



## THE STORY OF SLAUGHTERING COWS IN SURAH AL-BAQARAH

**Nur Afiyah**

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kediri

*afiyah.kediri99@gmail.com*

### **Abstract**

The name of surah al-Baqarah is taken from the story of slaughtering cows, verses 67 to 73. Suppose someone only reads the translation of the Qur'an or reads the Ijmali interpretation, of course. In that case, he will not be able to understand the story coherently because the verse arrangement is reversed. Therefore, it takes the narratological theory of the Qur'an to sequence the story so that it can be understood easily by historical chronology. The study uses a literature review by collecting the commentators, summarized in a book of commentaries. The study results are the story of the slaughter of a cow, starting from verses 72 and continuing with verses 67 to 71. After that, verse 72 is skipped and goes straight to verse 73. So, the chronological sequence of history is 72, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, and 73. Based on it, al-Baqarah is a cow slaughtered by the Israelites to uncover the case of the murder of a nephew to his uncle. The nephew is the only heir. He could not wait for an inheritance, so he killed his wealthy uncle. He left the trail by placing the corpse in front of someone else's house at night. Then the case of finding the body went viral, and the Israelites accused each other of being confused about finding the culprit. After that, they asked Moses to solve the case; the order came down for the Israelites to slaughter a cow. Then, part of the cow was struck against the corpse, and he got up and said it was his nephew who killed him.

**Keywords:** *The Story of Cows, Prophet Moses, Israelites, Surah al-Baqarah, Narratology of the Qur'an.*



## Introduction

Surah al-Baqarah is the second surah in the Qur'an, after Surah al-Fatihah. This surah includes *Madaniah* (which was revealed in Medina) except for verse 281, which was revealed in Mina when the Prophet had *hajj wada'*<sup>1</sup> and the last 3 verses (verses 284-286 or *sama'i* verses).<sup>2</sup> Surah al-Baqarah is also the longest surah in the Qur'an. It contains many stories, ranging from the characters of believers, hypocrites, and even the stories of the previous people. Although this surah consists of 286 verses, its name is taken from the story in verses 67-73. So, only seven verses are used as the basis for the name of the surah. Although there are only seven verses, the story cannot be easily understood because, first, the story of the slaughter of the female cow is not coherent in chronological order. The first story is actually in the 72<sup>nd</sup> verse, not 67, so it confuses people who read it. Second, the reason for the command to slaughter the cow is only in a thick interpretation (*tafsir tahlili*), so very few people understand it. So, the Qur'an does not explain the reasons for the order to occur. The Qur'an only explains the consequences so that it seems that

<sup>1</sup> Abu Hafs 'Umar bin 'Ali bin 'Adil, *Tafsir al-Lubab, Vol. 1* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2001), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Abd al-Rahman bin al-Kamal Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Al-Itqan fi 'Ulum al-Qur'an, Vol. 1* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2012), 73.

there are episodes that are cut off. Here is the translation of verses 67-73.

And [recall] when Moses said to his people, "Indeed, Allāh commands you to slaughter a cow." They said, "Do you take us in ridicule?" He said, "I seek refuge in Allāh from being among the ignorant (2: 67).

They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is." [Moses] said, "[Allāh] says, 'It is a cow which is neither old nor virgin, but median between that,' so do what you are commanded" (2: 68).

They said, "Call upon your Lord to show us what is her color." He said, "He says, 'It is a yellow cow, bright in color - pleasing to the observers" (2: 69).

They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is. Indeed, [all] cows look alike to us. And indeed we, if Allāh wills, will be guided" (2: 70).

He [Moses] said, "He says, 'It is a cow neither trained to plow the earth nor to irrigate the field, one free from fault with no spot upon her.'" They said, "Now you have come with the truth." So they slaughtered her, but they could hardly do it (2: 71).

And [remember] when you slew a man and disputed over it, but Allāh was to bring out that which you were concealing (2: 72).

73. So We said, "Strike him [i.e., the slain man] with part of it." Thus does Allāh bring the dead to life, and He shows you His signs that you might reason (2: 73).

The verse above notice why Allah commanded the slaughter of a female cow (there was a censored episode), and the Children of Israel kept asking questions (verses 67-71). in verse 72, Allah describes the debate about the murder case. In verse 73, Allah explains his power to bring the dead (corpses) to life. The result of an analysis of the translation of the Qur'an is coherent and has not chronologically described the incident.

If someone only reads the *ijmali* interpretation (global interpretation), which does not include an analysis of the story, then the chronology of the slaughter of the cow cannot be adequately understood. There is a *tahlili* interpretation (analytical interpretation) that discusses every story in detail, but not many people have time to finish reading the interpretation of the books. Therefore, one theory can bridge this problem: the narratological theory of the Qur'an. This theory was introduced by M. Faisol, who explained the story

of Moses from the perspective of the al-Qur'an narrative.

Al-Qur'an narratology is looking for scattered stories on particular themes. If the theme discussed is the story of Moses, the researcher must collect the number of the words "Moses" mentioned in the Qur'an. The book used as a reference in finding the number of words in the Qur'an is the work of Muhammad Fuad 'Abd al-Baqi.<sup>3</sup> The story of Moses, scattered in various suras one by one, must be studied and observed, which one is in the early, middle, and late periods. The initial episode is put at the beginning. The middle episode is placed in the middle, and the final episode is placed at the end.<sup>4</sup> The results of the preparation of the story may follow the sequence of mushaf, but it may also be different.

The theory above is slightly different when applied to the story of slaughtering cows, although the pattern is still the same and can be applied. The difference is that the story of Moses studied by M. Faisol is scattered in various suras. Meanwhile, the story of slaughtering cows is only found in Surah al-Baqarah, namely verses 67-73. Therefore, the

<sup>3</sup> Muhammad Fu'ad 'Abd al-Baqi, *al-Mu'jam al-Mufahras Li'alfaz al-Qur'an* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyah, 1364).

<sup>4</sup> M. Faisol, "Interpretasi Kisah Nabi Musa Perspektif Naratologi al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 11, no. 2 (Maret 2017), 366.

object must be listed in verses 67-73 only, not to touch other surahs for analysis.

After a story can be understood chronologically in a coherent way, the next step is to find out about the role of the Narrator (Allah) and the events surrounding it. After that, find out about the 'ibrah that can be taken from the story. In Surah Yusuf, Allah explains "There was certainly in their stories a lesson for those of understanding" (12: 111). So, even though the story has passed, it still contributes to real life today because of the story's purpose in the Qur'an.

This research uses a qualitative-library research method. Qualitative research, in terms of its object, emphasizes more aspects of social sciences such as history, social life, and soon.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, according to S. Aminah, qualitative research is to understand the meaning of the research being built by the researcher. Researchers, in this case, are the main instrument for collecting and analyzing data.<sup>6</sup> The object of social research is the behavior of the people of the past.

This study reveals the story of slaughtering cows by the Israelites at the

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Hasan et al., *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif* (Klaten: Tahta Media Group, 2022), 8.

<sup>6</sup> S. Aminah & Roikan, *Pengantar Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Ilmu Politik* (Jakarta: Prenada Media Group, 2019), 568.

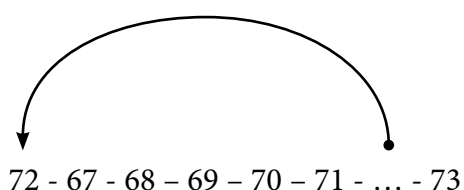
time of the Prophet Moses. The events that have passed thousands of years ago would not be possible to examine using interviews because they are history. Thus, the data must be from existing library materials in books, articles, or other research results. The main object of the literature used in this article is the discipline of interpretation because the Qur'an only explains the story concisely and uncoordinatedly. The tafsir *tahlili*<sup>7</sup> is the best option for digging up data about the story of the slaughter of the female cow.

### **The Story of the Cow in Surah al-Baqarah: Narratological Perspective of the Qur'an**

In explaining the interpretation of Surah al-Baqarah, which tells about the slaughter of cows in verses 67-73, the author needs to straighten that based on the narratological theory of the Qur'an, the chronological sequence of the verse starts from verses 72, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71,

<sup>7</sup> *Tahlili* is a method of interpreting the Qur'an which describes the content of the Qur'an in a descriptive-analytic manner. The content of the verses analyzed includes vocabulary, sentences, the reason for the revelation of the verse (*asbab al-nuzul*), *munasabah*, opinions of scholars, companions, *tabi'in*, and soon. The essence of the *tahlili* interpretation method is a "thick description" or extensive explanation so that the book of interpretation that uses *tahlili* will be in many volumes. Wely Dozan & Muhamad Turmuzi, *History of the Methodology of the Science of Tafsir al-Qur'an* (Yogyakarta: Bintang Pustaka Madani, 2020), 35.

and 73. So the sequence is reversed, starting from verses 72, 8, and then 67 to 71 and then jumping to verse 73. Therefore, in compiling this article's interpretation, the Qur'an's narratological theory is used to reveal the story's chronology, so it is not a compilation based on *tartib mushaf*. The illustration of the order of the verses can be described as follows:



The 72nd verse is moved to the first order because it contains the story's beginning. So the story's chronology is sequentially from verse 67 to 71, then jumps to 73, which is the end of the story. Thus, the sequence of verses and their interpretation will be adapted to this theory so that they are coherent and more understandable. The following is the 72<sup>nd</sup> verse of Surah al-Baqarah, which contains the beginning of the story of the slaughter of the cow:

And [remember] when you slew a man and disputed over it, but Allāh was to bring out that which you were concealing (2: 72).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Tim Kementerian Agama, *Al-Qur'an dan Terjemahnya* (Surabaya: Pustaka Assalam, 2010), 6.

The beginning of the order for the slaughter of the cow was related to a murder case among Israelites.<sup>9</sup> Once upon a time, an Israelite man was wealthy but had no children. The only heir of the wealthy Israelite was his nephew. However, one day the nephew was impatient to get the inheritance; he killed his rich uncle at night. He placed his uncle's body in front of the house of one of the Israelis. The next day the discovery of the body caused an uproar, and the Israelites accused each other. The person most suspected was the owner of the house with the body. The nephew also accused the owner of the house where the body was placed. This incident happened until someone came who gave the news by saying, "Isn't there Allah's Apostle around you? Moses?"<sup>10</sup>

They then went to him to ask for clarity about who killed the rich man of Israel. Then Moses received an order from God that the Israelites slaughter the cow so that the case could be revealed. Indirectly it shows that the character of the Israelites needed the Prophet Moses if only necessary. However, if they do not need Moses, they

<sup>9</sup> Abu al-Qasim Mahmud bin 'Amr al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta'wil*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi, 1407), 154.

<sup>10</sup> Wahbah bin Mustafa al-Zuhayli, *Al-Tafsir al-Munir fi al-'Aqidah wa al-Shari'ah wa al-Manhaj*, Vol. 1 (Damshiq: Dar al-Fikr al-Ma'asir, 2016), 185.

stay away. God then granted the request of the Israelites. Moses conveyed to them as in the Surah al-Baqarah as follows:

And [remember] when Moses said to his people, "Indeed, Allāh commands you to slaughter the cow." They said, "Do you take us in ridicule?" He said, "I seek refuge in Allāh from being among the ignorant (2: 67).

*"And [remember] when Moses said to his people."* This verse, revealed in Medina, warned the Jews to remember that Allah gave the Israelites many favors and to believe in the prophet Muhammad. Remember, O Muhammad and the Jews of Medina, the story of Moses when he told his people to solve the murder case among the Israelites.

*"Indeed, Allāh commands you to slaughter the cow."* It was purposed to eliminate the sense of worship and devotion of the Israelites to the cow statue. This commandment also aims to remove the seeds of the Israelites' material beliefs, as they are markedly different from those who genuinely believe in God.

*They said, "Do you take us in ridicule?"* These are their sayings and quoted by Allah in the Qur'an. They seemed to disapprove of the commandment. They consider it a mockery because

they once worshiped *'ijl* (a bull statue made of gold). It also indicates that the seeds of paganism have not been wiped out. The role of the Narrator (Allah) in this verse is decisive. God wanted to show His power to the Israelites that if they wanted the case to be resolved, they would inevitably have to follow the commandment, even though they were reluctant.

*He said, "I seek refuge in Allāh from being among the ignorant."* The accusation of the Israelites that the command was considered ridiculous was refuted by the Prophet Moses. Moses took refuge in Allah so that he would not be foolish. This phrase is a political and intelligent answer. It is said to be political because he does not answer his people's questions 'yes' or 'no' but responds to them in other ways. It is said to be smart because the answer emphasizes that the worshipers of the statue are stupid people for worshiping matter, while Prophet Musa wanted to be excluded from them.

They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is." He [Moses] said, "Allāh says, 'It is a cow which is neither old nor virgin, but median between that,' so do what you are commanded (2: 68).

*They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is."* This ques-

tion of the Israelites indicated they were reluctant to carry out God's commands directly. Instead, they asked about the details of the cow to be slaughtered, indicating that they still tend to worship the 'ijl, and if there is a substitute, they expect to be replaced with something else, not an ox. Prophet Musa patiently served their will and explained it as follows:

*Moses said, "[Allāh] says, 'It is a cow which is neither old nor virgin, but median between that.'* The type of cow referred to as median is a cow that is neither too young nor too old. In Javanese terms, between a young cow and an old cow, is *dhoro* for cows. As for the bull, it is called *jemoko*. If the bull is old, the Javanese call it *benthung*, and if it is small, it is called *pedhet*. Then, what is meant in this verse is *dhoro*.<sup>11</sup>

"So do what you are commanded." This last verse reaffirms the first commandment that was not carried out immediately. It is appropriate if there is one question and it has been answered, and then after that, it is required to implement it as this verse immediately. The Israelites wanted the command to be changed because they slaughtered the cow as they slaughtered their 'god.'

They said, "Call upon your Lord to show us what is her color." [Moses]

said, "He says, 'It is a yellow cow, bright in color—pleasing to the observers" (2: 69).

*"They said, "Call upon your Lord..."*

In the previous verse, Allah's commandment states that it must be carried out immediately. However, the Israelites still asked about the details of the cow. The Qur'an records this question of the Israelites by using the word *rabbaka* (your God), not *rabbana* (our God). This question gives the impression that they do not believe in Allah. If they already believe in Allah, the question is 'Ask our Lord,' not 'Ask your Lord,' which explains the color. After the Israelites asked about the 'age' of the cow, and it was answered, they also questioned its color.

*"He says, 'It is a yellow cow, bright in color—pleasing to the observers."* The second detailed question is about the color of the cow to be slaughtered. In this verse, Allah answers that the cow is yellow, bright yellow, which pleases those who look at it. This type of cow, for the Javanese, is a Brahman cow. In Java, there are at least two types of cows. *First*, local cows. The cow is usually white or *bligon* (a mixture of white and black) or a type of cow that is smaller than the average cow. *Second*, imported cows. Brahman cow belongs to the category of imported cows. This cow is usually fat, thick-skinned, and has the

<sup>11</sup> Abdur Rohman, *Tafsir Kediri*, Handbook (2022).

same character as mentioned in this verse: yellow, bright yellow, and pleasing to the eye. So, the cow referred to in this verse is the Brahman cow.

They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is. Indeed, [all] cows look alike to us. And indeed we, if Allāh wills, will be guided" (2: 70).

*They said, "Call upon your Lord to make clear to us what it is."* After the two questions were answered in the previous verses, the Israelites had not yet carried out the order to slaughter the cow. They questioned the details of the cow again. They also asked Moses to provide detailed information about it.

*"Indeed, [all] cows look alike to us."* This expression can be considered a form of caution so as not to be wrong in choosing the cow in question. However, on the other hand, those questions indicate that they are reluctant to carry out the command.

*And indeed we, if Allāh wills, will be guided.* The instructions referred to here are to obtain the characteristics of the cows that have been described. Three times the question of the Israelites indicated that they were reluctant to carry out the command. If the fourth question is answered, they will ask again about the details of the cow. People who repeatedly ask questions and do not

immediately carry out orders aim to make those who ordered feel annoyed and impatient and do what they were ordered to do themselves or change other orders. However, Allah knew their intentions, and Prophet Moses continued to answer their questions, even adding other information so they would not ask again.

He [Moses] said, "He says, 'It is a cow neither trained to plow the earth nor to irrigate the field, one free from fault with no spot upon her.'" They said, "Now you have come with the truth." So they slaughtered her, but they could hardly do it (2: 71)

Moses said, "He says, 'It is a cow neither trained to plow the earth...'" Plowing cows usually belong to the poor. The cows are still employed to increase their income and daily needs. Meanwhile, if the cow's owner is a rich person, the cow is usually not used to plow the fields. Whereas what is meant by "...[nor] to irrigate the field" is a cow pulling a wagon carrying water, and the water is to irrigate rice fields or crops. The cow can also pull the water in the well up (instead of a waterwheel).

*"[...] one free from fault with no spot upon her."* This description means that if the cow has stripes, it may be a milch cow or a holstein (an animal of a typi-



cally black-and-white breed of the large dairy cow). They said, "Now you have come with the truth." It is the awareness and understanding of the Israelites about their willingness to carry out the command. So they slaughtered it, but they could hardly do it. They think the characteristics of cows that meet these requirements are challenging to find, so they almost do not carry out the order. However, in the end, they could find the cow in question.

So We said, "Strike him [i.e., the slain man] with part of it." Thus does Allāh bring the dead to life, and He shows you His signs that you might reason (2: 73).

So We said, "Strike him [i.e., the slain man] with part of it." Once found, the Israelites bought it and slaughtered it. Al-Zuhayli explained that the cow was the orphan's pet, and he did not want to sell it except at a fantastic price. Then they agreed to buy the cow with gold as heavy as the cow's fur.<sup>12</sup> Allah then ordered to take one part of the cow that had been slaughtered. Al-Mawardi said there are five opinions regarding explaining the part of the cow. *First*, according to Mujahid 'Ikrimah and Qatadah are thighs. *Second*, according to al-Suddi is the part between the shoulders. *Third*, according to Abu al-'Aliyah

<sup>12</sup> al-Zuhayli, 124.

is a part of the bone from several bones. *Fourth*, according to Ibn Zayd is the ear. *Fifth*, according to al-Farra' is the tail-bone or coccyx. He reasoned that the coccyx is the part that does not crumble if buried.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, al-Qurtubi stated that this part is the tongue because it is used for speaking.<sup>14</sup>

Thus does Allāh bring the dead to life. After being "hit" with part of the slaughtered cow, suddenly, the corpse rose again and lived for a while. Immediately the people who gathered in the place asked who had killed him. Then the corpse that came back to life said, "he," while showing his hand to his nephew, Amil. After that, he died again.<sup>15</sup> Finally, 'Amil did not get an inheritance and was punished according to the law that the killer would not inherit from the person he killed.<sup>16</sup>

[A]nd He shows you His signs... In this verse, God's power is evident when resurrecting a dead person, which is evidenced by hitting one part of the female

<sup>13</sup> Abu Hasan 'Ali bin Muhammad bin Habib al-Mawardi, *Al-Nukat wa al-'Uyun*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar a-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2016), 143

<sup>14</sup> Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Abu Bakr bin Farkh Shams al-Din al-Qurtubi, *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an*, Vol. 1 (Riyadh: Dar 'Alim al-Kutub, 2003), 457

<sup>15</sup> 'Iz al-Din 'Abd al-'Aziz bin 'Abd al-Salam al-Sulami, *Tafsir al-'Iz bin 'Abd Salam*, Vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 1996), 43.

<sup>16</sup> Abu Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman bin Abi Hatim, *Tafsir Ibnu Abi Hatim*, Vol. 1 (Sidan: al-Maktabah al-'Asriyah, 2014), 136.

cow according to God's command. The Israelites witnessed this extraordinary phenomenon as a warning that Allah's commandment was true so that they would believe in Allah. At that time, the verse was addressed to the Israelites of Prophet Moses so they would believe. Meanwhile, when this verse was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad, it became a story to the Israelites so that they would believe in Allah.

*[T]hat you might reason.* The end of this verse suggests that the Israelites should think about the phenomena and acknowledge Moses's prophetic miracles. Then the story is addressed to the Israelites of the Prophet Muhammad to remind them of what their ancestors did. It is due to the Israelites' robust tribal ties or descendants at that time. Thus, they are advised to think and understand the story to believe in the Prophet Muhammad.

### ***Ibrah***

*Ibrah* is an attempt to take lessons or seek the meaning from the experiences of others or events that occurred in the past through a process of deep thinking; it raises awareness of one's self.

At least four messages can be obtained from the story above. *First*, from a legal perspective, the killer will not inherit the property of the person he killed. An Israelite nephew who killed his uncle earlier will not inherit. On

the contrary, he must receive punishment for his actions. The desire to get rich quickly by killing other people will result in his loss, and he must be responsible for his actions in this world and hereafter.

*Second*, from the theological aspect. God emphasized to the Israelites to abandon their former pagan worship and beliefs. The Israelites once worshiped *'ijl* (a cow statue made of gold). In this context, the Prophet Muhammad wanted to purify their faith and monotheism from material elements (*shirk*).

*Third*, a warning to all humans to remember God's authority who brings back the dead as a lesson (*ibrah*) to the Israelites during the time of Moses. Likewise, on the Day of Judgment, Allah will resurrect all humans who have died to account for their actions. Faith in the resurrection day is one of the *ibrah* of this story because many people today doubt the truth about the resurrection day.

*Fourth*, the reluctance to carry out the command indicates that they are still inclined to worship statues (*'ijl* or *shirk*). When they asked many times, they wanted the command replaced with another one. However, Allah still does not change His orders, so they appear to be bargaining with Allah's command. In the end, the Israelites also obeyed the order, although they tended to be forced.

## Conclusion

The story of the slaughter of a cow is only found in Surah al-Baqarah (2: 67-73), but the verses are still not in chronological order. In the narratological theory of the Qur'an, the story is ordered starting from verses 72, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, then 73. The story's details are as follows: verse 72 contains a murder case that disturbed the Israelites so that they contended and accused each other of the killer. Finally, they asked Prophet Musa to solve this case. Verse 67 explains God's command to the Israelites that they slaughter a cow to solve the case.

In verse 68, the Israelites ask about the specifics of the cow, whether the cow is old or young, then Moses replies that the cow was the middle one. Verse 69 explains the question of the Israelites regarding the color; then, it is answered that the color is a deep yellow pleasing to the eye. Verse 70 explains the Israelites' doubts regarding the cow's specifications, then verse 71 answers that the cow is a cow that has never been used to plow fields, has never been used for irrigation, is not striped, and is not deformed. Then jump to verse 73, where they got the criteria for the cow, then slaughtered, and part of the cow was beaten to the corpse so that the corpse got up and said that the killer was his nephew.

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