

The Concept of *Ahl Al-Kitab* : Recognition Adherents of *Ahl Al-Kitab*

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Abstract: *This paper will explore the existence of the ahl al-kitab . In exploring the existence of the ahl al-kitab , the writer traced it through the verses of the Qur'an. Furthermore, the understanding of these verses is sought according to the understanding of the experts. And then, the expert's understanding is comprehensively analyzed. The ulama' generally state that the so-called ahl al-kitab are the Jewish and Christian communities. However, among the ulama', still give opportunity to have dialogue regarding the status of the ahl al-kitab. This is because the Qur'an explicitly mentions the existence of the ahl al-kitab, and discusses it. Based on the Qur'an, the definition of the ahl al-kitab has developed, namely the ahl al-kitab refers to the notion of religion which is aimed at communities or groups of religious adherents who have holy books that have been revealed by Allah SWT to the Prophet and His Messenger in general. In the narration taken from Ahmad bin Hanbal, it is stated that the number of Prophets is 124,000. Of the 124,000 prophets, 315 were sent to become Messengers, or in other narrations, 314 or 313 people were mentioned. Thus, the number of holy books that Allah sent to earth is the same number with the Messengers who were sent to that earth. Some of these Messengers were narrated by the Qur'an, and some of them were not narrated by Qur'an.*

Keywords: *The ahl al-kitab; Confession of the Qur'an, Dialogue of 'Ulama'; Status of the Ahl al-Kitab*

Abstrak: *Tulisan ini akan mengupas tentang keberadaan ahl al-kitab. Dalam menelusuri keberadaan ahl al-kitab, penulis menelusurinya melalui ayat-ayat al-Qur'an. Selanjutnya, pemahaman terhadap ayat-ayat tersebut diupayakan sesuai dengan pemahaman para ahli. Dan kemudian, pemahaman ahli dianalisis secara komprehensif. Para ulama' umumnya menyatakan bahwa yang disebut ahl al-kitab adalah komunitas Yahudi dan Nasrani. Namun, di kalangan ulama' masih memberikan kesempatan untuk berdialog mengenai status ahl al-kitab. Hal ini karena al-Qur'an secara eksplisit menyebutkan keberadaan ahl al-kitab, dan membahasnya. Berdasarkan Al-Qur'an, pengertian ahl al-kitab berkembang, yaitu ahl al-kitab mengacu pada pengertian agama yang ditujukan kepada masyarakat atau kelompok pemeluk agama yang memiliki kitab-kitab suci yang diturunkan oleh Allah. SWT kepada Nabi dan Rasul-Nya pada umumnya. Dalam riwayat yang diambil dari Ahmad bin Hanbal disebutkan bahwa jumlah Nabi adalah 124.000. Dari 124.000 nabi, 315 diutus untuk menjadi tukang pijat, atau dalam riwayat lain disebutkan 314 atau 313 orang. Dengan demikian, jumlah kitab suci yang diturunkan Allah ke bumi sama dengan jumlah para Massenger yang diutus ke bumi itu. Beberapa dari Rasul ini diriwayatkan oleh Al-Qur'an, dan beberapa dari mereka tidak diriwayatkan oleh Al-Qur'an.*

Kata Kunci : *ahl al-kitab; Pengakuan Al-Qur'an, Dialog 'Ulama'; Status Ahli Kitab*

INTRODUCTION

Qur'an mentions and discusses the concept of *ahl al-kitab*. So, it is not surprising to say that the concept of *ahl al-kitab* is a distinctive Islamic theological concept in addressing the existence of other religions.¹ History records that before Islam was spread by the Prophet, there were already other religions that developed around Arabia, especially Judaism and Christianity, who were identified as *ahl al-kitab*.² The two religious communities are recognized as having a relationship of faith or two older siblings with Islam. This is because both originated in a semitic

¹ Mujiburrahman, "Ahli Kitab dan Konteks Politik di Indonesia," *Al-Fikr* 20, No. 1 (2016): 104.

² Mujiburrahman, 104. See also Q.S. al-'Ankabūt [29]: 46.

or Abrahamic religion.³ Therefore, it is natural for Islam to respond to the existence of these pre-existing religions. In this context, the Prophet stated that Islam “confirmed” the religions and books that came before him, and positioned himself as the “successor” of Judaism and Christianity.⁴ Thus, it can be said that the Islamic concept of the *ahl al-kitab* is a response to plural religious realities on the one hand, and the affirmation of the theological identity of Islam on the other.⁵

The debate of the *ulama'* in a discussion about whether the *ahl al-kitab* have only limited interpretations of the two religious communities above or not. Or is the interpretation broader in scope to several religions whose holy books are “strongly estimated” to have come from Allah, and are recognized as *samawī* religions and equated as *ahl al-kitab*. The differences in the interpretation of the *ulama'* regarding the meaning and scope of the *ahl al-kitab* are increasingly varied and are multi-interpretative. Furthermore, it has an impact on the opinion about the faith status of the *ahl al-kitab* both from Judaism and Christians and outside the two religions.⁶

DISCUSSION

1. Meaning and Term of the *Ahl al-Kitab*

The term of *ahl al-kitab* in Indonesian consists of two words, namely *ahl* (expert) and *al-kitab* (book). The word expert in Indonesian has two meanings, namely

³ Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan: Kajian Survei Beberapa Literatur Tafsir Al-Qur’an,” *Syahadah* 3, No. 2 (2015): 66; Aksin Wijaya, *Menusantarakan Islam: Menelusuri Jejak Pergumulan Islam yang Tak Kunjung Usai di Nusantara* (Yogyakarta: Nadi Pustaka, 2011), 14.

⁴ Aksin Wijaya, *Menusantarakan Islam*, 15; See also in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 19, 41, 97, Ali Imrān [3]: 50, al-Nisā’ [4]: 47, al-Māidah [5]: 46, 48, Fāṭir [35]: 31, al-Aḥqāf [46]: 30, dan al-Şaff [61]: 6.

⁵ Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan”, 66.

⁶ Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan”, 66.

people who have special knowledge, are proficient, very clever, understand very well about a state discipline and people who belong to a group, family or community.⁷ The word expert also means family, a community or a household.⁸ Besides that, it is also used to refer to something that has a close or ethnic relationship.⁹ The word expert can also be referred to as a family that still has a nasab relationship, such as the expression ahl al-bait, which is a term used for people who are still related to the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁰

The word expert in the Qur'an is used a variety of which is mentioned 125 times.¹¹ For example, referring to a certain group, such as ahl al-bait (al-Ah) zab [33]: 33), which was shown to the Prophet's family. The word expert also refers to a population (al-Qas) aṣ [28]: 45), family (Hud [11]: 40) and is also aimed at a group of people who adhere to certain beliefs and teachings (al-Baqarah [2] : 105).

Meanwhile, the word *Kitab* literally means book or letter.¹² Some also interpret it as God's revelations recorded.¹³ Shaḥrūr defines the word *kitab* to refer to the meaning of a collection of various themes revealed to Muhammad, therefore surah al-Fātiḥah is called "*Fātiḥah al-kitab*".¹⁴ Qur'an using the term *ahl al-kitab* in its various forms is found 319 times¹⁵ by having various meanings including the meaning of the book's writings, provisions, and obligations. As for

⁷ Umi Chulsum dan Windy Novia, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (Surabaya: Kashiko, 2006), 21.

⁸ Ahmad Warson Munawwir, *Kamus al-Munawwir* (Yogyakarta: Pondok Pesantren al-Munawwir, 1984), 49.

⁹ Majma' al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, *al-Mu'jam al-Wajīz* (tt: al-Hai'ah al-'āmmah li syu'ūn al-Muṭābi' al-Amiriyyah, tt), 29.

¹⁰ Umi Chulsum dan Windy Novia, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, 22.

¹¹ Muḥammad Fuād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras li al-Fāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* (Kairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1364), 121-123.

¹² Ahmad Warson Munawwir, *Al-Munawwir: Kamus Arab-Indonesia*, 1187.

¹³ Umi Chulsum dan Windy Novia, *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia*, 382.

¹⁴ Muḥammad Syaḥrūr, *Prinsip dan Dasar Hermeneutika al-Qur'an Kontemporer*, trans. Sahiron Syamsuddin "Al-Kitab wa Al-Qur'an: Qirā'ah Mu'āṣirah" (Yogyakarta: Kalimedia, 2015), 69; Siti Robikah, "Aplikasi Hermeneutika *Double Movement* Fazlur Rahman Terhadap Pemahaman Ahli Kitab dalam Al-Qur'an" (Skripsi, Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Salatiga, 2018), 61.

¹⁵ Muḥammad Fuād 'Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras*, 591-595.

the word *al-kitab* which refers to the holy book that Allah revealed in its usage, it seems to be general in nature. Thus, it means showing everything that Allah sent down, both the holy books that were revealed to the Prophet Musa, the Prophet Dawud, the Prophet Isa and the holy book that was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad SAW.¹⁶

Based on the explanation of the meaning and terms of the *ahl al-kitab* which are described separately, in general the meaning of the term *ahl al-kitab* when they are combined into one can be understood with various meanings, including: a person who is an expert on the books, the name for Bani Nazir from the Jews and Christians, Christian followers of the holy book, or people who hold to holy books, or people who hold to holy books other than the Qur'an.¹⁷ In other terms, the *ahl al-kitab* is the names of people who adhere to a religion that has holy book that come from God.

2. Definition of the *Ahl al-Kitab* according to the *ulama'*

In general, the *ulama'* have agreed on this issue, that those included in the category of *ahl al-kitab* are the Jewish and Christian communities.¹⁸ However, the *ulama'* have different opinions whether there were *ahl al-kitab*, apart from the two communities. After experiencing developments in terms of interpretations of *ahl al-kitab*, the *ulama'* have many differences in interpreting the concept based on their various arguments, especially when they interpreted Surah al-Mā'idah [5]: 5:

¹⁶ See for example Q.S. al-Baqarah [2]: 53 dan al-Isrā' [17]: 2.

¹⁷ Nasrullah, "Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan", 68-69.

¹⁸ Umi Sumbulah, "Islam dan Ahl Al-Kitab," *Al-Tahrir* 11, No. 1 (2011): 153.

الْيَوْمَ أُحِلَّ لَكُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتُ وَطَعَامُ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ حَلَالٌ لَكُمْ وَطَعَامُكُمْ حَلَالٌ لَهُمْ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أُجُورَهُنَّ مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ مُسَفِحِينَ وَلَا مُتَّخِذِي أَخْدَانٍ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ حَبِطَ عَمَلُهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَسِرِينَ.

“This day [all] good foods have been made lawful, and the food of those who were given the Scripture is lawful for you and your food is lawful for them. And [lawful in marriage are] chaste women from among the believers and chaste women from among those who were given the Scripture before you, when you have given them their due compensation, desiring chastity, not unlawful sexual intercourse or taking [secret] lovers. And whoever denies the faith - his work has become worthless, and he, in the Hereafter, will be among the losers”.

This verse explains that it is permissible to eat the slaughter of the *ahl al-kitab*¹⁹ and marry their women who keep their honor (*muḥṣanāt*), and in interpreting the scope and details of the groups of *ahl al-kitab* apart from the two Jews and Christians.²⁰

At the beginning of the development of Islam, the term *ahl al-kitab* was used to designate people who adhered Judaism and Christianity. Apart from these two religions, for example, the Magi, were not called the *ahl al-kitab*, even though at the time of the Prophet and his companions, the religion was well known. However, even though he is not called an *ahl al-kitab*, the Prophet Muhammad SAW. recommends to treat the Magi (Zoroaster) as same as the *ahl al-kitab*.²¹

Then during the *tabi'in* period, the term for the *ahl al-kitab*, especially in terms of coverage, details, and meaning of who was called began to experience

¹⁹ Wahbah al-Zuhāfi, *Tafsir Al-Munir: Aqidah, Syari'ah, Manhaj*, trans. Abdul Hayyie al-kattani, dkk “al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-‘Aqīdah wa al-Sharī‘ah wa al-Manhaj”, jilid 3 (Depok: Gema Insani, 2013), 425; ‘Abd Allāh bin Muḥammad Alu Syaikh, *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir*, trans. M. Abdul Ghoffar “Lubāb al-Tafsīr min Ibn Kathīr”, jilid 3 (tt: Pustaka Imam Asy-Syafi’i, 2008), 33.

²⁰ Al-Shāfi‘ī argues that what is meant by the *ahl al-kitab* are the woman of Israel. ‘Abd Allāh bin Muḥammad Alu Syaikh, *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir*, jilid 3, 36; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir*, trans. Arif Rahman Hakim, dkk “Tafsīr al-Qur’an al-‘Azīm”, jilid 3 (Surakarta: Insan Kamil, 2015), 813.

²¹ Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan”, 70.

development of meaning. Al-Shāfi'ī (died 204 H) in his book *al-Umm* as quoted by Nasrullah,²² accept the history mentioned, that Aṭā' (tabi'in) said: "Arab Christians are not *ahl al-kitab*. The so-called *ahl al-kitab* is the Israelites (*Banī Isrā'il*),²³ that is, those who were sent down to them the Torah and the Gospel". As for other people (apart from the Banī Isrā'il) who embraced Judaism and Christianity, they were not among the *ahl al-kitab*.

This definition is supported by the verse Qur'an which states, that the Prophet Isa was a special messenger for the Banī Isrā'il as it is mentioned in the letter al-Ṣaff [61]: 6:

وَإِذْ قَالَ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيَّ مِنَ التَّوْرَةِ وَمُبَشِّرًا
بِرَسُولٍ يَأْتِي مِنْ بَعْدِي اسْمُهُ أَحْمَدٌ فَلَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالُوا هَذَا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ

"And [mention] when Jesus, the son of Mary, said, "O children of Israel, indeed I am the messenger of Allah to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bringing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad". But when he came to them with clear evidences, they said, "This is obvious magic".

This verse also implies the limitations of what was brought by Prophet 'Isā until the arrival of Prophet Muḥammad SAW. Thus, al-Shāfi'ī thinks the *ahl al-kitab* as an ethnic community, not as a religious community brought by Prophet Mūsā and Prophet 'Isā.²⁴

²² Nasrullah, "Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan", 70.

²³ 'Abd Allāh bin Muḥammad Alu Syaikh, *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir*, jilid 3, 36.

²⁴ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir*, jilid 10, 135; Nasrullah, "Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan", 70.

For al-Ṭabarī, the *ahl al-kitab* are the followers of the Jewish and Christian religions from any descent and whoever they are, whether from the Banī Isrāil or not.²⁵ As for Abū Ḥanīfah and other *ulama'* of Ḥanafīyyah stated that what is called an *ahl al-kitab* is anyone who believes in a prophet or holy book that Allah SWT has revealed, not limited to the Jewish and Christian groups. Thus, if someone believes in the *ṣuḥuf* of Prophet Ibrahim or the book of Zabur, then he is also included in the understanding of this *ahl al-kitab*.²⁶ In addition to the above opinion, some salaf *ulama'* stated that any people who are “strongly assumed” of having a holy book can be considered as *ahl al-kitab*, just like the people of the Magi religion.²⁷

Al-Syahrastānī in classifying whether or not a community is called *ahl al-kitab*, he first divides the typology into two groups based on the parameters of the scriptures contained in a religious community. First, that followers of Judaism and Christianity who clearly have a holy book that is *muḥaqqaq* (right) are called *ahl al-kitab*. Second, those who have resembling (syibh) a scriptures but they are not included in the *ahl al-kitab*, but are referred to as *shibh ahl al-kitab* (resembling of the *ahl al-kitab*).²⁸ Meanwhile, Ibn Ḥazm interpreted the term of the *ahl al-kitab* almost the same as that put forward by the salaf *ulama'*, but Ibn Ḥazm said that the Magi were included in the group of the *ahl al-kitab*.²⁹

Al-Qāsimī argues, the meaning of the term *ahl al-kitab* is almost the same as that put forward by al-Shāfi'ī, but it includes ethnicities other than the Banī

²⁵ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsir Ath-Thabari*, trans. Ahsan Askan “Jāmi' al-Bayān al-Ta'wīl Ay al-Qur'ān”, jilid 8 (Jakarta Selatan: Pustaka Azzam, 2019), 423; Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan”, 70-71.

²⁶ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Tematik atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*, (Bandung: Mizan, 1994), 367.

²⁷ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an*, 367.

²⁸ Muḥammad bin 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal Wa Al-Nihal: Aliran-Aliran Teologi dalam Sejarah Umat Manusia*, trans. Asywadie Syukur “Al-Milal wa Al-Niḥal” (Surabaya: PT. Bina Ilmu, tt), 189.

²⁹ Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan”, 71.

Isrāil who adhere to Judaism and Christianity in the term of *ahl al-kitab*, until the Prophet Muhammad SAW was sent.³⁰

The interpretation of the term *ahl al-kitab* by some *ulama'*, especially contemporary *ulama'*, has undergone a broader development, so that it includes adherents of other religions such as Majusi, Sabi'in, Hinduism, Buddhism and Shinto. All are included in the scope of the *ahl al-kitab*. This opinion was stated by Maulana Muhammad Ali who emphasized that the people who adhere to the Magi, Sabi'in, Hindu and Buddhist religions are included in the group of *ahl al-kitab*. Even though these religions are claimed to tend to *shirk*, however, adherents of these religions must be treated like *ahl al-kitab*, not as polytheists.³¹

Thus, followers of existing religions, according to him, including other than Judaism and Christianity, it can be said that their teachings and the scriptures that are held, are revelations that were sent down to previous prophets and messengers, but their teachings and holy books have changed according to the development of their times. Even, Christianity, which is not so far from the religion brought by the Prophet Muhammad, has undergone changes. Therefore, the existing religions, apart from Judaism and Christianity, can be said to be the *ahl al-kitab*.

Wahbah al-Zuhāī states, that the use of the term *ahl al-kitab* in the Qur'an refers to the Jews and Christians who Allah sent down the Torah and the Gospel to their prophets.³² As for Fazlur Rahman, basically means the term *ahl al-kitab* as people who follow the prophets who obtained the holy book from Allah SWT

³⁰ Nasrullah, "Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan", 72.

³¹ Nasrullah, "Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan", 72

³² Wahbah al-Zuhāī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 3, 425.

from a long time ago to Prophet Muhammad SAW in Mecca and Medina.³³ They are referred to in the Qur'an as having the earlier revelations.³⁴

According to Rasyīd Riḍā, the concept of a *ahl al-kitab* is actually more general in nature and does not only refer to Jews and Christians from the Banī Isrāīl, but includes various other ethnic groups. The *ahl al-kitab*, according to him, could include religions outside of Judaism and Christianity such as Magi, Sabi'in, Hinduism, Buddhism and Shinto. According to Rasyīd Riḍā, although the Qur'an identifies Jews and Christians as *ahl al-kitab*, this does not mean that these religious groups are not recognized as *ahl al-kitab*. The argument made by Rasyīd Riḍā is that the Qur'an does not include the ancient religions of India and China, because the Arabs are not familiar with the terms of both. According to Riḍā this shows that the Qur'an avoids the *ighrāb* (foreign matter) aspect to its audience.³⁵

Meanwhile, Muḥammad 'Abduh as quoted by Nasrullah, has a different opinion with Riḍā, who in fact is his student, as stated in his *juz 'Ammā* interpretation which states that the *ahl al-kitab* include followers of the Jewish, Christian and Sabian religions,³⁶ as it is expressed implicitly in the surah al-Baqarah [2] verse 62:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ
عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

“Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans [before Prophet Muhammad] - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve”.

³³ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, trans. Anas Mahyudin “Islam” (Bandung: Pustaka, 1996), 233.

³⁴ Mohammed Arkoun, *Islam Kontemporer: Menuju Dialog Antar Agama*, trans. Ruslani “Rethinking Islam: Common Questions and Uncommon Answers” (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2001), 133.

³⁵ Muḥammad 'Abduh dan Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, jilid 3 (Mesir: Dār al-Mannār, 1367 H), 258.

³⁶ Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan, 73-74.

Sayyid Quṭub in the tafsir fi Zilāl al-Qur’ān as quoted by Heru Mustakim states, the *ahl al-kitab* are people who adhere to Judaism and Christianity from past to present, from any time and from any ethnic group.³⁷ This opinion is also held by M. Quraish Shihab who states, the *ahl al-kitab* are all adherents of Judaism and Christianity at any time, anywhere and from whoever they are. This opinion of the Quraish is based on the use of the Qur’an for the term *ahl al-kitab* which was limited to the two groups of Jews and Christians as the real group in Arabia at that time.³⁸

3. Discussing the Disbelief and Polytheism of the *Ahl al-Kitab*

The *ulama*’ argue that the *ahl al-kitab* belong to the group of infidels. As has been informed by the Qur’an in the letter al-Bayyinah [98]: 1, that the title disbelief is seen explicitly given to them.

لَمْ يَكُنِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنْفَكِينَ حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ

“Those who disbelieved among the *ahl al-kitab* and the polytheists were not to be parted [from misbelief] until there came to them clear evidence-”.

This is based on the understanding given, that “they are people who deny and reject the prophethood of Muḥammad SAW and the teachings it carries”.³⁹ The same thing was expressed by al-Ghazālī, that the meaning of disbelief which is seen in the beliefs of the *ahl al-kitab* is the attitude of denying the Prophet SAW about something he taught. Meanwhile, the opposite is to confirm the existence of an Prophet with regard to all the teachings he carries. So according to

³⁷ Heru Mustakim, “Ahlu Kitab Menurut Sayyid Quthb dalam Tafsir Fi Zilal Al-Qur’an,” *Profetika: Jurnal Studi Islam* 17, No. 2 (2016): 77; Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan, 74.

³⁸ M. Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan al-Qur’an*, 368.

³⁹ Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan”, 74-75.

al-Ghazālī, Jews and Christians are infidels because they deny the Prophet SAW.⁴⁰

However, the debate arose again, regarding whether the *ahl al-kitab* belonged to a polytheist group or not. Because in this position, there is a difference in theological terms between kafir and idolaters. Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī states that shirk is basically divided into two types, namely shirk *ẓāhir* and shirk *khafī*. The division of shirk is based on the level of clarity of shirk behavior itself. Those who consider God to be numberless, make images and idols as worship, this is shirk *ẓāhir*. While shirk *khafī* is included in this the behavior of the *ahl al-kitab* who deny prophethood, especially because they think that 'Isā *al-Masīh* is the son of God.⁴¹

In this context, since the Qur'an itself does not express it explicitly, it is natural for the *ulama*' to disagree about the position of the *ahl al-kitab* as a group of polytheists or not. There are some scholars who do not include them in the category of polytheism, but the majority of other *ulama*' say that the term musyrik includes unbelievers from among the *ahl al-kitab*⁴² with arguments based on the word of Allah SWT in *sūrah* al-Taubah [9]: 30-31.

وَقَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ عِزْرُ بْنُ اللَّهِ وَقَالَتِ النَّصَارَى الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ اللَّهِ تَلْكَ قَوْلُهُمْ بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ يُضَاهِئُونَ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ قَاتَلَهُمُ اللَّهُ أَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ ۚ ٣٠ اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهَيْبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَالْمَسِيحَ ابْنَ مَرْيَمَ وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ سُبْحَانَهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ٣١

“The Jews say, “Ezra is the son of Allah”; and the Christians say, “The Messiah is the son of Allah.” That is their statement from their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved [before them]. May Allah destroy them; how are they deluded?. They have taken their scholars and monks as lords besides Allah, and [also] the Messiah, the son of Mary. And they were not commanded except to

⁴⁰ Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan”, 75.

⁴¹ Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan”, 75.

⁴² Nasrullah, “Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan”, 75-76.

worship one God; there is no deity except Him. Exalted is He above whatever they associate with Him”.

Rasyīd Riḍā argues that the *ahl al-kitab* from the Jewish and Christian circles do not belong to the polytheist group. According to Riḍā the clearest definition of polytheist from the verses of the Qur’an is the Arabic polytheists who do not have a holy book or “sort” (*shibh*) of a holy book. Therefore, they are called *ummiyyūn*, that is, people who have never known the holy book from Allah.⁴³ On the basis of the above understanding of polytheist, Riḍā also argues that the Sabi’in, Magi, and religious groups that were “considered” of having holy books or similar to holy books such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucius do not belong to polytheists.⁴⁴

The opinion of Rasyīd Riḍā is, among other things, based on the interpretation of several verses of the Qur’an, such as al-Baqarah [2]: 105, al-Bayyinah [98]: 1, al-Ḥajj [22]: 17; which mentions the term *al-mushrikūn* side by side with the *ahl al-kitab* or with groups of Jews, Sabi’in, Christians and Magi, using the letter ‘*atf*, *wāw*, (which means “and”). The existence of the letter ‘*atf* (conjunction), implies a difference between the things that are connected. The indication in this verse means that there is a difference between *musyrikūn* and the *ahl al-kitab* or with the Jewish, Christian, Sabi’in and Majusi groups.⁴⁵ The argument in *sūrah* al-Taubah [9]: 31 which states that the *ahl al-kitab* have a polytheistic nature because they make their monks God (*arbāb*), according to Riḍā this does not make the *ahl al-kitab* a polytheist group. Even if it is said that

⁴³ Muḥammad ‘Abduh dan Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, jilid 2 (Mesir: Al-Manār, 1350 H), 349.

⁴⁴ Muḥammad ‘Abduh dan Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, jilid 2, 349.

⁴⁵ Muḥammad ‘Abduh dan Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, jilid 2, 349.

they have the character of shirk, then the nature of idolatry is *al-shirk fī al-rubūbiyyah*, which is taking religious rulings from humans (in this case monks) and not from revelation. In addition, the scribes basically still believed and had faith in Allah and the previous prophets. This is different from the polytheists who have the nature of *al-shirk fī al-ulūhiyyah*, that is, they believe in the power of gods other than Allah SWT.⁴⁶

Sayyid Quṭub as quoted by Nasrullah argues that the *ahl al-kitab* from the Jewish and Christian circles are among the polytheists. According to him, Jews and Christians are almost the same as Arab polytheists who believe in myths and superstition and think that Allah has children. According to Quṭub, the Arab polytheists were originally almost the same as the Jews and Christians who considered and made angels the daughters of Allah, and made their statues to be worshiped and given names of women such as Latta, Uzza and Manat, with the intention of getting closer to Allah.⁴⁷

Wahbah al-Zuḥaiḥī argues that explicitly the *ahl al-kitab* are identical to the unbelievers (*al-lazhīn kafarū*) as well as the polytheists (al-Bayyinah [98]: 1). The term *kufr* in this verse according to Wahbah, is people who oppose and reject Muhammad's apostleship. The disbelief of the *ahl al-kitab* in this verse is very clear, as is the disbelief of the polytheists, that is, they both oppose and reject the teachings brought by the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁸

4. Recognition of the Qur'an Against the Adherents of the *Ahl al-kitab*

Explicitly, the al-Qur'an acknowledges the existence of the adherents of the scriptures. This can be read through al-Baqarah [2]: 213.

⁴⁶ Muḥammad 'Abduh dan Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, jilid 2, 349.

⁴⁷ Nasrullah, "Ahli Kitab dalam Perdebatan", 77-78.

⁴⁸ Wahbah al-Zuḥaiḥī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 15, 620.

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً ۗ فَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ النَّبِيِّنَ مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ ۖ وَأَنْزَلَ مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ بِالْحَقِّ لِيَحْكُمَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ فِي مَا اختلفُوا فِيهِ ۗ وَمَا اختلفَ فِيهِ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ أُوتُوهُ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ بَعِيًّا ۗ بَيْنَهُمْ فَهَدَى اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَا اختلفُوا فِيهِ مِنَ الْحَقِّ بِإِذْنِهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ

“Mankind was [of] one religion [before their deviation]; then Allah sent the prophets as bringers of good tidings and warners and sent down with them the Scripture in truth to judge between the people concerning that in which they differed. And none differed over the Scripture except those who were given it - after the clear proofs came to them - out of jealous animosity among themselves. And Allah guided those who believed to the truth concerning that over which they had differed, by His permission. And Allah guides whom He wills to a straight path”.

Adam’s children and grandchildren were in a state where they needed divine guidance. So, Allah gifted them by sending messengers of joy and warnings to bring them out of darkness into light. This is so that there is no reason for humans to dispute Allah after the sending of the messengers. And along with some of the messengers, Allah sent down a book that shows people to the truth.⁴⁹

According to the *jumhūr* of *ulama*’, people used to be *hidāyah* people who embraced one religion, with the same creed and sharia, namely Islam. However, then they disagreed so that Allah sent prophets as messengers of joy and warning.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Aṭā’, and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī argued that humans at that time were people of *ḍalāl* (people who were perverted) who did not receive

⁴⁹ Wahbah al-Zuhāilī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 476.

⁵⁰ Wahbah al-Zuhāilī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 476; Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsir Ath-Thabari*, jilid 3, 579.

guidance with the truth and-in their actions-did not stop at the limits or rules of the Sharia. This condition required the sending of the messengers.⁵¹

While Abū Muslim al-Aṣḥānī and Qāḍī Abū Bakar al-Baqillānī argues, that (meaning al-Baqarah [2]: 213) is that humans were previously above nature. They carry out what is shown by reason in matters of faith and charity. However, human submission to their intellect was not based on God's guidance, so that eventually conflicts arose.⁵²

Meanwhile, the compilers of *Tafsir al-Manār* chose another purpose, namely that basically humans are social creatures. That is, Allah created humans as one people, related to each other in life. Every individual cannot possibly live independently without the need for other individuals. So, the potential of other people must be combined with their potential. This is known as *al-insān madanī bi al-ṭab*.⁵³

Based on al-Baqarah [2]: 213, the author thinks that every Messenger who was sent to earth was always given a book by Allah. This is reflected in the phrase of *wa anzal ma'ahum al-kitab*. With regard to the number of prophets there is a history:

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو الْمُغِيرَةِ حَدَّثَنَا مُعَانُ بْنُ رِفَاعَةَ حَدَّثَنِي عَلِيُّ بْنُ يَزِيدَ عَنِ الْقَاسِمِ أَبِي عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ عَنْ أَبِي
 أَمَامَةَ قَالَ كَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي الْمَسْجِدِ جَالِسًا وَكَانُوا يَطْنُونَ أَنَّهُ يَنْزِلُ عَلَيْهِ
 فَأَقْصَرُوا عَنْهُ حَتَّى جَاءَ أَبُو ذَرٍّ فَأَقْتَحَمَ فَأَتَى فَجَلَسَ إِلَيْهِ... قَالَ قُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ كَمْ وَفِي عِدَّةِ
 الْأَنْبِيَاءِ قَالَ مِائَةٌ أَلْفٍ وَأَرْبَعَةٌ وَعِشْرُونَ أَلْفًا الرَّسُلُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ ثَلَاثُ مِائَةٍ وَخَمْسَةَ عَشَرَ جَمًّا غَفِيرًا.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Wahbah al-Zuhāifī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 476.

⁵² Wahbah al-Zuhāifī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 476.

⁵³ Wahbah al-Zuhāifī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 476-477.

⁵⁴ Abū 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām al-Ḥāfiẓ Abī 'Abd Allāh Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal* (Riyād: Bait al-Afkār al-Dauliyyah li al-Nashr wa al-Tauzī', 1998), 1647-1648.

“Has told us Abū al-Mughīrah told us Mu‘ān bin Rifā‘ah told me ‘Alī bin Yazīd from al-Qāsim Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān from Abū Umāmah said: Rasūl Allāh SAW was sitting in the mosque, they thought the revelation had come down on him then they surrounded him until Abū Dharr came and entered then sat down near messenger SAW. ... he said; O messenger of God! How many prophets? messenger SAW said: “One hundred and twenty four thousand, the messengers are three hundred and fifteen, very many”.

Meanwhile, the history that comes from al-Ājirī and Abū Ḥatim al-Busī states that the number of prophets is 124,000 people,⁵⁵ among them, 313 people had the status of messengers. And those whose names are mentioned in the Qur’an are 18 people.⁵⁶ In another narration, the apostles numbered 314 people.⁵⁷

Al-Shaykh Muḥammad Nawawī al-Jāwī said that Allah sent down 104 books to earth. Among them are 10 books (*ṣahīfah*) for Prophet Adam, 50 books (*ṣahīfah*) for Prophet Shith, 30 books (*ṣahīfah*) for Prophet Idris, 10 books (*ṣahīfah*) for Prophet Ibrāhīm, 1 book for Prophet ‘Isā, 1 book for Prophet Mūsā, 1 book for Prophet Dāwud, and 1 book for Prophet Muḥammad.⁵⁸

However, when referring to the narrative above, there are 315 books or 314 books or 313 books that Allah sent down to earth. This number is in accordance with the number of messengers who were sent to earth. When the Prophet was sent to earth, he would be equipped with a holy book (*wa anzal ma‘ahum al-*

⁵⁵ In another narration it is stated that Allah sent as many as 8.000 prophets, consisting of 4.000 prophets from the Banī Isrāil and 4.000 prophets from all human groups. Look at Al-Shaikh Muḥammad Nawawī al-Jāwī, *Qaṭr al-Gaith fi Sharḥ Masāil Abī al-Laith* (Singapura-Jeddah-Indonesia: Ḥaramain, tt), 9.

⁵⁶ Wahbah al-Zuhāifī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 477.

⁵⁷ Al-Syaikh Muḥammad Nawawī al-Jāwī, *Qaṭr al-Gaith*, 9.

⁵⁸ Al-Syaikh Muḥammad Nawawī al-Jāwī, *Qaṭr al-Gaith*, 7.

kitab). These books are used by the messengers to guide humans (their people). This is reflected in the two phrase used by Qur'an, namely the pronunciation *ūtū naṣīban min al-kitab*⁵⁹ and *ūtū al-kitab*.⁶⁰ Some of these messengers, some were told by the Qur'an to Muslims, and some of them were not narrated by the Qur'an. This is reflected in al-Nisā [4]: 164.⁶¹

وَرُسُلًا قَدْ فَصَّصْنَاهُمْ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَرُسُلًا لَمْ نَفْصُصْنَهُمْ عَلَيْكَ وَكَلَّمَ اللَّهُ مُوسَى تَكْلِيمًا ۝١٦٤

“And [We sent] messengers about whom We have related [their stories] to you before and messengers about whom We have not related to you. And Allah spoke to Moses with [direct] speech”.

If so, whether every good deed of the *ahl al-kitab* can be accepted by Allah. Related to this, it can be read in al-Baqarah [2]: 62.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِئِينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ۝٦٢

“Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans [before Prophet Muhammad] - those [among them] who believed in Allah and the Last Day and did righteousness - will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve”.

This verse was revealed in connection with the friends of Salmān al-Fārisī. He came from the city of Jundisapur, including the aristocracy there.⁶² Ibn Abī Ḥatim and al-‘Adnīn their *Musnad* narrated from Mujahid, he said: I once asked the Prophet about the followers of the religion I used to also embrace. I told him

⁵⁹ Q.S. Ali ‘mrān [3]: 23; al-Nisā’ [4]: 44, 51.

⁶⁰ Q.S al-Baqarah [2]: 101, 144, 145; Ali ‘mrān [3]: 19, 20, 100, 186, 187; al-Nisā’ [4]: 47, 131; al-Māidah [5]: 5, 57; al-Taubah [9]: 29; al-Ḥadīd [57]: 16, al-Mudaththir [74]: 31; al-Bayyinah [98]: 4.

⁶¹ See also Q.S. Q.S. Ghāfir [40]: 78.

⁶² Narration from Ibn Jarīr and Ibn Abī Ḥatim from al-Suddī as quoted by Wahbah al-Zuhāifī in his interpretation. Look at Wahbah al-Zuhāifī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 137.

about their prayers and worship. Then the verse came down: “Behold, the believers, the Jews ...”.⁶³

Al-Wāḥidī narrated from Mujahid, he said: When Salman told messenger SAW about his friends, he said, “They will go to hell”. Salman said: Hearing that, I felt the world became dark. Then came down the verse “Behold, the believers, the Jews ...” until His word “grieves”. Said Salman: After that I felt as if I was freed from being crushed by a mountain.⁶⁴

Based on the above verse, actually people who justify the religious teachings brought by messenger SAW from Allah, people who convert to Judaism or Christianity, or people who change religions, and they believe in Allah alone without associating it with anything, having faith in the resurrection, and they do pious deeds, then they will definitely get the reward of their righteous deeds on the side of their Lord. They will not be afraid of the awesomeness of the Last Day. And they do not feel sad for the world and its beauty that they leave behind when they have witnessed the eternal pleasures of heaven for themselves.⁶⁵

CONCLUSION

After conducting a comprehensive discussion, the author can conclude that the term “*ahl al-kitab*” refers to the notion of religion aimed at communities or groups of religious adherents who have holy books that have been revealed by Allah SWT. to the Prophet and His Messenger in general. Apart from that, with regard to the status of the *ahl al-kitab*, the majority of the *ulama*’ agreed that they were

⁶³ Wahbah al-Zuḥāifī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 137.

⁶⁴ Wahbah al-Zuḥāifī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 137; Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad bin Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsir Ath-Thabari*, jilid 2, 30-31.

⁶⁵ Wahbah al-Zuḥāifī, *Tafsir Al-Munir*, jilid 1, 137-138.

disbelief. However, regarding the polytheistic status of the *ahl al-kitab*, there was a disagreement among *ulama'*.

Explicitly, the Qur'an acknowledges the existence of the adherents of the *ahl al-kitab*. The form of acknowledgment of the Qur'an towards the adherents of *ahl al-kitab* is manifested in the form of sending the holy book to each Messenger. The narration sourced from Ahmad bin Hanbal states that the number of prophets was 124,000, 315 of the 124,000 prophets were sent to become messengers, or in another narration it is stated that 314 or 313 people were messengers. Thus, the number of holy books that Allah sent to earth is the number of messenger who were sent to that earth. Some of these messengers were narrated by Qur'an, and some of them were not narrated by Qur'an.

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