## 43778 - Which is more sound, Tafseer Ibn Katheer or Tafseer al-Tabari?

**the question**

Which is more sound, Tafseer Ibn Katheer or Tafseer al-Tabari?.

**Detailed answer**

Praise be to Allah.

Each of these Tafseers was written by a great Sunni scholar, and the scholars still recommend them. Each of them has its own characteristics which means that the seeker of knowledge cannot show preference to one of them over the other. There follow a few comments on these two Tafseers.

1 – Tafseer al-Tabari

Imam Muhammad ibn Jareer al-Tabari was born in 224 AH and died in 310 AH, at the age of eighty-six, in the region of Tabaristan.

His Tafseer is entitled Jaami' al-Bayaan fi Ta'weel Aayi-'l-Qur'aan.

Abu Haamid al-Isfaraayini said: If a traveller were to travel to China in order to obtain it, that would not be too much.

Tabaqaat al-Mufassireen by al-Dawoodi, 2/106.

Ibn Khuzaymah said: I have read it from beginning to end and I do not know of anyone on the face of the earth who is more knowledgeable than Ibn Jareer.

Siyar A'laam al-Nubala', 14/273.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said: With regard to the Tafseers that are in circulation among the people, the most sound of them is the Tafseer of Muhammad ibn Jareer al-Tabari, for he mentions

the views of the salaf with proven isnaads, and there is no bid’ah (innovation) in it, and he does not transmit reports from dubious sources such as Muqaatil ibn Bukayr and al-Kalbi.

Majmoo’ al-Fataawa, 13/358.

He also said in Muqaddimah fi Usool al-Tafseer (p. 35), concerning the Tafseer of Ibn Jareer:

It is one of the best and greatest of Tafseers.

He relied on the views of three generations of mufassireen among the salaf, namely the Sahaabah, the Taabi’een, and the followers of the Taabi’een, and he quotes their opinions with isnaads going back to them. This is an important feature of his book which is not present in many of the books of Tafseer that are in circulation among us. But this feature does not matter to many ordinary Muslims who are not able to research isnaads and distinguish sound isnaads from weak ones; all they want is to know whether an isnaad is sound or weak by means of a clear and brief statement to that effect.

When he has finished quoting their opinions, he states which he thinks is most likely to be correct, then he describes how he reached that conclusion.

2 – Tafseer Ibn Katheer

His full name is Abu’l-Fida’ Ismaa’eel ibn Katheer al-Dimashqi, d. 774 AH.

His Tafseer is entitled Tafseer al-Qur’aan il-‘Azeem.

Al-Suyooti (may Allaah have mercy on him) said concerning this Tafseer: Nothing like it has ever been written.

Tadhkirat al-Huffaaz, p. 534.

This Tafseer is based on commentary by quoting texts – verses and ahaadeeth – and its fame is second to the fame of al-Tabari among later scholars.

It is written in an excellent and easy style which is not longwinded or boring, or too short and boring.

He explains verses by quoting other verses, and he quotes appropriate verses which explain the verse under discussion; then he quotes ahaadeeth that have been narrated on the same topic as the verse, and he quotes the isnaads of some, especially those that were narrated by Imam Ahmad in his Musnad, as he is one of those who memorized al-Musnad. He discusses the soundness and weakness of the ahaadeeth in most cases, which is an important feature of his Tafseer. Then he quotes the views of the salaf, including the Sahaabah and Taabi'een, and he states which view he believes to be superior. He also avoids odd dissenting opinions.

Muhammad ibn Ja'far al-Kataani said of it: It is full of ahaadeeth and reports with the isnaads of those who narrated them and discussion of how sound or weak they are.

Al-Risaalah al-Mustatrafah, p. 195

He draws attention to the shar'i attitude towards the Israa'eeliyyaat (reports from Jewish sources) and quotes some of them in his commentary on some verses.

Conclusion:

No seeker of knowledge can do without these two books. With regard to which is superior, nothing like the Tafseer of Ibn Jareer (al-Tabari) has been written since. It is essential for scholars and seekers of knowledge, but it is not appropriate for ordinary people because they are not qualified to understand it properly. The Tafseer of Ibn Katheer is more appropriate for the ordinary people, and there is much in it from which scholars and seekers of knowledge can benefit.

And Allaah knows best.