

In the name of Allāh, Most Merciful, the Bestower of Mercy

## *Al-Ibānah ‘an Usūl Ad-Diyānah*

### The Explanation of the Creed of Islam

*Imām* Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī (رحمة الله) died 324AH)

All praise is due to Allāh, the Lord of all creation—may He extol the Messenger in the highest company of Angels and grant him peace and security—likewise his family, Companions, and true followers.

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## The Life and Scholarship of *Al-Imām* Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī

He was the scholar, Abul-Hasan ‘Alī Ibn Ismā‘īl Ibn Ishāq Ibn Sālim Ibn Ismā‘īl Ibn Abdillāh Ibn Mūsā Ibn Bilāl Ibn Abī Burdah Ibn Abu Mūsā Al-Ash‘arī Al-Yamānī. He was born in the year 260 AH in Basra.<sup>1</sup>

His father, Ismā‘īl (رحمة الله) was a *Sunnī* and a follower of the Prophetic narrations. On his deathbed, he enjoined upon his son to learn

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<sup>1</sup> His biography can be found in the following historical works: Abul-Qāsim ‘Alī Ibn Al-Hasan Ibn Hibbatillāh Ibn ‘Asākir Ad-Dimashqī in *Tabyīn Kadhib Al-Muftarī Fimā Nasaba Ilā Abil-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī*; Al-Kāmil fit-Tārikh of Ibn Athīr (8/392), *Al-Ansāb* of As-Sam‘ānī (1/273), Al-Khatīb Al-Bagdādī in *Tārikh Al-Baghdād* (11/346); Ibn Khalakān in *Wafayāt Al-A‘yān* (3/284); Adh-Dhahabī in *Siyar A‘lām An-Nubalā* (15/85); Ibn Kathīr in *Al-Bidāyah wan-Nihāyah* (11/187, 204, 206), *Tabaqāt Ash-Shāfi‘iyyah* of Ibn Qādī (1/81); Tāj As-Subkī in *Tabaqāt Ash-Shāfi‘iyyah Al-Kubrā* (3/347); Ibn Farhūn Al-Mālikī in *Ad-Dibāj Al-Madhab Fī A‘yān Ahlil-Madhab* (2/94); Ibnul-‘Imād Al-Hanbalī in *Shadharāt Adh-Dhahab Fī A‘yān Min Adh-Dhahab* (2/303); and others.

from Zakariyyah Ibn Yahyā As-Sājī. Abul-Hasan’s father died while Abul-Hasan was still fairly young—for this reason he came under the care of his mother’s new husband, **Abu ‘Alī Al-Jubbā’ī**.

He lived both in Basra and Baghdad in the era of ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate which remained in power until it collapsed in 656 AH. He lived through six Caliphs, the first of them was Mu‘tamad ‘Alallāh and the last of them, Abul-‘Abbās Ahmad Ar-Rādī Billāh, whose Caliphate lasted from 322 AH to 329 AH. Abul-Hasan died in 324 AH, may Allāh’s mercy be upon him.

In the era of Abul-Hasan (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) several tumultuous events took place such as the *Zanj Rebellion* which began near the city of Basrah in 255 AH and was defeated in 270 AH after tens of thousands of deaths. In 278 AH there appeared the tribulation of the *Qarāmitah*, a secretive *Bātinī Shī‘ite* sect and a branch of *Severner Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ah*. They revolted against the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate seizing their opportunity during the *Zanj Rebellion* in Basra. They captured Bahrain, established a state and harassed the Muslim lands and travel routes around them, including Hajj pilgrims. In 293 AH, they ambushed a Hajj caravan and killed thousands of pilgrims. Then another faction of the *Ismā‘īlī Shī‘ites* arose, the *‘Ubaidī Fātimids*, who built a state stretching across North Africa in 292 AH. It was eventually overthrown by **Salāh Ad-Dīn Ayyūbī** (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) in 567 AH—and all praise is for Allāh.

In the arena of knowledge, then this era was distinguished with many scholars of *Hadīth*, *Fiqh* and *‘Aqīdah*. From the most distinguished of them were:

1. Dāwūd Ibn ‘Alī Adh-Dhāhirī, (d. 270 AH)

2. Ar-Rabīʿ Ibn Sulaimān (d. 270 AH), the companion of *Imām* Ash-Shāfiʿī.
3. Ibn Mājah Al-Qazwīnī (d. 273 AH), the author of the famous *Sunan*.
4. Abu Bakr Al-Marwazī (d. 275 AH), one of the foremost companions (students) of *Imām* Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.
5. Abu Dāwūd As-Sijistānī (d. 275 AH in Basra), the author of the well-known *Sunan*, and from the students of *Imām* Ahmad.
6. Ibn Qutaibah, ʿAbdullāh Ibn Muslim, the scholar and *khatīb* of *Ahlus-Sunnah* (d. 276 AH in Baghdad).
7. At-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH), the author of the *Sunan*.
8. ʿUthmān Ibn Sāʿid Ad-Dārimī (d. 280 AH), the *Imām* of *Sunnah* and a thorn in eyes of the innovators.
9. Ibrāhīm Ibn Ishāq Al-Harbī (d. 275 AH), a student of *Imām* Ahmad.
10. ʿAbdullāh (d. 290 AH), the son of *Imām* Ahmad Ibn Hanbal.
11. Muhammad Ibn Nasr Al-Marwazī (d. 294 AH), the Shāfiʿī scholar of *Hadīth*.
12. An-Nasāʿī (d. 303 AH), the author of the *Sunan*.
13. At-Tabarī (d. 310 AH), the author of the *Tafsīr*.
14. Ibn Khuzaymah, Muhammad Ibn Ishāq (d. 311 AH), the *Imām* of the scholars.
15. At-Tahāwī, Abu Jaʿfar Ahmad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Salāmah (d. 321 AH), the author of the well-known treatise in the Creed.

16. Al-Barbahārī, Al-Hasan Ibn ‘Ali Ibn Khalaf (d. 329 AH), the *Imām* of *Ahlu-Sunnah* of his age.

There were also numerous callers to misguidance from *Ahlul-Kalām*, *Al-Mu‘tazilah*, the *Sufīs*, *Khawārīj* and *Shī‘ah*. From the most notable:

1. Ahmad Ibn Mukhālīd (d. 269 AH), the freed slave of the Caliph Mu‘tasim; from the callers of the *Mu‘tazilah*.
2. Ibn Rāwandī the heretic (d. 300 AH). He was a *Mu‘tazilī*, but then rebelled against them.
3. Al-Jubbā‘ī, Abu ‘Alī Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdul-Wahhāb (d. 303 AH), the stepfather and teacher of Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī.
4. Al-Ka‘bī, ‘Abdullāh Ibn Ahmad Al-Balkhī, the *shaikh* of the *Mu‘tazilah* (d. 319 AH).
5. Al-Jubbā‘ī, Abu Hāshim (d. 321 AH).
6. Al-Māturīdī, Abu Mansūr Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Mahmūd (d. 333 AH). The founder of the *Māturīdiyyah* sect.
7. Al-Hazāz, Ahmad Ibn ‘Īsā (d. 286 AH). He was the first to speak with the heretical *Sufī* concept of *Al-Fanā’* (annihilation of human consciousness) and *Al-Baqā’* (subsistence and oneness with Allāh).
8. Al-Junayd, Abul-Qāsim Al-Junayd Ibn Muhammad Al-Qawārīrī (d. 298 AH), the master of the *Path of Sufism*.
9. Al-Hallāj, the *Sufī*, who claimed union with Allāh, for which he was executed in 309 AH.
10. Ash-Shamlighānī (executed 322 AH).
11. Al-Kulaynī, the *Rāfiḍī*, Muhammad Ibn Ya‘qūb (d. 329 AH), the author of the *Shī‘ite* source reference, *Al-Usūl Al-Kāfī*.

There was a period at the end of the era of *Imām* Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) and thereafter wherein the *Hanbalīs* had ascendancy in Baghdad. Those upon the creed and methodology of *Imām* Ahmad were known to be *Ahlul-Sunnah*, *Ahlul-Hadīth*, the People of Truth, and those who opposed them were known to be upon misguidance, deviation: *Ahlul-Bid‘ah*. In 324 AH the *Hanbalīs* held sway in Baghdād, and that was in the time of *Imām* Al-Barbahārī (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ). After a period of turmoil, there came a decree from Caliph Rādī Billāh against the *Hanbalīs*, and this was due to the incitement of the innovators against them. As a consequence, *Imām* Al-Barbahārī went into hiding, and he died in that state in 329 AH.<sup>2</sup> So, this historical note gives us some context to the era under discussion, the era of Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī.

Abul-Hasan (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) studied *Hadīth* under Zakariyyah Ibn Yahyā As-Sājī, one of the scholars of *Hadīth* and *Fiqh*. And he studied under Abu Khalīfah Al-Jamahī, Sahl Ibn Sarh, Muhammad Ibn Ya‘qūb Al-Muqrī and Abdur-Rahmān Ibn Khalaf—he narrated from them plentifully in his *tafsīr* entitled *Al-Mukhtazan*. He studied *‘Ilm Al-Kalām*, or *Speculative Theology*,<sup>3</sup> under Abu ‘Alī Muhammad Al-Jubbā’ī, the *shaikh* of the *Mu‘tazilah*—who was married to Abul-Hasan’s mother.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Al-Kāmil* (8/213), the events of 317 AH, and *Al-Kāmil* (8/308-309).

<sup>3</sup> Theological Rhetoric or Speculative Theology (*‘Ilmul-Kalām*) is the innovated practice of utilising argumentation, debate, and intellectual reasoning as proofs to establish the Islamic Creed (*Al-‘Aqīdah*) thus making reason dominant over the Revealed Texts. *‘Ilmul-Kalām* appeared at the end of the era of the *Sahābah*—and its ideas and notions were refuted by Ibn ‘Umar, Jābir ibn ‘Abdillāh, Abu Hurairah, Ibn ‘Abbās, Anas ibn Mālik and others (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ). The Companions would instruct the people not to give *salām* to

When Abul-Hasan had become highly proficient in speculative theology and rhetoric (*Al-Kalām*) of the *Mu‘tazilah* and attained a high station, he would pose questions to his teacher in class. But Al-Jubbā‘ī was not able to answer him in a way that would satisfy Abul-Hasan. So, he started doubting his beliefs, and it is narrated from him that he said:

Something caused doubt in my heart one night concerning the Belief (*‘Aqīdah*). So, I stood and prayed two *rak‘ahs* and asked Allāh to guide me to the Straight Path—then I went to sleep, and I saw in my dream Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ). I complained to him concerning my plight. So, Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said to me, ‘Upon you is to cling to my *Sunnah*.’ I became alert, and I contrasted the issues concerning *Al-Kalām* (Speculative Theology) with that which I found in the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Narrations. So, I affirmed what I found, and I cast everything other than the Book and the Narrations behind my back including my own opinions.<sup>4</sup>

So, Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī was a staunch *Mu‘tazilī*<sup>5</sup> until he reached the age of forty, in around 300 AH. Then he turned to the

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the *Qadariyyah*, nor to pray *janāzah* over them and not to visit their sick. See *Al-Farq baynal-Firaq* (pp. 39-40) of ‘Abdul-Qādir Al-Baghdādī (d. 429 AH). The sects of *Kalām* include, among others, the *Qadariyyah*, *Mu‘tazilah*, *Jahmiyyah*, *Ashā‘irah* and the *Māturīdiyyah*.

<sup>4</sup> *Tabyīn Kadhib al-Mufatrī* of Ibn ‘Asākir (pp. 38-39).

<sup>5</sup> Al-‘Allāmah Sālih Al-Fawzān said:

The *Mu‘tazilah* are the followers of Wāsil Ibn ‘Atā. They are called *Mu‘tazilah* because they broke away from the gatherings of *Imām* Al-Hasan Al-Basrī (d. 110 AH). They made a sect for themselves and

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established an ideology regarding the *Tawhīd* of Allāh that opposed the Creed of *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah*. And likewise in the foundations of *Imān* they established principles that opposed *Ahlu-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah*. These are known as the *Five Principles*, and they are:

1. **Tawhīd:** The *Mu'tazilah* intend by this the negation of the Attributes (*Sifāt*) of Allāh. They called the negation of the Attributes of Allāh *Tawhīd*. That is because they hold that to affirm multiple Attributes for Allāh necessitates affirmation of multiple gods.

2. **Al-'Adl (Justice):** They intend by this the negation of the Divine Pre-Decree of Allāh (the *Qadā* and *Qadar*) because they claim that affirmation of the Pre-Decree necessitates that Allāh is unjust and oppressive due to Him punishing His servants for an affair that He had already decreed for them.

3. **Enjoining good and forbidding evil:** They intend by this revolt against the rulers. So, the one who rebels against the rulers is enjoining good and forbidding evil according to them.

4. **A place between two places:** It was due to this issue that they differed with Al-Hasan Al-Basrī, and abandoned his gatherings. When Al-Hasan was asked about the about the major sinner, he answered with the saying of *Ahlu-Sunnah*, 'He is a believer, deficient in *Imān*.' He is not declared to be an unbeliever as is the way of the *Khawārij* and he is not described as having perfect *Imān* as the *Murji'ah* claim. Rather, he is a believer deficient in *Imān*. A believer due to his faith (*Imān*) and a sinner (*fāsiq*) due to his sin. So, when Al-Hasan answered with this answer, Wāsil Ibn 'Atā, who was his student, said, 'I say: he is neither a believer nor an unbeliever. He is in a place between two places.' Meaning that he has left the fold of *Imān* (i.e., left Islām) but he has not entered unbelief—he is in a place between two places—neither a believer, nor an unbeliever. If he dies without repenting, he will remain in Hell forever just as the

ideology of the *Kullābiyyah* which was founded by ‘Abdullāh Ibn Kullāb (died 240 AH) less than a century earlier. Ibn Kullāb was from the era of *Imām Ahmad Ibn Hanbal* (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) and *Imām Ahmad* refuted him and his followers severely.<sup>6</sup>

*Shaikh Al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah* (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) stated,

The saying that Qur’ān is from eternity, without a voice, without letters—that it is not except a single entity (or meaning) present with the Self of Allāh, then it is correct to say that it is the saying of the *Ash‘ariyyah*. But the first to utter this saying in Islam was ‘Abdullāh Ibn Kullāb. The Salaf and the great scholars would affirm for Allāh, the Mighty and Majestic, what is established with His Self of Attributes (*Dhātiyyah*)<sup>7</sup>, and they affirmed Actions

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*Khawārij* say. So, they innovated the saying: ‘A place between two places’ —and they became known for that.

**5. The textual threat (*al-wa‘īd*) is carried out:** They intend by this that whoever enters Hellfire will never exit from it. So, they believe that a Muslim who commits a major sin is forever in the Hellfire. They said, ‘Whoever deserves punishment does not deserve reward’.

See *Sharh ‘Aqīdatil-Imām Al-Mujaddid Muhammad Ibn ‘Abdul-Wahhāb* (p.29), *Al-Milal wan-Nihal* of Ash-Shahrastāni (1/48), *Siyar A‘lām An-Nubalā* of Adh-Dhahabī (5/464).

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Taymiyyah (رَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ) stated, “Al-Hārith Al-Muhāsibī ascribed himself to the saying of Ibn Kullāb and for this reason, Ahmad Ibn Hanbal ordered that Al-Muhāsabī should be boycotted—and Ahmad would warn against Ibn Kullāb and his followers.” *Dar‘u Ta‘ārad Al-‘Aql wan-Naql* (2/6).

<sup>7</sup> i.e., those Attributes that He (the Most High) never ceases to be described with.



that are connected to His Will (*Mashī'ah*)<sup>8</sup> and Power. The *Jahmiyyah* denied both of these. So, Ibn Kullāb agreed with the Salaf in the establishment of the Eternal Attributes [of the Self], but he rejected the fact that there are Attributes established with Allāh that are connected to His Will and Power.

And then came Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'arī after him, and he was the student of Abu 'Alī Al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303 AH) the *Mu'tazilī*. Then he retracted from the beliefs of the *Mu'tazilah*. He explained their contradictions in many places. He went to extreme lengths to oppose them in the issues of *Qadar*, *Imān*, in *al-wa'd*<sup>9</sup> and *al-wa'id*<sup>10</sup> until they, due to this, ascribed to Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'arī the beliefs of the *Murji'ah*<sup>11</sup>, *Jabriyyah* and *Wāqifah*.<sup>12</sup> In the arena of the Attributes of Allāh he took the path of Ibn Kullāb. So, this saying concerning the Qur'ān is the saying of Ibn Khullāb in origin, and it is the saying of those who followed him such as Al-Ash'arī and others.<sup>13</sup>

When speaking about the stages of the life of Abul-Hasan Al-Ash'arī, Ibn Taymiyyah (رحمة الله) said:

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<sup>8</sup> i.e., what He (the Most High) does when He wills, such as ascending over His Throne, or Descending to the nearest heaven in the last third of the night, etc.

<sup>9</sup> *Al-Wa'd*: Allāh's promises of reward.

<sup>10</sup> *Al-Wa'id*: Allāh's threats of punishments.

<sup>11</sup> The innovated sect that holds the view that actions are not from *imān*, and that *imān* does not increase or decrease.

<sup>12</sup> Those who refuse to state a position in the issue of the creation of the Qurān, as to whether it is created or not created.

<sup>13</sup> See *Majmū' Al-Fatāwā* (12/178).

The closer a person is to the era of the Salaf, the more knowledgeable he is in understanding and transmitting. I affirm this for the *Hanbalīs*—and I should make clear that Al-Ash‘arī, even though he was from the students of the *Mu‘tazilah*, he repented from that—he was the student of Al-Jubbā‘ī. However, he left that for the path of Ibn Kullāb. And he learned the foundations of the *Hadīth* sciences from Zakariyyah As-Sājī in Basra. Then, when he arrived in Baghdād, he studied the other branches of the Religion under the *Hanbalīs*. And that was his final affair [that he died upon] as he himself and his companions stated in their books.<sup>14</sup>

It should be noted that the *Ash‘arīs* of later times until today adopted the doctrine of Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī that he took from the teachings of Ibn Kullāb. So, they are more correctly called *Al-Kullābiyyah*. In fact, the *Ash‘arīs* of later times went beyond Ibn Kullāb because they adopted much of what Ibn Kullāb refuted from the beliefs of the *Mu‘tazilah*, so, upon analysis, they are a hybridisation of the ideologies of Ibn Kullāb, the *Mu‘tazilah* and the *Jahmiyyah*. Adh-Dhahabī (رحمة الله) stated,

I have seen four authorships of Abul-Hasan explaining the creed. He mentioned in them the principles of the Salaf concerning the Attributes of Allāh. He said in these writings, **‘They are to be left just as they are reported.’** Then he said, **‘This is my saying, this is my religion, and they (the Attributes) are not to be interpreted with *ta’wīl* (with metaphors).’**

He died Baghdād in the year 324 AH. A group from the *Hanbalīs* and other scholars spoke against him severely. And the speech

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<sup>14</sup> See *Majmū‘ Al-Fatāwa*, 3/228.

of anyone can be accepted or rejected except for the one who Allāh protected from error (i.e., the Prophet ﷺ). O Allāh guide us and show us mercy. Abul-Hasan Al-Ash‘arī had great intelligence, immense knowledge, some fine characteristics, and many writings that are a proof of his expansive knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *As-Siyar* (15/86-87).