

168773 - Differentiating between ‘Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh and someone else who apostatised and claimed that he had distorted the revelation

the question

‘Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh is a controversial figure in the history of Islam, as he was one of the scribes who wrote down the revelation, then he apostatized from Islam. Did he distort some of the verses of the Qur’an?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

Many people mix up two people who apostatized at the time of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). One of the reasons for that is that they both wrote down the revelation and they both apostatized. But in fact they are two different people. The first one is ‘Abdullah ibn Sa’d ibn Abi Sarh, and the second is a Christian man whose name is not known. The former apostatized then came back to Islam during the conquest of Makkah; the latter remained an apostate and died, and the earth rejected his body, and thus became a sign for the people. The latter is the one who claimed that he used to change words when he wrote down the revelation; that was not the noble Sahaabi ‘Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh.

Secondly:

With regard to the former, his name was ‘Abdullah ibn Sa’d ibn Abi Sarh, Abu Yahya al-Qurashi al-‘Aamiri, the brother through breast feeding of ‘Uthmaan ibn ‘Affaan. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had issued a death warrant against him, but ‘Uthmaan asked for protection for him, and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) granted him protection. He became Muslim again and was a good Muslim.

It was narrated that Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqaas said: On the day of the conquest of Makkah, the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) granted safety to the people except four people, two women whom he named, and Ibn Abi Sarh. As for Ibn Abi Sarh, he hid

with ‘Uthmaan ibn ‘Affaan, and when the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) called the people to swear allegiance, ‘Uthmaan brought him and made him stand before the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and said: O Prophet of Allah, accept the allegiance of ‘Abdullah. He raised his head and looked at him three times, each time refusing, then he accepted his oath of allegiance after the third time. Then he turned to his Companions and said: “Was there not among you any intelligent man who, when he saw me not accepting his pledge, would get up and kill him?” They said: O Messenger of Allah, we do not know what is in your mind; why did you not hint to us with (a movement of) your eyes? He said: “It is not appropriate for a Prophet to have treacherous eyes.”

Narrated by an-Nasaa’i (4067) and Abu Dawood (2683). Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh an-Nasaa’i.

‘Uthmaan (may Allah be pleased with him) appointed him as governor of Egypt, and he is the one who led the battle of Dhaat as-Sawaari. He went on campaign in North Africa and conquered many of its cities. He refrained from getting involved in the turmoil between ‘Ali and Mu’aawiyah (may Allah be pleased with them both), then he went to ar-Ramlah in Palestine. One morning he said: O Allah, let my last deed be Fajr prayer. He did wudoo’, then he prayed; he said the salaam to his right, then when he was going to say the salaam to his left, Allah took his soul.

That was in 59 AH.

Imam adh-Dhahabi (may Allah have mercy on him) said concerning him:

He never harmed anybody, and he did not do anything that he could be blamed for after the conquest of Makkah. He was one of the wisest and most generous of men.

End quote from Siyar A’laam an-Nubala’, 3/34

See also al-Isti’aab fi Ma’rifat al-Ashaab by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, 3/52; al-Isaabah fi Tamyeez as-Sahaabah, 4/110

We have not come across any report with a saheeh (sound) isnaad that says that ‘Abdullah ibn Abi Sarh used to distort the revelation; rather in his story it says that the Shaytaan caused him to slip.

It was narrated that Ibn ‘Abbaas said: ‘Abdullah ibn Sa’d ibn Abi’l-Sarh used to write for the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). Then the shaytaan caused him to slip and he joined the kuffaar. The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) ordered that he be killed on the day of the Conquest [of Makkah], but ‘Uthmaan ibn ‘Affaan sought protection for him and the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) granted him protection.

Narrated by an-Nasaa’i (4069) and Abu Dawood (4358); classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Saheeh an-Nasaa’i.

Thirdly:

With regard to the other man, he was a Christian, then he became Muslim, then he apostatized. He used to say that he changed the words that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) dictated to him. Then Allah, may He be exalted, destroyed him in a manner that served as a lesson to others who reviled the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and cast aspersions upon his religion.

It was narrated that Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: There was a Christian man who became Muslim and read al-Baqarah and Aal ‘Imraan, and he used to write for the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him). He went back to being a Christian, and he used to say: Muhammad does not know anything but what I wrote for him. Allah caused him to die, and they buried him, then the next morning the earth had thrown him out. They said: This is the doing of Muhammad and his companions, because he ran away from them; they dug up our companion and threw him (on the ground). So they dug a grave for him and made it deep, but the next morning the earth had thrown him out. They said: This is the doing of Muhammad and his companions, because he ran away from them; they dug up our companion and threw him (on the ground). They dug another hole for him and they made it as deep as they could in the

ground, but the next morning the earth had thrown him out. Thus they realised that this was not something that people had done, so they left him unburied.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This accursed one who fabricated lies against the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and said that he did not know anything but what he wrote for him was subject to vengeance and shame from Allah, as He caused him to be thrown out of the grave after he had been buried, several times. This is something extraordinary which shows to everyone that this was a punishment because of what he had said and that he was a liar, because such things do not happen to most of the dead.

It also shows that this crime was more grievous than merely apostatising, because such things do not happen to most apostates who die; Allah wrought vengeance for His Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) because of his slander and insults against him, to support His religion to prevail and expose the lie of the liar, because the people could not carry out the hadd punishment on him.

End quote from as-Saarim al-Masloul, 1/122

Thus it becomes clear that ‘Abdullah ibn Sa’d ibn Abi Sarh (may Allah be pleased with him) was innocent of that of which he was accused; he never made such a claim and never said such words. Moreover, he repented after that, and he became Muslim and was a good Muslim.

And Allah knows best.