

27224 - Overnight stay of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and Abu Bakr in the cave of Thawr

the question

I have been trying to find the hadeeth where it says that when the Prophet was migrating to Madeenah and he hid in the cave, an angel or angels covered with their wings the opening of the cave from the view of the searching party of the kuffaar.

The common version that is well known amongst Muslims is that a spider spun a web around the opening thus hiding the Prophet, but I found out that this narration is weak or fabricated, and that the report of angels covering the opening is an authentic version, can you tell me who the narrator was and in which book of hadeeth or seerah I can find this (with chains) ?.

Detailed answer

The overnight stay of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and Abu Bakr in the cave of Thawr is mentioned in the Book of Allaah and in the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). There follow some details:

1 - In the Book of Allaah:

The story of this overnight stay is mentioned in the Qur'aan. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“If you help him (Muhammad) not (it does not matter), for Allaah did indeed help him when the disbelievers drove him out, the second of the two; when they (Muhammad and Abu Bakr) were in the cave, he said to his companion (Abu Bakr): “Be not sad (or afraid), surely, Allaah is with us.” Then Allaah sent down His Sakeenah (calmness, tranquillity, peace) upon him, and strengthened him with forces (angels) which you saw not, and made the word of

those who disbelieved the lowermost, while the Word of Allaah that became the uppermost; and Allaah is All-Mighty, All-Wise”

[al-Tawbah 9:40]

This verse clearly states that the mushrikeen were conspiring to kill him, and that they [i.e., the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and Abu Bakr] stayed overnight in the cave.

2 - The Sunnah

With regard to the reports in the saheeh Sunnah which speak of the overnight stay in the cave:

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It was narrated that ‘Aa’ishah, the wife of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), said: “... then the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and Abu Bakr headed towards a cave on the mountain of Thawr, and they hid in it for three nights, during which ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Abi Bakr – who was a smart young lad – stayed with them at night then left just before dawn (at the end of the night) so that he would be among Quraysh in Makkah when morning came, as if he had spent the night among them. He used to listen out to see what they were planning, then he would bring news of that [to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and Abu Bakr] when darkness came...”

This was narrated by al-Bukhaari (3905) in a lengthy story to which he gave the title “The migration (hijrah) of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and his companions to Madeenah.”

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It was narrated that Abu Bakr (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: I said to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), when I was with him in the cave: “If one of

them looks down at his feet he will see us.” He said, “What do you think, O Abu Bakr, of two the third of whom is Allaah?” Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 3653.

The story of the spider’s web was narrated by Imam Ahmad (3241) from Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him), with regard to the verse (interpretation of the meaning): “And (remember) when the disbelievers plotted against you (O Muhammad) to imprison you” [al-Anfaal 8:30]. He said: Quraysh met together one night in Makkah. Some of them said: When morning comes, imprison him in chains – meaning the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). Some said, No, kill him; and others said, No, drive him out. Allaah informed His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) of that, so ‘Ali slept in the bed of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) that night, and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) went out and hid in the cave. The mushrikoon spent the night lying in wait for ‘Ali, thinking that he was the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). When morning came, they pounced on him, and when they saw ‘Ali, Allaah thwarted their plot. They said, Where is that friend of yours? He said, I do not know. So they set out after him and when they reached the mountain, they were confounded. They climbed up the mountain and passed by the cave, and saw a spider’s web over its entrance. They said, If anyone had entered here, the spider would not have spun a web over the entrance. And he stayed there for three nights.

The scholars differed concerning this hadeeth. Its isnaad was classed as hasan by al-Haafiz ibn Hajar in Fath al-Baari and by Ibn Katheer in al-Bidaayah wa’l-Nihaayah (3/222). It was classed as da’eef by al-Albaani in al-Silsilah al-Da’eefah. Ahmad Shaakir said in Tahqeeq al-Musnad (3251): there is some dispute concerning its isnaad. The commentators on al-Musnad said (3251): its isnaad is da’eef. And Allaah knows best.

With regard to the story of the two doves or pigeons, this was mentioned by Ibn Katheer in al-Bidaayah wa’l-Nihaayah (3/223). He said, it was narrated by Ibn ‘Asaakir, then he said: This hadeeth is ghareeb jiddan with this isnaad. It was similarly classed as da’eef by the commentators on al-Musnad in the same place referred to above.

Al-Albaani said in al-Silsilah al-Da'eefah (3/339): Note that there is no saheeh hadeeth concerning the spider and doves at the cave, despite the fact that this is widely mentioned in some books and lectures which are given on the anniversary of the migration of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) to Madeenah. So this should be borne in mind.

With regard to the angels concealing the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and Abu Bakr, this was narrated by al-Tabaraani in al-Kabeer (24/106-108) from the hadeeth of Asma' bint Abi Bakr. It is a lengthy hadeeth in which it says: "Then Abu Bakr said of a man whom he could see opposite the cave, 'O Messenger of Allaah, he is looking at us.' He said, 'No, the angels are concealing us with their wings.'..."

The isnaad of this hadeeth includes Ya'qoob ibn Humayd ibn Kaasib al-Madani, concerning whom the scholars differed. See Tahdheeb al-Kamaal by al-Mazzi, 32/318-323.

He was regarded as da'eef (weak) by Ibn Ma'een, Abu Haatim, al-Nasaa'i and Abu Zar'ah al-Raazi.

Abu Dawood al-Sijistaani said: we have seen in his Musnad ahaadeeth which we regard as munkar. We asked him for their sources and he refused to tell us, then he narrated them after that. We found ahaadeeth in some books that had been recently altered, and these ahaadeeth are mursal but he added isnaads to them and added something to the texts.

Ibn 'Adiyy said: There is nothing wrong with him and his reports. He narrated many ahaadeeth and many ghareeb reports.

Al-Dhahabi said: He was one of the scholars of hadeeth but he reports munkar and ghareeb reports.

Ibn Hibbaan classed him as thiqah (trustworthy). Al-Haafiz ibn Hajar said, he is sadooq (truthful) but he is confused sometimes.

Al-Albaani (may Allaah have mercy on him) classed his hadeeth as hasan but he did not class this hadeeth as hasan.

He said in al-Silsilah al-Da'eefah (3/263):

What is established concerning this Ya'qoob is that his hadeeth is hasan... If there is no other fault in the isnaad then it is hasan... Then he said: Shaykh al-Tabaraani Ahmad ibn 'Amr al-Khallaal al-Makki did not find anything about his background. He narrated approximately 16 hadeeth from him in al-Mu'jam al-Awsat, which indicates that he was one of his well-known shaykhs. If the hadeeth is known or there are corroborating reports, then the hadeeth is hasan.

And Allaah knows best.