

# EVIDENCE THAT THE PROPHET (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) DID NOT PRAY THE TARĀWĪḤ PRAYER MORE THAN ELEVEN RAK‘AHS IN RAMAḌĀN

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In the name of Allah, Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy.

All praise is due to Allāh, Lord of the worlds. May the peace, blessings and salutations of Allāh be upon our Messenger, Muhammad, and upon his family, his Companions and his true followers.

## THE FIRST EVIDENCE:

عن أبي سلمة بن عبد الرحمن أنه سأل عائشة رضي الله عن ها كيف كانت صلاة رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في رمضان فقالت ما كان رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يزيد في رمضان ولا في غيره على إحدى عشرة ركعة يصلى أربعا فلا تسأل عن حسنهن وطولهن ثم يصلى أربعا فلا تسأل عن حسنهن وطولهن ثم يصلى ثلاثا

Abu Salamah ibn ‘Abdur-Raḥmān (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) narrated that he asked ‘Ā’ishah (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهَا): “**How was the Prayer of the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) in Ramaḍān?**”

She replied: “**The Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) would not increase in Ramaḍān, nor outside of it, beyond eleven rak‘ahs. He would pray four—and do not ask about their beauty and their**

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the book *Kitāb Ṣalāt at-Tarāwīḥ* of Imām Muḥammad Nāṣir ad-Dīn al-Albānī (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ).

**length! Then he would pray four—and do not ask about their beauty and their length. Then he would pray three.”<sup>2</sup>**

In a narration reported by Ibn Abī Shaybah, Muslim and others:

كانت صلاته في شهر رمضان وغيره ثلاث عشر ركعة بالليل منها ركعتا الفجر

**“His prayer in the month of Ramaḍān and other than it was thirteen rak‘ahs during the night, from them the two rak‘ahs of Fajr.”**

There has come in another narration reported by Mālik—and from him al-Bukhārī and others—that ‘A’ishah (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهَا) said:

كان يصلي بالليل ثلاث عشر ركعة ثم يصلي اذا سمع النداء بالصبح ركعتين خفيفتين

**“He would pray thirteen rak‘ahs during the night, then when he heard the call to the Fajr prayer, he would pray two light rak‘ahs.”**

Al-Hāfiḍh Ibn Hajr al-Asqalānī (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said: **“It is possible that this addition [of two rak‘ahs] refers to the Sunnah of ‘Ishā’ being included along with the night prayer, since he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) would pray it in his house—or that it refers to what he would begin the night prayer with because it is established in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim from ‘A’ishah (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهَا) that Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) would commence the Night Prayer with two light rak‘ahs.”**

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<sup>2</sup> Reported by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū ‘Awānah, Abū Dāwūd, at-Tirmidhī, an-Nasā’ī and Mālik; and it was reported from Mālik by al-Bayhaqī and Aḥmad.

## THE SECOND EVIDENCE:

Zayd Ibn Khālid al-Juhanī (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said:

لَأَرْمُقَنَّ صَلَاةَ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ اللَّيْلَةَ فَصَلَّى رُكْعَتَيْنِ خَفِيفَتَيْنِ ثُمَّ صَلَّى رُكْعَتَيْنِ طَوِيلَتَيْنِ طَوِيلَتَيْنِ ثُمَّ صَلَّى رُكْعَتَيْنِ وَهُمَا دُونَ اللَّتَيْنِ قَبْلَهُمَا ثُمَّ صَلَّى رُكْعَتَيْنِ وَهُمَا دُونَ اللَّتَيْنِ قَبْلَهُمَا ثُمَّ صَلَّى رُكْعَتَيْنِ وَهُمَا دُونَ اللَّتَيْنِ قَبْلَهُمَا ثُمَّ أَوْتَرَ فَذَلِكَ ثَلَاثَ عَشْرَةَ رُكْعَةً

“I would closely observe the **Night Prayer** of the Prophet (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ), so he would pray two light rak‘ahs, then he would pray two very, very long rak‘ahs, then he would pray two rak‘ahs lighter than the previous two, then he would pray two rak‘ahs lighter than the previous two, then he would pray two rak‘ahs lighter than the previous two, then he would pray two rak‘ahs lighter than the previous two, then he prayed one witr. **So that was thirteen rak‘ahs in total.**”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Reported by Mālik, and from him, Muslim, Abu ‘Awānah, Abu Dawūd and Ibn Naṣr.

### THE THIRD EVIDENCE:

عن جابر بن عبد الله رضى الله عن هـ قال: صلى بنا رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم في شهر رمضان ثمان ركعات وأوتر فلما كانت القابلة اجتمعنا في المسجد ورجونا أن يخرج فلم نزل فيه حتى أصبحنا ثم دخلنا فقلنا يا رسول الله اجتمعنا البارحة في المسجد ورجونا أن تصلى بنا فقال: إني خشيت أن يكتب عليكم

Jābir Ibn Abdillāh (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) said: **“The Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) led us in Prayer in the month of Ramadān with eight rak‘ahs followed by Witr.** Then the following night, we gathered at the Masjid, and we hoped he would come out [and lead us]—and we did not cease to remain until Fajr, then he came out to us. We said: ‘O Messenger of Allāh, we gathered last night in the Masjid hoping that you would lead us [again] in prayer.’ He replied: ‘I feared it would become obligated upon you [so I left off coming out to lead you].’”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Reported by Ibn Nasr and at-Tabarānī with a *hasan* chain of narration due to what has preceded. Al-Ḥāfidh Ibn Hajr indicated in *al-Fatḥ* and in *at-Talkhīṣ* to its strength and he attributed it to Ibn Khuzaymah and Ibn Ḥibbān in their *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections.

## THE AHADĪTH MENTIONING TWENTY ARE VERY WEAK—AND IT IS NOT PERMITTED TO ACT UPON WEAK AḤADĪTH

ONE: “Ibn Hajr said in *al-Fath* (4/205-206) said: As for what Ibn Abī Shaybah reported from the Ḥadīth of Ibn ‘Abbās (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ): **‘The Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) would pray in Ramaḍān twenty rak‘ahs and the Witr.’** This chain of narration is weak.

Furthermore, this weak narration is opposed by the Ḥadīth of ‘Ā’ishah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا), which is in the two *Sahīhs* [as cited above], and she was more knowledgeable than others regarding the condition of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) in the night prayer.” —End of the speech of Ibn Hajr.

Al-Imām al-Albānī (رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ) said: “The Ḥadīth of Ibn ‘Abbās (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) is very weak, as as-Suyūṭī stated in *al-Ḥāwī lil-Fatāwī* (2/73). Its defect is that Abū Shaybah Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Uthmān is in the chain of narration. Al-Ḥāfidh said about him in *al-Taqrīb*: ‘Abandoned in Ḥadīth (*matrūk al-Ḥadīth*).’”

Had the Prophet of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) prayed twenty, even once, he would not have abandoned it thereafter. And had that occurred, it would not have been hidden from ‘Ā’ishah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا), given what she previously stated.

After mentioning the Ḥadīth in *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān* of Jābir (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ), **“The Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) led us in Prayer in the month of Ramaḍān with eight rak‘ahs followed by Witr”**, as-Suyūṭī said: “What is understood is that twenty rak‘ahs are not established as something the Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) practised. And what is found

in *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān* is in complete agreement with our position of adhering to what is reported in al-Bukhārī from ‘Ā’ishah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا), that he did not increase in Ramaḍān nor outside of it beyond eleven rak‘ahs.

And what also indicates this is that he (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ), whenever he engaged in an act, he remained consistent upon it as he did with the two rak‘ahs he prayed after ‘Aṣr, even though prayer at that time was forbidden.

**And had he prayed twenty rak‘ahs even once, he would not have abandoned it thereafter, and had it occurred, it would not have been hidden from ‘Ā’ishah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا), as she previously stated.”**

Al-Imām al-Albānī (رَحِمَهُ اللَّهُ) commented: “In as-Suyūṭī’s words there is a strong indication of his choice of the eleven rak‘ahs and his rejection of the twenty mentioned in the Hadīth of Ibn ‘Abbās (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْمَا) due to its extreme weakness—so reflect upon that.”

## THE PROPHET’S (ﷺ) RESTRICTION TO ELEVEN RAK‘AHS CAN BE SEEN AS A PROOF THAT IT IS NOT PERMISSIBLE TO INCREASE BEYOND THEM

Imām al-Albānī (رحمته الله) said: “It has become clear to us from what has preceded that the number of rak‘ahs for the night prayer is indeed eleven rak‘ahs, established by the authentic text from the action of the Messenger of Allāh (ﷺ). When we reflect upon this, it becomes evident that he (ﷺ) remained upon this number throughout his life, not increasing beyond it—whether in Ramaḍān or outside of it.

When we consider the regular Sunnah prayers throughout the day and other prayers, such as the prayer for rain and the eclipse prayer, the Prophet (ﷺ) adhered to a specific number of rak‘ahs in all of them. This has been accepted by the scholars as clear proof that it is not permissible to add to them.

So, likewise with the Tarāwīḥ prayer, it is not permissible to increase beyond the legislated number, since it shares with the previous prayers the fact that the Prophet (ﷺ) adhered to a specific number therein.”

And he (رحمته الله) said: “The Tarāwīḥ prayer is not from the unrestricted voluntary prayers (*an-Nawāfil al-Muṭlaqah*) such that the worshipper has the choice to pray whatever number he wants. Rather, it is a confirmed Sunnah (*Sunnah Mu’akkadah*) that resembles the obligatory prayers in that it is legislated to be performed in congregation, as stated by the Shāfi‘is. From this angle, it is even more deserving that no increase be made beyond it, more so than the regular Sunnah prayers.”

He also said: “A person says, ‘We concede that the text is established that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) prayed the Tarāwīḥ as eleven rak‘ahs only—and the report stating he prayed twenty is weak (*ḍa‘īf*). However, we do not see any harm in increasing beyond that [to twenty or more rak‘ahs] since the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) did not prohibit it.’

I respond by saying: ‘The origin concerning acts of worship is that they are not established except by a specific Shari‘ah proof from the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). This principle is agreed upon by the scholars, and we do not know of any Muslim ‘Ālim who opposes it.

Were it not for this foundational principle, it would be permissible for any Muslim to increase the number of rak‘ahs in the Sunnah prayers and even the obligatory prayers whose number has been established by his action (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) and his consistent practice by claiming that he (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) did not prohibit increasing them. And this is clearly and manifestly false!’”

## THE TRUE REASON BEHIND THE SCHOLARS DIFFERING CONCERNING THE NUMBER OF RAK‘AHS IN THE TARĀWĪḤ PRAYER

Imām al-Albānī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) said: “If it is said: ‘We concede that all the doubts are invalid, and that the text is free from any opposing evidence [that contradicts the eleven rak‘ahs for Tarāwīḥ], then what is the reason that led the scholars to differ regarding the number of rak‘ahs in the Tarāwīḥ prayer?’ We say: That which appears to us regarding the differing over the Tarāwīḥ are two reasons, and there is no third:

**The First**—and it is the strongest and most common—is that some were not aware of this text, which specifies the number [as eleven]. So, whoever the proof does not reach is excused for not acting upon it, due to Allāh’s saying:

وَأُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنُ لِأُنذِرْكُمْ بِهِ وَمَنْ بَلَغَ

‘This Qur’ān has been revealed to me that I may thereby warn you and whomsoever it may reach.’ Indeed, the scholar is rewarded [even if he is wrong], due to the saying of the Prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ):

إذا حكم الحاكم فاجتهد فأصاب فله أجران وإذا حكم فاجتهد فأخطأ فله أجر واحد

‘If a judge passes a ruling and strives to arrive at the correct judgment, and he is correct, then he has two rewards. And if he passes a ruling and strives, but errs, then he has one reward.’<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Reported by al-Bukhārī and others.

**The second**—that they understood the narrations [of eleven rak‘ahs] in a manner which, in their view, did not necessitate restricting the Night Prayer to that number or refraining from increasing beyond it [to more rak‘ahs]. This is due to certain interpretations that may occur to some scholars, without considering whether they are correct or mistaken such as the statement of the Shāfi‘ies who said: ‘As for the saying of ‘Ā’ishah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا), **‘He would not increase in Ramaḍān nor outside of it beyond eleven rak‘ahs,’** then it is to be understood as referring to the Witr prayer,’ and other such interpretations which do not obligate others to adopt them, since they are weak in their view.

So, consider, for example, this interpretation that I have quoted from the Shāfi‘ies—it is clearly not strong when you recall that the narration of ‘Ā’ishah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا) was in response to the one who asked her: **‘How was the prayer of the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) in Ramaḍān?’** Thus, the prayer being asked about includes the entirety of the Night Prayer—**so how can it be correct to restrict it to the Witr alone, excluding the totality of the Night Prayer?**

Furthermore, this interpretation would imply that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) had two separate prayers at night: One being the Night Prayer—and I do not know how many rak‘ahs that would then consist of—and the other being the Witr prayer, whose maximum would be eleven rak‘ahs!

And this is not something stated by anyone who is knowledgeable of the Sunnah. Rather, the narrations are numerous and mutually supporting that his prayer (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) during the night did not exceed eleven rak‘ahs, as previously mentioned.

So, this is from the consequences of interpreting the texts in order to support one’s *Madhhab*.”

## OUR POSITION TOWARD THOSE WHO DIFFER WITH US ON THIS ISSUE AND OTHERS

Imām al-Albānī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) said: “Once you have comprehended that, then let no one imagine that when we choose to restrict ourselves to the Sunnah regarding the number of *rak‘ahs* in the *Tarāwīḥ* prayer, and that it is not permissible to increase beyond it, that we thereby declare astray or declare innovation (*tabdī‘*) upon those scholars, whether past or present, who hold a different view, as some people have assumed—and they have taken that as a reason to attack us, imagining that our position necessitates that when we say a particular matter is not permissible, or that it is an innovation, then everyone who holds it to be permissible or recommended is thereby astray and an innovator! No! Rather, this is a false conjecture and a grave act of ignorance!

The innovation for which its perpetrator is censured, and to which the stern Ḥadīths warning against innovation apply, is:

طَرِيقَةً فِي الدِّينِ مُخْتَرَعَةً تُضَاهِي الشَّرْعِيَّةَ يُقْصَدُ بِالسُّلُوكِ عَلَيْهَا الْمُبَالَغَةُ فِي التَّعَبُّدِ لِلَّهِ سُبْحَانَهُ

**‘A newly invented way in the religion that resembles the Sharī‘ah, intended by traversing it to exaggerate in worship of Allāh, the Exalted, Most Perfect.’**

So, whoever introduces an innovation intending thereby to exaggerate in worship, while knowing that it is not from the legislation, then it is against such a person that those Ḥadīths are directed.

As for the one who falls into it without knowledge, and without intending exaggeration in worship, then those stern Ḥadīths do not

apply to him at all, nor do they concern him in the least. Rather, they concern those innovators who stand in the path of spreading the Sunnah, and who deem every innovation good without knowledge, without guidance, and without a text; nor even by way of following the people of knowledge and the scholars, but instead out of following desires and seeking to please the common people.

Far removed are the well-known scholars who are known for their knowledge, truthfulness, righteousness and sincerity from being described as such. Especially the four great Imāms [of the *Madhhabs*], the *Mujtahids* (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمْ). We state decisively that they are free from ever considering an innovation to be good out of exaggeration in worship. How could that be so, when they themselves warned against it, as we shall mention their explicit statements concerning that in a separate treatise on innovation, *inshā’-Allāh*.

Yes, one of them may fall into that which is a mistake in the Shari‘ah sense, but he is not taken to account for that. Rather, he is forgiven and rewarded for it, as has been mentioned repeatedly.”

CALIPH ‘UMAR IBN AL-KHATTĀB’S (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ)  
COMMANDS UBAYY IBN KA‘B AND TAMĪM AD-DĀRĪ  
(رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُمَا) TO LEAD THE PEOPLE IN PRAYER WITH  
ELEVEN RAK‘AHS

Imām al-Albānī (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) said: “As for the command of ‘Umar (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) with eleven rak‘ahs, then this is what Imām Mālik (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) reported in *al-Muwatta‘a*’ (1/137, no. 248), from Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf, from as-Sā‘ib ibn Yazīd, who said:

أمر عمر بن الخطاب رضى الله عن هـ أبى بن كعب وتميما الدارى أن يقوموا للناس بإحدى  
عشر ركعة

**‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) ordered Ubayy ibn Ka‘b and Tamīm ad-Dārī to lead the people with eleven rak‘ahs.’**

He continued: “The reciter would recite hundreds of verses, such that we would lean upon staffs due to the length of the standing. And we would not depart except at the break of dawn.’ Its chain of narration is very authentic.”

**A WEAK NARRATION:**

Al-Albānī said: “So if it is said: al-Firyābī in *aṣ-Ṣiyām* (1/76) and al-Bayhaqī in *as-Sunan* (2/496) reported, through the narration of Yazīd Ibn Khuṣayfah from as-Sā‘ib ibn Yazīd, who said: **‘They would pray, in the time of ‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) in the month of Ramaḍān, twenty rak‘ahs.’**

I say: This chain, with the wording ‘twenty rak‘ahs,’ is what is relied upon by those who went toward the permissibility of twenty rak‘ahs in the Tarāwīḥ prayer, and its chain outwardly appears authentic,

which is why some scholars authenticated it. However, it has a defect, rather, defects, which prevent one from asserting its authenticity, and instead render it weak and objectionable. The clarification of this is as follows...” Then Shaikh al-Albānī states three strong proofs showing the weakness of this narration.

Then Shaikh al-Albānī (رحمته الله) stated: “And a narration of similar weakness is what Ibn ‘Abdil-Barr mentioned, saying: al-Ḥārith ibn ‘Abdir-Raḥmān Ibn Abī Dhabāb reported from as-Sā’ib ibn Yazīd, who said: ‘The night prayer (Qiyām) in the time of ‘Umar was twenty-three rak‘ahs.’

I say: This chain of narration is weak.” Then he proves its weakness from the sciences of Ḥadīth.

## HOW TO DEAL WITH WEAK ḤADĪTHS

An-Nawawī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) said in *al-Majmū‘* (1/63): “The scholars who are precise and verifiers among the people of Ḥadīth and others have stated: if a Ḥadīth is weak, one does not say about it: ‘*The Messenger of Allāh* (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said,’ or ‘*he did*,’ or ‘*he commanded*,’ or ‘*he forbade*,’ or ‘*he judged*,’ or anything similar in the form of definite assertion.

Likewise, one does not say about the weak narrations: ‘*Abu Hurayrah narrated*,’ or ‘*he said*,’ or ‘*he mentioned*,’ or ‘*he informed*,’ or ‘*he transmitted*,’ or ‘*he issued a fatwā*,’ or anything similar to that.

And the same applies to the Tābi‘īn and those after them: if the report is weak, one does not ascribe any of these definite ascriptions to it.

Rather, in all of this, one says: ‘*It was narrated from him*,’ or ‘*transmitted from him*,’ or ‘*reported from him*,’ or ‘*we have been informed of it from him*,’ or ‘*it is said*,’ or ‘*it is mentioned*,’ or ‘*it is reported*,’ or ‘*it is attributed to him*,’ and so on in forms of qualification (*tamrīd*) not in forms of definite assertion (*jazm*).

The scholars said: The forms of definite assertion are reserved for the authentic (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or sound (*ḥasan*) Ḥadīths, while the forms of qualification are for everything else.”

Therefore, it should not be said that the Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) prayed twenty rak‘ahs, or that ‘Umar (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) commanded with twenty rak‘ahs and so on, after knowing that all those narrations are weak.

I, Abu Khadeejah, have not truly done justice to this tremendous work of Imām al-Albānī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) and could have taken many more narrations, explanations and details from it. I took the benefits from

only the first 67 pages or so, while the book is about 125 pages. The reason for that is that I wanted most Muslims to read and understand the main points in this topic without going into the details of the narrators and their praise and disparagement in establishing the authenticity and weakness of narrations. Having said that, I recommend anyone who wants to explore this subject further to read the book *Kitāb Ṣalāt at-Tarāwīḥ* of Imām Muhammad Nāṣir ad-Dīn al-Albānī (رحمة الله).

End.

All praise is due to Allāh, Lord of the worlds. May the peace, blessings and salutations of Allāh be upon our noble Messenger, Muhammad, and upon his family, his Companions and his true followers.