

ISRĀ'ILIIYĀT NARRATIVES IN IBN KATHĪR'S TAFSĪR: METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR QUR'ANIC STUDIES

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Abstract: *The presence of isrā'iliyyāt narratives within the tradition of Qur'anic exegesis has long been a subject of scholarly debate, particularly concerning the extent to which narratives originating from earlier religious traditions may be used in the interpretation of Qur'anic verses. Among classical exegetes, Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm, the work of Ibn Kathīr, is widely recognized for its strong reliance on transmitted reports (riwāyat) in the interpretation of the Qur'an. Within this framework, Ibn Kathīr's tafsīr frequently engages with isrā'iliyyāt narratives that appear in earlier exegetical materials. This study aims to analyze how Ibn Kathīr evaluates and manages isrā'iliyyāt narratives in his tafsīr and to identify the interpretive patterns he employs when dealing with such reports. Using a qualitative method through textual analysis combined with an intertextual approach, this research examines selected isrā'iliyyāt narratives cited in Ibn Kathīr's tafsīr and analyzes how these narratives are interpreted, assessed, and contextualized. The findings indicate that Ibn Kathīr adopts a selective and critical evaluative framework in dealing with isrā'iliyyāt. Although he pays attention to the chain of transmission (sanad), his assessment does not rely solely on sanad verification. He also evaluates the content of these narratives, particularly by comparing them with Qur'anic verses and authenticated prophetic traditions. Reports that contradict established Islamic theological principles or authentic hadith are explicitly rejected, whereas narratives that do not conflict with the core teachings of Islam are occasionally used cautiously to supplement the historical context or narrative details of particular verses. These findings demonstrate that Ibn Kathīr's engagement with isrā'iliyyāt is not an uncritical accommodation but rather operates within a structured interpretive framework that integrates both transmission criticism and content evaluation.*

Keywords: *Exegesis of the Al-Qur'an, Ibnu Kathīr, Isrā'iliyyāt Narrative, Qur'anic Studies*

Abstrak: *Kehadiran narasi isrā'iliyyāt dalam tradisi tafsīr Al-Qur'an telah lama menjadi bahan perdebatan di kalangan sarjana, khususnya terkait sejauh mana narasi yang berasal*

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dari tradisi keagamaan sebelumnya dapat digunakan dalam penafsiran ayat-ayat *Al-Qur'an*. Di antara para mufasir klasik, *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azīm* karya Ibn Kathīr dikenal karena penekanannya pada riwayat dalam penafsiran *Al-Qur'an*. Dalam kerangka ini, tafsir Ibn Kathīr kerap berhadapan dengan narasi *isrā'iliyyāt* yang muncul dalam bahan-bahan tafsir sebelumnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana Ibn Kathīr mengevaluasi dan mengelola narasi *isrā'iliyyāt* dalam tafsirnya serta untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola interpretatif yang digunakannya dalam menghadapi riwayat-riwayat tersebut. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui analisis tekstual yang dipadukan dengan pendekatan intertekstual, penelitian ini menelaah sejumlah narasi *isrā'iliyyāt* yang dikutip dalam tafsir Ibn Kathīr dan menganalisis bagaimana narasi tersebut ditafsirkan, dinilai, dan dikontekstualisasikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ibn Kathīr menerapkan kerangka evaluasi yang selektif dan kritis dalam menghadapi *isrā'iliyyāt*. Meskipun ia memberikan perhatian pada sanad atau rantai transmisi, penilaiannya tidak hanya bergantung pada verifikasi sanad semata. Ia juga mengevaluasi isi narasi tersebut, terutama dengan membandingkannya dengan ayat-ayat *Al-Qur'an* dan hadis nabi yang sah. Riwayat yang bertentangan dengan prinsip-prinsip teologis Islam atau dengan hadis yang otentik secara tegas ditolak, sedangkan narasi yang tidak bertentangan dengan ajaran pokok Islam terkadang digunakan secara hati-hati untuk melengkapi konteks historis atau rincian naratif dari ayat tertentu. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa keterlibatan Ibn Kathīr dengan *isrā'iliyyāt* tidak bersifat akomodatif tanpa kritik, melainkan berlangsung dalam kerangka interpretatif yang terstruktur yang menggabungkan kritik transmisi dan evaluasi isi.

Kata-kata Kunci: *Ibnu Kathīr, Narasi Isrā'iliyyāt, Studi Qur'an, Tafsir Al-Qur'an.*

Introduction

In the modern era, there has been a more critical reevaluation of various aspects of Islamic thought, including *isrā'iliyyāt* literature.¹ *Isrā'iliyyāt* refers to narratives and stories originating from Jewish tradition that have been incorporated into Islamic literature in the past.² Within modern intellectual circles, there is a tendency to question the reliability and relevance of *isrā'iliyyāt* in contemporary Islamic understanding. There are calls to restrain and diminish the role of *isrā'iliyyāt* in Islamic textual sources, as they are perceived to potentially cause misunderstanding or even misinterpretation of Islamic teachings.³

1 Ronald L. Nettler, "Early Islam, Modern Islam and Judaism: The *Isrā'iliyyāt* in Modern Islamic Thought," in *Muslim-Jewish Encounters*, ed. Ronald L. Nettler and Suha Taji-Farouki (London: Routledge, 2014), 1–14; Ismail Albayrak, "Modernity, Its Impact on Muslim World and General Characteristics of 19–20th-Century Revivalist–Reformists' Re-Reading of the *Qur'an*," *Religions* 13, no. 5 (2022): 424, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13050424>; Asma Afsaruddin, *Contemporary Issues in Islam* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015); Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014).

2 Ismail Albayrak, "Qur'anic Narrative and *Isrā'iliyyāt* in Western Scholarship and in Classical Exegesis," Dissertation, UK: The University of Leeds, 2000; Attahir Shehu Mainiyo and Muhammad Sani Abdullahi, "Impact of *Isrā'iliyyāt* Reports on the Islamic Creed of Contemporary Muslims," *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 7, no. 1 (2017): 67–82. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ijrs.v7i1.5>.

3 Stephen Lambden, "Some Aspects of *Isrā'iliyyāt* and the Emergence of the *Bābī-Bahā'*," Thesis, Newcastle: Newcastle University, 2002, <http://theses.ncl.ac.uk/jspui/handle/10443/203>; Achmad Tohe, "Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān's Qur'anic Commentary," Dissertation, Boston: Boston

Therefore, within modern intellectual circles, there is a push to reassess the role and relevance of *isrā'iliyyāt* in Islamic understanding, with efforts to reduce its influence in shaping religious beliefs and practices.⁴ This also has implications for Muslim-Jewish relations, as *isrā'iliyyāt* is often associated with stories from the Jewish tradition. Thus, a reevaluation of *isrā'iliyyāt* can also affect how Muslims perceive their relationship with the Jewish community.⁵ *Isrā'iliyyāt* is often used in the tradition of exegesis to provide additional context or explanation about the stories found in the Quran.⁶ However, approaches to the use of *isrā'iliyyāt* in Quranic interpretation can vary. Therefore, in interpreting the Quran, it is important to consider the cultural, historical, and academic contexts in understanding the use of *isrā'iliyyāt*.⁷ While some exegetes may use *isrā'iliyyāt* as an additional source, others may choose to be cautious or even avoid its use altogether in an effort to ensure the purity and truthfulness of Quranic interpretation.⁸

It is undeniable that the presence of *isrā'iliyyāt* stories in exegesis has become commonplace, and a lack of caution in handling this matter can potentially lead to misunderstandings. Someone who does not have a deep understanding may struggle to differentiate between stories originating from revelation, historical accounts, hadiths, and *isrā'iliyyāt*. There is a risk that *isrā'iliyyāt* will be regarded as the primary source of reference, especially if one is unaware of the differences and does not understand the criteria of authenticity among these sources.⁹ It is worth noting that in some famous exegeses, such as the book "*Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān al-Aẓīm*" by Ibn Kathīr, we can find the presence of *isrā'iliyyāt* stories. This indicates that

University, 2015.

4 Lumngatul Maarif and Eka Prasetyawati, "Analisis Isrā'iliyyat dalam Tafṣīr Hasyiah Al-Sawi Karya Ahmad bin Muhammad Sawi Al-Maliki," *Al-Quds: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Hadis* 4, no. 1 (2020): 97–118, <https://doi.org/10.29240/alquds.v4i1.1374>.

5 Steven M. Wasserstrom, "Who Were the Jews? Problems in Profiling the Jewish Community under Early Islam," in *Defining Judaism: A Reader*, ed. Aaron W. Hughes (London: Routledge, 2016), 117–49.

6 Mainiyo and Abdullahi, "Impact of Isrā'iliyyat Reports on the Islamic Creed of Contemporary Muslims," 67–82; Mohd Sholeh Bin Sheh Yusuff, "Bacaan Intertekstual terhadap Sumber Al-Isrā'iliyyat dalam Tafṣīr Nur al-Ihsan," *Insancita* 3, no. 1 (2018): 14–28, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2121/incita-jisisea.v3i1.965>; Muhammad Yasin Akhmad and Suhandi Suhandi. "Riwayat Israiliyyat dalam Tafṣīr Al-Qur'an: Asal-Usul dan Hukumnya," *Al-Dzikra: Jurnal Studi Ilmu al-Qur'an dan al-Hadits* 14, no. 2 (2020): 221–38, <https://doi.org/10.24042/al-dzikra.v14i2.6503>; Abd Kahar, "Memahami Eksistensi Isrā'iliyyāt dalam Tafṣīr," *El-Furqania: Jurnal Ushuluddin dan Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 2, no. 1 (2016): 17–34, <https://doi.org/10.54625/elfurqania.v2i01.1418>.

7 Althaf Husein Muzakky, "Interpretasi Ma'nā Cum Maghẓā terhadap Relasi Suami-Isri dalam QS al-Mujādalah [58]:1–4," *Hermeneutik: Jurnal Ilmu al-Qur'an dan Tafṣīr* 14, no. 1 (2020): 179–98, <http://dx.doi.org/10.21043/hermeneutik.v14i1.6569>.

8 A. Turmudi, "Penetrasi Budaya Yahudi dalam Ajaran Islam (Kajian Isrā'iliyyat dalam Tafṣīr Al-Qur'an)," *Dialogia* 8, no. 1 (2010): 31–52, <https://doi.org/10.21154/dialogia.v8i1.1282>.

9 Munirah, "Kontroversi Penggunaan Kisah Israiliyyat dalam Memahami Ayat-Ayat Kisah Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Ilmu Ushuluddin* 16, no. 2 (2017): 95–116, <https://doi.org/10.18592/jiu.v16i2.1727>.

even in exegeses considered to have the highest authority, the use of *isrā'iliyyāt* is not always avoided.

The *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm*, or more commonly known as Ibn Kathīr's Tafsīr, is one of the monumental works in the field of exegesis that utilizes the method of narration (*tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr*) to interpret the Qur'an.¹⁰ This book is considered by scholars as one of the most authentic exegeses. However, the dilemma arises when some *isrā'iliyyāt* narrations are found in it, which adds controversial elements to the image of this exegesis among scholars. In the assessment of scholars, the narrations contained in this book are considered to have a high level of authenticity. Al-Dhahabī, a prominent scholar, even stated that this book is the best narration-based exegesis.¹¹ However, complexity arises when some *isrā'iliyyāt* narrations are found in it. These stories, originating from Jewish tradition, can create a negative perception of Ibn Kathīr's exegesis among scholars. Therefore, this writing aims to explore some *isrā'iliyyāt* stories found in Ibn Kathīr's exegesis while highlighting the responses and comments given by Ibn Kathīr on these stories.

Although the discussion of *isrā'iliyyāt* within Qur'anic exegesis has been widely addressed in previous studies, most existing research tends to focus on identifying the sources,¹² classification,¹³ and theological implications of these narratives within the broader tradition of tafsīr.¹⁴ This study seeks to provide a new contribution by examining how Ibn Kathīr critically evaluates and manages *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives within his interpretive framework. Rather than merely cataloguing the presence

10 *Tafsīr bi al-ma'thūr* is an interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an with verses, verses with the hadith of the Prophet that explains the meaning of some verses that are difficult for the companions to understand, or an interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an with the ijtihad of the companions and *tābi'in*. See, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *Al-Tafsīr wa al-Mufasssīrūn*, vol. 1 (Mesir: Dār al-Kutub al-Hadīthah, 1972), 152; Nashruddin Baidan, *Wawasan Baru Ilmu Tafsīr* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2005), 375. In this regard, Ibn Kathīr applies this method by interpreting the verses of the Qur'an with the Qur'an, the Qur'an with the Sunnah, then with the opinions of the companions, and also refers to the opinions of the *tābi'in* and the authentic scholars of the Salaf. For more details, see: Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Al-Kitab al-'Ilmi, 2007), 8–10.

11 Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Dhahabī, *Al-Isrā'iliyyāt fī al-Tafsīr wa al-Hadīth* (Kairo: Dār al-Hadīth, n.d.), 133.

12 Nugraha Rifqi et al., "Epistemologi Isrā'iliyyāt dalam Perbincangan Al-Dakhīl," *Al-Hikmah* 2, no. 1 (2025): 33–43, <https://doi.org/10.64481/03pt9g85>; Mujiburrohman Mujiburrohman et al., "Ad-Dakhil Sumber Riwayat Ahli Kitab; Isrā'iliyat dalam Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr," *Desanta (Indonesian of Interdisciplinary Journal)* 4, no. 2 (2024): 249–75; Muhammad Sholihin et al., "Kritik Konten Israiliyyat dalam Tafsīr dan Hadis: Analisis Riwayat dan Dirayat," *Al-Hasyimi-Jurnal Ilmu Hadis* 2, no. 1 (2025): 1–11, <https://doi.org/10.63398/0r740g27>.

13 Sufian Suri and Sayed Akhyar, "Mengenal Israiliyyat dalam Tafsīr Al-Khazin," *Al-I'jaz: Jurnal Kewahyuan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2021): 128–44, <http://dx.doi.org/10.30821/al-i'jaz.v6i2.8959>; Rifqi et al., "Epistemologi Isrā'iliyyāt dalam Perbincangan Al-Dakhīl," 33–43.

14 Novita Alfatus Zahro, "Israiliyyat: Mengajarkan Atau Mengaburkan Ajaran Islam?" *Al-Ilmiya: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 1, no. 3 (2025): 830–37; Ahmad Iddal Abdullah et al., "Metodologi Riwayat Bil Ma'nā dan Implikasinya Terhadap Penerimaan Israiliyyat dalam Tafsīr," *Jurnal Sains, Sosial, dan Studi Agama* 2, no. 1 (2026): 65–76.

of such reports, this research highlights the interpretive patterns through which Ibn Kathīr assesses their validity by considering both the chains of transmission and the compatibility of their content with Qur'anic verses and authenticated prophetic traditions. By emphasizing the evaluative mechanisms employed by Ibn Kathīr, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of how classical exegetes negotiated external narrative materials within the authoritative framework of Islamic interpretation.

This research will employ a qualitative method with a library research approach.¹⁵ The primary data analyzed in this study will be the *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm* by Ibn Kathīr, particularly sections that include *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives. In addition, this study will review other tafsir works and various related literature that discuss the use of *isrā'iliyyāt* in Quranic exegesis. Data collection techniques will be carried out through a literature review, which includes tafsir books, scholarly articles, and relevant studies on the theme of *isrā'iliyyāt*.

In analyzing the data, this study employs qualitative content analysis combined with an intertextual approach to examine how *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives are presented and treated in Ibn Kathīr's exegesis. This approach focuses on identifying the ways Ibn Kathīr cites, transmits, evaluates, and comments on *isrā'iliyyāt* reports within his interpretation of Qur'anic verses. Through this method, particular attention is given to Ibn Kathīr's critical engagement with these narratives, including his acceptance, reservation, or rejection of certain reports based on their sources and theological implications. The analysis, therefore, concentrates on the textual patterns through which Ibn Kathīr filters *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives and clarifies their status within Qur'anic interpretation. The findings are presented descriptively and analytically in order to demonstrate Ibn Kathīr's interpretive strategy in dealing with *isrā'iliyyāt* within the broader discourse of Qur'anic exegesis.

It is important to note that this writing will not cover all *isrā'iliyyāt* stories in the book but will focus on some stories as representations of such narrations. Thus, we can see how Ibn Kathīr responds to and comments on these stories, whether he filters them or provides additional explanations to understand them more deeply. By exploring *isrā'iliyyāt* stories in Ibn Kathīr's exegesis, we can understand the author's approach and stance toward this controversial material. Whether he ignores, filters, or provides deeper explanations, he can offer a more comprehensive view of the quality and reliability of this exegesis. As readers, we will be invited to understand that the presence of *isrā'iliyyāt* in Ibn Kathīr's exegesis is not a guarantee of error but rather part of the complexity of the evolving intellectual heritage of Islam.

15 Taylor, Steven J., Robert Bogdan, and Marjorie L. DeVault. *Introduction To Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015.; David Silverman, "What Counts as Qualitative Research? Some Cautionary Comments," *Qualitative Sociology Review* 9, no. 2 (2013): 48–55, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.09.2.05>.

Interpreting *Isrā'iliyyāt* Narratives within the Tradition of Qur'anic Exegesis

Isrā'iliyyāt refers to narratives or stories derived from Jewish and Christian traditions that some Muslim commentators have used to explain verses of the Qur'an, especially those related to the history of the prophets or specific events that are not detailed in the Qur'anic text.¹⁶ On one hand, *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives are regarded by some scholars as additional sources that can enrich the understanding of verses that are ambiguous or require deeper contextual explanation. They argue that information from *isrā'iliyyāt* can provide historical or cultural background relevant to the prophetic era in line with Islamic teachings, thus making Qur'anic interpretations complete and more comprehensive. For example, certain stories of the prophets in the Qur'an are mentioned briefly without detailed descriptions, and *isrā'iliyyāt* is used to fill those gaps with further information.

The citation of *isrā'iliyyāt* as a source of interpretation has varied significantly over time, both in terms of quality and quantity. The presence of *isrā'iliyyāt* in the modern era has become an important topic for discussion in forums or scholarly writings. This is due to the connection of *isrā'iliyyāt* with narratives and stories originating from Jewish traditions, which were later incorporated into Islamic literature, including Qur'anic exegesis.¹⁷ The inclusion of *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives in Qur'anic interpretation has sparked diverse scholarly discussions, reflecting different approaches and attitudes among Muslim scholars throughout history. *Isrā'iliyyāt* narratives are often used in Qur'anic exegesis to provide additional context, clarify ambiguous verses, or offer moral lessons. However, their use varies among scholars.¹⁸

Some consider *isrā'iliyyāt* to be a valuable source for enriching the understanding of the Qur'an, especially in explaining historical events or prophetic narratives that are not explicitly detailed in the Qur'an. They argue that *isrā'iliyyāt* can complement the interpretation of the Qur'an by providing insights into the cultural and historical context of that time. Conversely, some scholars adopt a more cautious approach, acknowledging the potential risks of relying on *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives. They emphasize the need for critical evaluation and wise discernment when integrating these narratives into the interpretation of the Qur'an.¹⁹ Objections arise regarding the authenticity and reliability of *isrā'iliyyāt*, as it often lacks a chain of transmission (*isnād*) or may contradict established Islamic teachings. Therefore, scholars are careful to prevent the spread of false beliefs or misunderstandings

16 Luluk Inda Rini Mufida and Khozi Mubarak, "Isra'iliyyat dalam Tafsir Modern: Studi tentang Turunnya Adam dari Surga," *Mutawatir: Jurnal Keilmuan Tafsir Hadith* 10, no. 2 (2020): 365–89, <https://doi.org/10.15642/mutawatir.2020.10.2.365-389>.

17 Kahar, "Memahami Eksistensi Isrā'iliyyāt dalam Tafsir," 17–34.

18 Mufida and Mubarak, "Isra'iliyyat dalam Tafsir Modern: Studi tentang Turunnya Adam dari Surga," 365–89.

19 Muhammad Sholihin, "Kritik Abu Syahbah Terhadap Israiliyyat dan Maudu'at dalam Kitab-Kitab Tafsir (Studi Kitab Al-Israiliyyat Wa Al-Maudu'at Fi Kutub Al-Tafsir)," Skripsi, Yogyakarta: UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2015, <https://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/17245/>.

among the community.

However, many Islamic scholars also adopt a more cautious approach in using *isrā'iliyyāt* in the interpretation of the Qur'an. One of the main reasons is the issue of authenticity and reliability of these sources. Unlike hadith, which has an adequate isnad (chain of transmission), *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives often lack strong evidence regarding their origins, raising doubts about their validity. Additionally, some narratives from *isrā'iliyyāt* are considered to contradict the fundamental teachings of Islam or create doubts among Muslims. Therefore, scholars such as Ibn Kathīr and al-Baghāwī in their tafsir advocate that *isrā'iliyyāt* stories should only be accepted if they do not contradict the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah.²⁰ They recommend conducting a critical evaluation of these narratives before incorporating them into tafsir. Furthermore, some *isrā'iliyyāt* stories may contain mythological elements or aspects that do not align with pure Islamic teachings.

The use of *isrā'iliyyāt* in the interpretation of the Qur'an also reflects broader theological and methodological debates in Islamic studies.²¹ It highlights the tension between tradition and innovation, orthodoxy and heterodoxy, as well as the quest for religious authenticity amid cultural interactions. Moreover, the inclusion of *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives underscores the dynamic nature of Islamic intellectual heritage, influenced by interactions with neighboring civilizations and the assimilation of diverse cultural elements. In contemporary Qur'anic studies, scholars continue to grapple with the role of *isrā'iliyyāt* in interpretation.²² While some advocate for a nuanced approach that acknowledges the insights that *isrā'iliyyāt* may offer while conducting critical assessments, others promote a more conservative stance, emphasizing the primacy of the teachings of the Qur'an and authenticated Hadith.

Exploring *isrā'iliyyāt* in the interpretation of the Qur'an offers an intriguing lens for examining the complex interactions between Islamic tradition and external influences. As global researchers, it is important to engage with this topic critically, recognizing its complexities and appreciating the diversity of views within Islamic studies. In this way, we contribute to a deeper understanding of the diverse nature of Qur'anic interpretation and its broader implications for religious discourse in the contemporary world.

Evaluating *Isrā'iliyyāt* Narratives: Ibn Kathīr's Method of Acceptance and Criticism

Ibn Kathīr's approach to *isrā'iliyyāt* in his tafsir, *Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān al-Azīm*, demonstrates a balance between a critical attitude and selective acceptance. Ibn

20 M. Quraish Shihab, *Rasionalitas Al-Qur'an: Studi Kritis atas Tafṣīr Al-Manar* (Jakarta: Lentera Hati, 2006).

21 Yoga Felascho et al., "Israiliyyat dalam Kisah Zulkarnain," *Thullab: Jurnal Riset dan Publikasi Mahasiswa* 1, no. 1 (2021): 65–83.

22 Adib, Noblana. "Faktor-Faktor Penyebab Penyimpangan dalam Penafsiran Al-Quran." *Mawaizh: Jurnal Dakwah dan Pengembangan Sosial Kemanusiaan* 8, no. 1 (2017): 1-30, <https://doi.org/10.32923/maw.v8i1.694>.

Kathīr recognizes that *isrā'iliyyāt*, which originates from Jewish and Christian traditions, has the potential to enrich the interpretation of the Qur'an, especially concerning the stories of the prophets mentioned briefly in the Qur'an.²³ However, at the same time, he is cautious in selecting the *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives included in his tafsir. His approach is guided by the fundamental principle that these narratives must not contradict the teachings of Islam, particularly the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah. Therefore, in his tafsir, Ibn Kathīr classifies *isrā'iliyyāt* into three main categories: (1) Narratives that are in accordance with the Qur'an and Sunnah, which he accepts without hesitation; (2) Narratives that contradict Islamic teachings, which he outright rejects.²⁴ and (3) Narratives that are not mentioned in either the Qur'an or Sunnah, which he leaves in a neutral state, neither confirmed nor rejected.²⁵ This attitude aligns with the advice of the Prophet Muḥammad, who encouraged Muslims to “neither deny nor affirm” *isrā'iliyyāt* that lacks a strong basis in Islam.²⁶

In selecting the accepted *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives, Ibn Kathīr prioritizes two main criteria: the authenticity of the source and conformity with Islamic principles. He often cites the views of the companions of the Prophet and the *tābi'īn*, particularly 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbās, who is known for his knowledge of Jewish and Christian traditions. However, Ibn Kathīr does not accept these narratives from the companions outright without strict scrutiny. He rejects *isrā'iliyyāt* that contain mythological elements or narratives that do not align with the teachings of monotheism. For instance, some stories related to the details of the lives of the prophets in *isrā'iliyyāt* sometimes contain elements that are deemed to undermine the dignity of prophethood or contradict the concept of God's justice in Islam, thus leading to their rejection by Ibn Kathīr.²⁷

Ibn Kathīr's critical attitude is also evident in his assessment of the authority of these *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives. He understands that most of these narratives lack a clear *isnad* (chain of transmission), an essential component in Islamic tradition

23 Yusuf al-Qardhawi, *Berinteraksi dengan Al-Qur'an*, trans. Abdul Hayyie al-Kattani (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1999), 497.

24 This can be seen, for example, in interpreting Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 258; Q.S. Ṭāḥā [20]: 20; and Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]: 1.

25 This interpretation can be seen, for example, when interpreting Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 60, regarding the story of Prophet Moses and the Children of Israel.

26 Irwan Ahmad Akbar, “Does Quran Harbor Hatred Towards Jews?” (Hermeneutical Exploration of Surah Al-Baqarah: 120),” *Tafaqqub: Jurnal Penelitian dan Kajian Keislaman* 12, no. 2 (2024): 169–82, <https://doi.org/10.52431/tafaqqub.v12i2.3089>; Irwan Ahmad Akbar et al., “Legal and Ethical Interpretation of Blasphemy Cases in Indonesia: A Ma'na-Cum-Maghza Perspective,” *Asy-Syir'ab: Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah dan Hukum* 57, no. 1 (2023): 83–106, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajish.v57i1.1218>.

27 Nettler, “Early Islam, Modern Islam and Judaism: The Isra'iliyyat in Modern Islamic Thought,” 1–14; Aaron M. Hagler, “Sapping the Narrative: Ibn Kathir's Account of The Shūrā of 'Uthman in Kitab al-Bidaya wa-l-Nihaya,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 2 (2015): 303–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743815000069>.

for determining the validity of a narrative.²⁸ Narratives that lack isnad or whose sources cannot be trusted, particularly those from Jewish-Christian converts to Islam (such as Ka'b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih), are viewed skeptically. Although these figures are acknowledged to have deep knowledge of previous traditions, Ibn Kathīr remains cautious in accepting the stories they convey, especially if they cannot be verified by authoritative Islamic sources.²⁹

Meanwhile, Ibn Kathīr's accepting attitude towards *isrā'iliyyāt* is reflected in narratives that do not contradict Islamic teachings and do not contain controversial elements. In some cases, *isrā'iliyyāt* provides useful additional details that clarify certain historical contexts or backgrounds mentioned in the Qur'an. For example, in the stories of Prophet Moses or Prophet Joseph, Ibn Kathīr utilizes some elements from *isrā'iliyyāt* to enrich the narrative, as long as those elements do not contradict the fundamental teachings of Islam. Overall, Ibn Kathīr's approach to *isrā'iliyyāt* reflects a wise balance. He acknowledges the benefits of these narratives in providing additional insights, yet he is also very critical of the potential dangers that could arise if *isrā'iliyyāt* is used without strict filtering. Ibn Kathīr emphasizes that the Qur'an and Sunnah must remain the primary guidelines in interpretation, and *isrā'iliyyāt* should only be accepted if it aligns with these two sources.

Intertextual Analysis of *Isrā'iliyyāt* Narratives and Their Interpretation in *Tafṣīr Ibn Kathīr*

In assessing the validity and authenticity of *isrā'iliyyāt*, Ibn Kathīr adopts a meticulous critical approach, combining caution with the fundamental principle that the Qur'an and Sunnah must serve as the primary standards in accepting or rejecting these narratives. Ibn Kathīr's critical evaluation is based on several criteria, including the conformity of the narratives with Islamic teachings, the presence of a trustworthy isnad (chain of transmission), and alignment with pure principles of monotheism. This approach is particularly important given that *isrā'iliyyāt* often lacks a clear foundation in Islamic sources and originates from Jewish and Christian traditions, which, according to Ibn Kathīr, contain elements that contradict the teachings of monotheism.

One key principle in Ibn Kathīr's critical approach is the use of isnad as the primary measure of a narrative's validity. As explained in hadith studies, an isnad is crucial for determining the authenticity of a report. *Isrā'iliyyāt*, due to its origins from non-Muslim sources, often lacks a clear isnad or comes from individuals whose reliability is questioned, such as Ka'b al-Aḥbār and Wahb ibn Munabbih, two figures who converted to Islam from Jewish tradition. Ibn Kathīr recognizes that many narratives conveyed by them have historical value, but without a clear

28 Theo Jaka Prakoso, "Tales with Isrā'iliyyāt: The Story of Harut and Marut in Tafsir bi al-Ma'thur," *Journal of Islam and Science* 7, no. 1 (2020): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.24252/jis.v7i1.12554>.

29 Ismail Albayrak, "Isrā'iliyyāt and Classical Exegetes' Comments on the Calf with a Hollow Sound (Q. 20:83–98/7:147–155) with Special Reference to Ibn 'Atiyya," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 47, no. 1 (2002): 39–65, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jss/47.1.39>.

isnād, he refuses to base his tafsir on them definitively. This critical evaluation distinguishes him from some other mufassir who are more permissive in accepting *isrā'iliyyāt*.³⁰

In addition to the isnad, the conformity of the narratives with Islamic teaching principles also serves as an important foundation for Ibn Kathīr in assessing *isrā'iliyyāt*. He asserts that if a narrative contradicts the teachings of the Qur'an or Sunnah, it must be rejected. For example, some *isrā'iliyyāt* contain elements that demean the dignity of the prophets, which, in Ibn Kathīr's view, contradicts the fundamental Islamic principle that prophets are individuals chosen and protected by Allah from major errors. Narratives that portray the prophets as individuals with serious moral weaknesses are often found in Jewish and Christian traditions. Ibn Kathīr firmly rejects such narratives because they contradict the concept of prophethood in Islam. This reflects his critical approach that prioritizes the harmony of narratives with Islamic teachings.

Ibn Kathīr also acknowledges that some *isrā'iliyyāt* have historical value and can enrich the understanding of the social and cultural context during the time of the prophets. However, he emphasizes that such narratives must be accepted with great caution, especially if they cannot be verified through authentic Islamic sources. This principle of caution is based on his belief that the Qur'an and Sunnah have provided sufficient information to understand Islamic teachings, and *isrā'iliyyāt* should not replace or obscure the truths clearly explained in these two primary sources. Ibn Kathīr's critical evaluation of the validity and authenticity of *isrā'iliyyāt* reflects a careful and balanced methodological approach in Qur'anic interpretation. While he does not outright reject *isrā'iliyyāt*, he asserts that these narratives must be selected meticulously and should not contradict the fundamental principles of Islam. Ibn Kathīr's approach distinguishes him from other mufassir who are more permissive and serves as an important example in the study of tafsir regarding how to address external influences in the interpretation of the Qur'an.

In this section, the author will present several examples of *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives found in Ibn Kathīr. As explained earlier, Ibn Kathīr classifies *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives into three main categories. Below is a brief description of each category, along with examples of the stories included within them:

1. *Isrā'iliyyāt* Narratives That Are Critiqued and Commented Upon

In his tafsir of Q.S. Ṣād [38]: 34, Ibn Kathīr includes a story related to Prophet Solomon, in which a demon named Shahr al-Marīdah is mentioned in a narration that comes from Ibn Abbas. This story recounts Prophet Solomon's search for this demon at the bottom of the sea and his interaction with a spring of water that emitted wine. Throughout this narrative, Prophet Solomon is depicted as drinking wine, leading to a loss of consciousness, while the demon takes over his position

30 Irwan Ahmad Akbar, "Towards the Modern Meaning of Istihzā': A Semantic Approach to the Interpretation of Q. al-Tawbah/9," *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 23, no. 1 (2025): 130–53, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22321969-20250169>.

by sitting on his throne.³¹ Ibn Kathīr, as a mufassir known for his critical stance towards *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives, firmly comments that this narration is unacceptable and categorizes it as false and fabricated. His main argument is that a prophet, as a human chosen by Allah and protected from major errors, could not possibly engage in such an act as drinking wine to the point of intoxication. Additionally, in Ibn Kathīr's view, a demon can't resemble the face of Prophet Solomon and usurp his power by sitting on his throne. Both elements contradict Islamic teachings regarding the sanctity and infallibility of the prophets.

Ibn Kathīr's critical approach to this narrative is an example of the method he uses to filter and evaluate *isrā'iliyyāt*. *Isrā'iliyyāt* refers to narratives originating from Jewish and Christian traditions, which are sometimes absorbed by some mufassir in the interpretation of Qur'anic verses, particularly those related to the stories of the prophets. Ibn Kathīr consistently exercises caution in accepting such narratives, especially when they lack a clear and authentic isnad (chain of transmission). In this case, Ibn Kathīr points out that if this narration indeed comes from Ibn Abbas, it is likely that he received this story from the *Ahlul Kitāb* (the People of the Book, i.e., Jews or Christians). Within Jewish tradition, there are some who do not recognize the prophethood of Solomon and even deny it, so narratives from such sources often contain elements that contradict Islamic teachings. Ibn Kathīr views this story as an example of a rejected narration because it is peculiar and not in line with Islamic principles, particularly regarding the purity of the prophets.³²

Ibn Kathīr's approach is not only evident in his tafīr of Sūrah Ṣād but also in other interpretations, such as in Q.S. An-Naml [27]: 41-43, regarding the story of the Queen of Sheba.³³ In his interpretation of these verses, Ibn Kathīr also rejects various *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives that depict the Queen of Sheba in contexts that do not align with Islamic principles. Similarly, in the tafīr of Q.S. Al-Kahf [18]: 50,³⁴ which mentions Iblīs, Ibn Kathīr demonstrates his critical stance toward narratives that do not conform to the Islamic creed.

An analysis of Ibn Kathīr's method shows that he is very selective in accepting *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives, even when those narratives come from prominent companions like Ibn Abbas. For Ibn Kathīr, narratives that cannot be substantiated through an authentic isnad, as well as those that contradict fundamental Islamic teachings, must be rejected. His perspective serves as an important foundation in tafīr studies based on *tafīr bi al-ma'thūr* (interpretation based on tradition), where the emphasis on the validity of sources is key to maintaining the integrity and purity of tafīr. Ibn Kathīr's approach to interpreting verses related to *isrā'iliyyāt* reflects a solid theological and methodological stance. He firmly rejects narratives deemed to contain elements of falsehood or contradictions to Islamic principles,

31 Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il ibn Kathīr al-Dimashqī ibn Kathīr, *Tafīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm* (Beirut: Al-Kitāb al-'Ilmi, 2007), 1606.

32 Kathīr, *Tafīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, 1608.

33 Kathīr, *Tafīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, 1397–98.

34 Kathīr, *Tafīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, 1158.

while still appreciating those narratives that enrich the interpretation without causing theological confusion among the community. His cautious attitude helps preserve the integrity of his tafsir as an authoritative reference in the study of the Qur'an.

2. *Isrā'iliyyāt* Narratives That are Neither Confirmed nor Rejected (*Tawaquf*)

The story of Prophet Moses and the Children of Israel, related to Sūrah Al-Baqarah [2]: 67, reflects how Ibn Kathīr utilizes and assesses *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives in his tafsir. In his interpretation, Ibn Kathīr includes a narration that comes from Ibn Abi Hatim, which tells of a man from the Children of Israel who killed his relative to inherit his wealth and then accused another person of the murder. This story culminates in God's command to Prophet Moses to sacrifice a cow, as mentioned in the verse of the Qur'an.³⁵ In responding to this narration, Ibn Kathīr adopts a *tawaquf* stance, meaning he refrains from giving a definitive judgment, whether to affirm or deny the story. This is characteristic of his handling of *isrā'iliyyāt*, where narratives that do not contradict the fundamental teachings of Islam are left in a "neutral" state. Ibn Kathīr acknowledges that this story originates from the books of the Children of Israel, indicating that its source is from Jewish tradition, but he does not grant it full validity.

The *tawaquf* attitude that Ibn Kathīr takes towards this story demonstrates his caution in dealing with *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives. For Ibn Kathīr, stories from Jewish and Christian traditions can be accepted, but with strict limitations. In this regard, he follows the principle taught by Prophet Muhammad in a hadith: "Do not affirm the People of the Book, nor deny them." Therefore, *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives like this can be accepted as long as they do not contradict the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah, but they also cannot be regarded as primary sources for understanding Islamic teachings.³⁶

Ibn Kathīr allows stories like this to be part of the interpretation, but he emphasizes that these narratives should not serve as a basis or primary reference in understanding a verse. This *tawaquf* attitude demonstrates caution in integrating narratives from outside the Islamic tradition without denying their overall benefits. In this case, the story aligns with the command in the Qur'an regarding the sacrifice of a cow by the Children of Israel, and thus it is considered not to pose serious theological issues. According to him, this narration provides historical context and additional narrative that explains why Allah commanded the Children of Israel to sacrifice a cow. The Qur'an itself does not provide detailed information about the background of this command, except that it was a test for the Children of Israel. Therefore, this *isrā'iliyyāt* story serves to "fill in the gaps" in the narrative that are not explicitly explained in the Qur'an. However, as usual, Ibn Kathīr remains cautious of the potential deviations that may arise from non-Islamic sources.

This narrative also has important implications for understanding justice and

35 Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azīm*, 137.

36 Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Azīm*, 138.

Therefore, it can be concluded that Ibn Kathīr's interpretation in this case is more symbolic and is strongly suspected to be influenced by *isrā'iliyyāt* thought. As explained by Rashīd Riḍā, the story of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib originates from the Old Testament, and if this story were not included in the Jewish scriptures, likely, this view would not exist in Islamic literature.⁴⁰ Similarly, Ṭabāṭabā'ī in his tafsir comments that this verse indicates that women were created from the 'same kind' as Adam, without supporting the idea of Eve being created from Adam's rib.⁴¹

The hadith mentioning that women are created from a rib is often interpreted metaphorically (symbolically), rather than literally (*ḥaqīqī*). The main message of this hadith is that men who wish to marry women should treat them well and gently, because women, like ribs, have unique characteristics. If a man is too harsh, then a woman can be 'broken' (i.e., can suffer psychologically or emotionally), but if left alone, she will retain her qualities. This hadith serves more as behavioral advice in marital relationships rather than a biological or theological statement regarding the origin of the creation of women.

In this context, Ibn Kathīr may have fallen into a literal interpretation based on stories from *isrā'iliyyāt*, which often lack a strong isnad (chains of transmission). Although he is known as a hadith expert, in this case, it seems there is an influence from external narratives that were not explicitly critiqued.

This case shows that even a great scholar like Ibn Kathīr is not entirely free from the possibility of being influenced by *isrā'iliyyāt*. This is very likely because, during his time, narratives from previous scriptures (especially from Judaism and Christianity) were widely circulated and used by mufasir to explain stories that are not elaborated in detail in the Qur'an. In his tafsir, Ibn Kathīr often presents *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives but also provides critical commentary on them. However, in the case of the creation of Eve, it seems this narrative escaped his critical assessment.

Additionally, other examples of *isrā'iliyyāt* that are not critiqued by Ibn Kathīr can be found in his interpretation of the story of the Babylonian King and Prophet Abraham in Q.S. Al-Baqarah [2]: 258,⁴² and the story of Prophet Moses' staff turning into a serpent in Q.S. Ṭāḥā [20]: 20.⁴³ In both of these stories, Ibn Kathīr also seems to quote *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives without further investigating the origins or validity of these narratives. This indicates that while he is very critical of many reports, there are some cases where *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives are still found in his tafsir.

From this analysis, we can see that the story of the creation of Eve conveyed by Ibn Kathīr in his tafsir of Q.S. An-Nisā' [4]: 1, is likely derived from *isrā'iliyyāt* tradition, which is not supported by authentic Islamic sources. Although Ibn Kathīr is a highly respected expert in hadith and tafsir, this story demonstrates how

org/10.32764/application.v1i1.1733.

40 Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-Manār*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 324.

41 Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Al-Ālami li al-Maṭbū'at, 1983), 326.

42 Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Aẓīm*, 386–87.

43 Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'Aẓīm*, 1220.

narratives from outside the Islamic tradition can infiltrate tafsir and influence the understanding of the Qur'anic text. This underscores the importance of critical evaluation of tafsir sources and the influence of *isrā'iliyyāt*, especially when there is no support from the Qur'an or authentic Sunnah.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that Ibn Kathīr's engagement with *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives in *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-Adzim* reflects a structured and critical evaluative framework within the classical tradition of Qur'anic exegesis. Rather than accepting such narratives uncritically, Ibn Kathīr carefully assesses them through both transmission analysis and content evaluation. While attention is given to the chain of transmission (*sanad*), his evaluation also considers the compatibility of these narratives with Qur'anic teachings and authenticated prophetic traditions. Reports that contradict established Islamic theological principles or reliable hadith are explicitly rejected, whereas narratives that do not conflict with foundational Islamic teachings may be cited cautiously to clarify historical background or narrative details of certain verses.

These findings indicate that Ibn Kathīr's use of *isrā'iliyyāt* was not a form of uncritical accommodation but rather part of a controlled interpretive strategy that integrates verification of transmission with substantive textual evaluation. This approach reflects a broader methodological concern within the classical exegetical tradition regarding how external narrative materials should be engaged in Qur'anic interpretation. Therefore, this study contributes to the understanding of exegetical methodology by highlighting Ibn Kathīr's role in developing a selective and evaluative model for managing *isrā'iliyyāt* narratives. His approach illustrates how classical exegetes negotiated the presence of such narrative traditions while maintaining the authority of the Qur'an and authenticated prophetic teachings as the primary sources of interpretation.

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