https://doi.org/10.30532/mce.2021.14.2.195

SAUL, DAVID, AND GOLIATH IN THE QUR'ĀN (Q 2:246-251)

: READING TA'RĪKH AL-ṬABARĪ WITH AL-THA'LABĪ AND AL-QURṬUBĪ

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■ABSTRACT

Despite the Islamic concept of *taḥrīf*, which teaches that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures have been altered or misinterpreted, some of the post-quranic scholars of the medieval Islamic world were known to have appropriated them rather liberally in their Qurʾān commentaries and historical narratives. This paper focuses on the celebrated works of the quranic scholars, such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, and al-Qurṭubī, to examine their engagement with the extra-quranic sources, specifically in their exploration of Saul, David, and Goliath (Q 2:246-251). Previous scholarship has treated al-Ṭabarī's *History of the Prophets and Kings and al-Thaʿlabī's Lives of the Prophets* quite independently, but no sufficient study has been done to shed light into gauging the remarkable nature of their appropriation of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament sources in bolstering their Islamic agenda. Along with comparing the historiographical exposition of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī, this study provides an additional comparative vantage point by probing into al-Qurṭubī's quranic commentary, whose tendency is to minimize the incorporation of the extra-quranic material, albeit embracing al-Ṭabarī's reports. The analysis of this inquiry yields that both al-Thaʿlabī and al-Qurṭubī subscribe to al-Ṭabarī's *History* in their exegetical treatise, but markedly deviate from one another in their deployment of the Jewish and Christian material. However, this does not imply that these post-quranic scholars compromised their

understanding of the Qurʾān in their zeal to extrapolate the interpretative lacunae by means of the Jewish and Christian traditions. Rather, a careful examination reveals that all these Muslim scholars strove to articulate the Islamic ideals through skillfully adapting extra-quranic data with due reverence for the Qurʾān—a revealing fact that the religious texts of the two monotheistic traditions served as a buttress to better define their Islamic legacy.

Keywords: Saul, David, Goliath, the Qurʾān, al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Qurṭubī, Isrāʾīliyyāt

Ⅰ. INTRODUCTION

One of the inherent barriers that stifles interreligious dialogues among the adherents of the Abrahamic religions (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) may be the perception of the other's scripture.[1] According to the classical Islamic worldview, for example, the concept of "scriptural corruption" (*taḥrīf*) upholds the Qurʾān's textual integrity as opposed to the canon of Judaism and Christianity. It is a polemically charged idea that according to the Qurʾān (cf. Q 2:75; 4:46; 5:13, 5:41)—including the ca-

1 See also Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, "Qurʾānic Discourse on the Bible: Ambivalence and *taḥrīf* in the Light of Self-Reference," *Mélanges de l'Institut dominicain d'études orientales* 33 (2018): 3–38.

nonical collection of Muhammad's sayings (*ḥadīth*)—the Jews and Christians have altered or misinterpreted God's sacred revelation to Moses (the Torah, *tawrāt*) and Jesus (the Gospel, *inǰīl*), who were also presumably Muslims.[2] Since the canons of the Jews and Christians have been largely adulterated, if not fabricated, the Qur'ān annuls the scriptures of the preceding monotheisms as the pristine divine revelation. However, as some Islamic scholars duly note, the Qur'ān retains verses that endorse *taḥrīf* as well as those that tolerate the uses of Jewish or Christian material to promote the interpretation of the Qur'ān.[3] This ambivalent aspect is reflected in the history of quranic interpretation as it attests to an active incorporation of Jewish and Christian sources (*Isrā'īliyyāt*) by some notable quranic commentators in various contexts, either to better understand the Qur'ān or to critique non-Islamic teachings, especially during the pre-modern Islamic world.[4]

2 Gabriel Said Reynolds, "On the Qur'anic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*taḥrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 130.2 (2010): 189-202; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. P. Bearman et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 10:111-12.

3 For example, Wan Mohd Fazrul Azdi Wan Razali, Ahmad Yunus Mohd Noor, and Jaffary Awang, "…And Narrate from the Children of Israel and There is No Harm…": Making Sense of the Use of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Muslim Scholarship," *Al-Qanatir International Journal of Islamic Studies* 3.1 (2016): 23-39.

4 See the historical review of *isrā'īliyyāt* in Abudulla Galadari, *Qur'anic Hermeneutics: Between Science, History, and the Bible* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), esp. Chapter 4; G. Vajda, "Isrā'īliyyāt," *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. E. van Donzel et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 3: 211-12. For a general survey on the literary interaction between the Qur'ān and the Bible, Daniel J. Crowther et al., eds., *Reading the Bible in Islamic Context: Qur'anic Conversations* (Routledge Reading the Bible in Islamic Context Series; New York: Routledge, 2018); Georges Tamer et al., eds., *Exegetical Crossroads: Understanding Scripture in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*

A closer look at some of the quranic exegetical enterprises in the medieval period, in fact, reveals a more receptive position regarding the scripture of Judaism and Christianity.[5] For example, al-Biqāʿī's apologetic treatise (b. 809/1406–d. 885/1480), *The Just Verdict on the Permissibility of Quoting from Old Scriptures (al-Aqwāl al-qawīmah fī ḥukm al-naql min al-kutub al-qadīmah)*, was written in late Mamluk Egypt to defend his quotation of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures in his renowned Qurʾān commentary.[6] Al-Biqāʿī's unorthodox premise that provoked his medieval contemporaries, most of whom then subscribed to the tenet of *taḥrīf*, is that Muslims could use the Jewish and Christian Scrip-

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in the Pre-Modern Orient (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—Tension, Transmission, Transformation 8; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2018); Mark Beaumont, ed., *Arab Christians and the Qurʾan from the Origins of Islam to the Medieval Period* (History of Christian-Muslim Relations 35; Leiden: Brill, 2013); Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010); *Bible and Qurʾān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John C. Reeves (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003); Jane Dammen McAuliffe et al., eds., *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). See also 김대옥, "구약성서와 꾸란의 대화-공통 인물 내러티브를 중심으로," 「신학사상」 169 (2015): 7-43; 김지호, "이슬람의 꾸란과 기독교의 성경에 대한 비교연구," 「칼빈論壇」 40 (2020): 81-122; 윤재남, "꾸란과 성경의 선지자 비교를 통한 구원론 연구," 「선교와 현장」 7 (2002): 113-212; 키우 꽁 투언, 장훈태, "성경과 꾸란의 차이점에 관한 비평적 소고," 「ACTS 신학저널」 33 (2017): 115-154; 황원주, "꾸란 112장에 나타난 반기독교적 변증요소 연구," *Muslim-Christian Encounter* 12.2 (2019): 95-137.

5 Galadari, *Qurʾanic Hermeneutics*.

6 See the critical edition and the bibliographical information of the manuscripts in Walid A. Saleh, *In Defense of the Bible: A Critical Edition and an Introduction to al-Biqāʿī's Bible Treatise* (Leiden: Brill, 2008b); idem, "A Fifteenth-Century Muslim Hebraist: al-Biqāʿī and his Defense of Using the Bible to Interpret the Qurʾān," *Speculum* 83 (2008): 629-54.

tures to elucidate the Qurʾān.[7] Al-Biqāʿī asserted that referencing the Jewish and Christian Scriptures in explaining the Qurʾān was a "venerable Islamic practice" and that "the leading [quranic] scholars of every age" utilized the Bible, even including Muhammad.[8] Of course, this is not to say that al-Biqāʿī was a medieval herald of interfaith détente; it suffices to state that al-Biqāʿī, through his polemical debate with his opponents, raised the legitimate value of perceiving the biblical material as "holy enough for Muslims to use alongside the Qurʾān."[9]

Admittedly, al-Biqāʿī is not the first Islamic intellectual to adopt an intercanonical interpretive approach to explain the Qurʾān. Rather than minimizing the transmission of biblical and Jewish narrative traditions, or the *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, the medieval Islamic exegetes, such as al-Ṭabarī (b. 224-25/839-d. 310/923) and al-Thaʿlabī (?-d. 427/1035), appropriated the extra-quranic traditions rather leniently to enhance and expand their reading of the Qurʾān. Al-Ṭabarī was one of the most versatile Sunni quranic commentators and historians of his time, whose monumental *History of the Prophets and Kings (Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl mulūk)* remains a timeless contribution to Islamic historiography until this day.[10] In *History*, al-Ṭabarī outlines the universal history of

7 Saleh, *In Defense*, 4.

8 Ibid., 2.

9 Ibid., 2-3.

10 Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, "The Children of Israel" in *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl mulūk)*, Volume 3, trans. William Brinner (SUNY Series in Near Eastern Studies; New York: SUNY Press, 1991); idem, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-umam waʾl-mulūk*, 6 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1997); idem,

humankind from the creation to the inception and development of Islamic history up to his days (915 CE).[11] Al–Thaʿlabī was likewise a prolific quranic scholar of Nayshapur, in whose notable work, *Lives of the Prophets* (*ʿArāʾis al–madjālis fī qiṣaṣ al–anbiyāʾ*), he compiles and elaborates on the historical traditions mediated by the previous generation of Islamic sages, including al–Ṭabarī's *History (Taʾrīkh)*.[12]

The classic chronicles of both al–Ṭabarī and al–Thaʿlabī, especially over the period leading up to the establishment of Islam,

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Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed ibn Djarir at–Tabari, ed. Michael Jan de Goeje, 16 vols (Lughdunum Batavorum: E. J. Brill, 1879–1901). See also Mustafa Shah, "Al–Tabarī and the Dynamics of Tafsīr: Theological Dimensions of a Legacy," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 15.2 (2013): 83–139; Walid A. Saleh, "Rereading Al–Ṭabarī through Al–Māturīdī: New Light on the Third Century Hijrī," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 18.2 (2016): 180–209; Devin J. Stewart, "Consensus, Authority, and the Interpretive Community in the Thought of Muḥammad b. Jarīr Al–Ṭabarī," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 18.2 (2016): 130–79; Alena Kulinich, "'*And if one asks··· it is answered···*': the question–and–answer pattern in al–Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) commentary on sura al–Fātiḥa," *Journal of Arabic Language & Literature* 23.3 (2019): 145–170.

11 Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al–Ṭabarī, "General Introduction and From the Creation and the Flood" in *The History of al–Ṭabarī (Taʾrīkh al–rusul waʾl mulūk)* Volume 1, trans. Franz Rosenthal (SUNY Series in Near Eastern Studies; New York: SUNY Press, 1989).

12 Abū Isḥāḳ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al–Thaʿlabī, *Lives of the Prophets (ʿArāʾis al–madjālis fī qiṣaṣ al–anbiyāʾ)*, trans. William M. Brinner (Studies in Arabic Literature: Supplements to the Journal of Arabic Literature 24; Leiden: Brill, 2002); idem, *Qisas al–anbiyāʾ, al–musammī, ʿAraīs al–majalis* (Beirut: Dār al–Kutub al–ʿIlmiyya, 1985). See also Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsir Tradition: The Qur'ān Commentary of al–Tha'labī* (d.427/1035) (Leiden: Brill, 2004); Marianna O. Klar, *Interpreting al–Tha'labī's Tales of the Prophets: Temptation, Responsibility and Loss* (Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān; New York, NY: Routledge, 2009); Mehmet Akif Koç, "A Comparison of the References to Muqātil b. Sulaymān (150/767) in the Exegesis of Al–Thaʿlabī (427/1036) with Muqātil's Own Exegesis," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 53.1 (2008): 69–101.

retain explicit and implicit references to the Jewish and Christian literatures. In al-Ṭabarī's *Children of Israel*, for instance, the biblical patriarchs and prophets, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and Samuel, play a pivotal role of mediating Allah's revelation to the Israelites.[13] This mode of history-telling in the Islamic tradition is by no means anomalous because according to the Islamic supersessionist perspective, Muhammad is the culmination of the Jewish and Christian messianic apocalypse, overriding the former revelations of the two disparate monotheistic religions.[14] On this point, U. Rubin cogently states that the presence of Jewish and Christian traditions in the Islamic historiographies is the byproduct of Muslims' forging of self-identity *vis-à-vis* Judaism and Christianity.[15] The notion of Islam as God's chosen nation (ummah) to accomplish the divine plan for the world has been mediated by "countless non-Arab converts," who facilitated the adoption of the literary components of Jewish and Christian Scriptures to advance the Islamic ideological

13 al-Ṭabarī, *History*.

14 Uri Rubin, "Islamic Retellings of Biblical History," in *Adaptations and Innovations Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century, Dedicated to Professor Joel L. Kraemer*, eds. Y. Tzvi Langermann and Josef Stern (Louvain: Peeters, 2007), 299; Sandra Toenies Keating, "Revisiting the Charge of *Taḥrīf*: The Question of Supersessionism in Early Islam and the Qurʾān," in *Nicholas of Cusa and Islam: Polemic and Dialogue in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy, Rita George-Tvrković, and Donald Duclow (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 202-17.

15 Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 17; Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1999). See also 김규섭, "'유대인도 아니고 그리스도인도 아닌' 초기 꾸란 공동체의 정체성 형성에 관한 연구," *Canon & Culture* 13.2 (2019): 43-73.

agenda.[16]

The primary focus of this article is to evaluate the extent of biblical reappropriation and trace the rhetorical aim of al-Ṭabarī's account of Saul and David in their fight against Goliath (Q 2:246–251), in light of the later works of al-Thaʿlabī and al-Qurṭubī. In Surah *Al-Baqara* of the Qurʾān, verses 246–251 cover stories of Israel's request for a king (vv. 246–248), Saul's test of soldiers (v. 249), and David's defeat of Goliath (v. 250–51), which are reminiscent of the parallel biblical narratives in the book of Samuel (1 Sam 8–11, 17), albeit with conspicuous discrepancies between the two versions. Al-Ṭabarī's quranic retelling features a notable inclusion of biblical and aggadic material which functions to fill in the interpretative lacunae generated by implicit references to the extra-quranic literature. Although the unfolding sequence of events do not necessarily follow that of the Bible, circumstantial components that prop the plotline of the biblical account punctuate throughout al-Ṭabarī's elaboration of the key verses of the Qurʾān.

In this regard, W. A. Saleh has convincingly indicated that post-quranic scholars like al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī, straining to align the quranic Saul (Q 2:246–253) with the biblical Saul (1 Sam), produced a fancifully Islamized tale in their historical accounts.[17] Nonetheless, Saleh does not discuss in detail how they

16 Rubin, "Islamic Retellings," 299.

17 Walid A. Saleh, "'What if you refuse, when ordered to fight?': King Saul (Talut) in the Qurʾan and Post-Qurʾanic Literature," in *Saul in Story and Tradition*, ed. Carl Ehrlich (Mohr Siebeck: Tübingen, 2006), 261–83. See the lengthy discussion of other

recaptured the quranic version with such unfettered, non-Islamic flourishes. M. O Klar executed a more in-depth probing on al-Thaʿlabī's portrait of biblical figures, such as Job, Saul, David, and Noah, in conversation with other post-quranic scholars, including al-Ṭabarī, but her treatment of Saul's engagement with David against Goliath is rather cursory and limited.[18] In short, several attempts have been hitherto made to address the literary distinction of al-Ṭabarī's depiction of Saul in *History* quite independently, yet not enough attention has been given to how other post-quranic scholars, relying on al-Ṭabarī's tradition, further expanded or curtailed the appropriation of the Jewish and Christian traditions in their Qurʾān interpretation. To redress this deficit, this paper's aim will be to compare al-Ṭabarī's work on the selected key verses of Q 2:246-251 with the parallel accounts of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035) and al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) because both preserve historiographical reports of al-Ṭabarī. Al-Qurṭubī was a renowned Andalusian exegete whose quranic commentary tends to avoid the insertion of Jewish and Christian sources, but his work contains occasional citations of the *Isrāʾīliyyāt*.[19] The

biblical figures in the Qurʾān in *The Bible and the Qurʾan: Biblical Figures in the Islamic Tradition*, eds. John Kaltner and Younus Y. Mirza (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018); R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature* (Curzon Studies in the Qurʾan; Richmond: Curzon Press, 2002); Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

18 Marianna O. Klar, *Interpreting al-Thaʿlabī's Tales*.

19 Delfina Serrano Ruano, "Al-Qurṭubī" in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe et al. Accessed August 6, 2021. doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQCOM_050504. See, for example, al-Turkī's criticism of al-Qurṭubī's use of the *Isrāʾīliyyāt in al-Qurṭubī, al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān wa-l-mubayyin li-mā*

consideration of al–Qurṭubī̄'s quranic commentary in this comparative analysis, in addition to al–Thaʿlabī̄'s historiographical text, is expected to expose the diametrical tendencies of those quranic scholars who capitalize on extra–quranic sources beyond al–Ṭabarī̄'s legacy. Hence, the examination of al–Ṭabarī̄'s texts in relation to those of al–Thaʿlabī and al–Qurṭubī will demonstrate the degree to which the post–quranic scholars reformulated the mediated common traditions of Judaism and Christianity and synthesized creatively to enlighten the meaning of the Qurʾān with a rhetorical end. The main task of this study then will not be so much in gauging the scope of scriptural "corruption" of the preceding religions of Islam but in appraising the rhetorical impact of utilizing extra–quranic literature of other monotheisms (e.g., Hebrew Bible/Old Testament) that post–quranic commentators adopted according to their ideological purposes.

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taḍammanahu min al–sunna wa–āy al–furqān, ed. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al–Muḥsin al–Turkī, 24 vols (Beirut: Muʾassasit al–Risāla, 2006), 18–21. However, as Ruano mentions, other modern scholars offer a more lenient assessment on this issue. Mashhūr Ḥasan Maḥmūd Salmān, *al–Imām al–Qurṭubī: Shaykh aʾimmat al–tafsīr* (Damascus: Dār al–Qalam, 1993), 109–12, 124–7; Muhammad Bin Sharīfa, *al–Imām al–Qurtubī al–mufassir: Sīratuhu min taʾlīfihi*, t. 671 H. (Rabat: Markaz al–Dirāsāt wa–l–Abḥāth wa–Iḥyāʾ al–Turāth, 2010), 54.

Ⅱ. SAUL, DAVID, AND GOLIATH IN THE QUR'ĀN (Q 2:246–251)

1. Samuel the Prophet and Israel's Request of a King (Q 2:246)

In al-Ṭabarī's *The Children of Israel* (CI), the citation of Q 2:246 is foregrounded by the birth narrative of Samuel (cf. 1 Sam 1), beginning with the account of the captivity of the ark through the foreigner's attack and Israelites' subsequent petition of a prophet who would rescue them from their humiliating state of defeat.[20] God answers through Hannah's conception of Samuel, and Samuel's prophetic vocation is confirmed at Gabriel's calling of his name at the third time which resembles the biblical account of Samuel's initial calling at Shiloh (1 Sam 3). Gabriel declares to Samuel, "Go to your people and bring them your Lord's message. For God has sent you among them as a prophet."[21] But the Israelites who are skeptical of Samuel's calling demand a king to authenticate Samuel's prophetic appointment:

> But, when [Samuel] presented himself to [the Israelites], they considered him a liar, saying, "You have been hasty regarding prophecy. We will pay no attention to you." They said, "If you are a speaker of truth, then *send us a king to fight for the sake of God* (Q 2:246a), as a sign of your prophecy." Samuel

20 al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 3:129.

21 Ibid., 3:130.

> said, "Would you then *refrain from fighting, if fighting were prescribed for you*?"(Q 2:246b) *They said, "Why should we not fight for God's sake when we have been driven from our dwellings with our children* (Q 2:246c)—by tax payment?"[22]

Al-Ṭabarī mentions that the archenemy of the Israelites around this time was King Goliath of the Amalekites (contra the Philistines as in the Bible), who oppressed them through the imposition of *Jizya* (the tax levied against non-Muslims) and divested them of the Torah.[23]

By contrast, al-Tha'labī's account, which is ascribed to Wahb b. Munabbih, begins with the theological elucidation of Israel's waywardness, which echoes the Bible's poignant assessment of the "downward spiraling"[24] of Israel's apostasy after Joshua's death until the emergence of the monarchy at the beginning of the book of Judges (2:10-23):

> But when their misdeeds increased and their sins became great and they abandoned what God had enjoined upon them, God gave the Amalekites' power over them. These were a people who dwelt in Gaza and Ashkelon and the seacoast between

22 Ibid., 3:130-31.

23 See also Ziauddin Ahmad, "The Concept of Jizya in Early Islam," *Islamic Studies* 14.4 (1975): 293-305.

24 Kenneth C. Way, "The Literary Structure of Judges Revisited: Judges as a Ring Composition" in *Windows to the Ancient World of the Hebrew Bible: Essays in Honor of Samuel Greengus*, eds. Bill T. Arnold et al. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 247-60.

> Egypt and Palestine··· The Israelites remained in a state of unrest and controversy regarding their condition, at times persevering in their transgression and error. Then, at times, God would impose upon them someone who would avenge Him upon them so that they would return to penitence. God protected them from the worst of those who hated them until He sent Saul as king among them and returned their Torah to them, set their affairs in order, and strengthened their rule.[25]

Although al-Thaʿlabī's extra-quranic reference belies conspicuously conflicting details against the Bible (e.g., the Amalekites rather than the Philistines), its deployment of biblical insight—in this case, the formulaic cycle of Israel's salvation history marked by rebellion, oppression, repentance, and salvation during the period of Judges—is quite remarkable. Al-Thaʿlabī's particular narration that "the period from the death of Joshua son of Nun to the time when dominion was established among them and prophecy returned to them through Samuel the prophet" suggests a rhetorical aim of legitimizing Samuel's prophetic role.[26]

In the Bible, Israel's disposition toward idolatry leads to the LORD's test of Israel's faithfulness by means of the holy war (e.g., Judg 3:1-4) against their enemies in the Promised Land, of which the five Philistine lords top the list (Judg 3:3). In the course of time, Saul fails to fulfill the LORD's specific requirements of the holy war (1 Sam 15) against the Amalekites and is

25 al-Thaʿlabī, *Lives of the Prophets*, 440.
26 Ibid.

rejected, whereas David ascends to the throne at Hebron after routing the Amalekites (2 Sam 1–2), brings back the ark of God to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6), and subdues all the enemies around the United Kingdom of Israel, including the Philistines (2 Sam 8). Nevertheless, Saul figures prominently in al-Thaʿlabī's historiography as a legitimate kingdom founder of Israel, after a long hiatus of anarchy throughout the period of Judges, whose primary contribution is restoring the divine revelation—that is, the Torah—to the Israelites. Whereas the Bible describes David as the warrior king who defeated Goliath and restored the ark in its proper setting, al-Thaʿlabī envisions Goliath as having seized Israel's Torah, and Saul as the one who brought back the Torah to Israel's possession. Al-Thaʿlabī's text then proceeds to expound on Samuel's birth narrative, much of which may be described as an extension of al-Ṭabarī's version.

Notably, al-Thaʿlabī's historiographical commentary on Samuel's introduction of Saul as Israel's king (Q 2:246) is prefaced with startling details from the Bible that are not found in al-Ṭabarī's version. The biblical narrative on Samuel's calling (1 Sam 3), Eli and his profligate sons' wickedness and their downfall (1 Sam 2:22–36, 4:12–18), and the capture of the ark are virtually duplicated in al-Thaʿlabī's expositional narrative which is frequently combined with gap-filling, midrashic interpretation.[27] For instance, Israel's request of a king is predicated by Israel's request for a prophet. The Israelites figure out that Hannah is

27 Ibid., 442.

the last remaining woman, though old and barren, who is eligible to continue the legitimate prophetic lineage. Then, for fear she would bear a female child and switch the baby with another male child, the Israelites confine Hannah, who is already pregnant as an answer to her previous prayer offered at the provocation of her younger rival Peninnah. Moved by the zealousness of the Israelites, Hannah petitions God for a baby boy and God graciously answers her request. Finally, Samuel is presented as the prophet of Israel but after 40 years of his peaceful ruling, Goliath's attack instigates terror among the people so that they ask for a king. The subtle connection between Israel's request of a prophet and then a king underlines Israel's fickleness due to their lack of steadfastness and cowardice.[28]

Al-Qurṭubī's commentary on Q 2:246 begins by highlighting the contextual significance of Q 2:244, wherein the Israelites are addressed to "fight in the way of God."[29] Al-Qurṭubī opines that

28 Ibid., 444. Al-Thaʿlabī then goes on to clarify the hierarchal relationship between a prophet and a king. According to al-Thaʿlabī, the prophet has the hierarchical priority over the king as a mediator of the divine revelation to guide his rule. This reiteration of the power relationship between a prophet and a king signifies a slight departure from the biblical rendition of power relations in that both the king and the prophet were subsumed under the authority of the Torah. The rabbinic sage explicated that an Israelite king was to carry around the Mosaic reminder of limitations of kingship (Sanhedrin 21a; Deut 17:18-19).

29 Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Abī Bakr ibn Farḥ al-Anṣārī al-Khazrajī al-Andalusī al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī: The General Judgments of the Qur'an and Clarification of what it contains of the Sunnah and Āyahs of Discrimination Vol. 2 Juz' 2: Sūrat al-Baqarah* 142-253, trans. Aisha A. Bewley (London: Diwan Press, 2003), Q 2:244; idem, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān wa-l-mubayyin li-mā taḍam-manahu min al-sunna wa-āy al-furqān*, ed. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī, 24 vols (Beirut: Muʾassasit al-Risāla, 2006).

the verse 2:246 is quoted by Allah "to encourage fighting" to the Israelites.[30] The background explication for this is that when the Israelites were oppressed by their enemies, they asked for permission but once they were given the order to fight, the regressed with fear. The few who remained faithful were ultimately able to triumph over their enemies. Al–Qurṭubī claims that the weak–willed, cowardly ones are prone to be found in "wealthy nations who incline to comfort and easy life. When war occurs, they are reluctant to fight and follow their nature"(Q 2:246).[31] Al–Qurṭubī's closing comment apparently aligns with the point raised in the earlier verse (Q 2:244) and places the incident of Israel's request for a king in the proper context of a holy war: "… Allah reported that a small number of them remained firm on their first intention and their resolve to fight in the Way of Allah continued."[32] Hence, al–Qurṭubī steers away from invoking biblical or Jewish sources unlike his predecessors whose background narratives on the *āyah* (Q 2:246) start off with the explication of Samuel's miraculous birth (al–Ṭabarī) and even the recount of Israel's defiance throughout their history from the days of Joshua (al–Thaʿlabī).

30 al–Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al–Qurṭubī*, Q 2:246.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

2. God's Election of Saul (Q 2:247)

The Qur'ān describes the prophet (i.e., Samuel) responding to Israel's demand for a king by introducing Saul. Al-Ṭabarī's account accordingly expands the narrative arc to encompass the biblical description of Saul at the initial stage of his royal debut to Israel:

> So he prayed to God and was given a staff, the size of which was the height of the man who would be sent as the king. Samuel said: "Your companion's height should reach that of this staff." Their prophet said to them: "*Lo! God has raised up Saul to be a king for you*"(Q 2:247a). But the people said: "You have never been more untruthful than you are now. We belong to the tribe of kingship. He is not from that tribe, and '*he has not been given wealth enough*' (Q 2:247b) that we should follow him." The prophet said: "*Lo! God has chosen him above you, and has increased him abundantly in wisdom and stature*"(Q 2:247c).[33]

Integrating the strands of Jewish myth, al-Ṭabarī describes that the Israelites take the staff to Saul, who happened to be searching for his stray donkey (cf. 1 Sam 9:3-5, "the donkeys of Kish"), and they discover that the staff's length perfectly fits his height. Al-Ṭabarī's narrative weaves Q 2:247, which specifically mentions Saul, in the following section. When Samuel explains

33 al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 3:130-31.

that God has raised Saul as their king (v. 247a), the Israelites reject God's choice for a king over them because of his dubious tribal lineage and lack of "wealth"(v. 247b; cf. 1 Sam 10:27). The Qurʾān's reference to Israel's complaint against Saul regarding his lack of material possession (i.e., v. 247b) is markedly reminiscent of Saul's description in the Bible: Saul is the most handsome young Benjaminite, "a man of wealth," and whose head and shoulders tower above everyone else (1 Sam 9:1–2). The quranic deviation, expressed in Israel's complaint of his lack of wealth, denotes Israel's folly of rejecting God's chosen one. In addition, al-Ṭabarī's historiographical narrative supplements Israel's questioning of Saul's "sovereignty" over them in the Qurʾān with Israel's qualms about Saul's minor tribal affiliation. According to the Bible, when Samuel encounters Saul to reveal God's plan for him, Saul humbly admits that he is "from the least of the tribes of Israel" and that his "clan is the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin"(1 Sam 9:21 ESV). By delineating the Israelites as initially rejecting God's choice of Saul because of his unassuming tribal background in addition to his lack of riches, al-Ṭabarī's account casts the Israelites as contradicting God's will for them. The prophet reassures the Israelites that God has sufficiently endowed Saul with "wisdom and stature"(v. 247c).

Al-Thaʿlabī adheres to the midrashic lore of the horn with sizzling oil and staff as al-Ṭabarī does, but also attempts to further address Israel's initial rejection stated in the Qurʾān

(2:247), in which the Israelites question Saul's tribal origin and material status. Al-Thaʿlabī's story further intensifies the Israelites' claim of belonging to the "tribe of kingship."[34] The Israelites contend that Saul is from neither the "tribe of prophecy"(Levi) nor the "tribe of royalty"(Judah).[35] Israel's objection then evolves to an absurd claim that links Benjamin with Judah's levirate relationship with Tamar in the book of Genesis 38:

> But Saul was neither from the tribe of prophecy nor from that of royalty, but he was from the tribe of Benjamin son of Judah, who had committed a grave sin, having had intercourse with women by the side of the road during broad daylight, so God became angry at them and stripped both prophecy and royalty from them.[36]

Whether the Israelites' association of Benjamin with Judah is intended or presents a corrupted version of the biblical account is not immediately clear.[37] Nevertheless, given that there have been ample instances of mixing biblical characters in al-Thaʿlabī's historical account,[38] it would not be far-fetched to say that the case is a misreading of the biblical account. At any rate, the cumulative impact of fusing the two characters underscores Israel's

34 al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 3:131.

35 al-Thaʿlabī, *Lives of the Prophets*, 446.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid., 446. See footnote 2.

38 Ibid., 432. See footnote 1 and 2; idem, 443. See footnote 15.

resolute defiance of God's choice for them through the prophet. Al–Thaʿlabī then inserts the tradition that exploits the lexical cue drawn from the wordplay between the name Saul (Ṭālūt) and height (ṭūl), and extrapolates, in the words of Samuel, that Saul was chosen because of his surpassing internal and external qualities endowed by God, such as wisdom, stature, and beauty.[39]

Al–Qurṭubī's exegetical comment on Q 2:247 detracts from those of al–Ṭabarī and al–Thaʿlabī in that he discards much of the midrashic accretions related to the biblical figure Saul, opting for a more rational explanation. For al–Qurṭubī, the focus of the relevant verse is the concept of God's election of Saul. First, al–Qurṭubī embraces al–Thaʿlabī's description of the people's rejection of Saul based on his tribal lineage but with the clarification that Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin, neither from "the tribe of prophethood (Levi)" nor from "the tribe of kingship (Judah)."[40] Hence, al–Qurṭubī maneuvers away from the Israelites' aberrant association of Benjamin with Judah as found in al–Thaʿlabī's account and focuses more on Israel's irrational adamancy in resisting God's choice for them. Al–Qurṭubī also remarks, in agreement with al–Ṭabarī and al–Thaʿlabī, that Samuel's choice for Saul was divinely ordained through the bubbling oil in the horn when Saul appears before Samuel during his search for the stray donkeys. For al–Qurṭubī, Israel's complaint about Saul's apparent unworthiness based on his insignificant tribal background and paucity

39 Ibid., 446.

40 al–Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al–Qurṭubī*, Q 2:247.

flies in the face of logic, for God's providential election alone stands as the "conclusive argument" against all their objections:

> They also pointed out that he was poor, completely ignoring the strongest reason, which was the prior decree of Allah, and their Prophet pointed out this conclusive argument against them: 'Allah has chosen him over you.' His choice is the definitive argument. He made it clear to them that that was the reason why Ṭālūt was chosen.[41]

Moreover, al-Qurṭubī asserts that mere genealogical lineage does not qualify a person to assume the status of a king (v. 247); God's choice of Saul is beyond challenge as he surpasses all other Israelites in "knowledge, piety and strength," the characteristics that constitute an effective leader.

> A ruler merits his authority on the basis of knowledge, piety and strength, not on the basis of lineage. Lineage has no real say in the matter since knowledge and virtue supersede it as Allah makes clear by informing us that He chose Ṭālūt over them on account of his knowledge and strength even though their lineage was more noble.[42]

Al-Qurṭubī here resists enlisting superficial qualities such as external "beauty" as one of the traits of a potent king. He thus

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.

diverges from his predecessors' appropriation of the biblical and rabbinic material that emphasize Saul's "handsomeness" (cf. 1 Sam 9:2) as one of the hallmarks of his excellency. Moreover, al–Qurṭubī does not fail to mention some quranic commentators' statements that the final words in the *āyah* (v. 427), "And God gives His Sovereignty to whomsoever He will…," pertains to what Muhammad heard from Allah, although affirming that it was what was first spoken through Samuel to Saul.[43] The superimposition of Saul with Muhammad at this point dramatically unravels some of the fierce resistance each encountered by his own people before assuming the position of power, casting the Israelites' blind resistance to God's elect in a sharper relief. In the quranic exegetical tradition, as also hinted by al–Qurṭubī, the verse runs parallel to the account of Muhammad's rejection by the Quraysh and the Jews as a prophet for "his lack of wealth and status among the Quraysh and his non–Jewish lineage among the Jews" (cf. 3:26c).[44]

3. Saul and the Ark of the Covenant (Q 2:248)

Still, they request an additional sign of his kingship. Samuel then utters a prophecy that Saul will bring the ark back to them (v. 248a):

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43 Ibid.

44 *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*, eds. Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (New York: Haper One, 2015), 241 (Q 2:247).

> They said, "If you are truthful, bring us a sign that this man is a king." He said: "*Lo! The token of his kingship is that the ark, in which there is the Sakinah, and a remnant of that which the family of Moses and the family of Aaron left behind, will come to you from your Lord*" (Q 2:248a) …[45]

Al-Ṭabarī, ascribing to al-Qāsim and Yūnus, explains that the angels brought the ark back in Israel's midst.[46] While al-Qāsim notes that the ark was set before Saul by these angelic agents, Yūnus mentions that the Israelites angrily acknowledged God's election of Saul as they saw the ark descending from above by the angels. By contrast, the Bible mentions through David's words that the ark was not sought after during Saul's reign (cf. 1 Chron 13:3).[47] In fact, the God of Israel brought the ark back to the Israelite side to rest in Kiriath-jearim from the Philistines, who relinquished the custody of the ark after a series of divinely inflicted plagues (1 Sam 6). At last, David brought the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6:1-19). The mention of the ark (tābūt) occurs once in the entire Qur'ān (2:248), pointing to a conspicuous subtext within al-Ṭabarī's historical narrative intermixed with the quranic and biblical accounts.[48] As U. Rubin has aptly stated, unlike in the Bible where the ark is diversely seen as an em-

45 al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 3:130-31.

46 Ibid., 3:132.

47 *The Study Quran*, Q 2:248.

48 Uri Rubin, "Traditions in Transformation: The Ark of the Covenant and the Golden Calf in Biblical and Islamic Historiography," *Oriens* 36 (2001), 199.

blem of God's presence (i.e., "revelation, protection, [or] guidance") among the Israelites, in the Qurʾān it is solely the means to "legitimize authority" whereby the divinely ordained figure is authenticated.[49] If, as Rubin argues, the Qurʾān's overarching emphasis is on legitimatizing the oft-rejected quranic prophets as the genuine messenger of God, al-Ṭabarī's quranic rewriting achieves its rhetorical aim by highlighting Samuel's prophetic authority and his agency in introducing Saul as Israel's legitimate king against Israel's intractable resistance in the process.

Al-Thaʿlabī's account fills in the gap generated by the Qurʾān's reference to the ark as having rested under the custody of the Israelites, as it specifically mentions that the ark contains "a remnant left by the House of Moses and the House of Aaron" (Q 2:248).[50] Al-Thaʿlabī relates the story of how the ark was handed down from the days of Adam to Abraham and then to Ishmael the "firstborn"—not Isaac—and then to his son Kedar (or Qedar), who is referred to as Ishmael's second son (Gen 25:31; cf. 1 Chr 1:29), the forefather of the Kedarites (ancient Arab tribal federation). The descendants of Isaac demanded that Kedar hand over the ark to them, but Kedar resisted until God told him to yield the ark to his cousin Jacob, for only a prophet was able to open the ark. Jacob relates the story of his vision, which is reminiscent of his dream at Bethel (Gen 28:10–22): how angels descended to bring celestial "blessings and mercy" in a mysterious

49 Ibid, 199–200.

50 al-Thaʿlabī, *Lives of the Prophets*, 447–48.

light for the sake of Muhammad.[51] Kedar hands over the ark to Jacob, and when Kedar returns home, he fathers Ḥaml, in whom is found "the light of Muhammad," just as Jacob prophesied. So the ark remained with the Israelites through the time of Moses until the time of Samuel, while the "luminous representation of the preexistent Muhammad" lived on through the generation of the immaculate Ishmaelite descendants.[52] Al-Thaʿlabī's ground for tracing the history of the ark's guardianship is already made apparent at the outset: the ultimate keeper of the ark is none other than the house of Muhammad.[53] Al-Thaʿlabī then delineates the exile and the return of the ark back to Israel during the days of young Goliath, the story of which broadly parallels its biblical counterpart (1 Sam 5-6). The miraculous return of the ark is attributed to the workings of the angels (cf. Q 2:248, "born by the angels") and interlinked with the conferral of the ark to Saul.

Al-Qurṭubī's commentary on Q 2:248 contains overlapping stories with those related by al-Thaʿlabī and al-Ṭabarī. Al-Qurṭubī especially notes that the ark was first with Adam and then with Jacob and his descendants until Goliath and the Amalekites (i.e., Philistines) took it because of Israel's disobedience. Citing al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī also provides a detailed account of the ark's captivity and its miraculous return by means of oxen led by the angels. Al-Qurṭubī, on the other hand, pays relatively

51 Ibid.

52 Rubin, "Islamic Retellings," 309.

53 al-Thaʿlabī, *Lives of the Prophets*, 447.

more attention to defining the terms sakīna ("tranquility, serenity") and baqiyyah ("relics, remnant"), which are used to describe the ark in Q 2:248.[54] In particular, al-Qurṭubī relays the ḥādīth traditions that relate Muhammad's saying about sakīna, which identifies it as a mysterious cloud summoned during the recitation of the Qurʾān or as the angels.[55]

4. Saul Like Gideon (Q 2:249)

Resuming al-Suddī's tradition, al-Ṭabarī's narration continues to fuse the quranic verses (v. 249) with the account of Saul's military recruitment which loosely corresponds to the biblical account of Gideon's filtering of the Israelite soldiers before the war against the Midianites (Judg 7:1-8):

> *When [the Israelites] went forth, Saul said to them: "Lo! God will test you by a river. Whoever [therefore] drinks of it, he is not of me, and whoever does not taste of it is of me."* (Q 2:249a) This was the river of Palestine. They drank from it out of fear of Goliath; only four thousand of them crossed with Saul, while seventy-six thousand turned back. Those who drank of it became thirsty, while those who did not drink of it, except in the palms of their hands, had their thirst quenched.[56]

54 *The Study Qurʾān*, 2:248.

55 al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, Q 2:248.

56 al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 3:132; Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and the Bible: Text and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 97.

The juxtaposition of Saul and Gideon in view of the previous section on the Israelites' skeptical reaction to Saul's qualification casts in stark relief the mockery of the officials of Succoth at Gideon's capabilities prior to his triumph over the Midianites (Judg 7:6). But the Qur'ān does not specifically mention the number of soldiers that were summoned and chosen. Al-Ṭabarī elaborates on Q 2:249 by featuring Saul's downsizing of the Israelite soldiers from 80,000 to 4,000, and then down to 319, which parallels Gideon's reduction of the forces from 32,000 to 10,000, and then down to 300.[57] In the biblical version, those who lap the water with their tongues "like a dog" were finally chosen as opposed to those who knelt down to drink with their hands (Judg 7:5). The underlying ideological thrust of the record of Saul's reduction of the army is the legitimation of a divinely ordained leader who was entrusted with the depository of revelation (i.e., the ark of the covenant) and whose authority is ultimately confirmed through a miraculous military victory. Saul, although ini-

57 al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 3:132. See footnote 717. Out of the 4,000 people who dared to cross the river with Saul, all but 319 were enlisted to fight against the Philistines as the rest took flight at the sight of Goliath. Curiously, given the numerological importance of 19 in the quranic exegesis (Q 74:30), especially related to Muhammad's first reception of the 19 *āyaats* of Qur'ān whose first *āyaat* (Q 96:1-5) consists of 19 words of with 76 letters (19 x 4 = 76), the number 4,000 (76,000 ÷ 19 = 4,000) appears to implicate the faithful devotees of the Qur'ānic revelation. The number 319 which al-Ṭabari's tradition relates to "the people of Badr" is significant in the Islamic historiography in that it foregrounds the Campaign of Badr (ca. 2/624 CE), the first decisive victory of Muhammad's battles in which 300 some people were known to have routed about 1,000 Meccan enemies who outnumbered them. See Afnan H. Fatani, "Numbers" in *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 2006), 465-67.

tially rejected by his own people, is presented as God's chosen king of Israel and, by God's miraculous power, is able to prevail against the formidable enemy led by Goliath with a handful of faithful followers.

Al–Thaʿlabī's story contains more specific reasons for reducing the size of Saul's army prior to crossing the river: those who are physically unfit or have extenuating circumstances are excused from joining Saul's military campaign against Goliath and his forces. Al–Thaʿlabī's version of this exhibits considerable correspondence with the biblical prescription for military exemption presented in the book of Deuteronomy (29:5–7 ESV), which involves those who had to dedicate a newly built house, harvest the new vineyard, or fulfill a newlywed's marriage duty. Similarly, Saul relieves those who have outstanding duties regarding a house construction or business, financial predicament due to outstanding debt, and matrimonial duty of a husband toward his newly wedded wife.[58] The 80,000 warriors choose to march out with Saul after the first screening, but they are put to the test again because of a lack of water. The elaboration of the quranic verse, "Truly God will try you with a stream" (Q 2:249) in Al–Thaʿlabī's narration, is redolent of the wilderness tradition in the Bible (cf. Exod 15, 17; Num 20), where the Israelites are described as having been "tested" by the LORD (Exod 15:24, 25) when they complain about their thirst in the wilderness. In the book of Exodus, the Israelites are quenched of their thirst at the waters of

58 al–Thaʿlabī, *Lives of the Prophets*, 451.

Marah (Exod 15:7), after Moses casts a log into the bitter stream and makes it sweet again. Al-Thaʿlabī explains that those who did not drink from the "sweet" water stream, except for those who used their hands to "scoop" up the water, have proven to be trustworthy to join the fight. As in the case of al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī's story retains incidents evocative of Gideon's test of his soldiers at the river but appears to also synthesize a strand of the wilderness tradition in the Bible. As for the conflicting figures regarding the number of soldiers who crossed the river, al-Thaʿlabī upholds 313 soldiers as related by al-Barrāʾ b. ʿĀzib, who claims that Muhammad declared his army of 313 "on the day of Badr" (March 624 CE) as equal in number with Saul's faithful company when Saul crossed over the river to defeat Goliath.[59] This is at odds with al-Ṭabarī's account, in which the differing numbers are compromised with a narrative twist as discussed above.[60]

Al-Qurṭubī is more attuned to lexical subtleties than al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī. He begins by noting that the verb "set out" (*faṣala*) in the *āyah* (Q 2:249) implies "to separate from," which signifies Saul (Tālūt)'s departure from the people unfit for the battle.[61] Al-Qurṭubī, quoting Wahb ibn Munabbih, relates that when the Israelites, wary of impending paucity of water, urged Saul to ask Allah to make a river, he signaled that Allah will test them with it. Al-Qurṭubī rationalizes that the river water, which

59 Ibid., 452.

60 Ibid., 452. See footnote 16.

61 al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, Q 2:249.

was pleasantly sweet, served as a touchstone for the faithful followers in the days to come. Those who refrained from drinking or barely satiated their thirst with a handful of water are "those who are resolute and steadfast in the hardship of life…"[62] Citing Muhammad's proverbial saying, al-Qurṭubī imports parabolic interpretation that the river in the *āyah* (Q 2:249) is meant to represent the world: the people who drink the river water without hesitation are those who would indulge in the worldly pleasures, the people who refuse to drink at all are those who would deny mundane pleasures, and the people who only drink a scoop of the water are those who would draw a minimum benefit for basic survival.[63] Al-Qurṭubī's commentary evinces diverging quranic interpretations as to whether Saul is "a Prophet" or not, given Saul's revelation that Allah will test the Israelites with a river. After all, the unbelieving ones who gulped the water failed the test and were numbered up to 76,000. No sooner had the Israelites crossed the river than they encountered Goliath with his army of 100,000; then, nearly 3,680 of the Israelites of Saul's army left. Al-Qurṭubī illustrates that the total number of soldiers who finally dared to confront Goliath and his army was about 300 some people (e.g., with variants 310 or 313) and associates these brave ones with Muhammad's band of Badr. Al-Qurṭubī further clarifies that the term "a company" (fi'ah) in the Qur'ān (v. 249) derives from a word meaning "to cut with a sword," which indi-

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

cates that the small group of faithful followers are like "a section cut from the rest."[64] This particular āyah was given to "encourage fighting" and to point out that Allah's faithful ones should remain "steadfast and obe[dient]." Al-Qurṭubī exhorts based on his interpretation that no heroes of faith in Islam will cringe before engaging in the holy war, but they are to trust in Allah for victory against the enemies (Q 3:200; 5:23; 16:128; 22:40; 8:45).[65]

5. David's Victory Over Goliath (Q 2:250-251)

Al-Ṭabarī's historical account of Israel then returns to al-Suddī's account by quoting Q 2:250 again, where David is introduced to deal with Goliath. The fact that al-Ṭabarī's account moves into David's duel with Goliath without mentioning the intervening biblical episodes is noteworthy. Saul's unlawful sacrifice at Gilgal while facing the vast Philistine forces (1 Sam 13) and his partially completed military campaign against the Amalekites (1 Sam 15) invite Samuel's dire disapproval and results in the forfeiture of his kingship after all. That the quranic narrative seamlessly transitions to the scene of David's victory against Goliath without references to such a blatant failure on Saul's part further highlights one of the marked interpretative tendencies of al-Ṭabarī's story: as the mediator of divine revelation, Samuel the prophet's authority is repeatedly affirmed throughout his

64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.

illustrious prophetic career, including the anointing of Saul as Israel's king.

Then the narrative suddenly shifts to the battleground scene where Goliath and the Philistines are lined up for a battle against Saul and the Israelites, and the ensuing story is replete with imaginative elaborations of the biblical counterpart in ways that resemble a midrashic lore. Samuel entrusts a horn filled with the anointing oil and a breastplate of iron with Saul and prophesies that these will belong to the one who kills Goliath, especially with oil remaining on the hero's head in a crown shape and the breastplate a perfect fit for him. Just when Saul declares the promise of his daughter in marriage and Israel's rulership for the one who kills Goliath, David appears before Saul and is confirmed as the one about whom Samuel prophesied. When David confronts Goliath, the giant despises the lad, but David loses no time in striking the sling stone into the enemy's forehead triumphantly and consequently the enemy forces are defeated. After the dramatic showdown, David's success arouses Saul's jealousy and his murderous pursuit of David ends in his remorseful declaration, "He is better than I."[66]

However, just as the biblical account, Saul changes his mind and continues his raging pursuit of David but is again conscience-stricken until he is eventually confronted by one female diviner ("scholar") the giant spared. The diviner conjures up Joshua son of Nun, who prescribes the way of atonement for Saul: he

66 al-Ṭabarī, *History*, 137.

is to yield the throne to David and die on the battlefield with his sons. The grand narrative concludes with the citation of Q 2:251 in al-Ṭabarī's account with the final note on how the power finally transitioned from Saul into the hands of David in accordance with Samuel's prophecy:

> David became king after that, and God made him a prophet, for that is His word: *God gave him the kingdom and the wisdom*—it is said that the latter means prophecy (Q 2:251). [God] gave him Samuel's prophecy and Saul's kingship.

Al-Thaʿlabī's account coheres with that of al-Ṭabarī along the shared tradition of al- Suddī. One of the noticeable incongruencies is al-Thaʿlabī's appropriation of the vivid details of Samuel's anointing of David and David's slaying of Goliath as it appears in the biblical narrative in the book of Samuel (1 Sam 17). The inclusion of fine elements of the biblical narrative apparently belies the keen knowledge of the Bible in al-Thaʿlabī's source tradition: the declaration that God does not judge a man by his outer appearance but by his heart (1 Sam 17:7), Goliath's challenge of a duel (1 Sam 17:9), David's donning of Saul's coat of mail and his refusal to wear it (1 Sam 17:38-40), Goliath's belittling of David using the dog imagery, David's invocation of God's name before attacking the giant (1 Sam 17:45-47), Saul's murderous pursuit of David and subsequent consultation of a medium (1 Sam 19:8-17; 24; 26; 28), and the demise of Saul and his

sons on the battlefield (1 Sam 31). Still, al–Thaʿlabī's story relates David's routing of the enemies with Muhammad's defeat of the Meccans at Badr: just as David's stones were broken into pieces after penetrating Goliath's skull, their fragments killing off all the enemies, the Prophet conquered the vast army of Meccans when Allah "poured dust of the ground."[67] When David slayed Goliath's head and carried it along with his signet ring before Saul, it was "the Muslims" who responded with exultation and gave praise to God.[68] Al–Thaʿlabī, after presenting the subsequent episodes ending in Saul's martyrdom, describes that David ascended the throne with the people's unanimous consent, seven years after he destroyed Goliath and his army. By intermixing Q 38:27 and Q 2:251, al–Thaʿlabī's work attests that David is the only king since the day of Joshua son of Nun to have received such undivided support from the Israelites.[69]

Al–Qurṭubī offers an abridged report of David (Dāwud)'s slaying of Goliath (Jālūt), roughly converging on al–Thaʿlabī's narrative plotline. Nonetheless, al–Qurṭubī is patently silent about Saul's demise unlike al–Ṭabarī or al–Thaʿlabī. For al–Qurṭubī, Saul figures prominently in the battle against Goliath: David kills Goliath because Saul chose David to fight against the archenemy in the first place.[70] The accounts of Saul's zealous pursuit of the life of David, his consultation with a female "scholar" (i.e.,

67 al–Thaʿlabī, *Lives of the Prophets*, 456.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid., 462.

70 al–Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al–Qurṭubī*, Q 2:251.

medium) and tragic death in the battlefield are altogether missing in al-Qurṭubī's expositional treatise. Ascribing to al-Suddī, al-Qurṭubī observes that Allah gave David "sovereignty and wisdom" (Q 2:251), making him "the inheritor of both the kingdom of Ṭālūt (Saul) and the prophethood of Samwīl (Samuel)."[71] Thus, al-Qurṭubī evidently detracts from his exegetical predecessors—whose gap-filling interpretation of Q 2:251 is manifestly derived from the biblical source—by refusing to portray Saul as an unfortunate king whose martyrdom in the LORD's battle compensates for his wrongdoing against David.[72] In al-Qurṭubī's exegesis, David is also associated with Muhammad in that the shattered pieces of the sling stones that decimated thousands of enemy soldiers are compared to what Muhammad threw at Hawāzin in the Battle of Ḥunayn (630 CE), one of the momentous battles for Muslims.[73]

Ⅲ. SUMMARY EVALUATION

The examination of the post-quranic presentation of the biblical figures—namely, Saul, David and Goliath in Q 2:246-251—by al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, and al-Qurṭubī in their historiographical works is revealing. First, it is noteworthy that each of these quranic scholars contributed to expounding the Qurʾān by employing

71 Ibid.

72 Saleh, "What if you refuse," 2, 281-82.

73 al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*, 2:251.

in his own distinctive way the collections of Jewish and Christian sources to bolster their Islamic ideals. Insofar as the given verses are concerned (Q 2:246–251), al-Thaʿlabī's account exhibits the most extensive adoption of the biblical tradition, which expands upon al-Ṭabarī's work. Some of al-Thaʿlabī's adopted traditions manifest precise knowledge of the legal and historical narrative in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament more so than those of al-Ṭabarī, such as those reminiscent of military exemptions in the holy war (Deut 29:5–7), the wilderness tradition involving the LORD's test of Israel's faithfulness with no drinkable water (Exod 15; Num 20), theological prologue in the book of Judges which summarizes Israel's cyclical failure (Judg 2:11–19), and Samuel's anointing of David followed by David's defeat of Goliath (1 Sam 17). Al-Qurṭubī also cites al-Ṭabarī, though minimally, but his acute knowledge of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures is divulged by the ways in which he adjudicates interpretive discrepancies relating to the biblical facts, when we consider the works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī concomitantly. For example, al-Thaʿlabī's text amplifies al-Ṭabarī's mention of the "tribe of kingship" by attributing the "tribe of prophecy" and the "tribe of royalty" to Benjamin and Judah's illicit relationship with Tamar (Gen 38), and thereby posits an erroneous association of Saul's tribal lineage with that of David. Al-Qurṭubī apparently straightens out this muddled notion by elucidating that Saul belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, not to the tribe of Levi or to the tribe of Judah. Overall,

al-Qurṭubī refrains from tapping into al-Ṭabarī's extra-quranic material, while selectively exploiting the mediated tradition to expound fully Islamic truths with due attention to the linguistic nuances of the Qur'ān.

Notwithstanding glaring variances, the net effect of the so-called gap-filling midrashic elaborations has been shown to reinforce the Islamic rhetoric undergirding the historiographical commentaries, like those of al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī. Al-Qurṭubī, albeit maintaining a relatively restrained tenor, skillfully embraces extra-quranic elements of al-Ṭabarī's account and revamps his predecessor's tradition to render a renewed emphasis on the Islamic hegemony in view of the nascent history of Israel's monarchy. As for the underlying rhetorical emphasis, W. A. Saleh's proposition concerning the *Sitz im Leben* of Saul's story in the surah (Q 2:246-253) is instructive:

> … A more fruitful approach would be to see how this story fits in the chapter (sura) where it is presented and in the career of Muhammad. The paleographic and numismatic evidence point to the year 622 CE as a momentous year in the career of the prophet; and there is no contrary evidence that forces us to reject the traditional Muslim story that this date points to the relocation of Muhammad to Medina where he established his polity.[74]

74 Saleh, "What if you refuse," 270.

To be sure, the theory that Saul's story in the Qur'ān foregrounds the historical reality of Muhammad's pre–hijra and post–hijra years is helpful in comprehending the ideological orientation of the post–quranic literature. Most remarkably, all the aforementioned post–quranic scholars were consistent in depicting Israelites as capricious and rebellious infidels unfit to fulfill God's destiny for the world as they refused to engage in the holy war. When the prophet (i.e., Samuel) confronts the Israelites about whether they will be willing to go out and fight with the king should God install a king over them, their affirmative chorus inadvertently betrays their identity as refugees: "And why should we not fight in the way of God, having been expelled from our homes and [away from] our children?" (Q 2:246)[75] The "displaced" Israelites, which has no precedent in the parallel account in the Bible, are thus juxtaposed with Muhammad's band of migrants during the post–hijra years who have left their homes (i.e., having been forced to leave Mecca by the resistant natives), which functions to urge any followers of Islam to fight with complete trust in Allah despite precarious circumstances for the ultimate victory. Al–Ṭabarī elaborates such a quranic message with his depiction of Israel's challenge of Saul's legitimacy concerning his wealth and background as an extension of their questioning of Samuel's prophetic authority. The Israelites grudgingly affirm Saul's authority after having witnessed the angels bringing the ark to Saul, and about 319 brave soldiers remaining with Saul

75 Ibid., 276.

beyond the river are likened to "the People of Badr," who, under Muhammad's leadership, won the first decisive victory against the Meccans (ca. 624 CE). Al-Thaʿlabī associates Israel's opposition of their prophet and king with the theological statement of Israel's apostasy as recapitulated in the prologue to the book of Judges (Judg 3:1-4), which, according to the biblical perspective, eventually disqualifies the Israelites for the holy war. The ark's guardianship is entrusted with the house of Muhammad, in which is found the "the light of Muhammad"; therefore, the final transferal of the ark to Saul by the angels confirms God's appointment of Saul. Al-Thaʿlabī then informs that the number of Saul's trustworthy army of 313 people is equivalent to the number of Muhammad's band of warriors "on the day of Badr" (ca. 624 CE). By contrast, al-Qurṭubī forthrightly describes recalcitrant Israelites as rebutting God's election of Saul out of their ignorance and states how Allah transcends consideration of superficial traits in favor of internal characteristics of a true leader. Notably, al-Qurṭubī weaves the *ḥadīth* tradition on this point and draws a parallel between objections raised by the Israelites on account of Saul's qualification and the resistance Muhammad encountered by the Quraysh and the Jews in Mecca regarding his prophetic claims (Q 3:26c).

As for the presentation of Saul regarding David, nevertheless, the post-quranic commentators diverge significantly. Inconsistent with the quranic portrayal of impeccable prophets from Mo-

ses to Samuel, both al–Ṭabarī and al–Thaʿlabī end up articulating a somewhat warped version of the quranic Saul through the Jewish and Christian tradition.[76] In al–Ṭabarī's and al–Thaʿlabī's accounts, Saul wrongfully attempts to kill David and ends up seeking redemption through the *jihād* of the sword.[77] Al–Ṭabarī attributes Saul's downfall and David's rise to the divine orchestration of events (Q 2:251): it is God who determined the transfer of Samuel's prophecy and Saul's kingship to David. In al–Thaʿlabī's perspective, both Saul and David are compared to Muhammad on equal terms: just as in Saul's 300 some soldiers that were related to the Battle of Badr, the broken pieces of David's sling stones which annihilated Goliath's entire army are linked to the dust that drove away Muhammad's Meccan enemies at Badr (624 CE). Conversely, al–Qurṭubī's account of the quranic Saul remains untainted from extra–quranic influences; David's ascendancy is attributed to Saul's election of David, who rightfully inherits Saul's kingship and Samuel's prophethood through Allah's providence (Q 2:251). In al–Qurṭubī's assessment, the shards of David's sling stones are identified with Muhammad's weaponry in the Battle of Ḥunayn (630 CE), one of the most decisive Islamic victories. In this way, both Saul and David figure prominently as the conqueror of key battles in Israel's history, foreshadowing the series of Muhammad's successful campaigns. All in all, al–Qurṭubī, unlike al–Ṭabarī or al–Thaʿlabī, tends to eschew delving into the Jewish

76 Ibid., 280–81.

77 Ibid.

and Christian material to augment the quranic Saul for a more palatable interpretation. Nonetheless, it would not do justice to state that the post-quranic scholars, especially al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī, appropriated extra-quranic material without due regard for its consistency with the Qurʾān out of their sheer zeal to "add to their knowledge the details of Israelites history."[78] The foregoing examination of al-Ṭabarī's and al-Thaʿlabī's narrations on Q 2:246-251 indicates that both strove to make sense of the Qurʾān's message in their manipulation of the literary components of the extra-quranic data. The fact that God gave David "sovereignty and wisdom" (Q 2:251b) after Saul's victory against the Amalekites through David's military feat (Q 2:251a) had to be reconciled comprehensively—particularly, the reticence in the abrupt cessation of Saul's reign and the transfer of the prophetic and political leadership to David. Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī would have deemed the Jewish and Christian material as reliable sources to buttress their historiographical discourse and accordingly adopted the embedded tradition to consolidate Islamic ideals in the backdrop of Islam's foundational moments.

Ⅳ. CONCLUSION

The Qurʾān uniquely mentions Saul of Israel along with David in the context of the holy war against Goliath and the Amalekites

78 Ibid., 281.

(Q 2:246–251). This paper surveys the post–quranic literature of al–Ṭabarī, al–Thaʿlabī, and al–Qurṭubī, on the selected section of the Qurʾān, to understand the way in which the Jewish and Christian material (i.e., Hebrew Bible/Old Testament and rabbinic lores) are interwoven to enlighten the Qurʾān's messages. The result of the evaluation indicates that all the post–quranic commentators under scrutiny displayed conscious utilization of the extra–quranic sources, despite apparent variances in their degrees, and were intentional about concurring with the rhetorical aim of the Qurʾān. For instance, both al–Thaʿlabī and al–Qurṭubī cite al–Ṭabarī's historiographical tradition, while compiling or excising biblical and rabbinic sources at one's discretion to achieve interpretative aims within the ideological confines of Islam. That these medieval Islamic sages affirmed the value in incorporating the extra–quranic traditions which deploy Jewish and Christian sources to illuminate the Qurʾān points to the possibilities of greater vistas for interreligious dialogue among the major Abrahamic religions of the world today.

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■한글초록

꾸란의 사울, 다윗과 골리앗 (Q 2:246-251) : 알-탈라비, 알-꾸르투비와 함께 읽는 알-타바리의 타리크

안한나

유대교의 히브리 성경이나 기독교의 성경이 변조되거나 잘못 해석되었다고 가르치는 이슬람교의 전통적 개념인 타리프(taḥrīf)에도 불구하고, 중세 이슬람 세계의 일부 꾸란 학자들은 꾸란 주석과 이슬람의 역사적 연대기에서 타 아브라함 종교의 전승인 이스라일리얏(Isrā'īliyyāt)을 다소 관대하게 차용하여 전유했다. 이 논문은 수니파의 알-타바리(al-Ṭabarī, 10세기)와 알-탈라비(al-Thaʿlabī, 11세기) 그리고 안달루시아의 알-꾸르투비(al-Qurṭubī, 13세기)와 같은 꾸란 학자들의 고전적 문헌에 초점을 맞춰 그들이 꾸란에 명시된 사울, 다윗, 골리앗(Q 2:246-251)을 기술하는 과정에서 꾸란 외의 정경적 자료를 어떻게 다뤘는지 고찰한다. 이제까지 영미 학계는 어느 정도 알-타바리의 『예언자와 왕의 역사』와 알-탈라비의 『예언자들의 삶』을 개별적으로 다루었지만, 이들이 역사적 서술에서 해당 꾸란 본문을 주해하면서(Q 2:246-251) 히브리어 성경/구약의 자료를 어떻게 암시했는지에 대한 심도 있는 연구가 이루어지지 않았다. 본 연구는 알-타바리를 인용하고 있는 알-탈

라비의 역사적 주해와 알-꾸르투비의 꾸란 주석과 비교해 봄으로써 이 두 학자의 중첩되고 상반되는 부분을 선별된 꾸란 본문에 한해(Q 2:246-251) 분석해 보고자 한다. 결론적으로 알-탈라비와 알-꾸르투비 둘 다 알-타바리의 이슬람적 이념의 궤적과는 같이 하지만 유대교와 기독교 자료를 활용 및 인용하는 데 있어 서로 현저하게 차이가 있음을 알 수 있다. 그러나 이런 관용적 주해 성향이 유대교와 기독교 전통을 통해 꾸란의 해석적 공란을 채우려는 지나친 학문적 열성이며 꾸란의 근원적인 가르침을 타협했다는 의미는 아니다. 오히려 면밀히 살펴보면 상기 중세 무슬림 학자들은 꾸란에 대한 진지한 경의를 토대로 꾸란 외의 전승을 능숙하게 다룸으로써 이슬람의 역사적 유산을 설득력 있게 전달하려고 노력했음을 알 수 있다.

주제어: 사울, 다윗, 골리앗, 꾸란, 알-타바리, 알-탈라비, 알-꾸르투비, 이스라일리얏

논문투고일: 2021.08.09 논문심사일: 2021.09.02 게재확정일: 2021.09.06