

Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith by Ibn Qutaybah: Characteristics, Style and Methodology

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Abstract:

Long before the formal crystallisation of the 'ulūm al-ḥadīth, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Muslim Ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawārī (d. 276/889) produced *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*; a concise yet penetrating treatise that defends the ḥadīth corpus against accusations of contradiction. Situating the work at a pivotal moment in ninth-century Baghdad, this article analyses its defining features, literary style, and hermeneutical method. After outlining the intellectual milieu in which Ibn Qutaybah wrote, we map the book's structure—an introduction followed by eighty-six discrete rebuttals of problematic narrations—showing how the author's stylistic economy serves apologetic ends. We then examine rhetorical elements: Qur'ānic intertextuality, polemical asides, and strategic code-switching between terse argument and extended digression. The methodological core is dissected under four headings: (1) semantic and lexical harmonisation, (2) isnād-based prioritisation, (3) contextual and maqāsid-driven reconciliation, and (4) appeal to qiyās and rational probability. A comparative reading with al-Shāfi'ī's *Ikhtilāf al-Ḥadīth* and Ibn Ḥibbān's *Mashārib al-Anwār* highlights continuities and innovations in dealing with apparent contradiction. The article demonstrates that Ibn Qutaybah's blend of philology, kalām, and fiqh anticipates classical 'ilm mukhtalif al-ḥadīth yet retains distinct Abbasid-era polemical colours. Finally, it argues that his model remains instructive for contemporary debates on hadith integrity, urging a multidisciplinary reading that synthesises textual, rational and historical lenses.

Keywords: *Ibn Qutaybah, Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth, Isnād analysis, Hadith and kalām, Usūl al-ḥadīth*

1. Introduction:

The Holy Quran and the Hadith of the Messenger ﷺ are based on divine revelation. Allah Almighty has said:

"وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۗ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ"³

"And he (the Prophet ﷺ) does not speak from his own desire. It is nothing but a revelation sent down (to him)."

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³. An-Najm: 3-4.

This verse clearly indicates that the sayings of the Prophet ﷺ are also guided by divine revelation, providing us with the correct understanding and guidance of the religion. Therefore, both the Quran and Hadith are fundamental sources of Islam, and following them is obligatory. And the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

"Beware! Indeed, I have been given the Book and something similar to it along with it." ⁴

This means that along with the Quran, the Prophet ﷺ was also given something similar to it, referring to the Hadith.

Muslim scholars and hadith experts introduced various sciences and disciplines to preserve and establish the authority of Hadith. One of these sciences is "Mukhtalif al-Hadith" which deals with reconciling and explaining the apparent contradictions between different hadiths to bring clarity and harmony in their meanings.

2. Mukhtalif al-Hadith, Introduction and Evolution:

Through the science of Mukhtalif al-Hadith, hadith scholars have clarified the meanings of seemingly contradictory and complex hadiths and defended them against Zanadiqa (heretics), Mu'tazila, and other claimants of rationalism. The scholars of Islamic principles (Usuliyun) have also mastered this science to safeguard the authenticity and coherence of hadith literature. Imam Al-Sakhawi (d. 902 AH) said:

"It is one of the most important branches of knowledge, which all scholars are in need of. However, only those who are masters of both hadith and fiqh, and who have deep insight into intricate meanings, can attain complete expertise in it."⁵

This science is a highly significant branch of "Mustalah al-Hadith" (Hadith Terminology), and it is essential for all scholars to be acquainted with it. However, the true experts in this field are those who possess comprehensive knowledge of both hadith and jurisprudence (fiqh) and have a deep understanding of complex meanings. The first pioneer of the science of Mukhtalif al-Hadith was Imam Al-Shafi'i (d. 204 AH), who authored an independent work on this subject titled "Ikhtilaf al-Hadith". He also discussed this discipline in his other books, such as "Al-Risalah" and "Al-Umm".

Some other significant books in this field include:

- a) "Ikhtilaf al-Hadith" by Imam Ali ibn al-Madini (d. 234 AH).

⁴ . Abu Dawood, Sulaiman bin Al-Ash'ath, Sunan Abi Dawood, and Edited by: Muhammad Muhyi al-Din Abd al-Hamid, Al-Maktabah Al-Asriyyah, Sidon - Beirut, Number of volumes: 4, Hadith No: 4604.

⁵ . Al-Sakhawi, Muhammad bin Abdul Rahman, Fath al-Mughith bi Sharh Alfiyyat al-Hadith lil-Iraqi, Edited by: Ali Hussein Ali, Maktabat al-Sunnah, Egypt, First Edition: 1424 AH / 2003 CE, Number of Volumes: 4, Volume: -, Page: 67.

- b) "Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith" by Imam Muhammad bin Muslim Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH).
- c) "Al-Radd 'ala A'ada' al-Hadith" by Imam Abu Yahya Zakariyya bin Yahya Al-Saji (d. 307 AH).
- d) Works by Imam Abu Ja'far bin Jarir al-Tabari (d. 320 AH).
- e) "Sharh Mushkil al-Athar" and "Sharh Ma'ani al-Athar" by Imam Al-Tahawi (d. 321 AH).
- f) "Mushkil al-Hadith wa Bayanuh" by Imam Abu Bakr bin Furak (d. 406 AH).
- g) "Mushkil al-Hadith" by Imam Muhammad bin al-Hasan Al-Ansari (d. 406 AH).
- h) "Sharh Mushkil al-Hadith" (manuscript) by Imam Abu Muhammad al-Qasri.
- i) Works by Imam Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri (d. 456 AH).
- j) "Al-Tahqiq fi Ahadith al-Khilaf" by Imam Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH).
- k) "Majma' al-Bihar fi Ma'ani al-Ahadith wa al-Athar" by Imam Muhammad Tahir Siddiqi al-Hindi (d. 986 AH).

Apart from these independent books, numerous hadith commentators have discussed methods of reconciliation between seemingly contradictory hadiths in their commentaries, such as:

- Imam al-Nawawi (d. 676 AH) in "Sharh Sahih Muslim".
- Imam Muhammad bin Yusuf al-Karmani (d. 788 AH) in "Al-Kawakib al-Darari fi Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari".
- Hafiz Ibn Hajar (d. 852 AH) in "Fath al-Bari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari".
- Allama al-Ayni (d. 855 AH) in "Umdat al-Qari Sharh Sahih al-Bukhari".
- Imam Abdul Rahman Mubarakpuri in "Tuhfat al-Ahwadhi Sharh Jami' al-Tirmidhi".
- Maulana Muhammad Ashraf Azimabadi in "Awn al-Ma'bud Sharh Sunan Abi Dawood".

One of the most important books in this discipline is "Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith" by Ibn Qutaybah, which contains many valuable insights and methodologies for resolving apparent contradictions in hadith. Some errors and inaccuracies are also found, as mentioned by Imam al-Nawawi (d. 676 AH), Allama al-Iraqi (d. 806 AH), Allama al-Sakhawi (d. 902 AH), Allama al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH), Hafiz Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH), and others.

The book under our study has been published multiple times. The version we are referring to is the second edition published by Maktabat al-Isra'q in 1419 AH – 1999 CE. It consists of one volume with 528 pages and includes additional revisions and refinements compared to previous editions.

3. Ibn Qutaybah: Life and Contributions:

3.1. Birth and Death:

According to Imam Ibn al-Nadim (d. 438 AH), Ibn al-Athir (d. 630 AH), and Ibn al-Anbari (d. 577 AH), Imam Abu Muhammad Abdullah bin Muslim Ibn Qutaybah was born in 213 AH in Kufa, according to the most accepted opinion.⁶

There is also disagreement among historians regarding the date of Imam Ibn Qutaybah's death. According to Ibn al-Anbari, he passed away on 1st Rajab 276 AH after consuming Harisa (a type of dish). However, Imam Ibn Khallikan (d. 681 AH) states that Imam Ibn Qutaybah passed away in Dhul-Qa'dah 270 AH, while another opinion suggests 271 AH. Nevertheless, the first opinion (276 AH) appears to be the more widely accepted view.⁷

3.2. Acquisition of Knowledge and Teachers & Students:

Imam Ibn Qutaybah grew up in Madinat al-Ilm (Baghdad) and acquired knowledge from the scholars of the city. Apart from the hadith scholars of Baghdad, no mention is found of his other teachers. Some of his notable teachers include:

- His esteemed father, Muslim bin Qutaybah (d. 200 AH)
- Ahmad bin Sa'id al-Khallal
- Imam Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Salam al-Jumahi (d. 231 AH)
- Qadi Yahya bin Aktham (d. 242 AH)
- Abu Ya'qub Ishaq bin Ibrahim (d. 238 AH), known as Ibn Rahwayh
- Abu Hatim Muhammad bin Idris al-Razi (d. 277 AH)
- Imam al-Zubaidi Abu Ishaq Ibrahim bin Sufyan, a student of Sibawayh
- Al-Asma'i and Abu Ubaydah (d. 249 AH)
- Ali bin Khuzaymah (d. 246 AH)
- Harmala bin Yahya (d. 243 AH)
- Abu Abdullah al-Hasan bin al-Husayn al-Sulami (d. 246 AH)
- Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Muhammad bin Marzuq bin Bukayr bin Bahlul al-Bahili al-Misri (d. 248 AH). May Allah have mercy on them all.⁸

⁶. Al-Anbari, Abdul Rahman bin Muhammad, "Nuzhat al-Alba' fi Tabaqat al-Adiba'", Edited by: Ibrahim Al-Samarrai, Maktabat Al-Manar, Zarqa, Jordan, 3rd Edition, 1405 AH - 1985 CE, Number of Volumes: 1, Page: 159.

⁷. Al-Safadi, Khalil bin Aybak, "Al-Wafi bil-Wafayat", Edited by: Ahmad Al-Arna'ut and Turki Mustafa, Dar Ihya al-Turath, Beirut, Year of Publication: 1420 AH - 2000 CE, Number of Volumes: 29, Volume: 17, Page: 326.

⁸. Al-Dhahabi, Muhammad bin Ahmad, "Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'", Edited by: A group of scholars under the supervision of Sheikh Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut, Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 3rd Edition, 1405 AH / 1985 CE, Number of Volumes: 52, Volume: 13, Page: 297.

A large number of people acquired knowledge from Imam Ibn Qutaybah. Among his notable students were:

- His son, Ahmad bin Abdullah bin Muslim (d. 322 AH)
- Ahmad bin Marwan al-Maliki (d. 298 AH)
- Muhammad bin Khalaf bin Marwan (d. 309 AH)
- Ibrahim bin Muhammad bin Ayyub bin Bashir al-Saigh (d. 313 AH)
- Al-Tahawi bin Kulayb al-Shashi (d. 335 AH) and many others.⁹

3.3. Scholarly Opinions on Imam Ibn Qutaybah:

Many eminent scholars have testified to Imam Ibn Qutaybah's scholarly status and intellectual stature:

- Hafiz Ibn Hazm (d. 456 AH) described him as trustworthy in both religion and knowledge.
- Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463 AH) praised him as a leading scholar in Arabic language, linguistics, history, and the knowledge of the traditions and events of people, describing him as trustworthy, pious and virtuous.
- Hafiz Abu Tahir al-Salafi (d. 576 AH) counted Imam Ibn Qutaybah among the trustworthy scholars and the people of Ahl al-Sunnah.
- Imam Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597 AH) described him as a learned and virtuous scholar.
- Imam Ibn Khallikan (d. 681 AH) also regarded him as trustworthy and virtuous.
- Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) stated that Imam Ibn Qutaybah was considered an Imam of Ahl al-Sunnah, just as Al-Jahiz (d. 259 AH) was regarded as the orator of the Mu'tazilites.
- Imam al-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH) described him as a prolific author, truthful (Saduq), and one who narrated little (Qalil al-Riwayah). He also acknowledged that he was a comprehensive scholar but had limited engagement in the science of Hadith.
- Umar bin Rida Kahlala (d. 1408 CE) considered Ibn Qutaybah an expert in linguistics, grammar, rare words of the Qur'an, meanings of the Qur'an, rare Hadith, and similar sciences.¹⁰

⁹ . Al-Dhahabi, Muhammad bin Ahmad, "Tarikh al-Islam wa Wafayat al-Mashahir wa al-A'lam", Edited by: Bashar Awwad Ma'arouf, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1st Edition, 2003 CE, Number of Volumes: 15, Volume: 6, Page: 565.

¹⁰ . Kahlala, Umar bin Rida, "Mu'jam al-Mu'allifin", Maktabat al-Muthanna, Beirut, Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-Arabi, Beirut, Number of Volumes: 13, Volume: 6, Page: 1.

3.4. Imam Ibn Qutaybah's Notable Books:

Imam Abu Muhammad Abdullah bin Muslim Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276 AH) was a prolific scholar known for his contributions to various Islamic sciences, including Hadith, Tafsir, Fiqh, Arabic language, and history. Some of his most significant works include:

- "Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān" (Explanation of the Ambiguous Verses of the Qur'an)
- "Gharīb al-Qur'ān" (Lexicon of Rare Words in the Qur'an)
- "Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth" (Reconciliation of Apparently Contradictory Hadiths)
- "Gharīb al-Hadīth" (Lexicon of Rare Words in Hadith)
- "Kitāb al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafẓ wa al-Radd 'ala al-Jahmiyyah" (Differences in Expression & Refutation of Jahmiyyah)
- "Al-Imāmah wa al-Siyāsah" (Leadership & Politics) – (Some scholars dispute its attribution to Ibn Qutaybah)
- "Adab al-Kātib" (The Etiquette of the Scribe)
- "Al-Shi'r wa al-Shu'arā'" (Poetry and Poets)
- "Al-Ma'ārif" (The Book of General Knowledge)
- "'Uyūn al-Akhhbār" (Sources of Historical Reports)
- "Al-Ma'ārif" (A General Encyclopedia of History & Culture)

These books played a crucial role in Islamic scholarship, Arabic linguistics, and Hadith sciences.¹¹

4. The Subject and Purpose of "Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth":

The subject of this book is to establish the authority of the Sunnah and to provide scholarly responses to the objections raised by the deniers of Hadith. This is evident from the book's title:

"Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth fī al-Radd 'alā A'dā' al-Hadīth" ("The Interpretation of Contradictory Hadiths in Response to the Enemies of Hadith").

Imam Ibn Qutaybah wrote this book in response to a letter in which Ahl al-Ra'y (rationalist scholars) criticized Ahl al-Hadith (traditionalist scholars). They accused the Hadith scholars of narrating fabricated and contradictory reports, which, according to them, led to disagreements among Muslims and the formation of sects, each accusing the other of disbelief.

¹¹ . Al-Yafi'i, Abdullah bin As'ad, "Mir'at al-Jinan wa 'Ibrat al-Yaqzan fi Ma'rifat Ma Yu'tabar min Hawadith al-Zaman", Edited by: Khalil al-Mansur, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st Edition, 1417 AH - 1997 CE, Number of Volumes: 4, Volume: 4, Page: 271.

In that letter, reference was also made to another book by Ibn Qutaybah, "Gharīb al-Ḥadīth", which contained a chapter on resolving apparently contradictory Hadiths. The author was requested to compile all such Hadiths and provide reconciliations in a way that would earn the reward of Allah Almighty.

The scholarly contribution of Imam Ibn Qutaybah in this work has been highly appreciated by notable scholars, including:

- ❖ Imam Muhammad bin Nasr al-Marwazi (d. 294 AH)
- ❖ Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463 AH)
- ❖ Imam Abu ‘Amr ibn al-Salah (d. 643 AH)
- ❖ Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH)
- ❖ Imam al-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH)
- ❖ Imam Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH)

These scholars recognized the book as an important defense of Hadith sciences, responding to criticisms and clarifying apparent contradictions within the Prophetic traditions.¹²

4.1. Subject and Purpose of Compilation of *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*:

The subject of this book is to establish the authority of the Sunnah and to provide scholarly responses to the objections of those who reject it, as its title "Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth fī al-Radd ‘alā A’dā’ al-Ḥadīth" also indicates. The author, Imam Ibn Qutaybah, states that the reason for compiling this book was a letter in which the Ahl al-Ra’y (proponents of personal reasoning) criticized the Ahl al-Ḥadīth (hadith scholars), accusing them of narrating fabricated and contradictory hadiths. These alleged contradictions, they claimed, led to divisions among Muslims, resulting in various sects that accused one another of disbelief, with each sect interpreting hadiths in a way that suited its own views. This letter also referenced another book by Imam Ibn Qutaybah, Gharīb al-Ḥadīth, which contained a chapter explaining seemingly contradictory hadiths. The author was requested to gather all such conflicting hadiths and clarify their reconciliation with the intention of earning divine reward.¹³

Many esteemed scholars have highly appreciated this intellectual endeavor of Imam Ibn Qutaybah. Among those who praised this book are Imam Muhammad bin Nasr al-Marwazi (d. 294 AH), Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi (d. 463 AH), Imam Abu Amr Ibn al-Salah (d. 643 AH),

¹² . Al-Dhahabi, Muhammad bin Ahmad, *Mīzān al-Itidāl*, Vol: 2, p. 35. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, Vol: 11, p. 411. Ibn al-Salah, Uthman bin Abd al-Rahman, *Ma’rifat Anwā’ Ulūm al-Ḥadīth*, p. 2.

¹³ . Ibn Qutaybah al-Dinawari, *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, Introduction of the Editor, p. 47 and onwards.

Imam Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH), Imam Al-Dhahabi (d. 748 AH), and Imam Ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH).¹⁴

4.2. Contents of *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*:

Imam Ibn Qutaybah began the book with a lengthy introduction, the key points of which are as follows:

- He praised the commendable efforts of the *muhaddithīn* (hadith scholars) in preserving hadith and acknowledged their contributions.
- He defended them against the objections raised by the *Mu'tazilah*, *Mutakallimīn* (theologians), *Muntaẓimīn*, and other claimants who criticized the scholars of hadith.
- Refutation of Rationalist Objections:
 - a) He refuted the flawed objections raised by rationalists against hadith.
 - b) He praised the efforts of *muhaddithīn* (hadith scholars), stating that they sought the truth from its original and authentic sources.
 - c) They traveled across land and sea, from east to west, to collect hadith.
 - d) They distinguished between authentic and weak narrations, as well as between abrogating (*nasikh*) and abrogated (*mansukh*) hadith.
 - e) Due to their efforts, the truth became clear, hidden Sunnah was revealed to the jurists, and the practice of ruling based on the Prophet's hadith instead of personal opinions became established.¹⁵
- Collection of Hadiths Subject to Criticism:
 - a) In this book, Imam Ibn Qutaybah compiled a collection of hadith that had been criticized by theologians (*mutakallimīn*).
 - b) Examples include hadiths like *'Arq al-Khayl* (the sweat of horses), *Sha'r al-Dhira'ayn* (hair on the forearms), *'Iyadat al-Mala'ikah* and others.
 - c) He explained that some of these narrations were fabricated (*mawdu'*), which had led skeptics to mock hadith and caused an increase in doubt regarding their authenticity.
 - d) Imam Ibn Qutaybah exposed the flaws and errors of the *Mu'tazilah* and *mutakallimīn*, who rejected clear proofs, religious texts, and the consensus of the Muslim community (*ijma'*).

¹⁴ . Al-Dhahabi, Muhammad bin Ahmad, *Mizan al-I'tidal*, Vol. 2, p. 35. Al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, *Tarikh Baghdad*, Vol. 11, p. 411. Ibn al-Salah, Uthman bin Abdul Rahman, *Ma'rifat Anwa' Ulum al-Hadith*, p. 285.

¹⁵ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, p. 127.

- e) He addressed the objections of the *Mu'tazilah* against prominent *Sahabah* (companions of the Prophet), including:
- i. Abu Bakr As-Siddiq (d. 13 AH)
 - ii. Umar ibn Al-Khattab (d. 23 AH)
 - iii. Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 40 AH)
 - iv. Abdullah ibn Mas'ud (d. 32 AH)
 - v. Abu Hurairah (d. 57 AH)
 - vi. Hudhayfah ibn Al-Yaman (d. 36 AH)
- Provided well-founded responses to these objections.
- f) He Imam Ibn Qutaybah examined the beliefs and ideas of various Mu'tazilite and theological figures, including:
- i. 'Ubaydullah ibn Hasan Al-'Anbari (d. 168 AH)
 - ii. Hisham ibn Al-Hakam (d. 190 AH)
 - iii. Najjar Al-Mu'tazili (d. 220 AH)
 - iv. Nizam (d. 231 AH)
 - v. Abu Hudhayl Al-'Allaf (d. 235 AH)
 - vi. Al-Jahiz (d. 255 AH)
- g) Regarding *Al-Jahiz*, he stated that he was inconsistent in his beliefs, frequently lied, fabricated hadith to support his ideology, and mocked hadith.
- h) Imam Ibn Qutaybah discussed the well-known sects of his time, including:
- i. The *Khawarij*
 - ii. The *Murji'ah*
 - iii. The *Rafidah*
 - iv. The *Qadariyyah*
 - v. The *Mu'tazilah*
 - vi. The *Zindiqah* (heretics)
 - vii. The *Mulhidun* (atheists)
 - viii. The *Qā'ilīn bi'l-Badā'* (those who believe in divine change of mind)

This comprehensive work serves as a defense of the hadith tradition and a critique of theological and rationalist objections against it.¹⁶

After the introduction, Imam Ibn Qutaybah divided this book into the following three chapters:

¹⁶. Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, p. 112.

- ❖ Chapter: Mention of the Scholars of Kalam and the Scholars of Opinion – This chapter discusses the statements and arguments of the scholars of *Kalam* (theologians) and *Ahl al-Ra'y* (those who relied on rational judgment).
- ❖ Chapter: Mention of the Scholars of Hadith – This chapter praises and discusses the contributions of the *Muhaddithun* (Hadith scholars).
- ❖ Chapter: Mention of the Hadiths That They Claimed to Be Contradictory, the Hadiths They Alleged to Be in Conflict with the Book of Allah, and the Hadiths That They Considered to Contradict Reason and Rational Argument – This chapter addresses the objections of opponents regarding Hadiths that they claimed contained contradictions, those they believed were in opposition to the Qur'an, and those they thought were inconsistent with rational reasoning.

5. Imam Ibn Qutaybah's Style of Explaining Scholarly Issues:

In *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*, while responding to the objections of opponents, Imam Ibn Qutaybah does not explicitly mention the names of any sects. Instead, he presents different issues using general and neutral expressions such as:

- ❖ (قَالُوا: حَدِيثَانِ مُتَنَاقِضَانِ) – "They said: These two Hadiths contradict each other."¹⁷
- ❖ (قَالُوا: حَدِيثَانِ مُتَدَاغِمَانِ مُتَنَاقِضَانِ) – "They said: These two Hadiths refute each other and are contradictory."¹⁸
- ❖ (قَالُوا: أَحْكَامٌ قَدْ أُجْمِعَ عَلَيْهَا، يُبْطِلُهَا الْقُرْآنُ، وَيُخْتَجُّ بِهَا الْخَوَارِجُ) – "They said: These are rulings upon which there is consensus, yet the Qur'an invalidates them, and the Khawarij use them as evidence."¹⁹
- ❖ (قَالُوا: أَحَادِيثٌ مُتَنَاقِضَةٌ) – "They said: These Hadiths are contradictory."²⁰
- ❖ (حَدِيثٌ تُكَذِّبُهُ حُجَّةُ الْعَقْلِ وَالنَّظَرِ) – "They said: This Hadith is refuted by reason and rational argument."²¹

After stating these objections, Imam Ibn Qutaybah cites a Hadith and then presents one or more seemingly contradictory Hadiths, providing scholarly responses to the objections raised against them.

5.1. Different types of difficult Hadith:

Imam Ibn Qutaybah divided the seemingly contradictory or difficult hadiths in his book into the following categories:

- a) Hadiths in which contradiction has been claimed.²²

¹⁷ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*, p. 148.

¹⁸ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*, p. 271, 273.

¹⁹ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*, p. 277.

²⁰ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*, p. 383.

²¹ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*, p. 411.

- b) Hadiths that, on the surface, appear to contradict the Holy Qur'an.²³
- c) Hadiths that seem to be rejected by reason and intellect.²⁴
- d) Hadiths that apparently oppose consensus (Ijma).²⁵
- e) Hadiths that are apparently rejected by both the Qur'an and consensus (Ijma).²⁶
- f) Hadiths that are seemingly rejected by analogy (Qiyas).²⁷

5.2. The Meaning of the word “*Ta'wīl*”:

Imam Ibn Qutaybah generally uses the word *Ta'wīl* to refer to clarifying the proper meanings of hadith by reconciling all relevant narrations on a given topic, even if it is done from a specific perspective. When resolving apparent contradictions in hadith, he rarely employs the method of *tarjīh* (preferring one narration over another) or outright rejection.

He explains that when interpreting seemingly contradictory hadith, the approach should be permissible, contextually appropriate, and simple, so that any existing confusion is not further increased. This is why, after presenting a reconciliation for a difficult or disputed hadith, he often states:

وَهَذَا التَّأْوِيلُ بِحَمْدِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى - سَهْلٌ قَرِيبٌ²⁸

"And this interpretation—by the grace of Allah—is simple and straightforward."

Imam Ibn Qutaybah further clarifies that in reconciling hadith, he rejects far-fetched and invalid interpretations to prevent the distortion of the hadith's meaning. He ensures that what is meant as an honor for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is not misinterpreted in a way that leads to dishonor. He states:

وَنَحْنُ نَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ أَنْ نَتَعَسَّفَ، فَتَأَوَّلَ فِيمَا جَعَلَهُ اللَّهُ فَضِيلَةً لِمُحَمَّدٍ ﷺ²⁹

"We seek refuge with Allah from forced interpretations that would distort what Allah has made an honor for Muhammad (peace be upon him)."

Similarly, in another instance, he says:

أما المتناقض فنحن مخبروك بالمخارج منه، ومتهوك على ما تأخر عنه علمك، وقصر عنه نظرك³⁰ -

"As for apparent contradictions, we will inform you of the ways to reconcile them and clarify what your knowledge has not yet reached and what your understanding has fallen short of."

²² . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, p. 145-276.

²³ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, p. 277.

²⁴ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, p. 334,345.

²⁵ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, p. 379.

²⁶ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, p. 393.

²⁷ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, p. 390,486.

²⁸ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, p. 388.

²⁹ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, p. 316.

³⁰ . Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Hadīth*, p. 142.

5.3. Scholarly Merits of the Book:

Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth is a book that encompasses numerous qualities and perfections. Studying this work is of great importance in the present era, where reason has taken the form of a sacred idol, worshipped under the guise of modernity, objectivity, and broad-mindedness. These are the very issues that Imam Ibn Qutaybah sought to address through this book. A brief overview of the key merits of this work is as follows:

- a) Imam Ibn Qutaybah, in this book, attempted to harmonize reason (*'aql*) and religious texts (*naql*), particularly the Prophetic hadiths. This issue has challenged human thought in every era. The solution lies in establishing a balanced and correct relationship between reason and revelation. Despite all its virtues, reason is weak and limited when compared to revelation. Revelation is a strong and reliable source of knowledge. When reason is subordinate to revelation, it becomes a means to attain divine mercy and guidance. However, if reason is made superior to revelation and everything beyond human comprehension is rejected, it leads to misguidance.
- b) The correct resolution of human issues can only be achieved by considering both the Quran and the Sunnah together. The concept of separating the Quran from the Sunnah has, in some form, existed within different Muslim legal schools and philosophies. Imam Ibn Qutaybah, in this book, strongly emphasized the harmony between the Quran and the Prophetic Sunnah.
- c) The primary objective of writing this book was to express love for the hadith scholars (*muhaddithun*) and defend them. Imam Ibn Qutaybah refuted those who criticized the hadith scholars, accused them of fabricating hadiths, and blamed them for causing division and discord among Muslims. He highly praised their efforts in narrating, compiling, and verifying hadiths.
- d) A significant feature of *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* is its presentation of the arguments of deviant sects in their own words, followed by a rational and scholarly rebuttal.
- e) Imam Ibn Qutaybah affirmed the divine attributes of Allah, generally following the approach of the *Salaf al-Salih* (pious predecessors), leaving their true nature to Allah. However, in two instances, he interpreted certain hadiths metaphorically.
- f) In this book, Imam Ibn Qutaybah emphasized the affirmation of matters of the unseen (*ghayb*) and sought to strengthen the reader's conviction in them.
- g) The author adopted a style that blended both seriousness and subtle humor, following the literary traditions of the eloquent writers of his time.

- h) *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* is the only book in the field of hadith reconciliation (*mukhtalif al-hadith*) that presents objections in the exact words of the critics and responds to them using logical, textual, and literary arguments.
- i) Unlike other works in this genre, which often discuss internal disagreements among Ahl al-Sunnah, this book focuses on the arguments of sects with beliefs parallel to Ahl al-Sunnah and provides scholarly refutations of their claims.
- j) Occasionally, Imam Ibn Qutaybah cites hadiths with his own chain of transmission (*isnad*), though such instances are rare.
- k) As one of the leading figures of the Arabic language and an esteemed literary scholar, Imam Ibn Qutaybah maintained a refined style in his writing, avoiding overly complex words or convoluted expressions
- l) In this book, Imam Ibn Qutaybah compiled 111 hadiths related to the subject of conflicting narrations, organizing them under 46 topics and discussions. Additionally, he included 72 difficult hadiths, classifying them under 62 issues.
- m) Imam Ibn Qutaybah also pointed out certain incorrect interpretations adopted by some scholars. He critically examined these interpretations and highlighted the errors within them.

5.4. Some Inaccuracies in the Book:

Despite the many virtues of *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, a few shortcomings can be noted:

- a) Excessive reliance on Israeli traditions (*Isrā'īliyyāt*) and references to the scriptures of previous nations. This affected the book's authenticity, as it introduced non-Islamic sources into the discussion.
- b) Some of Ibn Qutaybah's responses are not academically strong, possibly because he was primarily a literary scholar (*adīb*), and hadith was not his primary area of expertise.
- c) The book combines two distinct types of hadiths:
 - a. Mukhtalif hadith (narrations that appear to be contradictory).
 - b. Mushkil hadith (narrations whose meanings are difficult to understand). The number of mukhtalif hadiths (46) is notably less than that of mushkil hadiths (72).
- d) Many of the hadiths are cited without their chain of transmission (*isnād*) or the names of their narrators. Furthermore, Ibn Qutaybah does not assess the authenticity (*ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḍa'īf*) of the narrations, and the book contains several weak and fabricated hadiths.
- e) In some cases, Ibn Qutaybah overly elaborates on minor issues, diverting from the book's primary focus.
- f) The book lacks a systematic arrangement according to:

- a. Fiqh (jurisprudential) categories,
- b. Musnad compilations (collections based on individual Companions), or
- c. Alphabetical order, making it difficult to navigate. Even hadiths related to the same topic are scattered throughout different sections of the book.

6. Summary of the Discussion:

Imam Ibn Qutaybah was a distinguished scholar, preacher, jurist, literary figure, and debater of the 3rd century Hijri. He possessed expertise in multiple disciplines, including Qur'anic recitations, the science of narrators (Rijal), medicine, sociology, physics, psychology, Arabic linguistics, and literature, among others.

In his book *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith*, Imam Ibn Qutaybah sought to reconcile seemingly contradictory hadiths and provided scholarly responses to objections raised against them. He addressed nearly 12 to 15 sects of innovators of his time with a unique polemical approach, effectively refuting their claims.

In this work, he referenced approximately 106 Prophetic hadiths, deriving around 57 legal and theological issues from them. Additionally, he addressed nearly 49 objections raised by the deniers of hadith. To clarify the complex meanings and intricate aspects of hadiths, he frequently cited Arabic poetry, using around 112 poetic verses for argumentation.

Despite its many strengths, *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith* also contains certain shortcomings. The book extensively relies on *Isrā'īliyyāt* (narrations from Jewish and Christian sources) and references texts from previous religious communities, which affects its reliability. Many hadiths are quoted without proper chains of transmission (isnad) or the names of their narrators and companions (Sahabah). Additionally, there is significant reliance on memory when citing hadiths, leading to variations in the wording of the texts.

Moreover, Ibn Qutaybah attempted to gather as many different hadiths as possible, resulting in the inclusion of numerous weak and a few fabricated (mawdu') narrations. The book lacks a systematic arrangement based on well-known classifications, making it difficult for readers to locate specific hadiths easily.

7. Recommendations:

- a) *Ta'wil Mukhtalif al-Hadith* is a fundamental and significant book on its subject. Its study should be made mandatory for advanced-level students.
- b) This is the second most important book in this field, in which the beliefs of various sects of that era are discussed and analyzed academically. Studying this book provides insights into the Muslim society of that time.

- c) The book contains many Isrā'īliyyāt (narrations from Jewish and Christian traditions). To enhance the book's credibility, it is crucial to critically examine and authenticate these narrations.
- d) It is an important need of the present time to extract the sources (*takhrīj*) of the hadiths mentioned in *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* and clarify their authenticity and weakness.
- e) Since the hadiths in this book are not arranged in any recognizable order, benefiting from it is quite difficult. Therefore, the narrations of this book should be organized according to jurisprudential topics (fiqhī chapters), compilations of hadith (masānīd), hadith dictionaries (ma'ājim), or alphabetical order to facilitate its study.
- f) The modern movements of rationalism, neo-Mu'tazilism and Orientalism have revived the fitnah of rejecting hadith for their specific agendas. Many of their objections are the same as those raised by the hadith rejecters of earlier times. Therefore, studying *Ta'wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* is essential to counter these modern ideological challenges.