

carried out by the German architect R. Koldewey (1855-1925) between 1899 and 1917 systematically traced mud brick architecture, distinguished between ancient buildings and later pits, and uncovered the Etemenanki, said to be the original foundation of the Tower of Babel (Koldewey, *Excavations*).

Most exegetes believe the Bābil mentioned in the Qurʾān to have been a town in ʿIrāq, but al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and, following him, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) also cite a minority opinion according to which it was a city in Persia and was also known as Bābil Dunbāwand—Damāwand in Persian—(cf. *Tafsīrs* of Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, *sub* Q 2:102). Ibn ʿAṭīyya (d. ca.542/1147) also mentions a weak opinion that it was located between Naṣībīn and Raʿs al-ʿayn, and a stronger opinion that it was in the vicinity of Kūfa. The latter theory accords with the saying of Ibn Masʿūd—may Allah be pleased with him—to the people of Kūfa: “you are between al-Ḥīra and Bābil” (Ibn ʿAṭīyya).

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- Yāqūt. *Buldān*.
- See also:** ANGELS; ARK; CHILDREN OF ISRĀʿĪL; IBRĀHĪM, UPON HIM PEACE; INTOXICANTS; LANGUAGE AND SPEECH; MAGIC; MOUNTAINS; SULAYMĀN, UPON HIM PEACE; WEIGHTS AND MEASURES.

MUZAFFAR IQBAL

Babylon

See BĀBIL.

BACKBITING

GHĪBA

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definition; ii. Gravity of Backbiting; iii. Related Sins: Calumny, Ridicule, Taunt, Name-Calling, and Gossip; iv. A Sin of the Tongue; v. Possibly an Enormity; vi. Exceptions; vii. Causes and Remedies; viii. Bibliography.

Definition

Ghība, translated as backbiting, speaking ill, and slander, is mentioned once in its VIII-stem form in the Qurʾān and is generally defined as a truthful verbal or non-verbal reference to someone absent (hence the root *gh-y-b* denoting what is absent or unseen) but in terms they would dislike: *And do not speak ill of one another behind your backs* (Q 49:12) (Jawharī, *Ṣiḥāḥ*, *sub gh-y-b*). In explanation of this verse many of the exegetes have adduced the following Prophetic hadith:

Backbiting is saying something about your brother that he would dislike. If what you say of him is true, you have slandered him (i.e., it is backbiting), and if what you say of him is not true, you have calumniated him.

Muslim, *Birr wal-ṣila wal-ādāb*, *taḥrīm al-ghība*; Tirmidhī, *Birr wal-ṣila*, *mā jāʿ fi-l-ghība*; Abū Dāwūd, *Adab*, *fi-l-ghība*; Dārimī, *Sunan*, *Riqāʿ*, *fi-l-ghība*; Mālik, *Muwattaʿ*, *Jāmiʿ*, *mā jāʿa fi-l-ghība*; cf. *Tafsīrs* of Māwardī, Abū Ḥayyān, Qurṭubī, Bayḍāwī, Ibn Kathīr, Ibn ʿĀdil, *sub* Q 49:12

“Saying something” in all of the above scenarios can be non-verbal:

“A short woman came to see the Prophet,” said ʿĀʾisha, “whereupon I gestured with my thumb thus—and I pointed my thumb to the Prophet; he said, ‘You have just slandered her (*laqad ightabtihā*).’”

Ibn Rāhūya, *Musnad* 3:495 §, 3:921 §1613; Abū al-Shaykh, *Tawbīkh* 1:204; al-Aṣbahānī, *Targhīb* 3:131 §2226

Al-Naḥlāwī (d. 1350/1931) defined *ghība* thus:

It is the mention of your specific brother’s flaws whereby he is recognizable to the addressee as well as anyone that can hear you, or recounting these flaws and making them comprehensible, even by gesturing with the hand or any other limb, in the sense of an insult and aversion. It is

categorically prohibited (*ḥarām qatʿī*); and, just as it can be committed with the tongue and the limbs, it can be committed in writing as well.

al-Ḥaẓr wal-ibāḥa, p. 173

Gravity of Backbiting

Backbiting is explicitly prohibited and denounced in the Qurʾān, in the wake of related judgmental sins, as comparable to devouring the dead corpse of one's brother:

Let not a group ridicule another group; it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor should women mock other women; it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor taunt one another, nor insult one another with epithets; evil is all imputation of iniquity after faith.... Avoid much suspicion, for some suspicions are sins. Do not spy. And do not speak ill of one another behind your backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would loathe it!

Q 49:11-12

The Prophet—upon him blessings and peace—warned that on the Day of Resurrection backbiters will be forced, to their own utter disgust, to perform such cannibalism as punishment: “On the Day of Resurrection a man who used to backbite people in life shall be brought and told: ‘Eat the flesh of your dead brother just as you ate it alive.’ Then, verily, he shall certainly eat it, and holler, and scowl!” (Ṭabarānī, *Muʿjam al-awsaṭ* 6:79 §5853 and al-Aṣḥabānī, *Targhīb* 3:131-132 §2227 yuʿtā bil-rajul... kul laḥma akhīka maytan through trustworthy narrators, except that Ibn Ishāq does not explicitly state direct transmission, cf. Haythamī, *Majmaʿ* 8:173-174 §13130). This graphic Qurʾānic simile has led to a lexical equivalency of the verb “to eat” (*akala*) and its feminine infinitive noun (*akla*) with backbiting in the Arabic language (al-Zamakhsharī, *Asās*, sub *a-k-l*). Another hadith states that backbiters will be in Hellfire, flaying their own chests and faces (Abū Dāwūd, *Adab*, ghība).

Al-Jaṣṣās (305-370/918-981) explained:

His saying *Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would loathe it!* (Q 49:12) is emphatic to condemn backbiting and censure its commission from several perspectives. First, human flesh is prohibited for consumption; likewise backbiting. Second, human beings are instinctively averse to eating human flesh, “so let backbiting among you be just as detestable.” Its avoidance is also made incum-

bent by the imperative of reason, since the demands of reason are more deserving of being followed than those of instinct. He did not stop at mentioning a human corpse but made it one's brother—the most extreme possible way to express condemnation and censure.

All of the above applies only to [speaking of] a Muslim who is outwardly upright and who has not manifested any behavior that demands branding him as depraved, just as it would be our duty to belie anyone falsely accusing him of it. However, if the accused is an overt profligate then it is not prohibited to mention the reprehensible acts he has committed. Nor is it obligatory for someone who hears them retold to rebuke the one who retells them.

Aḥkām al-Qurʾān 5:291

Related Sins: Calumny, Ridicule, Taunt, Name-Calling, and Gossip

If untruthful, the disparaging reference is *buhṭān*, calumny (*q.v.*), decried even more strongly in the Qurʾān (Q 4:20, 112, 156; 24:16; 33:58; 60:12), whence the plural adjective *buhṭ* in the expression *qawmun buhṭ* “a calumnious people,” by which the former rabbi and erudite Companion ʿAbd Allāh b. Saḷām—one of those promised Paradise—described his nation (Bukhārī, *Manāqib al-Anṣār*, bāb).

Other disparaging acts of the tongue (*q.v.*) are also condemned in the verse of Sūrat al-Ḥujurāt already cited:

- ridiculing others (*sukhriyya*): as in *Let not a group ridicule (yaskhar) another group* (Q 49:11), the second most frequently mentioned verb for the scoffs of the tongue in the Qurʾān (Q 2:218; 6:10; 9:79; 11:38; 21:41; 23:110; 37:12, 14; 38:63; 39:52) after its explicit synonym mockery (*istihzāʿ*), mentioned in the Qurʾān under the cognates of the root *h-z-ā* (Q 2:15; 6:5, 10; 9:65; 11:8; 15:11; 21:41; 36:30);
- taunting (*lamz*): *Do not taunt one another* (Q 49:11), a sin condemned in three other places in the Qurʾān (Q 9:58, 79; 104:1); and
- name-calling (*al-nabz bil-alqāb*): *nor insult one another with epithets* (Q 49:11).

In books on morals and ethics—such as al-Aṣḥabānī's *al-Targhīb wal-tarhīb*, al-Nahḷāwī's *al-Ḥaẓr wal-ibāḥa*, and the Sufī classics, among them Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-qulūb*, al-Qushayrī's *al-Risāla*, and al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʿ ʿulūm al-Dīn*—backbiting is usually treated in tandem with another,