152611 - The reports which suggest that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) contemplated suicide are flawed in both their chains of narration or their texts

the question

During my research on some websites, I found that it is mentioned in Saheeh al-Bukhaari that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) attempted suicide. But I could not find the text mentioned in Saheeh al-Bukhaari, so that I could have all the material that would help me to dispel this doubt. Could you please explain to me about this text that is mentioned in Saheeh al-Bukhaari, with detailed comments?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The hadith asked about is in Saheeh al-Bukhaari, no. 6581, in the Book of Dream Interpretation, in the chapter on the first thing of revelation that came to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was true dreams. The wording of the report is as follows:

Az-Zuhri said: ‘Urwah told me, from ‘Aa’ishah (may Allah be pleased with her), that she said: … the revelation ceased for a while, for so long that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) became sad. According to the reports that have reached us, he was so sad that on several occasions he wanted to throw himself from the top of high mountains, but every time he went to the top of a mountain in order to throw himself down from it, Jibreel appeared to him and said: O Muhammad, you are truly the Messenger of Allah. And he would calm down as a result and feel at ease, and he would go back. When the revelation had ceased for a long time, he would do the same thing again, and when he reached a mountaintop, Jibreel would appear to him and say the

same thing to him.

Secondly:

This additional material (which speaks of the cessation of revelation and the Prophet's contemplating suicide) is not the words of 'Aa'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her). Rather these are the words of az-Zuhri, who was one of the Taabi'een and was not contemporary to that event. He did not state that any of the Sahaabah told him that; therefore when he stated that in the report, he prefaced it with the words, "According to the reports that have reached us."

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Moreover, the one who said "According to the reports that have reached us" is az-Zuhri. What these words mean is: one of the things that we heard about the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is this story. It is one of the stories that az-Zuhri heard, and it is not mawsool (i.e., it has no connected chain of narration between him and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)). Al-Karmaani said: This is what appears to be the case.

Fath al-Baari (12/359).

Abu Shaamah al-Maqdisi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

These are the words of az-Zuhri or someone else, and not 'Aa'ishah. And Allah knows best. That is because he said "According to the reports that have reached us", and 'Aa'ishah did not say any such thing a concerning this matter.

Sharh al-Hadith al-Muqtafa fi Mab'ath an-Nabi al-Mustafa (p. 177).

Thirdly:

The reports of az-Zuhri in which he says "According to the reports that have reached us" are not acceptable, because their chains of narration are interrupted from the beginning. Hence they are like mu'allaq reports [mu'allaq, lit. "hanging"; a report in which one or more narrators is/are omitted from the beginning of the chain]. The fact that such stories or mu'allaq reports are

mentioned in the book of Imam al-Bukhaari does not mean that they are saheeh (sound) in his view, or that it can be said of them “it was narrated by al-Bukhaari”, because the report of which that may be said is the report that he narrated with a complete isnad (chain of narration). Shaykh al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Attributing it to al-Bukhaari [by saying “it was narrated by al-Bukhaari”, as if it were a saheeh hadith] is a serious mistake, because it gives the impression that this story of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) wanting to throw himself down from a mountaintop is saheeh according to the conditions set by al-Bukhaari. But that is not the case; rather al-Bukhaari mentioned this at the end of the hadith of ‘Aa’ishah about the beginning of revelation… [and he quoted the report mentioned above].

This additional material was also narrated by Ahmad (6/232-233); Abu Na‘eem in ad-Dalaa’il (p. 68-69); al-Bayhaqi in ad-Dalaa’il (1/393-395) via ‘Abd ar-Razzaaq from Ma‘mar.

Via this isnad it was also narrated by Muslim (1/98), but he did not narrate the same wording; rather he narrated the version of Yoonus from Ibn Shihaab, which does not contain this additional material. It was also narrated by Muslim and Ahmad (6/223) via ‘Aqeel ibn Khaalid that Ibn Shihaab said … without this additional material. It was also narrated by al-Bukhaari at the beginning of as-Saheeh from ‘Aqeel.

I [Shaykh al-Albaani] say: From the above we may conclude that there are two problems with this additional material:

The first is that Ma‘mar is the only one who narrated it; it was not narrated by Yoonus and ‘Aqeel. Therefore it is regarded as shaadhdh (odd).

The other is that it is mursal [i.e., the Sahaabi is missing from the chain of narrators] and problematic. The one who says “According to the reports that have reached us” is az-Zuhri, as is clear from the context and as was stated by al-Haafiz in al-Fath.

I say: This is something that Dr. al-Booti [the author of the book that Shaykh al-Albaani is critiquing

here] did not realise, because he was unaware of it, so he thought that every single letter in Saheeh al-Bukhaari meets the author's conditions of soundness. Perhaps he did not distinguish between hadiths with complete isnaads and mu'allaq hadiths, and he did not distinguish between mawsool hadiths [those with a complete chain of narration going back to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)] and mursal hadiths [those in which the Sahaabi is missing from the chain of narration], which al-Bukhaari may quote incidentally, like this hadith of 'Aa'ishah, at the end of which this mursal addition appears.

It should be noted that this additional material was not narrated via any complete chain of narrators that may be regarded as sound, as I have explained in Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth ad-Da'eefah, no. 4858. I also referred to that in my comments on Mukhtasar li Saheeh al-Bukhaari.

End quote from Difaa' 'an al-Hadith an-Nabawi (40-41).

Fourthly:

There are other chains of narration for the story of the Prophet's alleged suicide attempt during the cessation of revelation after it came to him for the first time. All of them are to be rejected, and are either da'eef (weak) or mawdoo' (fabricated).

These isnaads include the following:

1. The isnad of Ibn Mardawayh

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar said:

It was narrated by Ibn Mardawayh in at-Tafseer via Muhammad ibn Katheer, from Ma'mar, with the omission of the phrase "According to the reports that have reached us". The wording is as follows: … a period when the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was sad [as a result of the cessation of revelation] and his grief overwhelmed him to the extent that… All of it is similar to the report of az-Zuhri, from 'Urwah, from 'Aa'ishah, although the former report is the reliable one.

Fath al-Baari (12/359-360).

What is meant by the words of al-Haafiz, “although the former report is the reliable one” is the report of az-Zuhri contains the phrase “According to the reports that have reached us”, but this report has no unbroken chain of narrators.

Shaykh al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said, commenting on the view of al-Haafiz:

This is supported by two things:

The first is that this Muhammad ibn Katheer– who is as-San‘aani al-Maseesi – is da‘eef (weak), because of his poor memory.

Al-Haafiz said: He is honest but makes a lot of mistakes. He is not Muhammad ibn Katheer al-‘Abdi al-Basri, who is thiqah (trustworthy).

The second is that it is contrary to the report of ‘Abd ar-Razzaaq, which says: Ma‘mar told us…, which clearly distinguishes between the first and last parts of the hadith, and clarified that the latter part was the wording of az-Zuhri.

All of this indicates that Muhammad ibn Katheer as-San‘aani was mistaken in his suggestion that this additional material had an unbroken chain of narrators, and proves that it is in fact da‘eef (weak).

Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth ad-Da‘eefah wa’l-Mawdoo‘ah (10/453).

2. The isnad of Ibn Sa‘d

Muhammad ibn Sa‘d said:

Muhammad ibn ‘Umar told us: Ibraaheem ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Moosa told me, from Daawood ibn al-Husayn, from Abu Ghatafaan ibn Tareef, from Ibn ‘Abbaas, that after the revelation came to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) in Hiraa’, he did not see Jibreel for several days, and he felt so sad that he went to Thabeer (mountain) and to Hiraa’, wanting to throw himself down from the mountaintop. Whilst the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was like that, going to one of these mountains, he heard a voice from heaven.

So the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) stopped, shocked by the voice, then he lifted his head and saw Jibreel, sitting on a chair between heaven and earth, saying: “O Muhammad, you are indeed the Messenger of Allah, and I am Jibreel.” So the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) left, after Allah had comforted him and put his mind at rest. Then the revelation started to come frequently.

At-Tabaqaat al-Kubra (1/196).

Shaykh al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This is a fabricated isnad. The problem with it is either Muhammad ibn ‘Umar – namely al-Waaqidi – who is accused of fabricating reports. Al-Haafiz said in at-Taqreeb: He is matrook (rejected) despite his great knowledge. We have mentioned above that the leading scholars discussed him more than once.

Or (the problem with it) is Ibraaheem ibn Muhammad ibn Abi Moosa – namely ibn Abi Yahya – whose full name is Sam‘aan al-Aslam, the freed slave of Banu Aslam, Abu Ishaaq al-Madani. He is also matrook, like al-Waaqidi, or more so. Al-Haafiz said concerning him: He is matrook (rejected). The views of leading scholars criticizing him were narrated in at-Tahdheeb, and there is virtual consensus that he was a liar. For example, al-Harbi said: The scholars of hadith overlooked his hadith. Al-Waaqidi narrated from him hadiths that could be fabricated, but al-Waaqidi is worthless.

And he said regarding the chain of narration: Ibn Abi Moosa, but I think this is an error, and what it should have said is Ibn Abi Yahyaa. It may be that this is the tadlees [when a narrator narrates a hadith that he did not hear directly from his shaykh, without mentioning the name of the third party from whom he did hear it, using wording that may or may not give the impression that he heard it directly] of al-Waaqidi himself, because he engaged in tadlees in other reports. ‘Abd al-Ghani ibn Sa‘eed al-Masri said: He is Ibraaheem ibn Muhammad ibn Abi ‘Ataa’, from whom Ibn Jurayj narrated, and he is ‘Abd al-Wahhaab from whom Marwaan ibn Mu‘aawiyah narrated, and he is Abu’dh-Dhi’b from whom Ibn Jurayj narrated.

Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth ad-Da‘eefah wa’l-Mawdoo‘ah (10/451).

3. The isnad of at-Tabari

Ibn Jareer at-Tabari said:

Ibn Humayd told us: Salamah told us, from Muhammad ibn Ishaaq, who said: Wahb ibn Keesaan, the freed slave of the family of az-Zubayr, told me: I heard ‘Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr saying to ‘Ubayd ibn ‘Umayr ibn Qataadah al-Laythi: Tell us, O ‘Ubayd, how Prophethood began for the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) when Jibreel (peace be upon him) first came to him. ‘Ubayd said: I was present with others when ‘Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr narrated: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) used to retreat to Hiraa’ for one month every year. … Jibreel came to him on the command of Allah. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “He came to me whilst I was sleeping, bringing a cover of brocade in which there was a written document, and he said: ‘Read!’ I said: ‘What should I read?’ Then he pressed me to him until I thought that I would die, then he released me and said: ‘Read!’ I said: ‘What should I read?’ I only said that so that he would not do the same thing to me again. He said: ‘Recite in the name of your Lord who created - … Taught man that which he knew not’ [al-‘Alaq 96:1-5]. So I recited it. Then he stopped and went away. I got up from my sleep, and it was as if those words were inscribed on my heart. No one in Allah’s creation was more hated to me than a poet or a madman; I could not bear to look at them. I said: This person – meaning himself – must be a poet or a madman. I do not want Quraysh to ever talk about me like that at all. I shall surely go to a high mountain and throw myself down from it and kill myself, and find relief thereby. So I went out, intending to do that, but when I was halfway up the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying: ‘O Muhammad! You are indeed the Messenger of Allah and I am Jibreel.’ I looked up, and saw Jibreel in the form of a man, with his feet astride the horizon, saying: ‘O Muhammad! You are indeed the Messenger of Allah and I am Jibreel.’”

Taareekh at-Tabari (1/532, 533).

The text of this report is munkar (odd) and is contrary to the sound reports. In this text, the meeting of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) with Jibreel occurs in a dream, not when he was awake. Moreover, it says that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

“What should I read?” Both of these ideas are false. The meeting with Jibreel occurred when he was awake, and what he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said [when instructed to read] was, “I am not a reader,” stating that he was unable to read. But this weird report claims that he was not unlettered.

As for the isnad of the report, Shaykh al-Albaani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

But this isnad is something with which we do not feel comfortable, especially as it is contrary to what was quoted above of the narration of trustworthy narrators. It has several flaws:

1. It is mursal. ‘Ubayd ibn ‘Umayr was not a Sahaabi; rather he was one of the senior Taabi‘een. He was born during the time of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him).
2. Regarding Salamah – who is ibn al-Fadl al-Abrash – al-Haafiz said: He is honest but makes a lot of mistakes. I [al-Albaani] say: In addition to that, Ziyaad ibn ‘Abdillah al-Bakaa’i differed with him. Ziyaad is the one who narrated the Seerah from Ibn Ishaaq, and Ibn Hishaam narrated it via him. Concerning him, al-Haafiz said: His reports on the Maghaazi (military campaigns of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) are good.

Ibn Hishaam narrated this hadith in as-Seerah (1/252, 253) from him, from Ibn Ishaaq, without the additional material that I put between square brackets [ ], in which is found the strange story of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) thinking of throwing himself down from a mountaintop.

It is possible that al-Abrash is the only one who narrated it, and al-Bakaa’i did not narrate it, in which case it is munkar (odd) for another reason, which is that it differs from the report of al-Bakaa’i, for al-Abrash is less reliable than al-Bakaa’i with regard to their narration from Ibn Ishaaq, as is indicated by the comments of al-Haafiz noted above.

And it is possible that Ibn Hishaam himself omitted it from his book, because the meaning is very odd and it is contrary to the fact that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was infallible and could not have contemplated such a sin. In his introduction to his book, Ibn Hishaam indicated that he did something like that, as he said (1/4): I have omitted some of what Ibn Ishaaq

mentioned in this book, that it is not appropriate to attribute to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)… and other things that are very weird.

Moreover, there is another problem with the isnad, which is:

1. Ibn Humayd – whose name is Muhammad ar-Raazi – who is da‘eef jiddan (very weak). A number of leading scholars, including Abu Zar‘ah ar-Raazi – regarded him as a liar.

In conclusion, the hadith is da‘eef (weak) in its chain of narrators and munkar (odd) in its text. The believer does not feel comfortable believing these weak narrators and what they attribute to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), that he thought of killing himself by throwing himself down from a mountaintop, when he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) is the one who said – as is soundly narrated from him –: “Whoever throws himself down from a mountain, killing himself, will be in the fire of Hell, throwing himself down therein, for ever and ever.” [Agreed upon]. At-Targheeb (3/205) – especially when those weak narrators contradicted the trustworthy scholars of hadith.

Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth ad-Da‘eefah wa’l-Mawdoo‘ah (10/455-457).

Fifthly:

From the above it may be established that the reports about the Prophet’s alleged suicide attempt are da‘eef (weak); in fact some of them are false. It is also clear that the texts of these reports are false and odd, for several reasons:

1. The cessation of revelation was to allow time for calming the fear that had come to our Prophet Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) the first time revelation came to him, and to give him to prepare himself for what was to come. How can that be reconciled with the idea that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) wanted to commit suicide?

Ibn Tooloon as-Saalihi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The wisdom behind the cessation of revelation – and Allah knows best – was so that he (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) could recover from the shock he had experienced and so that he would long for the revelation to come back.

Subul al-Huda wa’r-Rashaad fi Seerat Khayr al-‘Ibaad (2/272).

2. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not doubt for a moment that he was a Prophet, for Allah, may He be exalted, made his heart steadfast by means of the Revelation. What he felt of fear when the revelation came for the first time is indicative of his humanity and of the intensity of revelation. After that, some forms of revelation still used to cause him (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) some hardship.

Conclusion:

The report which says that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) thought of committing suicide because of the delay in the revelation during the early stages of his mission, and the additional material which is in al-Bukhaari but does not meet the standards of al-Bukhaari, cannot be regarded as part of as-Saheeh. Al-Bukhaari himself (may Allah have mercy on him) confirmed that these were the words of az-Zuhri and no one else, and that it was something that he had heard without any isnad, and it is not sound. We have mentioned some other versions of the hadith, all of which confirm that this story is not sound in either its chain of narrators or its text.

And Allah knows best.