

A Critical Analysis of the Reports of “Eschatological Immunity” (*ma ‘ṣūmiyyat-e ukhrawī*) as a Reward for Certain Righteous Acts in Imāmī Sources

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Abstract

In the Imāmī narrative sources, there are traditions according to which, in return for performing certain righteous deeds, individuals are promised various forms of eschatological immunity (*ma ‘ṣūmiyyat-e ukhrawī*). These include exemption from reckoning and punishment on the Day of Resurrection, or the forgiveness of all their sins. Such traditions raise the question of how a single righteous deed could possibly erase all of a person’s sins and transgressions and protect them from eschatological reckoning and punishment. Could such an understanding not render the process of reckoning meaningless and undermine the principle of divine justice in judgment?

To facilitate the examination of these traditions, the present study categorizes them according to similarities and differences in the types of promised eschatological immunity. On the basis of this classification, the forms of immunity are initially divided into two categories: comprehensible and incomprehensible. The comprehensible forms of immunity are then further divided into absolute immunity and immunity without an absolute qualification. Within each of these categories, several propositions concerning eschatological immunity are identified and subjected to a critical examination from the perspective of ḥadīth criticism. By assessing the degree to which each proposition is consistent with the system of religious knowledge derived from the Qur’an, established Sunnah, and reason, the authors undertake a substantive evaluation of its validity.

The research employs a library-based method for data collection and a descriptive-analytical method for analysis and reaching conclusions.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Imami hadith sources contain reports in which certain righteous acts are presented as causes of eschatological immunity. These reports promise outcomes such as forgiveness of sins, freedom from reckoning and punishment, security from the great terror of the Resurrection, freedom from fear and grief, protection from harm, and the remove of the pen. The apparent meaning of some of these reports raises an important question: how can performing a particular righteous act result in the removal of previous sins or exemption from reckoning and punishment in the Hereafter? Such an understanding may apparently conflict with the principle of individual responsibility and with the Qur'anic conception of the precise reckoning of human deeds. The present study seeks to examine these reports conceptually and to determine the validity of their meanings within the integrated system of religious teachings. The research particularly focuses on the nature and extent of the promised immunity and distinguishes between meanings that can be understood and evaluated and those that lie beyond ordinary human comprehension.

Materials and Methods

The present study is fundamental in terms of its purpose and employs a library-based method for data collection and a descriptive-analytical method for analysis and reasoning. The research material consists of reports in Imami sources that promise forms of eschatological immunity as rewards for particular righteous acts. The reports were first collected and then classified according to similarities and differences in the type of immunity promised. In the first stage, they were divided into two principal categories: comprehensible and incomprehensible forms of immunity. The comprehensible forms were subsequently divided into absolute and non-absolute forms according to whether their apparent wording indicated unrestricted immunity. The study approaches the reports primarily through conceptual and substantive hadith criticism. Accordingly, the meaning of each proposition was examined in relation to the integrated system of religious teachings derived from the Qur'an, established Sunnah, and reason. The analytical process consisted of

identifying the principal eschatological promise in each report, determining the scope of its apparent meaning, examining its compatibility with established religious principles, and assessing whether the proposition could be accepted as stated, accepted through a restricted or non-absolute interpretation, regarded as incomprehensible and therefore left without judgment, or rejected because of incompatibility with fundamental religious principles. The study does not attempt to establish the validity of the reports through detailed examination of their chains of transmission. Instead, it concentrates on the conceptual validity of their contents and on whether their meanings can be reconciled with the broader framework of Islamic teachings. This approach makes it possible to distinguish between the validity of a report's wording and the validity of a particular interpretation of its meaning.

Results and Findings

The findings demonstrate that the reports concerning eschatological immunity are not homogeneous and cannot be evaluated according to a single rule. Their classification according to the type of immunity produces three principal categories: incomprehensible forms of immunity, comprehensible forms without unrestricted meaning, and comprehensible forms with an apparently absolute meaning.

The first category consists of incomprehensible propositions. The two principal examples are resurrection in the state of pilgrimage and recitation of the talbiyah, and resurrection in the state of martyrdom. These propositions concern the manner of resurrection, which belongs to a post-worldly reality inaccessible to ordinary human experience. Although neither proposition can be regarded as rationally impossible or necessarily incompatible with divine justice, their specific reality cannot be adequately understood or substantively validated through ordinary human cognition. Accordingly, the appropriate conclusion regarding them is suspension of judgment rather than definitive acceptance or rejection.

The second category consists of comprehensible forms of immunity whose wording does not necessarily imply unrestricted exemption from all forms of reckoning and punishment. These include forgiveness of sins, security from the great terror of the Resurrection, security from divine wrath and fire on the Day of Resurrection, protection from harm, security from weeping and the distress of the Resurrection, and, in one report, forgiveness for the individual's

parents and children. The analysis indicates that forgiveness of sins can be accepted when understood in a non-absolute and graded sense. A righteous act may contribute to the removal of some sins or their consequences, while this does not necessarily entail the complete cancellation of all accountability. Similarly, security from the terror of the Resurrection can be accepted because such security is itself compatible with the religious conception of the reward of righteous deeds. Security from weeping and the distress of the Resurrection is likewise not understood as a complete exemption from reckoning and punishment, since the promised immunity is restricted to a particular condition or aspect of the Resurrection. Protection from harm and security from divine wrath and fire can also be accepted if understood as restricted forms of protection rather than absolute exemption from all eschatological consequences.

The report concerning forgiveness for the individual's parents and children, however, cannot be reconciled with the principle of individual responsibility when applied to children who had no role, intention, or participation in the act that supposedly generates the reward. It is therefore regarded as unacceptable in its stated meaning.

The third category includes apparently absolute forms of immunity, particularly absolute forgiveness of sins, denial of every form of reckoning and punishment, the remove of the pen, and the denial of fear and grief. The denial of fear and grief can be accepted because it is compatible with the religious description of righteous believers. Absolute forgiveness, however, cannot be attributed simply to the performance of a particular act or recitation without considering repentance and the distinction between divine rights and the rights of people. The absolute denial of reckoning and punishment is incompatible with the fundamental principle of precise accountability for human deeds and is therefore rejected. Likewise, interpreting the remove of the pen as the complete removal of responsibility from rational and voluntary followers of the Ahl al-Bayt cannot be accepted, because the principle of individual responsibility and the purpose of worldly trial would thereby be undermined. The results consequently show that the validity of most reports depends upon restricting apparently absolute meanings rather than accepting them in an unrestricted form.

Conclusion

The study concludes that reports of eschatological immunity should not be treated as a homogeneous group. Their substantive evaluation requires a distinction between incomprehensible propositions, comprehensible propositions without unrestricted meaning, and comprehensible propositions with an apparently absolute meaning. The two propositions concerning resurrection in the state of pilgrimage and martyrdom are beyond ordinary human comprehension and therefore require suspension of judgment. Several non-absolute forms of immunity, including forgiveness of sins, security from the terror of the Resurrection, protection from certain forms of harm, and security from particular forms of eschatological fear and punishment, can be accepted when interpreted within appropriate limits. By contrast, forgiveness extended to persons who had no role in the relevant act, absolute denial of reckoning and punishment, and the remove of the pen from rational and voluntary individuals are incompatible with the fundamental principles governing human responsibility and divine justice. Accordingly, the central finding of the study is that eschatological immunity should generally be understood in a restricted and graded manner rather than as the complete negation of accountability. This approach provides a basis for reconciling acceptable reports with the integrated system of religious teachings while identifying propositions whose apparent meanings cannot be sustained.

Keywords: Eschatological Immunity; Fiqh al-Hadith; Hadith Criticism; Remove of the pen; Thematic validation