

**Negotiating Authority in Qur'anic Exegesis:
The Epistemological Function of *Isrā'īliyyāt* Narratives from the
People of the Book**

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Abstract: This study discusses the existence of the history of *isrā'īliyyat* in the interpretation of the Qur'an, which are stories derived from Jewish and Christian traditions, which are widely used by mufasir in explaining the verses of the Qur'an. The presence of *Isrā'īliyyat* in the tafsir is inseparable from the role of the Scribes who embraced Islam and carried their religious heritage, as well as the intense interaction between the early Muslim community and the people of the Kitabi. The focus of this study is on the principle inherited by the Prophet Muhammad PBUH in responding to the narration of the Scribes, namely "do not justify and do not lie" (*tawaqqūf*), which then becomes an epistemological guideline in accepting or rejecting the history of *isrā'īliyyat*. The main data source is taken from the main books of Qur'an Science as well as classical and modern tafsir books. The data were analyzed descriptive-analytically, examining the relationship between the history of *Isrā'īliyyat* and the involvement of the People of the Book in its dissemination. The results of the study show that scholars have different views on *isrā'īliyyat*, but in general they agree that the narration cannot be used as a basis in terms of creed and law. *Isrā'īliyyat* can only be used as a complement to the narrative provided that it does not contradict Islamic principles, has a traceable sanad, and does not damage the image of the prophets. This study emphasizes the importance of being selective and critical in responding to narratives originating from outside the Islamic tradition, in order to maintain the purity of the interpretation of the Qur'an and the integrity of Islamic teachings. This principle remains relevant to be applied in today's context full of cross-cultural and religious information exchange.

Keywords: *Isrā'īliyyat*; Scholar of the Book; Tafsir Al-Qur'an; Islamic Epistemology

Abstrak: Penelitian ini membahas eksistensi riwayat *isrā'īliyyat* dalam tafsir Al-Qur'an, yaitu kisah-kisah yang bersumber dari tradisi Yahudi dan Nasrani, yang banyak digunakan oleh para mufasir dalam menjelaskan ayat-ayat Al-Qur'an. Kehadiran

Isrāīlīyat dalam tafsir tidak lepas dari peran para Ahli Kitab yang memeluk Islam dan membawa warisan keagamaan mereka, serta interaksi yang intens antara komunitas Muslim awal dan masyarakat Kitabi. Fokus kajian ini adalah pada prinsip yang diwariskan oleh Nabi Muhammad SAW dalam menyikapi riwayat dari Ahli Kitab, yaitu “jangan dibenarkan dan jangan didustakan” (*tawaqqūf*), yang kemudian menjadi pedoman epistemologis dalam menerima atau menolak riwayat *isrāīlīyat*. sumber data utama diambil dari buku-buku induk Ilmu Al-Qur'an serta kitab-kitab tafsir klasik dan modern. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif-analitis, dengan memeriksa hubungan antara riwayat *Isrāīlīyat* dan keterlibatan Ahli Kitab dalam penyebarannya. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa para ulama memiliki pandangan yang beragam terhadap *isrāīlīyat*, namun secara umum mereka sepakat bahwa riwayat tersebut tidak dapat dijadikan dasar dalam hal akidah dan hukum. *Isrāīlīyat* hanya dapat digunakan sebagai pelengkap naratif dengan syarat tidak bertentangan dengan prinsip Islam, memiliki sanad yang dapat dilacak, serta tidak merusak citra para nabi. Kajian ini menekankan pentingnya sikap selektif dan kritis dalam menyikapi narasi-narasi yang berasal dari luar tradisi Islam, demi menjaga kemurnian tafsir Al-Qur'an dan integritas ajaran Islam. Prinsip ini tetap relevan untuk diterapkan dalam konteks kekinian yang penuh dengan pertukaran informasi lintas budaya dan agama.

Kata kunci: *Isrāīlīyat*; Ahli Kitab; Tafsir Al-Qur'an; Epistemologi Islam.

Introduction

The relationship between the Scribes and the *history of isrāīlīyat* is one of the important issues in the study of Qur'anic interpretation, especially in relation to the stories of the prophets and the previous people.¹ The Scribes, i.e. the Jews and Christians who embraced Islam in the time of the Companions and *tabi'in*, brought with them their inheritance of religious knowledge which was then transmitted in the form of narrations known as *isrāīlīyat*.² This narration is often used as a complementary material in the interpretation of verses that are considered less detailed by some *mufasssir*, especially in the stories of the prophet.³ However, many of these narrations come from unverifiable sources, and even have the potential to contradict the values of monotheism and the principles of '*Ismah Al-Anbiyā'*.⁴ Therefore, a critical attitude towards the history of *Isrāīlīyat* is very important so that Muslims are not deceived by narratives that have not been tested for validity.

¹ M Rozali, & Nurul, and Syahrani Lubis, “Israiliyat: Histori Eksistensi Dan Tokoh,” *Al-Kaffah* 10, no. 2 (2022): 152–53, <https://jurnalalkaffah.or.id/index.php/alkaffah/article/view/48>.

² Muḥammad Ḥusain Al-Dzahabīy, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssirūn* (Kairo: Maktabah Wahbah, 1431). J.1, 140-141.

³ Mawardi Mawardi, “Kritik Riwayat Penafsiran Israiliyat Al-Tabari Tentang Kisah Nabi Yusuf Dalam Surat Yusuf Ayat 24,” *AL QUDS: Jurnal Studi Alquran Dan Hadis* 6, no. 3 (2022): 1157–80, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v6i3.5283>.

⁴ Yusuf Fauzi, “Israiliyyat Dalam Qasas Al-Anbiya’ (Studi Kitab Al-Jami’ Li Ahkam Al-Qur’an Karya Al-Qurtubi),” *Action Research Literate* 8, no. 11 (2024).

In the tradition of religious texts, the presence of narrations from the Ahlul Kitab or known as *Isrā'īliyyāt* has become an inevitable phenomenon. However, these histories cannot be taken for granted without strict screening. Vigilance in accepting *isrā'īliyyāt* is not only born from the prudence of scholars, but also based on strong methodological considerations.⁵ On the other hand, although *isrā'īliyyāt* has enriched the narrative in the reading of religious texts, not a few of them have distorted the understanding of revelation. Some of the narrations contain elements that are contrary to the principle of monotheism or portray the prophets inappropriately, such as attributing great sins to them or exposing them in a reprehensible moral position. This indicates the insertion of non-Islamic traditions into the normative Islamic discourse. Therefore, prudence is not only an academic attitude, but also a form of commitment to the purity of Islamic teachings.⁶ A critical attitude towards *isrā'īliyyāt* does not mean rejecting them entirely, but carefully sorting out which ones are in accordance with the basic principles of the Shari'ah and which need to be ignored.⁷ With this approach, the ummah not only avoids misunderstandings in understanding the stories of the Qur'an, but is also able to distinguish between the truth of revelation and the influence of external traditions that are speculative or even misleading.

Various studies have explored the role of *the history of isrā'īliyyāt* in the interpretation of the Qur'an, particularly its involvement through transmission from the Scribes, and uncovered three main tendencies. First, historical-descriptive studies trace the inclusion of the *isrā'īliyyāt* tradition in classical commentary, especially in the works of al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Kathīr, to fill the narrative void in the Qur'anic⁸ stories. Second, critical-analytical studies assess *isrā'īliyyāt* with the methods of sanad and matan criticism, which then classify them in the category of *maqbul*, *mardūd*, or *maskūt 'anhu*, and affirm the prophetic principle of "*lā tuṣaddiqūhum wa lā tukaddibūhum*" as an epistemological fence.⁹

⁵ Fauzi.

⁶ St Rajiah Rusydi, "Israiliyat Dan Pengaruhnya Dalam Khazanah Keilmuan Islam," *Jurnal Pilar: Jurnal Kajian Islam Kontemporer* 02, no. 1 (2011): 66–77.

⁷ Munirah Munirah, "Kontroversi Penggunaan Kisah Israiliyat Dalam Memahami Ayat-Ayat Kisah Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Ushuluddin* 16, no. 2 (2018): 95, <https://doi.org/10.18592/jiu.v16i2.1727>.

⁸ Nafisah Jali, "Israi'liyat Materials in Tafsir Al-Thabari," *An-Nisa Jurnal Kajian Perempuan Dan Keislaman* 15, no. 1 (2022): 41–56, <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v15i1.75>; Muhammad Ulil Rosyad, Ibn Hazar, and Muhammad Zahid, "ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE OF THE ISRA'ILYAT NARRATIVES ON PROPHETS YUSUF AND DAWUD IN JAMI' AL-BAYAN BY IBN JARĪR AL-ṬĀBARI," *Al-Munir: Jurnal Ilmu Al-Qur'an Dan Tafsir* 6, no. 2 (2024): 167–86, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.24239/al-munir.v6i2.953>.

⁹ Ahmad Levi Fachrul Avivy, Jawiah Dakir, and Mazlan Ibrahim, "Isra'iliyyat in Interpretive Literature of Indonesia: A Comparison between Tafsir Marah Labid and Tafsir Al-Azhar," *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 3 (2015): 401–7, <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n3s2p401>; Suci Romadani Siregar, Nur Aulia Indriyanti, and

This approach highlights the urgency of theological protection, especially with regard to the doctrine of *'iṣmah al-anbiyā'*. Third, a contextual and intercultural approach examines the function of the *isrā'īliyyāt* narrative as an instrument of *cultural borrowing*, both in modern and regional interpretations, including the interpretation of the archipelago, by showing how the history can enrich the story but also has the potential to cause syncretism and distortion of faith.¹⁰ Although these three research streams have deepened the understanding of the role of the Scribe in the transmission of interpretation, the majority of studies still dwell on the dichotomy of acceptance or rejection. The epistemological function of the principle of "*kullu mā jā'a min ahl al-kitāb ghayru muṣaddaq wa lā mukadhdhab*" as a normative framework for negotiating the relationship between revelation and external traditions is still poorly explored, leaving an important research gap. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the theological and epistemological implications of this principle as an instrument of normative selection for the history of *isrā'īliyyāt* in the interpretation of the Qur'an.

This article aims to explain the theological basis of the principle of "*Kullu Mā Jā'a Min Ahl Al-Kitāb Ghayru Muṣaddaq Wa lā Mukadhdhab*" (everything that comes from the Scribes is neither justified nor denied) in the context of textual study. Another purpose is to show how this attitude becomes an epistemological guideline in responding to the history of *isrā'īliyyat* brought by scholars of the book, especially those that have the potential to contaminate the purity of Islamic teachings. This study is also expected to provide a basis for Qur'an scholars to make a narrative selection of the sources used in the interpretation. In addition, this paper seeks to show the negative impact of blind acceptance of *isrā'īliyyat* on the faith of the people.

In order to achieve this goal, this study uses a qualitative approach with *the library research method*. The main data sources are taken from the main books of Qur'anic Science, and other primary reference books. The data were analyzed in a descriptive-analytical manner, examining the relationship between the history of *isrā'īliyyat* and the involvement of the People of the Book in its dissemination. The researcher also used the methods of sanad and matan criticism to review the

Hery Sahputra, "CRITICAL STUDY OF AL-DAKHIL FROM THE PATH OF ISRA'ILIIYAT," *Ahkam Jurnal Hukum Islam Dan Humaniora* 4, no. 2 (2025): 662–74, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.58578/ahkam.v4i2.6335>.

¹⁰ Mahbub Ghozali, "The Shifting Use of *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Qur'anic Exegesis and Its Implications on The Comprehension of the Verses on Jālūt and Ṭālūt Story," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 25, no. 1 (2024): 40–53, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v25i1.5575>; Lukman Nul Hakim et al., "ISRA'ĪLIYYĀT DISCOURSE IN ARCHIPELAGO INTERPRETATION: Bisri Mustafa's Study of The Tafsir Al-Ibriz," *Al-Tahrir: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 23, no. 1 (2023): 103–35, <https://doi.org/10.21154/altahrir.v23i1.5383>; Hidayat Aydar, "Isra'Iliyat As an Intercultural KnowledgeBridge and Reflections on the Ottoman Folk Culture," *International Journal of Social Science* 6, no. 8 (2013): 93–109, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.9761/JASSS1954>.

validity of several examples of history that are often used as a reference for interpretation. In the process of analysis, a comparison will be made between the attitude of classical scholars and the views of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH on the history of the Scribes. The results are expected to provide a normative foothold in responding to religious information sourced from outside the authentic Islamic tradition.

Results and Discussion

The Qur'anic Perspective on the People of the Book and the Transmission of *Isrā'īliyat*

In the Islamic understanding, *the People of the Book* is a term that refers to religious groups that have accepted the book of revelation before the revelation of the Qur'an, especially Jews and Christians. This group is considered to have a special position because they acknowledge the existence of the One God, believe in the previous prophets, and believe in the last days. Therefore, the Qur'an often distinguishes between the People of the Book and the polytheists. Classical scholars such as Ibn 'Aṭīyah¹¹ and Al-Qurṭubī¹² state that the People of the Book in the verses of the Qur'an are the Jews and Christians who continue to embrace their religion. In this view, they are valued for having brought much good in their faith, even though they do not acknowledge the prophethood of Muhammad. In fact, some scholars from the Hanafi school have expanded this definition to include adherents of other religions who are considered to still have the *book of samawīy* such as Zabur, Suhuf Nabi Ibrahim, and Suhuf Nabi Shiz.¹³ However, most scholars limit the meaning of the Book to the Children of Israel, namely the descendants of the Prophet Ya'qūb, who claim that it is only from them that the prophet and the holy book were revealed.¹⁴

This term comes from the pronunciation of *Ahlun* which means family, group, or community that has special ties, and is used in the form of *the phrase Ahlul Kitab* to refer to them as the heirs of previous books. This mention appears 31 times in the Qur'an, with the dominance of Madaniyah verses. This reflects the intensity of the interaction between the Prophet and Muslims with the community of Scribes in Medina.¹⁵ The Qur'an gives a diverse picture of the People of the Book: some verses show a sympathetic approach, such as in Al-

¹¹ Ibn 'Aṭīyah, *Al-Muḥarrar Al-Wajīz Fī Tafsīr Al-Kitāb Al-'Azīz* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1422). J.4, 230.

¹² Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Al-Anṣarīy Al-Qurṭubīy, *Al-Jāmi' Li Aḥkām Al-Qur'ān* (Mesir: Dār al-Kutub Al-Miṣriyah, 1964). J.13, 350.

¹³ Muhammad Quraish Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Mawdu'ī Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat* (Bandung: Mizan, 2004).367

¹⁴ Suad Nori Ali, "Al-Jadl Al-'Aqdi Ma'a Ahli Al-Kitab Surah Ali 'Imran Anamudzaj" (Turki: Aksaray Universiti, 2020).15.

¹⁵ Shihab, *Wawasan Al-Qur'an: Tafsir Mawdu'ī Atas Pelbagai Persoalan Umat*. 458.

'Ankabut verse 46,¹⁶ which invites dialogue in a good way and acknowledges the values of goodness in some of those who still hold monotheism and do righteous deeds. However, the majority of the other verses contain harsh criticism of their deviation from the teachings of the scriptures, their stubbornness, and their hostility towards the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims.¹⁷

This attitude was based on their recognition of the basic values of Tawheed and the existence of Divine revelation, even though they had not yet accepted the apostolate of Muhammad. However, this lenient attitude does not apply indefinitely. When some of the People of the Book, such as the Banu Quraizhah in the Battle of Ahzab, commit treason against the Prophet and the Muslims, then decisive and even military action is justified by revelation, as stated in QS. Al-Aḥzāb (33): 26 and QS. Al-Ḥasyr (59): 11. In this context, the People of the Book are judged not only on the basis of their theology, but also on the basis of their socio-political actions towards the Muslims.

Furthermore, in QS. Al-Ḥadid (57:29), the Qur'an strongly rejects the claims of exclusivity of the Children of Israel who believe that only they are entitled to revelation and prophethood. This verse affirms that Allah's gift is fully in His hands and can be given to whomever He wills, including the Prophet Muhammad who is not of the descendants of the Children of Israel.¹⁸ The rejection of the prophethood of Muhammad by most of the Scribes became an important limitation in their spiritual relationship with the Muslims. On the one hand, they are still valued for their recognition of God and His books, but on the other hand, their denial of the prophethood of Muhammad is seen as a form of rejection of the continuity of revelation itself.

Overall, the People of the Book are seen as a complex group they are in a position between not being completely in line with Islam, but also not completely equating with the polytheists. Therefore, the relationship of Muslims with them needs to be lived wisely, selectively, and full of contextual considerations. The principles of polite dialogue, wise da'wah, and fair treatment are the main foundations in interacting with them. However, firmness must still be taken when there is an act of betrayal or apparent hostility. This approach shows that Islam is not only inclusive and tolerant, but also realistic in reading the socio-political dynamics faced by the ummah in its history.

¹⁶ Faḥru Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib Al-Ghaib* (Beirut: Dār Al-Fikr, 1981). Faḥru al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *Maḥāṭib Al-Ghaib* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981). J.25, 63.

¹⁷ Muslim Djuned and Nazla Mufidah, "Makna Ahli Kitab Dalam Tafsir Al-Manar," *Tafse: Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1–13, <https://jurnal.ar-raniry.ac.id/index.php/tafse>.

¹⁸ Nāṣir Al-Dīn Abū Sa'īd Al-Baiḍāwī, *Anwār Al-Tanzil Wa Asrār Al-Ta'wil* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1418). J.5, 191, see also, Syams Al-Dīn Muḥammad bin Aḥmad Al-Khaṭīb Al-Syarbīnīy, *Al-Sirāj Al-Munīr Fi Al-I'ānah 'Alā Ma'Rifati Ba'di Ma'ānī Kalāmi Rabbīnā Al-Ḥakīm Al-Khabīr* (Mesir: Maṭba'ah Būlāq, 1285). J.4, 218.

The Scribe in the Islamic view refers to Jews and Christians who received divine revelation through earlier books such as the Torah and the Gospel, and are believed to have religious knowledge that has been passed down from generation to generation. Their special position as the owners of previous revelations makes them one of the main sources of *isrā'īliyyat narrations*, namely stories derived from the traditions of the Children of Israel that are included in the interpretation of Islam, especially the interpretation of the Qur'an and the stories of the prophets. Since the earlier mufasir often interacted with the Scribes or with converts from among those who brought knowledge of the previous book, the history of *Isrā'īliyyat* became a medium for the delivery of additional narratives that are not explicitly found in the Qur'an or authentic hadith. Although some of these narrations are accepted as complementary or entertaining, many have been criticized for potentially containing distortions or contradicting the basic principles of Islam. Thus, understanding the definition of the Scribe is not only important in the social and theological context, but also in assessing the validity and position of *the history of isrā'īliyyat* in the treasures of Islamic science.

Linguistically, the word *isrā'īliyyat* is the plural form of *Israiliyyah*, which comes from the word *Israil*, a Hebrew term meaning "servant of God".¹⁹ In Islamic tradition, this name is associated with the Prophet Jacob bin Ishaq bin Ibrahim. Ibn Kathir and other scholars support this identification by referring to a hadith from Abu Dawud, who narrates that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) once asked a group of Jews if they knew that Israel was the Prophet Jacob, and they confirmed it. Over time, the term *Isrā'īliyyat* became very attached to Jewish identity, although it essentially had a broader meaning. *The Children of Israel* refer to the lineage of the Prophet Jacob, while *the Jews* refer more to their religious views, beliefs, and dogmas. According to Ahmad Khalil Arsyad, *isrā'īliyyat* is a collection of stories that come from the people of the book (Jews and Christians), whether related to their religion or not. There is also another view that *isrā'īliyyat* is an adaptation of religious stories from non-Islamic traditions that spread to the Arabian Peninsula, brought by Jews who had long migrated, both to Babylonian territory in the east and to Egypt in the west.²⁰

Isrā'īliyyat consists of stories attributed to the descendants of the Prophet Ya'qub (the Children of Israel) who professed Judaism. The Qur'an mentions the Children of Israel many times, one of which is in Surah Al-Māidah verse 78, which states that those who disobey are cursed through the words of the Prophet David and Isa son of Mary because of their iniquity and transgression. Scholars

¹⁹ Muḥammad Ḥusain Al-Khallāf, *Al-Yahūdiyyah Wa Al-Masīhiyyah Wa Al-Islām* (Kairo: Al-Mu'assasah Al-Masīhiyyah wa Al-Miṣriyyah, 1962). 14.

²⁰ Badru Al-Dīn Al-'Ainī, *'Umdah Al-Qārī Bi Syarḥi Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* (Bairut: Dār Al-Fikr, n.d.). 129.

of tafsir and hadith extend the meaning of *Isrā'īliyyat* as any form of old story of Jewish, Christian origin, or even artificial narrative inserted into the literature of tafsir and hadith.²¹ These stories can also come from outsiders who are hostile to Islam, with the aim of undermining the faith of the ummah.

In the sense of the term, *isrā'īliyyat* encompasses Jewish traditions derived from the Torah, the Psalms, and hereditary narratives that are full of myths, fairy tales, and superstitions. Jews are a term attached to the followers of the Children of Israel before the birth of the Prophet Jesus, while after that, the followers are called Christians. Both groups are known as scholars of the book, and their stories often enter the Islamic environment, both through those who convert to Islam and those who coexist as *dzimmi*. When Islam entered the phase of codification of tafsir, many *stories of Isrā'īliyyat* were also documented in the books of tafsir, although not as a source of law or creed. These stories are more often used as illustrative complements, especially in the narratives of the prophets of the Children of Israel. Although some of them can be justified, in general *Isrā'īliyyat* contains elements that are contrary to the values of Islamic teachings.²²

The emergence of *isrā'īliyyat* in Islamic treasures began with social dynamics when Islam began to develop and many people from various nations converted to Islam. Some of them entered with sincere intentions, but others brought with them culture, traditions, and religious narratives from previous religions. Moreover, when Jews and Christians converted to Islam or coexisted as *dzimmi*, they also relayed stories from their holy books; such as the Torah and the Gospel, in a more detailed form than those mentioned in the Qur'an. These stories were then relayed to the Prophet's companions and spread among the Muslims. Some of the Companions accept these stories as far as they do not concern creed or law. The Prophet himself has reminded Muslims not to directly justify or deny information from scholars of the book, but to be neutral (*tawāqquf*) unless there is confirmation from the Qur'an or authentic hadith. The spread of *Isrā'īliyyat* was also strengthened by the migration and association of the Jews who had long spread to various Arab regions and brought with them various religious narratives that later included in the interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an.

Isrā'īliyyat in Qur'anic Interpretation and the Principles of Verification

Scholars of interpretation have different views on the use of the history of *isrā'īliyyat* in the interpretation of the Qur'an. Ibn Katsīr, for example, classifies *isrā'īliyyat* into three types: first, which is in accordance with the teachings of Islam and supported by the evidence of the Shari'i, and is therefore acceptable; second, which is clearly contrary to the Shari'a, so it must be rejected; and third, whose status is unclear, then the best attitude is *that tawāqqūf* is not directly accepted or

²¹ Muḥammad Ḥusain Al-Dzahabīy, *Isrā'īliyyāt Fī Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Ḥadīth* (Kairo: Majallat al-Azhar, 1968). 9.

²² Shalahuddin Hamid, *Study Ulum Al-Qur'an* (Jakarta: Intimedia, 2002). 350.

rejected, although it is still permissible to narrate.²³ A similar approach is taken by al-Dzahabi, who emphasizes the importance of verification of sanad and conformity with reason and *nash syar'i* as a benchmark in responding to *isrā'īliyat*. He added that if a narration is believed to come from a trusted companion, then it is more acceptable because the companions are known to be more careful in taking information from the scribes than the *tabi'in* after him.²⁴

Ibn al-'Arabī takes a more cautious approach, assessing not only the content of the news but also the credibility of the narrator before narrating the story of the Book Scholar.²⁵ Meanwhile, Ibn Taymiyyah stated that many of the stories in the commentary are speculative and unnecessary, and if the source comes from the Scribes without confirmation from the Shari'a, then it must be dealt with with a neutral attitude as the Prophet commanded: neither justifying nor denying;

فَهَذِهِ الْأُمُورُ طَرِيقَةُ الْعِلْمِ بِهَا لِلنَّفْلِ، فَمَا كَانَ مِنْهَا مَنُفَوَّلًا لِنَفْلٍ صَاحِبًا عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قُبُلًا، وَمَا لَا - نَنْتَقِلُ
عَنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ كَكُفِّبٍ وَوَهَبٍ - وَقَفَ عَنْ تَصْدِيقِهِ وَتَكْذِيبِهِ؛ لِقَوْلِهِ صَلَّى عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ: " إِذَا حَدَّثَكُمْ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ فَلَا
تُصَدِّقُوهُمْ وَلَا تُكْذِبُوهُمْ

Rashid Riḍā understood that Ibn Taymiyyah's attitude was intended to reject the claim of absolute truth to the history of *isrā'īliyat*, but still opened the possibility of acceptance if the story was in accordance with Islamic principles.²⁶

Muhammad 'Abduh, although he warned of the danger of influencing the stories of the Scribes, kept open the possibility of using their narration as long as it did not contradict the logic and postulates of the Qur'an.²⁷ In fact, in *Tafsīr al-Manār*, he and Rashīd Riḍā quoted the contents of the Torah and the Gospels to clarify the verses of the Qur'an as long as the content of the quotations did not violate religious principles.²⁸ Al-Biqā'ī also justifies the use of verses from the holy book of the People of the Book as an interpreter, as long as there is reinforcement from the Qur'an. On the other hand, al-Qāsimī tends to be skeptical of *isrā'īliyat* because of the contradictions and lies in their traditions that are still circulating.²⁹ In general, scholars agree that the history of *isrā'īliyat* should not be used as a source of law and creed, but only as a complement to a narrative that must be carefully filtered. They remind that acceptance of *Isrā'īliyat* must be

²³ 'Imād Al-Dīn Abū Al-Fidā' Ismā'īl bin 'Umar bin Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān Al-'Aẓīm* (Lebanon: Dār Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyah, 1998). J.3:13.

²⁴ Al-Dzahabīy, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrūn*. 179-180.

²⁵ Muḥammad Ḥusain Al-Dzahabīy, *Tafsīr Ibn 'Arabīy Li Al-Qur'ān Ḥaḥiqatuhu Wa Khaṭruhu* (Madinah: Jāmi'ah Al-Islāmiyah, n.d.). 246.

²⁶ Rasyīd Ridho, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'an Al-Ḥakīm* (Mesir: Maṭba'ah al-Miṣrīyah, 1926). J. 1:9.

²⁷ Ridho. J.1, 288.

²⁸ Ridho. J.1, 17.

²⁹ Jāmal Al-Dīn Al-Qāsimīy, *Maḥasīn Al-Ta'wīl* (Beirut: Dār Al-Kutub Al-'Ilmiyah, 1418). J.1:45-47.

based on prudence, credibility of sources, and conformity with the values of Islamic teachings. This approach reflects the firmness of scholars in maintaining the authenticity of interpretation from the influence of external narratives that have the potential to damage the purity of revelation.

Caution and Verification in Transmitting the Stories of the People of the Book

The exposition of the history of the scribes shows significant differences between the Qur'an and earlier books, such as the Torah and the Gospels, in terms of the presentation of important stories. The Qur'an tends to prioritize the clarity of the core and essence of the story without revealing unnecessary details. For example, in the story of Adam, the Qur'an does not mention the location of heaven, the type of forbidden tree, or the role of the serpent in the temptation of Eve, while the Torah gives a more detailed explanation of all these elements. In the beginning, the companions of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) were very selective in accepting the narrations of the scribes, choosing only those that did not contradict the principles of Islam. However, during the *tabi'in* period, with many people from among the scholars of the book who embraced Islam, there was an increase in acceptance of these narrations. This has led to the *isrā'īliyat narration* increasingly being found in tafsir, although not all of them are reliable or consistent with the teachings of the Qur'an.³⁰

In the study of tafsir, there is a significant difference between authentic and weak narrations, both in terms of sources and validity. As explained in the existing texts, books of tafsir often contain a variety of narrations, both valid (true) and invalid or even invalid (false). This reminds us of the basic principle in the science of interpretation that the knowledge received must come from a clear source, namely the knowledge transmitted by the prophet *ma'sum* (preserved from error) or the knowledge that has strong and accountable evidence.

For example, some disagreements among the *mufassir* regarding details that have no valid basis, such as the color of Ashabul Kahfi's dog, the type of cow that Moses beaten, or the wood material used to build Noah's ark, are examples of histories that cannot be used as a basis for truth without clear evidence. Such narrations, although sometimes quoted in the commentary, cannot be taken for granted without adequate verification. In fact, some of these narrations are often from scribes, such as those quoted from Jewish or Christian sources, which should be treated with caution.

³⁰ Muhammad Umar Al-Ḥājī, *Mawṣū'at Al-Tafsīr Qabla 'Ahd Al-Tadwīn* (Damaskus: Dār al-Maktabah, 2007). 275.

In this case, the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) provides an important guide in responding to the news from the scholars of the book as narrated by Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal³¹

إِذَا حَدَّثَكُمْ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ فَلَا تُصَدِّقُوهُمْ وَلَا تَنْكَرِبُوهُمْ، وَقُولُوا: آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَكُتِبَ وَرُسُلِهِ، فَإِنْ كَانَ حَقًّا لَمْ تُكْذِبُوهُمْ، وَإِنْ كَانَ كَذِبًا لَمْ تُصَدِّقُوهُمْ

If you hear the narration of the scribes, then do not believe them or deny them, for they may tell the truth that you reject, or the lies that you believe.

This hadith of the Prophet emphasizes the importance of being cautious in receiving information from them. This is closely related to the position of *the Ahl al-Kitāb* in Islam, namely the Yahūd and Naṣrānī who are recognized as the recipients of previous revelations, but often carry religious traditions and stories that are not always in harmony with the teachings of Islam. In this context, the narrations of *isrā'iliyyāt* derived from figures such as Ka'b al-Aḥbār or Wahb ibn Munabbih should be rigorously examined before being accepted in tafsīr, since they are not *ma'ṣūm narrators* and their narrations are often not accompanied by *strong sanad*.

In the study of interpretation, the principle that true knowledge is derived from a *ma'ṣūm* prophet or from a trusted narrator is the main benchmark in determining the validity of a narration. Therefore, the narration of *Ahl al-Kitāb* cannot be taken for granted without clear and verifiable evidence. Even if the narration is narrated by a *tābi'īn*, caution is still needed, as not all *tābi'īn* words can be made *ḥujjah*, especially if there are differences of opinion between them or if they are known to take a lot of narration from non-Islamic sources. On the contrary, the narration of the *ṣaḥābah* takes precedence because of their closeness to the Prophet Muḥammad and their steadfastness in maintaining the authenticity of the teachings of Islam. Thus, a selective and critical attitude towards *the narrations of the Ahl al-Kitāb* becomes very important in maintaining the purity of the tafsīr of the Qur'ān, as well as in distinguishing between *ṣaḥīḥ revelations* and additional stories that have the potential to deviate from the basic principles of Islamic teaching.³² It should be noted that the principle of caution in accepting the narration of the scribe is not only limited to general information, but also includes narration related to virtue (*fadilah*) or special practices in Islam. We are also taught not to rush to accept or reject information from them without clear verification. This shows the importance of wisdom in filtering history, especially as it relates to the virtues of charity.

³¹ Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal, *Musnad Īmām Aḥmad Bin Ḥanbal* (ttp: Maktabah al-Risalah, 2001). J.28, .460.

³² Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Sa'īd al-Ḥanafī Al-Makkī, *Al-Ziyādah Wa Al-Iḥsān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* (Markaz al-Buḥūth wa al-Dirāsāt, 1427). J.7, 418.

In the context of the history of the virtues of worship that are considered weak or invalid, there is a prohibition to determine or specialize a charity in a certain way or time without a solid basis from nash shar'i. For example, if there is a history that mentions praying at a certain time with a certain reading or in a certain place that does not have a clear legal basis, then it should not be accepted just like that. This is because the determination of the virtues of such charity can only be done if there is strong evidence to support it. On the other hand, if there is a narration that says that remembering Allah in the market is something that is sunnahnah, then it is acceptable because it is in accordance with the authentic teachings of Islam and provides real benefits to Muslims.³³

This difference also confirms that the narration that comes from the companions is much more acceptable than the narration of the tabi'in, because the companions are closer to the original source (the Prophet (peace be upon him) and are less likely to be influenced by external influences such as the narration of the scribes. In this case, the validity of the narration of the companions is more assured, because they are more likely to receive information directly from the Prophet Muhammad (saw) or from people who heard it directly from him. Therefore, the history of the companions is often considered stronger and more reliable than the history of tabi'in, which often relies on indirect sources, including from the scribes.³⁴ Overall, the approach applied in criticizing the narration of the scholars of the book and related to the virtues of charity is selective and cautious, and must always be based on authentic shari'a evidence. Clarity of sources and evidence is indispensable to ensure that what is accepted does not contradict the Islamic principles that have been established in the Qur'an and authentic Hadith.

In another hadith narrated by Imam Bukhari from Abdullah bin Amr, the Prophet PBUH said:

بَلِّغُوا عَنِّي وَلَوْ آيَةً، وَحَدِّثُوا عَن بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ وَلَا حَرَجَ، وَمَن كَذَبَ عَلَيَّ مُتَعَمِّدًا فَلْيَتَّبِعُوا مَقْعَدَهُ مِنَ النَّارِ³⁵

Tell me even one verse, and tell me about the Children of Israel without sin, and whoever lies in my name wilfully, let him prepare his place in Hell.

This hadith shows the importance of conveying true knowledge and information, but also provides flexibility in conveying the story of the Children of Israel, as long as it does not lead to lies or deviations from the truth. However, in the context of the narration of the book, even though the Prophet PBUH relieved to tell the narration of the book, he still reminded us not to immediately believe it

³³ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Abī Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh Al-Tabrīzī, *Al-Kāfi Fī ‘Ulūm Al-Ḥadīth* (Al-Ardan: al-Dār al-Athariyyah, 2008). 247.

³⁴ Al-Tabrīzī. 248.

³⁵ Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad bin Ismā‘īl Al-Bukhārī, *Shahih Bukhārī* (Damsyiq: Dār Ibnu Kathīr, 1993). J.3, 1275.

or deny it. This shows that although information from the scribes is permissible, we should be careful in judging its truthfulness, and not take it without critical judgment.

If there is no valid evidence that strengthens or refutes the narration, then we are forbidden to consider it as absolute truth. Because, in the absence of clear evidence, the history can only be treated as acceptable information, but it does not have to be believed. In this case, the advantage of listening to the narration of the scribes is to provide cognitive or understanding benefits, but at the same time keep from falling into unfounded confessions of truth. Thus, the Prophet PBUH emphasized the balance between receiving useful information and filtering out what is acceptable and what needs to be questioned. Therefore, information that comes from scholars of the book, even if it is permissible to be conveyed, should not be taken for granted without further verification, and we must always be careful not to fall into deviations from the teachings of Islam that have been established in the Qur'an and authentic Hadith.³⁶

Conclusion

The history of *isrā'iliyāt* is an inevitable part of the history of Qur'anic interpretation, especially in the context of the explanation of the stories of the prophets and the previous people. Its presence is closely related to the role of the Ahl al-Kitāb who converted to Islam in the early days, as well as the cultural and intellectual interaction between the Muslim and non-Muslim communities. However, not all of these histories can be taken for granted. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH has inherited the principle of *tawaqquf* in responding to the news from Ahl al-Kitāb, which is not to justify and not deny their history, unless there is support from authentic revelation. This principle then becomes an important epistemological guideline in maintaining the integrity of interpretation and purity of faith.

Classical and modern scholars have a wide range of approaches to *isrā'iliyāt*, from the permissive to the highly critical. In general, they agree that this kind of narration should not be used as a basis for law or belief, but can only be used narratively and illustratively with strict conditions: it does not contradict the Shari'a, it does not degrade the dignity of the prophets, and it comes from a path of narration that can be accounted for. Therefore, a disciplined method of sanad and matan criticism is needed, as well as a contextual understanding of the historical role of Ahl al-Kitāb in the transmission of religious knowledge. This study confirms that a selective and critical attitude towards the history of Ahl al-Kitāb remains relevant in the contemporary context, in the midst of the rampant exchange of narratives across cultures and religions. With a proportionate scholarly approach, Muslims can harness the narrative value of *Isrā'iliyyāt's*

³⁶ Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn Al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ Al-Targhīb Wa Al-Tarhīb* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', 2000). 57.

history without having to sacrifice the authority of revelation and the principles of pure Islamic theology.

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