

## The Confirmation Story about the Prophet Muḥammad as a Boy and Baḥīrā the Monk

[Once when the Prophet Muḥammad was a boy he accompanied his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, on a merchant caravan to Syria.] When the caravan reached Buṣrā in Syria, there was a monk there in his cell by the name of Baḥīrā, who was well versed in the knowledge of Christians. A monk had always occupied that cell. There he gained his knowledge from a book that was in the cell, so they allege, handed on from generation to generation. They had often [80] passed by him in the past and he never spoke to them or took any notice of them until this year, and when they stopped near his cell he made a great feast for them. It is alleged that that was because of something he saw while in his cell. They allege that while he was in his cell he saw the apostle of God in the caravan when they approached, with a cloud overshadowing him among the people. Then they came and stopped in the shadow of a tree near the monk. He looked at the cloud when it overshadowed the tree, and its branches were bending and drooping over the apostle of God until he was in the shadow beneath it. When Baḥīrā saw that, he came out of his cell and sent word to them, 'I have prepared food for you, O men of Quraysh, and I should like you all to come both great and small, bond and free.' One of them said to him, 'By God, Baḥīrā! something extraordinary has happened today, you used not to treat us so, and we have often passed by you. What has befallen you today?' He answered, 'You are right in what you say, but you are guests and I wish to honour you and give you food so that you may eat.' So they gathered together with him, leaving the apostle of God behind with the baggage under the tree, on account of his extreme youth. When Baḥīrā looked at the people he did not see the mark which he knew and found in his books, so he said, 'Do not let one of you remain behind and not come to my feast.' They told him that no one who ought to come had remained behind except a boy who was the youngest of them and had stayed with their baggage. Thereupon he told them to invite him to come to the meal with them. One of the men of Quraysh said, 'By al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā, we are to blame for leaving behind the son of 'Abdullah b. 'Abdu'l-Muṭṭalib.' Then he got up and embraced him and made him sit with the people. When Baḥīrā saw him he stared at him closely, looking at his body and finding traces of his description (in the Christian books). When the people had finished eating and gone away, Baḥīrā got up and said to him, 'Boy, I ask you by al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā to answer my question.' Now Baḥīrā said this only because he had heard his people swearing by these gods. They allege that the apostle of God said to him, 'Do not ask me by al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā, for by Allah nothing is more hateful to me than these two.' Baḥīrā answered, 'Then by Allah, tell me what I ask'; he replied, 'Ask me what you like'; so he began to ask him about what happened in his waking and in his sleep, and his habits, and his affairs generally, and what the apostle of God told him coincided with what Baḥīrā knew of his description. Then he looked at his back and saw the seal of prophethood between his shoulders in the very place described in his book. When he had finished he went to his uncle Abū Ṭālib and asked him what relation this boy was to him, and when he told him he was his son, he said that he was not, for it could not be that the father of this boy was alive. 'He is my nephew,' he [81] said, and when he asked what had become of his father he told him that he had died before the child was born. 'You have told the truth,' said Baḥīrā. 'Take your nephew back to his country and guard him carefully against the Jews, for by Allah! if they see him and know about him what I know, they will do him evil; a great future lies before this nephew of yours, so take him home quickly.'