

Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ)

(d. 370H) on Contagion



Abū Bakr al-Rāzī al-Jaṣṣāṣ¹ (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) said in Aḥkām al-Qurʾān, after quoting various ḥadīths pertaining to the plague:

So in these reports is the prohibition of leaving the land of the plague [intending to] flee from it and the prohibition of coming to [the land of plague] as well.

Now if a person says: “If the lifespans have already been decreed and confined, never being hastened or delayed from their times, then what is the angle of the prohibition of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) from entering a land of plague alongside his prohibition from leaving [the land] on account of it, yet there is no difference between entering it and remaining in it”.²

¹ Al-Ṣaḥābī said of him: “Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, Aḥmad ibn ‘Alī al-Ḥanafī, the Imām, ‘Allāmah, Muftī, Mujtahid, signpost of Irāq... author of [many] works... alongside his knowledge he was a person of abstinence and worship... He was inclined towards I’tizāl and in his works are signs of that in the subject of seeing Allāh and other affairs.” See al-Siyar (16/340).

² In other words why has one person been **prohibited from entering** the land of plague and another has been **prohibited from leaving** the land of plague when the meaning is the same for both of them, which is preservation of health and life. The answer of “quarantine” has been provided by the latecomers, some of whom wish to impress upon non-Muslims from the angle of science. However, the issue of “quarantine” cannot be derived from the ḥadīths of the plague, because the prohibition has been qualified and restricted only to he who intends to flee the plague, fearing death. As for he who wishes to leave for other reasons such as visiting relatives, or for trade or for seeking medical

It is said to him: The angle which the Prophet [came from] is that if a person enters it while there is the plague therein, it is possible that death and the appointed time [that were already decreed for him] would come to him in that land. So a person may say: “If he had not entered that land, he would not have died.” So he prohibited from entering [that land] so that this would not be said. And it is like the saying of the Exalted:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَقَالُوا لِإِخْوَانِهِمْ إِذَا ضَرَبُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَوْ
كَانُوا غُرًى لَّوْكَانُوا عِنْدَنَا مَا مَاتُوا وَمَا قُتِلُوا لِيَجْعَلَ اللَّهُ ذَلِكَ حَسْرَةً فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ

“O you who believe! Be not like those who disbelieve [the hypocrites] and who say to their brethren when they travel through the earth or go out to fight: ‘If they had stayed with us, they would not have died or been killed,’ so that Allāh may make it a cause of regret in their hearts.” (3:156).

So the Prophet (ﷺ) disliked that [a person] should enter it and thereafter die [due to the arrival of his time] and some ignorant people then say: “If only he had not entered, he would not have died.”

And upon this [same] meaning which we have presented is what is related from the Prophet (ﷺ): “*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*”, alongside his saying: “*There is no contagion, and no omen [in the*

treatment and the likes, then this is perfectly permissible. Hence, this has nothing to do with quarantine because these ḥadīths have nothing to do with contagion to begin with. Rather, all of these ḥadīths frame the plague in the same way that jihād on the battlefield is framed. It is prohibited to abandon the battlefield, trying to flee Allāh’s decree, deserting the army, leaving behind the wounded, eroding the will and morale of those who remain behind and so on. For more details on this matter refer to our paper: “**Higher Wisdoms in The Ḥadīth Regarding the Land of Plague**”: [hadith-blue-land.pdf](#) — 25 April 2020.

overhead flight of birds]”—so that when a healthy camel is afflicted with an illness after a sick camel passed by it, a person does not say: “The [sick] camel passed the illness to it.”

And it was said to Allāh’s Messenger: “There is a perforation on the lip of a camel [due to mange], and then all the camels get mange.” So the Prophet (ﷺ) said: “So what gave it to the first one?”³

Notes:

1. There is no contradiction in the Sunnah. The Mu’tazilah, Missionaries and Orientalists have tried to attack the statements of the Prophet (ﷺ) with respect to contagion. This is what led Muslim scholars to the various ways in which reconciliation has been made between the various texts.

Those who claim that the ḥadīths of the plague are framed from the angle of contagion are unable to answer the doubt as to why—if entering a land of plague and remaining in it are the same—entering has been prohibited but leaving it is also prohibited. While also keeping in mind the ḥadīth, “*Flee from the leper as you would flee from a lion*”, leprosy is not fatal, one can live with it for a lifetime, but the plague kills in days, if not hours. So why should one flee from the leper but be prohibited from remaining in the land of plague.

So those who insist these commands are on account of contagion, out of fear of contagion, then they are unable to provide a satisfactory answer.

As for invoking “quarantine”—which is a diversionary method of trying to answer this question—then there is no proof for

³ Aḥkām al-Qur’ān (Dār Iḥyā al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 1412H) 2/165-166.

quarantine in these texts, even though this is the opinion of many scholars. This is because these ḥadīths are framed from the angle of jihād in the battlefield, and the evidence for this is the Prophetic Sunnah itself. There is no explanation and clarification better than that which comes from the Prophet (ﷺ) himself.

We have discussed this in more detail in the paper, “**Higher Wisdoms in The Ḥadīth Regarding the Land of Plague**”: [hadith-plague-land.pdf](#) — 25 April 2020, which the reader is referred to.

2. The claim that the nature of the error of the Pagan Arabs was their belief that contagion operates outside the domain of Allāh’s decree, and that this is what the Prophet (ﷺ) was addressing when he said: “*So what gave it to the first one?*” is weak and misses the mark, even though this has been said by many scholars. For the Arabs affirmed al-Qadar and even argued by way of it, as occurs in numerous places in the Qur’ān, to justify their shirk. While there may have been some fringe people who said contagion moves outside the domain of Allāh’s decree, this is not a satisfactory explanation for this ḥadīth and this was not the angle of the Prophet’s response.

We have discussed this in more detail in the discussion of al-Taḥāwī and al-Qurṭubī’s statements on the subject.

Rather, the considerations of the Prophet (ﷺ) include the following:

—**a)** So that **statements of “if”** are not made about al-Qadar, as it relates to calamity, disease and death. This subject has a separate chapter dedicated to it in Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, and it is from the realm of minor shirk. This is indicated by Abū Mūsa al-Ash‘arī (رضي الله عنه) and others, and we have cited their statements in previous articles.

—b) So that **coincidence** and **association** are not confused with **causation**, whereby mixing played no role in the appearance of disease, it was purely incidental and the disease actually occurred on account of the same factors that led to disease in the first person or first animal. This confusion is the basis for the exaggeration in contagion, and Allāh knows that man is prone to such thoughts, especially when he is ignorant of the complexity of the *asbāb* (ways and means). So He sent His Prophet (ﷺ) with this guidance, to close such avenues. This is the realm of minor shirk, exaggeration in the causes or making something to be a cause when it is not a cause. This is indicated by many scholars whom we have cited from in previous articles.

—c) So that a person is not subjected to **an unnecessary mental struggle**, wherein he has to bear the harm of being in the presence of a sick person, and the anxiety itself leads him to become ill. This is indicated by al-Qurṭubī.

—d) So that the situation is avoided where if a person is in the company of a leper, or sick camels are next to his healthy camels, **his imaginations and fears play up** and lead him to presumptions with respect to omens and contagion.

So this is a type of harm (*adhā*) that he need not subject himself to, as it opens the door to potential corruption of his creed. This is indicated by Imām Mālik and Abu ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim bin Sallām.

All of the above matters relate to the thoughts, feelings, statements and actions of people and the objective behind the various statements of the Prophet (ﷺ) was to place barriers in front of minor shirk and corruption in creed.

Now, because we make a distinction between “inoculation” and the vague, ambiguous term of “mixing”, then we can even incorporate this into our list:

—e) So that encounters between the sick and healthy do not lead to the event of inoculation, which can lead to **the fresh creation of another instance of disease**, through the creational systems of cause and effect which are part and parcel of al-Qadar. So here, while affirming this, we do not speak of “disease transmission” or “contagion”, because this is not contagion. No disease was transmitted from one person to the next, because no such thing is possible. **And this is because a cause among the causes of disease (such as inoculation), is not the actual disease itself.** Disease is a state, a condition, an incidental attribute (‘araḍ) not a noun-entity, it is multicausal and multifactorial in nature. For the same state to arise and develop in another person, it requires numerous factors and conditions, and is therefore created afresh.

Ibn al-Qayyim used some precise words when he said of mixing:

قد يكون سببا يخلق الله تعالى فيه المرض

[Mixing] can sometimes be a cause **through which Allāh creates** the disease [in the healthy].⁴

For more on “transmission” of states and qualities, refer to the speech of Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in our earlier article: “**Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463H) on Contagion**”: [ibn-abdal-barr-contagion.pdf](#) — 9 October 2020.

Misconception: As for the claim that the ḥadīth of the bedouin and the camel was to make the bedouin leave his belief that contagion moves outside of Allāh’s decree, then there is nothing in the ḥadīth which proves this. Rather, the nature of the objection

⁴ Ḥāshiyah Tahdhīb Sunan Abī Dāwūd (10/290).

is explicit in the ḥadīth itself and the Prophet (ﷺ) rebutted it with the following line of reasoning, in light of what has preceded:

“Just as the first camel got mange without requiring another camel, then likewise all your other camels can also get mange without requiring another camel. This is because the factors that caused the first case of mange, can equally be present for the other camels, from their surroundings coupled with their own weakness and susceptibility due to yet other factors. Thus, there is no contagion, and all of this takes place by way of al-Qadar.⁵ All of what has been described is through the creational systems of cause and effect, through the asbāb. So: ➔

- a) do not exaggerate in what you presume to be a means, and
- b) do not confuse association with causation.

And in addition to these matters:

- c) so as not put yourself through an unnecessary mental struggle, and
- d) in order to prevent your imaginations and fears from running loose and presumptions arising in your mind,

➔ its best if you keep sick camels away from healthy camels—[or keep away from the leper, or not go to the land of plague]—to cut off the doors to all of these things from the outset.”

So the reasoning here is similar to the following:

“Do not drink alcohol, and do not sit in a place where it is consumed, because that is a route through which you may be led to drink alcohol, which you have been prohibited from.” And: “Do not commit fornication, and do not be alone with a non-maḥram woman, because that is a route through which you may be led to fornication, which you have been prohibited from.”

⁵ Keeping in mind what we have stated about inoculation, which is a potential route to the fresh creation of another instance of disease, if individual susceptibility to it exists.

In other words: **This is the prohibited thing, do not do it, and these are the ways that lead you to it, so keep away from them to remain safe what you have been prohibited from.**

3. Staying on the issue of those who claim that the point of dispute was only about whether contagion occurs through Allāh's decree or outside of it, then Ibn al-Qayyim pointed out that this comes from deficiency in knowledge, while also indicating that this is just one of many opinions.

Unfortunately, some people today have tried to claim that this, and only this, is the meaning of the ḥadīth: “*There is no contagion*”, and likewise, the ḥadīth of the bedouin and his camels, that his dispute with the Messenger (ﷺ) was about whether contagion happens through Allāh's decree or not.

Ibn al-Qayyim said of the ḥadīth, “*There is no contagion*”:

This negates what the Pagans used to affirm of a recurring type of causation [through mixing] that follows a single course, it not being possible for it to be invalidated, nor diverted from its place, nor for it to be opposed by [means] that are stronger than it. It is not as the one whose knowledge is deficient says that they [the Pagans] used to consider [contagion] to be an independent efficient cause on its own [outside Allāh's will and power].⁶

⁶ I'lām al-Muwaqqi'in (Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1423H) 4/65. We should keep in mind however, that atheists, materialists and naturalists who reject a Creator will obviously say that contagion exists without a Creator. Hence to them, it occurs outside the domain of the Creator's will and power, because they do not accept a Creator to begin with. As such they strip the causes (asbāb) and effects (musabbabāt) of their Creator (musabbib). And as for the Pagan Arabs, then they exaggerated in the causes which Allāh has created. Further, the Pagans were not all of the same type, they were of categories with various beliefs regarding creation, resurrection and the likes.

Thus, the issue was about exaggeration in causation. And in addition, it was also confusing association with causation, as other scholars have pointed out.

The Pagans affirmed the Divine Decree because they tried to use it as an argument to justify their shirk.

The Pagans argued: “... **if Allāh had so willed, we and our forefathers would not have committed shirk**” (6:148).⁷

Al-Sa’dī commented on this verse:

Allāh has informed that the Pagans will justify their shirk and declaring unlawful what Allāh made lawful through the argument of al-Qaḍā and al-Qadar, and that they will make Allāh’s will which encompasses everything of good and evil a proof for themselves in repelling blame from themselves.

So this indicates that the Pagan Arabs believed that good and evil is from Allāh’s decree.

4. In the above points—based upon the speech of Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ, and also the other scholars whose statements we have translated previously— we have combined all of their insights to provide internally coherent explanations within the same ḥadīth and externally coherent explanations between ḥadīths, while affirming worldly realities (inoculation as a means of fresh disease creation) and identifying the specific area of ambiguity—“mixing”—in which baseless presumptions can arise due to exaggeration in causation or confusing association with causation, leading to the very contagion **negated and prohibited** by the Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ).

⁷ See also: 16:35, 43:20.

And this should make clear that these are certainly not “Ẓāhiri (literalist) viewpoints” as someone has tried to claim, but rather they are powerful, sound arguments which indicate that the Salaf and the earlier scholars had greater insight into this matter.

5. Finally, invoking a modern-day consensus on the matter of “contagion” does not constitute evidence.

Likewise the claim of the one who said: “We must follow the Qur’ān, the Sunnah and the understanding of the Salaf and of the scholars in this subject” when lecturing on contagion is meaningless and empty when one observes that in the list of scholars cited in the view being presented on contagion, there are no citations from any scholars prior to the 7th century hijrah.⁸

Likewise implying that those who hold the view we have outlined in detail, that they are Ẓāhirīs, then this is an ad hominem attack, devoid of evidence.⁹

So whoever wants to speak, write and give lectures on this subject, they must make the effort to first read and then grasp the view that is being outlined, and then upon **amānah ‘ilmiyyah**—the responsibility of being precise, honest and just—accurately

⁸ A document was circulated at the end of May with a compilation of the statements of many scholars from the latecomers on contagion. There is little mention of anything from the Salaf.

⁹ Some speech of Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymīn was circulated on the matter of contagion in which there appeared to be some confusion between Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Ḥajar, and in which reference was made to Ibn Ḥazm being a Ẓāhirī. However, this has no connection to this subject matter, the use of this speech does not make for a good argument because the view we have outlined has come from the Imāms from the Salaf, centuries before Ibn Ḥazm. Further, our view has not been grasped properly, despite it having been explained for six months, with very careful distinctions and details. In fact, this view has also already been explained directly and at length to those who originate the above claims. So there ought to be no room for any confusion.

represent other people's views before critiquing them or warning others from listening to or holding them.

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29 Safar 1442 / 16 October 2020—v.1.01

Reproduced below is a section from: “**Higher Wisdoms in The Ḥadīth Regarding the Land of Plague**”: [hadith-plague-land.pdf](https://www.hadith-plague-land.pdf)
— 25 April 2020.

THE VARIATION IN DISPOSITIONS AND INCLINATIONS OF PEOPLE

Naturally, people vary in their mental constitutions and emotional dispositions. If one fears a particular sickness, it is an individual personal matter. Precautions can be taken by such a person in accordance with his or her constitution, disposition and fears. **However, that does not mean that such measures are always in accordance with the factual realities or ways and means that are justified and warranted.**

They may be measures which simply give reassurance to the heart and mind of such a person. If a person fears a butterfly as the scorpion or hornet is feared, he may take measures against butterflies, but those measures are in accordance with his beliefs and presumptions, not in accordance with factual realities.

And this is why scholars such as Ibn al-Qayyim make a very insightful point in that among the people are those predisposed to imagining things (*awhām*) and having fears which induce such psychological and emotional states that suppress the body’s vital processes, and which in turn lead to the very disease being feared. Such people predispose themselves to disease through such imaginations and fears and they are the ones likely to be put to trial with belief in contagion. It is for the likes of these people that the commands have come in the ḥadīths to not enter a land of plague, to flee from the leper and not to pass sick animals by healthy ones—so that they can be protected from the consequences of their own imaginations, presumptions and fears and not be put to trial with belief in omens and contagion.

From this consideration, we can also see the wisdom,

conciseness, breadth and depth of meaning (jawāmi‘ al-kalim) in the speech of the Messenger (ﷺ) in that he put ...

- belief in evil omens in their various forms,
- contagion,
- influence of stars and,
- imagined harm from Jinns in relation to travel

... all together in one sentence. This is because they all involve things which have no reality and which are but the presumptions and imaginations in the mind of the individual. And the Messenger (ﷺ) gave guidance for the benefit of such people. Hence, for the one who harbours omens, he advised that the omen be repelled and pushed out of the mind through reliance upon Allāh and continuing to do the activity which he set out to do originally. And with respect to the one who is fearful of disease and may be prone to belief in contagion should he get a disease, he advised him to not enter the land of plague and not to mix with a leper.

We mention once more what **Abū ‘Ubayd al-Qāsim bin Sallām** (رحمة الله) said:

“The prohibition of ‘*Let not the owner of sick camels pass them by the healthy camels of another*’ is not affirmation of contagion. Rather, it is because if the healthy camels became sick through Allāh’s decree, it might occur in the heart of their owner that this was due to contagion. Hence, he would start doubting and be put to trial. Hence, he [the Prophet] ordered the avoidance of this practice. And some people have carried [the ḥadīth] to mean that [the prohibition] is due to fear for the healthy on account of the one with the disease, and this the most evil of what the ḥadīth has been carried to mean, because it facilitates the way for believing in omens which is prohibited against. However, its angle is as I have presented.”¹⁰

¹⁰ Badhl al-Mā‘ūn Fī Faḍl al-Ṭā‘ūn, pp. 187 and is mentioned by al-Baghawī in Sharḥ al-Sunnah (12/169).