

CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE QUR'ĀN¹

Muzaffar Iqbal

The Qur'ān uses three appellations for Christians: *naṣārā*, *ahl al-injīl*, and *ahl al-kitāb*. Two otherwise prevalent Arabic equivalents of Christians and Christianity, *Masīḥiyyūn*, *Masīḥiyya*, are not used in the Qur'ān. This article explores the Qur'ānic view of both Christians and Christianity through the lens of earliest Muslim exegetical sources. It also compares some of the earliest explanations with the latter views in order to explore questions such as dependence of the Qur'ānic interpretations on the social and political circumstances. The article situates the discourse in the Islamic tradition and explores all Qur'ānic verses pertaining to the subject.

Keywords: Christians in the Qur'ān; Qur'ānic Studies; the Qur'ān and other faith communities; Early Christian Reception of the Qur'ān; Christian-Muslim relations.

Introduction: Definitions and Usage

The Qur'ān uses three appellations for Christians: *naṣārā*, *ahl al-injīl*, and *ahl al-kitāb*. Two otherwise prevalent Arabic equivalents of Christians and Christianity, *Masīḥiyyūn*, *Masīḥiyya*, are not used in the Qur'ān.

- i. ***Naṣārā*:** *Naṣārā* is used 14 times in its plural form and once in the singular (*naṣrānī*) (Q 2:62, 111, 113x2, 120, 135, 140; 5:14, 18, 51, 69, 82; 9:30; 22:17; and Q 3:67 respectively).
- ii. There are two opinions about the term's provenance. According to the first opinion, it is a toponym from the Levantine village called Nāṣira (Nazareth), "where 'Īsā, the son of Maryam, was born" (Yāqūt, *Buldān*, *sub nāṣira*); thus, 'Īsā, upon him peace, was called al-Nāṣirī, "as per

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the opinion of Ibn ‘Abbās (3_{BH}-68/619-688) narrated through an unsatisfactory chain” (Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 2:62). Other names given for this village include Nāṣrān, Naṣṭuriyya, Naṣṭūna and Naṣrān (Fayrūzābādī; Ibn Manẓūr). Ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Rāzī (d. after 666/1267) says its singular masculine form (*naṣrān*) “is never used without the ascriptive *yā’* (*yā al-nisba*), [hence *naṣrānī*]” (*Mukhtār, sub n-ṣ-r*; also see Ibn Manẓūr for a similar explanation).

- iii. According to the second opinion, it is derived from the root *n-ṣ-r* (*naṣara-yanṣuru-naṣran*—“to help”), especially in the sense used in Q 61:14, which quotes a conversation between Prophet ‘Īsā, upon him be peace, and his companions. He asks, ‘*Who are my helpers unto Allah?*’ (*man anṣārī ilā-Llāh*). The disciples respond, ‘*We are the helpers of Allah; We believe in Allah; bear witness that we are Muslims.*’ Q 3:52 has the same question and answer (see below). Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310/839-923) quotes a couplet in support of the view that they are called *naṣārā* because of their mutual help and assistance (*li-nuṣra ba‘ḍuhum ba‘ḍā wa tanāṣurihim*) (*sub* Q 2:62; for a similar linguistic explanation, see Rāghib, *sub n-ṣ-r*). Abūl-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī (467-538/ca. 1344-1392) also supports this opinion and holds that the final *yā’* in *naṣrānī* is exaggerative (*lil-mubāligha*), not ascriptive (as it was in the first opinion above), in recognition of their help to the Messiah (*al-Masīh*) (*sub* Q 2:62; also see Fayrūzābādī, *Baṣā’ir*).
- iv. In Q 5:14, the appellation *naṣārā* is mentioned as a self-proclaimed attribute: *Those who say, “we are naṣārā”*. Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ‘Umar al-Rāzī (543-606/1148-1209) says, “Allah Most High did not say *mina-l-naṣārā* (“from the Christians”), because they called themselves by this name, claiming to support Allah Most High. The referent are those who said to ‘Īsā, ‘*we are the helpers of Allah*’ (*naḥnu anṣāru-Llāh*, Q 3:52). This name is, in fact, a name of praise (*ism madh*), but Allah Most High clarifies that they claimed this attribute [to be theirs], but they were not thus attributed by Allah” (*laysū mawṣūfīna bihā ‘ind-Allah*); for similar explanations, see Qushayrī; Baghawī; Samarqandī; Bayḍawī; Ibn ‘Aṭīyya).
- v. *Ahl al-Injīl* (“People of Injīl”), used once (Q 5:47). Injīl is directly mentioned twelve times (Q 3:3, 48, 65; 5:46, 47, 66, 68, 110; 7:157, 111; 48:29; 57:27); it is often mistranslated as Gospel, but it is not the four Gospels of the New Testament which were authored by known human beings; rather, it is the Qur’ānic name of the revelation sent to ‘Īsā, upon him peace.

- vi. Christians are included in the three Qurʾānic terms referring to the “People of the Book”: *ahl al-kitāb*—used thirty times in eight Madinan suras (Q 2:105, 109; 3:64, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 98, 99, 110, 113, 199; 4:123, 153, 159, 171; 5:15, 19, 59, 65, 68, 77; 33:26; 57:29; 59:2, 11; 98:1, 6) and once in a Makkan sura (Q 29:46); *alladhīna ūtū-l-kitāb* (“those who were given the Book”), which occurs fifteen times (Q 2:101, 144, 145; 3:19, 100, 186, 187; 4:47, 131; 5:5, 57; 9:29; 57:16; 74:31; 98:4); and, *alladhīna ūtū naṣībān min al-kitāb* (“those who were given a portion of the Book”), used thrice (Q 3:23; 4:44, 51).
- vii. The term “People of the Book” technically refers to both Jews (*al-yahūd*) and Christians (*al-naṣārā*) (Muqātil; Ṭabarī; Ibn Abī Ḥatīm; Baghawī; Rāzī; Ibn ʿAshūr, *sub* Q 6:156; Māturīdī, *sub* Q 4:47; Samarqandī, *sub* 29:46), “along with all [their subsects] who accept Torah and Injil” (Ibn Qudāma, *masʾalat yuqātal ahl al-kitāb wa-l-majūs*), on the basis of Q 6:156, which constitutes “an explicit proof that [the term] “People of the Book” refers to Jews and Christians only, to the exclusion of *Majūs*” (Jaṣṣās, *sub* Q 6:156; Māturīdī, *sub* Q 4:47). The exegetes variously identify verses where the term “People of the Book” refers to Jews, Christians, certain individuals or groups among them, or Jews and Christians together; see the section “Implied References”.

Monks and priests (Q 5:82; 9:31, 34), and monasticism (Q 57:27; *rahbāniyya*) are also mentioned in various contexts.

Key Features

Key features of Christians and Christianity in the Qurʾān are intimately connected with its account of the life and prophethood of ʿĪsā, upon him peace, whose special birth (see BIRTH) is attested and alleged crucifixion is denied: *They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him* (Q 4:157, see CRUCIFIXION). He is “the Messiah” (*al-Masīḥ*) (Q 3:45; 4:157, 171-172; 5:17, 72, 75; 9:30-31), a Prophet (*nabī*, Q 19:30) and a Messenger (*rasūl*, e.g., Q 4:157, 171; 5:120), sent to the Children of Isrāʾīl (*rasūlan ilā banī Isrāʾīl*, Q 3:49; and in other phrases, Q 3:53; 4:171; 5:75; 61:6). The Qurʾān stresses the human nature of both ʿĪsā and his mother, upon them peace. His likeness *in the sight of Allah is that of Ādam; He created him from earth, then said, “Be!” and he was* (Q 3:59). And elsewhere, *The Messiah, son of Maryam, was naught but a Messenger—Messengers have passed away before him. And his mother was truthful (ṣiddīqa). Both of them ate food. Behold how We make the signs clear unto them; yet behold how they are perverted!* (Q 5:75). The verse precludes all illusions to the divinity of ʿĪsā and his mother, because—like all human beings—they had the need to eat, “which is a euphemism for the need to void themselves; and this cannot be the characteristic of a God and, secondly, the need to eat due to necessity

indicates their incapacity [to remain without food], and for God there can never be an incapacity” (Māturīdī). ‘Īsā, upon him peace, in fact, declares his own servanthood to Allah, *Indeed, I am the servant of Allah* (Q 19:30). “The very first words he spoke declared the transcendence of his Lord, the Exalted, from having a child and confirmed his servanthood to Him” (Ibn Kathīr). The servanthood of ‘Īsā, upon him peace, is also one of the characteristics of Prophet Muḥammad (Q 17:1; 25:1; 53:10; 57:9; see SLAVES OF ALLAH) and of all other Prophets and Messengers (Q 14:11; 4:172; 5:73).

Fasting, prayers, and giving of alms comprise main acts of worship in Christianity, as they do in all other revealed religions (Q 2:43, 83, 110, 177, 183, 277; 4:77, 162; 5:12; 7:156; 9:71; 19:31, 55; 21:73; 22:41; 24:37; 98:5). The verse ordaining fasting in the month of Ramadan (Q 2:183) states that it was also prescribed for *those before you*—a phrase which refers to Christians, as per the eminent Successor-jurist and hadith transmitter ‘Amir b. Sharāḥīl al-Hamdānī al-Sha‘bī (d. ca. 104/721) (Ṭabarī; Ibn ‘Aṭīyya) and to all Prophets and their people since Ādam, upon him peace (Rāzī). The revelation sent to ‘Īsā, upon him peace, contained Laws which abrogated or modified certain injunctions of the Torah (Q 3:50) and the Christians were commanded to judge by the Injil: *Let the people of the Injil judge by what Allah has sent down therein; whoever does not judge by what Allah has sent down—it is they who are iniquitous* (Q 5:47).

Covenant

And with those who say, ‘We are naṣārā,’ We made a covenant. Then they forgot part of that whereof they were reminded. So We stirred up enmity and hatred among them, till the Day of Resurrection. God will inform them of what they used to do (Q 5:14). Since ‘Īsā, upon him peace, was sent to the Children of Isrā’īl, who already had a Covenant through Prophet Mūsā, upon him peace, this new Covenant is understood to be a renewal of the previous Covenant, with the modification of certain Laws. It also included the requirement to believe in the Prophethood of Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace, *whom they find inscribed in the Torah and the Injil that is with them* (Q 7:157) and whom they were to recognize (Qurṭubī; Baghawī, *sub* Q 5:14). The enmity and hatred that will prevail among them till the Day of Resurrection (see DAY OF RECKONING) may either refer to enmity between Christians and Jews, or between various sects of Christians, “because every group declares all other groups disbeliever” (Rāzī); or specifically between three Christian sects: the Nestorians—who believed the Messiah to be the son of God, the Jacobites—who said, God is the Messiah, and the Melkites—who said God is the third of the three, the Trinity consisting of the Messiah, his mother, and God” (Samarqandī).

Double Reward

Two verses (Q 28:54; 57:28) promise double reward to those Jews and Christians to whom the message of the Qurʾān has reached and they believe in it. *Those unto whom We gave the Book before it, they are believers in it. And when it is recited unto them, they say, "We believe in it; verily it is the truth from our Lord. Verily we were Muslim even before it." It is they who will be given their reward twice over for their having been patient. And they repel evil with good, and spend from that which We have provided them* (Q 28:52-54).

"This is so because they believed in the Books of the Prophets who came before the advent of our Prophet, Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace, [in these Books] they find descriptions and praise of Muḥammad, thus, they already believed in him and his Book, even before the descent of the Qurʾān, that is why they said, *verily we were already Muslims even before it*" (Ṭabarī).

In Q 57:28, their double reward is called "*a double portion of His Mercy*": *O you who believe! Fear Allah and believe in His Messenger; He will [then] give you a double portion of His Mercy, provide you a light by which to walk, and forgive you; Allah is Forgiving and Merciful* (Q 57:28). "The light by which to walk is the Qurʾān and the way of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace" (Ṭabarī; also see Māwardī; Samarqandī; Baghawī). The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, said, "Three types of people will receive a double reward: a man from the People of the Book who believed in his Prophet, lived to see the time of Muḥammad, believed in him, followed him and attested his truth; a slave who fulfilled his duties towards Allah and towards his masters; and a man who had a female slave and he taught her good manners, educated her well, then freed her and married her; he will receive a double reward" (Muslim, Īmān, wujūb al-Īmān bi-risālati nabīyyinā Muḥammad; Bukhārī, Jihād wa-l-Sayr; faḍl man aslama min ahl al-kitabayn).

Refuted Doctrines

(a) Alleged Divinity of ʿĪsā, upon him peace

The Christian belief in the divinity of ʿĪsā, upon him peace, is mentioned in two direct statements from them (Q 5:17, 116) and equated with disbelief (*kufūr*): *They certainly disbelieve, those who say, "Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary." Say, "Who would have any power over Allah if He desired to destroy the Messiah, son of Mary, and his mother, and those on earth all together?" Unto Allah belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them. He creates whatsoever He wills, and Allah is Powerful over all things* (Q 5:17). Al-Rāghib notes that the Qurʾānic text does not say, "Messiah is God," but rather, it quotes Christians claiming, "God is the Messiah," and explains that in essence, the two statements are the same, because the claim is that the Messiah possesses both Divine nature

(*lāhūt*) and human nature (*nāsūt*) (see also, Abū Ḥayyān, *sub* Q 5:17; and Shaahrastānī, *Milal*, Juz' 2, faṣl al-thānī: al-naṣārā—al-Ya'qūbiyya, who says “fa-ṣāra-l-ilah huwa-l-masīḥ—God is thus identified with the Messiah”). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī says the phrase “*and those on earth all together...*” is a reminder that ‘Īsā is similar to everyone who has a physical form (*ṣūra*), innate created peculiarity (*khilqa*), corporeality (*jismiyya*), physical composition (*tarkīb*), and changeable attributes and circumstances—in other words, he too is a creature of Allah. Then He said, ‘*He creates whatsoever He wills, and Allah is Powerful over all things.*’ There are two aspects of *He creates whatsoever He wills*: (i) at times He creates a human being from a father and a mother, as is customarily known, at times without a father and mother, as in the creation of Ādam, upon him peace, or without a father, as was the case for ‘Īsā, upon him peace; (ii) [it may refer] ‘Īsā’s proportioning of the shape a bird with clay and Allah’s creation of flesh, life, and ability in it as ‘Īsā’s miracle (cf. Q 3:49; 5:110), [and ‘Īsā’s miracles of] reviving of the dead, the healing of the blind and the leper—and there can be no objection to Allah Most High’s actions (*sub* Q 5:17; for a similar explanation of the last part of the verse, see Zamakhsharī).

In Q 5:72, Prophet ‘Īsā is directly quoted, refuting their belief in his divinity: *They certainly disbelieve, those who say, “Indeed Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary.” But the Messiah said, “O Children of Israel! Worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.” Surely whosoever ascribes partners unto Allah, Allah has forbidden him the Garden, and his refuge shall be the Fire.* The verse rejects both the literal and analogical understandings of the Christian doctrine with respect to the relationship between ‘Īsā and Allah Most High, as Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad al-Māturīdī (d. 333/ca.945) points out. “It is illogical for a deity to be born of a human being. Thus ‘Īsā, upon him peace, could not be God; for if it were so, surely his mother would be more entitled to this status, because she precedes him and an antecedent is more entitled to [divinity] than the descendant. When someone has a child, they have it of their very own substance (*jawhar*), not from that of someone else; were it not logically impossible for Him to take a son, He would [in any case] not have taken it from the substance of humankind, as [is indicated] in Q 21:17, *had We wished to find a pastime We could have taken it from Ourselves.*”

In Q 5:116, ‘Īsā, upon him peace, is himself questioned about what people believed about him: *And when Allah said, “O ‘Īsā, son of Maryam! Did you say unto people, “Take me and my mother as gods apart from Allah?”” He said, “Glory be to You! It is not for me to utter that to which I have no right. Had I said it, You would surely have known it. You know what is within me and I know not what is within You. Truly it is You Who has absolute knowledge of things unseen.* Al-Ṭabarī says,

This will be asked on the Day when Allah will assemble the Messengers and

ask, ‘What was the response you received?’ (cf. Q 5:109), but it is also said that it took place when ‘Īsā, upon him peace, was raised by Allāh (cf. Q 3:55; 4:158), as per a report from al-Suddī.” In either case, the response of ‘Īsā, upon him peace, is, “Exalted are you (*tanẓīhan Laka*) far above that O my Lord.... It is not for me to utter that to which I have no right; I cannot and must not say that—for I am but a created slave (‘*abdun makhlūq*’) and my mother is Your slave (*amatun Laka*); how could a slave and slave-woman claim divinity (*al-rubūbiyya*)? Had I said it, Thou wouldst surely have known it; [‘Īsā] says: There is nothing that could be concealed from You and You know it with certainty that I did not say that, and I never ordered people [to worship me].

In Q 5:72, ‘Īsā, upon him peace, is quoted as calling his people to *worship Allāh*, that is, “declare the Oneness of Allāh (*wahḥīdū-l-lāha*) and obey Him [Who is] *my Lord and your Lord*; that is [He] is my Creator and your Creator and He is my Sustainer (*rāziqī*) and your Sustainer” (Samarqandī). The assertion that Allāh is *my Lord and your Lord* is mentioned in four other verses (Q 3:51; 5:117; 19:36; 43:64) on the tongue of Prophet ‘Īsā, upon him peace, underscoring his human nature. Several commentators specify that among the Christians, certain sects—such as the Jacobites (*Ya‘qūbiyya*)—believe in essential unity between Allāh and ‘Īsā, upon him peace (Ṭabarī; Rāzī; Ibn al-Jawzī).

Al-Qurṭubī cites a report from Ibn ‘Abbās who said, “Allāh Most High does not bear children as did Maryam, and he is not born as was ‘Īsā. In *He begets not* [cf. Q 112:3] one finds an explicit refutation of Christian doctrine and also an answer to those who said “*Uzayr is the son of Allāh*’ [an allusion to the Jews, in Q 9:30]”. Transcendent Unicity of Allāh Most High is succinctly stated in the early Makkan Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (Q 112), about which Abū Muḥammad Sahl b. ‘Abd Allāh b. Yūnus b. Rafī‘ al-Ṭustarī (d. 283/896) refutes “in its four verses all [forms of] disbelief (*kufṛ*) and fancies (*ahwā’*)”; it is called Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ (“the Sura of Sincerity”) because it sweeps away all impurities foreign to the transcendence (*tanẓīh*) of Allāh, Exalted is He above all that is not befitting to Him”.

(b) Their Belief that ‘Īsā, upon him peace, was the Son of God

From the Qur’ānic perspective, polytheism (*shirk*, *q.v.*) is an unforgiveable sin (Q 4:48; also see Q 4:36; 5:72; 31:13). Thus, belief in a human being as son of God, whether in an analogical sense or as someone eternally begotten and co-eternal with “God, the Father,” directly opposes the Qur’ānic descriptions of the Creator, which are uncompromising about His Absolute Oneness and His incomparability to anything else (Q 2:163; 4:171; 5:73; 6:19; 16:22; 18:110; 21:107; 41:6; 42:11; 112:4); He has no partner, no helper (Q 2:22,165; 14:30; 34:33; 39:8; 41:9) and like Him there is nothing (Q 42:11); He has neither an

opponent nor a rival (Q 6:19; 15:96; 17:22, 39, 42; 21:22; 23:91, 117; 51:51); He begot neither a son (Q 2:116; 4:171; 6:100-101; 9:30-31; 10:68; 17:111; 18:4; 21:26; 25:1) nor a daughter (Q 6:100; 16:57; 37:149; 43:16; 52:39); He has no mate (Q 6:101; 72:3); He is beyond duality (Q 16:51) or trinity (Q 4:171; 5:73), He has always existed—He is the First and the Last, the Outwardly Manifest and the Inwardly Hidden, Who has knowledge of all things (Q 57:3), the changeless (Q 2:255; 3:2; 20:111; 112:2) Lord of the Heavens and the Earth (Q 13:16; 17:102; 18:14; 19:65; 21:56; 26:24; 37:5; 38:66; 43: 82; 44:7; 78:37)—the possessor of all the attributes of perfection (Q 59:23; 62:1). and He alone deserves to be worshipped (Q 1:2; 5:28; 7:54; 13:16; 19:65; 37:4-5; 38:65-66).

Al-Ḍaḥḥāk calls the Christian belief about ‘Īsā, upon him peace, being the son of God “the most hideous disbelief (*ashnaʿ al-kufr*).” Q 9:30 refers to this claim as mere statements, *And the Christians say, ‘the Messiah is the son of Allah.’ That is merely what they say with their mouths* (see also Q 4:171; 5:17; 19:35). Al-Qurṭubī explains “*what they say with their mouths*,” means “mere sounds with no meaning; ... it is only words uttered by the mouth, a claim that has no authentic meaning behind it. For they acknowledge that Allah Most High did not take a female companion (*sāḥiba*); how then can they claim that He has a child? This is a lie, just a statement of the tongue (*qawḥun lisānī*)—compared to authoritative statements (*al-aqwāl al-ṣaḥīḥa*) confirmed by proofs and evidence.... Allah has not mentioned any kind of speech linked to mouths and tongues unless it refers to wicked speech (*qawḥ zūr*), like His Words *they say with their mouths what was not in their hearts* (Q 3:167; also 48:11); and *grave is the word that comes out of their mouths; they speak not except a lie* (Q 18:5) (Qurṭubī, *sub* 9:30).

Al-Rāzī equates it with idol worship:

There is no difference between the one who worships an idol and the one who worships the Messiah or anyone else, because in the latter case, a human being is taken as deity and this constitutes association with Allah (*shirk*). After Allah Most High has declared, in the previous verse, that the Jews and the Christians do not believe in Allah, He explains it in this verse through their ascription of child to Allah; whoever admits this concerning God (*fī ḥaqqi-l-ilāh*) has, in fact, rejected God Himself (*ankara-l-ilāh*)... Furthermore, if we observe attentively, we can ascertain that the disbelief of an idol-worshipper is more insignificant (*akḥaff*) than the disbelief of the Christians, due to the fact that the idol-worshipper does not say that this idol is the creator of the world or the deity of the world, but he considers it a means by which he can get closer to the obedience of Allah. The Christians *subscribe* to the idea of incarnation (*al-ḥulūl*) and union [of God and man] (*al-ittiḥād*) and this is an extremely abominable disbelief. Thus, it has become evident that there is no difference between the devotees of incarnation (*ḥāʾulāʾ al-ḥulūliyya*) and other polytheists (*sāʾir al-mushrikīn*).

(c) Trinity

The belief that God exists, simultaneously and eternally, as a communion of three distinct beings—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—constitutes a plurality that is utterly foreign to the Qurʾānic descriptions of Allah, one of Whose Beautiful Names is *al-Ṣamad*, “which indicates absolute unlikeness of Allah to anything that the polytheists take as a deity” (Rāghib, *sub ṣ-m-d*). In Q 4:171, the Christians are commanded to ...say not ‘Three’; desist, it is better for you. Indeed, Allah is but one God. Exalted is He above having a son.... In Q 5:73, the rebuke is severe, *They certainly disbelieve who say, ‘Truly God is the third of the three,’ whereas there is no god save One Allah. If they do not refrain from what they say, a painful punishment will befall those who disbelieve.* The exegetes mention different Christian sects who held different views about who the persons are in the Trinity. Al-Ṭabarī, for instance, says that before they became divided into Jacobites, Melkites, and Nestorians, the majority of Christians held that the Eternal God (*al-ilāh al-qadīm*) is one essence (*jawharun wāḥidun*), accompanied by three hypostases (*thalātha aqānīm*): the unbegotten father (*aban ghayra mawlūd*), the son begotten without a father (*ibnan mawlūdun ghayra wālid*), and the spouse who is between them (*zawjan mutatabbaʿa baynahumā*) (*Tafsīr*).

Abū-l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī al-Naysābūrī (d. 468/1075) says the phrase *third of three* amounts to holding Allah, ‘Īsā and Maryam on the same Divine level (*Basīl*). Other exegetes attribute Trinity to various Christian sects. For instance, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥusayn b. Masʿūd al-Farrāʾ al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) ascribes this statement to the Marqūsiyya sect, who hold that “divinity is common between Allah the Exalted, Maryam and ‘Īsā, each one of them being god, thus there are three gods” (*Tafsīr*). Al-Qurṭubī says the Melkites (al-malikiyya/al-malkāniyya), the Nestorians (al-nasṭūriyya) and the Jacobites (al-yaʿqūbiyya) hold this belief, for they say that the Father (*abun*), the son (*ibnun*) and the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quḍus*) are together one god; but they do not mean three distinct gods.

(d) Alleged Crucifixion

Q 4:157 quotes and refutes *their saying*, “We killed the Messiah, ‘Īsā, son of Maryam, the messenger of Allah.” But they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, though it was made to appear so to them. Those who differed about this are in doubt. They have no knowledge of it—they follow mere conjecture. The certainly did not kill him. “These words imply tremendous disbelief and their real intention to [kill the Messiah]” (Rāzī). Qurṭubī points out that Christian sects differ on the crucifixion—the Nestorians hold that ‘Īsā was crucified in his human nature (*fi nāsūtihi*), not in his divine nature (*lā min jihat lahūtihi*); whereas the Melkites hold that crucifixion affected both his natures. The Christian veneration of the Cross is not explicitly mentioned in the Qurʾān, but Abū Wahb ‘Adiyy b.

Ḥatīm al-Ṭaʿī said (when he was still a Christian), “I went to the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, wearing a golden cross around my neck; when he saw it, he said, “What is this, O ‘Adiyy? Throw away this idol (hādḥā-l-wathan)” (Qurṭubī and Khāzin, *sub* Q 9:31; Tirmidhī, Sunan, Abwāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān, wa min sūrat al-Tawba). For a more complete discussion, see CRUCIFIXION.

(e) Monasticism

In Q 57:27, monasticism is mentioned as a self-constructed way: *We sent after them Our Messengers and We sent ʿĪsā, son of Maryam, and We gave him the Injīl and placed kindness and mercy in the hearts of those who followed him. And monasticism (raḥbāniyya) they invented—We did not ordain it for them—only to seek to please Allah. Yet they did not observe it with proper observance. So We gave those of them who believed their reward, yet many of them are iniquitous* (Q 57:27). Al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī and several other exegetes quote a report from Ibn ʿAbbās, according to which after the corruption of the message revealed to ʿĪsā, upon him peace, by the kings who came after him, certain Christians—who had remained true to the original message—were threatened and they withdrew from the world and thus invented monasticism. By the time of the Prophet, only a few remained of the earlier true Christians. Then, “the man left his hermitage, the wandering person returned, others left their small houses and believed in him [Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace] and accepted him as true [Prophet]”. (Ṭabarī) (see MONASTICISM AND MONKS).

Refuted Claims

(a) Exclusive Soteriology

Q 2:111, *And they say, ‘None shall enter Paradise except that they be Jews or Christians.’ Such are their fancies. Say: ‘Bring your proof, if you are truthful’* and Q 2:113, *The Jews say, “The Christians stand on nothing,” and the Christians say, “The Jews stand on nothing,” though they recite the Book. Those who do not know say the same thing. Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that wherein they differ* are explained by the exegetes in the context of their revelation, which is said to be the visit of the Christians of Najrān to Madina during which they met the Jews of Madina and both groups mutually cursed (*fa-tasābbū*) and accused one another (Baghawī, *Tafsīr*; Wāḥidī, *Wajīz*). “The Jews disbelieved in ʿĪsā, his religion, and in the Injīl, and the Christians disbelieved in Mūsā and the Torah, by this, each of them disbelieved in their Book, because the Injīl confirms the veracity of Mūsā and the Torah, which [foretells] the glad tidings of ʿĪsā and [confirms] the authenticity of his prophethood (*ṣiḥḥat nubuwwatih*) and both of them confirm the veracity of Muḥammad, upon him be blessings and peace. Thus, Allah Most High reprimands both groups for their false

accusations” (Ibn ‘Aṭiyya). Each group cherishes hope for itself and assumes salvation for their cause, but mere conjecture (*mujarrad al-ḥusbān*) without proof is fruitless (Qushayrī). This verse is also an allusion to their claim that no good can reach the Believers from their Lord, and in the end they [Jews and Christians] wish to turn [the Believers] back to disbelief” (cf. Q 3:100; Bayḍāwī, *sub* Q 2:111). Q 2:120 and Q 2:135 further expand on the theme of exclusivism, the former stating that the Christians, like the Jews, will never be pleased with the Muslims until the latter follow their religion and the latter by referring to their statement, *And they say, “Be Jews or Christians and you shall be rightly guided”*. The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, is commanded to respond by saying, *“Rather, [ours is] the creed of Abraham, a ḥanīf, and he was not of the idolaters.”* (see ḤANĪF AND ḤUNAFĀ’).

(b) Their Claim about Ibrāhīm, upon him peace, and his children

Christians and Jews both claimed that Ibrāhīm, Ismā‘īl, Ishāq, Ya‘qūb, and *al-asbāt* [the descendants, the tribes] were all following their religion (Q 2:140). Q 3:65-67 refutes their claim that Ibrāhīm, upon him peace, was a Jew or a Christian; after all, *the Torah and the Injīl were not revealed until after him*. Their retroactive claim “contains an evident chronological contradiction for “both Judaism and Christianity were born and became accepted religions after the revelation of their Books—the Torah and the Injīl—which happened long after the death of Ibrāhīm, upon him be peace (Wāḥidī, *Wajīz*). How could Ibrāhīm be a follower of a religion that appeared after him—this is a contradiction originating in conjecture (Qushayrī, *sub* Q 3:65). Rather, Ibrāhīm is identified as *ḥanīf*—upright and inclining towards truth, and *muslim*—a submitter to Allah (see Makkī; Wāḥidī, *Wajīz*; Qushayrī).

(c) Their Claim to be the Sons and Beloved of Allah

And the Jews and the Christians say, “We are the sons of Allah, and His beloved.” Say, “Why then does He punish you for your sins?” Nay, but you are mortals of His creating. He forgives whomsoever He wills, and He punishes whomsoever He wills, and unto Allah belongs sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, and unto Him is the Return (Q 5:18). Ibn ‘Abbās, Allah be well-pleased with them both, says, “the phrase, the Jews and the Christians said, refers to the statements of two particular groups—the Jews of Madina and the Christians of Najrān (*Tanwīr al-miqbās*). Al-Ṭabarī also mentions another report from Ibn ‘Abbās, which names three Jews of Madina, who, when invited and warned regarding Allah by the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, said to him, “Do not worry about us, O Muḥammad; by Allah, we are the sons of Allah and His beloved.” This, al-Ṭabarī says, is like their claim that fire will not touch us, except for a few days (Q 3:24). “Arabs, according to the linguistic features

of their language, may express news, especially in instances of boasting, as an account on behalf of the whole community, even if the speaker was a single person from among them; as they can say, “*naḥnu-l-ajwād al-kirām*—we are the most generous people,” even though “the generous” is applicable to only a single person from among them, who was probably not even the speaker himself. ... This explains why Allah described the statement as coming from all Christians, even though only some of them made the statement” (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*; for a similar, but more detailed explanation, see Māwardī).

Whether it is meant literally or not, the claim of being sons of Allah is rejected, because “filiation (*al-bunuwwa*) necessitates a kind of similarity, kinship and familial ties (*mujānasa*), whereas al-Ḥaqq [the Truth, meaning Allah] is free (*munazzah*) from such; and affection between two genetically similar [entities] (*al-mutajānisayn*) necessitates sharing common traits (*ihṭizāz*) and familial intimacy (*mu‘ānasa*), whereas *al-Ḥaqq* is far above that. Allah Most High responded to them, saying, *Nay, but you are mortals of His creating*. And it is not possible for the created to be part of the Eternal (*ba‘ḍan li-l-qadīm*), for the Eternal has no parts of His Oneness; and if He has no dividable parts, it is impossible for Him to have a child. If it is inconceivable for Him to have a child, it is also inconceivable that there exists affection, in such a way as they believe, between them and Him” (Qushayrī).

Their Excesses

In two verses (Q 4:171; 5:77), the People of the Book are commanded not to overstep the bounds in their religion. In Q 4:171: *O People of the Book! Do not go to excess in your religion, nor utter anything concerning Allah save the truth. Verily the Messiah, ‘Isā, son of Maryam, was only a Messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He committed to Maryam, and a Spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His messengers, and say not “Three.” Refrain! It is better for you. God is only one—Allah; Glory be to Him that He should have a child! Unto Him belongs whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is on the earth, and Allah suffices as a Guardian.* Q 5:77 states: Say, “*O People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion beyond the truth, and follow not the caprices of a people who went astray before, and led many astray, and strayed from the right way.*”

Al-Sam‘ānī and al-Rāzī point out, that Jews and the Christians “both committed excesses in the matter of ‘Isā; the Jews by their failure to recognize his right (*bil-taqṣīr fī ḥaqqihī*) and the Christians by exceeding the limits” (*cf.* their *Tafsīrs*, *sub* Q 4:171). “The religion of Allah is between the one who falls short (*al-muqaṣṣir*) and the one who commits excesses (*al-ghālī*)” (Ibn Qutayba; Jaṣṣāṣ; Rāzī). Excess (*ghuluww*) is “iniquitous transgression of the boundaries” (Zajjāj, *sub* Q 4:171) that is explicitly forbidden in matters of religion (Baghawī); and it can also mean “being extreme in specific matters (*al-tashaddud*)”

(Wāḥidī, *Wajīz*).

In his *Latāʾif al-ishārāt* (“Subtle Indications”), al-Qushayrī says that one aspect of the Christians’ “overstepping of the bounds” mentioned in the verse is “the contradiction of their saying that one is three and three is one. Persisting in absurdity only increases absurdity and nothing else” (*Tafsīr*). Al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. ʿAbdullāh Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148) explains: “Allah Most High prohibits committing excess in religion in two ways: excess with respect to Absolute Oneness (*tawḥīd*) and excess in deeds; their excess with respect to *tawḥīd* is ascribing a son to Him, Exalted is He above their saying; and their excess in deeds is that they invented unlawful acts, like monasticism (*al-raḥbāniyya*), permitting the prohibited and prohibiting the permitted” (*Aḥkām*, *sūrat al-baqara*, *al-āyatu al-tāsiʿa* ‘ashrata: qawluhu Taʿālā qul yā ahl al-kitāb).

The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, said, “Do not exaggerate in praising me as the Christians praised the son of Maryam, for I am only a slave; so, call me the ‘Slave of Allah and His Messenger’” (Bukhārī, *Aḥādīth al-anbiyāʾ*, bāb qawlu-Llāhi *wa-dhkur fī-l-kitābi maryama idh intabadhat min ahlihā*).

Mutual Imprecation

As already mentioned, some eighty verses at the beginning of Q 3 were revealed on the occasion of the visit of a delegation of Christians who came to Madina from Najrān in the year 9 or 10 (632 or 633) and disputed with the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace (Wāḥidī, *Asbāb*; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*). The delegation was headed by three prominent leaders—ʿAbd al-Masīḥ al-ʿAqib, who was their prince and in charge of their affairs; al-Ayham al-Sayyid; and Abū Ḥāritha b. ʿAlqama, their bishop—who argued for various Christian doctrines. They asked: “Why do you scold our lord (*tashtumu ṣāḥibanā*)?” (Ṭabarī, *Baghawī*, *Tafsīrs*). They also inquired about virgin birth (Wāḥidī, *Wajīz*, *sub* Q 3:59). They claimed that ʿĪsā, upon him peace, was God, because he revived the dead, healed lepers, and spoke of unseen realities; that he was the son of God, because he had no human father; and that he was the third of three, because God employs the first person plural in revealed scripture (Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, *Dhikr naṣārā Najrān*).

The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, replied that ʿĪsā was a slave of Allah and invited them to accept Islam. They refused. The Prophet told them that three of their practices hold them back from accepting Islam: worshipping the cross, eating pork, and claiming that Allah has a son (Wāḥidī, *Asbāb*, *sub* Q 3:59). He recited to them Q 3:59: *Indeed, the example of ʿĪsā in the sight of Allah is like that of Ādam. He created him from dust, and then said to him ‘Be!’ and he was.* When they still refused to accept the truth, Allah Most High commanded

his Prophet, upon him blessings and peace: *And whosoever disputes with you concerning him (namely ‘Isā, upon him peace), after the knowledge which has come unto you, say: ‘Come! We will summon our sons and your sons, and our women and your women, and ourselves and yourselves, then we will pray humbly (nabtahil) and invoke the curse of Allah upon those who lie’ (Q 3:61).* They asked for time until the next morning to consult one another. The next day, the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, brought with him his two grandsons al-Ḥasan (d. 50/670) and al-Ḥusayn (d. 61/680), his daughter Fāṭima (d. 10/632), and his cousin ‘Alī (13_{BH}-40/609-660)—but the Christians refused both to participate in the mutual imprecation (*mubāhala*) or to accept the invitation of Islam. Instead they agreed to pay a the special tax meant for such people (*jizya*) twice a year, in Muḥarram and Rajab. The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, sent Abū ‘Ubayda b. al-Jarrāḥ (40_{BH}-18/583–639) to collect the agreed amount (Wāḥidī, *Wajīz*; Samarqandī, Baghawī, *sub* Q 3:61; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*).

Foretelling of Aḥmad, upon him blessings and peace

Prophet ‘Isā, upon him peace, foretold the advent of the Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace: *And when ‘Isā, son of Maryam said: “O Children of Isrā’īl! Behold, I am the Messenger of Allah unto you, confirming whatever is before me of the Torah, and bringing good tidings of a Messenger who shall come after me and whose name is Aḥmad.” And when he came unto them with clear proofs, they said, “This is manifest sorcery” (Q 61:6).* Aḥmad is second of the two Qur’ānic names of the Prophet, who said, “I have specific names: I am Muḥammad, and I am Aḥmad, and al-Ḥāshir (the Gatherer, i.e., leading Resurrection), and al-Māḥī (the Eradicator, i.e., of unbelief), and al-‘Āqib (the Concluder, i.e., of Prophets and prophecy)” (Bukhārī, *Tafsīr*, qawluḥu ta‘ālā min ba‘dī ismuhu Aḥmad; Muslim, *Faḍā’il, fī asmā’ih*; Tirmidhī, *Adab, mā ja’ fī asmā’ al-Nabī*; Dārimī, *Sunan*, *Riḳāq, asmā’ al-Nabī*; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Nahja*, introduction p. 29-40).

Every Prophet has foretold his people about the Final Prophet, but Allah Most High has singled out ‘Isā with this mention [in the Qur’ān] because he is the last of them in sequence before our Prophet, upon them be blessings and peace. Thus He has made clear that the glad tidings of his coming involved every successive Prophet, until they concluded with ‘Isā (Qushayrī, *sub* Q 61:6).

Obligation to Believe in the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace

Two almost identical verses (Q 2:62; 5:69) group together Believers, Jews (see CHILDREN OF ISRĀ’ĪL), Christians, and Sabeans (*al-ṣābi’ūna, q.v.*), promising them their reward with God: *Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord; no fear shall come upon*

them, nor shall they grieve (Q 2:62). A third verse (Q 22:17) mentions Christians among a cluster of five other groups, all of whom will receive Divine judgment: *Indeed, those who believe and those who are Jews, and the Sabians and the Christians and the Magians and those who associate with Allah—Allah will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed, Allah is Witness over all things.*

The exegetes discuss the applicability of these verses after the advent of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace. According to Ibn ‘Abbās (3BI-68/619-688), Q 2:62 was abrogated by Q 3:85, *Whosoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers* (Ṭabarī; Māwardī; Qurṭubī). Al-Ṭabarī says, “the belief of the Jews, the Christians and the Ṣābi’ūn [mentioned in the verse] is their attesting the truthfulness of Muḥammad and what he brought. Whoever among them comes to believe in Muḥammad, in what he brought and in the Last Day, and works righteousness, and does not alter or change so that he dies in this [faith], the reward for his deeds and his wage awaits him with his Lord, as He has described.” (*sub* Q 2:62; for similar explanations see, Qurṭubī, Bayḍāwī, Ibn Kathīr). Abū Ishāq al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923) says, “It is impossible that anyone of them can be said to have faith without believing in the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, and the proof of this is His Words *Those who disbelieve and turn away from the path of Allah—He has rendered their deeds in vain. And those who believe and perform righteous deeds, and believe in what has been sent down unto Muhammad—and it is the Truth from their Lord—He has absolved them of their evil deeds and set their state aright* (Q 47:1-2)” (*Ma‘ānī, sub* Q 2:62). As a principle, the Qur’ān insists that no distinction be made between Prophets (Q 2:136, 285; 3:84; 4:150-152) and thus Q 2:62 and 5:69 do not include those who accept some of the Books but reject other Divine Revelations; thus, Q 2:62 refers to only those from among the named groups who believe in all Prophets and all Divine Books (Māturīdī, *sub* Q 2:62).

The phrase “*whosoever believes in Allah and the Last Day and works righteousness* (‘amila ṣāliḥan)” —the portion that is present verbatim in the first two verses—refers to a person from among the four groups mentioned in these verses, “who followed his religion before it was abrogated [by the subsequent Divine Revelation], and who believed in the Beginning [of creation] (*al-mabda’*) and the Final Abode (*al-ma‘ād*) in his heart (*muṣaddiqan bi-qalbihi*) and who performed his deeds in full accordance with the Law. It is also said that it refers to everyone who became believer with a sincere faith (*īmānan khāliṣan*) from among the disbelievers and embraced Islam with true acceptance—then those *will have their reward with their Lord*, Who promised it to them based on their faith and good deeds” (Bayḍāwī, *sub* Q 2:62).

The principle invoked by the exegeses in their explanation is based on the

presence of a core set of unchanging beliefs throughout the course of human history. Thus, explaining Q 42:13, *He has prescribed for you as religion the same as that which He enjoined upon Nūḥ, and that which We revealed unto thee, and that which We enjoined upon Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and ʿIsā, that you establish religion and not be divided therein. Grievous for the idolaters is that to which you call them. Allah chooses for Himself whomsoever He will and guides unto Himself whosoever turns in repentance*, Ibn Kathīr says:

Allah the Exalted mentions the first Messenger sent after Ādam—that is, Nūḥ, upon them be peace—and then the last of them, Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace—and then He mentions [three of] those who came in between them—resolutely determined Messengers, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and ʿIsā bin Maryam. This verse mentions five Messengers, just as they are mentioned in Sūrat al-Aḥzāb, where He says, *And when We took from the Prophets their covenant, and from you, and from Nūḥ, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and ʿIsā son of Maryam* (Q 33:7). The Message which all the Messengers brought was to worship Allah alone, with no partner or associate, as Allah says: *And We did not send any Messenger before you but We revealed to him, ‘Verily, there is no god but I; so worship Me.’* (Q 21:25). [The Prophet said], “We Prophets are children of different mothers (*awlādu ʿallāt*) and our religion is one.” [Muslim, Faḍāʾil; faḍāʾil ʿIsā]. That is, the common element (*al-qadr al-mushtarak*) between them is ‘worship of Allah’—the One, Who has no partner, even though their Laws and ways (*sharāʾiʿuhum wa manāhijuhum*) may differ, as Allah says, *For each among you, We have prescribed a Law and a way* (Q 5:48), [commanding to] *establish religion and not be divided therein* (Q 42:13), meaning, Allah enjoined all the Prophets, peace and blessings of Allah be upon them all, to be as one and He forbade them to differ and be divided. (*Tafsīr*)

The second principle employed in explanations of the status of the People of Book is that of sequential Abrogation of one Divine Law with a subsequent Law and all previous Laws by the Law brought by the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace. The Qurʾānic verses supporting this principle include Q 3:19 (*Truly the religion in the sight of Allah is Islām...*), Q 3:85 (*Whosoever seeks a religion other than Islām, it shall not be accepted of him*), and verses stating the universality of the Prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad for all people, lands, and until the end of Time, such as Q 4:79; 7:158; 21:107; 25:1; and 34:28 (*And We sent you not, but to entire humankind, as a bringer of glad tidings and a warner; but most people know not*).

The Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, himself said—while mentioning five things which were not given to anyone before him—“Every Prophet [before me] was sent to his nation only, but I have been sent to all humankind.” (Bukhārī, K. al-Tayamamum; Muslim, al-Masājīd wa mawāḍiʿ al-ṣalāt, juʿilat li al-arḍ masjidan wa ṭulḥuran, where the wording is slightly

different, “I have been sent to the Red and the Black”, which, Ibn Kathīr (*Tafsīr*) said, “amounts to the same thing”). The Prophet also said, “By Him in whose hand is the soul of Muḥammad, any person of this Community, any Jew, or any Christian who hears of me and dies without believing in what I have been sent with, will be an inhabitant of hell” (Muslim, *Īmān*, wujūb al-Īmān bi-risāla nabiyyinā Muḥammad ṣallā-Llāhu ‘alayh wa-sallam ilā jamī‘ al-nās, wa naskh al-milal bi-millatihi). Abū-l-Ḥusayn Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj b. Muslim al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī (ca. 206-261/821-875) records this hadith in the Book of Faith (*Kitāb al-Īmān*) in a chapter tellingly entitled, “Obligation (*wujūb*) of believing that our Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace, was sent as a Messenger to all humanity and [the belief that] through the Sacred Law (*sharī‘a*) revealed to him, all previous Laws were abrogated”. His foremost commentator, Abū Zakariyyā Yaḥyā b. Sharaf al-Nawawī (631-676/1234-1277), comments, “In this is the proof that the Messengership of our Prophet has abrogated all previous religions (*fa-fīhi naskh al-milal kullihā*), its intrinsic meaning (*mafhūmihī*) also proves that anyone to whom the message of Islam has not reached is excepted from [this verdict], because of the accepted principle that there is no judgment before the Law has reached [the one being judged]” (*Sharḥ*). In *Rawḍat al-ṭālibīn*, his legal work on Shāfi‘ī Law, an abridgement of ‘Abd al-Karīm b. Muḥammad al-Rāfi‘ī al-Qazwīnī’s (d. 623/1226) *al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*, which, in turn, is a commentary on al-Ghazālī’s (d. 555/1111) *al-Wajīz*, al-Nawawī says: “Anyone who does not believe that whosoever follows a religion other than Islam—like the Christians—or has doubts about their disbelief (*taḥfīrihum*), or who validates their religion (*ṣaḥḥaha madh-habahum*), such a person is himself a disbeliever (*fahuwā kāfir*), even if his Islam and creed are manifest” (*Rawḍat al-ṭālibīn*, 10:70).

In his *al-Mustasfā min ‘ilm al-uṣūl* (*The clarified from legal theory*), al-Ghazālī himself had said, “It is the consensus of the entire Umma (Community) that the Sacred Law of Muḥammad—upon him blessings and peace—has abrogated the laws of all of his predecessors either in totality or in whatever contravenes it—and this is agreed upon; whosoever denies this, violates the consensus” (*Mustasfā*, K. al-Naskh, Sec 2; p. 1:89). It is important to note that these legal works specifically mention abrogation of Laws and rulings and not articles of faith upon which rests the foundation of religion, such as belief in the Unicity of Allah Most High (*tawḥīd*), Resurrection, Prophethood, Angels, and the Hereafter—all of which remain unchanged since the beginning of revelation (cf. al-Shawkānī’s two monographs *Irshād al-thiqāt ilā ittifāq al-sharā’i‘ ‘alā al-tawḥīd wal-mā‘ād wal-nubuwwāt* and *al-Maḡālāt al-fākhira fī ittifāq al-sharā’i‘ ‘alā ithbāt al-dār al-ākhirā*, both published within his collected *Fatāwā*; also see al-Bahūtī al-Ḥanbalī’s (d. 1051/1641), *Kashshāf al-qinā‘*, 6:170 and Ibn Qudāma, *Rawḍa*, 1:229).

Their Closeness to Believers

Affection for the believers serves as a mark of differentiation between the Jews and the Christians: *You will surely find the most hostile of men toward those who believe to be the Jews and those who ascribe partners unto Allah, and you will find the nearest of them in affection toward those who believe to be those who say, “We are naṣārā (Christians);” that is because among them are priests and monks, and because they are not arrogant* (Q 5:82). Ibn ‘Abbās, Muḥāhid b. Jabr (d. ca. 104/722); Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (45-95/665-713), ‘Ikrima (d. 104/722), Qatāda (d. 117/735), and al-Suddī (d. 127/745) all report the occasion of revelation of this verse to be the arrival of a delegation of Christians from Abyssinia who came to visit the Prophet along with Ja‘far [b. Abī Ṭālib] and his companions who had migrated to Abyssinia (Muḥāhid; Ṭabarī; Ibn Abī Ḥātim; Rāzī; Samarqandī; Waḥidī, *Asbāb*). Al-Suddī (d. 127/745) says: “The Najāshī sent twelve men—seven priests and five monks—to the Messenger of Allah, upon him blessings and peace, to meet him and ask him questions. The Prophet recited to them what Allah had revealed to him. They wept and believed. Then they returned to al-Najāshī. [Upon hearing the report of his envoys], He departed [from his city] with them [to come to Madina] but died on his way. The Prophet and the Muslims prayed [his funeral prayer in absentia, *ṣalāt al-ghā’ib*] and asked forgiveness for him” (Samarqandī, *Baḥr*; Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 5:82). The name of the Aksumite monarch (who were generally called al-Najāshī) at the time of this event is cited as Aṣḥama b. Abjar (Aṣḥama is Arabicized as ‘Aṭiyya; cf. Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, bāb hijrat aṣḥāb Rasūli-Llāhi min Makka ilā arḍ al-Ḥabasha, 3:98), who died in 10/632 (Ibn Ishāq, *Sīra*, ḥadīth al-hijrat al-tūlā ilā-l-Ḥabasha, p. 213). His funeral prayer in absentia, led by the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, is a fully authenticated event, witnessed by many Companions of the Prophet, including Jābir b. ‘Abd Allāh (d. ca.77/696), who said he was standing in the second row: “When the Najāshī died, the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, said, “Today a pious man has died; get up and offer the funeral prayer for your brother Aṣḥama.”” (Bukhārī, Manāqib al-Anṣār, Mawt al-Najāshī; Muslim, Janā’iz, fī-l-takbīr ‘alā-l-janāza; Mālik, Janā’iz, mā jā’a fī-l-takbīr ‘alā-l-janā’iz; also reported in several other major collections of hadīth, including, but not limited to, Aḥmad, 7:116 § 7282; and Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, Janā’iz, mā jā’a fī ṣalāt al-Nabī ṣallā-Llāh ‘alayhi wa-sallam ‘alā-l-Najāshī).

Some commentators say Q 5:82 is specifically concerning these Christians, while others consider it to be the general characteristic (*ṣifa*) of all those Christians “who were the true believers upon the Law of ‘Isā (*‘alā shari‘at ‘Isā*) and when Allah Most High sent His Prophet Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace, they believed in him” (Ṭabarī; Samarqandī; Māwardī; Qurṭubī). Māwardī favors the former while al-Ṭabarī prefers the latter, because, “according to my understanding, the correct opinion in this context

is that Allah Most High describes the characteristics of a people, who say ‘*we are naṣārā*’ and the Prophet of Allah finds them as those who are the nearest in affection to the People of Faith in Allah and in His Messenger; but He did not mention [specific] names for us.” (*Tafsīr*).

Prohibition to take them as *awliyā*

The exegetical discussions on Q 5:51, *O you who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as awliyā*, include two basic queries: (i) the meaning of *awliyā* (“close friend, near, adjacent, neighboring, supporter, helper, benefactor”) in this verse; and (ii) whether or not the injunction is temporally constrained. Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī (d. ca.502/1108) explains the linguistic and Qur’ānic usage of *awliyā* (sing. *walī*) by drawing upon related words from the root *w-l-y*: “The primary meaning of *al-walā*’ *wal-tawāl* is to put two or more things next to one another in such a way that nothing can come between them; from this emerged its metaphorical usage in the sense of nearness (*qurb*), whether spatially (*makān*) or in relationship, religion, friendship, help, or creed.”

The weight of the scholarly opinion points to taking the word *awliyā* in this verse to mean “close allies”, “protectors,” and “those to whom one turns for help”, as al-Rāghib and others point out that such an understanding is consistent with the Qur’ānic usage of this word in other verses such as Q 9:23, where believers are asked not to take even their fathers and brothers as *awliyā* if they prefer disbelief over belief; and in Q 3:28, *Let not believers take disbelievers as awliyā* rather than believers; and likewise in Q 4:89, 139, 144. In a passage (Q 5:78-81) containing one of the strongest condemnations of those who disbelieved among the Children of Isrā’īl, one of their gravest sins is said to be that they took *awliyā* from among the disbelievers and had they believed in Allah and the Prophet, and that which was sent down unto him, they would not have taken them as *awliyā*, but many of them are iniquitous (Q 5:81).

The majority of exegetes consider the prohibition of close allegiance with Jews and Christians to be generally applicable across time. However, they also add that this verse specifically commanded a few individuals around the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, which included ‘Ubāda b. al-Ṣāmit, who had allies among the Jewish tribes living around Madina; ‘Abdullāh b. Ubayy b. Salūl and other unnamed hypocrites, who supported the Jewish tribe of Banū Qurayza and the Christians of Najrān; Abū Lubāba b. ‘Abd al-Mundhir; al-Zubayr; and Ṭalḥa (cf. Ṭabarī, Sam‘ānī; Rāzī; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb*; Ibn al-‘Arabī, *sūrat al-Mā’ida*; itikhādḥ waliyyin li-l-Muslimīn; Makkī).

Al-Ṭabarī is unequivocal in his explanation about the general applicability of the verse to all believers:

Allah Most High prohibits all Believers (*al-mu’minīna jamī’an*) from taking

the Jews and the Christians as helpers (*anṣāran*) or allies (*ḥulafāʾ*) instead of the people of faith in Allah and His Messenger. And He declares that whosoever takes them as helpers, allies, and *awliyāʾ* (*naṣīran wa ḥalīfan wa waliyyan*) besides Allah and His Messenger and the Believers, such a person belongs to them in their joining of forces (*al-taḥazzub*) against Allah, His Messenger, and the Believers. Indeed, Allah and His Messenger disavow (*barīʾan*) such a person. It may be that the verse was revealed regarding ʿUḇāda b. al-Ṣāmit and ʿAbdullāh b. Ubayy b. Saʿl and their Jewish allies, or regarding Abū Lubāba concerning his action with regard to the Jewish tribe of Banū Qurayza [see e.g. Baghawī], or regarding the two men, as per al-Suddī, one of whom wanted to join the Jews in Dahlak and the other wanted to join the Christians in the Levant (*al-Shām*)...but even if this is so, the appropriate method to decide [about the applicability of the verse] is to decide according to the generally applicable literal wording of the Revelation (*li-zāhir al-tanzīl*)...Nevertheless, the verse was undoubtedly revealed in connection with a hypocrite (*munāfiq*) who supported a Jew or a Christian, because he feared for himself some adversities, for the following verse refers to it in His Words, *Yet you see those in whose hearts is a disease hastening to them, saying, "We fear lest a change of fortune should befall us." It may be that Allah will grant victory, or a command from Him. And then they shall be remorseful for that which they secretly harbored in their souls* (Q 5:51).

Implied References

The exegetes identify several verses which refer to Christians without naming them directly. These identifications are sometimes not exclusive or definite. Such verses include:

- **Q 1:7:** *The path of those You have favored, not of those who incurred wrath, nor of those who are astray.* The majority view of the exegetes is that those who have incurred wrath are the Jews and those who are astray are the Christians. Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938) says, "I know of no difference of opinion on this among the exegetes" (Tafsīr; also see Ṭabarī; Qurṭubī; Bayḍāwī, Tafsīrs; Suyūṭī, Asrār p. 60, where he declares an exegetical consensus about this interpretation). The hadith of ʿAdiyy b. Ḥātim b. ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd al-Ṭāʾī (d. ca. 66/686), the son of the poet Ḥātim al-Ṭāʾī (al-Dhahabī, vol. 3: 163, no. 26), is often cited in support of this explanation: ʿAdiyy b. Ḥātim said, "The Messenger of Allah, blessings and peace upon him, said, 'those who incur wrath are the Jews, and those who are astray are the Christians'" (Aḥmad, Musnad, 35:20§21095; Tirmidhī, Tafsīr, wa min sūra Fātiḥati al-kitāb; al-Haythamī, Mawārid, Kitāb al-Tafsīr, Sūrat al-Fātiḥa; al-Fārisī, Iḥṣān, dhikr iftirāq al-yahūd wa-l-naṣārā firaqan mukhtalifa; Suyūṭī, Itqān, Type 80; Suyūṭī, Muḥḥimāt, sub Sūrat al-Fātiḥa). Ṭabarī and Bayḍāwī both also cite Q 5:77, who went astray before and led astray many and have strayed from the Straight

Path, in support of this interpretation (Tafsīrs; see ASTRAY);

- **Q: 2:114:** *And who does greater wrong than the one who bars [entrance to] the mosques of Allah, lest His Name be remembered therein, and strives for their ruin? They are those who should not enter them, save in fear. Theirs is disgrace in this world, and theirs is a great punishment in the Hereafter.* Ibn ‘Abbās (3B1-68/619-688) identified that those who bar worshippers to enter mosques to be the Christians and the mosque as Bayt al-Maqdis in Jerusalem (Ṭabarī, Qurṭubī, Sam‘ānī, and Ibn Kathīr; Suyūṭī, Muflḥimāt);
- **Q 2:116:** *They say, “Allah has taken a son.” Glorified be He in His transcendence! Nay, to Him belongs all that is in the heavens and earth; and all surrender to Him in obedience.* The referents here are either Christians alone (cf. Ṭabarī, Qurṭubī, Sam‘ānī, Ibn Kathīr), or Christians, Jews, and the polytheists of Makka (Qushayrī and Rāzī; Makkī, Hidāya);
- **Q 2:118:** *Those who do not know say, “Why does Allah not speak to us, nor a sign come to us?” Those who came before them also spoke likewise; their hearts are alike; We have made the signs clear for a people who have certitude.* They are either the Christians, per Mujaḥhid b. Jabr (d. ca. 104/722); the Jews, per Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (45-95/665-713) and ‘Ikrima (d. 104/722), both reporting from Ibn ‘Abbās; or the Arab polytheists, per Qatāda (d. 117/735) and al-Suddī (d. 127/745). The verse’s context is the refutation of the Christian claim of a divine son (Q 2:116), hence al-Ṭabarī rejects the latter two ascriptions (Tafsīr);
- **Q 2:138:** *The ṣibgha of Allah—and which ṣibgha can be better than that of Allah? And we are His worshippers.* This verse rejects Christian custom of baptism (Qurṭubī, Tafsīr). Linguistically, *ṣibgha*, derived from the root ṣ-b-gh, carries the meaning of imparting a new color through immersing a cloth in a dye (Ibn Manẓūr). In theological terms, *ṣibgha* is the original *fiṭra* (Ibn Fāris). Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī says *ṣibgha* refers to the “innate faculties, like the intellect (*‘aql*), which Allah has created in humankind and by which the human being is differentiated from animals” (Mufradāt). The phrase *ṣibghata-llāh* is explained by the exegetes as “*fiṭra* (the primordial nature) upon which Allah Most High created humans” (cf. Q 30:30), as per Mujaḥhid (d. 102/720 or 104/722); “the religion of Allah” (*dīn Allāh*),” as per Qatāda (Māwardī; al-Qurṭubī; Ibn Qutayba, *Mushkil*, sub Q 2:138); and “the way (*millat*) of Ibrāhīm”, as per al-Farrā’ and al-Zajjāj (Ma‘ānī)—Ibrāhīm being the archetypical monotheist (*ḥanīf*) (Q 3:95). Thus, *ṣibgha* understood as *fiṭra* is contrasted with the Christian custom of either immersing the child in baptismal water (*mā’ al-ma‘mūdiyya*) or pouring it over the child’s head, per a report from Ibn ‘Abbās (Ṭabarī, Baghawī, Rāzī, Tafsīrs). The *ṣibgha* of Allah is “*al-ḥanīfiyyat al-muslima*,

and not your immersing of children in water” (Makkī);

- **Q 2:143-46**, which was revealed in the second year after the Hijra in reference to the changing of *qibla*—the direction of prayer—from Jerusalem toward Makka mentions Jews and Christians as *those unto whom We have given the Book recognize it as they recognize their children* (specifically the scholars among them: Ṭabarī), as does *everyone has a direction toward which he turns* (cf. Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Qurṭubī, Ibn Kathīr);
- **Q 2:159-60**: *Truly those who conceal what We have sent down of clear proofs and guidance—after We made it clear to mankind in the Book—are those who are cursed by Allah and cursed by the cursers; save those who repent, make amends, and make it clear; they are those unto whom I relent. And I am the Ever-Relenting, the Most Merciful.* This verse refers to the scholars of the Jews and Christians who conceal the prophethood of the Prophet Muḥammad, while those who repent and correct themselves are those who embraced Islam from among them (cf. Ṭabarī; Baghawī; Ibn ‘Aṭiyya; al-Balansī, *Mubhamāt*);
- **Q 2:177**: *Piety is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west....* The Christians are those who “faced eastward” (Ṭabarī; Ibn Kathīr);
- **Q 2:257**: *Allah is the Protector of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light. As for those who disbelieve, their protectors are false deities (tāghūt); they bring them out of light into the darkness. They are the inhabitants of the Fire, wherein they shall dwell forever.* The phrase *those who disbelieve* refers either to Christians (Ṭabarī; Makkī) or to all those from the People of the Book who disbelieved [in the Prophethood of Muḥammad, upon him blessings and peace] (Ibn Abī Ḥātim); or specifically to the leaders of the misguided among them (Ibn ‘Aṭiyya; Baghawī);
- **Āl ‘Imrān (Q 3)**: A number of exegetes—including Ṭabarī, Abū-l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī al-Naysābūrī (d. 468/1075), the Andalusian exegete Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), and Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī (849-911/1445-ca.1505)—say that some eighty verses at the beginning of Madīnan Sura *Āl-‘Imrān* (Q 3) were revealed in reference to the visit of the Christian delegation from Najrān, consisting of sixty riders, among whom were fourteen of their nobles, including three who decided all their affairs. They stayed in the Prophet’s Mosque for several days, prayed facing east, and disputed with the Prophet regarding ‘Īsa, upon him peace. Their unyielding disputation led to the challenge of mutual imprecation (*mubāhala*) that the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, issued, following the revelation of Q 3:61: *Say to them: Come, let us summon our sons and your sons, our women and your women, ourselves and yourselves, then*

imprecate one another and invoke the curse of Allah upon the liars (Ṭabarī; Ibn al-Mundhir; Naḥḥās; Wāḥidī, *Asbāb*, Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān; Suyūṭī, *Asrār*, pp. 60-61; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1:573-584). Al-Suyūṭī also highlights the mirroring of the sequence of mention of the Jews and Christians in Q 1:7 in the two suras which follow Q 1. In Q 1:7 Jews are the referent of (*those who have earned Divine wrath*); this is followed by a reference to the Christians (*those who are astray*). Al-Suyūṭī says, “Whenever the People of the Book are mentioned in [Sūrat al-] Baqara (Q 2), the Jews are specifically intended and Christians are not directly addressed (*lam yaqā’ bi dhikr al-khiṭāb*); in Āl ‘Imrān (Q 3), the Christians are directly addressed abundantly, and some eighty verses at its beginning were revealed concerning the delegation [of Christians] from Najrān. [The second last verse of Q 3] *And among the People of the Book are those who believe in Allah, and what has been sent down unto you, and what has been sent down unto them, men humble to Allah, not selling the signs of Allah for a small price; their wage is with their Lord; Allah is swift in reckoning* (Q 3:199), is concerning the Najāshī and his companions from amongst the Christians who entered Islam, as reported in the hadith” (*Asrār* pp. 60-61):

- Q 3:20: The disputants in the verse are identified in the commentaries as the Christians from Najrān (*cf.* Ṭabarī, Qurṭubī; Bayḍawī; Ibn Kathīr);
- Q 3:59-61: *Truly the likeness of ‘Īsā, in the sight of Allah, is as that of Ādam....* This is a refutation of the divinity of ‘Īsā, upon him peace, claimed by the Christian delegation from Najrān (*cf.* Ṭabarī, Qurṭubī, Bayḍawī, Ibn Kathīr);
- Q 3:80: *Nor could he order you to take the angels and prophets as lords.* This is an allusion to two delegations, one of Jews led by Abū Rāfi‘ al-Quraṣī, and the other of Christians from Najrān (Balansī, *Mubhamāt*; Ibn Hishām, *Mā nazala fī qawl Abī Rāfi‘ wa-l-najrānī* “A-turīdu an na‘budaka kamā ta‘budu-l-naṣārā ‘Īsā”; Ibn Abī Ḥatīm and Ibn Kathīr; Shawkānī, *Fath al-qadīr*);
- Q 3:78: Among them is a group who twist their tongues with the Book, to make you think that what they say is from the Book, but it is not from the Book. And they say, “this is from Allah,” but it is not from Allah. And they utter lies about Allah knowingly. There are two reports from Ibn ‘Abbās regarding this verse. According to the first, the group refers to the Jews (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr; Wāḥidī, Wajīz; Qurṭubī, Tafsīr; Makkī, *Hidāya*), specifically the Jews who lived around Madina (Ṭabarī, Tafsīr); according to the second, transmitted via al-Ḍaḥḥāk, it refers to both the Jews and the Christians (Baghawī, Tafsīr; Ibn al-

Jawzī, Zād), since both altered their Books (the Torah and the Injīl, respectively).

- Q 3:90: Truly those who disbelieve after having believed, then increase in disbelief, their repentance shall not be accepted, and they are the ones who are astray. This verse refers to both the Jews and the Christians (Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Tafsīrs);
- Q 4:150: Truly those who disbelieve in Allah and His messengers, and seek to make a distinction between Allah and His messengers, and say, “We believe in some and disbelieve in others,” and seek to take a way between. They are the Jews—who disbelieved in ‘Īsā and Muḥammad, upon them peace, and believed in other prophets—and the Christians, who believed in ‘Īsā and all prophets before him, but disbelieved in Muḥammad (Ṭabarī, Baghawī, Sam‘ānī, Ibn Kathīr);
- Q 7:169: Then they were succeeded by generations who inherited the Scripture, but took the [unlawful] gains of this lower world, saying, “We will be forgiven.” Some exegetes hold that this refers to the Christians (*cf.* Mujaḥid, Ṭabarī);
- Q 13:43: *Whosoever has the knowledge of the scripture* is explained by the exegetes to be a reference to Salmān al-Fārisī and Tamīm al-Dārī, two Christians who entered Islam, as well as to Rabbi ‘Abd Allāh b. Salām who accepted Islam; according to others, it refers to Jews and Christians generally (*cf.* Ṭabarī, Qurṭubī; Ibn al-Jawzī, Zād; Balansī, *Mubhamāt*);
- Q 16:103: And We certainly know that they say: It is only a human being who teaches him. The tongue of the one they refer to is non-Arabic (a‘jamī), while this [Qur’ān] is in clear Arabic. Exegetical and “occasions of revelation” (asbāb al-nuzūl) literature identify more than one persons of Christian background as referent of the one they refer to; he is variously named as Bal‘ām, Ya‘īsh or Yā‘īsh, and Jabr; Sam‘ānī says there were two such slaves and the name of the second was Yasār (Ṭabarī, Baghawī, Sam‘ānī);
- Q 17:111: *And say: Praise be to Allah, who has not taken a son....* This verse refutes the claims of the Jews, the Christians, and the polytheists who attributed offspring to the Creator (Ibn Kathīr, ; Balansī, *Mubhamāt*);
- Q 18:9-22: The People of the Cave (*aṣḥāb al-kahf*) are identified in the exegetical literature as a group of young Christians who fled persecution under the reign of the pagan Roman Emperor Trajan Decius (Diqyānus) (d. 401_{BE}/251) (*cf.* Ṭabarī, Baghawī, Sam‘ānī, Ibn Kathīr);
- Q 18:103: *Say, “Shall I inform you who are the greatest losers with respect to*

their deeds?” This refers to the Jews and the Christians and the priests and monks in their cells and monasteries (cf. Ṭabarī, Ibn al-Jawzī; Balansī, *Mubhamāt*);

- **Q 23:53:** *But the people divided their religion among them into sects—each faction exulting in what it had.* This refers to the splintering of Judaism and Christianity into various sects (Wāḥidī, *Wajīz*; Balansī, *Mubhamāt*; Baghawī).
- **Q 28:51:** *And indeed We have caused the Word to reach them, that haply they may reflect.* This either refers to both the Jews and the Christians (Balansī, *Mubhamāt*), or specifically to those Christians who came from Ethiopia (*al-Ḥabasha*) and believed in the Message of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace (Baghawī);
- **Q 30:32:** *Of those who have divided their religion and became sects....* This is considered a general reference to the Jews and the Christians (cf. Ṭabarī, Baghawī);
- **Q 36: 13-20:** In the parable of the People of the City (*aṣḥāb al-qarya*), the city is identified as Antioch (*Anṭākiya*) (Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr*), and the man who *came running from the farthest part of the city* is identified as a Christian martyr by the name of Ḥabīb b. Muriyy or Ḥabīb al-Najjār of Antioch, who was a carpenter (cf. Ṭabarī; Qurṭubī; and Ibn Kathīr; Ibn al-Jawzī);
- **Q 43:65:** *But the parties differed among themselves. Woe unto those who do wrong; they will face the punishment of a painful day!* This refers to the Christians who disputed among themselves regarding ‘Īsā, upon him peace, or to both the Jews and the Christians who disputed about the same matter (cf. Ṭabarī, Rāzī, Qurṭubī);
- **Q 85:4-10:** Most exegetes conclude that these verses refer to the massacre of the Christians of Najrān at the hands of the Jewish ruler of Yemen around 110 BH/524 (Ṭabarī, Qurṭubī, Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr). These verses are especially significant in that they refer to pre-Islamic Christians as “believers.” They were thrown into ditches where fire blazed (Ṭabarī; Baghawī; Sam‘ānī; Ibn Kathīr) (see PEOPLE OF UKHDŪD)
- **Q 105:** *Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with the people of the elephant?* This sura describes an event in the year of the birth of the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace (570 C.E.), generally known as “the Year of the Elephant,” when Christians from Ṣan‘ā’, Yemen, led by the warlord Abraha (usually known as *Abraha al-Ashram*—the one who has a disfigured nose or is harelipped) was sent by the Axumite Christian kingdom to destroy the House of Allah (*bayt Allāh*), the Ka‘ba, in Makka

(see PEOPLE OF THE ELEPHANT) (cf. Baghawī, Qurṭubī, *Tafsīrs*).

A Protected People

In Islamic jurisprudence, People of the Book living under Muslim rule are protected subjects (*ahl al-dhimma*, also *ahl al-ʿaql*) for they conclude a communal treaty which secures their lives and wealth. They do not pay *zakāt* but pay a special tax (*jizya*) and receive protection (al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabsūṭ*, Siyar; al-Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʿ al-ṣanāʾiʿ*, Siyar), which is mentioned in Q 9:29 (*Fight those who do not believe in Allah and in the Last Day, and who do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden, and who do not follow the Religion of Truth among those who were given the Book, till they pay the jizya with a willing hand, being humbled*). According to most exegetes, the verse was revealed during the expedition of Tabūk (Ṭabarī,) in 9/630, and “the Christian inhabitants of the border towns of Ayla, Jarbāʾ, and Adhrulḥ concluded peace treaties with the Prophet, upon him be blessings and peace, agreeing to pay this tribute” (Ṭabarī, Qurṭubī, Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr; Ibn Hishām, al-ṣulḥ maʿa Ṣāliḥ Ayla). For lexical, exegetical, and jurisprudential details, see *JIZYA; TREATY AND ALLIANCE*.

The Prophetic traditions attest the inviolable status of such Christians and the People of the Scripture in general: “Whoever kills a *muʿāhad* (one who is granted protection) shall not smell the fragrance of Paradise, though its fragrance can be smelt at a distance of forty years [of travel]” (Bukhārī, *Jizya*, bāb itḥim man qatala muʿāhadan bi-ghayr jurm). The Prophet, upon him blessings and peace, also said, “Beware: if anyone wrongs a *muʿāhad*, or diminishes his right, or forces him to work beyond his capacity, or takes from him anything without his consent, I shall plead for him (*fa-anā ḥajjjuhu*, i.e. for the *muʿāhad*) on the Day of Judgment” (Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, Awwal kitāb al-kharāj wal-fayʾ wa-l-imāra, bāb fī-l-dhimmi).

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