

An Appraisal of Jewish History: Analysis of Ibn e Kathīr's Approach

Dr. Munazza Batool

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Usuluddin, International Islamic University,
Islamabad.

Shagufta Amir

Research Scholar, Faculty of Usuluddin, International Islamic University,
Islamabad.

Abstract

The paper focuses on the contribution of Ibn e Kathīr as a historian in general and a historian of Jewish and biblical history in particular. Though Ibn e Kathīr has remarkable contribution in various fields of Islamic sciences including Tafsīr, Hadith and sciences of Hadith, his contribution to the world history namely *al bidayah wa al nihayah* reveals yet another dimension of his scholarly figure as an historian. In this paper an attempt has been made to appreciate and evaluate the Jewish and the biblical history as presented by Ibn e Kathīr. It is the view of the authors that besides the specialized works of *al Milal wa al Nihal* the encyclopediac histories or the world histories are also sources for studying other religions from an Islamic perspective. Thus, in case of Ibn e Kathīr it has been concluded that he has dealt with the Jewish history through the Quran and Sunnah perspective while he also relies on the biblical narratives for rebuilding the Jewish past. However, his treatment of the Jewish sources is nuanced by his Tafsīri or exegete lense where he looks upon these as *Isra'eliyāt*.

Keywords: History, Judaism, *Isra'eliyāt*,

Introduction

Abu al- Fida Ismail ibn Umar Ibn e Kathīr the Imam and the Hafiz was born in 700A.H./1301C.E. in a town known as Majdal in Syria during the rule of king al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalawun¹. His famous name Ibn e Kathīr is reference to the name of his grandfather and great grandfather.² The appellation of *Imad al-Din* the pillar of religion used by his contemporaries as a gratitude and salutation to his contribution in the field of religious sciences, while his *kunyah* or the title was Abu al-Fida.³

Ibn e Kathir belonged to a noble family of Banu Hasla of Quraish, his father Umar Ibn e Kathīr was born in a small town called Sharaqiyyun in Busra in 640 A.H. during the rule of Ayyubid sultanate in Egypt who had settled in Busra with his maternal relatives from tribe of Banu Aqaba.⁴ His

father was a religious teacher and a well known scholar of the Shafiites school of thought, a poet and an orator. He had two wives and Ibn e Kathīr was the youngest son of his second wife.⁵

Like his father Ibn e Kathīr had migrated to Damascus for his education and career; the time of his migration is not known but what remains clear is that Ibn e Kathīr was a well reputed figure in Damascus of noble and cultured family. His brothers were well known scholars and this also had a great influence on the character and personality of Ibn e Kathīr. Thus his early education started at home in a traditional way, he started with memorization of Holy Quran by heart and continued perusal of his learning of traditional Islamic sciences like Islamic law from his brother. After learning these basic Islamic sciences at home, he attached himself to Burhan al- din (D.729A.H.) a widely known scholar of that time as a pupil. He also learnt Islamic law from Kamal al- din al- Zamlakani (D.727A.H.).⁶

Among his teachers that are listed by his biographers and himself were the key figures like Kamal al- din Abdul Wahab (his elder brother), Shams-al-din Muhammad Ibn 'Abd-al-Rahman -al-Asfahani (D.749A.H.), Baha'-al-din Qasim Ibn 'Asakir (D.732A.H.), Hafiz Shams-al-din Dhahabi (D748 A.H.), Ibn al-Suwaidi Muhammad ibn Ibrahim (D.711A.H.), Afif al- din Ishaq Ibn Yahya al-Amidi (D.725A.H.) and Ibn Shahana al- Hajjar (D.730A.H.). Ibn e Kathīr also had an honor to learn from Ibn Taymiyyah.⁷ His own teacher and a widely known scholar of that time, Shams Uddin Adh-Dhahabi stated about him in his *Al-Mu'ajam Al-Mukhtasar*:

*He was the Imam, the Muhadīth, the Mufti (deliverer of legal verdicts), the outstanding scholar of Islamic Jurisprudence and Tafsīr, he wrote many valuable works"*⁸

Some of his most famous scholarly writings are: *Tafsīr al-Quran al- 'Azīm*, the exegesis of Noble Quran the famous and important commentary, *Al-Bidāyah wa Al-Nihāyah*, the Beginning and the End, a highly valuable and prestigious work of Ibn e Kathīr. An encyclopedic history that starts from the beginning and creation of the universe, records the lives of prophets, the time of Pious Caliphs and the rise and fall of different Muslim Caliphates and Sultanates, *Al-Takmil li ma'rifati althiqāt wal- Majāhīl*, the Complete Book on critique and knowledge of well-known and unknown reporters, *Jami' al-Masanīd wa-Sunan al- Hadī Li Aqwam Sunan*, the Combined *Musnads* and the *Sunan* that Guide to the Most Precious *Sunan* a work that is considered to be one of the finest works of Ibn e Kathīr on the knowledge of Hadith. This is also his last work, he died before completing it.

He also compiled the great works like *Tabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyyah*, the Categories of the Shafiites, *Takrīj Ahādīth Adillah al- Tanbīh Fī Fiqh al- Shāfi'iyyah*, Extraction of the Narrations in Shafiite Jurisprudence, *Takhrij Ahādīth Mukhtasar ibn Al- Hājib* Extraction of Hadith in original version of *Mukhtasar Ibn Al- Hajib*, *Sharh Sahīh Al-Bukhāri* commentary on Sahīh Al-Bukhari which is not complete likewise his work *Al- Ahkām Al-Kubrā* The

Major Rulings is also incomplete. *Ikhtisār 'Ulūm al-Hadīth* An Abridgement of the Science of Hadith, *Musnad al-Shaikhain* *Musnad* of two Shaykhs Abū Bakar and Umar May Allah Pleased be with them, *Al- Sīrah al- Nabawīyyah*; Biography of the Prophet upon him be peace and *Al-Muqaddimah Fī Usūl al- Fīqh*; Introductions to the Science of Usūl Al- Fīqh are his well known works. He also wrote Mukhtasar *Kitāb Al- Madkhal Ilā Kitāb Al-Sunan Līl Baihaqī* (Introduction of the Sunan by Al- Baihaqī and *Rīsālah Fī Al- Jihād* (Treatise on Jihad).⁹

Ibn e Kathīr died at the age of seventy-four in Shā'bān 747 A.H. According to Hafiz Ibn Hajar he had become blind during his last years may Allah be pleased with him. ¹⁰He lived during 14th century when the Mongols were marching towards the central Asia resulting in disruption and turmoil. Muslims were facing hardships and unrest politically and socially. It was in this uneven situation that Ibn e Kathīr contributed to the advancement of Islamic sciences and served Muslim *ummah* by his pen.

There are many works dealing with the study of Muslim historiography and the approaches of Muslim Historiographers. In his book "A History of Muslim Historiography" Franz Rosenthal classifies Muslim Historians in two categories; Firstly, world historians, who wrote the world history inspired by Holy Quran, as Holy Quran talks about the beginning of universe and there are historical events of different nations they also wrote about the world its beginning and different nations. These historians had dealt with the world history differently and used various approaches to inscribe their world histories for instance some of them relied on biographical and genealogical histories, some of them had an instructive approach and some had dynastic and political approach. Secondly, there were local historians, who recorded the histories of certain regions, dynasties or about a specific time.¹¹Here we find that Ibn e Kathīr can be placed in the first category of Muslim Historians i.e. the world historians.

Ibn e Kathīr as Historian

Ibn Kathīr's magnum opus *Al-Bidaya wa Al-Nihaya* is one of the exceptional books on world history. He starts his work from the discussion about the creation, the Throne or *Kursi* and the creation of heavens, earth, angels, devils and jinn. He also describes the creation of Prophet Adam upon him be peace. Ibn e Kathīr then describes the lives and the stories of prophets up to the time of Israelites then he continues to discuss the period before Islam and the arrival of the holy Prophet upon him be peace and continues till the last detailed description of his life. Ibn e Kathīr was a traditionalist and belonged to the Shafiite school of thought but we find him narrating and referring the opinions of other schools of thought as well for instance in the portion related to the story of of creation he uses a great deal of references from Tafsir al- Qurtubi a work by a scholar and exegete of Maliki school of thought.

Ibn e Kathīr was an exegete and a jurist and also had worked on Hadith.

His work on history clearly manifests his multidimensional approach of narration. His expertise in various subjects such as Tafsīr, Hadīth, Sīrah, Fiqh and History is palpable in his historiography. He follows the style of narration or *riwāyah* as his method for history particularly when he is dealing with the Prophet's stories mentioned in Quran and Hadith. For the analysis of the historical events he resorts to the Fiqh methodology. His multi-method approach to history is no doubt ensued from his intellectual background as well as an impact of the methodologies of his teachers and mentors who belonged to different schools of thought. For example, Ibn e Kathīr describes the story of people of Lūt peace be upon him in detail almost it is extended on fifteen pages and explains why Allah SWT punished them for their sinfulness. He states many verses from Quran about the punishment of people of Lūt peace be upon him. He analyzes this story from his Ibrah perspective i.e. in an instructive way to conclude that this story is a lesson for people to come till the Day of Judgment.¹²

Moreover, he deals with the history and historical details through his analytical and critical approach thus we find him denying many of the stories of Israelites regarding their Prophets. For instance, he says there is no evidence to accept the sacrifice offering of Prophet Isaac upon him be peace as it is mentioned in Torah. The sacrifice offering of Ishmael is confirmed from the Quran and Hadith.¹³ As Allah SWT says in Quran:

And when he (his son) was old enough to walk with him, he said. "O, my son! I have seen in a dream that I am slaughtering you (offering you in sacrifice to Allah), so see what you think?"¹⁴

And Abraham's son replied him;

"O, my father! Do that which you are commanded, Insha Allah (if Allah wills) you shall find me of As-Sabireen (the patient ones)"¹⁵

Then Ibn e Kathīr describes the same story of sacrifice from the perspective of Quran and Hadith. Here he refers to different commentaries of Quran and discusses at length the opinions of different exegetes to demonstrate that Prophet Ishmael upon him be peace was elder than Prophet Isaac upon him be peace and that this sacrifice was a test for Prophet Abraham upon him be peace from his Lord about his first-born son Prophet Ishmael upon him be peace born to him in his old age.¹⁶

Another example of his critical and analytical approach can be seen in his dealing with the story of Prophet Jonah (Younus) upon him be peace, here again we find Ibn e Kathīr narrates many verses from Quran and sayings from Sunnah of prophet while mentioning the details from the biblical narrative. He makes a beautiful connection between the verses of Holy Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace. Ibn e Kathīr starts the story of prophet Jonah upon him be peace by mentioning a verse from Quran as follows:

Then has there not been a [single] city that believed so its faith benefitted it except the people of Jonah? When they believed, We removed from

*them the punishment of disgrace in worldly life and gave them enjoyment for a time.*¹⁷

Ibn e Kathīr then elaborates how Allah sent Prophet Jonah (Yunus) upon him be peace to the people of Nenvah in the land of Mosul and that his people rejected him and his message arrogantly. He continued to preach and guide them to the message of Allah but the attitude of his people did not change. Dishearten he left the city warning his people of punishment within three days. After his departure his people were convinced that Allah SWT will punish them for their disobedience. Regretting their ignorance and stubbornness towards the message of Allah they repented for their sins and Allah; The Most High saved them from punishment.¹⁸ Then he moves on to explain the disagreement between the exegetes of Quran regarding the repentance of the people of Nenvah that whether it would benefit them in afterlife. Then he refers to a verse from Holy Quran about Yunus upon him be peace:

*And indeed, Jonah was among the messengers. when he ran away to the laden ship. And he drew lots and was among the losers. Then the fish swallowed him, while he was blameworthy.*¹⁹

Here Ibn e Kathīr explains that when Prophet Jonah was swallowed by the fish he thought that he had died. But when he moved his limbs and felt he was alive he prayed to Allah and said, *O Lord, I have taken as a place of worship to you, a place which no other person has reached.* Then he mentions the difference of opinion among exegetes about the time duration of Prophet Jonah's stay in the belly of fish. According to Qatadah it was three days while according to opinion of Ja'far al Sadiq it was seven days whereas Abu Malik and Mujahid mentioned it was forty days.²⁰

Throughout his historical narrative Ibn e Kathīr has provided ample references from Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace. In describing the history of the period of early Prophets he continues to elucidate on the role of prophets in religious affairs of nations. He discusses the events about Prophets of Allah SWT in light of Quran and Hadith and other Muslim historical sources. Ibn e Kathīr's historical approach is narrative and instructive. His expertise and fondness in the domain of Holy Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace makes his work a classical Muslim approach to the History. His entire work on history is full of references from Quran and Hadith and provides a rich material from Quran and Hadith about the historical events of the past nations.

There are some key points that signify his contribution in the field of historiography:

- Ibn e Kathīr provides a detailed analysis of the perspectives of various schools of thought about the creation of Universe and Throne.
- Ibn Kathīr's work on history provides a collection of Quranic narrations according to historical order.
- One of the main contributions by Ibn e Kathīr is the documentation of

the historical events in a more appalling manner than the other historians of that era.

- His work on history is also a rich collection of Hadith about the historical events.
- He strongly relies on the primary sources of Islam i.e., Holy Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace as well as on the rational stories from other sources but at the same time he avoids myths and false stories.
- Ibn e Kathīr was a poet too he often uses the poetic materials while describing the events for instance while describing the sack of Baghdad he writes his painful feelings about the horrendous event.
- Throughout the pages of *Al- Bidayah wa Al- Nihayah*, it can be seen that Ibn e Kathīr makes a strong effort to explore the connection between Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace.
- *Al- Bidayah Wa al- Nihayah* is also unique in dealing with the materials of Hadith, Ibn e Kathīr uses the critical Hadith methodology, thus when he uses the Hadith materials he provides references from different books of Hadith and applies the critical methods to examine the authenticity of the text by discussing even the narrators or *ruwat* of a particular text.

Al- Bidayah wa Al- Nihayah presents a deep connection between the stories of prophets and the nations of the world and establishes a historical relation between Quran and Sunnah of Prophet upon him be peace. Thus he appears to be the pioneer in this respect of connecting the history of various epochs together.

Ibn e Kathīr's Approach to the History of Judaism:

Ibn e Kathīr's approach towards history of Judaism is instructive. He narrates stories and events of Jewish nation from Quran and analyzes those stories in the light of Prophet Muhammad's sayings as well as from other sources. His book of history *Al Bidaya Wa al-Nihaya* has a massive collection of Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace. He uses other sources to bridge the narrative of historical accounts. It is interesting to note that in the history of common events between Quran and Biblical sources a comparative study has been made by Ibn e Kathīr. Sometimes his sole purpose of such comparisons is to prove the authenticity of the recorded events.

For instance, Ibn e Kathīr narrates the story of Oj during the time of Prophet Moses. According to Jewish account Oj was a giant and his height was 3330 yards. He tried to throw a mountain on Israelites. In the meantime, a bird came and broke that mountain into pieces. Prophet Moses's height was ten yards and he jumped extra ten yards to touch his ankle. Then he killed him by his miraculous stick by beating his ankle only. He criticizes Tabari for

mentioning this story in his book. He states that this story is one of fallacious accounts of Israelites. One should not mention these types of accounts which are beyond rationality. The Ibn e Kathīr mentions an authentic Hadith of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace that Allah S.W.T created man with maximum height of seventy feet, gradually it decreased by passage of time.²¹ In *Al -Bidaya wa al- Nihaya*, a systematic narration of stories of prophets have been done in chronological order.

Ibn e Kathīr on History of Jews; *ibrah* or the Instructive Style of Narration

Like other Muslim historians Ibn e Kathīr starts history of Jews from the birth of Prophet Isaac P upon him be peace in the house of Prophet Abraham upon him be peace. He starts this story by mentioning a verse of Quran as follows:

وَبَشِّرْنَاهُ بِإِسْحَاقَ نَبِيًّا مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ () وَبَارَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَىٰ إِسْحَاقَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا مُحْسِنٌ وَظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ مُبِينٌ

*And we gave him the glad tidings of Is'haq, a Prophet from the righteous. We blessed him and Is'haq and their progeny are (some) that do right, and some that plainly wrong themselves.*²²

Then he mentions a Hadith reported by Abu Hurairah from the Messenger of Allah SWT:

*“Verily, the noble, son of the noble, son of the noble, son of the noble is Yusuf (Joseph), son of Ya'qoob, son of Ishaq, son of Ibrahim.”*²³

Ibn e Kathīr states that the good news about birth of Prophet Isaac upon him be peace was delivered by angels of Allah when they came to destroy the people of Lot upon him be peace. To Ibn e Kathīr those three angels were Gibraīl, Mīkaīl and Israfil. When they delivered good news of a noble son Prophet Abraham's wife Sarah came with a loud cry of amazement. Then he states a verse from Holy Quran:

قَالَتْ يَا وَيْلَتَىٰ أَأَلِدُ وَأَنَا عَجُوزٌ وَهَذَا بَعْلِي شَيْخًا إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ

*She said, "Woe to me! Shall I give birth while I am an old woman and this, my husband, is an old man? Indeed, this is an amazing thing!"*²⁴

So the Jewish history from the birth of Prophet Isaac upon him be peace. Ibn e Kathīr narrates all the events during the lifetimes of Prophets such as, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Aron, Moses' peace be upon them and many other Israelites Prophets. Allah SWT granted sons to Prophet Isaac upon him be peace and from the progeny of Prophet Ya'qūb upon him be peace the history of Israelites begins. Israel was the title of ya'qūb upon him be peace which means Man of God. Ibn e Kathīr discusses the events that happened during the life of Prophet Ya'qūb upon him be peace, i.e., the attempt of Prophet Joseph's upon him be peace murder by his brothers and eventually his arrival in Egypt in the court of Aziz. Furthermore, Ibn e Kathīr states that Prophet Yusuf became ruler of Egypt after the death of Aziz.²⁵

In the story of prophet Musa, A.S Ibn e Kathīr states that after Prophet Yusuf A.S, Pharaohs of Egypt were afraid of increasing numbers of Israelites. Therefore, they started to take services from them and eventually made them

their slaves. After the migration of Israelites along with Prophet Moses upon him be peace, they lived for forty years of wilderness in desert Sinai. For Ibn e Kathīr, it was just a punishment by Allah SWT for their misdeeds.

Ibn e Kathīr states the misdeeds and disobedience of Israelites, when Allah SWT left them in desert for forty years of wilderness. He explains that after their emancipation from Egyptian slavery, they refused to follow Prophet Moses upon him be peace and the law of Allah SWT. They spoke words of ignorance and disobedience to Moses after they had saw Allah's ability to do anything. As a result, Allah SWT punished them through a sojourn of forty years in desert Sinai.²⁶

In all of these stories mentioned by Ibn e Kathīr the element of disobedience of Israelites and punishments by Allah SWT, are strongly highlighted. As Holy Quran explains the disobedience of Jews likewise Ibn e Kathīr in every story of the Holy Book derives a lesson for Muslims. For instance, when Ibn e Kathīr narrates the story of Qaroon, he starts with a verse of Holy Quran which forbids the exult because Allah SWT does not like those who exult. The verse is as follows:

لَا تَفْرَحْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْفَرِحِينَ

“Do not exult. Verily! Allah likes not those who exult”²⁷

Then he describes the harmfulness of to be proud and its bad end. Qaroon was a cousin of Prophet Moses, says Ibn e Kathīr . He had enormous wealth but he behaved arrogantly to his people. Prophet Moses warned and advised him to be generous as Allah was generous to him. Yet he replied, all I have is because of my knowledge. He went before his people with all his pride, those who were the desirous of worldly life, they said, ah! We would have the wealth of Qaroon. Indeed, he is the master of great fortune. On the other hand, who were desirous of reward of hereafter, they said, woe to him! the reward of Allah is better than this. By the will of Allah, earth swallowed him along with his supporters and wealth. Ibn e Kathīr states that there is a deep lesson in this event, for those who forget the laws of Allah in order to become wealthier. He states many verses from Quran and sayings of Prophet Muhammad, where exult and pride are strictly forbidden. As Ibn e Kathīr describes the following Hadith of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace:

It is reported on the authority of ‘Abdullah Ibn ‘Abbas (May Allah be pleased with him) that he said, “Qaroon was Moosa’s cousin. Qatadah said that he was called An-Noor (the Light) because of his pleasant voice when reciting the Tawrah. But the enemy of Allah was guilty of hypocrisy, like the hypocrisy of Samiri, and he was destroyed by his wrongdoing, because of his wealth.”²⁸

Ibn e Kathīr states the story of cow sacrifice, the companionship of Prophet Moses upon him be peace and Prophet Khizar upon him be peace, and about Qaroon. After prophet upon him be peace Ibn e Kathīr states stories of prophet Hazkeal, Joshua, Ilyas, Samuel. In all these stories Ibn e Kathīr describes the restoration of their religion by these Prophets.

In the stories of Prophet Dawūd upon him be peace and Prophet Suleiman upon him be peace. Ibn e Kathīr states that many previous historians took biblical stories to explain the time of these prophets but many stories of Israelites are not true. There is a long description of Prophet Dawūd and Suleiman peace be upon them in Tarikh Ibn e Kathīr. This description is contained in several Quranic verses and sayings of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace to highlight their attributes as Messengers of Allah.

Al- Bidaya wa Al- Nihaya describes the destruction of first temple and the role of prophet Danial for restoration of temple briefly. Ibn e Kathīr states this destruction in the light of Quranic verses which are as follows:

وَقَضَيْنَا إِلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ فِي الْكِتَابِ لُتْفِئِدُنَّ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَّتَيْنِ وَلَتَعْلُنَّ عُلُوًّا كَبِيرًا () فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ
أُولَاهُمَا بَعَثْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ عِبَادًا لَنَا أُولِي بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ فَجَاسُوا خِلَالَ الدِّيَارِ وَكَانَ وَعْدًا مَفْعُولًا

*Then We clearly declared to the Children of Israel in the Book: "Twice you will make mischief in the land and will commit transgression. o, when the occasion for the first of the transgressions arrived, We raised against you some of Our creatures who were full of might, and they ran over the whole of your land. This was a promise that was bound to be fulfilled."*²⁹

After this destruction Ibn e Kathīr mentions a list of prophets between Prophet Daniel and Zakariya PEACE BE UPON HIM and starts the stories of Prophet Yahya A.S and Prophet Issa A.S. There is no description of Macedonians and Romans in Tarikh Ibn e Kathīr .

For the Jews of Madinah Ibn e Kathīr is agreed with Ibn Kalbi's opinion that when Nebuchadnezzar invaded the Holy Land of Jerusalem, a group of Jews migrated to the land of Hijaz. With the passage of time, they prospered in valley of *Qura* and built their castles around the land of *Yathrib* i.e., the castle of *Khaybar*.³⁰

Furthermore, Ibn e Kathīr states that after the destruction of Holy Land by Nebuchadnezzar, wherever Jews fled to save themselves, the curse of Allah SWT never left them. When they came in the land of Hijaz, Nebuchadnezzar wrote to the ruler of Hijaz that he must expel these cursed people from his land. Yet the ruler of Hijaz didn't accept his order. Eventually the land of Hijaz also saw a dreadful invasion by Nebuchadnezzar because of cursed nation of Jews.³¹

Ibn e Kathīr while narrating the stories of prophets of Israelites sometimes analyzes the social or political circumstances of Jews as a nation. Regarding Jewish history, Ibn e Kathīr's approach is to learn a lesson from their misdoings and disobedience. He narrates a story of Israelites and then explains that why Allah SWT abandoned this nation. For Ibn e Kathīr Israelites are the people who are no more beloved or chosen of Allah SWT.

As many other Muslim scholars Ibn e Kathīr worked on "*Qasas al Anbiya*" stories of prophets. This work by Ibn e Kathīr is also included in his History of the world. While his book *Al- Bidayā wā Al- Nihayā* is full of Quranic stories about Jews. As in Holy Book of Allah, there is not much details of second temple period, Ibn e Kathīr also has not focused on this period. Like

Ibn e Kathīr many other Muslim historians who do not prefer *Isra'eliyāt* in their writings do not narrate about the condition and state of that period.

Ibn e Kathīr's main focus on Jewish history is on the stories of prophets but he also discussed the state matters or societal conditions of the Jews though very rarely. He describes their achievements and sufferings as a religious group. As it is stated earlier that Ibn e Kathīr was a Quranic exegete thus his work is full of criticism on the Jews and their attitudes towards their religion and prophets as Allah SWT has stated in Holy Quran about the misdeeds and deceits of the Jews in detail.

Invalidation of Biblical Stories *Isra'eliyāt* by Ibn e Kathīr:

The term *Isra'eliyāt* applies to the reports of legendary and religious literature of Jews and Christians. Many Muslim scholars have used *Isra'eliyāt* in their interpretation of Holy Quran and other literary works such as history. Yet others preferred to avoid the biblical sources in their writings. They just took the necessary data such as genealogical information and names of places etc. Ibn e Kathīr is one of the Muslim scholars who prefer to avoid *Isra'eliyāt* in their writings but have used them where considered necessary. In his introductory remarks of *Al- Bīdayā wā Al- Nihayā* he asserts that in following words:

We shall not mention the *Isra'eliyāt*, except what is permissible according to Islamic law, which does not contradict the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger.³²

Furthermore, he explains that the use of *Isra'eliyāt* will be only for names and places to establish a sequence among events but he will not use these references from *Isra'eliyāt* as an evidence or to establish a truth as according to him for truth his work only relies on the Book of Allah and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace.³³

Ibn e Kathīr has used the Biblical sources in his book of history after he has nuanced his usage of such materials at the same time he asserts his position regarding for avoiding the *Isra'eliyāt* in his writings. He mentions some references from Holy Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace. He quotes the verses of Surah *Ta'ha* to defend his opinion about the biblical sources. Those verses are as under below:

كَذَلِكَ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ مَا قَدْ سَبَقَ وَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ مِنْ لَدُنَّا ذِكْرًا () مَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَحْمِلُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وِزْرًا () خَالِدِينَ فِيهِ
وَسَاءَ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ حِمْلًا

*Thus, [O Muhammad], We relate to you from the news of what has preceded. And We have certainly given you from Us the Qur'an. Whoever turns away from it - then indeed, he will bear on the Day of Resurrection a burden, [Abiding] eternally therein, and evil it is for them on the Day of Resurrection as a load.*³⁴

Ibn e Kathīr argues for many Biblical sources one cannot say it is true or false. Therefore, we should avoid in order to save ourselves from the burden of sin, on the day of resurrection. To follow another book except Quran, can ruin one's good deeds. Furthermore, he gives references from the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace. For instance, he quotes a

Hadith of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace from imam Ahmed's Musnad. The Hadith is as follows:

*Imam Ahmed narrates on the authority of Jabir bin Abdullah that Umar ibn Khattab came to Prophet Muhammad with a book which he had obtained from one of the people of the scripture and he read it to the prophet. The Prophet became angry and said, O Ibn Khattab, are we going to play in religion? By Allah I have come to you with a pure religion. Do not ask them about anything, for they may say something true and you do not believe or they may say something false and you believe it. By Allah if Moosa was alive he would not have done anything but follow me.*³⁵

Ibn e Kathīr considers this as an authentic Hadith but according to Al-Bukhari, there is weak narrator in its chain named Mujalid ibn Sa'eed. Hafiz Ibn Hajjar said that its chain does not reach such a standard which can be taken as evidence.³⁶

Conclusions

To conclude Ibn e Kathīr's approach towards Jewish history can be styled as critical, instructive and comparative. His historiography of the Jewish accounts and events provides an analysis of the Islamic perspective of history as well as connects it with the biblical narrative. But while doing so he is very careful about the issue of authenticity of any narrative or account. The yardstick he uses for the authenticity of the historical account or event is that of Quran and Sunnah. Another important contribution of Ibn e Kathīr is the documentation of the historical events and connecting and exploring them through various sources and narrations. He strongly relies on the primary sources of Islam i.e., Holy Quran and Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad upon him be peace as well as on the rational stories from other sources but at the same time he avoids myths and false stories. One of the key contributions of *Al-Bidayah wa Al-Nihayah* is that it establishes a historical relation between Quran and Sunnah of Prophet upon him be peace and the history of Jews in particular and the world history in general thus it is connecting the history of various epochs together.



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