

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC
THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION (ISTAC)

SHAHRASHTAN ON THE
PEOPLE OF THE BOOK (AHL AL-KITAB)
A STUDY OF HIS AL-MILAL WA AL-NIHAL

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION (ISTAC)
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE M. A. DEGREE

BY

MUHAMMAD AZIZAN BIN SABJAN

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA
APRIL, 2000





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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA
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Say: O People of the Book! come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah: That we associate no partners with Him: That we erect not from among ourselves, lords and patrons other than Allah. If then they turn back, Say ye: Bear witness that (at least) are Muslims (bowing to Allah's Will)

(*Sūrat Āli 'Imrān*, 3:64)

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"O my Lord! So order me that I may be grateful for Thy favors, which Thou hath bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may work the righteousness that will please Thee, and admit me by Thy grace, to the ranks of Thy righteous servants." (*Sūrat al-Naml*, 27:19).

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Last but far from least: “And He is Allah. There is no God but He. To Him be praise, at the first and at the last. For Him is the Command and to Him shall ye (all) be brought back.” (*Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ*, 28:70)

QUOTATIONS FROM THE QUR'AN

All quotations from the Qur'ān translation are taken from 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, new edition with revised translation, commentary and newly compiled comprehensive index (Beltsville: Amana Publications, 1996).

ABSTRACT

The aim of my thesis is to discuss and evaluate Shahrastānī's (479/1086-548/1153) conception of the People of the Book. In order to achieve such an objective, the thesis is divided into three chapters: chapter one entitled "Shahrastānī on Judaism," chapter two "Shahrastānī on Christianity," and chapter three "Shahrastānī on the Semi People of the Book."

In the Introduction, I presented Shahrastānī's life and works as well as his conception of the People of the Book.

In chapter one, I dealt with Shahrastānī's understanding of Judaism. Here, I studied how he perceives the Torah and evaluates the Theory of Abrogation. The discussion will enable us to discern how he describes and conceives the followers of Judaism as part of the People of the Book. The discourse continues with an examination of the five Judaic sects: [1]. the Ananites (*al-'Ināniyyah*), [2]. the Isuites (*al-'Isawiyyah*), [3]. *al-Muqārabah* and *al-Yūdh 'āniyyah*, [4]. *al-Mūshkāniyyah* and [5]. the Samaritans (*al-Sāmīrah*) by focusing mainly on their fundamental doctrines and thoughts. Among the doctrines that are discussed in considerable detail are the treatment of Moses and Jesus as well as the incarnation and redemption.

Chapter two revolves around Shahrastānī's treatment of Christianity, especially his analysis of the distortion of the Christian scriptures. Furthermore, Shahrastānī's view of the three major Christian sects: [1]. the Melchites (*al-Malkāniyyah*), [2]. the Nestorians (*al-Nasṭuriyyah*) and [3]. the Jacobites (*Ya'qūbiyyah*) was examined vis-à-vis the Doctrine of Trinity, the status of Jesus and other relevant factors.

While chapter one and two deal with Judaism and Christianity, chapter three concentrates on a more specific problem: the issue of the Semi People of the Book

(*Shibh Ahl al-Kitāb*). Here, my analysis is directed to Shahrastānī's explicit statements and assertions regarding the Semi People of the Book as a people who possess sacred scrolls. In this regard, special attention was made to study his remarks about them, especially with regards to the paramount doctrines, sects and schisms.

Having clarified the above-mentioned points, I presented a general conclusion on Shahrastānī's understanding of the People of the Book. I firmly believe that this thesis will provide a preliminary yet clear insight into Shahrastānī's own understanding of the People of the Book, which hopefully can enlighten further investigation leading to a critical study on the People of the Book.

INTRODUCTION

The question of the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) has long been of central significance to the comparative study of religion. Many Muslims and European scholars have hence taken close heed of the People of the Book and their role as the holders of sacred books. The nature of this study is of extreme importance as it is a serious attempt to highlight the views of one of the Muslim scholars who devotes much time and effort on studying the People of the Book. His name is Abū'l Faḥ Muḥammad b. 'Abdul al-Karīm Aḥmad al-Shahrastānī (479/1086-548/1153). Since no research of his study on the People of the Book has been carried out before, our aim is to point out how he identifies the People of the Book and accordingly how he treats the controversies among them in his work, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*. In order to achieve this objective, we shall start by first, studying his life and works.

Shahrastānī: His Personal Background and Conception of The People of The Book

1. The Life and Works of Shahrastānī (479/1086-548/1153)

Shahrastānī's full name, as recorded by the Muslim biographers of learned men in Muslim history, is Abū al-Faḥ Muḥammad Ibn 'Abdul Karīm Ibn Aḥmad Tāj al-Dīn al-Shahrastānī. His surname was Abū Muḥammad, but he is generally known as Shahrastānī. He also receives other honorific titles such as the learned man (*al-Afḍal*) or the leader (*al-Imām*). Most of the scholars believe that he was born in the small city of Shahrastān situated between Nisabūr and Khawārizm on the northern frontier of Khurāsān. The city itself was built by 'Abdullah Ibn Ṭāhir (182/798-230/844), the governor of Khurāsān during the reign of al-Ma'mūn (b. 170/786). Scholars have

disagreed on the date of his birth. Talking about this disagreement, Ibn Khallikān (608/1211-682/1281) states that according to his own notes, Shahrastānī was born in 469/1076 and passed away in 548/1153. However, according to Ibn al-Sam'ānī (506/1113-562/1166), Shahrastānī himself, when asked, told him that he was born in 479/1086. Other authors give the dates 467 and 469 but the testimony of al-Sam'ānī seems the most authoritative.¹

After Shahrastānī had received his traditional education, he moved to the prestigious metropolis of Nishāpur. There, he embarked on a detailed study of the Islamic sciences. Most of his principal masters were in their turn disciples of al-Juwaynī (d.478/1085). In Shāfi'ī law (*fiqh*), he was the pupil of Abū'l Muzaffar Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad al-Khawāfi (d. 500/1106), a friend of al-Ghazālī (450/1058-505/1111) and a judge at Ṭūs, and of Abū Naṣr 'Abdul Raḥīm Ibn Abī'l Qāsim 'Abdul al-Karīm Al-Qushairī (d.514/1120), son of the eminent mystic. He learned commentary of the Qur'ān (*tafsīr*) and theology (*kalām*) from Abū'l Qāsim Salmān Ibn Nāṣir al-Anṣārī (d. 412/1118), who exerted a great influence over him. As for Ḥadīth, Shahrastānī learned it from Abū al-Ḥassan 'Ali Ibn Aḥmad al-Madīnī (d. 494/1100).²

In 510/1117, Shahrastānī made the pilgrimage to Mecca. On his return journey, he visited Baghdad and stayed there for three years. With strong assistance from his friend, Abū'l Faṭḥ As'ad Ibn Muḥammad al-Mayhanī (d. 523/1129), Shahrastānī then obtained a position in Niẓāmiyyah, one of the best schools in Baghdad at that time. For three years with considerable success, Shahrastānī devoted his time to teaching,

¹ Muḥammad 'Abdul Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, ed. by Amīr 'Ali Mahnā and 'Ali Ḥassan Fā'ūr, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa, 1997), 1:11, hereinafter cited as *al-Milal*. In this respect, I have benefited from some of the notes made by the editors of this book, Amīr 'Ali Mahnā and 'Ali Ḥassan Fā'ūr. These notes, I shall add to considerably. Cf. Khayruddin al-Zirikī, *al-A'īam: Qāmīs Tarājim*, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li'l Malāyīn, 1984), 6:215.

² G. Monnot, "Al-Shahrastānī," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, new ed. (1997), 9:214-215.

preaching and lecturing in that very school. Later, Shahrastānī was appointed as vice of the chancellery (*nā'ib Dīwān al-Rasā'il*) on the strong recommendation of his friend, Naṣīr al-Dīn Abū'l Qāsim Maḥmūd b. al-Muẓaffar al-Marwazī who was the minister (*wazīr*) from (521/1127-526/1131). However, due to a political crisis, Shahrastānī left Baghdad and returned to his native town, Shahrastān. It was here that Shahrastānī passed away towards the end of November 1153 (*Shāban* 548).³

Shahrastānī is responsible for a score of works⁴ which cover a wide range of Islamic sciences. The twelve most important works are *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fi 'Ilm al-Kalām*, *Mas'alah fi Ithbāt al-Jawhar al-Fard*, *Muṣāra'at al-Falāsifa*, *Mafātīḥ al-Asrār wa Maṣābīḥ al-Abrār*, *Majlis*, *al-Manābij wa al-Āyāt*, *Qiṣṣat Mūsā wa-al Khidīr*, *Risālah* (which consists of three in volumes) and *Sharḥ Sūrat Yūsuf*.⁵ Towards the end of his life, Shahrastānī met many religious scholars, philosophers, theologians, jurists and pseudo-sufis. Most of them admired him and he received many credits from them.

Despite these merits, he was nevertheless accused of being heretic and of having extreme Shiite tendencies, especially of in support of the Ismailites. Nonetheless, such accusations are refutable in view of the intense piety Shahrastānī manifested in most of his writing. For instance, in both *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* and *Nihāyat al-Iqdām fi 'Ilm al-Kalām*, Shahrastānī surveys the full range of beliefs within Islam in order to make clear for others the nature of sectarian differences and their deviation from the path of Islam. If he restrains himself from flailing at the weaknesses or excesses

³ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:11-12. Cf. Muḥammad 'Abdul Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Muslim Sects and Divisions: The Section on Muslim Sects in Kitāb al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, trans. by A.K. Kazi and J.G. Flynn (London: Kegan Paul International, 1984), 1, hereinafter cited as *The Muslim Sects*.

⁴ For a close look at these works, see for instance Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:14-15; G. Monnot, "Al-Shahrastānī," 9: 215-216; al-Zirikī, *al-A'lām*, 6:215 and Zuhair al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh Ḥukamā' al-Islām*, ed. by Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī (Damascus: Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabīyah, 1946), 141-142.

⁵ For descriptions of such works, see for example: G. Monnot, "Al-Shahrastānī," 9:215-216.

of sectarians, it is only because he possesses an implicit faith in the ability of his fellow Muslims to respond to the fair, even-handed treatment of those who differ from them. The charge that he was preoccupied with philosophy may be admitted, but it is no exaggeration to assert that for Shahrastānī, the best of philosophy is expressed in religion, the best of religion in prophecy, the best of prophecy in Muḥammad (May Allah bless and give him peace!) and only the Muslims correctly interpret the revelation delivered to Muḥammad (May Allah bless and give him peace!).⁶ To conclude this part, we can say that, despite all criticisms leveled against him, Shahrastānī was indeed a remarkable scholar. To him we owe our greatest appreciation for his wisdom and excellent contributions in the discipline of Islamic sciences.

2. A Study of his *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*

As noted, a number of writings have been credited to Shahrastānī, but the major source of his fame is the *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, his monumental treatise on religious sects and philosophical groups. Its popularity in the medieval period is amply attested to by the existence of numerous studies in many libraries all over the world. *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* is still cited as the best known work of several Muslim scholars and even with analyses of Shahrastānī's source dependencies, the fame of *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal* has not been lessened. Indeed, the integrity of its author has been heightened.⁷

In this very book, Shahrastānī treats all the Muslim, non-Muslim sects and several philosophical positions known in his time with due balance and absence of

⁶ Al-Shahrastānī, *The Muslim*, 2. Cf. Bruce B. Lawrence, *Shahrastānī on the Indian Religions* (Hungary: Mouton & Co, 1976), 14-15, hereinafter cited as *The Indian*.

⁷ Lawrence, *The Indian*, 15-16.

vituperation. His intention, thus, is to highlight the historical account of these sects as well as to point out their emergence, survival and religious practices. Since his work was like a small but concise encyclopedia, Shahrastānī gives fair criticism on these sects. In addition, Shahrastānī is making a clear distinction between truth (*ḥaqq*) and falsehood (*bāṭil*) which he expresses throughout his presentation of the sects in this book *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*.⁸

Talking about his typology of world religious traditions and ideologies, Shahrastānī ranks each non-Muslim religious tradition and ideology according to its proximity to Islam. Based on the religious and quasi-religious groups known to him, he classifies the religious traditions of non-Muslims into four general categories:

1. Those who possess a revealed book (*kitāb munzal*), i.e., Jews and Christians.
2. Those who possess a semi-revealed book (*ṣuḥuf*), i.e., Zoroastrians and Manicheans.
3. Those who subscribe to laws and binding judgments without the benefit of a revealed book, i.e., the ancient Sabians.
4. Those who have neither a revealed book nor fixed laws, i.e., the ancient as well as the materialist philosophers, the star-worshippers and the Brahmans.⁹

Within this structure, Shahrastānī presents a vast range of data, as varied in quality as it is broad in scope. He takes into account the claims and arguments of all these religious-philosophical groups and then exhibits the irrational and illogical aspects of their ideas and beliefs. In terms of presenting the issue under debate, he

⁸ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:6-7 and 17ff.

⁹ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:49. Cf. Lawrence, *The Indian*, 16-17. As for the Brahmans, they are critical for further study for there are several sources stating that they came from a monotheistic religion and, thus, can be included in the category of the Semi People of the Book (*Shiḥh Ahl al-Kitāb*). On such sources, see for instance Ved Prakash Upadhyaya et al., *Muḥammad in the Vedas and the Puranas*, trans. by Muḥammad Alamgir (Kuala Lumpur: A.S. Nordeen, 1998), 3-163.

directly proceeds to the main points, records the arguments of the opponents and then refutes them by means of his clear and strong presentation.¹⁰ The way he treats the sects is also consistent and systematic. For instance, all philosophies and religious systems that do not accept the phenomenon of prophecy are approached together.¹¹ Judaism and Christianity, due to their closeness to Islam and because they share with Islam their belief in God, in Prophecy and in the Scriptures, are dealt with more comprehensively than other religious traditions and philosophical ideologies.¹² So far as his presentation of the religious scriptures of the Jews and Christians is concerned, his main criterion is that a scripture, which is revealed by God, cannot be inconsistent and contradictory in its contents and teaching.¹³

Excellent critical studies of Shahrastānī's contribution to our knowledge have already been made in certain areas, namely, the views of Indians (*Ārā' al-Hind*).¹⁴ Nonetheless, the middle section of *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, which purports to set out the views of the People of the Book has so far not been critically examined or translated. The present study, thus, intends to provide a study of the People of the Book as conceived by Shahrastānī and this will be investigated now.

3. Shahrastānī's Conception of the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*)¹⁵

Shahrastānī, in his opening words on the People of the Book, states that there are two groups that were isolated from the True Religion (*al-Millat al-Ḥanīfiyyah*)¹⁶

¹⁰ Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:6-7.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2:305ff.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1:49-52

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1:50-52.

¹⁴ Lawrence, *The Indians*, 1ff.

¹⁵ For a decisive study on the People of the Book, see also Muḥammad Galib M., *Ahl al-Kitāb: Makna dan Cakupannya* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1998), 17-187.

¹⁶ The True Religion (*al-Millat al-Ḥanīfiyyah* or *al-Millat al-Samḥah*) is the religion of Islam which started from prophet Abraham until prophet Muḥammad (May Allah bless and give them peace!).

and Islamic Law (*al-Sharī'ah al-Islāmiyyah*). They are: [1]. The People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*), namely, the Jews and Christians who respectively hold the revealed scriptures of the Torah (*Tawrāh*) and the Gospel (*Injīl*) and [2]. The Semi People of the Book (*Shibh Ahl al-Kitāb*), namely, the Zoroastrians (*al-Majūs*) and Manicheans (*al-Mānawīyyah*) who received scriptures (*ṣuḥuf*) from Abraham. In this regard, Shahrastānī says that although the Semi People of the Book are part of the People of the Book, Muslims are prohibited from marrying them or eating their slaughtered animals because their scriptures have been "lifted" (*rufi'ah*) by Allah.¹⁷

Shahrastānī's definition of the People of the Book mentioned in the previous paragraph can be clarified further. Firstly, in line with his definition of the People of the Book, many scholars and commentators of the Qur'ān state that the People of the Book are isolated from the True Religion for they have refused to place faith in Prophet Muḥammad (May Allāh bless and give him peace). By refusing to accept Prophet Muḥammad (May Allāh bless and give him peace), though part of their own scriptures required them to believe in him, they have accordingly disbelieved in a portion of their revealed scriptures. In so doing, they have committed grave sins,

According to most scholars and commentators of the Qur'ān, those who embrace this religion starting from prophet Abraham to Muḥammad (May Allah bless and give them peace!) and thereafter are called the True Believers (*Hunāfi*). As for the word *Hunāfi* or *Hanifa* itself, it occurs fourteen times in the Qur'ān. For instance, see (*Sūrat al-Baqarah* 2:135); (*Sūrat Āli 'Imrān*, 3:67 and 95); (*Sūrat al-Nisā*; 4:125); (*Sūrat al-Hajj*, 22:31) and (*Sūrat al-Bayyinah*, 98:5). According to the lexicographers, this word has two meanings: [1]. It implies the meaning of righteous (*muṣtaqīm*) or safe (*salāmah*) such as those who have faith in Allah and have not been misled, they are on the right path (*ḥanīf*). [2]. It also means inclining towards something (*mā'i*) as to prophet Abraham who inclined himself towards the truth of Islam. For commentators like Ibn 'Abbas, Ḥassan and Mujāhid, the word *Hanīf* has four meanings: [1]. The follower of the truth (*Itba' al-Ḥaqq*), [2]. The Pilgrimage (*Hajj al-Bait*), [3]. The follower of prophet Abraham in religious laws of Islam (*Itba' Ibrāhīm fi Sharā'i' al-Islām*) and [4]. Sincerity in all activities (*Ikhlas al-'Amaal*). For further details see for instance: Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:275. See also al-Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 16 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Ghad al-'Arabī, 1991), 2:448, hereinafter cited as *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Cf. Ghulam Haider Aasi, "Muslim Understanding of other Religions: An Analytical Study of Ibn Hazm's Kitāb al-Faṣl fi al-Milal wa al-Aḥwā' wa al-Nihāl" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1986), 361, hereinafter cited as *The Study*.

Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:247. The condition of the Semi People of the Book and their scrolls will be discussed in considerable detail in Chapter Three.

which eventually has isolated them from the True Religion of Islam. Allah has described their conditions many times in the Qur'ān. For instance, Allah says:

Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures)-in the Tawrah and in the Injil- For he commands them what is just and forbids them; what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure); He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them. So it is those who believe in him, honor him, and succor him, and follow the light that has been sent down to him- it is they that shall attain to a happy state." Say: O men! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of Allah, to whom belong the dominion of the heavens and the earth: there is no god but He: it is He that gives both life and death, So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet who believe in Allah and His words, follow him that (so) ye may be guided. (*Surāt al-A'raf*, 7:157-158)

O ye who believe! Believe in Allah and His Messenger, and the scripture, which He hath sent to His Messenger, and the scripture, which He sent to those before (him). Any who deny Allah, His angels, His books, His Messengers and the Day of Judgment, hath gone far, far astray. (*Sūrat al-Nisā'*; 4:136)

Indeed, it is part of their scriptures to have faith in Muḥammad (May Allāh bless and give him peace) and to embrace his Law which he was sent down to give to us. Thus, by believing in Moses and the Torah, Jesus and the Gospel,¹⁸ the Jews and the Christians respectively were to believe in the Messenger who would be sent to them. Nevertheless, if they still choose not to believe in him, they have accordingly

¹⁸ On the description of the Prophet Muhammad in the Old and New Testament, see Maulāna 'Abdul Majīd Daryabadi, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān: Translation and Commentary of The Holy Qur'ān-Tafsīr Majīdī*, 4 vols. (Islamabad: Islamic Book Foundation, n.d.), 2: 156-159.

disbelieved the Torah and the Gospel, which were brought to them by Moses and Jesus. Consequently, they become the Spreaders of Corruption (*al-Mufsidūn*), or the Obstinate (*al-Mu'ānidūn*), or the Rejecters (*Jāhidūn*)¹⁹ as Allah has named them in the Qur'ān.²⁰ In short, due to such ignorance of the truth, they are isolated from the True Religion as Shahrastānī has explained before.

However, if the People of the Book had not changed their religious traditions and had they willingly submitted themselves to Prophet Muḥammad (May Allah bless and give him peace!), they would have been true Muslims and considered among the Allah-guidance (*muttaqīn*) who follow the divine and prophetic guidance (*hudā*),²¹ as Allah has stated in these verses:

This is the Book; In it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear Allah; Who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer, and spend out what We have provided for them; and who believe in the Revelation sent to thee and sent before thy time, and (in their hearts) have the assurance of the Hereafter, They are on (true guidance), from their Lord, and it is these who will prosper. (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:2-5)

Those who believe and work righteousness-their Lord will guide them because of their faith. Beneath them will flow rivers in gardens of bliss. (*Sūrat Yūnus*, 10:9)

4. Distinction between the People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) and the Pagans (*Umīyyūn*)

Commenting upon the distinction between the People of the Book and the Pagans, Shahrastānī states that there are major differences between the Pagans and

¹⁹ Mohd. Sani Badron, "Ibn 'Arabī's Conception of Religion" (M.A. thesis, ISTAC, 1998), 65 and 102, hereinafter cited as *Ibn 'Arabī*.

²⁰ See for example (*Sūrat al-An'ām*, 6:20-21); (*Sūrat al-Naml*, 27:13-14) and (*Sūrat al 'Ankabut*, 29:47).

²¹ Mohd. Sani, *Ibn 'Arabī*, 103-104.

the People of the Book. The Pagans, he views, lived in Mecca. Known as the People of Ismā'īl (*Banī Ismā'īl*), they were of the people who followed the teaching of their tribes before accepting Islam. The Ka'bah, which is situated in Mecca, was their kiblāh and they performed prayers by facing towards it. Their enemies were those who practised idolatry. In contrast, the People of the Book were those of the Israelites (*Banī Isrā'īl*) who practised the religion of their ancestors before embracing the teaching of the revealed scriptures. They revered Bait Al-Maqdis in Jerusalem and regarded it as their kiblāh in all their prayers. The enemies of this people were the Pharaoh (*Fir'aūn*) and Hāmān.²²

Such statements by Shahrastānī need further clarification. Firstly, in conformity with Shahrastānī's distinction, there are four Quranic verses²³ that stated clearly the differentiation between these two groups. For instance, Allah says:

So if they dispute with thee, Say: I have submitted my whole self to Allah and so have those who follow me. And say to the People of the Book and to those who are unlearned: Do ye (also) submit yourselves? If they do, they are in right guidance. But if they turn back, thy duty is to convey the Message and in Allah's sight are (all) His servants. (*Sūrat Alī-Imrān*, 3:20)

It is He who has sent amongst the Unlettered, a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to sanctify them and to instruct them in Scripture and Wisdom-although they had been, before in manifest error. (*Sūrat al-Jumu'ah*, 62:2)

In conformity with the verses above, many commentators of the Qur'ān such as Ibn 'Abbās state that what is meant by the Unlettered People here is the Pagans. They are identified by this name for they received no scriptures and most of them were

²² Al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, 1:247-248.

²³ See (*Sūrat al-Baqarah*, 2:78); (*Sūrat Alī-Imrān*, 3:20 and 75) and (*Sūrat al-Jumu'ah*, 62:2).

illiterate, unable to read and write. In contradistinction to them are the People of the Book who received scriptures from their prophets. Most of them were literate and unlike the Pagans, the People of the Book were fully conscious of the revelation of Prophet Muḥammad (May Allah bless and give him peace!).²⁴

At this juncture, it has become clearer now why Shahrastānī intends to set out such distinctions between the two groups. In a strict sense, besides outlining their differentiation, he wants us to acknowledge that the Pagans and People of the Book are not the same. Though they lived together and in the same area, they still held different characteristics, customs and religious traditions. To Shahrastānī, such recognition is needed before further exploring his study on the People of the Book. In short, besides avoiding confusion, the distinctions given will help us to understand better his elucidation on the People of the Book. Such a statement is proven true. Shahrastānī, after outlining the distinctions, then proceeds with his general treatment of the Jews and Christians.

5. The Treatment of Judaism and Christianity in *al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*

Shahrastānī, in the opening words of his treatment, states again that the Jews and Christians are the People of the Book. They are identified by such a name for they received the scriptures of the Torah and the Gospel from their respective prophets. Between the two, Shahrastānī views, Christianity is in second place after Judaism. The Christians are ranked in second place because the Gospel contains only religious exhortations (*mawā'iz wa mazāji*) and exemplary lessons (*rumūz wa amthāl*). The

²⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 2:191; 4:142-143 and 15:527-528.

Jews, thus, are ranked in the first place because from their scripture the law (*sharī'ah*) was implemented.²⁵

Shahrestānī then focuses on the major disagreement between the Jews and Christians. That is, the issue of Moses and Jesus. For the Jews, Jesus is just an ordinary man. They did not recognize him as a prophet and he abided by Moses and the Torah.²⁶ Such accusations make the Christians also discard Moses' prophesy. They, in fact, begin to make some alterations to the Gospel in order to show the Jews that they also have their own faith and integrity.²⁷ Among the changes they make are the replacement of the sacred day from Sabbath to Sunday and the authorization of eating swine.²⁸

Shahrestānī then notes the Muslim solution to their problem, in conformity with numerous Quranic verses, which have been revealed upon this issue, by stating that for Muslims, it is already clear that the Jews and Christians have distorted their scriptures and deviated from the truth. The truth about Moses and Jesus is that they

²⁵ Al-Shahrestānī, *al-Milal*, 1:248-249.

²⁶ Ibid. Actually, the Jews really believe that Jesus was a Prophet who was sent by God to them. In fact, they assume Jesus not only to be a prophet, but also their awaited king who would help them to rule the world and gain prosperity in their life. Nonetheless, when Jesus started to summon them to God and His blessing, to live in piety and so on, they began to disapprove of him, reject his Gospel and started to claim that he was insane, a disbeliever, deceiver and so on. Later, they assassinated Jesus. This event has been written down in one of the Jewish sacred books, the Talmud. Nevertheless, the Jews have expunged the event from the Talmud so that Jesus' followers of all times (*Masīhiyyīn*) will never learn about it. For details of such descriptions, see, for example Ahmad Shibī, *Muqārana al-Adyān: al-Masīhiyyah*, 10d ed. (Cairo: Maktabah al-Nahḍah al-Masriyah, 1993), 76-77. Cf. Adīb Sa'b, *al-Adyān al-Hayyah: Nasha'uhā wa Taḥawwuhā* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 1993), 147-151. See also Israel Shahak, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years* (London: Pluto Press, 1994), 97-98. Now, the Jews are still waiting for their awaited king after being frustrated with Muḥammad (May Allah bless and give him peace!). Nevertheless, according to Ibn Taymiyya, in reality, they are waiting for the Antichrist. (*al-Dajjāl*). It is he whom the Jews were following when 70,000 shawl-wearing Jews of Isfahan went out [in revolt] with him. On such descriptions, see Ahmad Ibn 'Abdul Ḥafīm Ibn Taymiyya, *A Muslim Theologian's Response To Christianity: Ibn Taymiyya's al-Jawāb al-Ṣāḥih*, ed. and trans. by Thomas F. Michel S.J. (New York: Caravan Books, 1984), 188-189, hereinafter cited as *The Response*.

²⁷ The hatred for Jews is so critical that the Christians have also labeled them with a symbol of satanic unfaith in their Gospel of John. For more details about such statements and of the Jews from the perspective of Christianity, see for example Ismā'īl Rāḥī Al-Fārūqī et al., *Dialogue of The Abrahamic Faiths* (Virginia: Al-Sa'dāwī Publications, 1991), 19-21.

²⁸ Al-Shahrestānī, *al-Milal*, 1:249.