Beliefs about Prophet ʿĪsā in Islam: A Critical Refutation of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad’s Claims in the Light of Qur’ān and Sunnah

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Abstract: This paper looks into some of the claims made by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyani against the Prophet ʿĪsā (as). Mirza’s claims were not only discourteous to ʿĪsā (as), but were also not in line with the fundamental beliefs propagated by Islam. The Qur’ān and Sunnah has emphasized ʿĪsā’s Prophet-hood, his reverence, his miracles, his ascending and his descending as the promised messiah. The mainstream Sunnī School namely the Ahl Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah base their position on these deliberations. Early tafsīr works such as Ibn Jarîr al-Ṭabarî’s Tafsīr al-Ṭabarî, al-Nasafi’s Madārik al-Tanzîl wa Haqâiq al-Ta’wil, and major hadith sources are referred to in exposing the mainstream position of Islam and concomitantly refuting Mirza’s claims.

Keywords: Qadiyani, Prophet ʿĪsā, tafsīr, Qur’ān, Sunnah.

Introduction

In the 19th century, most of the Muslim world had lost their native identity to Western civilization particularly in the Indian sub-continent. Muslims were facing political, social
and faith-related challenges emanating from various quarters. Western civilization dominated so much that it put the population in doubt about their own faith and identity. Progress of the “natives” were halted in general and Muslims in particular. Different missionaries, including Christians and Aryans, were playing their role in order to convert Muslims to their religions. (Nadvi, n. d.) At the end of the 19th century, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiyani (d. 1908) pushed the Muslim confusion to its peak when he proposed a new brand of Islam and initiated an active movement to propagate it. Under the rubric of moderation and reformulation of the Muslim society, he denied many teachings of Islam which have been held fast by the Muslims for over 1,300 years. In this march, he claimed to be a mujaddid (reviver of Islam), mahdī (guided one) and the promised Messiah awaited by the Muslims to reform the Ummah.

After looking at the different phases of Mirza’s life, we find that he made various claims at each phase inconsistent in nature. At times he claimed to be Maryam (as), at times to be ‘Īsā (as) and at times claimed for his own prophecy. Mirza while claiming to be a messenger of Allah used defamatory and insulting remarks for Prophet ‘Īsā (as). Whereas before this, he believed that Prophet ‘Īsā (as) was raised to the heaven and will descend near to the day of resurrection (qiyyâmah).

This paper concentrates on Mirza’s claims related to Prophet ‘Īsā (as). It attempts to analyze the claims in light of the primary sources of Islam namely the Qur’ān and the Sunnah. For a fair approach, the claims are taken from Mirza’s own works. The paper presents these claims followed by an analytical discussion.

Ten Claims of Mirza

1. “Allah has sent the promised Messiah (Mirza) for the Ummah who is superior to the previous Messiah [‘Īsā (‘alayh al-salām)] in all his status”. (Qadiyani, 1902)
2. “Allah has sent the promised Messiah [me] to this Ummah who is superior to the previous Messiah in every sense. I swear upon the One who owns my life, if Messiah son of Maryam was present in my time, he would not be able to perform miracles that I can and he would not be able to show signs that are emerging from me”. (Qadiyani, 1907)
3. “When Allah, His Messenger, and all Prophets due to the last Messiah’s record of activities declared him superior, then asking “Why do you claim yourself to be superior than ‘Īsā (as), son of Maryam?” is Satan’s whisper”. (Qadiyani, 1907)
4. “Other than fraud and cheating, there was nothing in the hands of ‘Īsā (as)”. (Qadiyani, 1984)
5. “It should be remembered that ‘Īsā (as) was habitual to lying”. (Qadiyani, 1984)
6. “Ancestors of ‘Īsā (as) were very sacred and pure [a sarcastic remark]. His three maternal and three paternal grandmothers were adulteresses and loose (Kasbī) women. From this bloodline, ‘Īsā (as) came into existence”. (Qadiyani, 1984)
7. “...’Isā (as)’s friendship with the prostitutes was because of his grandmother’s relation in the middle. Otherwise, a pious man will not allow a shameless woman to touch his head with her impure hands, rub perfume earned by prostitution on his head, rub her hair on his feet. For one who can comprehend can imagine what kind of character this man ‘Isā (as) can have”. (Qadiyani, 1984)

8. “The grandfather of ‘Isā (as), Dāwūd (as) committed all types of evil deeds. He killed an innocent man deceitfully for his sexual desires. He sent female pimps to bring the wife of that man, got her drunk and had sex with her. In this way, he spent lots of money on illegal acts”. (Qadiyani, n. d.)

9. “[The Arabic word] “tawaffa” is confined to the meaning of death”.

10. ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Abbās (ra) interpreted the word “mutawaffa” as “mumīt” (dead).

Discussion on Mirza’s claims

In the above claims Mirza disrespected Prophet ‘Isā (as) and his noble family tremendously and defamed them. He also denied the miracles of ‘Isā (as) mentioned in the Qur’ān. He showed his superiority over Prophet ‘Isā (as), openly. He even went to the extent saying, “other than fraud and cheating, there was nothing in the hands of ‘Isā (as)”. He denied the ascending of ‘Isā (as) and argued that the word ‘tawaffa’ which has been used in the holy Qur’ān means death and illustrated that ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Abbās (ra) interpreted the word ‘mutawaffa’ as mumīt (dead).

On the other hand, from an Islamic perspective, Prophets and Messengers are the appointed vicegerents (khulafā’ sing. khalīfah) of Almighty Allah. It is necessary for the Messenger or the Prophet to have high respect for other Prophets. Allah mentions Prophet ‘Isā (as) in many verses in the Qur’ān. His miracles, different stages of his life from his birth to raising him to the heaven and his second coming near the end of time (Day of Resurrection) are found in the Qur’ān and Sunnah. We shall discuss and analyze the claims of Mirza in the light of the latter two.

Prophet ‘Isā (as) and His Mother Maryam in the Qur’ān

Allah has selected and purified Maryam (PBUH), mother of Prophet ‘Isā (as) from the noble family of ‘Imrān who were known as pious people in the community. Allah says in the Holy Qur’ān:

Behold! The Angels said: "O Mary! Allah has chosen you and purified you- chosen you above the women of all nations. "O Mary! Worship your Lord devoutly: Prostrate yourself, and bow down (in prayer) with those who bow down." (al-Qur’ān, 3:42-43)

Imām Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH) quoted a hadith reported by Imām al-Bukhārī (d. 256 AH) in the commentary of this verse that Maryam bint ‘Imrān and Khadijah bint Khuwaylid are the best women of Jannah. In another hadith, Āsiyah wife of Fir‘awn and
Fāṭimah bint Muhammad (ra) are among them. It is also stated in some other report that these four women are the perfect women of the world. (Al-Ṭabarî, 1997) Imām al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) quoted a hadith reporting Prophet Muhammad (saw) saying that Khadijah (ra) had been given the superiority in his Ummah as Maryam was given superiority above all women of the world. (al-Suyūṭī, 1990)

Adding onto this, the miracle of Allah had been bestowed upon Prophet ʻĪsā (as) when his mother became pregnant despite not copulating with any man. Allah has mentioned the whole story of Maryam and her pregnancy in the Qur’ān:

Relate in the Book (the story of) Mary, when she withdrew from her family to a place in the East. She placed a screen (to screen herself) from them; then We sent to her our angel, and he appeared before her as a man in all respects. She said: "I seek refuge from you to (Allah) Most Gracious: (come not near) if you do fear Allah." (al-Qur’ān, 19: 16-18)

In these verses mentioned above, Almighty Allah discusses a period of Maryam’s life explaining how she left her people and went into privacy for some time in a private eastern chamber for prayer and devotion. The angel appeared to her in this state of purity. The famous Qur’ān scholar, Imām Ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarî (d. 310 AH) in his commentary stated that when Angel Jibrīl appeared to her in the shape of man; she showed her modesty and fear of Allah in order to protect herself from any mishap. Angel Jibrīl told her that he is a Messenger of Allah and came to give her glad tidings. (al-Ṭabarî, 1997)

This story line is repeated in the Qur’ān in various verses such as verse 42 to 51 of al-Nisā’ (3: 42-51). Interestingly the theme of the story of Maryam in the ongoing verse is different from the verses of al-Nisā’. The theme here is to disclose the personal experience of Maryam as a worshiper of Allah, her piety and purity. The verses reveal that Maryam was destined to become the mother of the Prophet Jesus Christ. (al-Qur’ān, 19: 16-18)

In contrary to this, Mirza denied the uniqueness of Maryam. Almighty Allah described in the Qur’ān that Allah has chosen her over all other women of the world. Mirza alleges:

“See this is a big objection that Maryam was given to the Hykal so that she would be the servant of Baitul Maqdis and will not marry for whole life. However, when she became six months pregnant, the elder people of the community forced her to marry a carpenter named Yusuf due to her pregnancy. After spending two months in his house she delivered a baby boy. This baby was named ‘Isa or Messiah. (Qadiyani, 1906)

After forging a non-revered picture of Maryam and ʻĪsā (as), Mirza claimed that there was not even a single miracle in the hands of Prophet ʻĪsā (as). He framed the miracles of ʻĪsā (as) as ‘cheating’ and ‘deceiving’ acts. The Qur’ān itself is the argument against Mirza as it discloses the chastity of Maryam and the miracles of Prophet ʻĪsā (as).
Miracles of ‘Īsā (as)

‘Īsā (as): The Word of Allah

There were many miracles which had been bestowed upon Prophet ‘Īsā (as). He was born from Virgin Maryam whereby Allah informed her about his unique attributes in her pregnancy and told her that he was sent to the children of Isrā’îl as a Messenger of Allah; he was given the name of Messiah. The Holy Qur’ān (al-Nisā’ 4: 171) states:

Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) a messenger of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His messengers. (al-Qur’ān, 4:171)

Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī in the commentary of the following verse stated that Messiah was the son of Maryam, not the son of God as some of the extreme people of the Book believe. Thus, Allah emphasized on his name and called him with his mother’s name; Messiah son of Maryam. (al-Ṭabarī, 1997)

Speaking in Infancy

Another miracle of Prophet ‘Īsā (as) was speaking while still a baby in the cradle. After giving birth to Prophet ‘Īsā (as), Maryam went to her people, carrying him in a cradle. People started throwing abuses at her. However, Allah asked her not to speak and informed her that Prophet ‘Īsā (as) will speak on her behalf from the cradle. Allah states in the Qur’ān:

But she pointed to the baby. They said: "How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?" He said: "I am indeed a servant of Allah: He has given me Revelation and made me a Prophet" (al-Qur’ān, 19: 29-30)

Speaking from the cradle in the state of infancy was the miracle of Prophet ‘Īsā (as). Imām al-Bukhārī on the authority of Abū Hurayrah reported that the Prophet Muḥammad (saw) said: “None spoke in the cradle but three. The first was Jesus....” Imām al-Nasafī (d. 537 AH) commented that the first thing Prophet ‘Īsā (as) pronounced was his gratitude to Allah, and he admitted the sovereignty of Allah and said that he was the servant of God and was bestowed with the Kitāb (Injīl). (al-Nasafī, n. d.)

Mirza’s insults to Prophet ‘Īsā (as) accusing him to be impure does not carry any weight. His accusation is easily deemed false when verses of Almighty Allah are presented in its defense. The verses are self-revealing for ‘Īsā (as)’s miracles and purity.

‘Īsā’s (as) other Miracles

We discussed three miracles of Prophet ‘Īsā (as); his birth from Virgin Maryam, speaking from the cradle and becoming the Messenger of Allah by birth. These miracles are sufficient to demolish the claims of Mirza made against him. However, there are many other miracles shown through ‘Īsā (as) as Allah Almighty says:
And (appoint him) a Messenger to the Children of Israel, (with this message): "I have come to you, with a Sign from your Lord, in that I make for you out of clay, as it were, the figure of a bird, and breathe into it, and it becomes a bird by Allah's leave: And I heal those born blind, and the lepers, and I quicken the dead, by Allah's leave; and I declare to you what you eat, and what you store in your houses. Surely therein is a Sign for you if you did believe". (al-Qur'ān, 3: 49)

Prophet ʿĪsā (as) was an eminent and distinguished Messenger of Allah. He could perform miracles with the will of Allah as stated in the aforementioned verses. He could breathe soul into a bird made out of clay, he could heal lepers, cure those who were blind since birth, and could give life to the dead. Al-Ṭabarî says there was no cure for leprosy and blindness at that time. Thus, these miracles were given to Prophet ʿĪsā (as) in order to prove his Prophecy. Nevertheless, denying his miracles and abusing him is like rejecting the verses of the Holy Qur'ān itself. Imám al-Suyūṭî and al-Nasafî wrote that Prophet ʿĪsā (as) gave life to Sam the son of Prophet Nūḥ (as) with the will of Allah. Moreover, he could tell people what they ate and what they stored in their houses as Allah has mentioned in the above verse. (al-Ṭabarî, 1997)

Mirza denied that Prophet ʿĪsā (as) had the miracle of making a bird out of clay as Allah mentioned in the above verse. He said that this belief is not only erroneous but the fact that Messiah could make a bird out of clay and blow soul into it was idolatry in nature (mushrikana). He claimed that this was just a game. It was just the bird of clay enhanced with the help of soul (rūḥ) similar to the incident of ʿṢamīrî and Prophet Musa (as) mentioned in the Qur’ān (20: 95). (Qadiyani, 1308 A.H)

**Descending of Prophet ʿĪsā (as)**

In addition to our ongoing discussion, it seems appropriate to bring to light the arguments of Mirza about Prophet ʿĪsā (as) descending to earth close to the Day of Judgment. Mirza’s early writings unveiled that he used to believe that Prophet ʿĪsā (as) will return near the end of time. He supported this position as shown in his book *Izālat Awhām*. Mirza writes:

This is not hidden that the prediction of second coming of Prophet ʿĪsā (as) is a first order prediction, it has been accepted by all collectively. These predictions are supported by the Şahih sources (the most authentic collections on hadîth) no other sources are comparable to it. It has the highest position of uninterrupted transmission (tawâtûr). *Injîl* (Bible) also approves it. (Qadiyani, 1308 A.H)

In the statement above, Mirza admitted the return of ʿĪsā (as) and he discussed the authenticity of the prediction which cannot be compared to any other prediction due to its uninterrupted transmission status. It has been accepted by all collectively. However, in the same book *Izālat al-Awhām* he diminished the certainty of these predictions by claiming that:
The belief of the second coming of Prophet ‘Īsā (as) is not part of Islam, nor it is the fundamentals of Islam. It is (just) a prediction from hundreds of predictions. It has no relation with Islam. (Qadiyani, 1308 A.H)

Lastly, he claimed that Prophet ‘Īsā (as) will never come again and he died in Sri Nagar, Kashmir. He says that “Remember, ‘Īsā will never descend”, further on the same page he stated, “Indeed, Messiah had died and his grave is at Mahallah Khanyar in Srinagar”. (Qadiyani, 1902)

The nominal position of Islam is in contra to that of Christians. The Christians believe that Prophet ‘Īsā (as) was crucified by Romans (Matthew 27: 32-61). However, the Qur’ān denies this by stating that:

“That they said (in boast), "we killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah" but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not. Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise. (al-Qur’ān, 4:157-158).

There are two important points to note here. One the nominal position of Muslims to believe in descending of Jesus Christ is based on the Qur’ān and Sunnah; the primary sources of Islam. Whoever claims that Jesus will not descend before the Judgement day have to resort to the belief that he died, whereas the Qur’ān clearly states otherwise. The second point, for a Muslim to believe in the Hereafter is one of the constituent of tawḥīd (unity). It is not an optional matter; hence the creed of a Muslim is incomplete without the belief in Hereafter. One of the milestones of the Hereafter is descending of Jesus in Damascus. The Messenger of Allah in discussion of the Hereafter stated that it will not start unless various signs come true and descending of Jesus is one of those signs. This is sustained by various authentic reports such as the hadith in Ṣaḥḥ Muslim on the authority of Ḥūdhayfah Ibn Usayd al-Ghifārī:

The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) came to us from ‘Arafah as we were discussing the Last Hour. Thereupon he said, “It will not come until you see ten signs first: ..., the descent of Jesus son of Marry....” (Ibn Kathīr, n. d.)

Mirza’s claim to believe in Jesus’ descent is not part of Islam is not true. We saw that based on the Qur’ān and Sunnah, believing in Jesus’ descent is part and parcel of Islam and its belief system (tawḥīd). This has been the position of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah. (Al-Baghdadi, 2004)

Ascending of Prophet ‘Īsā (as) to the Heaven
In one of the above claims, Mirza said that “The Arabic word ‘tawaffa’ is confined to the meaning of death”. Moreover, he claimed that ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Abbās (ra) interpreted the
word ‘mutawaffa’ as ‘mumīt’ (dead). However, in order to analyze the claims of Mirza and to know the actual meaning of the word ‘tawaffa’, we need to see how the word is used in the Qur’ān.

The meaning of ‘tawaffa’ simply means ‘death’ in English. This word ‘tawaffa’ is derived from the verb ‘wafā’ which means to fulfil. It has been used for different meanings in the Qur’ān: taking the self-back to death, making someone sleep or taking someone back to the presence of Allah (in relation to ‘Īsā (as)).

For instance, in chapter al-An‘ām the word ‘tawaffa’ denotes ‘taking back oneself in his sleep’:

> It is He who does take your souls by night (yatawaffākum bi al-layl), and has knowledge of all that you have done by day: by day does He raise you up again; that a term appointed be fulfilled; in the end unto Him will be your return; then will He show you the truth of all that you did. (al-Qur’ān, 6: 60)

The Qur’ānic exegetist, Abū al-Thanā‘ Shihāb al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Ālūsī (d. 1270 AH) in Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī states that the word ‘tawaffa’ has been used here to denote sleep on the basis of Isti‘ārat Ṭab‘iyyah—a metaphor based on common natural features of two things as we see in sleep and death. The meaning is al-Nawm (to sleep) and there is similarity between both death and sleep. People fall short to differentiate between the two phenomenons. (al-Ālūsī, 2001)

The author of al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) explains this verse and says that it is correct to use the word ‘wafāt’ and ‘mawt’ for ‘sleep’ because both situations are similar to each other. In sleeping one does not possess the sense of his actions while in death he loses his senses completely. (al-Rāzī, 1990)

In chapter al-Zumār (39: 42), the word tawaffa has been used to mean death and also sleep. Almighty Allah states:

> It is Allah that takes the souls (of men) at death (Allāh yatawaffā al-anfusa ḥāna mawtiḥā); and those that die not (He takes) during their sleep: those on whom He has passed the decree of death, He keeps back (from returning to life), but the rest He sends (to their bodies) for a term appointed verily in this are Signs for those who reflect.

The mystery of sleep and death is a fascinating enigma, a solution of which is “beyond the ken of man”. Superstition, imaginative, and psychological literature has been written on the subject, “but the simplest and truest religious doctrine is laid down here in a few words. In death we surrender our physical life, but our soul does not die; it goes back to a plane of existence in which it is more conscious of the realities of the spiritual world.” This is what is meant by “Allah takes the soul.” (Yusuf Ali, note 4306-4309)
In light of the verses we quoted, one can understand that Almighty Allah takes back the souls of human beings when they are sleeping. However, He sends back the souls of those whose death is not yet decreed. In this scenario, while sleeping the soul leaves the body for a brief time and when he wakes up, the soul comes back to the body. (Yahya, 2003)

In the same context the word “mutawaffīka (take you)” is used when Almighty Allah says to ʿĪsā (as) in chapter Āl-ʿImrān (3: 55):

Behold! Allah said: "O Jesus! I will take you (mutawaffīka) and raise you to Myself (wa rafiʿuka ilayya) and clear you (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow you superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall you all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein you dispute.

Jesus was charged by the Jews with blasphemy that he claimed to be God or the son of God. Almighty Allah informed Prophet ʿĪsā (as) that He will take him, clear him of such a charge (muṭahhiruka), and will raise him (rafiʿuka) to Himself before the Jews could harm him.

Imām al-Ṭabarī (d. 310 AH) quotes various meanings of the word ‘wafāt’. Some scholars believe that the meaning of ‘wafāt’ is al-Nawm (to make someone asleep) i.e. I make you asleep and raise you (to heaven) while you are sleeping. In addition, Mirza said in his book Izālat Awhām that the meaning of māta (from wafāt) means to sleep. (Qadiyani, 1308 A.H)

Others believe that the word ‘wafāt’ in this verse denotes ‘qabīd’ (to seize someone from somewhere). In this verse, it means, “I seize you alive from the earth and raise you towards Myself from the disbelievers.” Some scholars opine that there is transposition of the conjunctions in this verse known as al-tagām wa al-takhīr in Arabic grammar—preceding and deferring of the conjunctions as Thanvi states in his refutation…. In this case the verse will be interpreted as:

I (Allah) will raise you towards Me, and protect you from disbelievers (from their propaganda as they intend to kill you) and I will give you death in the last days (before the Day of Resurrection) after your descend to the world.

Imām al-Ṭabarī (1997) gives preference to the latter, mostly based on the authentic hadith on the arrival of ʿĪsā (as).

In chapter al-Māʾidah the word “tawaffaytani” is used for “qabāṭani (you seized me)”. Almighty Allah states:

Never said I to them aught except what you did command me to say, to wit, 'worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord'; and I was a witness over them
whilst I dwelt amongst them; when you did take me up you were the Watcher over them, and you are a witness to all things. (al-Qur’ān, 5: 117)

This verse indicates that Almighty Allah informed Prophet ‘Īsā (as) about the deeds and conducts of his nation after taking him to Himself. In this, ‘‘Īsā (as) said to Almighty Allah that he never claimed to his people other than what he was commanded to say: “worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord.” The part of the verse saying “You were watcher over them…” indicates that Almighty Allah informed ‘Īsā (as) the aftermath conduct of his people when He seized him. “And you are the witness to all things” denotes that ‘Īsā (as) only knew the belief of his people until he was amongst them. (al-Ṭabarī, 1997)

From Imām Qurṭubí’s perspective, the word ‘wafat’ consists of three meanings: death, sleep and rising up to Allah as it was done with Prophet ‘Īsā (as). (Yahya, 2003)

As we saw earlier, Mirza moved away from his earlier position towards believing the non-return of Prophet ‘Īsā (as). He said that ‘Īsā (as) died in Sri Nagar, Kashmir. Moreover, he presented evidence to validate his argument. He argued that ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Abbās (ra) interpreted the word ‘mutawaffa’ as mumūt (dead) as mentioned above. The Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā’ah believe that ‘Īsā (as) did not die but ascended to heaven and will return near the end of the world. The Qur’ān and the hadīth of Prophet Muhammad (saw) state clearly that he will return near the end of the world. Now we shall present the view of Ibn ‘Abbās (ra) and discuss the verses of the Qur’ān and hadīth on the arrival of Prophet ‘Īsā (as) before the Day of Resurrection. (Uthmānī, 2008)

Imām al-Suyūṭī (1990) quotes the view of Ibn ‘Abbās (ra) on the following verse (4: 159):

And there is none from the People of the Scripture but that he will surely believe in Jesus before his death (qabla mawtihi). And on the Day of Resurrection he will be against them a witness.

Ibn ‘Abbās (ra) says that people from Ahl al-kitāb (Jews and Christians) will accept ‘Īsā (as) as Allah’s Messenger. The other report from Ibn ‘Abbās (ra) says that: If the third person pronoun in mawtihi (his death) refers to a Jew the meaning will be; people of the book will believe in Prophet ‘Īsā (as) as the Messenger of Allah especially the Jews before his death. In addition to this, other reports of Ibn ‘Abbās (ra) interpret this verse as: A Jew will not die until he believes in Prophet as Allah’s servant and messenger. (Suyūṭī, 1990)

The majority of the Qur’ān exegetists (mufassirūn) believe that the third person pronoun in ‘bihi (him)’ and in ‘mawtihi (his death)’ refers to Prophet ‘Īsā (as). According to this opinion the meaning of the verse will be: “After the arrival of Prophet ‘Īsā (as) from the heaven, the people of the Book will accept him and will believe in him before his death.”
Imâm Ḥasan al-Baṣrî explains that Prophet ‘Īsā (as) is alive now in the presence of Allah and when he descends everyone will believe in him before his death. (al-Ṭabarî, 1997)

This is narrated in the authentic tradition of Prophet Muhammad (Ṣallallāh ‘alayh wa sallām) reported in Ṣaḥīh al-Bukhārî. Prophet Muhammad (saw) said:

"By Him in Whose Hands my soul is, surely (Jesus,) the son of Mary will soon descend amongst you and will judge mankind justly (as a Just Ruler); he will break the Cross and kill the pigs and there will be no Jizyah (i.e. taxation taken from non-Muslims). Money will be in abundance so that nobody will accept it, and a single prostration to Allah (in prayer) will be better than the whole world and whatever is in it." Abû Hurayrah added "If you wish, you can recite (this verse of the Holy Book): “And there is none Of the people of the Scriptures (Jews and Christians) But must believe in him (i.e Jesus as an Apostle of Allah and a human being) Before his death, And on the Day of Judgment He will be a witness against them (4: 159).”

(al-Bukhārî, 1400 A.H)

This hadîth elaborates the meaning of verse 4: 159. Based on the hadîth, one can clearly understand that Prophet ‘Īsā (as) has a significant role to play upon his arrival; to break the cross, to kill the pigs and to demolish the tribute (jizyah).

In chapter al-Zukhrūf (43: 61), Almighty Allah stated ‘Īsā (as) to be the landmark of the Last day. He the Exalted says:

And (Jesus) shall be a Sign (for the coming of) the Hour (of Judgment): therefore have no doubt about the (Hour), but follow Me: this is a Straight Way”.

Another hadîth of al-Bukhârî reports that the Prophet (saw) pointed out that when Prophet ‘Īsā (as) arrives he will perform his prayer behind Imâm Mahdî. He (saw) said:

How happy you all will be when Prophet ‘Īsā (as) will come down and your Imâm (leader) will be from you. (al-Bukhârî, 1400 A.H)

This hadîth in Ṣaḥīh al-Bukhārî is narrated by Abû Hurayrah. The hadîth clearly states that Prophet ‘Īsā (as) will come down to earth and will pray behind an Imâm of Muslims. The hadîth scholars (muhadîthûn) comment that the Imâm here refers to Imâm Mahdî, who will lead the prayer and Prophet ‘Īsā (as) will perform his prayer under the leadership of Imâm Mahdî. This hadîth also distinguishes between Imâm Mahdî and Prophet ‘Īsā (as). Both are two different individuals.

In addition, Imâm al-Suyûtî quotes the hadîth of Prophet Muhammad (saw) that our beloved Prophet (saw) expressed his yearning to meet ‘Īsā (as) and said, “I wish I have a long life and I could meet ‘Īsā Ibn Maryam (as). If I die convey my salâm to him.” (al-Suyûtî, 1990)
In another hadith, the Prophet (saw) disclosed the place where ‘Īsā (as) will descend. He said, “Jesus, son of Mary will descend at the white minaret in the east of Damascus.” (al-Suyūtī, 2000) This hadith is narrated by many muhaddithūn such as Imām Abū Dāwūd, Imām al-Tirmidhī, Imām Aḥmad and so on. All these reports establish the point that Prophet ‘Īsā (as) will arrive from the heaven at the white minaret east of Damascus.

Imām Abū Dāwūd reported Abū Hurayrah’s hadith that the Prophet (saw) said:

There is no Prophet between me and ‘Īsā (as) who will descend. When you see him, recognize him: he is a burly man reddish and white, he would be wearing two colorful cloths as if his head is dripping, although he will not be wet, he will fight people for Islam, he will break the cross and kill the pigs, demolish the jizyah. Allah will destroy all other religions other than Islam, and Allah will kill the falls Messiah at that time, then Prophet ‘Īsā (as) will live forty years and will die; Muslims will pray his death prayer (ṣalāt al-janāzah). (al-Sījistānī, 2009)

Prophet Muhammad (saw) said that ‘Īsā (as) will kill the anti-Christ (Dajjāl) at the door of Lud. (al-Tirmidhī, 2005) The Prophet (saw) also described the life of Prophet ‘Īsā (as). Ibn Ḥajr al-‘Asqalānī reported:

‘Īsa son of Mary will descend to the earth (from heaven), he will marry, he will have children, he will stay forty-five years in this world and die, and he will be buried in my grave with me. Finally, I and ‘Īsa will stand from one grave between Abū Bakr and ‘Umar. (Al-‘Asqalānī, 1422 A.H.)

Mirza did not pull any punches to prove himself as the replica of ‘Īsā (as). In response to Lud hadith, Mirza said that ‘Lud’ is the short form of Ludhiana a city in Punjab, India. Opposing to this, from the very day of this hadith all the Prophet’s companions and Muslim scholars believed that this place is in Damascus. (Qadiyani, 1902)

In another hadith Prophet Muhammad (saw) said that ‘Īsā (as) will descend and will stay for forty years among the people.” (al-Suyūtī, 1990) In addition, Imām al-Suyūtī quotes a hadith narrated by Samurah ibn Jundub that the Prophet (saw) said:

Dajjāl (Anti-Christ) is about to depart he is purblind with his left eye. He will heal lepers and blinds, he will give the life to dead, He will say I am your god, (to reply this) whoever will say you are my god, will be in fitnah (problem), and whoever will say my God is Allah Eternal (hayyūn lā yamūt) would be saved from his fitnah, he will not face any fitnah and punishment from him. He will roam anywhere on the earth with desire. Then, ‘Īsā Ibn Maryam (as) will descend from the West. (According to al-Ṭabarī from the East) verifying Prophet Muhammad (saw) and his religion (Islam), then he will kill Dajjāl (Anti-Christ). Indeed, he is the sign of the Day of Resurrection. (al-Suyūtī, 1990)
Finally, based on the discussions it is crystal clear that Mirza’s claims about Prophet ʿĪsā (as) are his inventions. He made such claims about a distinguished Prophet of Allah in order to prove that he is the Messiah. The verses and the traditions we presented illustrate that Prophet ʿĪsā (as) was an extraordinary Prophet of Allah, born without a father. He was given many miracles including talking while still in the cradle. He was lifted to heaven by the Almighty and will descend near the end of the world. Prophet Muḥammad (saw) did not only give the glad tidings about his descend but also other details about him, such as his descending place, his life, children including his death and his significant work of killing the anti-Christ (Dajjāl), etc. He is a sign of the Day of Resurrection. On the other hand, Mirza not only insulted ʿĪsā (as) and his sacred family with hideous accusations but also denied his ascending and his arrival to the world. Through these claims, Mirza has showed his version of belief and Islam in contra to the Qur’ān and Sunnah.

**The Fatwā of Shaykh Shaltūt and Some Later Sunnī Scholars**

There is no way out in discussing the descending of Prophet ʿĪsā (as) without alluding to the fatwā of Shaykh Shaltūt (d. 1963) of al-Azhar University, and the counter fatwās of other notable scholars of al-Azhar in responding to his views on the issue. According to the record, a Qadyānī (follower of Mirza) forwarded three questions to the rector of al-Azhar, Shaykh Muḥammad Mustāfa al-Marāghī (d. 1945) concerning the coming back of ʿĪsā (as). Al-Marāghī forwarded the questions to Shaykh Shaltūt who was one of the senior council member of Al-Azhar and a prominent student of Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduh. Following were the content of the questions:

1. Is ʿĪsā (as) alive or dead in the light of the Qur’ān and the Sunnah?
2. What is the legal ruling for a Muslim who renounces ʿĪsā (as) to be alive?
3. What will be the legal status of the one who does not believe in ʿĪsā (as) returning and living supposedly he reappeared in this world once again?

Shaykh Shaltūt’s fatwā in responding to these questions created tension and confusion among the Sunnī Muslims both in Egypt and elsewhere. His fatwā refuted the position established by the prophetic tradition that supports the descending of ʿĪsā (as) as one of the sign of the Qiyāmah (End of the world). His fatwā subsumes three focal points:

1. There is no an authentic proof both in the Qur’ān and the Prophetic tradition that is suitable to formulate a belief which appease the heart that ʿĪsā (as) was elevated/raised to the heaven in his earthly body, that indeed he is alive in the heaven until the present time, and that he will descend to this world again near to the Day of judgement.
2. That what is understood from the Qur’ānic verses concerning ascending of ʿĪsā (as) denotes that Allah has taken his life, lifted him to Himself and protected him from his enemies the nonbelievers, and these became a reality. His enemies could not kill him or crucify him, for Allah has taken his life to Himself.
3. That whoever deny that `Īsā (as) is been lifted to the heaven with his earthly body, and he is alive there until now, and that he is returning to this world towards the end of the world (al-Qiyamah), such person should not be considered as a denier of an issue supported by a definitive proof (dalīl qatī`ī). He has not gone out of the abode of Islam and his belief, and his legal status should not consider him as an apostate. He should be considered as a Muslim and a believer. If he dies in this state of denial, he should be treated as a believer and Janāzah prayer will be performed on him. He will be buried in the Muslim grave yard. There is nothing wrong with his belief in the eyes of Allah. Surely, Allah is All-Knowing and All-Seeing of what His servants do. (Shaltūt, 2004)

This fatwā came under fire of the prominent scholars of the time and generated counter-fatwās refuting Shaltūt. Among the refuting scholars was Shaykh al-Islam Muṣṭafā Ṣabrī (d. 1954) the last Shaykh al-Islam of Ottoman Empire, Shaykh Muhammad Zāhīd al-Kawthari (d. 1952) who was the deputy rector of Islamic shaykhdom of Ottoman Empire, and many other prominent scholars of al-Azhar University. In refuting the position of Shaltūt, the scholars alluded to the exegesis of the Qur’ānic verses and the prophetic traditions while dealing with the issue at hand. The verses of concern are in three different chapters of the Holy Qur’ān:

1. Āl-‘Imrān (3: 52—55): Allah says: When Jesus found unbelief on their part he said: "Who will be my helpers to (the work of) Allah?" Said the disciples: "We are Allah's helpers: We believe in Allah, and do thou bear witness that we are Muslims; "Our Lord! We believe in what Thou hast revealed, and we follow the Messenger; then write us down among those who bear witness."; And (the unbelievers) plotted and planned, and Allah too planned, and the best of planners is Allah; Behold! Allah said: "O Jesus! I will take thee and raise thee to Myself and clear thee (of the falsehoods) of those who blaspheme; I will make those who follow thee superior to those who reject faith, to the Day of Resurrection: Then shall ye all return unto me, and I will judge between you of the matters wherein ye dispute.

2. Al-Nisā’ (4: 157—158): Almighty Allah states: That they said (in boast), "We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah"; but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not; Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself; and Allah is Exalted in Power, Wise.

3. Al-Mā‘īdah (5: 116—167): Allah Says: And behold! Allah will say: "O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?" He will say: "Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, Thou I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in full all that is hidden; "Never said I to them aught except what Thou didst command me to say, to wit, 'worship Allah, my Lord and your Lord'; and I
was a witness over them whilst I dwelt amongst them; when Thou didst take me up Thou wast the Watcher over them, and Thou art a witness to all things.

Shaykh Shaltūt argues that the word “توفی” (tawaffa –died) was mentioned in different occasions in the Qurʾān and it does mean death. So, as a result, it is clear from the verse that Prophet Ḥūsain is dead and that affirms the end of his mission with his people, and it should not be understood that he is still alive in the heaven and will descend near the End of the world. As far as verses of al-Ḥusain are concerned, Shaltūt maintains the position that prophet Ḥūsain was not raised to heaven in his earthly body, but in his soul. He rejected the exegesis which presents such interpretation. He furthers his argument by saying that those exegetists who connected their interpretation of these verses with the Prophetic traditions on the Prophet Muḥammad’s ascension to the heaven (mi’rāj) should consider the status of the transmitters of these ḥadīths and the content of the ḥadīth itself. The transmitter is Abū Hurayrah. Shaltūt argued, that the ḥadīth reported by Abū Hurayrah should not be used as a basis for faith (ʿaqīdah) related issues, because the ḥadīth is Ahād (chain of narration are limited to one particular reporter). He added that the Ahād ḥadīth does not provide us with certitude. Such ḥadīth is suspicious because of its limited number of transmitters to the Prophet.

According to Shaltūt, the Qurʾānic verses stated above infer that Prophet Ḥūsain is dead. He was raised by Almighty Allah to Himself to protect him from the aggression of his enemies the nonbelievers; Almighty Allah protected him from being crucified and being killed. Shaltūt refuted also those exegeses of the verses of the Qurʾān which opposed his aforementioned position. He argued that those verses are not conclusive (qaṭ’ī al-dalālah = conclusive evidence which does not open to any other probabilities or interpretation) and those Prophetic traditions which scholars present are not exhaustive in terms of transmission (qaṭ’ī al-wurūd = No compromise in the chain of transition up to the prophet). A text which does not fulfil these conditions cannot become basis for faith related matters.

Counter Fatwā

With all these expositions of Shaltūt, many contemporary scholars of his time responded by refuting his argument in a scholarly manner. Two famous figures among them were Shaykh al-Islam Muṣṭafa Ṣabrī, and Shaykh Muḥammad Zahīd al-Kawthārī. Ṣabrī in his Mawqif al-ʿAql mentioned an important reason behind scholars like Muḥammad ʿAbduh, his students Rashīd Riḍā, al-Marāghi, and Shaltūt could reject the miracles of the prophets, and the veiled realms (al-maghībat) was because of their extreme engagement with the western philosophy. This imperiled their belief in the Qurʾān and the Sunnah by placing both on the same level. This was the root and the reason for their misappropriation and misinterpretation of the holy Qurʾān and their equalizing the scripture with mythical books. Ṣabrī dedicated a complete chapter in the fourth volume of his book Mawqif al-ʿAql. He wrote:

…For example, indeed, we continue to understand from those Qurʾānic verses which indicate the ascendance of Prophet Ḥūsain (as) that he was raised
alive, as it was understood by all the predecessors among the Qur’ānic interpreters, until came al-Shaykh Shaltūt who proclaimed that what was meant in the verse was raising of his spirit only. If Shaltūt was right in his interpretation then why did the others agreed on the incorrect interpretation? In fact, it was Shaltūt who was wrong, as we are going to explain it later. Moreover, the belief that denies miracles and the modern principles that switches the prophecy to a genius automatically denies the significance of such sinful acts in the sight of those who committed such acts. (Ṣabrī, 1981)

Meanwhile, this skepticism and doubt about the issue under study was not new in the history of the modernists in Egypt. Shaltūt himself was a modernist being a disciple of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā. Riḍā himself had published an article querying the coming back of ‘Īsā (as) in Majallat al-Manār, January 1927. (Yasin, n.d.)

In another response to Imām Shaltūt’s fatwā and his proponents, the scholar of hadīth Shah Anwar al-Kashmiri of India, collected seventy hadith which affirm the coming back of prophet ‘Īsā (as), and mention the great mile stones before the End of the world. (Kashmiri, 1965)

To present a detailed elaboration of Shaykh Shaltūt and his proponents’ position on ‘Īsā (as) and the refutation of the opponents require a separate independent work. However, the important point one has to understand here is that some 20th century modern Sunnī scholars especially Muhammad ‘Abduh and his students have a different position from the majority Sunnī scholars. Another important point is that views and arguments of this minority group do not defend or support Mirza’s claims we discussed until now. The nucleus of the position of the minority is that ascending of ‘Īsā (as) alive is not an article of Islamic faith, because the verse of the Qur’ān is open to various interpretations. This position in any manner does not support Mirza’s claim to be the awaited Messiah. (Adil Salahi, 1992)

**Conclusion**

This study finds that Mirza claimed himself to be the awaited Messiah, as many have done before him. To establish this claim, he relied on three modes of arguments. In first mode, he tried to tarnish the reputation and dignity of ‘Īsā (as) by soiling his character and demeaning his miracles. Mirza tried to defame the noble family of ‘Īsā (as) who belongs to the house of ‘Imrān stated in the Qur’ān by targeting the chastity of Maryam (as). In response to this we found that the Qur’ān and the Sunnah withholds the chastity, nobleness and uniqueness of both Jesus and his mother Maryam. The Qur’ān declares Maryam to be the chosen and purified of the women of all nations. A report of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī ranks Maryam among the best women of the world and of the Paradise. Mirza framed the miracles of Jesus as deceiving acts, whereas miracles of Jesus are explicitly described in the Qur’ān especially verse 49 of Āl-‘Imrān.
Second mode of arguments by Mirza is the denial of Jesus’s ascendance and his descending close to the day of Resurrection. Mirza declared that belief in this matter is not of importance in Islam. We found that Qur’ān (4: 157-158) and authentic hadīth reports such as the hadīth on appearance of 10 major signs prior to the Last Hour infer the belief in Jesus’s descending as part and parcel of belief system of Islam (tawhīd).

The third mode of arguments by Mirza is the belief that Jesus died hence will not descend. This mode is subsiding Mirza’s second mode of arguments. Mirza in his argument presented the report of Ibn ʿAbbās (ra) that the word “tawaffa” in the Qur’ān is confined to the meaning of “death (mumiḥ).” Our discussion on the verses using the word tawaffa and its derivatives, found that the word denotes both sleep and death. In the context of Jesus, the word “tawaffa” denotes sleeping or seizing and not death. As far as the views of Ibn ʿAbbās (ra) are concerned, we discovered that he himself referred to death of Jesus in verse 4: 159. The interpretation of Ibn ʿAbbās (ra) is in a different context opposing to what Mirza claimed. Ibn ʿAbbās (ra) interpreted that after Jesus will descend, the people of the book will believe in Jesus, before he will die his natural death.

All the arguments made by Mirza and the responses we discussed highlight the underlining position regarding Jesus in Islam:

- Jesus is one of the Prophets sent by Almighty Allah about 300 years before Prophet Muhammad the last Prophet.
- He came from a respectful family known as the House of ʿImrān in the Qur’ān.
- Jesus’s mother Maryam is the symbol of chastity in Islam.
- He was seized by Almighty Allah before the Jews of his time could kill him.
- He will descend near to the day of Resurrection.
- He will die a natural death after living the life of a Muslim.

The last part of our succinct discussion on Shaykh Shaltūt’s fatwā unveiled that a minority of scholars namely Muḥammad ʿAbduh and his students hold a different opinion in opposition to majority Sunnī scholars. Since this fatwā and the refutation involve reputable scholars of 20th century, a separate research work to concentrate on this theme is needed to be taken up by the researchers. Almighty Allah knows the best.
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