



THE BIOGRAPHY OF AL-HAAFIZ IBN KATHEER

He is: the Imaam, the Haafiz, the Shaikh of the Muhadditheen, the Historian, the Explainer of the Qur·aan, `Imaaduddeen Abul-Fidaa· Ismaa`eel ibn `Umar ibn Katheer ibn Daw· ibn Katheer ibn Zar`, al-Qurashee; al-Busrawee, then ad-Dimashqee, the jurist, ash-Shaafi`ee.¹

He was born in Mijdal, a village to the east of Busraa-which is a town in the province of Damascus, in the year 701 H, where his father was a Khateeb.

After the death of his father he moved, along with his brother Kamaaluddeen `Abdul-Wahhaab, to Damascus, in the year 707 H.

He memorized the whole of the Qur·aan at the age of ten, and he read the different recitations, and he excelled in tafseer.

He married Zaynab the daughter of al-Haafiz Abul-Hajjaaj al-Mizzee, and he closely accompanied him and learned from him. He gave great attention to the science of hadeeth, and qualified under him in it. He also accompanied Shaikhul-Islam Taqiyyuddeen Ibn Taimiyyah and was a special student of his and defended him, and he followed him upon many of his opinions. He used to deliver verdicts in accordance with his view concerning the question of the three simultaneous divorces, that they count as a single divorce, and he was put to trial on account of this and suffered harm.

He gave attention to memorising the texts; and to awareness of the chains of narration, the hidden defects in narrations, the narrators, and to history, to the extent that he excelled in all of that whilst he was still a youth. He delivered verdicts, taught and debated. He excelled in Fiqh, Tafseer, and Arabic Grammar. He closely studied the narrators and the hidden defects in narrations.

He became the Shaikh of the Saalihiyyah School, after the death of adh-Dhahabee; and the Shaikh of Daarul-Hadeeth al-Ashrafiyyah for a short while after the death of as-Subkee. Then this was taken from him after it was seized by Kamaaluddeen al-Ma`arree.

HIS SCHOLARLY STATUS:

Ibn Katheer had prominent status as is clear from the institutions of knowledge he headed; and the mosques in which he taught; and the works of Tafseer, History, and Hadeeth that he authored.

¹ Refer for his biography to:

(1) 'Tadhkiratul-Huffaaz' (4/1508); (2) 'al-Mu`jamul-Mukhtass' (no. 86); (3) 'Dhayl Tabaqaatil-Huffaaz' of al-Husaynee (p. 57); (4) 'Dhayl Tabaqaatil Huffaaz' of as-Suyootee (p. 361); (5) 'Tabaqaatush-Shaafi`iyyah' of al-Qaadee Shuhbah (no. 638); (6) 'ad-Durarul-Kaaminah' of al-Haafiz Ibn Hajr (1/399); (7) 'Inbaa.ul-Ghumr' of al-Haafiz Ibn Hajr (1/45); (8) 'Shadharaatudh-Dhahab' of Ibnul-`Imaad (6/231); (9) 'an-Nujoomuz-Zaahirah' of Ibnu Taghreebardee (11/123-124); (10) 'al-Badrut-Taali' of ash-Shawkaanee (1/153); (11) 'Hadiyyatul-`Aarifeen' (1/215); (12) 'ar-Raddul-Waafir' (no. 48); (13) 'al-A`laam' of az-Ziriqlee (1/317); (14) 'Mu`jamul-Mu'allifeen' (2/283).



As for the schools that he took charge of, then they were: The Ashrafiyyah School of Hadeeth, the school of as-Saalihiyyah, the school of an-Najeebiyyah, the school of at-Tankaziyyah, and the school of an-Nooriyyah al-Kubraa.

These were schools sought after by the students of knowledge from the east and the west, and their Shaikhs and teachers had high status. None were allowed to teach in them except those who were firmly grounded in knowledge and whose position amongst the scholars was established. Therefore, the scholars respected him and the hearts of the students of knowledge were attentive to him.

As for the mosques in which he delivered his lessons, then the most famous of them were ‘al-Jaami` al-Amawee’, the mosque of Ibn Hishaam, the Jaami` of Tankaz, the Jaami` of al-Fooqaanee-and he used to deliver the *Khutbah* in it also.

This being in addition to his writings which have filled the earth with knowledge, and from which people have benefitted in his lifetime and after his death.

THE SCHOLARS PRAISE OF HIM:

adh-Dhahabee said: “The jurist, the mufti, the muhaddith... he gave special attention to the narrators, to the texts, and to acquiring knowledge of Fiqh. He elucidated, wrote works, debated, authored, explained (the Qur·aan), and attained precedence...”²

He also said: “The imaam, the jurist, the muhaddith, the singular and outstanding scholar... He was a jurist knowledgeable in various fields, a precise muhaddith, a critical and verifying explainer (of the Qur·aan). He produced beneficial works. He was well aware of Fiqh, and had good understanding of Arabic and the Fundamentals (of Fiqh). He memorized a good portion of the texts, of tafseer, and the narrators. He heard (narrations) from me, and had good memorisation.”³

Ibn Hajjee said: “I never came to him except that I benefitted from him, and I was his constant companion for six years.”

Ibn Habeeb said, as quoted from him by Imaam Ibn Hajar:⁴ “He was an imaam, frequent upon *tasbeeh*⁵ and *tahleel*⁶, and he was at the head of the scholars of explanation (of the Qur·aan). He heard, gathered, and authored. People strove to listen to his sayings. He spoke in a manner

² ‘Tadhkiratul-Huffaaz’ (4/1508)

³ ‘al-Mu`jamul-Mukhtass’ (no. 86)

⁴ ‘Inbaa.ul-Ghumr’ (1/39)

⁵ Saying ‘Subhaanallaah’: (I declare Allaah free of all imperfections). (transl.)

⁶ Saying ‘Laa ilaaha illaallaah’ (None has the right to be worshipped except Allaah). (transl.)



that delighted, he narrated, and he brought benefit. The pages of his verdicts were sent to the lands, and he became famous for precision and verification. He attained leadership in knowledge in History, Hadeeth, and Tafseer.”

Abul-Mahaasin ad-Dimashqee said: “He delivered verdicts and taught. He debated and excelled in Fiqh, Tafseer, and Grammar. He carefully studied the narrators and the hidden defects of narrations.”⁷

al-Haafiz Ibn Hajr said: “He could bring a great deal to mind, and he joked in a fine manner. His works spread throughout the lands within his life-time, and the people derived benefit through him after his death.”⁸

al-`Aynee said, as quoted from him by Ibn Taghreebardee: “He was the example amongst the scholars and the great memorizers, and the reference point for the people of meanings and wordings. He heard, gathered, compiled, taught, narrated, and wrote works. He had an abundance of knowledge and awareness of Hadeeth, Tafseer, and History. He became famous for precision and verification. He attained the limit in knowledge of History, Hadeeth, and Tafseer; and he wrote many beneficial works.”⁹

HIS `AQEEDAH (CREED AND BELIEF):

He -rahimahullaahu ta`alaa- was upon the `Aqeedah of the Salafus-Saalih (the Pious Predecessors). This is proven by his tremendous Tafseer, which is the most excellent tafseer that has made the `Aqeedah of the Salaf manifest. An example of that is his saying, in his explanation of His Saying -He the Most High:

﴿ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ﴾

[Sooratul-A`raaf (7): 54]

[[Meaning: Then He ascended over the Throne]]:

“Regarding this we follow the position of the Salafus-Saalih: Maalik, al-Awzaa`ee, ath-Thawree, al-Layth ibn Sa`d, ash-Shaafi`ee, Ahmad, Ishaq ibn Raahawaih, and others from the imaams of the Muslims, in the earlier and the later times: (and it is to let them pass)¹⁰ without saying how (*takyeeef*), without declaring resemblance to the creation (*tashbeeh*), and without negating the attributes (*ta`teel*). Furthermore, what is immediately apparent to the minds of

⁷ ‘Dhayl Tadhkiratil-Huffaaz (no. 58)

⁸ ‘Inbaa-ul-Ghumr’ (1/39); ‘ad-Durarul-Kaaminah’ (1/400)

⁹ ‘an-Nujoomuz-Zaahirah’ (11/123)

¹⁰ An addition from the text of Tafseer Ibn Katheer. (transl.)



those who hold that the Creator resembles the creation is something negated for Allaah-the Most High, since nothing from the creation resembles Allaah:

﴿لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ﴾

[Sooratush-Shooraa (42): 11]

[[Meaning: There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing]].”

HIS MOST PROMINENT TEACHERS:

Ibn Katheer studied under many famous major Shaikhs, and the most important of them are:

1) Shaikhul-Islaam Taqiyyuddeen Ahmad ibn `Abdil-`Azeem ibn `Abdil-Haleem ibn `Abdis-Salaam ibn Taimiyyah, who died in 728 H.

al-`Iraaqee said within his biography of Ibn Katheer: “He was an especially close student of Shaikh Taqiyyuddeen Ibn Taimiyyah, and he defended him, and he followed him upon many of his views.”

2) The Imaam, al-Haafiz, the Muhaddith of Shaam, Jamaaluddeen, Abul-Hajjaaj Yoosuf ibn az-Zakee `Abdir-Rahmaan al-Mizzee, who died in 742 H. Ibn Katheer closely accompanied him, and married his daughter.

3) The Imaam, al-Haafiz, the Muhaddith, the Historian of Islaam, Shamsuddeen, Aboo `Abdillaah Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn `Uthmaan adh-Dhahabee, at-Turkumaanee in his origin, ad-Dimashqee. The author of beneficial works such as ‘Siyar A`laamin-Nubalaa’’, ‘Taareekhul-Islaam’, and ‘Meezaanul-I`tidaal’. He died in 748 H.

4) Abul-`Abbaas Ahmad ibn Abee Taalib ibn Ni`mah ibn Hasan ibn `Alee an-Najjaar, who was well-known as ‘Ibnush-Shahnah’. He lived for a hundred years, and died in 730 H.

HIS MOST PROMINENT STUDENTS:

1) Shihaabuddeen Abul-`Abbaas Ahmad ibn Hajjee ibn Moosaa ibn Ahmad, as-Sa`dee, al-Husbaanee, ad-Dimashqee, al-Haafiz. The historian of Islaam. He produced many works, from them his explanation of ‘al-Muharrar’ of Ibn `Abdil-Haadee. He died in 816 H.

2) Shihaabuddeen Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Hareeree, ad-Dimashqee, who was well known as as-Sulaawee. He became the Qaadee of Ba`labek, and then the Qaadee of al-Madeenah, and then he moved around as a Qaadee for other places. He died in 765 H.

3) Abul-Mahaasin al-Husaynee, Muhammad ibn `Alee ibn al-Hasan ibn Hamzah ibn Hamd ad-Dimashqee, who died in 765 H.

HIS MOST FAMOUS WORKS:



Ibn Katheer filled the Islamic library with beneficial works. Some of them have been printed, and others remain in manuscript form. The most important of his printed works are:

- (i) ‘Tafseerul-Qur·aanil-`Azeem’,
 - (ii) ‘al-Bidaayah wan-Nihaayah’,
 - (iii) ‘Ikhtisaar `Uloomil-Hadeeth’,
 - (iv) ‘Fadaa·ilul-Qur·aan’,
 - (v) ‘Tuhfatut-Taalib bimukhtasar Ibnil-Haajib’,
 - (vi) ‘Ahaadeethut-Tawheed war-radd `alaa Ahlish-Shirk’,
 - (vii) ‘al-Fuṣool fee Seeratih-Rasool ﷺ’,
 - (viii) ‘Seerah `Umar ibn `Abdil-`Azeez’;
- and he has many works that remain in manuscript form.

HIS DEATH:

Ibn Katheer -rahimahullaah- died on the day of Thursday, the 26th of Sha`baan, in the year 774 H, in Damascus, and he was buried therein.

[Translated by Aboo Talhah Daawood ibn Ronald Burbank]