

Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān (3): Verses 55–57

When Allah said, "O Jesus, indeed I am taking you in full (mutawaffika), and raising you to Myself, and purifying you from those who disbelieved, and making those who follow you above those who disbelieve until the Day of Resurrection. Then to Me is your return, and I shall judge between you concerning that over which you used to differ. As for those who disbelieved, I shall punish them with a severe punishment in this world and the Hereafter, and they shall have no helpers. But as for those who believed and performed righteous deeds, He will give them their rewards in full. And Allah does not love the wrongdoers."

This is a new beginning (isti'nāf).

The word **"idh" (when)** is an adverb not attached to anything preceding it, or it is connected to an omitted verb, meaning:

"Remember when Allah said..."

just as occurred in His saying:

"And when your Lord said to the angels: Indeed I am placing upon the earth a successor." (2:30)

This is the narration of the event of the raising of the Messiah and his being concealed from the sight of his enemies.

Allah preceded this event by informing him of it as a means of comforting him, since what he desired—the guidance of his people—had not been fully accomplished.

This was despite Allah's knowledge that Jesus loved meeting Allah.

It was also glad tidings for him that Allah would make his religion prevail, because the greatest concern of a messenger is guidance and the conveyance of the divine law.

For that reason He said to him:

"And making those who follow you above those who disbelieve."

The calling of his name ("O Jesus") serves as reassurance and consolation.

In the hadith, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said:

"No prophet is taken in death until he is given the choice."

His statement:

"Indeed I am mutawaffika."

Its apparent meaning is:

"Indeed I am causing you to die."

This is the meaning of this verb wherever it is used, because the original meaning of the verb **tawaffā** with respect to a thing is to take it completely and receive it in full.

Thus it is said:

"Allah took him (tawaffāhu)."

meaning:

Allah decreed his death.

And it is said:

"The Angel of Death took him."

meaning:

He carried out Allah's will regarding his death.

The word **tawaffi** is also used metaphorically for sleep because of the resemblance between sleep and death, as in His saying:

"It is He who takes you (yatawaffākum) by night." (6:60)

and His saying:

"Allah takes the souls at the time of their death, and those that have not died during their sleep. Then He retains those for whom He has decreed death and releases the others until an appointed term." (39:42)

That is,

as for those who have not died the known death, He causes them in their sleep to undergo a death resembling complete death,

just as in His saying:

"He is the One who takes you by night."

Then He says:

"Until, when death comes to one of you, Our messengers take him."

Thus, all of these are, in reality, forms of causing death.

The only distinction between them is one established by common usage and customary expression.

For this reason He clarified the matter by saying:

"Then He retains the one upon whom He has decreed death and releases the other until an appointed term."

Thus the discourse is perfectly coherent and ordered.

However, its arrangement has been misunderstood by some minds.

Even clearer than this verse is the verse in Sūrat al-Mā'idah:

"When You caused me to die (falamā tawaffaytanī), You were Yourself the Watcher over them." (5:117)

For this indicates that he had indeed undergone the well-known death that separates a person from knowledge of what takes place on earth.

To interpret it as referring to sleep, in the case of Jesus, has no meaning.

For if Allah wished to raise him, it would not have been necessary for him to sleep.

Moreover, sleep would merely have been the means by which he was raised.

Therefore it would not be appropriate for the means to be emphasized while the intended objective is left unmentioned.

Accordingly, to claim that the word here means merely **being raised from this world** is to invent an entirely new meaning for the word **death (wafāh)** in the Arabic language without any evidence.

For that reason Ibn 'Abbās and Wahb ibn Munabbih said:

It refers to the death of actual dying.

This is also the apparent implication of Mālik's statement in **Jāmi' al-Utbiyyah**:

Mālik said:

"Jesus died when he was thirty-one years old."

Ibn Rushd said in **al-Bayān wa al-Taḥṣīl**:

"It is possible that his statement, 'He died when he was thirty-three years old,' was intended literally and not metaphorically."

Part 2 (Exact Translation)

Al-Rabīʿ said:

It was the death of sleep. Allah raised him while he was asleep.

Al-Ḥasan and a group of others said:

Its meaning is:

"Indeed I am taking you from the earth and delivering you safely into heaven."

It has also been said:

"Mutawaffika" means:

"Accepting your deeds."

What led them to interpret the meaning of **death (wafāh)** in this way was what has been reported in the authentic hadiths:

that Jesus will descend near the end of the duration of this world.

This gives the impression that he possesses a special life, more particular than the life of the souls of the rest of the prophets,

whose life itself is more particular than the life of the rest of souls,

for the lives of souls differ in degree,

as is indicated by the hadith:

"The souls of the martyrs are in the crops of green birds."

They considered interpreting the meaning of this verse to be preferable to interpreting the hadith concerning his life and his descent.

Among them were those who interpreted the meaning of **death**, making Jesus alive with his original life.

Others retained the apparent meaning of death, while making his present life a second life.

Thus Wahb ibn Munabbih said:

Allah caused him to die for three hours, raised him during that time, then brought him back to life in heaven with Himself.

Others said:

He remained dead for seven hours.

Ibn ʿAbbās and Mālik refrained from specifying exactly how that occurred.

Indeed, they were rightly guided and correct in doing so.

It is possible that his present life is like the life of the rest of the prophets.

And it is possible that his descent—if understood literally—will be a resurrection for him before the general Resurrection, as a special exception.

Indeed, his descent has been expressed in the wording:

"Allah will raise (yabʿathu) Jesus, and he will kill the Dajjāl."

This was narrated by Muslim from ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿUmar.

After that, he will not die again.

Rather, from there he will proceed directly to the Hereafter.

It has also been said in interpreting the verse that the conjunction in:

"and raising you to Me"

involves precedence and delay in wording,

since the conjunction **wa (and)** does not indicate chronological order.

Thus the meaning would be:

"Indeed I am raising you to Me, then causing you to die after that."

There is nothing in the wording itself to indicate that he dies at the end of time,

except that in the hadith of Abū Hurayrah recorded by Abū Dāwūd:

"He (Jesus) will remain for forty years, then he will die, and the Muslims will pray over him."

The preferable position is that Allah's statement:

"Indeed I am mutawaffika"

should be understood according to its literal meaning,
for that is its apparent meaning.

And the reports whose apparent sense indicates that he is alive should instead be interpreted as referring to a life of honor with Allah,
similar to the life of the martyrs,
indeed even stronger than theirs.

And if his descent is understood literally without interpretation,
then that descent would stand in the place of a resurrection.

As for the statement in the hadith of Abū Hurayrah:

"Then he will die and the Muslims will pray over him,"

it is an interpolation (mudraj) from Abū Hurayrah,
because none of the others who narrated the hadith concerning Jesus' descent reported this addition,
although they were numerous Companions.

Moreover, the narrations differ among themselves and are not explicit.

Nor has the Qur'an, while enumerating Jesus' distinctions and virtues, mentioned that he will descend at the end of time.