

«مقاله پژوهشی»

نگرشی نو بر معنای عبارت «مَا تَقَدَّمَ وَ مَا تَأَخَّرَ» در آیه دوم سوره فتح

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چکیده

ترجمه قرآن به سبب بلاغت اعجازآمیز آن و به دلیل قرار گرفتن در مجموعه متون دینی و ارتباط عمیق آن با اعتقاد مسلمانان از حساسیت و دشواری فوق‌العاده‌ای برخوردار است. اضافه بر آن پیچیدگی متن برخی از آیات و عدم سازگاری ترجمه سطحی و ظاهری آن با اصول و محک‌های قطعی اسلامی بر دشواری این کار افزوده است. آیه دوم سوره فتح از جمله این آیات است که به سبب ارتباط با عصمت پیامبر (ص) و اجماع مسلمانان در این زمینه نیاز به دقت و بررسی فزون‌تری دارد. عبارت «ما تقدم و ما تاخر» در آیه شریفه از نظر اکثر مترجمان قرآن به گذشته و آینده ترجمه شده است و مضمون آیه را اینگونه ترجمه کرده‌اند که خداوند گناهان گذشته و آینده پیامبر(ص) را مورد آمرزش قرار می‌دهد. آمرزش گناهان گذشته امری مقبول و معقول است اما آمرزش گناهان آینده، امری ناپذیرفتنی می‌نماید. پژوهش حاضر به روش توصیفی و تحلیلی درصدد است برای حل این مشکل، ترجمه صحیح و دقیق این عبارت را با استفاده از نظریات مفسران و روایات واکاوی کند.

واژه‌های کلیدی

عصمت پیامبر(ص)، معناشناسی، سوره فتح، مَا تَقَدَّمَ، مَا تَأَخَّرَ.

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A New Perspective on the Meaning of the Phrase "Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhkhara" in the Second Verse of Surah al-Fath

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ABSTRACT

Translating the Quran is an extraordinarily sensitive and challenging task due to its miraculous eloquence, its position within religious texts, and its deep connection to the beliefs of Muslims. Furthermore, the complexity of certain verses and the inconsistency between their superficial translations and the definitive principles of Islam add further difficulty to this process. The second verse of Surah al-Fath is one of these verses, which, due to its connection to the impeccability of the Prophet (PBUH) and the consensus of Muslims on this matter, requires greater attention and examination. The phrase "Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhkhara" in this verse has traditionally been translated by most Quran translators as referring to the past and the future, suggesting that Allah forgives the Prophet's past and future sins. While the forgiveness of past sins is understandable and reasonable, the forgiveness of future sins appears unacceptable. This study aims to resolve this issue by exploring an accurate and precise translation of this phrase through the theories of commentators and hadiths, employing a descriptive-analytical method.

KEYWORDS

Prophet's Impeccability, Semantics, Surah al-Fath, Mā Taqaddama, Mā Ta'akhkhara.



Introduction

Translation is the restatement of the message of a source language in the closest natural equivalent of the target language, one that is first close in meaning and then in style to the original text (Nida and Taber, 1969: 12). Translation is a one-way process, meaning it always moves in one direction, from a "source" language to a "target" language. Catford defines translation as "the replacement of textual material in one language by equivalent material in another language" (Catford, 1965: 20).

The sensitivity of translation in sacred texts is much higher than in ordinary texts and presents its own unique challenges, sometimes leading to misunderstandings of verses or hadiths. The second verse of Surah *al-Fath* contains words whose correct understanding requires more careful consideration in translation. This study seeks to demonstrate that the translation of "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*" as "past and future" is incorrect. Rather, "*Mā Taqaddama*" refers to the "past," and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" refers to what is near the "present time," while translating "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" as "future" is an error. This study also examines the translations of various translators. Few translators have paid attention to this point and provided an accurate translation, while most have presented an unacceptable translation of this noble verse. A precise investigation of the meaning of these phrases can often resolve the underlying doubt and reveal the true meaning of the verse. This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What is the correct meaning of the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*" in the second verse of Surah *al-Fath*?
2. What are the interpretive and narrative evidences supporting this meaning?

3. To what extent have translators adhered to the correct meaning of the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*"?

Regarding previous research, the following works can be mentioned: "Sayyid Mohammad Hossein Javaheri published an article titled "Research on the Types of Quran Translation" in the Journal of Quranic Research (Special Issue on Quran Translation) in 2005, issues 42 and 43." The author in this article examines the foundations of translation knowledge and the tools and principles of translation, aiming to clarify the various meanings of translation-related terminology and facilitate the convergence of Quran translators and critics. Mohammad Mehdi Masoudi published an article titled "Quranic Explanation of the Precedence and Consequence of the Soul and Body from a Philosophical Perspective" in the Journal of Quranic Research in 2015, issue 75. In this article, he offers a new interpretation of the Quranic phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*" from a Quranic-philosophical perspective. Mohammad Hassan Taqiyyeh published an article titled "Comparative Critique of Quran Translations" in the Literary Criticism Studies Journal in 2017, issue 45. In this research, he selected and compared the translations of several verses from five translators and critically assessed them. He not only critiques others but also examines and evaluates his own translation. Mohsen Khushfar and Mansoureh Bagheri published an article titled "Study of the Word *Dhanb*, *Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*, and Its Relationship with Divine Forgiveness in the Second Verse of Surah *al-Fath* from the Viewpoint of Both Sunni and Shia Commentators" at the 6th National Conference on Modern Research in Humanities in 2020. This research discusses the second verse of

Surah *al-Fath* and the relationship between the "*Dhanb*" of "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*" and the impeccability of the Prophet (PBUH). However, no research has been conducted specifically on the meaning of the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*." It is hoped that the present research will make a small contribution to the precise understanding of this verse.

1. Statement of the Problem

Translation refers to an action or process involving the transfer of something from one language to another, and it is also used to refer to the product of such a process (Webster, 2003: 1241). Furthermore, translation is defined as the act of relating the meaning of a source text to its equivalent in the target language (Kaplan, 2002: 1051-1054). During the transfer of meaning, often through adjustments and structural changes, part of the meaning is lost, which implies that, from a linguistic perspective, there is no complete equivalence or balance between languages. That is, when the form of meaning changes, this change also affects the meaning itself, and it is difficult to claim that the same meaning exists in two sentences with different structures and forms. This is why the concept of "equivalence" is not raised in translation studies; what is considered is "balance," which is often not fully attainable. In other words, perfect balance in translation is an ideal and unrealistic concept that is practically unachievable (Manafi Anari, 2005: 88). Of course, in the case of translating the Quran, besides the literary aspect, the religious and doctrinal dimension further complicates the issue. The miraculous dimensions of the Quran and the translator's preconceptions make Quran translation face theoretical and practical difficulties. For instance, the verse "And when

Ibrahim said to his Father Azar, "Do you take idols as gods? Indeed, I see you and your people to be in manifest error" (al-An'ām/74)¹ presents a challenge because, according to other Quranic verses, Azar is depicted as an idol worshiper, whereas a significant number of Muslims believe that all of the Prophet Muhammad's ancestors were Muslims and believers in Allah, and that no polytheists existed in his lineage. This discrepancy complicates the translation of this verse. Therefore, some commentators have translated the word "Ab" in a meaning other than "Father," arguing that "Father" is specific, but "Ab" is broader in meaning. Similarly, the verse "So that Allah may forgive you what has proceeded of your sin and what will follow" (al-Fath/2) has faced challenges in translation and interpretation due to these preconceptions. Two important points are noteworthy in translating and interpreting this verse. The first point involves the word "*Dhanb*" (sin); among Shia scholars, the impeccability of the Prophet (PBUH) before and after his prophethood is a consensus. A statement by Shaykh *al-Ṭūsī* is a representative example of Shia belief in this matter: "Our Prophet, Muhammad (PBUH), is infallible throughout his life, in speech, in what he must do, and in what he must not do, as if any sin were to occur, he would lose his status among the people. And if forgetfulness were allowed, trust in his words would be undermined, and consequently, the purpose of his prophethood would be invalidated, which is impossible." (Ṭūsī, 2000 AD/1421 AH: 97) In contrast, there are differences among Sunni scholars on this matter. While some do not believe in the Prophet's impeccability before

1. "*Wa idh Qāla Ibrahimu li Abīhi Āzara Atattakhidhu Aṣnāman Ālihātan inni Araka wa Qawmaka fī Ḍalalin Mubīn.*"

prophethood, almost all of them accept his impeccability after prophethood. However, *Ibn Taymīyyah* is an exception; he believes that prophets, including Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), are not protected from sin and error after prophethood but immediately repent upon committing sin (*Ibn Taymīyyah*, 1985 AD/1406 AH: 2, 432). Thus, it can be claimed that the impeccability of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is agreed upon by both Shia and Sunni scholars, though there are differences regarding the extent of this impeccability. Nonetheless, the impeccability of the Prophet (PBUH) after prophethood is a consensus among Islamic scholars, and as mentioned, only *Ibn Taymīyyah* has contradicted this consensus, though his reasons for doing so are weak and unsubstantiated, requiring further examination. Some researchers have analyzed his arguments and demonstrated their flaws (*Malik Makan*, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 103). Therefore, the word "*Dhanb*," which is translated as sin, contradicts the belief of Muslims on this matter, leading some translators and commentators to choose alternative meanings, such as the consequences of an action, etc. It is important to note that the precise meaning of the word "*Dhanb*" should be examined based on authoritative sources. One can claim that the original meaning of this word is not "Sin." Words are often initially coined to refer to tangible and specific matters, and later their meanings extend to abstract and general concepts. Based on this, the word "*Dhanb*" (with an open "Dhal" and a silent "Nun") is derived from the word "*Dhanab*" (with an open "Dhāl" and "Nūn"), meaning "Animal Tail." Since the tail of an animal is at the end, this term has been used metaphorically to refer to low-ranking individuals and those considered unimportant or worthless within a community. "*Dhanb*" originally meant "Grasping the tail of something." "*Dhanabtuhū*" means "I grasped its

tail." Subsequently, any action with undesirable consequences came to be referred to as "*Dhanb*," as such an act has an inevitable outcome (*Rāghib*, 1983 AD/1404 AH, under the word "*Dhanb*"). Thus, according to what *Rāghib* has explained, the original meaning of the word "*Dhanb*" is the adverse consequence or result of an action, and in this sense, it does not conflict with the impeccability of the Prophet (PBUH). *Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī*'s insightful and scholarly analysis of this verse and the connection between conquest and forgiveness is quite illuminating. He states: "The Prophet's efforts to invite people and his struggle against disbelief and polytheism, both before and after the migration, as well as the wars he fought with the polytheists, were actions that had negative consequences, making them a type of "*Dhanb*." It is clear that the polytheists of Quraysh, as long as they maintained their power, never regarded him with forgiveness, meaning they did not cease causing him trouble. They would never forget the destruction of their tribe and the killing of their leaders, and until they quashed the Prophet's name and existence, they would not rest. However, Allah, through the conquest of Mecca or the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, which ultimately led to the conquest of Mecca, removed the power of the Quraysh and covered the sins the Prophet, was accused of by the polytheists, granting him protection from the harm of the Quraysh. The word "*Dhanb*" here refers to the negative consequences and the dangerous outcomes brought about by his invitation, which, from the perspective of the polytheists, made him deserving of punishment, much like how Moses (PBUH) considered himself guilty in the killing of the Egyptian youth and said, "And they have a sin, so I fear they will kill me—this is the meaning of the Prophet's past sins, the sins he had committed before the

migration. His future sins would be the bloodshed he caused among the leaders of Quraysh after the migration. Allah's forgiveness of the Prophet's sins is about covering them and nullifying the resulting punishments by taking away the power of the Quraysh." (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 18, 385)

The second point involves the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*," which most translators have rendered as "Past and Future." The forgiveness of past sins is something that is easily understood, but the forgiveness of future sins raises theological questions. It seems to imply that a person has been granted permission to commit sins and then be forgiven. With this interpretation, it appears as if Allah has forgiven the past and future sins of an individual. Since this phrase, other than for the Prophet (PBUH), has also been applied to non-infallible individuals, such translations complicate the matter further. For example, some narrations suggest that the visitor to the shrine of Imam Ḥusayn (PBUH) may have his past and future sins forgiven. In such cases, this ritual act could be interpreted as permission to commit sins in the future.

This paper seeks to demonstrate, through a precise analysis of the meaning of "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*," that the translation of this phrase as "Past and Future" is incorrect. Instead, "*Mā Taqaddama*" corresponds to "Past," and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" refers to what is near the "present," thus the translation of "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" as "Future" is inappropriate. Additionally, this study examines the translations of various scholars. Only a few translators have correctly rendered this phrase, while most have presented an unacceptable translation of this noble verse. A careful investigation of the precise meaning of the

expressions may eliminate the root of the confusion and reveal the true meaning of the verse.

It is important to note that the second verse of Surah *al-Fath* involves interpretive translation. Three definitions of interpretive translation can be provided:

A) The translator elaborates on the content, but in a different language from the original, as in Persian or translations of the Quran in other languages. Examples include the translations of Tafsir *al-Mīzān*, *al-Minhāj al-Ṣādiqīn*, and Elahi Qumshaei (Ma'rifat, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 1, 115).

B) Interpretive translation refers to translations in which the translator adds explanations within the translation to convey the context of the verse in the target language, aiming to better transfer the meaning and offer an interpretive meaning (Jawāhirī, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 12).

C) In the third sense, interpretive translation involves the translator conveying their interpretive understanding within the translation, without using clear markers like parentheses or brackets, which can be considered free translation (Gholamhoseinzadeh, 2007 AD/1386 SH: 57).

Since the Quranic text was revealed long ago, understanding and interpreting its content is not straightforward, and various factors influence the accurate comprehension of the text. As one Quran scholar rightly pointed out, "The translation of ancient texts and sacred books, especially the Holy Quran, carries the specific contexts of its era, including linguistic, historical, geographical, ethnic, theological, and spiritual aspects, and modern words, with their numerous changes over time, cannot entirely replace the original text nor be literally adequate. The reason we see literal translations as vague, disconnected, and

sometimes even erroneous is precisely because of disconnect between the meanings of words in the modern technological era and the meanings of words in the time of the Quran. Therefore, it is necessary to preserve the integrity of the content while ensuring that the translation stays true to the Quran's meaning and style, and by utilizing interpretations and connections between verses, and occasionally adding explanatory terms in parentheses or footnotes, we can bridge the temporal gap and make the translation more accessible and faithful to the original text." (Bi Azar Shirazi, 1998 AD/1377 SH: 267)

A review of previous scholars and translators' works leads us to conclude that they were never truly focused on critically assessing earlier translations and pointing out their shortcomings. Sometimes, they corrected earlier translations within their own works (Khorramshahi, AD/1378 SH: 50). In contemporary times, the critique of translations has gained momentum, and after the Islamic Revolution, both Quran translations and scholarly critiques of translations have expanded significantly.

2. Analysis of the Translation of the Noble Verse 2 of Surah *al-Fath*

Forty translations of the Quran were selected to conduct a comprehensive examination of Quranic translations in order to determine how many translators and commentators have accurately conveyed the meaning of the verse, particularly the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhkhara*." The word "*Dhanb*," commonly translated as "Sin," implies the negation of the impeccability of the prophets from a theological perspective, and in this verse, it contradicts the impeccability of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) regarding sin. To resolve this issue, translators have used terms such as "Mistake,"

"Slip," "Error," "Consequence," "Wrongdoing," "Aftermath," "Obstacles," and "Difficulties" in their translations. Occasionally, they have retained the word "Sin" but attributed it to the community of the Prophet (PBUH) or identified sins that the polytheists attributed to the Prophet (PBUH). In any case, extensive efforts have been made by commentators and translators to address this issue and resolve the contradiction with the Prophet's impeccability. While addressing this topic is not the main focus of this paper, a brief reference to it is made for completeness and context.

The primary goal of this paper is to clarify the correct meaning of the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhkhara*." A common issue found in the translations below is the use of the terms "past" and "future." Translators have rendered "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhkhara*" as "Past" and "Future." However, the use of "past" and "future" is uniform across most of these translations. Upon further reflection on the translations, it appears that the most accurate and precise translation of the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhkhara*" is "Preceding and Succeeding." Other phrases that convey the same concept can also be classified as correct translations. The various terms that translators have selected for "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhkhara*" are classified as follows. In the classification below, translations (1-2) through (14-1-2) can be considered correct, although in terms of style, the equivalent "Preceding and Succeeding" seems superior to the others. Other phrases such as "Previous and Subsequent," "Before and after Migration," "Past and Present," "Earlier and Later," "Previous and Remaining," "Advanced and Delayed," "Came first and came last," and "Earlier and Later" are conceptually equivalent to "Preceding and

Succeeding" but differ in terms of wording and composition.

2.1. Correct Translations

2.1.1. Preceding and Succeeding

- Khorramdel: "The goal was for Allah to forgive your preceding and succeeding sins, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."
- Garmaroudi: "So that Allah may forgive your preceding and succeeding sins, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."
- Nasafi: "Indeed, Allah forgives your preceding and succeeding slips and completes His favor upon you, and keeps you on the path of righteousness."

2.1.2. Past (First) and Last

- Bahrapour: "So that Allah may remove your past and last sins [which they attributed to you] and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Khorramshahi: "So that finally Allah may forgive your first and last sins [of the nation] and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."

2.1.3. Before Migration and After Migration

- Balaghi: "So that Allah may remove the consequences of your deprivation before migration and after migration and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path leading to the exaltation of Islam's word."

2.1.4. Past and Present

- Qara'ati: "So that Allah may cover the adverse consequences [of your invitation] in the past and present, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."

2.1.5. Previous and Later

- Kaviyanpur: "So that Allah may forgive your previous and later sins [of your followers] and complete His favor upon you and guide your future followers to the straight path."

2.1.6. Past and Remaining

- Qureshi (Ahsan al-Hadith): "So that Allah may forgive your past and remaining sins and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."

2.1.7. Came First and Came Last

- Ashrafi: "So that Allah may forgive you what came first from your sin and what came last and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Abū al-Futūḥ al-Rāzī: "So that Allah may forgive you what came first of your sin and what came last, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."
- Misbahzadeh: "So that Allah may forgive you what came first from your sin and what came last, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."

2.1.8. Preceded and Followed

- Mu'izzi: "So that Allah may forgive you what preceded your sin and what followed and complete His favor upon you and lead you to the straight path."

2.1.9. Was First and Will Be After

- Rahnama: "So that Allah may forgive for you the sins that were before and those that will be after and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."

2.1.10. Preceded and Then Came

- Khajavi: "So that Allah may forgive whatever preceded your sin and whatever

will follow, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."

2.1.11. Past and Will Follow

- Siraj: "So that Allah may forgive for you what is the past of your sin [what the polytheists considered a sin] and what will follow, and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."

2.1.12. Previous and Remaining

- Dehlawi: "The ultimate result of the conquest is that Allah will forgive for you what passed from your sins and what remains, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."

2.1.13. Past and After

- Ansari: "So that Allah may cover for you what is the past of the consequences [which emerged from the speech and actions of the people regarding you] and what will come after, and complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."

2.1.14. Past and Delayed

- Amini: "So that Allah may forgive the past lapses of yours and those you have delayed, complete His favor upon you, and show you the straight path."

2.2. Incorrect Translations

It seems that translations that render "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*" as "Past and Future" are incorrect. Not only is this translation not an accurate equivalence in terms of style, but it also raises theological issues that are difficult to address. The precise equivalents of "*Taqaddama*" and "*Ta'akhhara*" are examined with reference to verses and narrations in the following discussions. The theological issue is related to the Prophet's

impeccability, which will be discussed in detail later. Unfortunately, as observed, around 60% of translators have chosen this equivalence, while other translations, such as "Before and after this," "Past and after this," "first and future," "Past, now, and then," are also conceptually synonymous with "Past and future."

2.2.1. Past and Future

- Arfa': So that He may forgive your past and future sins, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path.
- Elahi Qumshei: "So that Allah may forgive your past and future sins (the scholars say that the sins of the Prophet are those that the polytheists considered as such, for which they saw his call to the oneness of Allah as his greatest sin, and these sins refer to before and after the migration), and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Yassari: "So that Allah may forgive your past and future sins as a reward for purifying Mecca from polytheism, the Kaaba from idols and idol worship, and complete His great favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Ansari: "So that finally Allah may forgive your past and future sins and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Pourjavadi: "So that Allah may forgive your past and future sins and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Ṭabāṭabā'ī: "So that Allah may remove the effects of the sins you were indebted to the polytheists for (and for which they considered you deserving of harm and punishment) and forgive both your past and future sins, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."

- Fouladvand: "So that Allah may forgive your past and future sins and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Fayz al-Islam: "So that Allah may forgive your past and future sins (which the polytheists considered a sin)."
- Makarem Shirazi: "So that Allah may forgive the past and future sins attributed to you (and establish your truth) and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Meshkini: "So that Allah may forgive your past and future sins (the ones the polytheists considered, such as defaming their sacredness, or the first offenses you considered as mistakes) and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Barzi: "So that Allah may forgive the past and future sins [of your nation] for you and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Boroujerdi: "So that Allah may forgive the past and future sins of your community and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Payandeh: "So that Allah may forgive the wrongdoings of your past and future and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Muṣṭafawī: "So that He may forgive any kind of past and future mistakes, complete His blessing and grace upon you, and guide you on the straight path."
- Sadeghi Tehrani: "So that Allah may cover the dangerous worldly consequences of your work (mission), both past and future, and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."
- Safarzadeh: "After this, Allah, by virtue of the blessings of this universal victory, will forgive your past mistakes and also those that

may arise in the future, and complete His favor upon you and keep you on the straight path."

- Ansariyan: "So that Allah, through this manifest victory, will remove everything from the past and future [obstacles, plots, and difficulties caused by your enemies] that stood in the way of the progress of your call to Islam, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."

2.2.2. Before This and After This

- Ayati: "So that Allah may forgive your sins, both what was before this and what will come after, complete His favor upon you, and guide you to the straight path."

2.2.3. Past and After This

- Halabi: "So that Allah may forgive for you your past sin and what will come after, and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."

2.2.4. First and Future

- Bayān al-Sa'ādah: "So that Allah may forgive your first and future sins [of your community] and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."

2.3. Past, Now, and Then

- Mojtabavi: "So that Allah may forgive your sins—the wrongs that the polytheists and enemies committed against you—both past, now, and later on, and complete His favor upon you and guide you to the straight path."

Mojtabavi is the only translator who has chosen the equivalence "Past, now, and then" for the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhkhara*." The above translations appear to be incorrect because, in terms of meaning and concept, they are similar to "Past and future,"

even though the wording may seem different. Ayati has chosen "Before this and after this," which, in meaning, is the same as "Past and future." Halabi has chosen "After this" for "*Mā Ta'akhhara*," and *Bayān al-Sa'ādah* uses "First" for "*Mā Taqaddama*." As observed, the majority of Quran translations (about 60%) have erred and failed to select an accurate and correct equivalent for the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*."

3. The Meaning of "Qaddama" and "Akhkhara" in Commentaries

To understand the correct meaning of "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" in the second verse of Surah *al-Fath*, we will review the opinions of commentators on these expressions. Additionally, this study will also examine verse 13 of Surah *al-Qīyāmah*, which contains the terms "*Qaddama*" and "*Akhkhara*," along with the views of commentators. We will begin by analyzing the interpretation of the second verse of Surah *al-Fath*. In this noble verse, Allah says: "So that Allah may forgive you what has preceded of your sin and what will follow." There is some debate among commentators regarding the meaning of "Preceding" and "Following." Some have interpreted "*Mā Taqaddama*" as referring to the disobedience and lapse of Adam and Eve, and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" as referring to the sins of the Ummah (community). Others have understood "*Mā Taqaddama*" as referring to matters before the Prophet's prophethood and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" as relating to the period after his prophethood. Some have interpreted "*Mā Taqaddama*" as referring to events before the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" as those that occurred after the treaty.

However, based on the interpretation of the original meaning of the verse, and particularly the relationship of this forgiveness with the

"*Fath Hudaibiyyah*" (the conquest of Mecca), it becomes clear that the meaning refers to all the false accusations and sins that were attributed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in both the "Past" and "Future." Had this great victory not occurred, these sins would have been considered definite. But with this victory, both the false accusations of the past were removed, and the possibility of future false accusations was eliminated. A supporting narration for this interpretation is reported from Imam *Ali ibn Mūsā al-Riḍā* (AS), whom, when asked by *Ma'mūn* about this verse, responded: "No one among the polytheists of Mecca had a heavier sin than the Messenger of Allah (PBUH), because they worshipped 360 idols. When the Prophet (PBUH) invited them to monotheism, it was very hard for them. They said: 'Has he made our entire Gods one God? This is something strange... We have never heard such a thing from our forefathers. This is just a great lie.' But when Allah opened Mecca for His Prophet (PBUH) after the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, Allah said: 'O! Muhammad! We have given you a clear victory, so that the sins of the past and future that the polytheists of Arabia attributed to you because of your call to monotheism may be forgiven.' Some of the polytheists of Mecca at that time accepted Islam, while others left Mecca without embracing Islam, yet they could not deny monotheism, and thus the Prophet's sin, in their eyes, was forgiven due to the victory." When *Ma'mūn* heard this, he said, "Blessed be you, Abul Ḥasan." (Arūsī Ḥuwayzī, 1992 AD/1412 AH: 5, 56; Makarem Shirazi, 1994 AD/1373 SH: 22, 117)

Tafsir Nemooneh offers a relatively comprehensive categorization of the opinions of commentators regarding the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*." The opinions

of commentators regarding this phrase are as follows:

- Before and after the period of ignorance (Jahiliyyah) (Tha'labī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 12, 204)
- Before and after the conquest (Ṭūsī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 9, 304; Māwardī, 1983 AD/1402 AH: 4, 138)
- Before and after the revelation of the verse (Māwardī, 1983 AD/1402 AH: 4, 138)
- Before and after prophethood (Ṭūsī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 9, 304; Māwardī, 1983 AD/1402 AH: 4, 138)
- Before and after the migration (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 18, 133).

In one of the interpretations, "*Mā Taqaddama*" is associated with the incident of Maria, and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" is related to the story of *Zayd ibn Hārithi* (Ālūsī, 1995 AD/1415 AH: 19, 182). *Abū Muslim Khurāsānī* interprets "*Mā Taqaddama*" as the sin of Adam and the subsequent sins that followed (Tha'labī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 12, 204). This interpretation was criticized by Shaykh Ṭūsī, who argued that this verse speaks specifically about the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and that relating it to the story of Adam is unfounded (Ṭūsī, 1988 AD/1409 AH: 9, 304).

Tha'labī, in one of his interpretive possibilities, translates "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" as "Old" and "New," which aligns with the interpretations conveyed in narrations. *Qarashī* also adopts this interpretation, stating: "It is highly probable that the meaning of "*Mā Taqaddama min Dhanbik*" and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" refers to distant and recent sins, not sins that occurred in the past and will occur in the future. In other words, the sins that happened long ago and the sins that have just occurred. This interpretation is entirely natural, and there is no need for a

convoluted explanation, such as saying that past sins are forgiven and that we are granted the ability to avoid sin in the future." (Qarashī, 2005 AD/1384 SH: 3, 25)

Based on the review of the commentaries, it appears that "*Qaddama*" refers to something that is "Advanced" or "Preceding," while "*Akhkhara*" refers to something that will "Follow" or occur later, and it never refers to the future. Perhaps the most accurate translation of "*Akhkhara*" would be the word "succeeding," which contrasts with "Preceding." Therefore, it is better to use the term "preceding and succeeding" for this phrase (Khorramdel, Garmaroudi, Nasafi).

Now, we turn to the views of commentators regarding the noble verse "*Yunabba'u al-Insan Yawma'idhin bimā Qaddama wa Akkhara*," (al-Qīyāmah/13) which contains the phrases "*Qaddama*" and "*Akhkhara*." Various interpretations have been proposed for this verse, which can be categorized as follows, according to Ibn Juzayy:

A) *Ibn 'Abbās* and *Ibn Mas'ūd* have stated that this refers to actions performed before death and actions that remain as a legacy after death as a tradition or method;

B) *Mujāhid* believes that the first and last actions of a person will be brought to his attention. Some commentators interpret the first and last as referring to actions at the beginning and end of one's life (Khāzin, 1995 AD/1415 AH: 6, 132; Baghawī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 8, 54), while others interpret the first and last as referring to the beginning and end of a time period (Sa'di, 1987 AD/1408 AH: 1, 899);

C) 'Ikramah has said it refers to deeds that are done wrongly and deeds of goodness that are delayed (Ṭabarī, 1982 AD/1402 AH: 24, 61). According to Ṭabarī, "*Qaddama*" refers to a good or bad deed that is performed, while

"*Akhkhara*" refers to a deed that comes after the first one and nullifies its effect. This interpretation is also cited from *al-Kashshāf* (Zamakhsharī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 7, 189);

D) *Ḍaḥḥāk* said it refers to some obligatory deeds that are performed and others that are delayed;

E) Some believe it refers to the deeds of disobedience that are performed and acts of obedience that are delayed;

F) *Zayd ibn Aslam* believed it referred to wealth that is used and wealth that is inherited (Ibn Jawzī, 2001 AD/1422 AH: 6, 98). Similar classifications are found in the commentary of *al-Qurṭubī* (Qurṭubī, 1985 AD/1364 SH: 19, 89). Another interpretation of this verse is that all of a person's deeds (both past and present) will be made known to them: "He will be informed of all his deeds, whether old or new, first or last, small or large." (Ibn Kathīr, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 8, 277)

Ibn Kathīr interprets "*Qaddama*" and "*Akhkhara*" as "Old" and "New," which aligns with the interpretation found in the narrations. Based on the views we have discussed, it is confirmed that "*Qaddama*" refers to something that is done before another action, and "*Akhkhara*" refers to something that is done after another. In fact, advancing and delaying is a relative concept that is measured in relation to a specific starting point, and sometimes the point of reference is not explicitly stated but becomes evident from context (Ibn 'Āshūr, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 13, 446).

4. The Meaning of "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhkhara*" in Narrations

The narrations transmitted through the Ahl al-Bayt (AS) play a significant role in understanding the true meaning of Quranic verses. This is because the infallible members of the family of the Prophet (PBUH) were the

authentic interpreters of the Quran and the pure Islamic teachings. They were entrusted with explaining the meanings of the verses, and whenever an incorrect interpretation of the Quranic verses was circulated in society, they were responsible for correcting these misconceptions. Even if some individuals do not consider them infallible, it can be argued that by the consensus of the Muslim community, each of the infallibles (AS) was regarded as one of the greatest scholars of their time. Moreover, due to their proximity to the time of the Quran's revelation, they were witnesses to many contextual clues that could aid in the correct interpretation of the verses. In Islamic narrations, we also encounter the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhkhara*." Several narrations regarding the virtue of visiting the shrine of Imam Ḥusayn (AS) are found in prominent Shia books. One such narration states: "*Ḥaddathanī al-Ḥusayn ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Amr an al-Mu'allā ibn Muḥammad, an Abū Dāwūd al-Mustaraq, 'an ba'di Aṣḥābinā 'an Muthannā al-Hannat, 'an Abī al-Ḥasan al-Awwal* (AS), he said, "I heard him say: "Whoever visits Ḥusayn (AS) while knowing his rights, Allah will forgive him his sins, both past and future." (Ibn Qūlawayh, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 140; Ṣadūq, 1959 AD/1379 AH: 194)

It is important to note that the visitation of the shrine of Imam Ḥusayn (AS), as an optional act, can erase the sins a person has committed up until the time of the visit. However, to accept that the future sins of the visitor are forgiven would be incompatible with the principles of Shari'ah. To address this doubt, some narrations use the terms "Old" and "New" in place of "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhkhara*," which conveys a more reasonable and acceptable meaning. The following two narrations support this point:

Harun ibn Kharejeh says, "I asked Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS), "People think that whoever visits *Ḥusayn* (AS) gets the reward of one pilgrimage and one 'Umrah." The Imam (AS) said, "By Allah, whoever visits him with recognition, Allah will forgive all his sins, old and new." (Ṣadūq, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 195) Another narration states: "*Ḥusayn ibn Muhammad Qummī* says: "Imam *Mūsā ibn Ja'far* (AS) said: "The least reward for one who visits *Ḥusayn ibn Ali* (AS) by the riverbank, if he knows his rights, respects him, and has allegiance to him, is that all his old and new sins will be forgiven." (Ṣadūq, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 196).

Ibn Maskān narrated from Imam *Ṣādiq* (AS) that he said: "Whoever visits *Abū 'Abdullāh Ḥusayn* (AS) and knows his rights, all his sins will be forgiven, old and new (i.e., the sins committed in youth and those committed later in life)." (Ṣadūq, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 419) This narration indicates that "*Mā Ta'akhkhara*" refers to the "New" sins, as it explicitly uses the word "Hadith" in place of "*Mā Ta'akhkhara*." This narration offers a new interpretation of "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhkhara*," with "*Mā Taqaddama*" referring to sins committed in youth and "*Mā Ta'akhkhara*" referring to sins committed later in life. In the book *al-Mazār* by *Ibn Mashhadī*, there is also a narration that supports the points mentioned earlier. The narration goes: "From al-*Ḥusayn ibn Abī Sayyār al-Madā'inī*, from *Ya'qūb ibn Yazīd*, from *Ibn Abī 'Umayr*, from '*Abdul Raḥmān ibn al-Ḥajjāj*, who said: "*Abū 'Abdullāh* (AS) said: "Whoever visits the grave of *Ḥusayn ibn Ali* (AS) one of the three nights—of the Night of *Fiṭr*, the Night of Eid *al-Aḍḥā*, or the Night of the Mid-Shaban—his sins, both past and future, will be forgiven." (Ibn Mashhadī, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 348) This narration should be understood in light of the

previous narrations, where "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhkhara*" were interpreted as "Old" and "New." In some narrations, this virtue is also mentioned concerning the visitation of Imam *Ali al-Riḍā*'s (AS) shrine. The narration goes: "*Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā*, from *Ali ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ja'fari*, from *Ḥamdān ibn Ishāq*, who said: "I heard *Abū Ja'far* (AS) say, or a man reported to me from *Abū Ja'far* (AS): "Whoever visits the grave of my Father in Tus, Allah will forgive his sins, both past and future." (Ibn Mashhadī, 1998 AD/1419 AH: 546)

There are also narrations regarding the virtues of the night of Mid-Shaban, which mention that the doors of heaven open on this night and the doors of mercy, acceptance, forgiveness, grace, repentance, blessings, generosity, and kindness are all opened. It is said that during this night, the decrees of life and the yearly sustenance are distributed, and anyone who spends this night in *Dhikr* (remembrance of Allah), *Tahlīl*, *Takbīr*, *Du'ā*, prayer, recitation of the Quran, and seeking forgiveness until the morning will be granted heaven as his abode, and his past and present sins will be forgiven: "For indeed, this is a night when the doors of the heavens open and the doors of mercy, pleasure, forgiveness, grace, repentance, blessings, generosity, and kindness open. Allah releases the same number of mercy as the hair of the sheep and its wool. Allah determines the appointed times and distributes the yearly provisions. "O! Muhammad! Whoever revives this night with *Tasbīḥ*, *Tahlīl*, *Takbīr*, *Du'ā*, prayer, reading, voluntary acts, and seeking forgiveness, Jannah will be his place of residence, and Allah will forgive his past and present sins." (Ibn Ṭāwūs, 1997 AD/1376 SH: 2, 699)

Majlisī, in his interpretation of the verse, mentions several possibilities and, inspired by the above narrations, one of the interpretations he suggests is: "The meaning is that if you have a past or recent sin, we will forgive it." This interpretation aligns with the understanding of "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" as referring to past and present sins. In one of the volumes of *Bihar al-Anwar*, *Majlisī* offers a similar interpretation: "As for the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*," there is no objection to interpreting it as the old sins and the new decisions that were made about him and his community." (*Majlisī*, 1982 AD/1403 AH: 67, 30)

Other narrations about looking at the Ka'ba in the narrative texts also confirm the previous views. An example of this narration is: "The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Whoever looks at the Ka'ba with faith and sincerity, just one look, will have their past and future sins forgiven. Whoever looks at the Ka'ba, it is better than the worship of a year." (*Nūrī*, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 9, 357)

These types of narrations, where a person asks Allah for the forgiveness of "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*," should be understood in light of the previous statements. The individual's intention is not to seek forgiveness for future sins but for past and present sins. This is how the meaning should be understood in the context of the *Du'a al-Samat*, where the supplicant asks Allah, by the right of this blessed supplication, to forgive their sins: "O! Allah, by the right of this prayer and by the right of these names whose meanings and inward realities are known only to You, bless Muhammad and his family, and avenge the enemies of the family of Muhammad. Do this and that and avenge me from such-and-such, and forgive my sins, both past and future." (*Kaf'amī*, 2004 AD/1383 SH: 92)

It should be noted that "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" does not mean "What will come" in the future, and it has often been mistakenly interpreted as future sins. This is due to a lack of precision in the wording of the narration. Both "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" are in the past tense and should not be interpreted as present or future actions. The failure to address this simple issue has caused considerable conceptual difficulties.

A new point that can be added, with a theological perspective, is that "Forgiveness" means the "Removal of punishment," and the complete removal of punishment entails the removal of the full obligation. The removal of the full obligation, in turn, is invalid by both reason and revelation. This point is so clear that further explanation is unnecessary. It is also important to note that the narrations regarding "*Mā Taqaddama*" and "*Mā Ta'akhhara*" have been used for ordinary humans and non-infallibles. If this phrase refers to past and future sins, it would create a theological problem and lead to unacceptable consequences. It makes no sense for the reward of an act of worship to be the forgiveness of future sins, as this would essentially open the door to committing sin.

Conclusion

The translation of the second verse of Surah *al-Fath* is challenging due to its connection to the impeccability of the Prophet (PBUH). The first difficulty lies in the use of the word "Dhanb" in this noble verse. Translators and commentators have proposed solutions to avoid the issue of the Prophet's (PBUH) impeccability, which is outside the scope of this discussion. The second difficulty pertains to the phrase "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhhara*," which most translators and commentators have rendered as "Past and future." The issue with this

translation lies in the forgiveness of past and future sins. The forgiveness of future sins is incompatible with the principles of Islamic thought. Based on the opinions of commentators in verses where the phrase "*Qaddama wa Akhkhara*" is used, and by referring to the narrations that have played a significant role in explaining this phrase and clarifying its true meaning, it has been concluded that translating "*Mā Taqaddama wa mā Ta'akhkhara*" as "Past and future" is not an accurate translation and is not without its issues. Unfortunately, as observed, about 60% of translators have chosen this equivalence. The narrations interpret this phrase as "Old" and "New," which resolves the theological issues related to the forgiveness of future sins. What the investigation into the commentators' views reveals is that "*Qaddama*" and "*Akhkhara*" are relative terms, measured in relation to a specific starting point, and the chronological order of events determines their precedence and succession. Therefore, translations that render "*Taqaddama*" and "*Ta'akhkhara*" as "Preceding and Succeeding" are the most accurate and eloquent choices.

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