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Factors Underlying Prophet Ayyub's Success in Enduring Trials: An Analysis of Surah Shad Verses 41–44 from Ibn Kathir's Exegetical Perspective

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Abstract

This study examines the factors underlying Prophet Ayyub's success in enduring severe trials based on Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Surah Shad verses 41–44 and explores their relevance to contemporary Muslim life. Previous studies have generally focused on patience, moral education, and psychological resilience, while the interrelationship between supplication, obedience, and the quality of *awwab* has received limited attention. This study employed a qualitative, descriptive-analytical library research design using the *tahlili* method of Qur'anic interpretation. The primary sources were the Qur'an, particularly Surah Shad verses 41–44, and volume seven of *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*. Relevant books, journal articles, theses, and previous studies served as secondary sources. Data were collected through documentation, validated through source criticism and literature triangulation, and analyzed by describing Ibn Kathir's interpretation, identifying significant statements, classifying the findings into central themes, and contextualizing their contemporary relevance. The findings reveal three interrelated factors. First, sincere supplication demonstrates Prophet Ayyub's complete dependence on Allah without turning prayer into a demand. Second, obedience to divine commands represents active effort accompanied by trust in Allah. Third, the quality of *awwab* reflects his continual return and submission to Allah during both hardship and recovery. These findings demonstrate that Prophet Ayyub's success was founded not merely on physical endurance or patience, but on a sustained spiritual relationship with Allah. These three factors provide a relevant framework for strengthening Muslims' spiritual resilience when confronting illness, loss, disaster, and other hardships.

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Introduction

The Qur'an is the sacred scripture of Muslims and is characterized as *shamil wa mutakamil*, meaning comprehensive and complete. Its authenticity has been preserved throughout history in a manner unparalleled by other scriptures. The Qur'an is a miracle bestowed by Allah upon His Messenger and transmitted to the community of believers so that it may be understood properly and serve as an enduring guide for life (Matondang, 2025; Septina et al., 2023).

In addition to serving as a guide for life, the Qur'an explains the various trials that human beings encounter. Such trials form part of the human journey and test a believer's faith and patience. Every person faces trials in different forms, including hardship, loss, and other difficulties. One Qur'anic account that particularly exemplifies extraordinary patience amid severe suffering is the story of Prophet Ayyub. He was once immensely wealthy, owned extensive lands, and had many descendants. Allah subsequently tested him through the loss of his children, family, and possessions and by afflicting his body with a debilitating illness. The illness affected nearly every part of his body, while his heart and tongue remained sound (Wardah et al., 2024). Exegetical reports further emphasize the severity of these trials: his relatives withdrew from him, and only his wife remained faithfully by his side.

Prophet Ayyub's success in enduring exceptionally severe trials constitutes one of the Qur'an's most prominent examples of steadfast faith. In Surah Shad verses 41–44, Allah describes how he persevered through prolonged suffering without losing his trust in Allah. The account indicates that his success rested not merely on endurance, but also on the strength of his faith, patience, and intimate spiritual relationship with Allah (Fitri et al., 2025).

Proper etiquette in supplication was another essential factor. In his supplication, Prophet Ayyub neither complained about nor blamed Allah for his ordeal. Instead, he attributed his suffering—manifested in illness and distress—to Satan's affliction. Despite the severity of his burden, he did not attribute evil to Allah. This conduct demonstrates that successfully enduring a trial does not entail freedom from pain; rather, it involves maintaining a heart connected to Allah amid suffering (Trisia & Anggraini, 2021). His manner of supplication also indicates that his success was not attributable solely to physical endurance, but to several mutually reinforcing factors reflected in the interpretations of Qur'anic exegetes, including Ibn Kathir's exegesis of Surah Shad verses 41–44. Identifying and analyzing these factors therefore constitutes the central focus of this study.

The story of Prophet Ayyub in Surah Shad verses 41–44 has been examined from various perspectives. Scholars have related the account to the formation of a hardy personality and have traced its interpretation from the classical to the modern-contemporary periods in connection with the concept of the Adversity Quotient. Other studies have treated the story as a source of moral-educational values, particularly fortitude and patience in confronting trials. Its moral values have also been examined through a thematic exegetical approach based on Wahbah al-Zuhaili's *Tafsir al-Munir* (Kulsum, 2026; Mahidinha & Masithoh, 2022; Trisia & Anggraini, 2021; Wardah et al., 2024).

Previous research has generally addressed the story of Prophet Ayyub in terms of psychology, moral education, ethical values, and the development of exegetical thought.

Nevertheless, no study has specifically identified the factors underlying his success in enduring trials through Ibn Kathir's sequential interpretation of Surah Shad verses 41–44. Earlier studies also tend to present patience as his principal characteristic without explaining how sincere supplication, obedience to Allah's commands, and the quality of *awwab* constitute an integrated spiritual process. The novelty of this study therefore lies in formulating these three success factors from Ibn Kathir's interpretation, examining their interrelationship, and explaining their relevance to contemporary Muslim life.

In response to this gap, the study addresses three questions. First, how does Ibn Kathir interpret the story of Prophet Ayyub in Surah Shad verses 41–44? Second, according to this interpretation, what factors supported Prophet Ayyub's success in enduring his trials? Third, how are these factors relevant to Muslims confronting contemporary trials and calamities? Accordingly, this study aims to analyze Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Surah Shad verses 41–44, identify the factors underlying Prophet Ayyub's success, and explain their relevance as spiritual guidance for Muslims facing various hardships.

Method

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive-analytical library research design. It applied the *tahlili* method of Qur'anic interpretation, which examines verses sequentially by considering their meanings, interrelationships, discursive context, and exegetical explanations (Ali & Mustofa, 2023). The primary sources were the Qur'an—particularly Surah Shad verses 41–44—and Volume 7 of *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*. Secondary sources included books, journal articles, theses, and previous studies concerning the story of Prophet Ayyub, supplication, obedience, patience, the quality of *awwab*, and spiritual resilience. Sources were selected according to their relevance to the research focus, bibliographic clarity, publication traceability, full-text availability, and contribution to the analysis. Recent scholarship was prioritized, while classical works were retained because of their foundational exegetical status (Ibn Kathir, 2004).

Data were collected through documentation involving the identification, reading, recording, and classification of relevant literature. Key information was recorded according to source identity, research focus, principal concepts, interpretations of the verses, findings, and relevance to the study objectives. Sources unrelated to Surah Shad verses 41–44 or lacking clear publication details were excluded. Data trustworthiness was maintained through source criticism, literature triangulation, and repeated reading. Source criticism involved verifying authorship, year of publication, publisher or journal, volume, issue, page range, and the correspondence between source content and the cited claims. Triangulation was conducted by comparing the primary interpretation with supporting books and journal articles to ensure the credibility and consistency of the analysis and to keep the interpretation of the verses aligned with their broader exegetical context (Bowen, 2009; Kiger & Varpio, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017).

The data were analyzed in six stages. First, Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Surah Shad verses 41–44 was described. Second, statements concerning Prophet Ayyub's responses to his trials were identified. Third, the data were coded and grouped into three themes: sincerity in supplication, obedience to Allah's commands, and the quality of *awwab*. Fourth, the relationships among the themes were reviewed and analyzed to provide a

comprehensive account of the factors underlying Prophet Ayyub's success. Fifth, the findings were compared with previous studies to identify similarities, differences, and the study's contribution. Finally, the findings were interpreted contextually to explain their relevance to Muslims confronting illness, loss, disaster, and other contemporary trials.

Results

Ibn Kathir's Interpretation of Surah Shad Verses 41–44

وَاذْكُرْ عَبْدَنَا أَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الشَّيْطَانُ بِنُصْبٍ وَعَذَابٍ أَرْكُضْ بِرِجْلِكَ هَذَا مُغْتَسَلٌ بَارِدٌ وَشَرَابٌ وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ أَهْلَهُ وَمِثْلَهُمْ مَعَهُمْ رَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَذِكْرًا لِّأُولَى الْأَلْبَابِ وَخُذْ بِيَدِكَ ضِغْثًا فَاضْرِبْ بِهِ وَلَا تَحْنُتْ إِنَّا وَجَدْنَاهُ صَابِرًا نِّعَمَ الْعَبْدُ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ

Meaning: “And remember Our servant Ayyub, when he called to his Lord, ‘Indeed, Satan has afflicted me with hardship and torment.’ [Allah said], ‘Strike the ground with your foot. Here is cool water for washing and drinking.’ We restored his family to him, along with as many more, as a mercy from Us and a reminder for people of understanding. ‘Take a bundle of grass in your hand and strike with it, and do not break your oath.’ We truly found him patient. What an excellent servant! Indeed, he continually turned to Allah.” (Q.S. Shad [38]: 41–44).

In *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, the story of Prophet Ayyub is presented as an exemplar of a servant's patience in enduring severe and prolonged trials. These trials occurred in succession, encompassing physical suffering, the loss of his possessions, and calamities affecting his children. Only his heart and tongue remained sound. After the suffering had continued for an extended period and his condition had become increasingly distressing, he supplicated to Allah as stated in Surah Al-Anbiya verse 83:

﴿وَأَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الضُّرُّ وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّحِيمِينَ﴾

Meaning: “And [remember] Ayyub, when he called to his Lord, ‘Indeed, adversity has touched me, and You are the Most Merciful of the merciful.’” (Q.S. Al-Anbiya [21]: 83).

Allah answered the supplication by instructing Prophet Ayyub to strike the ground with his foot, whereupon a spring emerged. He bathed in its water, and the illness affecting the exterior of his body disappeared. He drank from another spring, and the illness within his body was likewise cured. His recovery was therefore complete, both outwardly and inwardly. As a further manifestation of mercy, Allah restored his family and multiplied their number. This event teaches people of understanding that patience can lead to relief and tranquility. The command to take a bundle of grass and strike his wife with it in fulfillment of his oath also represents a divine concession, or *rukhsah* (Ibn Kathir, 2004).

Factors Underlying Prophet Ayyub's Success in Enduring Trials

Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Surah Shad verses 41–44 reveals three principal factors that supported Prophet Ayyub's success in enduring his trials: sincerity in supplication, obedience to Allah's commands, and the quality of *awwab*. These factors did not operate independently; rather, they formed an integrated spiritual process through which Prophet Ayyub endured suffering and ultimately received Allah's assistance.

Sincerity in Supplication to Allah

Allah states in Surah Shad verse 41:

وَاذْكُرْ عَبْدَنَا أَيُّوبَ إِذْ نَادَىٰ رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَسَّنِيَ الشَّيْطَانُ بِنُصْبٍ وَعَذَابٍ

Meaning: “Remember Our servant Ayyub, when he called to his Lord, ‘Indeed, Satan has afflicted me with hardship and torment [pain].’” (Q.S. Shad [38]: 41).

In Ibn Kathir’s interpretation, the hardship mentioned in this verse refers to Prophet Ayyub’s bodily suffering, whereas the torment refers to the calamities that befell his wealth and children. After accepting his supplication, Allah instructed him to rise and strike the ground with his foot. When he obeyed, Allah caused a spring to flow; bathing in its water removed the illness from the exterior of his body. Allah then instructed him to strike the ground elsewhere, producing another spring from which he drank. Its water became the means through which his internal illness was cured, thereby restoring his outward and inward health completely (Ibn Kathir, 2004).

Prophet Ayyub’s supplication in Surah Shad verse 41 was not expressed as a demand for immediate healing. Rather, it was a sincere disclosure of his physical suffering and grief over the calamities affecting his wealth and children. This attitude reflects complete dependence on Allah and humble acceptance of His decree without complaint or negative assumption.

Obedience to Allah’s Commands

Allah states in Surah Shad verse 42:

أَرْكُضْ بِرِجْلِكَ هَذَا مُغْتَسَلٌ بَارِدٌ وَشَرَابٌ

Meaning: “[Allah said], ‘Strike the ground with your foot. Here is cool water for washing and drinking.’” (Q.S. Shad [38]: 42).

Before his recovery, Prophet Ayyub generally depended on his wife for assistance with his daily needs. On one occasion, she waited for him and became concerned by his delay. When she looked for him, Prophet Ayyub returned in restored health and with a more vigorous appearance. Failing to recognize him, she asked whether he had seen Allah’s afflicted prophet. Prophet Ayyub replied, “I am he” (Ibn Kathir, 2004).

The account in Surah Shad verse 42 demonstrates Prophet Ayyub’s obedience to Allah’s command. He did not wait for an explanation of how striking the ground with his foot could cure an illness he had endured for years. Instead, he immediately obeyed because of his complete trust in Allah. The outcome was not merely the alleviation of his illness, but complete recovery. Surah Shad verse 42 thus illustrates that obedience to Allah’s commands, even when their wisdom is not immediately apparent, may lead to assistance that exceeds human expectations.

Possessing the Quality of Awwab

Allah states in Surah Shad verse 44:

وَحُذِّ بِيَدِكَ ضِغْنًا فَاضْرِبْ بِهِ وَلَا تَحْنَتْ أَتَانَا وَجَدْنَاهُ صَابِرًا نِعْمَ الْعَبْدُ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ

Meaning: “Take a bundle of grass in your hand and strike with it, and do not break your oath.’ We truly found him patient. What an excellent servant! Indeed, he continually turned to Allah.” (Q.S. Shad [38]: 44).

One account states that Prophet Ayyub’s wife sold her braid to obtain a piece of bread with which to feed him. Prophet Ayyub then swore that he would strike her one hundred times if

Allah restored his health. After recovering, however, he did not wish to carry out the oath because of his wife's profound devotion, affection, and loyalty.

Allah provided a resolution by instructing Prophet Ayyub to take a bundle of one hundred blades of grass and strike his wife once with it. In this manner, he could fulfill his oath without harming her. The event demonstrates the relief Allah grants to servants who remain God-conscious and surrender themselves to Him (Ibn Kathir, 2004). Describing Prophet Ayyub as an excellent servant and as *awwab* underscores his consistent return and submission to Allah throughout his trials.

Discussion

Sincerity in Supplication as the Foundation of Spiritual Steadfastness

The first factor supporting Prophet Ayyub's success in enduring his trials was the earnestness and sincerity of his supplication to Allah. Etymologically, supplication derives from a root denoting calling, invoking, or petitioning from a lower to a higher position. Terminologically, it is an act of servitude through which a person acknowledges absolute dependence on Allah. Sincere supplication is not merely a verbal utterance; it is a state of the heart that entrusts the outcome entirely to Allah without any motive other than seeking His pleasure (Jannati & Hamandia, 2022).

Sincerity entails purifying one's intention exclusively for Allah without seeking praise or worldly benefit. The efficacy of supplication is related to the purity of the petitioner's heart and spiritual quality. The more a person avoids conduct that undermines sincerity and reverence, the stronger that person's confidence in Allah's assistance becomes. The Qur'an records the acceptance of the prophets' supplications as evidence that prayers offered with hope do not escape Allah's attention, even when their requests appear impossible according to human reasoning (Aby, 2025; Al Hamid & Hakim, 2025; Nurhayati et al., 2023).

The sincerity of Prophet Ayyub's supplication is evident in his honest disclosure without demands, his purity of intention, and his confidence in Allah's assistance. Supplication in the Qur'an constitutes a comprehensive act of worship because it reinforces *tawhid* and spiritual intimacy between the servant and Allah. Sincerity in supplication strengthens this inner relationship and enables a person to maintain spiritual steadfastness amid suffering (Firdaus et al., 2023).

Obedience as a Form of Human Effort and Trust in Allah

Obedience to Allah's commands is an essential expression of faith, for faith without obedience remains an unsubstantiated profession. Etymologically, the term obedience derives from the Arabic *ata'a-yuti'u-ta'ah*, meaning to submit, comply, and follow. Obedience thus constitutes a foundation that preserves and strengthens faith, particularly under conditions of intense pressure.

Faith may grow stronger when obedience is maintained under difficult conditions because adversity is precisely where faith is demonstrated. This differs from obedience practiced when life proceeds without difficulty (Saputra, 2022). The quality of a servant's obedience is measured not only by compliance during favorable circumstances, but also by consistency when trials occur repeatedly. This principle provides the basis for understanding Prophet Ayyub's continued obedience to Allah amid suffering.

Obedience does not conflict with human effort; the two operate in conjunction. Effort, or *ikhtiar*, is manifested in carrying out Allah's commands, whereas trust, or *tawakkul*, is reflected in accepting that the final outcome rests entirely within Allah's power. Obedience to Allah is not a passive posture of merely awaiting assistance. Instead, it is itself a form of effort, because complying with Allah's commands represents the servant's endeavor to draw closer to Him (Setiawan & Mufarihah, 2021).

The command to strike the ground with his foot in Surah Shad verse 42 illustrates the relationship among obedience, effort, and trust in Allah. Prophet Ayyub performed the action

required of him while entrusting its outcome entirely to Allah. His obedience confirms that *tawakkul* does not eliminate human effort; rather, it directs that effort within a framework of submission to Allah.

The Quality of Awwab as Continual Return to Allah

Etymologically, *awwab* derives from the root *aba-ya'ubu*, meaning “to return.” Its intensive morphological form denotes repeated and persistent action. The term describes a servant who continually returns to Allah, whether while maintaining obedience or after committing an error. This quality characterizes a servant who never turns away from Allah under any circumstances, as exemplified by Prophet Ayyub’s steadfast devotion throughout his trials (Pitaloka & Truna, 2021).

The term *awwab* at the conclusion of Surah Shad verse 44 represents the culmination of Allah’s praise for Prophet Ayyub. This commendation followed a prolonged sequence of patience, supplication, and obedience rather than a single event. The obedience described in verse 42 concerns the specific command to strike the ground with his foot, whereas *awwab* in verse 44 encapsulates his entire character—from prosperity, through illness and suffering, to recovery.

Optimism, patience, and the conviction that Allah is the Supreme Healer and the Most Merciful sustained Prophet Ayyub’s journey from illness to recovery. The consistency of this inner disposition formed the core of his character as *awwab*: he obeyed not only when given a particular command, but remained oriented toward Allah throughout every phase of life (Sangaji, 2023).

The quality of *awwab* is also reflected in Prophet Ayyub’s obedience when he struck the ground with his foot in accordance with Allah’s command. This act was not merely compliance; it expressed a deeply embedded disposition of continual return to Allah. A person characterized as *awwab* responds to Allah’s command by returning and surrendering completely without first demanding a rational explanation.

Prophet Ayyub’s patience and obedience culminated in *rida*, the willing acceptance of Allah’s decree. Such acceptance manifests the quality of *awwab* because the servant not only returns to Allah during hardship but also maintains that closeness after receiving assistance (Aziz et al., 2025).

The three factors identified in this study are mutually reinforcing. Sincere supplication initiates Prophet Ayyub’s closeness to Allah, obedience provides tangible evidence of that closeness, and the quality of *awwab* integrates both. A servant who continually returns to Allah remains sincere in supplication and obedient to His commands in both hardship and ease. The description “an excellent servant” in Surah Shad verse 44 therefore does not commend a single event; it affirms Prophet Ayyub’s consistent steadfastness, obedience, and continual return to Allah.

Contemporary Relevance of Prophet Ayyub’s Success Factors

Contemporary life frequently exposes people to sudden trials. One example is the natural disasters that affected several areas of Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra beginning in late November 2025. Prolonged extreme rainfall triggered flash floods and landslides, severed road access, damaged homes, and displaced local communities. By December 22, 2025, the disasters had claimed 1,106 lives, while 175 people remained missing (KumparanNEWS, 2025).

The effects of a disaster cannot be measured solely by casualties and physical damage; they are also evident in disruptions to people’s inner lives and religious practices. These disruptions may impede congregational prayer, damage places of worship, and interrupt Qur’anic recitation and dhikr. Flood-affected communities initially experienced panic, anxiety, and confusion before turning to religious coping strategies to regain a sense of calm.

These religious strategies were practiced through prayer, *dhikr*, *istighfar*, and *tawakkul*, enabling communities to understand calamity not only as a source of suffering but also as a meaningful test of life. Higher levels of spirituality strengthen an individual’s capacity to endure and recover from the effects of disaster (Azizah & Daulay, 2026).

Spiritual factors such as faith, patience, *tawakkul*, and the conviction that every trial contains wisdom are essential to a person's capacity to confront disaster. This phenomenon resembles the story of Prophet Ayyub insofar as both involve trials marked by the loss of property, family, shelter, and disruption to ordinary life.

The Qur'an refers to disasters through several terms, including *bala'*, *musibah*, *fitnah*, punishment, and *'iqab*. These terms convey a dimension of faith-testing for those who experience them, whether through hardship or prosperity. Prophet Ayyub's trials are therefore not merely an account of the past; they communicate values that remain relevant to contemporary disaster response (Firdausiyah & Hardivizon, 2021).

The experiences of disaster-affected communities reveal successive suffering, sincere supplication, obedience throughout the recovery process, and surrender to Allah as a source of inner calm. Sincerity in supplication, obedience to Allah's commands, and the quality of *awwab* can therefore serve as spiritual guidance for Muslims confronting calamity. These findings affirm that the capacity to endure trials is built through steadfast return to Allah as manifested in supplication, obedience, effort, and *tawakkul*.

Conclusion

Based on Ibn Kathir's interpretation of Surah Shad verses 41–44, Prophet Ayyub's success in enduring his trials was supported by three interrelated factors: sincerity in supplication, obedience to Allah's commands, and the quality of *awwab*. The sincerity of his supplication is evident in his appeal to Allah without demands and without blaming the divine decree. His obedience is demonstrated by his willingness to carry out Allah's command as an act of effort accompanied by *tawakkul*. The quality of *awwab*, meanwhile, reflects his consistent return and submission to Allah during both suffering and recovery. Together, these factors form an integrated spiritual process, demonstrating that Prophet Ayyub's success was grounded not merely in patience or physical endurance but in a relationship with Allah continuously sustained through supplication, obedience, and submission. These findings provide a spiritual foundation for Muslims confronting illness, loss, disaster, and other hardships.

This study is limited to Surah Shad verses 41–44 and adopts *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* as its principal exegetical source. As a library study, it neither compares Ibn Kathir's interpretation with those of other classical and contemporary exegetes nor empirically examines the application of the three factors. Future studies should compare Ibn Kathir's interpretation with other exegetical works and incorporate Surah Al-Anbiya verses 83–84 to develop a more comprehensive understanding of Prophet Ayyub's story. Empirical research is also needed to examine how sincere supplication, obedience, and the quality of *awwab* contribute to community spiritual resilience. In practical terms, educators, preachers, and religious counselors may employ these three factors in spiritual formation while maintaining a balance among supplication, obedience, effort, and *tawakkul*.

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