175914 - The Virtue of Offering 4 Rak`ahs after `Isha’

the question

Is this an authentic Hadith: “Whoever prays four (`Rak`ahs) after ``Isha’, they will be equal in worth to Laylat Al-Qadr”?

Summary of answer

It is proven that the Prophet used to pray four Rak`ahs after `Isha’. As for the Hadiths which speak of the virtue of doing so, they are all extremely inauthentic; the best and strongest of them is the Hadith of Ibn `Umar, despite the fact that it is inauthentic.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Did Prophet Muhammad offer 4 Sunnah prayers after `Isha’?

It is proven from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that after ``Isha’, when he returned to his house, he would pray four `Rak`ahs. That was narrated in a Hadith from Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), who said:

I stayed overnight in the house of my maternal aunt Maymunah bint Al-Harith (may Allah be pleased with her), the wife of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was with her because it was her night. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) prayed `Isha’, then he came to his house and prayed four Rak`ahs. Then he went to sleep, then he got up and said: “The little boy has gone to sleep”, or similar words. Then he went and stood (to pray) and I stood on his left, but he made me stand on his right. He prayed five Rak`ahs, then he prayed two `Rak`ahs, then he went to sleep, until I could hear him breathing deeply. Then he went out for the prayer. (Narrated by Al-Bukhari,

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In fact it is narrated in another Hadith – even though it is somewhat inauthentic – that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) habitually prayed four Rak`ahs after `Isha'.

It was narrated that `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) never prayed `Isha' then entered upon me except he would pray four or six Rak`ahs. (Narrated by Abu Dawud, 1303. It was classed as inauthentic in Al-Umm 2/57 and by Al-Albani in Da`if Abu Dawud).

Similar to that is a Hadith narrated from `Abdullah ibn Az-Zubayr (may Allah be pleased with him) who said: When the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) had prayed `Isha', he would pray four Rak`ahs, and make it odd-numbered by adding a Rak`ah. Then he would go to sleep so that he could get up and pray later on in the night. (Narrated by Ahmad in Al-Musnad, 26/34. It was classed as inauthentic by the commentators because its chain of narration is interrupted)

The practice of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) indicates that it is prescribed to pray four `Rak`ahs after `Isha' prayer. Therefore the scholars unanimously agree that it is prescribed to offer this prayer after `Isha', whether there is a specific authentic Hadith concerning its virtue or not.

The Hanafi jurists are of the view that these four Rak`ahs after `Isha' are to be regarded as a regular Sunnah that is offered after the obligatory prayer, as it says in Fat-h Al-Qadir (1/441-449).

But what appears more likely to be correct – and Allah knows best – is that it is a voluntary prayer that comes under the heading of Qiyam Al-Layl (voluntary night prayers), as Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him described it in Al-Mughni (2/96) as a "voluntary prayer".

The virtue of the four Rak`ahs after `Isha'

Concerning the virtue of the four Rak`ahs after `Isha' prayer there are five Marfu` Hadiths, i.e.,

they are attributed to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), and there are ten reports from the Companions and the Successors of the Companions (Tabi`un) that speak of their practice and their words in that regard.

And there are many Hadiths that were compiled by Ibn Abu Shaybah in Al-Musannaf, in a chapter entitled Fi Arba`i Rak`at ba`d Salat Al-`Isha' (Concerning Four Rak`ahs after `Isha' Prayer).

Al-Marwazi (may Allah have mercy on him did likewise in his important book Qiyam Al-Layl, in a chapter entitled Al-Arba`u Rak`at ba`d Al-`Isha' Al-Akhirah (The Four Rak`ahs after `Isha'), and Al-Bayhaqi in As-Sunan Al-Kubra, in a chapter entitled Bab man ja`ala ba`da Al-`Isha' Arba`a Rak`at aw Akthar (Chapter on One who prays Four or More Rak`ahs after `Isha').

We will quote these Hadiths and reports here, with some commentary on them.

- The first Hadith

It was narrated that Ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

"Whoever prays `Isha' in congregation, and prays four Rak`ahs before he leaves the mosque, it will be equivalent to Laylat Al-Qadr." (Narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir, 13.14/ p. 130 and in Al-Mu`jam Al-Awsat, 5/245). He said:

Muhammad ibn Fadl As-Saqati told us: Mahdi ibn Hafs told us: Is-haq Al-Azraq told us: Abu Hanifah told us, from Muharib ibn Dithar, from Ibn `Umar.

And it was narrated via At-Tabarani by Abu Na`im in Musnad Abu Hanifah (p. 223)

At-Tabarani (may Allah have mercy on him said: No one narrated this Hadith from Ibn `Umar except Muharib ibn Dithar, and no one narrated it from Muharib except Abu Hanifah, and it was narrated only by Is-haq Al-Azraq.

Al-`Iraqi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "It is somewhat inauthentic." (Tarh At-Tathrib, 4/162)

Al-Haythami (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Its chain of narration includes a narrator who is weak but is not accused of lying.” (End quote from Majma` Az-Zawa’id, 2/40)

He also said: “It includes a narrator who was classed as weak in Hadith.” (End quote from Majma` Az-Zawa’id, 2/231)

Shaykh Al-Albani (may Allah have mercy on him) said, commenting on the remark of At-Tabarani that “it was narrated only by Is-haq”:

“He is Ibn Yusuf Al-Wasiti, and he is trustworthy. The same applies to all the men of the chain of narrators, apart from Abu Hanifah (may Allah have mercy on him). The Imams classed him as weak. … Al-Hafidh Al-Haythami also referred to the classification of Abu Hanifah as weak when he said, immediately after quoting the Hadith: He is somewhat weak in Hadith. It is as if he did not dare to mention his name openly because he feared the sectarianism of the Hanafis of his time. May Allah suffice us against the evil of sectarianism and its people! The biographies of all the narrators of this Hadith are given in At-Tahdhib apart from As-Saqati; his biography appears in Tareekh Baghdad (3/153). Al-Khatib said: He was trustworthy. He was also mentioned by Ad-Daraqutni who said: He is truthful.” (End quote from Silsilat Al-Ahadith Ad-Da`ifah, 5060)

- The second Hadith:

It was narrated from Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him), who attributed it to the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he said: “Whoever prays four Rak`ahs after `Isha’, reciting in the first two Rak`ahs `Qul ya ayyuha’l kafirun’ [Surat Al-Kafirun] and `Qul Huwa Allahu Ahad’ [Surat Al-Ikhlas], and reciting in the last two Rak`ahs ‘Tanzeel As-Sajdah’ [Surat As-Sajdah] and ‘Tabarak Alladhi bi yadihi’l-mulk (Blessed is He in Whose Hand is the dominion)’ [Surat Al-Mulk], they will be recorded for him like four Rak`ahs on Laylat Al-Qadr.

This was narrated by Al-Marwazi (may Allah have mercy on him) in Qiyam Al-Layl (p. 92); At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Kabir (11/437); and Al-Bayhaqi in As-Sunan Al-Kubra (2/671). All of them narrated it via Sa`id ibn Abu Maryam: `Abdullah ibn Farrukh told me: Abu Farwah told me, from Salim Al-Aftas, from Sa`id ibn Jubayr, from Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) in a Marfu`

report [i.e., attributed to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)].

Al-Bayhaqi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "It was narrated only by Ibn Farrukh Al-Masri."

This is a weak chain of narrators because of Abu Farwah Yazid ibn Sinan Ar-Rahhawi. The critics of Hadith unanimously agree that he is to be classed as weak. In fact, Yahya ibn Ma`in said concerning him: He is nothing. An-Nasa'i said: His Hadith is to be rejected. Ibn `Adi said: Most of his Hadith is not known. (End quote from Tahdhib At-Tahdhib, 11/336)

Hence it was classed as inauthentic by Al-Haythami in Majma` Az-Zawa'id (2/231); and by Al-Albani in Silsilat Al-Ahadith Ad-Da`ifah (in his discussion of Hadith no. 5060).

- The third Hadith:

It was narrated that Anas (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

"Four Rak`ahs before Dhuhr are equivalent (in virtue) to four like them after `Isha', and four Rak`ahs after `Isha' are equivalent (in virtue) to four like them on Laylat Al-Qadr." (Narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Awsat, 3/141, via Yahya ibn `Uqbah ibn Abil-`Ayzar, from Muhammad ibn Jihadah. He said: No one narrated this Hadith from Muhammad ibn Jihadah except Yahya)

This chain of narration is very weak because of Yahya ibn `Uqbah ibn Abil-`Ayzar. Abu Hatim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: He makes up Hadith. Al-Bukhari (may Allah have mercy on him) said: His Hadith is to be rejected. Ibn Ma`in (may Allah have mercy on him) said: He is an evil liar. (End quote from Lisan Al-Mizan, 8/464)

Al-Haythami (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "Its chain of narration includes Yahya ibn `Uqbah ibn Abu Al-`Ayzar, who is very weak." (End quote from Majma` Az-Zawa'id, 2/230)

Al-Albani (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "It is very inauthentic." (End quote from Silsilat Al-Ahadith Ad-Da`ifah, 2739, 5058)

- The fourth Hadith:

It was narrated from Al-Bara’ ibn `Azib (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

“Whoever prays four Rak`ahs before Dhuhr, it is as if he praying them as Tahajjud at night; whoever prays (four Rak`ahs) after `Isha’, they will be equivalent (in virtue) to four like them on Laylat Al-Qadr. And if one Muslim meets another and takes him by the hand, and they are both sincere, they will not part until they have both been forgiven.” (Narrated by At-Tabarani in Al-Mu`jam Al-Awsat, 6/254). He said: Muhammad ibn `Ali As-Sa’igh told us: Sa`id ibn Mansur told us: Nahid ibn Salim Al-Bahili told us: `Ammar Abu Hashim told us, from Ar-Rabi` ibn Lut, from his paternal uncle Al-Bara’ ibn `Azib (may Allah be pleased with him).

At-Tabarani (may Allah have mercy on him) said: No one narrated this Hadith from Ar-Rabi` ibn Lut except `Ammar Abu Hashim, and it was narrated only by Nahid ibn Salim.

Al-Haythami (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Its chain of narration includes Nahid ibn Salim Al-Bahili and others. I have not found anyone who mentioned them.” (End quote from Majma` Az-Zawa’id, 2/221)

Al-Albani (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“It is an inauthentic narration… I could not find any biography for Nahid ibn Salim Al-Bahili. Al-Haythami said concerning the Hadith: Its chain of narration includes Nahid ibn Salim Al-Bahili and others, and I have not found anyone who mentioned them. Apart from Al-Bahili I do not know who he is, unless he is the shaykh of At-Tabarani, because he said: Muhammad ibn `Ali As-Sa’igh told us: Sa`id ibn Mansur told us: Nahid ibn Salim Al-Bahili told us… But Al-Haythami does not usually speak against the shaykhs of At-Tabarani who are unknown and who are not mentioned in Al-Mizan, for example. And Allah knows best.” (End quote from Silsilat Al-Ahadith Ad-Da`ifah, 5053)

- The fifth Hadith:

It was narrated that Yahya ibn Abu Kathir (may Allah be pleased with him) said:

The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) instructed his companions to recite ‘Alif-

Lam-Mim As-Sajdah' [Surat As-Sajdah] and 'Tabarak Alladhi bi yadihil-mulk (Blessed is He in Whose Hand is the dominion)' [Surat Al-Mulk], for each verse of them is equivalent to seventy verses of other Surahs, and whoever recites them after ``Isha', it will be for him equivalent in virtue to reciting them on Laylat Al-Qadr.

This was narrated by `Abd Ar-Razzaq in Al-Musannaf (3/382) from Mu`ammar ibn Rashid, from Yahya ibn Abu Kathir. It was narrated like this, as a Mursal Hadith, because Yahya ibn Abu Kathir was one of the junior Successor, who died in 132 AH. It is not known from whom he narrated this Hadith, and it is obvious that this is a reason to classify the Hadith as inauthentic." (End quote from Tahdhib Al-Kamal, 11/269)

Reports from the Companions and Successors about offering 4 Rak`ahs after `Isha'

With regard to the reports that were narrated about the comments of the Companions and Successors which were similar in meaning to this Hadith, they are as follows:

- The first report:

It was narrated that `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Whoever prays four Rak`ahs after `Isha', not separating them with a Taslim, they will be equivalent (in virtue) to four like them on Laylat Al-Qadr.

This was narrated by Ibn Abu Shaybah in Al-Musannaf (2/127). He said: Waki` told us, from `Abd Al-Jabbar ibn `Abbas, from Qays ibn Wahb, from Murrah, from `Abdullah.

This chain of naration is good and intact.

- The second report:

It was narrated that `Abdullah ibn `Amr (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Whoever prays four Rak`ahs after `Isha', they will be equivalent (in virtue) to four like them on Laylat Al-Qadr. (Narrated by Ibn Abu Shaybah in Al-Musannaf (2/127). He said: Ibn Idris told us, from Husayn, from

Mujahid, from `Abdullah ibn `Amr.)

We say: The narrators of this chain of narration are trustworthy, but there was a difference of opinion as to whether Mujahid heard from `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn Al-`As. Al-Bardiji said: Mujahid narrated from Abu Hurayrah and `Abdullah ibn `Amr. And it was said that he did not hear from them. (End quote from Tahdhib At-Tahdhib, 10/43)

- The third report:

It was narrated that `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) said: Four Rak`ahs after `Isha' are equivalent (in virtue) to four like them on Laylat Al-Qadr.

This was narrated by Ibn Abu Shaybah in Al-Musannaf (2/127). He said: Muhammad ibn Fudayl told us, from Al-`Ala' ibn Al-Musayyab, from `Abd ar-Rahman ibn Al-Aswad, from his father, from `A'ishah.

The narrators of this chain of narration are trustworthy, but we have not come across anyone who mentioned `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Al-Aswad as being one of the shaykhs of Al-`Ala' ibn Al-Musayyab.

- The fourth report:

It was narrated that `Abdullah ibn `Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: Whoever prays four Rak`ahs after `Isha', before leaving the mosque, they will equivalent (in virtue) to four like them on Laylat Al-Qadr. (Narrated by Muhammad ibn Al-Hasan Ash-Shaybani – as it says in Al-Athar (1/292) – from his shaykh, Imam Abu Hanifah: Al-Harith ibn Ziyad or Muharib ibn Dithar – Muhammad was not certain – told us, from Ibn `Umar)

This is a weak chain of narration because of the doubt and uncertainty. We have not come across any biography for Al-Harith ibn Ziyad, but Al-Hafidh Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It was undoubtedly narrated from Muharib. … As for Al-Harith ibn Ziyad, I have not seen any mention of him among those who narrated from Ibn `Umar. (End quote from Al-iIthar bi Ma`rifat Ruwwat Al-Athar, p. 57)

- The fifth report:

It was narrated that Ka`b ibn Mati` – who is also known as Ka`b Al-Ahbar – said: Whoever prays four Rak`ahs after `Isha' and bows and prostrates properly in them, they will be equivalent (in virtue) to four like them on Laylat Al-Qadr.

There are a number of chains of narration from Ka`b, which we do not want to quote at length. They were narrated by Ibn Abu Shaybah, An-Nasa'i, Ad-Daraqutni, Al-Bayhaqi and others.

Shaykh Al-Albani (may Allah have mercy on him) said concerning one of its chains of narration:

"There is nothing wrong with this chain of narration, but it is Munqati` (interrupted) and is Mawquf (i.e., attributed to a Companion), stopping at Ka`b – namely Ka`b Al-Ahbar. Even if the Hadith was Marfu` (i.e., attributed to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)), it could not be taken as evidence, because in this case it would be Mursal, so how about if it is Mawquf?" (End quote from Silsilat Al-Ahadith Ad-Da`ifah, 5053)

- The sixth report:

It was narrated that Maysarah and Zadan said: He used to pray, of voluntary prayers, four `Rak`ahs before Dhuhr and two `Rak`ahs after it, two Rak`ahs after Maghrib, four Rak`ahs after `Isha', and two Rak`ahs before Fajr.

This is how I found it, without mentioning the name of the Companion, although what is most likely to be the case is that it was `Ali ibn Abu Talib. He is the one from whom Maysarah narrated it.

It was narrated by Ibn Abu Shaybah in Al-Musannaf (2/19). He said: Abu Al-Ahwas told us, from `Ata' ibn As-Sa'ib.

- The seventh report:

It was narrated that `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Al-Aswad (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Whoever prays four Rak`ahs after `Isha', they will be equivalent (in virtue) to four like them on Laylat Al-Qadr.

This was narrated by Ibn Abu Shaybah in Al-Musannaf (2/127). He said: Al-Fadl ibn Dakin told us, from Bakir ibn `Amir, from `Abd Ar-Rahman.

- The eighth report:

It was narrated that `Imran ibn Khalid Al-Khuza`i said: I was sitting with `Ata' when a man came to him and said: O Abu Muhammad, Tawus is claiming that whoever prays ``Isha' then prays two `Rak`ahs after it, reciting in the first Rak`ah Tanzil As-Sajdah [Surat as-Sajdah] and in the second Rak`ah `Tabarak Alladhi bi yadihi'l-mulk (Blessed is He in Whose Hand is the dominion)' [Surat Al-Mulk], there will be written for him (a reward) like that standing in prayer on Laylat Al-Qadr. `Ata' said: Tawus is telling the truth; after that I never omitted to do that.

This was narrated by Abu Nu`aym in Hilyat Al-Awliya' (4/6). He said: `Umar ibn Ahmad ibn `Umar Al-Qadi told us: `Abdullah ibn Zaydan told us: Ahmad ibn Hazim told us: `Awn ibn Salam told us: Jabir ibn Mansur, the brother of Is-haq ibn Mansur As-Saluli, told us, from `Imran ibn Khalid.

- The ninth report:

It was narrated that Al-Qasim ibn Abu Ayyub (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Sa`id ibn Jubayr used to pray four Rak`ahs after `Isha'.

This was narrated by Al-Marwazi (may Allah have mercy on him) in Ta`dhim Qadr As-Salah (1/167). He said: Yahya told us: `Abbad ibn Al-`Awwam told us, from Husayn, from Al-Qasim.

- The tenth report:

It was narrated that Mujahid (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Four Rak`ahs after `Isha' are equivalent (in virtue) to four like them on Laylat Al-Qadr.

This was narrated by Ibn Abu Shaybah in Al-Musannaf (2/127). He said: `Ali told us, from Al-A`mash, from Mujahid.

Scholarly views on offering 4 Rak`ahs after `Isha’

In conclusion, it is proven from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he used to pray four Rak`ahs after `Isha’. As for the Marfu` Hadiths which speak of the virtue of doing so, they are all extremely inauthentic; the best and strongest of them is the Hadith of Ibn `Umar, despite the fact that it is inauthentic.

With regard to the reports that were narrated from the Companions and Successors, they are indicative of the fact that the early generations acted in accordance with this Sunnah and that it was widespread among them. So it comes under the heading of Qiyam Al-Layl (voluntary prayers at night), for which there is evidence by the dozen in the Quran and Sunnah. However, when it comes to describing it as equivalent to prayers offered on Laylat Al-Qadr, this is something that we cannot accept definitively, especially as it was narrated from Ka`b Al-Ahbar, because Ka`b was often influenced by what he knew of the Scriptures of the People of the Book. So there is the concern that the source of ascribing this virtue to this prayer may be Ka`b Al-Ahbar, and those of the Companions who took it from him only did that because of their attachment to the virtues of deeds for which they hoped for reward, and there is no harm in that..

Shaykh Al-Albani (may Allah have mercy on him) was of the view that these reports may be raised to the level of being Marfu`, which makes it permissible to quote them as evidence and act upon what is mentioned in them, as he (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

The Hadith is narrated in authentic Mawquf reports from a number of the Companions. Moreover, Ibn Abu Shaybah (may Allah have mercy on him) narrated similar Hadiths from `A'ishah, Ibn Mas`ud, Ka`b ibn Mati`, Mujahid and `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Al-Aswad in Mawquf reports, and the chains of narration going back to them are all authentic – with the exception of Ka`b. Although they are Mawquf, they come under the ruling on marfoo` reports, because the contents of the Hadiths could not have been based on personal opinion, as is quite clear.” (End quote from Silsilat Al-Ahadith Ad-Da`ifah, 5060)

And Allah knows best.