



## The Spirit and Holy Spirit in The Quran and its Exegeses

Kuran'da ve Tefsirlerinde Ruh ve Ruhu'l-Kudüs

**Mohammad MAKDOD**

Doktor Adayı, İbn Haldun Üniversitesi, Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü, İstanbul/Türkiye  
Ph.D. Candidate, İbn Haldun University, School of Graduate Studies, İstanbul/Türkiye  
[m.makdod1@gmail.com](mailto:m.makdod1@gmail.com) | [orcid.org/0000-0002-4029-861X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4029-861X) | [ror.org/02y5xdw18](https://ror.org/02y5xdw18)

### Makale Bilgisi Article Information

<b>Makale Türü</b>	<b>Article Type</b>
Araştırma Makalesi	Research Article
<b>Geliş Tarihi</b>	<b>Date Recieved</b>
09 Eylül 2024	09 September 2024
<b>Kabul Tarihi</b>	<b>Date Accepted</b>
04 Aralık 2024	04 December 2024
<b>Yayın Tarihi</b>	<b>Date Published</b>
31 Aralık 2024	31 December 2024

### İntihal Plagiarism

Bu makale, iThenticate yazılımı ile taranmıştır.  
İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.

This article has been scanned with iThenticate  
software. No plagiarism detected.

### Etik Beyan Ethical Statement

Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur (Mohammad Makdod).

It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited (Mohammad Makdod).

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 lisansı ile lisanslanmıştır.

Licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.

Atıf | Cite As

“Makdod, Mohammad. “The Spirit and Holy Spirit in The Quran and its Exegeses”. *Kader* 22/2 (Aralık 2024), 362-379.  
<https://doi.org/10.18317/kaderdergi.1545625>”

## Abstract

The term 'Holy Spirit' is referenced four times in the Quran, with three instances directly related to Jesus Christ, while the broader term 'spirit' or "the spirit" (al-Rūh) appears eighteen times, some of which pertain to Mary, the mother of Jesus. This study explores the concepts of the Spirit and Holy Spirit as they are presented in the Quran, as well as their interpretations in classical Islamic exegesis. The research begins by analyzing the Quranic verses where the "Holy Spirit" is associated with Jesus Christ and his mother, providing a detailed examination of these occurrences and their contextual significance. Subsequently, the study delves into the instances of the "Holy Spirit" in other contexts, offering a comparative analysis of the term's usage across different passages. Following the discussion on the "Holy Spirit," the study shifts focus to the discussion of "the spirit" (al-Rūh) and "a spirit" (Rūh) in the Quran. Adopting the same methodological approach, it first addresses the verses connected to Jesus and Mary, before exploring the diverse contexts in which the spirit is mentioned. In each case, the relevant Quranic interpretations are discussed, drawing from key Quranic commentaries (tafsīr). The study relies on a combination of classical exegetical methods, incorporating both narration-based exegesis (tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr), such as the works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Baghawī, and reasoning-based exegesis (tafsīr bi-l-ra'y), as exemplified by the works of Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Additionally, it evaluates the authenticity and sources of the exegetes' interpretations, scrutinizing their reliance on prophetic traditions (hadith), the explanations of the Prophet's companions, and even biblical sources. By presenting and comparing a range of Quranic interpretations, this study aims to highlight the diversity of thought surrounding the concepts of the 'Spirit' and 'Holy Spirit' within Islamic tradition. It provides a valuable resource for those seeking to understand how these notions are interpreted and debated within Islam and offers a platform for comparison with the corresponding concepts in Christianity and Judaism, thereby contributing to broader interfaith theological dialogues.

**Keywords:** Kalām, Holy spirit, The spirit, Jesus, Mary, Angels.

## Öz

Kuran'da "Kutsal Ruh" (Rūhul-kudūs) terimi dört kez geçmektedir ve bunların üçü doğrudan Hz. İsa ile ilişkilidir. Daha genel anlamda kullanılan 'el-ruh' veya 'ruh' terimi ise on sekiz kez geçmekte olup, bazıları Hz. İsa'nın annesi Meryem ile bağlantılıdır. Bu çalışma, Kuran'da yer alan Ruh ve Kutsal Ruh kavramlarını ve bunların klasik İslam tefsirlerindeki yorumlarını incelemektedir. Araştırma, Kutsal Ruh'un Hz. İsa ve annesi Meryem ile ilişkilendirildiği Kuran ayetlerini analiz ederek başlamakta, bu ayetlerin ve bağlamlarının derinlemesine bir incelemesini sunmaktadır. Ardından, Kutsal Ruh'un farklı bağlamlarda geçtiği ayetlere yönelerek terimin çeşitli kullanımlarını karşılaştırmalı bir analizle ele almaktadır. Kutsal Ruh tartışmasının ardından çalışma, Kuran'da geçen "ruh" (el-Rūh) ve "bir ruh" (Rūh) terimlerinin incelenmesine odaklanır. Aynı metodolojik yaklaşımı izleyerek, önce Hz. İsa ve Meryem ile bağlantılı ayetleri ele almakta, ardından ruh kavramının farklı bağlamlarda geçtiği diğer ayetleri incelemektedir. Her durumda, ilgili Kuran tefsirlerine dayanarak bu ayetlerin yorumlarını ele alır. Çalışma, rivayete dayalı tefsir (tafsīr bi-l-ma'thūr) ile akla dayalı tefsir (tafsīr bi-l-ra'y) yöntemlerini bir arada kullanmaktadır. Rivayet temelli tefsirlerden Ṭaberî ve Begavî'nin eserleri, akıl temelli tefsirlerden ise İmam Fahreddin er-Râzî'nin çalışmaları örnek olarak incelenmektedir. Ayrıca, müfessirlerin kullandığı kaynakların güvenilirliğini tartışmakta ve bu kaynakların hadisler, sahabe yorumları ve hatta Kutsal kitap'a dayanan bilgiler olup olmadığını değerlendirmektedir. Farklı Kuran yorumlarını sunarak ve karşılaştırarak, bu çalışma İslam geleneğinde 'Ruh' ve 'Kutsal Ruh' kavramları etrafındaki düşünsel çeşitliliği gözler önüne sermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu kavramların İslam'da nasıl anlaşıldığını ve tartışıldığını araştırmak isteyenler için değerli bir kaynak sağlamanın yanı sıra, Hristiyanlık ve Yahudilikteki benzer kavramlarla karşılaştırma imkânı sunarak dinler arası teolojik diyaloga önemli katkılarda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kelam, Kutsal ruh, Ruh, İsa, Meryem, Melekler.

## Introduction

Islam does not have the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, but it does have the term ‘Holy Spirit’ appearing in a few places in its sacred book. The Arabic term of the Holy Spirit, “روح القدس” (rūḥ al-Qudus) shares a similar pronunciation and roots with its Hebrew counterpart “רוּחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ” (ruach ha-qodesh) and could be translated literally as the spirit of the holiness or the sacred spirit. The word “روح” (rūḥ) typically refers to the spirit of a living being, whether a human being or another being, while the word “قدس” (holy) is a nominal form that is used as an adjective to emphasize a higher degree of the adjective ‘holy’.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, translating the Arabic term “روح القدس” as the Holy Spirit is not an inaccurate translation.

In the Quran, there are four occurrences of the Holy Spirit, three of them are associated with Jesus, and one is related to a different context. Additionally, the word ‘spirit,’ whether definite or indefinite, appears eighteen times in various verses, some of them pertaining to Jesus and his mother, Mary. This paper is dedicated to exploring these occurrences, explaining their context, and providing the possible interpretation elucidated by distinguished Quran exegetes. We will present only the English translation of the Quranic verses, primarily relying on one translation and resorting to others if necessary to convey the exact meaning of the Arabic words. Regarding the Quranic exegesis (tafsīr)<sup>2</sup>, it is important to note that it is a vast field where the exegetes have various focuses. Some elaborate further on the linguistic points, while others have their theological or legal approach. We can broadly categorize the books of exegesis into two types: those based on narrations and those based on reasoning. The former rely more on the prophetic traditions, companions’ opinions, and the sayings of the early scholars to interpret the Quran’s meaning. The latter type depends more on rational or linguistic reasoning.<sup>3</sup> In the paper, we will depend on six important books of exegesis. The first one is the exegesis of Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 923),<sup>4</sup> which is mainly an exegesis based on narrations. The next three books are the books of al-Ḥusayn al-Baghawī (d. 1122),<sup>5</sup> Abulḥaq ibn ‘Aṭīya (d. 1147),<sup>6</sup> and Jamāl al-Dīn ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201).<sup>7</sup> These three books combine between the two methods, using both narrations and reasoning, but they place more emphasis on the first method. The fifth book is an encyclopedia of narrations related to Quranic exegesis<sup>8</sup>, while the last one is the exegesis of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210),<sup>9</sup> which is a theological exegesis based primarily on rational analysis.

However, before starting, it is important to note that this paper presents an unprecedented study on the spirit and the Holy Spirit in the Quran and Its exegesis. Therefore, it will primarily rely on

<sup>1</sup> Abbās Ḥassan, *al-Naḥw al-Waḥī* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma‘ārif, 14. Edition, 2007), 3/461.

<sup>2</sup> *Tafsīr* simply means interpretation. It is the Islamic discipline that collects and discusses the possible interpretations of Quran.

<sup>3</sup> For further details regarding the types of Quranic exegesis, see Abdullah Shihata, *‘Ulum al-Tafsīr* (Cairo: Dar al-Shrūk, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jami‘ Bayan ‘an Ta’wīl Ayī al-Quran* (Beirut: Dar al-Turath, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> al-Ḥusayn al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī* (Riyadh: Dar Ṭayba, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Abulḥaq bin ‘Aṭīya, *al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafsīr al-Kitāb* (Beirut: dar al-Kutub, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Jamāl al-Dīn bin al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr fi al-Tafsīr* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Mus‘āid al-Tayyar, et al. *Mawsū‘at al-Tafsīr bil-Ma’thūr* (Beirut: Dar bin Ḥazim, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Taḥṣeer al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dar Iḥyā al-Turath, 3. Edition, 1999).

classical sources, though it will refer to some auxiliary studies when necessary. For achieving this endeavor, we will provide the translation of the verses, explain their context and background, and then discuss the various interpretations provided by Quran exegetes.

## 1. The verses of the Holy Spirit

### 1.1 The Holy Spirit Supports Jesus

The first two occurrences of the term 'Holy Spirit' are found in the second chapter of the Quran, *Sūrat al-Baqara*<sup>10</sup>. It is the longest chapter in the Quran, comprising of 286 verses. This chapter was revealed mainly in the Medinan period, the second period of Islam following the migration of the prophet and his companions from Mecca to Medina. In this period, the Muslims of Mecca interacted with the Jewish community residing in Medina, and consequently, a portion of the Quranic discourse began to address the people of the book (ahl al-kitāb)<sup>11</sup>. The chapter takes its name from the story of the cow, which Moses ordered the Israelites to sacrifice in order to discover the murderer of an innocent person.<sup>12</sup>

We gave Moses the Scripture and We sent messengers after him in succession. We gave Jesus, son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. So how is it that, whenever a messenger brings you something you do not like, you become arrogant, calling some impostors and killing others? (al-Baqara 2/ 87).<sup>13</sup>

This verse is mentioned among other verses that enumerate the covenants that God made with the children of Israel. It begins at verse 83,

Remember when We took a pledge from the Children of Israel: 'Worship none but God; be good to your parents and kinsfolk, to orphans and the poor; speak good words to all people; keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms.' Then all but a few of you turned away and paid no heed. (al-Baqara 2/83).

It continues to cover several verses where God reminds the children of Israel of the blessings He bestowed on their ancestors; thus, the verse mentioning the Holy Spirit is interconnected with other verses that address the children of Israel. In these verses, God reminds them that He gave Moses the book, which is a monumental blessing and guidance for them. He sent successive messengers to them, and the last one of them is Jesus Christ. God affirms in many instances that sending Jesus Christ as a messenger is a significant favor. Furthermore, providing him with clear proofs and supporting him with the Holy Spirit are additional favors. Towards the end of the verse, God admonishes them for arrogantly mistreating His prophets, rejecting and killing some

---

<sup>10</sup> For an English introduction and commentary on this chapter, see Fadhlalla Haeri, *Keys to the Quran*. (London: Zahra Publication, 2. Edition, 2018), 60-89.

<sup>11</sup> The Quran refers to the Christians and Jews as the people of the book (ahl al-kitāb) and the Quranic discourse with them is different from that with the polytheists.

<sup>12</sup> The story of the cow mentioned in the Quran resembles the story of the red heifer in the Bible, albeit with some differences. The description of the cow in both the Quran and the Bible is quite similar, while the purpose of slaughtering it appears to be different. In the Quran, the purpose is to discover the murderer of an innocent person. Cf. Numbers 19:1-10; Deuteronomy 21:1-9.

<sup>13</sup> The English translation of the Quran that I follow is of M.A.S. Abdel Haleem see M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (Oxford: University Press, 2008).

of them. The Holy Spirit is highlighted as a support that God gave to Jesus Christ. The nature and reality of this support will be discussed when we move to the interpretation part.

The second verse in the same chapter is found toward the end where the discourse with the children of Israel is drawing to an end. It is the verse 253,

We favoured some of these messengers above others. God spoke to some; others He raised in rank; We gave Jesus, son of Mary, Our clear signs and strengthened him with the holy spirit. If God had so willed, their successors would not have fought each other after they had been brought clear signs. But they disagreed: some believed and some disbelieved. If God had so willed, they would not have fought each other, but God does what He will. (al-Baqara 2/253).

This verse comes at the end of the story of David and Goliath, where David was chosen by God after defeating Goliath. The narrative begins with the story of Joshua calling the Israelites to fight their enemies and informing them that Saul is chosen by God as their king. Consequently, we see the verse that mentions the 'Holy Spirit' affirms that some prophets were chosen above others and granted higher ranks. Among these chosen prophets are Moses and Jesus. God spoke directly to Moses and gave Jesus clear proofs<sup>14</sup> and supported him with the Holy Spirit.

These two occurrences of the 'Holy Spirit' are mentioned in the context of the story of the children of Israel. Sending Jesus to them and favoring him with clear proofs and the Holy Spirit are among the graces that God bestowed upon the Israelites. The admonishing tone is evident in the repetition of the favors bestowed upon them and their response by breaking covenants with God and rejecting His messengers. These verses are primarily addressing the Jews in Medina, warning them against repeating the same mistake of their ancestors by rejecting the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

The last occurrence of the 'Holy Spirit' associated with Jesus Christ is found in the fifth chapter of the Quran. It is the chapter of al-Mā'ida. This chapter was revealed in the Medina period and named after the story of the table or the banquet that the disciples of Jesus asked him to supplicate to God to descend upon them. This event is narrated only in four verses (al-Mā'ida 5/ 112-115)<sup>15</sup>, while the rest of the chapters deals with various topics, most of which are related to the people of the book. The Holy Spirit in this chapter is found in a long verse where God mentions His blessing upon Jesus. He says,

Then God will say, 'Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favour to you and to your mother: how I strengthened you with the holy spirit, so that you spoke to people in your infancy and as a grown man; how I taught you the Scripture and wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel; how, by My leave, you fashioned the shape of a bird out of clay, breathed into it, and it became, by My leave, a bird; how, by My leave, you healed the blind person and the leper; how, by My leave, you brought the dead

<sup>14</sup> The clear proofs given to Jesus are the miracles that God created for him, such as curing the illnesses, resurrecting the dead, and other miracles. See Āl 'Imrān 3/49; 5/110.

<sup>15</sup> The story of the table in the Quran does not seem to refer to the same story of the last supper in the new testimony. Gabriel Said Reynolds attempts to draw a parallel between this Quranic narrative of the table and another biblical story related to Moses and his people. See Reynolds, Gabriel "On The Qur'ān's Mā'ida Passage And The Wanderings Of The Israelites," in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, ed. Carlos A. Segovia and Basil Lourié (New Jersey: Georgia Press: 2021), 91-108.

back to life; how I restrained the Children of Israel from [harming] you when you brought them clear signs, and those of them who disbelieved said, "This is clearly nothing but sorcery" (al-Mā'ida 5/ 110).

The mention of these favors in the Quran precedes the story of the table and the denial of the divinity of Jesus Christ. God addresses the Christians in these verses to admonish them not to consider Jesus as a god, affirming that Jesus and his mother are human beings whom God favored with several blessings, including the support of Jesus with the Holy Spirit. Once again, this verse resembles the previous verses in considering the Holy Spirit as a support that God bestowed upon Jesus Christ.

### 1.1.1. The Exegesis

The Quranic exegetes discuss the meaning of the 'Holy Spirit' in its first occurrence in the chapter of al-Baqara (al-Baqara 2/ 87) and only affirm the chosen interpretation in the next two occurrences (al-Baqara 2/253; al-Mā'ida 5/110). Al-Ṭabarī states that previous Quranic exegetes held different opinions about the interpretation of the 'Holy Spirit.' According to al-Ṭabarī and Ibn al-Jawzī, these different interpretations are restricted to three positions. The first one says that the 'Holy Spirit' refers to the archangel Gabriel, the second to the gospel, and the third to the divine greatest name (ism Allah al-A'zam).<sup>16</sup> Al-Baghawī adds a fourth position by stating that the spirit is Jesus's spirit, while the holy (Qudus) refers to God. Attributing Jesus's spirit to God is a method of honoring him, as al-Baghawī explains.<sup>17</sup> However, none of the exegeses that we rely on adds a fifth interpretation of the Holy Spirit.

Exploring the origin of the first position (that the 'Holy Spirit' refers to the archangel Gabriel), Al-Ṭabarī narrates this opinion, with his chain of narration, from five early Quran exegetes among the successors (tabiīn)<sup>18</sup> who are Qatāda bin Di'āma (d. 736), Al-Ḍaḥḥāk bin Muzāḥim (d. 725), Ismā'il Al-Suddī (d. 745), Al-Rabī' bin Anas (d. 757), and Shahr bin Ḥawshab (d. 730).<sup>19</sup> Ibn Al-Jawzī and Ibn 'Aṭīya attribute this interpretation only to the first four of them. Al-Baghawī includes Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣārī<sup>20</sup> among those who maintain this position. Furthermore, in the encyclopedia of Tafsīr,<sup>21</sup> we find this opinion is attributed to a prominent companion of the prophet, Abdullah bin Mas'ud (d. 650), and to a senior successor who is an ex-Jewish scholar, Ka'b al-Akḥbār (d. 652).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>16</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jami' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wil Ayī al-Quran*, 2/320. Whether there is a name of God that is greater than the rest of His names or all His names are equally great, is a disputed matter among theologians. Furthermore, those who asserted the existence of the greatest name differ as to which one it is. For further discussion on this topic, see Abdullah al-Damijī, *Ismi Allah al-A'zam*, (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 1/140.

<sup>18</sup> The successors (*Ṭābī'īn*) are the generation that followed the companions of the prophet. In other words, they are the immediate students of the companions.

<sup>19</sup> For their biographies, see Shams al-Dīn al-Zahabī, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'* (Beirut: Al-Risālā Publication, 1985), 5/282; 4/598; 4/564; 6/169; 4/373.

<sup>20</sup> al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is one of the main early successors (*ṭābī'īn*), and his interpretations of the Quran are spread in almost every Quranic exegesis. For his biography, see Al-Zahabī, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, 4/564.

<sup>21</sup> *Mawsū'at al-Tafsīr bil-Ma'thūr*, 2/538.

<sup>22</sup> Ka'b al-Aḥbār was a Jewish scholar from Yaman who converted to Islam after the death of the prophet and migrated to Medina. For his biography, see *Ibid*, 3/490.

The second interpretation that Quranic exegetes narrate is the interpretation of the holy spirit as the gospel.<sup>23</sup> This opinion is attributed to Abd al-Rahmān bin Zayd (d. 799)<sup>24</sup> by all of our exegetes. However, this interpretation, mainly in these verses, seems lacking credibility because there is an instance in which the Holy Spirit and the gospel are mentioned in the same verse (Quran 5:110). For this reason, al-Ṭabarī casts doubt on this interpretation and states that repeating the word gospel twice without additional meaning is a redundancy that the Quran and its eloquence are above.<sup>25</sup> However, interpreting the word ‘spirit’ as the sacred book, whether it is the Quran, the Gospel, or the Torah is a common practice in different verses as we will see later, but in this instance, the redundancy is excluded by our exegetes. Al-Rāzī, for example, excludes this interpretation from the verses (al-Baqara 2/87,253) by arguing that the verb ‘supported him’ (ayadnah) requires a literal interpretation, while interpreting the ‘Holy Spirit’ as the gospel is a metaphorical interpretation.

The third interpretation is that the Holy Spirit refers to the divine greatest name by which Jesus used to perform great miracles, such as resurrecting the dead and curing the blind. This interpretation is attributed to Abdullah bin ‘Abbās (d. 687), a cousin of the prophet and the most erudite Quran exegete. The attribution of this opinion to Abdullah bin ‘Abbās is narrated by al-Ṭabarī, al-Baghawī,<sup>26</sup> and other early Quran exegetes, such as Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d.327).<sup>27</sup>

The fourth interpretation, included by al-Baghawī, suggests that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of Jesus. This interpretation is based on the meaning of the word ‘qudus,’ which means purity. In other words, according to this interpretation, the meaning of the Holy Spirit is ‘the pure soul.’ Al-Baghawī elaborated on this interpretation by stating that the purity stems from being created directly by God in a virgin woman.<sup>28</sup>

After exploring the provided interpretations, we can present the exegetes’ preferred interpretation along with their arguments. Al-Ṭabarī and Ibn ‘Aṭīya affirmed that the first opinion, the Holy Spirit is the archangel Gabriel, is the most valid interpretation, while the other two narration-based exegeses simply presented the opinions without favoring any one of them. More textual proof supporting this opinion can be found in some Quranic verses as we will see later, as well as in prophetic statements (hadith). One of the most authentic prophetic statements is narrated in the two sound books Hadith (saḥīḥayn).<sup>29</sup> It is the narration of Abu Ḥuraira (d. 679) that the prophet told Ḥasaān bin Thābit (d. 674) “respond to them on behalf of me, and may the Holy Spirit be with you”<sup>30</sup> and in another narration, he told him “May Gabriel be with you.”<sup>31</sup> These

<sup>23</sup> The Gospel mentioned in the Quran does not refer to the four gospels that we have today. See Muhammad al-Munajjid, “Does the Original Gospel Exist Today,” Islam Question and Answer, accessed April 4, 2024. <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/85280/does-the-original-gospel-exist-today>

<sup>24</sup> al-Zahabī, *Siyar A‘lam al-Nubala’*, 8/349.

<sup>25</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jami‘ Bayan ‘an Ta’wīl Ayī al-Quran*, 2/322.

<sup>26</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jami‘ Bayan ‘an Ta’wīl Ayī al-Quran*, 2/322; Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 1/141.

<sup>27</sup> Abd al-Rahmān bin Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr al-Quran al-‘Azīm* (Riyadh: Mustafa Al-Baz Publication, 1999), 1/169.

<sup>28</sup> al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 1/140.

<sup>29</sup> *Saḥīḥayn* means the two authentic books (Hadith books).

<sup>30</sup> Muḥammad bin Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Beirut: Dar al-Tawq al-Naja, 2002), 8/36.

<sup>31</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4/112.

statements are just two examples of the prophetic statements that provide textual proof for using the term 'Holy Spirit' to indicate to the archangel Gabriel.

Al-Rāzī also chose to defend the first opinion, stating that the Holy Spirit is the archangel Gabriel. He argued that Jesus, more than other prophets, was accompanied and supported by the archangel Gabriel because the angel was sent to Mary to give her the good tidings, breathed into her the spirit of Jesus, accompanied him during all phases of his life, and was with him when he ascended to the heavens. Furthermore, the angels are spiritual beings created from light, and Gabriel's spirituality, as an archangel, is stronger and holier than other angels. Since the archangel Gabriel is responsible for conveying the revelations to the prophets, describing him as spirit is appropriate because the revelations/religions sustain our spiritual life, as al-Rāzī argues.<sup>32</sup> On a final note, we observed that the term 'Holy Spirit' in the previous verses has various plausible interpretations. Some of these interpretations lack supporting evidence, while others are backed by prophetic statements or early scholars' opinions. The most compelling interpretation is that the Holy Spirit refers to the archangel Gabriel, as many Quranic exegetes have preferred. This preference is well-grounded due to the context of the story of Jesus in the Quran and other textual evidence, such as prophetic statements.

### 1.2. The Holy Spirit Conveys the Quran

As we mentioned in the introduction there are four occurrences of the Holy Spirit in the Quran, three of which are related to Jesus Christ, and we have already elaborated on their context and interpretation. The final occurrence is related to the revelation of the Quran and to the prophet Muhammad. It is mentioned in chapter 16, which is a chapter revealed in the period of Mecca. This chapter does not deal with topics related to Jews and Christians because the prophet and his companions had not yet started interacting with them. Instead, this chapter affirms Islamic creed and ethics, the unity and sovereignty of God, the wonders of creation and the glory of God, and engages in discussion with the polytheists. The verse of the holy spirit cannot be understood in isolation from the previous verse, so I will provide the translation of both verses.

When We substitute one revelation for another- and God knows best what He reveals- they say, 'You are just making it up,' but most of them have no knowledge. Say that the Holy Spirit has brought the Revelation with the Truth step by step from your Lord, to strengthen the believers and as guidance and good news to the devout. (al-Naḥl 16/ 101,102).

The verses are a response to the polytheists of Mecca who accused the prophet Muhammad of being a fabricator because he abrogated some divine commands.<sup>33</sup> In response to this accusation, God asks the prophet to say that the holy spirit brought it down from your lord. The pronoun "it" refers to the Quran, and the verse affirms that the commands that the prophet is delivering are brought down from the Lord by the Holy Spirit.

---

<sup>32</sup> al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafseer al-Kabīr*, 3/596.

<sup>33</sup> Abrogation (nasikh) means that God commands something for a certain temporary reason, and then later revokes or replaces that command. For more information on abrogation in the Quran and Islamic law, see Louy Fatoohi, *Abrogation in Quran and Islamic law* (London: Routledge, 2024).



### 1.2.1. The Exegesis

The indication of the holy spirit in this verse does not seem to require further discussion by the Quranic exegetes. All of them agreed that the interpretation of the holy spirit here is the archangel, Gabriel. Al-Ṭabarī only replaced the term ‘Holy Spirit’ by Gabriel. He restated the verse as follows, “Say, Gabriel brought it.”<sup>34</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭīya adds more confirmation to this interpretation by asserting that the holy spirit here is Gabriel and there is no dispute among the exegetes regarding this interpretation.<sup>35</sup> Al-Rāzī affirmed the same meaning and provided a linguistic explanation to clarify why Gabriel is described as the Holy Spirit. He explains that *quḍus* is a noun with a meaning of an adjective and attributing one pronoun to a verbal noun (*maṣḍar*) is common in Arabic for the purpose of adding more emphasis. For example, Ḥātim is a generous man, so to emphasize his generosity more, we say ‘Ḥātim of generosity’ (Ḥātim al-jud). Therefore, the spirit is Gabriel and to emphasize his sanctity and purity, he was described as *ruḥ al-quḍus* (Holy Spirit).<sup>36</sup> Although this instance of the term ‘Holy Spirit’ clearly refers to the archangel Gabriel, none of our Quranic exegetes used this verse to support their interpretations of the first three occurrences of the term. In other words, interpreting the term as referring to the archangel Gabriel in each context is based on separate proofs.

## 2. The Verses of ‘The Spirit’ and ‘A Spirit’

This part presents the verses where the term ‘the spirit’ and ‘a spirit’ are mentioned, followed by the exegetes’ discussion. It begins with the verses related to Jesus and his mother, Mary, and then proceed with other verses.

### 2.1. A Spirit Visits Mary

In chapter 19, we find the occurrence of the spirit as a messenger sent by God to Mary. This chapter, titled ‘Mary,’ is named after Mary, the mother of Jesus. It narrates the story of Mary and her family, the miraculous conception, the story of Zakaria and his son, and some other topics. The mention of the spirit in this verse is connected to the story of the miraculous conception. The verse is rendered as follows, “Mention in the Quran the story of Mary. She withdrew from her family to a place to the east. And secluded herself away; We sent Our Spirit to appear before her in the form of a perfected man.” (Maryam 19/ 16,17).

#### 2.1.1. The Exegesis

Al-Ṭabarī kept the discussion brief and chose to present and support one interpretation, which is that “spirit” here refers to the archangel, Gabriel. He bolstered this interpretation with several narrations related to early linguists and Quranic scholars.<sup>37</sup> Many exegetes supported this interpretation and attributed it to the majority of Muslim scholars. However, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn ‘Aṭīya, al-Baghawī and Al-Rāzī provided another possible interpretation suggesting that the spirit

<sup>34</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jami‘ Bayan ‘an Ta’wil Ayi al-Quran*, 17/298.

<sup>35</sup> Abdullḥaq bin ‘Aṭīya, *al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafsir al-Kitab* (Beirut: dar al-Kutub, 2002), 3/421.

<sup>36</sup> al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafseer al-Kabir*, 20/270.

<sup>37</sup> al-Ṭabarī, *Jami‘ Bayan ‘an Ta’wil Ayi al-Quran*, 18/161.

is Jesus himself.<sup>38</sup> This narration is attributed by Ibn al-Jawzī to the companion Ubayy bin ka‘ab (d. 650) and to the famous linguist, Abū Ishāq al-Zajjāj (d. 923). Al-Rāzī attributed it to an early Mu‘tazilite scholar, Abū Muslim al-Aṣbahānī (d. 1067). However, the ambiguity of this interpretation lies in understanding how Jesus was sent to her and how she conceived him at the same time. Ibn al-Jawzī clarifies this by saying that the Jesus came to her as a man, talked to her and then entered her mouth, and thus she conceived him. Ibn ‘Aṭīya, on other hand, explains this position in the light of the first interpretation by saying that the spirit is Jesus, and the one who appeared to Mary as a man is the angel. In other words, God sent the angel Gabriel with the spirit of Jesus, and he, the angel, breathed that spirit into her.<sup>39</sup> This explanation that Ibn ‘Aṭīya provides seems to be more plausible than Ibn al-Jawzī’s clarification, as the latter implies that Jesus was created as man before being conceived or the spirit came to Mary in her dream. However, al-Rāzī, uses the context of this verse to exclude the possibility of interpreting the spirit as Jesus. The dialogue between Mary and the one who appeared to her in a form of a man continues to cover a few verses, one of them begins as follows, “but he said, ‘I am but a Messenger from your Lord, [come] to announce to you the gift of a pure son.’” (Maryam 19/19). Al-Rāzī uses this verse to affirm that the correct interpretation is the first one, the angel Gabriel is the spirit that was sent to Mary because if the spirit was Jesus himself, he could not say to her, “to announce to you the gift of a pure son.”<sup>40</sup> Although the exegetes in this verse support the interpretation of the archangel Gabriel and reject the one that says that the ‘spirit’ is Jesus himself, in the next part, some of them accept the latter interpretation. This affirms that the exegetes interpret these terms separately in each context.

## 2.2. Jesus is a Spirit

The word ‘spirit’ seems to have different references in several verses. In the following three verses, the literal meaning of ‘the spirit’ refers to Jesus himself. The first occurrence is found in chapter 4, known as the chapter of the women (al-Nisā’).

People of the Book, do not go to excess in your religion, and do not say anything about God except the truth: the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was nothing more than a messenger of God, His word, directed to Mary, a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of a ‘Trinity’- stop [this], that is better for you- God is only one God, He is far above having a son, everything in the heavens and earth belongs to Him and He is the best one to trust. (al-Nisā’ 4/171).

This chapter was revealed during the Medina period, encompassing topics related to the people of the book, along with instructions about marriage, divorce, and the treatment of women. The verse in question negates the trinity and affirms the unity of God by highlighting that Jesus is a messenger of God and ‘a spirit’ (rūḥ) created by His command. The Arabic verse states only “rūḥ from Him,” which the translator renders as “a spirit from Him”.

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭīya, *al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafsīr al-Kitāb*, 4/9; Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 5/223; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr fi al-Tafsīr*, 3/123; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 21/520.

<sup>39</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭīya, *al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafsīr al-Kitāb*, 4/9; Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 5/223; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr fi al-Tafsīr*, 3/123; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 21/520.

<sup>40</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭīya, *al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafsīr al-Kitāb*, 4/9; Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 5/223; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-Masīr fi al-Tafsīr*, 3/123; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 21/520.

The next two occurrences are related to the story of miraculous conception, and the verses literally say that a spirit was breathed into Mary, the mother of Jesus. In other words, it conveys the same idea of the previous verse, Jesus is a spirit belonging to God. The term occurs in chapters 21, “the prophets” (al-Anbiyā’), and in chapter 66, “the prohibition” (al-Taḥrīm). In the first one, it is translated as follows, “Remember the one who guarded her chastity. We breathed into her from Our Spirit and made her and her son a sign for all people.” (al-Anbiyā’ 21/91).

In the second chapter, we have a quietly similar meaning and similar translation. It is put as, “and Mary, daughter of Imran. She guarded her chastity, so We breathed into her from Our spirit. She accepted the truth of her Lord’s words and Scriptures: she was truly devout.” (al-Taḥrīm 66/ 12) In both chapters, the word “rūḥana” (Our Spirit) is mentioned in a context where Mary is praised by God for her chastity and devotion.

### 2.2.1. The Exegesis

The interpretation of the spirit in these verses varies, but most of them have similar meanings. Ibn al-Jawzī lists seven opinions about the meaning of ‘the spirit’ here, which are: a human spirit, a blow (al-naḥka), giving life, mercy, the archangel Gabriel, a life for people’s spiritual life, and a revelation.<sup>41</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭīya, on the other hand, supports only one interpretation: the spirit (rūḥ) is the blow that the angel breathed into Mary, whereby she conceived Jesus.<sup>42</sup> This interpretation seems to be the most celebrated one among our Quranic exegetes. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Baghawī primarily noted this opinion, and then followed it with three other opinions from the seven opinions that Ibn al-Jawzī mentioned. The first one is interpreting the spirit as a mercy because Jesus was sent to people as a mercy from God. The second one as a revelation from God, and this interpretation is similar to the first one because a revelation is considered as a mercy and guidance from God as well. The third one as a human spirit that God created and sent by the angel. The difference between Jesus’s spirit and the spirit of other humans’ lies in the miraculous way of his creation. Humans are created from sperms, and then they are given spirits, while Jesus was created directly by God in a miraculous manner.<sup>43</sup>

Al-Rāzī not only mentions the different opinions but also tries to justify some of the chosen interpretations. He argues that people normally describe something as a spirit when it is exceptionally pure and clean. In this case, God uses the word ‘spirit’ to describe Jesus because of his remarkable pure soul. Furthermore, the word ‘spirit’ here in Arabic is indefinite “ruḥ,” which indicates that Jesus’s spirit is from the honored sacred souls. Al-Rāzī clarifies the reason of interpreting the spirit as a blow by stating that, in Arabic, the breath of wind is called a spirit because the word for ‘spirit’ (ruḥ) and ‘wind’ (riḥ) are quite similar and used interchangeably in some cases.<sup>44</sup> Finally, interpreting the ‘spirit’ as Jesus himself is still a plausible interpretation, but it is still not supported by the exegetes. The most common interpretation affirms that the spirit is the blow or the spirit that was Jesus created from.

<sup>41</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zās al-Masīr fi al-Tafsīr*, 1/502.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn ‘Aṭīya, *al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafsīr al-Kitāb*, 2/139.

<sup>43</sup> Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 2/314; Al-Ṭabarī, *Jami‘ Bayan ‘an Ta’wīl Ayī al-Quran*, 9/419,420.

<sup>44</sup> Al-Rāzī, *Al-Taḥseer al-Kabīr*, 11/271.

### 2.3. The Spirit is a Revelation/Sacred Book

We have already covered all the occurrences of the 'Holy Spirit' and the 'spirit' that are related to Jesus and his mother, Mary. The remaining occurrences do not seem to be referring specifically to the Holy Spirit, but they might help us understand the previous verses and certainly contribute to completing the picture of the usage of these terms in the Quran.

We find the following verse: "He sends down angels with inspiration at His command, to whichever of His servants He chooses, to give [His] warning: 'There is no god but Me, so beware of Me.'" (al-Nahl 16/2). The Arabic word 'bi al-rūḥ' is translated in this verse as 'with inspiration,' while the literal translation should be 'with the spirit'. In chapter 42 the term 'spirit' is rendered more faithfully to the Arabic word as follows, "So We have revealed a spirit to you [Prophet] by Our command: you knew neither the Scripture nor the faith, but We made it a light, guiding with it whoever We will of Our servants. You give guidance to the straight path, (al-Shu'arā' 42/52). In chapter 40, the word 'spirit' is rendered as 'revelation.' In the translation, it is put as follows, "He is exalted in rank, the Lord of the Throne. He sends revelations with His teachings to whichever of His servants He will, in order to warn of the Day of Meeting." (al-Mu'min 40/15). We see that the literal meaning of these three verses referring to the revelation or the message that the prophets receive from God.

#### 2.3.1. The Exegesis

The interpretation of the spirit in these verses revolves around four similar meanings: revelation, prophecy, mercy, divine commands. They are similar because revelation and divine commands are the foundation of the prophecy, and the prophecy is intended to be a mercy for mankind. However, these interpretations are attributed to Ibn 'Abbās and other early Quran exegetes, such as Qatāda and al-Suddī. In the first verse (16/02), Ibn al-Jawzī adds another interpretation to the meaning of 'spirit' here, saying that each angel comes down to earth bringing with him the soul of a creature. Put it differently, the spirits of all living beings are brought down to earth by the angels.<sup>45</sup> He attributes this interpretation to one important early Quranic exegete, Mujāhid bin Jabar (d. 722).<sup>46</sup> Another different interpretation is seen in Ibn 'Aṭīya's exegesis, suggesting that the spirit refers to a type of angel that resembles human beings who accompanies the archangel Gabriel.<sup>47</sup> This opinion is attributed to the early scholar, Ibn Juraj (d. 768).<sup>48</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī's interpretation could be supported with several textual proofs, such as the famous hadith in which the angel is commanded to blow the soul into the fetus and write four matters.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, Ibn 'Aṭīya's interpretation does not appear to have explicit support in neither the Quran or the Sunna. However, these two interpretations are not given enough attention by other exegetes, and thus, kept their focus on the first four interpretations mentioned.

### 2.4. The Spirit Brings Down the Sacred Books

---

<sup>45</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zās al-Masīr fi al-Tafsīr*, 2/550.

<sup>46</sup> al-Zahabī, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, 4/450.

<sup>47</sup> Ibn 'Aṭīya, *al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafsīr al-Kitāb*, 3/378.

<sup>48</sup> al-Zahabī, *Siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*, 6/326.

<sup>49</sup> For the full text of the Hadith see, al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 4/111.

In chapter 26, the word 'spirit' is described as trustworthy and as the one who brought down the Quran. The verse is rendered as follows, "Truly, this Quran has been sent down by the Lord of the Worlds. The Trustworthy Spirit brought it down. (al-Shu'arā' 26/192, 193). The trustworthy spirit (al-rūḥ al-Amīn) seems to refer to the archangel Gabriel. This verse is similar to the earlier verse of the holy spirit (al-Naḥl 16/102).

#### 2.4.1. The Exegesis

Muslim scholars are in agreement that the archangel Gabriel is the one who brought down the revelation/Quran to the prophet Mohammad. Therefore, our Quranic exegetes does not mention other possible interpretations. Furthermore, Ibn 'Aṭīya affirms this interpretation by stating that the 'the spirit' here refers to the angel Gabriel by consensus, i.e. the consensus of Quranic exegetes.<sup>50</sup>

### 2.5. The Spirit is Different from the Angels

Although the previous verse affirms that the spirit is the angel Gabriel, other verses explicitly differentiate between the angels and the spirit by mentioning them together in the same context. This distinction is evident in the following verses: "by which the angels and the Spirit ascend to Him, on a Day whose length is fifty thousand years." (al-Ma'ārij 70/04). The distinction is clear as well in the following two verses. In chapter 78, it is rendered as "On the Day when the Spirit and the angels stand in rows, they will not speak except for those to whom the Lord of Mercy gives permission, who will say only what is right." (al-Nabā' 78/38). The next verse is translated as follows, "on that night the angels and the Spirit descend again and again with their Lord's permission on every task." (al-Qadr 97/4). In these three verses, the angels and the spirit are mentioned separately, which indicates that they are not the same thing.

#### 2.5.1. The Exegesis

In the first verse (al-Ma'ārij 70/04) there are two common interpretations: the first one is the archangel Gabriel, and the second is the spirit or the soul of the deceased. Al-Ṭabarī, al-Baghawī and Ibn al-Jawzī maintain these two interpretations.<sup>51</sup> However, a more detailed discussion of 'the spirit' unfolds in the second verse (al-Nabā' 78/38) where interpreting 'the spirit' as the archangel Gabriel does not seem to be favored by some of our Quranic exegetes. They introduced two main narratives from the esteemed companions of the prophet, Ibn 'Abbās and Ibn Mas'ūd, suggesting that the spirit is the greatest creature ever created by God. While still an angel, this being is greater than all the angels combined together.<sup>52</sup> This interpretation gains support from al-Rāzī. He contends that this verse implies that the status of this spirit is higher than that of the angels. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that the chosen interpretation by the theologians is the archangel Gabriel.<sup>53</sup> However, the existence of such an angelic being that surpasses the rest of the angels cannot be definitely affirmed or denied because the authenticity of the narrations from

<sup>50</sup> Ibn 'Aṭīya, *al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafṣir al-Kitāb*, 4/242.

<sup>51</sup> al-Baghawī, *Tafṣir al-Baghawī*, 8/220; Al-Ṭabarī, *Jami' Bayan 'an Ta'wil Ayi al-Quran*, 23/601.; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zās al-Masir fi al-Tafṣir*, 4/336.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.8/317; 24/174; 4/391, 392.

<sup>53</sup> al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafseer al-Kabir*, 30/638.

the two companions, Ibn ‘Abbās and Ibn Mas‘ūd, are not strong enough to lend credibility to this information. The narrations are not found in any reliable book of Hadīth; furthermore, the narration presented by the exegetes is criticized by Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) and other scholars.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, interpreting the spirit as an angelic being superior to the rest of the angels does not exclude the possibility of it being the archangel Gabriel. This is why many exegetes chose to interpret the spirit here as the archangel Gabriel. Finally, we have two more interpretations of the spirit: one suggests that the spirit is a collective noun that refers to the spirits or the souls of human beings, while the second introduces ambiguity by interpreting the spirit as a creature resembling a human being but not really human.<sup>55</sup> This ambiguity is emphasized in the discussion in the following part.

## 2.6. The Ambiguity of the Spirit

In chapter 17, ‘the spirit’ represents something beyond the scope of human knowledge. The verse concerning the spirit serves as a response to the Jewish people who inquired about it. The verse is translated as follows, “[Prophet], they ask you about the Spirit. Say, ‘The Spirit is part of my Lord’s domain. You have only been given a little knowledge.’” (al-Isrā’ 17/85). The story of the Jewish people posing this question to the prophet is an authentic account mentioned in Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī.<sup>56</sup>

### 2.6.1. The Exegesis

Similar to the previous verses, we find interpretations asserting that the spirit is an angelic being greater than the rest of the angels, while others suggest it is a being resembling human beings but not quite human. Al-Baghawī and Ibn al-Jawzī offer additional opinions, interpreting the spirit as Jesus Christ, or as the spirit of human beings.<sup>57</sup> The opinion that the spirit is the human spirit does not appear to be a marginal one, as al-Rāzī –after discussing other exegetes’ interpretations—affirmed that the most correct opinion is the human spirit. Al-Rāzī argues that the question about the spirit could pertain to different aspects, such as its nature and essence, its relationship with the body, its life after the death of the body, or its origin, whether it is created or pre-eternal. Based on the context, al-Rāzī chose two possibilities, the first one is about its nature and essence, and the second is about its origin, created or pre-eternal. The essence of the spirit, al-Rāzī contends, is not comprehensible to human beings, similar to other essences such as that of God or His angels. While we understand many things by their characteristics and effects, the true essence remains beyond our comprehension. The second possibility, which is related to the origin of the spirit, seems to be favored by al-Rāzī. He argues that inquiring about the origin of the spirit involves the question of whether it is created or pre-eternal. According to him, the spirit is created by God, and this answer is stated in the same verse. However, the translation does not convey this meaning accurately. The Arabic words are “qul al-rūḥ min amri Rabbī” and “amr” could have the meaning of creation as al-Rāzī argues. To support his argument, he cites other occurrences of the

---

<sup>54</sup> Mawsū‘at al-Tafsīr bil-Ma’tūr, 22/636.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zās al-Masīr fī al-Tafsīr*, 4/392.

<sup>56</sup> al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 1/37.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zās al-Masīr fī al-Tafsīr*, 3/50; Al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 5/126.

Arabic word “amr” (command) used in the meaning of ‘creating.’<sup>58</sup> Therefore, according to al-Rāzī, the Jewish inquired about the origin of the spirit, and the Quran responded that the spirit is created by God.

## 2.7. The Spirit as an Assistance to the Believers

In the first part, we saw that the spirit is given to Jesus as a support from God, while in this verse, we see the spirit, as a divine assistance, extended to the believers in a general sense. Chapter 58 states this support as follows,

[Prophet], you will not find people who truly believe in God and the Last Day giving their loyalty to those who oppose God and His Messenger, even though they may be their fathers, sons, brothers, or other relations: these are the people in whose hearts God has inscribed faith, and whom He has strengthened with His spirit. He will let them enter Gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will stay: God is well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are on God’s side, and God’s side will be the one to prosper. (al-Mujādala 58/22).

God strengthens the believers with a spirit from Him, and this spirit is a spirit that is owns by God. In another verse, we see the support of God is presented as “rūḥu Allah” (the spirit of God). This occurs in the story of Joseph and his brothers. Jacob instructs his children to return to Egypt to search for Joseph and his brother Benjamin, telling them not to lose hope in the spirit of God, as it is expected to help them in finding their brothers. The verse is translated as follow, “My sons, go and seek news of Joseph and his brother and do not despair of God’s mercy- only disbelievers despair of God’s mercy.” (Yūsuf 12/87). By translating the term “rūḥ-Allah” as “The mercy of Allah,” the translation appears to deviate from the Arabic literal word, but not from the context.

### 2.7.1. The Exegesis

In the first verse, the exegetes offer five different interpretations of the spirit that God strengthens/supports the believers with. They include victory given by God, faith, mercy, the Quran, and archangel Gabriel. We do not find a dispute among our exegetes because all these interpretations are plausible. It is possible that the spirit refers to one of them, more than one, or even all of them.<sup>59</sup>

In the second verse, which pertains to the story of Joseph, the exegetes kept the discussion brief and chose to interpret the spirit as the mercy of God. They select this interpretation based on the context of this verse and the command that Jacob gave to his children, ‘do not despair of God’s mercy.’

## 2.8. The Spirit and Adam

The story of the creation of Adam contains three occurrences of the word ‘spirit’ in three different verses. In the first one, “When I have fashioned him and breathed My spirit into him, bow down before him.” (al-Ḥijr 15/29). The pronoun ‘him’ refers to Adam, while the context of the verse is the story of his creation and the command for angels to prostrate to him. This context is covered

<sup>58</sup> al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafseer al-Kabīr*, 21/392,93.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zās al-Masīr fi al-Tafsīr*, 4/252; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 8/63; Ibn ‘Aṭīya, *al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafsīr al-Kitāb*, 5/282.

in verses 26-31. The verse in chapter 38 is formed similarly as follows, “When I have shaped him and breathed from My Spirit into him, bow down before him.” (Ṣād 38/72). It is a Quranic habit to narrate the story of the creation of Adam along with two other stories: the command for angels to prostrate to him and the disobedience of Satan. However, the last related verse is found in chapter 32 as follows, “Then He moulded him; He breathed from His Spirit into him; He gave you hearing, sight, and minds. How seldom you are grateful!” (al-Sajda 32/9). We see in all these verses that ‘the spirit’ is something that belongs to God and is breathed into Adam at the beginning of his creation.

### 2.8.1. The Exegesis

The interpretation of the spirit in these verses is straightforward and does appear to be directly related to the Holy Spirit. It is the spirit by which Adam became a living being. The Arabic word ‘rūḥī’ means ‘My spirit,’ indicating the belonging of this spirit to God. Al-Rāzī expounds on the possessive pronouns ‘my’ by explaining that the spirit is owned by God, just as He owns all the spirits and everything else. Similarly, we use phrases like ‘my house’ to denote ownership. Attributing the spirit to God serves another purpose as well, which is to honor that spirit. Likewise, we refer to Kaaba as ‘beit-Allah’ (the house of God).<sup>60</sup>

### 2.9. The Spirit is Serenity

Although the final verse where the term “rūḥ” appears in a context describing the state of the believer after passing away. It is translated as follows, “If that dying person is one of those who will be brought near to God, he will have rest, ease, and a Garden of Bliss.” (al-Wāqī‘a 56/88,89). The Arabic word *rūḥ* is translated as ‘rest’ in all the translations. None of the available English translations render it as ‘a spirit.’

### 2.9.1. The Exegesis

The interpretation of the word spirit revolves around three words: serenity, mercy and rest. There is no conflict between these interpretations and all of them allude to the reward that the believer will receive in the hereafter.<sup>61</sup> None of them could be interpreted as referring to an angelic being or any living spirit. Therefore, we close the discussion without further elaboration.

## Conclusion

The three occurrences of the Holy Spirit related to Jesus are primarily interpreted as the archangel Gabriel, the gospel, the divine greatest name, or the spirit of Jesus himself. The first interpretation appears to be favored by our Quranic exegetes, who asserted that the Holy Spirit is the archangel Gabriel who supported and accompanied Jesus throughout his life. To support this interpretation, they relied on some prophetic statements, scholars’ opinions, and the context of the verses. The fourth occurrence of the term affirms that the Holy Spirit brought down the revelation with truth, i.e. the Quran. Notably, this explicit reference to the archangel Gabriel is not used by the Quranic exegetes to support their interpretation of the first three instances. This

---

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 25/141.

<sup>61</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zās al-Masīr fī al-Tafsīr*, 4/230; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 8/26.



indicates that they interpreted each occurrence of the term according to its context and supporting evidence.

It is also worth noting that when the Quranic exegetes mention several possible interpretations, it does not necessarily mean they give credit to all of them. They often do this to present previous opinions and then explicitly or implicitly choose and support one or more interpretations.

The definite and indefinite forms of the spirit appear numerous times in various contexts. The spirit visiting Mary is interpreted as the archangel Gabriel, while the spirit breathed into Mary has several interpretations, such as mercy, life, Jesus's spirit, and the breath. In other contexts, the "spirit" refers to the Quran or to revelations. When the term is linked to the story of Adam, the interpretations seem to be straightforward: it is the spirit that God breathed into Adam. However, when it is accompanied by the angels, the Quranic exegetes differ in defining it. It could be the archangel Gabriel, the human spirit, or a mysterious being that is the greatest creation of God. These are the main occurrences of the spirit, alongside others, referring to eternal serenity, rest, or God's mercy.

## Bibliography

- Abdel Haleem, M.A.S. *The Qur'an*. Oxford: University Press, 2008.
- al-Baghawī, Al-Ḥusayn. *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*. Riyadh: Dar Ṭayba, 1997.
- al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad bin Ismā'īl. *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dar al-Tawq al-Naja, 2002.
- al-Damijī, Abdullah. *Ismi Allah al-A'zam*. Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 1998.
- al-Munajid, Muhammad. "Does the Original Gospel Exist Today." *Islam Question and Answer*, accessed April 4, 2024. <https://islamqa.info/en/answers/85280/does-the-original-gospel-exist-today>
- al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*. Beirut: Dar Iḥyā al-Turath, 3. Edition, 1999.
- al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Jarīr. *Jami' Bayan 'an Ta'wīl Ayī al-Quran*. Makkah: Dar al-Turath, ??.
- al-Ḍahabī, Shams al-Dīn. *siyar A'lam al-Nubala'*. Beirut: Al-Risalā Publication, 3. Edition, 1985.
- Bin Abī Ḥātim, Abdurḥamān. *Tafsīr al-Quran al-'Azīm*. Riyadh: Mustafa Al-Baz Publication, 1999.
- Bin al-Jawzī, Jamāl al-Dīn. *Zād al-Masīr fi al-Tafsīr*. Beirut: Dar al-Kutub, 2002.
- Bin 'Aṭiya, Abdulḥaq. *Al-Muḥarir al-Wajiz fi Tafsīr al-Kitab*. Beirut: dar al-Kutub, 2002.
- Fatoohi, Louy. *Abrogation in Quran and Islamic law*. London: Routledge, 2024.
- Haeri, Fadhlalla. *Keys to the Quran*. London: Zahra Publication, 2. Edition, 2018.
- Ḥassan, Abās. *al-Naḥw al-Wafī*. Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 14. Edition, 2007.
- Khattab, Mustafa. *The Clear Quran*. Bolingbrook: Books of Signs Foundations, 2016.
- Mus'aid, Al-Ṭayyar, et al. *Mawsū'at al-Tafsīr bil-Ma'thūr*. Beirut: Dar Ibn Ḥazim, 2017.
- Pickthall, Marmaduke. *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1930.
- Reynolds, Gabriel "On The Qur'ān's Mā'idā Passage And The Wanderings Of The Israelites," in *The Coming of the Comforter: When, Where, and to Whom? Studies on the Rise of Islam and Various Other Topics in Memory of John Wansbrough*, ed. Carlos A. Segovia and Basil Lourié, 91-108. New Jersey: Georgia Press: 2021.
- Shihata, Abdullah. *'Ulum al-Tafsīr*. Cairo: Dar al-Shrūk, 2001.