

CHRISTIANS AND CHRISTIANITY

NAṢĀRĀ, AL-NAṢRĀNIYYA

This article comprises the following sections: i. Definitions and Usage; ii. Key Features; iii. Covenant; iv. Obligation to believe in the Prophet, upon him blessings and peace; v. Double Reward; vi. Closeness to Believers; viii. Divine Promise of their Ascendancy; ix. Prohibition to take them as *awaliyāʿa*; x. Refuted Doctrines: (a) Alleged Divinity of ʿĪsā, upon him peace; (b) Their Belief that ʿĪsā, upon him peace, was the Son of God; (c) Trinity; (d) Alleged Crucifixion; (e) Monasticisms; xi. Refuted Claims: (a) Exclusive Soteriology; (b) Their Claim about Ibrāhīm, upon him peace, and his Children; (c) Their Claim to be the Sons and Beloved of Allah; xii. Their Excesses; xiii. Mutual Imprecation; xiv. Implied References; xv. A Protected People; xvi. Bibliography.

Definitions and Usage

The Qurʾān uses three appellations for Christians: *naṣārā*, *ahl al-injīl*, and *ahl al-kitāb*. Two otherwise prevalent Arabic equivalents of Christians and Christianity, *Masīhiyyūn*, *Masīhiyya*, are not used in the Qurʾān.

- I. **Naṣārā:** *Naṣārā* is used 14 times in its plural form and once in the singular (*naṣrānī*) (Q 2:62, 111, 113x2, 120, 135, 140; 5:14, 18, 51, 69, 82; 9:30; 22:17; and Q 3:67 respectively).
 - There are two opinions about the term’s provenance. According to the first opinion, it is a toponym from the Levantine village called Nāṣira (Nazareth), “where ʿĪsā, the son of Maryam, was born” (Yāqūt, *Buldān*, *sub* nāṣira); thus, ʿĪsā, upon him peace, was called al-Nāṣirī, “as per the opinion of Ibn ʿAbbās (3BH-68/619-688) narrated through an unsatisfactory chain” (Ṭabarī, *sub* Q 2:62). Other names given for this village include Nāṣrān, Naṣūriyya, Naṣrūna and Naṣrān (Fayrūzābādī; Ibn Manẓūr). Ibn ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Rāzī (d. after 666/1267) says its singular masculine form (*naṣrān*) “is never used without the ascriptive *yāʿ*” (*yā al-nisba*), [hence *naṣrānī*]” (*Mukhtār*, *sub* n-ṣ-r; also see Ibn Manẓūr for a similar explanation).
 - According to the second opinion, it is derived from the root n-ṣ-r (*naṣara-yanaṣuru-naṣran*—“to help”), especially in the sense used in Q 61:14, which quotes a conversation between Prophet ʿĪsā, upon him be peace, and his companions. He asks, ‘Who are my helpers unto Allah?’ (man anṣārī ilā-Llāh). The disciples respond, ‘We are the helpers of Allah’ We believe in Allah; bear witness

that we are Muslims. Q 3:52 has the same question and answer (see below). Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224-310/839-923) quotes a couplet in support of the view that they are called *naṣārā* because of their mutual help and assistance (*li-nuṣra baʿduhum baʿdā wa tanāṣurihim*) (*sub* Q 2:62; for a similar linguistic explanation, see Rāghib, *sub* n-ṣ-r). Abūl-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (467-538/ca. 1344-1392) also supports this opinion and holds that the final *yāʿ* in *naṣrānī* is exaggerative (*lil-mubāligha*), not ascriptive (as it was in the first opinion above), in recognition of their help to the Messiah (*al-Masīh*) (*sub* Q 2:62; also see Fayrūzābādī, *Baṣāʿir*).

- In Q 5:14, the appellation *naṣārā* is mentioned as a self-proclaimed attribute: *Those who say, “we are naṣārā”*. Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. ʿUmar al-Rāzī (543-606/1148-1209) says, “Allah Most High did not say *mina-l-naṣārā* (“from the Christians”), because they called themselves by this name, claiming to support Allah Most High. The referent are those who said to ʿĪsā, ‘we are the helpers of Allah’ (naḥnu anṣāru-Llāh, Q 3:52). This name is, in fact, a name of praise (*ism madh*), but Allah Most High clarifies that they claimed this attribute [to be theirs], but they were not thus attributed by Allah” (*laysū marṣūfīna bihā ʿind-Allah*); for similar explanations, see Qushayrī; Baghawī; Samarqandī; Bayḍāwī; Ibn ʿAṭiyya).
- II. **Ahl al-Injīl** (“People of Injil”), used once (Q 5:47). Injīl (*q.v.*) is directly mentioned twelve times (Q 3:3, 48, 65; 5:46, 47, 66, 68, 110; 7:157, 111; 48:29; 57:27); it is often mistranslated as Gospel, but it is not the four Gospels of the New Testament which were authored by known human beings; rather, it is the Qurʾānic name of the revelation sent to ʿĪsā, upon him peace.
 - Christians are included in the three Qurʾānic terms referring to the “People of the Book” (*q.v.*): *ahl al-kitāb*—used thirty times in eight Madinan suras (Q 2:105, 109; 3:64, 65, 69, 70, 71, 72, 75, 98, 99, 110, 113, 199; 4:123, 153, 159, 171; 5:15, 19, 59, 65, 68, 77; 33:26; 57:29; 59:2, 11; 98:1, 6) and once in a Makkān sura (Q 29:46); *alladhīna ūtū-l-kitāb* (“those who were given the Book”), which occurs fifteen times (Q 2:101, 144, 145; 3:19, 100, 186, 187; 4:47, 131; 5:5, 57; 9:29; 57:16; 74:31; 98:4); and, *alladhīna ūtū naṣīban min al-kitāb* (“those who were given a portion of the Book”), used thrice (Q 3:23; 4:44, 51).