact is established] in the Sunni sources, as well as in the sources which the Wahhābis claim as theirs.

We will start by stating that there are a large number of hadith reports in the various hadith collections such as Ahmad b. Hanbal's *Mosnad* where the Mahdi is said to be of the *ahl al-bayt* or a member of the household of the Prophet, i.e. one of His Eminence's descendants;² and that he will have the same name as the Prophet;³ and that these hadith reports do

1. Ibid: 151.

2. Ibn-e Hanbal, n. d., vol. 1: 376; vol. 3: 36 and 70.

3. Ibid, vol. 1: 376; Abu Dāwoud, n. d., vol. 2: 508.

not point to whether the Mahdi will be from the Hasanid or Hosaynid line. On the other hand, there are another group of hadith reports which specify which branch of the Hasanid or Hosaynid lines of the household of the Prophet the Mahdi will be descended from.

Now concerning the issue of whether or not the promised Mahdi will be from the Hasanid line, it would seem that the oldest source in which this matter is referred to and from which all other downstream sources which have echoed this reference have relied on, is the *Sonan* of Abū-Dāwūd. In this authoritative Sunni collection of hadith, Abū-Dāwūd has brought a report to bear whose narrator is Hārūn b. Mughayra, who relates the report from Amr b. Abī-Qays, from Shuayb b. Khālid, from Abū-Ishāq, from Imam Ali; in which His Eminence Imam Ali is reported to have looked at his son Imam Hasan, and then to have said, “This son of mine is a Lord and Master, just as the Prophet has so characterized him.¹ Soon an offspring from his line who has the same name as your Prophet will arise who will be similar to the Prophet in terms of his behavior and comportment, but not in his looks” after which it is reported [in the same report that Imam Ali continued on to talk about] the issue of [his] establishing a reign of peace and social justice on Earth.²

On the other hand, concerning the issue of whether or not the promised Mahdi will be from the Hosaynid line (among those who have specified this variable one way or the other), it can be said that there have been others who have related this same hadith report of Abū-Dāwūd’s, but have related it where Imam Hosayn is its subject rather than Imam Hasan.

1. Reference to a hadith report of the Prophet who is said to have stated that Hasan and Hosayn are the Lords and Masters of the youth of paradise.

2. Ibid, vol. 2: 511.

Jazrī ash-Shāfe'ī (833 HQ) has written in his book:

Imam Ali ^{PBUH} looked at his son Husain ^{PBUH} and said: This son of mine is a lord as the Prophet ^{PBUH} called him so; he will have a progeny named after your prophet ^{PBUH}, similar to him in character, but not so in appearance. Then he said that he will fill the earth with Justice. The same thing has been narrated by Abi Dāwoud in his Sunnah.¹

Jazrī has, in effect, related that same report of Abū-Dāwūd's with Imam Hosayn as its main subject, and assures us at the end of his discourse that he has related it from Abū-Dāwūd, and says no more about it.² Moqaddasī ash-Shāfe'ī has also brought to bear several hadith reports concerning the promised Mahdi being from the Hosaynid line, including the hadith [which has been initiated by] Hodhayfa in this regard in *'Aqd ad-Doror*, which is reported from a number of reporters.³ And while it is true that Eben Qayyem considers Hodhayfa's hadith to be *dhaif* (weak, unreliable) – on account of the presence of Abbās b. Bakkār in its chain of custody⁴ – but the sum total of the hadiths [which relate this matter] cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the entirety of the Shi'a believe the promised Mahdi is from the Hosaynid line; and as will be discussed, the hadith reports having to do with the twelve caliphs which appear in the [Sunni] collections of hadith can only be properly reconciled with the twelve Imams of the Shi'a. And in addition to the two hadith reports from Abū Eshāq and

1. Jazri, n. d.: 130

قال علي [عليه السلام]: ونظر إلى ابنه الحسين [ع] فقال: إن ابني هذا سيد كما سماه نبي صلى الله عليه وآله وسلم وسيخرج من صلبه رجل يسمي باسم نبيكم يشبهه في الخلق ولا يشبهه في الخلق ثم ذكر قصة يملأ الأرض عدلاً هكذا رواه أبو داود في سننه وسكت عليه.

2. In this case, it is possible to imagine a scribal error between the words “حسن” and “حسين”.

3. Moqddasi Shāfe'I, 1410 A H: 83, 95, 157, 161, 195, 284.

4. Ibn-e Qayyem, 1403 A H: 146.

Hozayfa, there is another report which points to the Mahdi being from the Hosaynid line, which has been related by Na'im b. Hammād (229 HQ),¹ al-Daraqutnī (385 HQ), and Ganjī ash-Shāfe'ī (658 HQ).²

In addition to the above mentioned items, it should be noted that there are scholars among the Sunni community who not only believe the Mahdi to be descended from the Hosaynid line of the Prophet's progeny, but also believe that his identity is known and that he is none other than the Twelfth Imam of the Shi'a, [as the Shi'a also believe]. As an example, let us take the Shāfe'ī scholar Eben Talha (652 HQ). In the last chapter of his book *Matāleb as-Sou'l*, Eben Talha relates a hadith report concerning the Mahdi from the great scholars from within the Sunni community such as Abū-Dāwūd, Termedhī, Moslem, Bokhārī, Tha'labī, and others, and considers them all to be *sahīh* and explicit in the fact that the Mahdi is a progeny of Her Eminence Lady Fātema, and is of the Family (*etrat*) and House (ahl al-bayt) of the Prophet, and that these attributes can only be properly reconciled with the characteristics of the Twelfth Imam of the Shi'a.³ Eben Talha responds to those who make the objection that it is possible for another person to be from the progeny of Her Eminence Lady Fātema throughout history by saying that this is merely a possibility, and that up to our time, these characteristics [which have been stipulated in the reports within the Sunni hadith corpus] do not obtain for anyone other than the son of Imam Hasan al-Askari [the Eleventh Imam of the Shi'a]. Eben Talha brings the example of the Jews to bear, who denied the prophethood of the Prophet Mohammad (unto whom be God's peace) even though his characteristics had been prophesied in the Torah; and

1. Ibn-e Himād, 1414 A H: 229, 230.

2. Kanji, Shāfe'ī, 1409 A H: 116.

3. Ibn-e Talha Shafe'ī, 1419 A H: 312 – 314.

cites this as the greatest reason for the confirmation of this identification [of the Mahdi with the Twelfth Imam of the Shi'a], and is of the opinion that given such external reasons and the substantiation of the attributes for the Twelfth Imam of the Shi'a, it is not possible to stipulate any other person as the promised Mahdi. And finally, Eben Talha states with respect to hadith reports which report the Mahdi as having the same name as the Prophet's father that this is not the case, basing his conclusion on Quranic evidence and its usage of the Arabic word "ab" for grandfather, as well as the currency of the usage of the word "esm" as a patronymic (konya) or adjective, thus Abū Abdollāh Hosayn b. Alī becomes the identity of the father of the promised Mahdi. He thus ends up defending the Shi'a position.¹

The Shāfe'ī scholar Mowasselī ash-Shāfe'ī also relates a hadith report in which the Imam al-Kāzem [the Seventh Imam of the Shi'a] talks about the occultation (*ghayba*) of the Mahdi, and who responds to one who asks about his attributes that he is the fifth [generation] of the sons of the Seventh Imam.²

Similarly, Ebrāhīm al-Jowaynī al-Khorāsānī (730 HQ) relates hadith reports in his famous book *Farā'ed as-Samtayn* in praise of the House of the Prophet (the *ahl al-bayt*), as well as reports which stipulate the Mahdi as being descended from the Hosaynid line of the Prophet's progeny, and that he will be the twelfth in the line of the Twelve Imams. Jowaynī reports from Eben Abbās, from the Prophet of God that the Prophet, Imam Ali, Imam Hasan, Imam Hosayn, and nine sons of Imam Hosayn are pure and immaculate.³ He also relates two other reports which stipulate the

1. Ibid: 314 – 320

2. Museli, 1424 A H: 159 – 160.

3. Humawi Joweini, 1398 A H, vol. 2: 313.

number of the Imams to be twelve and which further stipulate the Imam al-Mahdi to be the twelfth of them. In the second of these reports, His Eminence [the Prophet] states that the Imams which will follow him will be twelve in number, specifying their identities and stipulating that the Mahdi will be the twelfth of them.¹ Continuing his narrative, Jowaynī relates another hadith report of the Prophet's in which the Mahdi is said to have the same name as His Eminence the Prophet, to be a progeny in the line of Imam Hosayn, and will be one who will rise up [in insurrection against the forces of evil] of a certainty prior to the Resurrection.²

It seems that Eben Sabbāq al-Mālekī (855 HQ) is yet another scholar who believes that the Mahdi is an actual person whom he identified with His Eminence the Hojjat [Mohammad] b. al-Hasan, who is descended from the Hosaynid line of the Prophet's House.³ Eben Sabbāq begins his narration by relying on Shaykh Mofīd as his source, and then proceeds to bring to bear hadith reports from authoritative Sunnite collections. [Eben Sabbāq does not make an explicit assertion in this regard, but] given the selection of the hadith reports that he used, it is implicit that he believes that the Mahdi whose advent is promised at the end of time is a Fātemid and Hosaynid Imam, and the Twelfth Imam of the Shi'a. The only explicit statement that he makes in this regard is the Imam al-Mahdi's advent being something which is promised [and therefore awaited], according to some scholars of hadith science.⁴

Fadl b. Rūzbehān al-Khonjī (927 HQ), a staunchly anti-Shi'a personality according to some, has examined the beliefs of the various

1. Ibid, vol. 2: 312, 313.

2. Ibid, vol. 2: 325 and 326.

3. Māleki, 1409 A H: 283.

4. Ibid: 293

sects within Islam concerning the identity of the Mahdi. After an analysis of their merits, he draws the following conclusion:

Therefore, in accordance with the dictates of prudence, we concur with the Imāmīya [Twelver Shi'a], and state that the promised Mahdi is Mohammad b. al-Hasan, who is the Qāem [the one who will rise in insurrection against the forces of tyranny and iniquity] and who is the Awaited One, whose advent will come when its term is determined [by God], who will fill the world with justice and righteousness, and will cleanse it of oppression and rebellion [against God's intended order], and the effects of whose grace presently reaches the select (*khāsān*). In any event, the dictates of caution bid us to believe with a will that the promised Mahdi who will arise at the end of time is His Eminence the Immaculate Imam Abol-Qāsem Mohammad al-Mahdi b. al-Imam Abī-Mohammad al-Hasan al-Askari (may God's peace and blessings be unto him).¹

Shams ed-Dīn Mohammad b. Towlūn ad-Dameshqī (953 HQ), another Sunni thinker, identifies the Mahdi as the Twelfth Imam of the Twelver Shi'a in a couplet:

And [the son of] the Askari, the Good (*hasan*), and the Purified One,
[Is] Mohammad the Guided One (*al-Mahdi*) who will soon arise.²

Qondūzī al-Hanafī (1294 HQ), the Hanafi Sunni scholar of the thirteenth lunar century is yet another personality who can be said to identify the Mahdi as the Twelfth Imam of the Twelver Shi'a. We can arrive at this conclusion by two avenues. On one hand, Qondūzī relates hadith reports which ascertain the identity of the Mahdi as the Twelfth

1. Khanji, 1375: 278 – 279.

2. Ibn-e Tulun, n. d.: 118

Imam; and additionally, there are chapters and sections to be found within his work which are devoted specifically to a treatment of the Mahdi whose advent is promised at the end of time. For example, he relates a hadith report which Jowaynī and Mowaffaq b. Ahmad al-Khārazmī have also related, from Solaym b. Qays, from Salmān al-Fārsī, in which the Imams [of the Shi'a] have been described as being *hojjats*,¹ and in which the Mahdi is identified as being the Twelfth Imam of the Twelver Shi'a.

I arrived at the Prophet ^{PBUH} while Imam Husain was sitting on his lap and the prophet kissed his eyes and face and said, “You are Sayyed and son of Sayyed and brother of Sayyed, and you are imam and son of imam and brother of imam, and you are *hujjah* (reason) and son of *hujjah* and brother of *hujjah*, and father of nine *hujjahs*, the ninth of whom will rise up.”²

In the above hadith report, the ninth *hojjat* from the line of Imam Hosayn is presented as the Qāem [the one who will rise in insurrection against the forces of tyranny and iniquity and will bring about universal peace and harmony] of the *ahl al-bayt* (the Household of the Prophet), i.e. the promised Mahdi whose advent is awaited at the end of time. This is an example which Qondūzī the Hanafi scholar has selected and related; but in addition to these hadith reports, he has dedicated chapter eighty-eight of the aforementioned book to proving that the promised Mahdi is none other than His Eminence the *Hojjat* [Mohammad] b. al-Hasan al-

1. *Hojjat*: the clear and perfect embodied evidence of and unimpeachable authority for all truth on Earth and therefore the conclusive argument and evidentiary proof against all falsehood on the Plain of Assembly on Judgement Day.

2. Qanduzi Hanafi, 1422 A H, vol. 3: 291.

دخلت على النبي صلى الله عليه وآله فاذا الحسين بن علي علي فخذي وهو يقبل خدي ويلثم فاه ويقول: أنت سيد أخو سيد وأنت إمام ابن إمام أخو إمام وأنت حجة ابن حجة إخو حجة أبو حجة تسعة من صلبك تاسعهم قائمهم

Askari.¹ As Qondūzī quotes passages from various Sunni scholars such as Eben Talha ash-Shāfe’ī, Homawī al-Jowaynī, Salāh ad-Dīn as-Safdī, Mohammad b. Yusof al-Ganji ash-Shāfeī, etc. the purport and substance of the sum total of which is that the Mahdī whose advent is awaited at the end of time is none other than the Twelfth Imam of the Shi’a.² As an example, Qondūzī’s citing a passage from Salāh ad-Dīn as-Safdī is as follows:

Verily the Mahdi is the Twelfth Imam of the Imamīya [the Twelver Shi’a]; their first [Imam] is our Lord and Master (*seyyedīna*) Ali [b. Abī Tāleb], and their last [Imam] is [the Imam] al-Mahdi.³

Therefore, considering the entirety of the matter [that has been presented], and considering the opinion and positions of the preeminent scholars within Sunni scholarship, it can be concluded that Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz’s position that the Mahdi is from the Hasanid line is unfounded.

3. The Identity of the Twelve Caliphs and the Inconsistent and Selective Identification [of Ben-Bāz in this Regard]

A grouping of the hadith reports which are available through Sunni hadith collections are reports in which the Prophet speaks of twelve Caliphs or Twelve Emirs (Princes). These hadith reports can be found in the most authoritative collections of hadith within the Sunni tradition [from Bokhārī and Moslem on down to Ahmad b. Hanbal, Abū Dāwūd, Termedhī, Hākem, etc.]. What all of the hadiths in this grouping share in common is the number twelve, which is associated either with the

1. Ibid, vol. 3: 374.

2. Ibid: 347 – 348.

3. Ibid: 374

إِنَّ الْمَهْدِيَّ الْمُؤَعَّدَ هُوَ الْإِمَامُ الثَّانِي عَشَرَ مِنَ الْأَيْمَةِ أَوْلَهُمْ سَيِّدُنَا عَلِيُّ وَأَخْرَجَهُمُ الْمَهْدِيُّ

word “caliph” or “emir”.¹ Throughout the history of Islam, many Sunni scholars have attempted to identify historical personages with these twelve caliphs or emirs which are prophesied to follow in the wake of the Prophet [and to rule over the community of the faithful]; but their efforts have always been met with difficulties. A group have attempted to carry out this task selectively and on an *ad hoc* basis. They invariably select the four “Rightly Guided” caliphs, and add to these four caliphs from the Omayyad and Abbāsīd dynasties, but they have not been able to come up with a list of twelve candidates upon which all are agreed and for which there can be a consensus of scholarly opinion. As we saw earlier, [at the top of Section 2], Ben-Bāz believes that the imams who best conform to the description of the twelve imams which have been prophesied by the Prophet are the four “Rightly Guided” caliphs, Mu’āwiya, Yazīd, Abdol-Mālek b. Marwān and his four sons, and Omar b. Abdol-Azīz.²

What we know is that this number of twelve caliphs neither corresponds with the number of caliphs which followed in the wake of the Prophet [whose reign is considered to be legitimate by Sunni scholarship], nor does it correspond with the number of caliphs in the Omayyad dynasty, whose dynasty consisted of the reign of fourteen caliphs. Furthermore, the tyranny and despotism of Yazīd b. Mu’āwiya is something that is obvious to all Moslems [as is that of many if not most others within the Omayyad clan, thus disqualifying them from being representatives of righteous and hence legitimate caliphs who would qualify under the criteria of the prophecy]. And the number of caliphs in the Abbāsīd dynasty exceeds that of the number in the Omayyad dynasty. Thus, in making his selection of

1. Refer to: Bukhāri, 1407 A H, vol. 6: 2640; Muslim Neyshāburi, n. d., vol. 6: 3; Ibn-e Hambal, n. d., vol. 5: 90 and 97; Abu Dāwūd, n. d., vol. 4:172; Tarmazi, vol. 4: 501; Hākim Neyshāburi, 1411 A H, vol. 4: 546

2. Bin Bāz (b), vol. 4: 100.

caliphs that purportedly conform to the prophecy, as just stated, Ben-Bāz has not provided any specific criteria, and the only criterion or indicator which he offers is the resoluteness of religion and its purchase on society at large during their reigns – a criterion which is obviously subject to personal interpretation and subjective opinion, and which therefore is not conducive to any consensus. Furthermore, it is not clear why and on the basis of what criteria Ben-Bāz has discarded Marwān and Mu'āwiya b. Yazīd from the list?! On one hand, he claims that the religion of Islam was established and its purchase on society at large during the reign of the Omayyad was satisfactory, but then on the other hand, he discards the four caliphs after the reign of Heshām b. Abdol-Mālek b. Marwān. How is it that *they* did not qualify for the list? Was it because the religion of Islam was no longer established and lost its purchase on society during their reigns?? Do the remaining Omayyads who continued with their lives and established the reign of Islam in Andalusian Spain not count for some reason or other? Do *they* not qualify for inclusion in Ben-Bāz's list? The former Grand Sheikh and Mufti of the Wahhābis does not consider political differences such as that which arose after the death of Yazīd with the reign of Eben Zobayr in Mecca against Marwān's reign in Shām (or the Levant) as a factor which affects the integrality of the uninterrupted reign of Islam; and believes that after these events, the people gathered around Abdol-Mālek b. Marwān and regained their political unity.¹ Thus we see that this position does not provide for a suitable criterion for the efficacy and purchase of the religion of Islam on society, because if these political differences do not cause any breach in the continuity and integrality of religion in the view of Ben-Bāz, then this would mean that by the application of this standard, many if not most of the other

1. Ibid, vol. 4: 100.

Omayyad and Abbāsīd caliphs would also have to be included in the list of twelve caliphs, which would pad the number up to one that is much higher than its prophesied limit.

The other point that we can mention is that some of the earlier scholars whose works are acceptable to the Wahhābis such as Eben Kathīr have included¹ caliphs other than those which Ben-Bāz selected in his list; and the criterion which these earlier scholars used was the righteousness of the caliph's conduct and the justice that prevailed under their respective reigns – a criterion which Ben-Bāz can naturally not be expected to agree on [in every instance]. On the other hand, Eben Kathīr claims that it is possible for the Mahdī to be one of the twelve caliphs in question.² Others, such as Sūyūtī, citing [the opinion of other] scholars [who have gone before him], also state that it is possible for the Mahdī to be one of the twelve caliphs;³ whereas Ben-Bāz does not consider the Mahdi to be one of the twelve caliphs, on the basis of the criterion that religion has lost its purchase on society and that the advent of the Mahdi has yet to take place.

The prerequisite of the prophecy of the Prophet regarding the twelve caliphs is that these individuals have a [spiritual] connection to [the ministry of] the Prophet; and that failing this, their succession to the Prophet and their investiture in the caliphate will not be realized. There has never been any agreement or consensus in the Sunni community concerning the identities of these twelve caliphs. Given this state of affairs, it must be said that it is only the Imams of the House of the Prophet (the *ahl al-bayt*) who are twelve in number and who are endowed with the [necessary]

1. Ibn-e Kathir, 1419 A H, vol. 3: 59.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Soyuti, 1427 A H: 173

attributes of having the highest degrees of piety, knowledge, lineage, and preeminence. Furthermore, there are numerous hadith reports which can be found in the Shi'a hadith report corpus and even among the Sunni collections which mention these [Twelve Imams] by their names and titles, a portion of which reports was touched on above.

Eben Talha is one of the Sunni scholar of the Shāfe'ī school who has identified the Twelve Imams of the Shi'a as the caliphs to which the Prophet referred in his prophecy.¹ The famous Iranian historiographer of the tenth hegira century Ghīāth od-Dīn b. HammāmKhāndmīr has also identified the Twelve Imams of the Shi'a as the caliphs to which the Prophet referred, and has provided different reasons for his position.² And Najm od-Din ash-Shāfe'ī is also another Sunni scholar who ranks among the number who have arrived at the same conclusion.³

In addition to the above Sunni conclusions based on Sunni sources, there are hadith reports in the Shi'a hadith corpus which relate the prophecy of the twelve caliphs and which [specifically] mention the names of the Twelve Imams of the Shi'a. Some Sunni scholars such as Jowaynī and Qondūzī have related these hadith reports.⁴ In the seventy seventh chapter of his book, Qondūzī al-Balkhī examines the hadith reports having to do with the twelve caliphs which appear in Sunni sources such as the *Sahīhayn* (of Bokhārī and Moslem) and other authoritative sources and the identities of the persons which these reports refer to; and concludes that it is only the Twelve Imams of the Shi'a who can be identified as the

1. Ibn-e Talha Shāfe'ī, 1419 A H: 41

2. Khwāndamir, 2001, vol. 2: 7 – 8.

3. Tabrizi, 1409 A H: 442 – 443.

4. Joweyni, 1398 A H, vol. 2: 313; Qanduzi, 1422 A H, vol. 3: 282.

caliphs to which the Prophet referred in his prophecy.¹

We can thus conclude that the identification of the former Grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia, Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz of the four “Rightly Guided” caliphs, Mu’āwiya, Yazīd, Abdol-Mālek b. Marwān and his four sons, and Omar b. Abdol-Azīz as the twelve caliphs to which the Prophet referred in his prophecy is not only logically unsupportable, but additionally has many insurmountable objections against it.

4. The Propriety of Religion during the time of the Omayyads

Another criticism of the thought of Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz is his belief that the religion of Islam was only properly applied up to the time of [the end of] the Omayyad dynasty. This is an opinion for which there is no scholarly consensus. But not only that, the Damascene historian Eben Kathīr, who is a scholar who is looked upon with favor and trust by the Wahhābis, has stated that the criterion of the righteousness of the caliph’s conduct and the justice that prevailed under their respective reigns is what must be used to determine the identity of the twelve prophesied caliphs; and given that, and after having selected the four “Rightly Guided” caliphs, Eben Kathīr only chose Omar b. Abdol-Azīz specifically from among the Omayyads and a few caliphs from among the Abbāsids generally.² It would seem that Eben Kathīr would not consider as acceptable some of the caliphs which were named by Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz as candidates for the twelve prophesied caliphs, such as Mu’āwiya, Yazīd, and Marwān. So then how can these same caliphs even be considered as ones who upheld the proprieties and demands of the religion of Islam when even Salafi personalities such as Eben Kathīr do not accept them as such? How can

1. Qanduzi, *ibid*: 292 – 293.

2. Ibn-e Kathir, 1419 A H, vol. 3: 59

a caliph such as Yazīd b. Mu'āwīya even be considered to be remotely qualified as an upholder of the faith when he was someone whose moral corruption was not even hidden and was open for all to see [such as his drinking], and whose manifest rebellion against God's order and against the tenets and ordinances of the ministry of the Prophet lead His Eminence's grandson, Imam Hosayn, to rise up in insurrection against such tyranny and despotism?? And on the other hand, if the religion of Islam was indeed upheld properly as Ben-Bāz claims during Omayyad times, in that case, why did he not include the last handful of caliphs in his precious list?

It would seem that the Wahhābis and in particular Ben-Bāz's penchant for the Omayyad Dynasty and their deference for them out of all due proportion is the cause of the bias in their opinions, which are without any historical basis or justification. For example, Eben Taymīya has pronounced the reign of the Omayyads as one that is beloved and dear (*azīz*), believing the *sonna*¹ [of the Prophet] to be more pronounced during that era; but at the same time, he also praises the Abbāsīd period and honors their caliphs.² The opinion of such an important personage who is held in such high esteem by the Wahhābis is also at variance with the opinion of Ben-Bāz who limits the propriety of the application of Islam to the Omayyad period.

4. Summary and Conclusion

Given what we have stated above, it can be stated that the position of the Wahhābis and particularly that of Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz with respect to

1. *Sonna*: the paradigmatic and exemplary model of moral conduct revealed by God as embodied revelation in the person of the Prophet Mohammad ﷺ whose emulation is to be strived for by all who have attained to faith.

2. Ibn-e Teymiyyah, 1406 A H, vol. 8: 239 – 238.

the issue of Mahdism is no different in principle to that of the Sunnis, as both of these sects believe in the tenet of Mahdism as an abstract concept and do not believe that a specific person has already been born who will fulfill the function of this divine promise. This position is in stark contrast to the position of the Shi'a and to the position of some scholars among the Sunni sect such as Eben Talha ash-Shāfe'ī, Mowasseli ash-Shāfe'ī, Jowaynī, Khonjī, Qondūzī al-Hanafī, etc. who believe the Twelfth Imam of the Shi'a, His eminence Hojjat b. al-Hasan al-Askarī, to be the promised Mahdi whose advent at the end of time is awaited.

Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz stipulates the above-mentioned attributes of the Mahdi to be as follows: He will have the same name as his father, as well as the Prophet; He will be a descendent of the Prophet of God; He will be a descendent of the Prophet of the Hasanid line; He will rise up in insurrection against an oppressive social order in order to establish a reign of peace and justice; The Mahdi will rule in accordance with the sacred law of Islam; and the Mahdi's advent will be accompanied by the advent of the Christ Jesus, the son of Lady Mary. Abdol-Azīz Ben-Bāz anathemizes anyone who does not believe in the advent of the Mahdi at the end of time, but does so with caution (*bāehtīāt*). But he abandons such caution in favor of a definitive anathematization when it comes to the belief of the return of His Eminence the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, or with respect to the belief in the rise of the Dajjāl¹ [at the end of time].

Certain criticisms can be levelled at Ben-Bāz's positions, some of which are at variance even with that of the positions of persons such as Eben Taymīya. Ben-Bāz's belief that the father of the Mahdi will have the same name as the father of the Prophet, and his belief that he will be

1. An Islamic equivalent of the anti-Christ, against whose hoards the Mahdi and the Christ Jesus will go to battle in the end times.

a descendent of the Prophet of God from the Hasanid line are two beliefs which have serious opposition and detractors from Sunni scholarship, based on the Sunni hadith corpus; and thus these two positions seem to be unfounded. Two other positions of his are also equally indefensible: the first of these is his identification of the twelve caliphs in the prophecy of the Prophet, which are *ad hoc* and do not display any consistency in terms of the criterion upon which they are based. The second position has to do with Ben-Bāz's claim that the religion of Islam was upheld properly during Omayyad times, which assertion does not stand up to the historical facts.

In any event, what should be emphasized is that while it is true that the Wahhābis have some extreme views in creedal matters and in matters of sacred jurisprudence and law, but that nevertheless, basing their opinions on hadith reports from the Sunni corpus concerning the Mahdi which they consider to be *motewāter*, like the other sects within Islam, they too believe in the principle of Mahdism, in his advent at the end of time, at which event he will establish universal peace and harmony throughout the world.

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