

## **IMAM ABU JAAFAR AT-THABARY: MUFASSIR'S SCHOLAR**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari, may Allah have mercy on him, is the only well-known reference in the study of the interpretation of bil Ma'tsur because of his ability to interpret the Qur'an, guided mainly by the good narrations of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), his sahaba (may Allah be pleased with him), the tabiin, and tabi' tabiin, so that the scholars from generations to generations have made Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari the supreme teacher of the Mufassir. This qualitative research seeks to better understand Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari's thoughts by conducting library research and collecting data from various literatures. The results of the study prove that Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari and his interpretation book, Jami` al-Bayan: Verses of Qur'an Interpretation, can be a major foothold in the development of Al-Qur'an interpretation throughout the world. In terms of method, he prioritizes the interpretation of bil ma'tsur because it is more postulated and precise in uncovering the secrets of the contents of the Qur'an. It is a guide to solving various problems for people.

**Keywords:** *Imam Abu Jaafar At-Thabary, Mufassir, al-Qur'an*

### **ABSTRAK**

Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari- semoga Allah merahmatinya, merupakan satu-satunya referensi terpengaruh dalam kajian tafsir bil ma'tsur, karena kemampuan beliau dalam menafsirkan al-Qur'an, berpedoman utama pada periwayatan-periwayatan baik dari Rasulullah Shallallahu Alaihi Wasallam, para sahabat radhiallahu Anhu, para tabiin maupun tabi' tabiin, sehingga para ulama-ulama di generasi kegenerasi menjadikan Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari sebagai guru para Mufassir. Penelitian ini bertujuan agar bisa mengenal lebih dekat dengan pemikiran Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan menggunakan kajian kepustakaan (*Library research*) yaitu mengumpulkan data-data dari berbagai literatur. Hasil penelitian membuktikan bahwa Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari dengan karyanya kitab tafsir- Jami` al-Bayan -Tafsir Ayat al-Qur'an bisa menjadi pijakan utama dalam perkembangan penafsiran al-Qur'an diseluruh dunia. Dalam hal metode beliau lebih mengutamakan dan cenderung pada tafsir bil ma'tsur karena lebih berdalil dan tepat dalam membuka tabir rahasia isi kandungan al-Qur'an yang menjadi pedoman diberbagai persoalam umat.

**Kata Kunci:** *Imam Abu Jaafar At-Thabary, Mufassir, al-Qur'an*

## **A. Introduction**

Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari has traveled to various countries and met with scholars and community leaders; he is the only greatest figure in his generation in terms of knowledge, intelligence, and all scientific qualifications, and is proudly quoted as saying, "I was given the opportunity to see such a great person." His writings cover a wide range of scientific disciplines, including logic, arithmetic, algebra, and medicine; as a result, many figures in literature cite his works.

He leaves the splendor of the world and its people and keeps away from things that are not related to the hereafter. He is like a reader who knows nothing but the Qur'an, a hadith reader who knows nothing but hadith, a jurist who knows nothing but fiqh, a grammarian who knows nothing but grammar, a mathematician who knows nothing but mathematics, and he is a man of great devotion. He writes various collections of knowledge, and if you combine his books with those of others, you will find that his books are superior to others. As a result, it is clear that Abu Jaafar at-Thabari draws from all knowledge in various literatures and is not limited to a specific body of knowledge.

This qualitative research uses library research to collect data from various literary sources. The source of data in this study is available literature related to the prominent figure of Abu Jaafar At-Thabari.

## **B. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Biography of Imam Abu Jaafar Ath-Thabari**

His full name is Abu Jaafar Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Katsir bin Ghalib al-Amali at-Thabari. He is better known as Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari, and he was born in the Amulu region, Tabaristan's largest city<sup>1</sup>, in 224 H<sup>2</sup> (some historians say 225 H), which means at the end of 224 and the beginning of 225 H. Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid, Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari, grew up in the city of Amulu, began studying with the Ulama in that area from childhood, and memorized the Qur'an at the age of 7. He wrote the hadith when he was nine years old. "My father saw me in a dream that I was with the Prophet (peace be upon him), my hand has a bag full of stones, and I threw it to the Prophet (peace be upon him," said Imam ibn Jarir. Experts in dream interpretation<sup>3</sup> say: This child will grow up as a figure in religious sciences; therefore, his father is very motivated for the success of his son in seeking knowledge.

### **2. Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Thabari's Lineage**

Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kathir.<sup>4</sup> Historians only agree that his lineage was Yazid (Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid). Some historians say up to Ghalib (Muhammad

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<sup>1</sup> Shihab al-Din bin Abdullah al-Roumi al-Hamawi Abu Abdullah Yaqut, *Mu'jam Al-Bildan*, 2nd edn (Beirut: Dar Shadr, 1995), p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> Syamsuddin Abdul Khair Muhammad bin Ali ibnu Jazari, *Ghayatun-Nihayah Fi Thabaqat Al-Qurra'*, 1st edn (tpp: Maktabah Ibnu Taimiyah, 1932), p. 107.

<sup>3</sup> Syamsuddin Ar-Razi, *Mukhtar Ash-Shihah* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1995), p. 467.

<sup>4</sup> Shams al-Din Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby, *Al-Muhaqaq, Sayr 'i'lam Al-Nubala'i* (Muasasat al-Risalah), p. 298.

bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kathir bin Ghalib)<sup>5</sup>, and some others say up to Khalid (Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Khalid).<sup>6</sup>

### **3. Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Thabari's Nickname**

He was given the nickname Abu Jaafar (even though he had no sons and he was never married), as expressed by Imam Ahmad bin Ali bin Hajar Abu Al-Fadhl Al-Asqalani<sup>7</sup>: "Even he himself said, "I have no children: I have never touched a legitimate woman, let alone an unlawful one".<sup>8</sup> He was attributed to Ath-Tabari, a large country that produced world leaders in various scientific fields (literature experts, philosophers, and fiqh experts).<sup>9</sup>

Imam Syamsuddin Abu al-Khair Ibn al-Jazari stated that some historians add his tenacity to that of Al-Amali Al-Baghdadi.<sup>10</sup> The environmental conditions in which he was born had a big contribution to and influence on his scientific growth and development. Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid Abu Jaafar at-Thabari lived between 224-310 H/ 839-923 M.<sup>11</sup>

Imam Ibn Jarir lived in Baghdad until he died, i.e., between the end of the reign of al-Mu'tasim Muhammad bin Harun al-Rashid (218 H–227 H) and the end of the era of al-Muqtadir Billah Ja'far bin al-Mu'tadid (295 H–319 H).

### **4. Life of Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Thabari**

Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari—may Allah have mercy on him—lived in an uproarious era where struggles for power and division took place. It was full of peace and unity in East and West before, passing through the era of the caliphs Ar-rashidin and the Umayyad caliphs afterwards, although the conflicts and differences of opinion that occurred within it eventually led to the establishment of the Abbasid Caliph in the east, who took power and then consolidated the Islamic state and expanded its territory on a larger scale. However, as time went by, division and strife also occurred.

Imam Ibn Jarir traveled to various areas of the Abbasid Caliphate to seek knowledge.<sup>12</sup> He started his life journey in Amaaly Tabaristan and ended it in Baghdad, where he died.

### **5. Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Thabari's journey in seeking knowledge**

Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid, also known as Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari, has been an avid seeker of knowledge since he was a child. He memorized the Quran when he was seven years old. Abu Jaafar at-Thabari said: "I memorized the Qur'an for seven years; I

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<sup>5</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhammad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

<sup>6</sup> Syamsuddin Abu al-Abbas Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Khallikan, *Wafayat Al-A'yan Wa-Anba' Abna' Al-Zaman*, 1st edn (Beirut: Dar al-Shadr, 2009), p. 191.

<sup>7</sup> Ibnu Hajar Al-'Asqalani, *Lisan Al-Mizan*, 3rd edn (Beirut: al-Alamy Foundation for Publications, 1986), p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> Shihab al-Din bin Abdullah al-Roumi al-Hamawi Abu Abdullah Yaqut, *Mu'jam Al-'Udaba'* (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1993), p. 2449.

<sup>9</sup> Abu Abdullah Yaqut, *Mu'jam Al-Bildan*.

<sup>10</sup> Jazari.

<sup>11</sup> Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr, *Tabaqat Al-Hifazi* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1982), p. 311.

<sup>12</sup> Taj al-Din bin Ali bin Abdul Kafi al-Subki, *Tabaqat Al-Shafi'iat Al-Kubra* (ttp: Hajr Lil Tiba'at wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi, 1992), p. 120.

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prayed with people when I was eight; and I wrote hadith. I am nine years old."<sup>13</sup> This shows his great mind, his alertness, his love for knowledge, and his desire to meet and study with scholars in various parts of the Islamic world. The beginning of his journey (*rehlah*) was to the Rayy region, a famous city among city centers. This city is famous for its abundant fruits and other natural products. It is a pilgrimage station of Masjidil Haram, which passes through Salabah and Qasbah, a mountainous region between Naisabur (160 leagues in Farsakh) and Qazawan (27 leagues), Qazvin to Abhor (12 leagues), and Abhar to Zanjan (15 leagues)<sup>14</sup> to study and seek knowledge from Muhammad bin Hamid bin Hayyan Al-Tamimi Al-Razi, Abu Abdullah (d. 248 H), Hafez hadiths from the residents of al-Rayy, who visited Baghdad, many imams took knowledge from him, such as Ibn Hanbal, Ibn Majah, and al-Tirmidzi, but some denied him. Imam Ibnu Jarir has more than 100 thousand hadiths from Muhammad Bin Hamid ar-Razi.<sup>15</sup>

Then he went to Assalam, which is one of the cities in Baghdad.<sup>16</sup> He wanted to meet in person to study with Imam Ahmad bin Hambal, but he was late because Imam Ahmad bin Hambal had passed away. Imam Ibn Jarir stayed in Assalam to study from prominent scholars before traveling to Basrah (a well-known city in Iraq at the time) to study from scholars there.

After that, Imam ibn Jarir went to Kufah, a very famous city at that time in Iraq, where he met Abu Kuraib Muhammad Ibn al-Ala' al-Hamdani, who was a famous hadith scholar and also a teacher of some hadith experts, as mentioned by Abd al-Rahman bin Abi Bakr and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 H).<sup>17</sup> It is said that Imam Ibn Jarir heard more than one hundred thousand hadiths from Abu Kuraib, then he returned to Assalam, wrote and lived there for a while, as well as studied sciences of Qur'an.<sup>18</sup>

Then he traveled abroad to Egypt and wrote about armies, beaches, borders, and much more. In 253 AH, he traveled to Fustat and studied under Imam Malik, Imam Syafii, and other scholars. "I've met all the experts in Egypt to from them," Imam Ibn Jarir said, as well as experts from other areas.

After that, Imam Ibnu Jarir returned to Assalam to stay there for a while, then he returned to Tabaristan, then to Baghdad, and went to Bardan Qantara. He stayed there until the end of his life. He focused on teaching and writing; he refused to be appointed as a judge; he divided his day and night for the benefit of himself and his religion, as Allah Subhanahu wataala guided him.<sup>19</sup>

### 6. Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari's Teachers

Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari had met a large number of sheikhs in his country and the countries he visited. He learned from them various scientific literature, hadiths,

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<sup>13</sup> Abu Abdullah Yaqut, *Mu'jam Al-'Udaba'*.

<sup>14</sup> Abu Abdullah Yaqut, *Mu'jam Al-Bildan*.

<sup>15</sup> Abu Abdullah Yaqut, *Mu'jam Al-'Udaba'*.

<sup>16</sup> Abu Abdullah Yaqut, *Mu'jam Al-Bildan*.

<sup>17</sup> Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr.

<sup>18</sup> Abu Abdullah Yaqut, *Mu'jam Al-'Udaba'*.

<sup>19</sup> Abu Abdullah Yaqut, *Mu'jam Al-'Udaba'*.

interpretations, grammar, languages, presentations, Qiraat, etc. It is difficult to name all his syeikhs, however, we mention some of the most famous ones as follows:

- 1) Ahmad bin Hamid al-Razi. He is a scholar and a great hafiz. He was born in 160 H and passed away in 248 H.<sup>20</sup>
- 2) Ahmad bin Hammad al-Dolabi is an imam and a hafiz. Abu Bishr Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Hammad ibn Sa'id ibn Muslim al-Ansari, al-Dulabi, al-Razi, al-Warraq, narrated by Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari -may Allah have mercy on him- Book of al-Mubtada'i wa al-Maghazi - he was born in 244 and passed away in 1300.<sup>21</sup>
- 3) Muhammad bin Abdul Malik bin Abi al-Shawareb is an imam, trustee, muhaddith, and jurist. Sharif, Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Abdul Malik bin Abi al-Shawareb, Muhammad bin Abdullah bin Abi Usman bin Abdullah bin Khalid bin Aseed bin Abi al-Ais bin Umayyah bin Abd Shams bin Abd Manaf Al-Qurashi, Bani Umayyad. al-Basri, Abu Jaafar at-Thabari—may Allah have mercy on him—we heard many hadiths from him. He passed away in the year 240 H.<sup>22</sup>
- 4) Abu Hammam al-Walid bin Shuja' is al-Waleed bin Shuja' Abu Hammam bin Abi Badr Al-Sakuni. He passed away on Wednesday, 13th Rabi'ul Awal, 243.<sup>23</sup>
- 5) Abu Krib Muhammad Ibn al-Ala al-Hamdani is one of the prominent sahib hadiths. It is said that Abu Jaafar at-Thabari—may Allah have mercy on him—heard more than one hundred thousand hadiths from Abu Kuraib. He died in the year 248 H.<sup>24</sup>

## **7. Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Thabari's Students**

Imam at-Thabari's students are among prominent scholars, they are:

- 1) Ibn Kamal Ahmad bin Kamal bin Khalaf al-Baghdadi is a sheikh, imam, scholar, hafiz, and a judge. Abu Bakr Ahmed bin Kamel bin Khalaf bin Shajarat al-Baghdadi, a student of Muhammad bin Jarir at-Thabari. He was born in 260 H. Ibn Shajarat passed away in Muharram in 350 H.<sup>25</sup>
- 2) Al-Baqirhi Abu Ali Mukhlid bin Jaafar bin Mukhlid is Sheikh, al-Saduq, al-Muammar. Abu Ali Makhlid bin Jaafar bin Makhlid bin Sahl al-Farsi, al-Baqirhi, al-Daqqaq. He died in Dzul-Hijjah in 369 H.<sup>26</sup>
- 3) Al-Tabarani Abu Al-Qasim Suleiman bin Ahmed bin Ayyub is an imam, hafiz, trustee, traveler, adventurer, Islamic modernist, and commonwealth man. Abu al-Qasim Suleiman bin Ahmed bin Mutair al-Lakhmi, Shami, and al-Tabarani are the authors of three dictionaries. He was born in Acre, in the month of Safar, 263 H.<sup>27</sup>
- 4) Abu Amr bin Hamdan Muhammad bin Ahmed al-Hairy is an imam, hadith scholar, trustworthy person, grammarian, scholar, ascetic, and devout Muslim, Musnad

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<sup>20</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

<sup>21</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

<sup>22</sup> Muhammad bin Hibban bin Ahmed Abu Hatim al-Tamimi al-Basti, *Al-Thiqat* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1975), p. 102.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Bin Abdullah bin Saleh Abu al-Hasan al-Ajli al-Kufi, *Ma'rifat Al-Thaqati* (Madinah: al-Dar, 1985), p. 342.

<sup>24</sup> Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr.

<sup>25</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

<sup>26</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

<sup>27</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

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Khorasan. He was born in 283 H and passed away on the 28th of Dzulqa'dah 376 H.<sup>28</sup>

As well as his other students.

### **8. Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Tabari's School of Thought**

At the beginning of his life, Imam Abu Jaafar at-Tabari belonged to the Shafi'i sect: Ahmed bin Abdullah bin Ahmed al-Farghani, Abu Mansour bin Abi Muhammad Abdullah bin Ahmed [bin Jaafar] bin Khudyah bin Hamis al-Farghani. His father was a friend of Muhammad bin Jarir at-Tabari, author of commentaries and history, and we will write his story later in the next chapter. Ahmad died in the month of Rabi' al-Awwal in 398 AH; he said that the Shafi'i school was spread in Baghdad, then it was spread everywhere. Imam Abu Jaafar at-Tabari chose in his books, as mentioned by Yaqut bin Abdullah al-Rumi al-Hamawi.

### **9. Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Tabari's Aqidah**

Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid Imam Abu Jaafar at-Tabari believed in Ahlusunnah Waljamaah and al-Dhahabi. The Islamic historian Imam al-Dhahabi al-Hafiz died on 3 Dzulqa'dah (48 H). Abu Jaafar Muhammad bin Jarir at-Tabari told us about his beliefs and said that it is enough for a person to know that his Lord is Allah, who rules over the throne.<sup>29</sup>

Imam Ibnu Katsir, Ismail bin Omar bin Katheer bin Daou bin Deraa al-Qurashi al-Basrawi, then al-Dimashqi, Abu al-Fida, mentioned that he had been included in the Shiite group. Ignorant people accused Imam Abu Jaafar at-Tabari of being an adherent of atheism. We seek refuge in Allah from these accusations. Yet he is one of the Islamic scholars who is very knowledgeable and practices the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger; may Allah bless him, give him safety, and exalt his rank.<sup>30</sup>

### **10. Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Tabari's Death**

Imam Abu Jaafar at-Tabari passed away in Baghdad at sunset on a Sunday evening, with two days left of Shawwal in 310 H. Ahmad bin Kamel stated that he was buried in Rahbah Yaquub, which is Baghdad.<sup>31</sup>

### **11. Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Tabari's Knowledge**

Imam Abu Jaafar at-Tabari is a Sunni Muslim imam, a historian, an interpreter, and an expert on fiqh. He is the author of two of the greatest books on interpretation and history. He compiled and classified them. He (may Allah have mercy on him) was praised by the scholars of his time and those who came after them.

This shows the position of the scholar Imam Abu Jaafar at-Tabari among the scholars who were his contemporaries or those who came after him. Ulama's praise for Imam Abu Jaafar ath-Tabari:

- 1) Al-Khatib, one of the Imams, a great scholar, mufti, hafiz, and critic, was Abu Bakr Ahmed bin Ali bin Thabit bin Ahmed bin Mahdi al-Baghdadi. He was born

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<sup>28</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

<sup>29</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

<sup>30</sup> Abu Al-Fida Ismail bin Omar bin Kathir Al-Qurashi Al-Basri, *Bidayat Wa Al-Nihayat* (tpp: Dar al-Hajar, 1997), p. 849.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Basri.

in the year 292. His father, Abu al-Hasan, was a preacher in the village of Darzijan. He studied the Qur'an with Abu Hafs al-Kitani. He traveled to Basra when he was 20 years old, to Nishapur when he was 23 years old, to Sham as well as to Mecca,<sup>32</sup> etc. He wrote a lot and said: "Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Katheer bin Ghalib is one of the imams of the scholars, a reference; he has collected and studied knowledge that was not possessed by the people of his time." He also is a memorizer of the Book of Allah, knows its readings, understands its meaning, and is an expert in the laws of the Qur'an and Sunnah so that he can distinguish between the truths and falsehoods. Nasakh, Mansukh, the words of friends of the prophet, Tabiin, the history of human life.<sup>33</sup>

- 2) Al-Dzahabi said that he is a person who is trustworthy, honest, memorized, a leader in interpretation, an imam in fiqh, a sign in history, a writer of biographies of figures, an expert in all fields of knowledge, languages, etc.
- 3) Ibn Khuzaymah, Imam of the Imams, Sheikh Al-Islam Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Ishaq bin Khuzaimah, Bin al-Mughirah, bin Salih, bin Bakr al-Salami al-Nays. He was born in 223 H, and he passed away in the month of DzulQa'dah in 311 H<sup>34</sup> said that I do not know anything more knowledgeable on earth than Ibn Jarir.

## **12. Imam Abu Jaafar Ath-Thabari's Influences and Works**

His scientific influence is evident in the large number of great scholars who studied under him. He also left various great scientific works, which are evidence of the breadth of his knowledge. It is represented in many of his books, including the book of interpretation, the book of usul, the book of fiqh, the book of hadith, and others.

Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari's works are as follow:

- 1) Tafsir- Jami` al-Bayan, interpretation verses of the Qur'an
- 2) History Books: The History of the Apostles, Prophets, Kings and Caliphs
- 3) The narrator's Book: Biadhiyl al-Mudhil
- 4) Al-Qira'at wa al-Tanzil Al-Qur'an
- 5) Latif al-Qawl wa al-Khafif fi Ahkam Syara'i 'al-Islam
- 6) Adab book: al-Qudat wa al-Mahadir wa al-Sijilaat
- 7) Scholars' Ikhtilaf al-'Amsar
- 8) Al-Musnad al-Mujarrad
- 9) Athabshir

## **C. Conclusion**

In Islam, there are many well-known and influential figures in their lifetimes as well as for generations who come after them as role models and references for science. One of them was Imam Abu Jaafar at-Thabari; may Allah have mercy on him. Imam Abu Jaafar was known as an intelligent scientist whose opinions and fatwas were always used as

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<sup>32</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

<sup>33</sup> Abu Abd Allah Muhamad bin Ahmad al-Dhahaby.

<sup>34</sup> Abd al-Rahman ibn Abi Bakr.

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references. Imam Abu Jaafar's scientific works, which have become a reference for Islamic studies researchers even today, demonstrate his knowledge. Among his very popular works is *Tafsir-Jami` al-Bayan*, an interpretation of verses of the Qur'an. This book of interpretation is the main reference in the scientific literature on the interpretation of the Qur'an.

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