

# The Difference Between the Plague (al-Ṭa‘ūn) and Common Death / Disease (al-Wabā’)



## Hadīths on the Plague

The ḥadīth of Anas (رضي الله عنه) that the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said: “*The plague (al-ṭā‘ūn) is martyrdom for every Muslim.*”<sup>1</sup>

The ḥadīth related by Ā‘ishah (رضي الله عنها) that the Messenger of Allāh (صلى الله عليه وسلم): “*The plague (al-ṭā‘ūn) is martyrdom for my nation and a [form of] stabbing [by] your enemies among the Jinn, [appearing as] blisters like the blisters of camels<sup>2</sup>, it comes from beneath the armpits, and the hypochondres<sup>3</sup>.*”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wal-Tarhīb (no. 1399).

<sup>2</sup> And in another report: “*resembling an abscess, boil*”, refer to Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wal-Tarhīb (no. 1408).

<sup>3</sup> In the Arabic: “marāqq”, the two areas which lie right beneath the tip of the chest on the right and left sides, beneath which the liver and spleen are found, or it can refer to the lower and softer part of the belly. Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr said: “The plague is an abscess that comes from the marāqq and the armpits, and it

And the ḥadīth of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) that the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “*The perishing of my nation is through death (in battle) and the plague, it is the stabbing [made by] your enemies among the Jinn, and in both [types of deaths] there is martyrdom.*”<sup>5</sup>

Abū 'Asīb relates that the Messenger of Allāh (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “*Jibrīl (عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ) came to me with the fever and the plague [granting me a choice therein]. I held the fever for Madīnah and sent the plague to Shām. The plague is martyrdom for my nation and a punishment upon the disbeliever.*”<sup>6</sup>

### **Ibn al-Qayyim on the Wisdom of the Jinn Being Unleashed Upon Men Through the Plague**

Ibn Ḥajar quotes Ibn al-Qayyim (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ): “There is a far reaching wisdom in the plague being a [form of] stabbing by our enemies, the jinn. For among our enemies [the jinn] are their devils, (shayāṭīn). As for the obedient among them, then they are our brothers, and Allāh has only ordered us with enmity towards our enemies among men and jinn, that we wage war against them, seeking His pleasure therein. But most people

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can also come out through the hands and fingers and from wherever Allāh wills.” As cited by Ibn Ḥajar in al-Fath (10/180).

<sup>4</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr (no. 3946).

<sup>5</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr (no. 4231).

<sup>6</sup> Ṣaḥīḥ al-Targhīb wal-Tarhīb (no. 1401)

refused except to appease them. Thus, [Allāh] unleashed [the jinn] upon them as a punishment because they responded to [the call of the jinn when they] misguided them and ordered them with disobedience, sin and corruption on earth. They obeyed them and hence, the wisdom [of Allāh] required that He should unleash [the jinn] against them by stabbing them [internally] in the same way that He unleashes their enemies among the men against them [through war and conquest] whenever they cause corruption upon the earth and throw the Book of Allāh behind their backs. So this is a battle [against men] from men and the plague is a battle [against men] from the jinn. Both take place through All-Mighty's and All-Wise's unleashing [of the men and jinn] upon whoever deserves punishment and as martyrdom and mercy for whoever deserves it. This is the sunnah of Allāh with respect to punishments. They befall in a general manner and hence they are a purification for the believers and revenge against the sinners.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Badhl al-Māʿūn FI Faḍl al-ṬĀʿŪn (Dār Kutub al-Athariyyah, 1413H) p. 85.

## The Difference Between the Plague (Ṭā'ūn) and Common Death / Disease (Wabā')

Ibn Ḥajar (رحمته الله) wrote: “[al-Qāḍī] ‘Iyāḍ said: ‘The origin of al-ṭā’ūn is with the ulcers that arise within the body whereas al-wabā’ is disease in a more general sense. They are referred to as ‘plague’ due to their resemblance to it [from the angle that they also result] in death. Every ṭā’ūn is a wabā’ but not every wabā’ is a plague’”<sup>8</sup>

This shows that wabā’ is a generalised term, an umbrella term under which many diseases can enter, including the ṭā’ūn (plague), and that the ṭā’ūn is a specific type of disease which has unique causative factors and symptoms.

He (رحمته الله) also said: “That which distinguishes ṭā’ūn (plague) from wabā’ (common disease, death) is the origin of the ṭā’ūn—which the physicians did not address and as did most of those who tried to define the ṭā’ūn—and it is [the fact] that it comes from the piercing of the Jinn... the physicians did not address it because it is from the piercing of the Jinn and this is not a matter that can be encompassed by the intellect, it is known only through the legislator [the Prophet]. Hence, they spoke about that [only] in accordance with what their principles [of medicine] necessitate.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Faḥ al-Bārī (al-Maktabah al-Salafiyyah), 10/1840.

<sup>9</sup> Faḥ al-Bārī (10/181).

Ibn Ḥajar (رَحِمَهُ اللهُ) cites numerous scholars in description of the plague: Abū al-Walīd al-Bājī: “It is disease that encompasses many people in a given location among the locations, and is besides what is usually experienced of the diseases of people.” He also cites from al-Nawawī in al-Rawḍah: “It is said that the plague is the blood gushing [rapidly] into the organ.” Ibn Ḥajar also explains: “And others have said it is the agitation and expansion of blood [in tissues and organs].” He cites again from al-Nawawī in al-Taḥdhīb: “[The plague] is pustules and swellings [abscesses] which are extremely painful. They come out [of the body to its surface] as if ablaze [on fire]. The area [of skin and tissue] surrounding them turn black, green, very deep red or purple, like [the size and shape of a] pearl. Throbbing pain and being sick accompanies this.”<sup>10</sup>

### **The Dajjāl and the Plague Cannot Enter Madīnah But Other Diseases Can**

Abu Hurairah (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) reports that Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “Neither the [False] Messiah [al-Dajjāl] nor the plague will enter Madīnah.”<sup>11</sup>

Also from Abu Hurairah (رَضِيَ اللهُ عَنْهُ) that Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: “There are angels guarding the entrances

<sup>10</sup> Faṭḥ al-Bārī (10/1840).

<sup>11</sup> Related by al-Bukhārī (no. 5731), Kitāb al-Ṭibb.

of Madīnah, the plague nor the Dajjāl will be able to enter it.”<sup>12</sup> As for disease in general, then A'ishah (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا) narrates: “When Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) reached Madīnah, Abū Bakr and Bilāl became ill. When Abū Bakr’s fever got worse, he would recite (this poetic verse): ‘Everybody is staying alive with his People, yet Death is nearer to him than His shoe laces.’ And Bilal, when his fever deserted him, would recite: ‘Would that I could stay overnight in a valley wherein I would be surrounded by Idhkhīr and Jalīl (kinds of goodsmelling grass). Would that one day I could drink the water of the Majannah, and would that (The two mountains) Shāmmah and Ṭafil would appear to me!’ The Prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said: ‘O Allāh! Curse Shaiba bin Rabī’ah and ‘Utba bin Rabī’ah and Umayyah bin Khalaf as they turned us out of our land to the land of diseases (al-wabā’).’ Allāh’s Messenger (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) then said, ‘O Allah! Make us love Madīnah as we love Makkah or even more than that. O Allah! Give blessings in our sāl and our mudd (measures of food) and make the climate of Madīnah suitable for us, and divert its fever towards Al-Juḥfah.’” A'ishah added: “When we reached Mādīnah, it was the most unhealthy (awba’) of Allāh’s lands, and the valley of Buṭhān (the valley of Medina) used to flow with impure coloured water.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Related by al-Bukhārī (no. 1880), Kitāb Faḍā’il al-Madīnah.

<sup>13</sup> Related by al-Bukhārī (no. 1889), Kitāb Faḍā’il al-Madīnah.

This shows that whilst plague (ṭā'ūn) cannot enter Madīnah, the city is still subject to outbreaks of disease and death. Such diseases are due to the well known causes of disease such as change in seasons, pollution and putrefaction of air, poison, toxicity in water, food and so on.

Ibn Ḥajar (رحمة الله) said: “If the ṭā'ūn (plague) was the very same thing as the wabā' (common disease / death), then the two ḥadīths would contradict each other. However, there is no contradiction between them because the ṭā'ūn is more specific than the wabā'.”<sup>14</sup> He goes on to mention, from Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī, how in the time of 'Umar, when Abū al-Aswad al-Du'lī came to Madīnah, he had observed that an illness occurred there and lots of people were dying a quick death.

So this shows there is **no contradiction** between common disease or death taking place in Madīnah and the negation of the plague entering Madīnah because the plague is a specific and unique disease in which the Jinn play a role and which cannot be truly understood by the physicians through the known causative factors of disease. Such diseases with known causes and factors can be treated with tried and tested treatments whereas the plague confounds the physicians because of its

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<sup>14</sup> Badhl al-Mā'ūn Fī Faḍl al-Ṭā'ūn (Dār Kutub al-Athariyyah, 1413H) p. 49-50.

unique nature. The jinn assault the diseased person through a type or form of stabbing whose reality is unknown and the disease manifestation is through this unseen activity of the enemies among the jinn, we seek refuge in Allāh from such harm and evil.

### **Precautionary Measures For the Avoidance of Harm**

Once the above difference has been made clear with respect to al-ṭā'ūn and al-wabā', then the apparent conflict between precautionary measures of quarantine and isolation being taken in the city of Madīnah and the plague not being able to enter Madīnah is immediately resolved. Hence, the rulers may apply such measures for the common death/disease (al-wabā') should it erupt in that city by preventing people from leaving or if it erupts in another city or a foreign land by preventing them from coming into Madīnah.

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