

Sūrat al-Nisā' (4): Verses 156–158

The phrase:

"And because of their disbelief"

is coordinated **a second time** with His statement:

"So because of their breaking [the covenant]" [al-Nisā':155].

It was not considered sufficient to rely merely upon His saying:

"and their disbelief in the signs of Allah" [al-Nisā':155].

Rather, the preposition **bi-** ("**because of**") was repeated, even though the conjunction alone would have sufficed, intentionally for the sake of emphasis.

The conjunction was also retained because of the distance between the two expressions, and because the context is one of magnifying the enormity of disbelief. Thus, the speaker mentions it and repeats it, confirming it and showing that there is no doubt whatsoever that the ruling is attached to it.

An example of this type of repetition is the saying of **Labīd**:

So the two struggled over a spreading acacia whose shade fluttered...

Like the smoke of a blazing fire whose flames are kindled...

Covered over and mingled with growing desert shrubs...

Like the smoke of a bright fire whose peaks rise high.

He repeated the comparison with the words:

"Like the smoke of a fire"

in order to reinforce the meaning of the first comparison.

In **al-Kashshāf** it is said:

"Their disbelief was repeated because they disbelieved in Moses, then in Jesus, then in Muhammad—peace be upon them all. Thus one instance of their disbelief was coordinated with another."

That is, the second disbelief is regarded as distinct from the previous one because of the conjunction with His saying:

"and their saying against Mary a tremendous slander."

A similar example is the verse of 'Uwayf al-Qawāfī:

Baseness is nobler than Wabr and his father,

And baseness is nobler than Wabr and all that they begot.

For he repeated:

"Baseness is nobler than Wabr"

because the second occurrence had attached to it the additional phrase:

"and all that they begot."

Al-buhtān (slander) is the verbal noun of **bahatahu**, meaning that one confronts another with a statement or deed that he neither expects nor is able to answer.

One who deliberately does this is called **bahūt**, whose plurals are **buhūt** and **buht**.

The Jews fabricated whatever falsehoods they wished against Mary, peace be upon her.

As for their statement:

"Indeed, we killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary,"

the reason they are reproached for it is that they intended to count this supposed deed among the glories of their forefathers, regarding it as one of their celebrated achievements in violating the clear covenant under the pretext of supporting religion.

"The Messiah" (al-Masīḥ) had become a title for Jesus, peace be upon him.

The Jews gave him this title mockingly because, in the Hebrew language, **Masīḥ** carries the meaning of **king**, as was previously discussed regarding the verse:

"His name will be the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary" [Āl 'Imrān:45].

Thus they intended the title as ridicule, and it consequently became his designation among them.

But Allah reversed their intention of belittling him and instead made it a title of honor.

Something similar occurred when some of the polytheists referred to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ as **Mudhammam ("the much-blamed one")**.

The wife of Abū Lahab said:

We have disobeyed Mudhammad;

His command we have rejected.

Thereupon the Prophet ﷺ said:

"Do you not marvel at how Allah turns away from me the abuse and curses of Quraysh? They insult and curse Mudhammad, while I am Muhammad."

This narration is reported from Abū Hurayrah in **Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī**, in the chapter on the names of the Prophet ﷺ from the Book of Virtues.

Regarding the words:

"the Messenger of Allah"

if these words belong to the Qur'anic narration itself rather than to the Jews' original statement, then their purpose is to praise Jesus and to indicate that those who boast of having killed him are even more deserving of the punishment decreed upon them because of that claim.

Accordingly, **"Messenger of Allah"** is in the accusative case as an expression of praise.

If, however, it forms part of the Jews' own quoted speech, then their describing him in this way was intended sarcastically, just as the idolaters said to the Prophet ﷺ:

"O you upon whom the Reminder has been sent down, indeed you are surely mad." [al-Ḥijr:6]

Likewise the people of Midian said to Shu‘ayb:

"Does your prayer command you that we should abandon what our fathers worshipped or cease doing with our wealth whatever we wish? Surely you are indeed the forbearing, the rightly guided!" [Hūd:87]

—in both cases intending mockery.

On this interpretation, **"Messenger of Allah"** functions grammatically as an adjective describing **the Messiah**.

The statement:

"And they did not kill him..."

most evidently contains a **wāw of circumstance (wāw al-ḥāl)**, meaning:

They made that statement while the reality was that they had not killed him.

Thus, it is not merely an independent statement reporting that the killing did not occur. For had it been an independent report, the context would have called for reinforcing it with stronger emphatic devices. Rather, because it functions as a circumstantial clause describing those who uttered the statement that has been coordinated among the reasons for their curse and punishment, those very reasons themselves establish the falsity of their claim.

Nevertheless, it is also possible for it to be understood as an independent declarative statement coordinated with the previous statements reporting what they said.

In that case, its lack of emphatic particles may be explained in one of several ways:

- either because the audience being addressed consists of the believers,
- or because this report is itself sufficiently evident that no further emphasis is needed, making the omission of emphasis an intentional departure from what would ordinarily be expected,
- or because this information comes directly from Allah, who alone knows the hidden realities of all matters, making it too exalted to require additional confirmation.

Allah then says:

"Nor did they crucify him."

This is coordinated with:

"They did not kill him,"

because crucifixion may occur without resulting in death.

At times criminals were crucified merely as a punishment and then later pardoned.

Allah Himself says:

"Indeed, the recompense of those who wage war against Allah and His Messenger..."

"...is that they be killed or crucified..." [al-Mā'idah:33]

In common usage, however, **crucifixion** refers to binding a condemned person to a wooden structure in such a manner that he is unable to move, after which he is pierced with a spear or shot with arrows.

Likewise, the claim current among them was that Jesus had first been crucified and then pierced through the heart with a spear.

The sentence:

"But it was made to appear so to them"

is an **istidrāk** (corrective qualification).

What is being qualified is the implication of the preceding words:

"They did not kill him."

Those words establish that their claim was entirely without foundation and was sheer fabrication.

The corrective statement then explains that the basis of their assumption that they had killed him was that they imagined they had done so.

That mistaken appearance constituted the **shubhah** ("semblance," "confusion," or "misapprehension") which led the Jews to believe that they had killed the Messiah.

This consisted in what they outwardly witnessed: namely, that someone whom they believed to be the Messiah was killed and crucified.

It is in this sense that the transmitted reports have explained the meaning of **the resemblance** (al-shabah).

The words:

"It was made to appear so to them"

admit of one possible interpretation, namely:

The Jews who claimed to have killed the Messiah during his own lifetime were presented with someone made to resemble the Messiah, and it was that person whom they killed.

Meanwhile Allah saved the Messiah from the humiliation of being put to death.

Accordingly,

shubbiha ("it was made to resemble")

is a passive verb derived from **shabah**, meaning similarity or resemblance in outward form.

The object, which would normally function as the passive subject, has been omitted because the verb itself sufficiently indicates it.

The implied meaning is:

"A person resembling him was made to appear."

On this analysis,

"to them" (lahum)

serves in place of the omitted passive subject.

The pronoun **"them"** refers to those who declared:

"Indeed, we killed the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary,"

namely, the Jews living in his own time.

The meaning therefore becomes:

A resemblance occurred before them.

In this interpretation, the preposition **lām** has the sense of **'inda** ("before" or "in the perception of"), just as one says:

A certain opinion occurred to me.

On this interpretation, the corrective force of the statement is perfectly clear.

A second possible interpretation is that the meaning is:

"But the report of the Messiah's crucifixion was made doubtful for the earlier and later Jews."

That is,

the falsehood became confused with truth in their minds.

This belongs to the same category as Arabic expressions such as:

"It was made to seem so to you,"

or

"The matter became confused for so-and-so."

According to this interpretation, there was **no actual person made to resemble Jesus**.

Rather, the **false report itself** bore such a likeness to truth that it deceived people.

Here the preposition **lām** means **"for the sake of."**

Thus the meaning is:

The report was made to resemble truth **for their sake**, that is, in order to mislead them.

In other words, their religious leaders fabricated this account so as to satisfy their burning resentment toward Jesus after he had come exposing and invalidating their false beliefs.

Alternatively, the **lām** may carry the meaning of '**alā** ("upon") in a figurative sense, similar to Allah's saying:

"And if you do evil, it is against yourselves." [al-Isrā':7]

The subtlety of departing from the normal preposition '**alā** lies in the implication contained within the verb **shubbiha**, namely the sense of **"to fabricate"** or **"to produce."**

Thus the meaning becomes:

The rabbis manufactured this report in order to cast doubt upon the common people.

Among the historical reports is the account that **Judas Iscariot**, one of the Messiah's companions, had deviated from the truth and become a hypocrite.

He was the one who informed on Jesus, peace be upon him.

It is also related that Allah caused the likeness of Jesus to be cast upon Judas, and that Judas was the one who was crucified.

The origin of this account is found in the **Gospel of Barnabas**, attributed to Barnabas, one of the disciples.

This account accords with the **first interpretation** mentioned above.

It is also reported that **Pilate**, the governor of Palestine, was later questioned in Rome regarding the affair of Jesus' execution and crucifixion.

He replied that he had no knowledge whatsoever concerning the matter.

This further supports the uncertainty and confusion that surrounded the alleged killing and crucifixion.

According to this account, the crucifixion never actually occurred; rather, the Jews invented the story.

This accords with the **second interpretation**.

The belief that **must** be held, on the basis of the explicit text of the Qur'an, is:

The Messiah was neither killed nor crucified. Rather, Allah raised him to Himself and saved him from those who sought him.

As for everything beyond this, the matter remains open to different possibilities.

The discussion concerning the meaning of Allah's raising him has already been presented in connection with His statement:

"Indeed, I will take you and raise you to Myself" [Āl 'Imrān:55].

His statement:

"Indeed, those who differ concerning him are surely in doubt about him"

indicates that disagreement actually arose regarding the affair of the Messiah's death.

Such disagreement exists among Christians.

The majority of them say:

The Jews killed him.

Others say:

The Jews did not kill him; rather, they killed Judas Iscariot, who had been made to resemble the Messiah.

This belief is recorded in the **Gospel of Barnabas**, a work which the Church today regards as an altered (corrupted) book.

Accordingly, the meaning is that most Christians who differ regarding the matter are not truly certain concerning his crucifixion.

Instead, doubt continues to exist within themselves, although outwardly they display certainty.

In reality, however, it is **not** certainty.

Thus Allah says:

"They have no knowledge concerning it except following conjecture."

Here **ẓann (conjecture)** means **doubt**.

The word **ẓann** is frequently used in this sense in Arabic speech.

Likewise in the Qur'an:

"Indeed, some conjecture is sin." [al-Ḥujūrāt:12]

And in the authentic hadith:

"Beware of conjecture, for conjecture is the most false of speech."

Accordingly, the exception in His statement:

"except following conjecture"

is a **disconnected exception (istithnā' munqaṭi')**.

Its counterpart is the saying of al-Nābighah:

I swore an oath without any reservation,

And there is no knowledge except a good opinion of my companion.

That is, what follows the exception is not actually included within what precedes it.

Allah then says:

"And they certainly did not kill him (157). Rather, Allah raised him to Himself. And Allah is Ever-Mighty, All-Wise (158)."

This clause may be coordinated with His previous words:

"They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him,"

or it may instead be coordinated with His statement:

"They have no knowledge concerning it."

Yaqīn (certainty) is firm knowledge that admits of no possibility of doubt.

It is the verbal noun corresponding to the verb **yaqina**, which is conjugated:

yaqina – yayqanu – yaqanan,

although this verbal noun is infrequently used.

More commonly one says:

ayqana – yūqinu – īqānan.

The word:

"yaqīnan" ("certainly")

may be understood as standing in place of an emphatic verbal noun confirming the meaning of the preceding sentence.

This is because the overall meaning conveyed by the passage—

from their statement,

"Indeed, we killed the Messiah..."

through His words,

"They neither killed him nor crucified him, but it was made to appear so to them"

—establishes with certainty that their killing of him never occurred.

Accordingly,

"certainly"

serves to reinforce that established meaning.

It is also possible that **"yaqīnan"** functions as a circumstantial qualifier (**ḥāl**) referring to the pronoun in:

"they killed him."

The meaning would then be:

They did not kill him while being certain that they had killed him.

Accordingly, the negation applies both to the action itself and to the condition attached to it.

This is indicated by His earlier statement:

"They neither killed him nor crucified him."

That is,

they were **not certain** of having killed him because of the confusion that surrounded the identity of the person seized.

On this interpretation, the word **"killing"** retains its literal meaning.

The pronoun in:

"they killed him"

refers to Jesus son of Mary, peace be upon him.

It is also possible that the word:

"killing"

is being used metaphorically in the sense of **gaining complete mastery over something or overcoming it.**

The Arabs would say:

"He killed the wine,"

meaning:

He mixed it until its strength disappeared.

They would also say:

"Its scholar killed the land,"

meaning:

He mastered it completely.

Among the verses cited in **al-Ḥamāsah**, in the chapter on satire, is the line:

The bodies of the sons of Sa'd ibn 'Amr impress you,

Yet you lose interest in them once experience has mastered them.

Another poet says:

Thus do those who know it inform others concerning it;

By my knowledge I have completely mastered that with certainty.

Another poet says:

The days killed me after I had mastered them through experience;

So now I behold the killer as the one killed.

According to this interpretation, the pronoun in:

"they killed him"

returns not to Jesus, but to **knowledge**, mentioned in His words:

"They have no knowledge concerning it."

Thus the phrase:

"they did not kill it with certainty"

would mean:

They did not attain complete and certain knowledge of the matter.

On this understanding,

"yaqīnan"

serves as a specification (**tamyīz**) clarifying the relationship expressed by the verb.

Finally, after all of these possibilities, Allah decisively nullifies their claim by saying:

"Rather, Allah raised him to Himself."

That is,

They never gained possession of him.

The **raising** refers to removing him from this worldly realm into the realm of the heavens.

The preposition:

"to" (ilā)

indicates figurative arrival in the sense of honor and nearness.

That is,

Allah raised him with a raising of closeness and distinction.

The discussion concerning the nature of this raising, and the differing opinions regarding whether Jesus, peace be upon him, remained alive or whether Allah caused him to die, has already been presented in connection with His statement:

"Indeed, I will take you and raise you to Myself" [Āl 'Imrān:55].

The concluding statement:

"And Allah is Ever-Mighty, All-Wise."

is perfectly suited to its place.

Since He is **Mighty (‘Azīz)**, it is fitting that, by virtue of His might, He should grant honor to His devoted servants.

And since He is **Wise (Ḥakīm)**, He perfected the manner of this raising, making it:

- a trial for the unbelievers,
- an insight for the believers,
- and a punishment for Judas the betrayer.