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## VISITING THE GRAVES OF THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH (PEACE AND BLESSINGS BE UPON HIM)

**Abstract.** In this article, the theological and juridical debates that have emerged in recent centuries regarding the visitation of the blessed grave of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) are examined. Particular attention is given to the claims of certain groups who identify themselves as “Salafis,” and who, based on a literalist and incorrect interpretation of the well-known “three mosques” hadith, classify traveling with the intention of visiting the Prophet’s grave as *haram*, *bid’ah*, or even a means leading to *shirk*. The study critically analyzes these assertions through the practice of the Companions, the established positions of the four Sunni legal schools, the sound exegetical interpretations of the relevant hadiths, and historical evidence. The findings demonstrate that, within authoritative Islamic sources, traveling for the purpose of visiting the Prophet’s grave has consistently been regarded as one of the most meritorious acts of devotion and a sacred means of attaining closeness to God.

**Keywords:** Visitation of the Prophet’s grave; the “three mosques” hadith; legal ruling on travel; claims of innovation (*bid’ah*); *Ahl al-Sunnah* position; practice of the Companions; juridical analysis; critique of Salafism.

### INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental principles of Islamic faith is love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and showing the utmost respect toward him. As one of the practical expressions of this reverence, the overwhelming majority of the Muslim ummah throughout the centuries has regarded visiting his blessed grave as one of the greatest acts of devotion (a means of attaining closeness to God). However, in recent centuries—and especially today sharp debates have arisen regarding the permissibility

of traveling specifically for this purpose, mainly among certain groups who identify themselves as “Salafis.” These groups interpret the hadith stating that “no journey should be undertaken except to three mosques” in an overly literal and excessively generalized manner, and consequently label traveling with the intention of visiting the Prophet’s grave as bid‘ah, haram, or even “a means leading to shirk.” This claim stands in clear contradiction to the established practice of the noble Companions and the consensus-based position formed over centuries by the jurists of the four Sunni legal schools.

This study is devoted to a scholarly and critical examination of the roots of this theological juridical disagreement, the evidences presented by both sides, and the broader social and spiritual implications of the debate.

**The Salafi claim:** One of the most dangerous sources of discord among Muslims today is undoubtedly the artificially provoked controversy surrounding travel undertaken to visit the blessed grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). The main source of this discord lies in the reinterpretation of a well-known hadith by proponents of the movement that labels itself “Salafi,” a reinterpretation that departs completely from its intended meaning.

Their claim is based on the famous hadith narrated by Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ: لَا تُشَدُّ الرِّحَالُ إِلَّا إِلَى ثَلَاثَةِ مَسَاجِدٍ: الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ، وَمَسْجِدِي هَذَا، وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى

It is narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him): “...Mounts should not be saddled for a journey except to three mosques: al-Masjid al-Haram, this mosque of mine, and al-Masjid al-Aqsa” (reported by Imam al-Bukhari).

At first glance, this hadith clearly concerns mosques and the unique merit associated with them. However, representatives of the aforementioned movement interpret it in an entirely different manner to support their own position. They generalize the prohibition stated in the hadith not only to other mosques, but also to all blessed places including the graves of prophets and saints. According to their interpretation, the hadith implies the following ruling:

“This hadith indicates that traveling to blessed sites, such as the graves of prophets and righteous individuals, is prohibited.”

This interpretation has been further intensified by their modern proponents, who appended to the ruling of “prohibition” additional accusations such as “innovation (bid‘ah)” and “a means leading to shirk.” In one of the fatwas issued by them on this subject, it is stated:

“Traveling with the intention of visiting graves is prohibited, an innovation, and a means leading to shirk. One must not travel for the purpose of visiting graves. It is not permissible to travel to any place for worship except the three mosques...”

Thus, according to the claim of these pseudo-Salafis, embarking on a journey with the intention of visiting the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is not only impermissible but also an innovation and a sinful act that leads to shirk. They thereby accuse the entire Muslim ummah of having committed a grave sin for more than fourteen centuries by engaging in this practice. Their argument is built upon a literal reading and incorrect interpretation of the hadith “Mounts should not be saddled except to three mosques.” They regard this hadith as definitive proof that traveling to visit the Prophet’s grave is prohibited.

#### **The Response of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah:**

The primary evidence cited by this group is the hadith narrated by Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim:

لَا شَدُّ الرِّحَالُ إِلَّا إِلَىٰ ثَلَاثَةِ مَسَاجِدٍ: الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ، وَمَسْجِدِي هَذَا، وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى

Its meaning is: “No journey should be undertaken to any place (seeking worship or special merit) except to three mosques: al-Masjid al-Haram, this mosque of mine, and al-Masjid al-Aqsa.”

The so-called “Salafis” interpret the prohibition mentioned in this hadith in an overly general and literal manner, extending it not only to other mosques but also to journeys undertaken for the purpose of visiting the graves of saints and even the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). However, the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama‘ah consider this interpretation erroneous and clarify the true intent of the hadith as follows:

First, none of the pious predecessors (al-salaf al-salih) ever interpreted the hadith in the manner proposed by these groups. On the contrary, the entire Muslim ummah including the jurists of the four Sunni schools has regarded visiting the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) as a recommended (mustahabb) act. This

ruling applies equally to the residents of Madinah who visit without traveling, and to those journeying from distant lands; the legal status does not change.

Second, the actual meaning of the hadith “No journey is undertaken except to three mosques” is entirely different from what they claim. As understood by both early and later scholars, the hadith means: “There is no additional merit in traveling to any mosque for the purpose of performing prayer, except for these three mosques.” Why? Because prayers performed in these three mosques carry a multiplied reward: up to one hundred thousand in al-Masjid al-Haram, up to one thousand in the Prophet’s Mosque, and up to five hundred in al-Masjid al-Aqsa. Therefore, the hadith does not address traveling to visit graves or sacred sites; rather, it pertains specifically to journeys undertaken seeking the special virtue of praying in mosques.

Third, another hadith supports this correct understanding. Explaining a hadith through another hadith is the most sound scholarly methodology. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal, in his Musnad, reports the following narration:

عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدٍ الْخُدْرِيِّ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ لَا يَبْغِي لِلْمَطْهِرِ أَنْ تُشَدَّ رِحَالُهُ إِلَى مَسْجِدٍ يُبَغِّي فِيهِ الصَّلَاةُ غَيْرُ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ  
وَالْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى وَمَسْجِدِي هَذَا.

It is narrated from Abu Sa‘id al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him):

“No mounts should be saddled for travel—with the intention of performing prayer therein—except to al-Masjid al-Haram, al-Masjid al-Aqsa, and this mosque of mine” (reported by Imam Ahmad). The hadith scholar Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-‘Asqalani (d. 852/1449) classified this narration as *ḥasan* in his work *Fath al-Bari* (Asqalani, 1970:65).

It is clear from this narration that the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) explicitly restricted the prohibition to travel undertaken “with the intention of performing prayer”. This entirely refutes the claim made by the “Salafis.” As Hafiz al-‘Iraqi (d. 806/1403) states in his *Alfiyyah*: “The best explanation of a hadith is another hadith” (Iraqi, 2002:61). Thus, interpreting a hadith through another authentic hadith is far more accurate and truthful than distorting its meaning through an isolated literal reading. In this way, the very evidence upon which the pseudo-Salafis rely actually works against them and exposes the lack of any sound scholarly basis for their argument. Their misinterpretation of the hadith and their erroneous conclusion—that traveling to visit the Prophet’s grave is “ḥaram” or “bid‘ah” has been decisively rejected by the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah.

When this controversy first appeared, prominent scholars of the time strongly refuted it. Among them was Imam Taqi al-Din al-Subki (d. 683/1354), who authored a dedicated treatise entitled *Shifa' al-Siqam fi Ziyarat Khayr al-Anam* ("A Healing for the Sick Regarding the Visitation of the Best of Mankind"), in which he invalidated the claim. Later scholars likewise affirmed the baselessness of this view. Notably, Hafiz Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d. 852/1449) openly criticized this claim, calling it "one of the most unacceptable assertions" (Asqalani, 1970:65).

Interestingly, the renowned hadith scholar and historian Imam al-Dhahabi (d. 748/1348) also interpreted the hadith "Mounts should not be saddled except to three mosques" in accordance with the understanding of Ahl al-Sunnah, stating:

"No journey is to be undertaken to any mosque in the hope of attaining extra reward except to these three mosques, because they possess a unique virtue" (Dhahabi, 1985:368).

Imam al-Dhahabi emphasized that the prohibition pertains specifically to travel to mosques seeking the reward of prayer, and thus it does not apply to traveling to visit the Prophet's grave. He then presented a compelling logical argument defending the permissibility of such travel:

"Visiting his grave is among the greatest acts of devotion that draw a person closer to Allah. Traveling to his noble grave necessitates traveling to his mosque, and this—by consensus—is permissible, for one cannot reach the Prophet's grave except by entering the mosque."

In other words, since traveling to the Prophet's Mosque is explicitly permitted by the hadith, and the Prophet's blessed grave is located within that very mosque as an inseparable part of it, permitting the journey while forbidding the visitation constitutes a clear contradiction.

The permissibility of traveling to visit his blessed grave is further supported by the following hadith:

عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ لَيَهْبِطَنَّ اللَّهُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ حَكْمًا عَدْلًا، وَإِمَامًا مُفْسِطًا، فَلَيُسْلِكَنَّ فَجَّ الرَّوْحَاءِ حَاجًا أَوْ مُعْتَمِرًا، وَلَيَقْنَعَنَّ قَبْرِي فَلَيُسْلِمَنَّ عَلَيَّ، وَلَأَرْدَنَّ عَلَيْهِ.

It is narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) said: "Allah will surely send down Jesus, the son of Mary, as a just ruler and an equitable leader. He will certainly travel along the

route of Fajj al-Rawḥa' (the Valley of Rawḥa') as a pilgrim performing ḥajj or 'umrah, and he will stand at my grave and greet me, and I will surely return his greeting."

This narration was declared *sahih* by Ḥafiz Abu 'Abd Allah al-Ḥakim in his *al-Mustadrak*, and al-Dhahabi endorsed his evaluation (Naysaburi, 1990:595).

This authentic hadith may be regarded as a prophetic foretelling that refutes the attempts of the "Salafis" to diminish the legitimacy and virtue of visiting the Prophet's grave by labeling it as a "means leading to shirk" or an "innovation." What is described here is not the personal action of a Companion, but rather a divinely sanctioned future event affirmed by the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) himself. If visiting the Prophet's grave and offering him salutations were truly an innovation or an act leading to shirk, it would never have been foretold that another mighty Messenger Jesus, son of Mary would perform this deed.

Furthermore, the Prophet's words, "and I will surely return his greeting" (وَلَأَرْدَنَ عَلَيْهِ), emphatically affirm that he responds to salutations given at his grave. This completely contradicts the Salafi claim that the grave is an inert place where no spiritual interaction occurs. On the contrary, it establishes that the visitation holds a lofty rank with Allah and represents a living, sacred exchange between two Prophets.

There is also a narration that the Prophet's mu'adhdhin, the Companion Bilal ibn Abi Rabah (d. 20/641), traveled from Syria to Madinah specifically to visit the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him). Citing this report, Ḥafiz al-Subki stated in *Shifa' al-Siqam*:

"This narration has been transmitted with a good chain and serves as definitive evidence for this issue" (Subki, 1983, p. 52).

The report is also recorded by Ibn 'Asakir in his *Tarikh* (Ibn 'Asakir, 2003:136–137).

The narration concerning Bilal ibn Rabah's deliberate journey from Syria to Madinah for the sole purpose of visiting the Prophet's grave serves as strong historical and juridical evidence against the Salafi claim that such a journey is "ḥaram" or an "innovation." This is because the action of a Companion (fi 'lu saḥabi), especially when no other Companion objected to it (a form of tacit consensus), carries significant weight in Islamic legal methodology. The fact that major hadith masters like al-Subki and Ibn 'Asakir transmitted this report with a "ḥasan" chain further confirms that the earliest generation of Muslims did not interpret the "three mosques" hadith in the narrow and literalistic way proposed by Salafis. Instead, they regarded such a journey not as

forbidden, but as a profound expression of love, longing, and devotion to the Messenger of Allah.

Scholars have also cited the following hadith as additional evidence for the permissibility of traveling to visit the Prophet's grave:

رَوَاهُ ابْنُ عُمَرَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ مَنْ زَارَ قَبْرِي وَجَبَتْ لَهُ شَفَاعَةٌ.

It is narrated from Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him): "The Messenger of Allah said: 'Whoever visits my grave, my intercession becomes obligatory for him'" (reported by Imam al-Daraqutni) (al-Daraqutni, 1966:278).

Imam al-Nawawi (d. 676/1277) states in his work *al-Adhkar*:

"Concerning the visitation of the grave of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him) and the invocations related to it: Know that every pilgrim performing *hajj* should make his way toward the visitation of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him), whether this lies directly on his path or not. For visiting him is among the greatest acts of devotion, the most beneficial efforts, and the most meritorious deeds sought by the servants of Allah" (al-Nawawi, 1994:216).

Imam al-Nawawi's statement is a direct and powerful scholarly refutation of the modern Salafi claim that traveling specifically for the purpose of visiting graves—based on their misreading of the "three mosques" hadith—is "haram" or an "innovation." His phrase, "whether it lies on his route or not," clearly implies that the pilgrim must intentionally undertake a special journey, even altering his path and enduring hardship, solely to visit the Prophet's grave. Thus, an act that Salafis label as "bid'ah" is described by one of the greatest authorities of Ahl al-Sunnah not merely as permissible, but as "one of the greatest acts of devotion" and "one of the most noble deeds." This demonstrates that the Salafi interpretation stands in complete contradiction to the mainstream Sunni scholarly tradition.

Ibn Qudamah al-Hanbali (d. 620/1222), in the "Hajj" chapter of his work *al-Mughni*, states:

"Section: Visiting the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is recommended (mustahabb), for al-Daraqutni narrated with his chain from Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah said: 'Whoever visits my grave, my intercession becomes obligatory for him'" (al-Mughni, 1986:588).

Imam al-Buhuti al-Hanbali (d. 1050/1641) writes in *Kashshaf al-Qina'*: “Section: When one completes *hajj*, it is recommended—based on the *hadith* narrated by al-Daraqutni—to visit the graves of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and his two Companions, Abu Bakr and ‘Umar (may Allah be pleased with them both). Note: Ibn Nasrullah al-Hanbali (d. 844/1140) stated: The fact that visiting his grave is recommended implies that traveling for this purpose is also recommended, because the pilgrim’s visitation after *hajj* cannot occur without travel. This is a clear indication that travel for visitation is itself recommended” (al-Buhuti, 1982:514-515).

‘Ali ibn Sulayman al-Mardawi al-Hanbali (d. 885/1480), in his *al-Insaf*, states regarding the ruling “When a person completes *hajj*, it is recommended for him to visit the grave of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) and the graves of his two Companions”: “This is the definitive position held unanimously by both the earlier and later scholars of the Hanbali school” (al-Mardawi, 1997:53).

Izz al-Din Ibn Jama‘ah (d. 767/1365) writes:

“When pilgrims and performers of ‘umrah return from Makka which Allah has honored and exalted it is a strongly recommended act for them to turn toward the city of our master, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings be upon him), in order to attain the honor of visiting him. For such visitation is among the greatest acts of devotion and the most blessed forms of spiritual striving” (Ibn Jama‘ah, 1994).

These narrations serve as a strong juridical and methodological rebuttal to the Salafi stance that traveling to visit graves is “*haram*” or “*bid‘ah*.” The analysis demonstrates that from foundational scholars like Ibn Qudamah (d. 620/1222) to later authorities such as Ibn Nasrullah (d. 844/1140), al-Mardawi (d. 885/1480), and al-Buhuti (d. 1050/1641), all unanimously regarded the visitation of the Prophet’s grave not merely as *mustahabb*, but—as Izz al-Din Ibn Jama‘ah emphasized – “one of the greatest acts of devotion.”

Most importantly, al-Buhuti’s statement that “the recommendation of visiting necessarily implies the recommendation of traveling for that purpose” directly contradicts the Salafi distinction that “travel is forbidden except to three mosques.” Al-Mardawi’s assertion that this is “the definitive view of all earlier and later Hanbali scholars” proves that the Salafi claim is not only contrary to Sunni consensus, but even contradicts the authoritative position of the very madhhab they claim to follow.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that the view prohibiting travel to visit the Prophet's grave is a relatively late and anomalous opinion in Islamic history, founded primarily on a misreading and overly literal interpretation of the "three mosques" hadith. According to the consensus of Sunni scholars, the restriction mentioned in this hadith pertains solely to traveling to other mosques with the intention of seeking the unique merit of prayer performed therein; it does not refer to general travel or to the visitation of graves. This understanding is further confirmed by a ḥasan narration recorded in Imam Ahmad's *Musnad*, which explicitly defines the purpose of the prohibited travel as being "with the intention of performing prayer."

In contrast, traveling specifically to visit the Prophet's grave was a practice upheld by the Companions themselves and has been recognized throughout Islamic history—including by all four Sunni legal schools—as one of the greatest acts of devotion. Scholars such as Ibn Qudamah, al-Mardawi, and al-Buhuti emphasized that this ruling represents "the definitive position of all earlier and later authorities of the madhhab."

Therefore, to label this blessed journey as "innovation" or "a means leading to shirk," in contradiction to the consensus of the ummah and the four schools of law, is not only a distortion of historical and scholarly reality but also a form of disrespect toward the Messenger of Allah. Such extreme claims sow division, hostility, and mutual condemnation among Muslims, and should thus be recognized as a highly dangerous social fitnah that threatens the unity of the community.

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