Unit 19

The past tense of كَانَ

The **noun** of كَانَ is in the nominative.

The **predicate** of كَانَ is in the accusative.

Below is a chart with the full conjugation of the verb كَانَ in the past tense. It follows the same pattern as that of قَالَ .

Plural	Dual	Singular	
كَانُوا	كَانَا	كَانَ	3.m.
كُنَّ	كَانَتَا	كَانَتْ	3.f.
كُنْتُمْ	كُنْتُمَا	كُنْتَ	2.m.
كُنْتُنَّ	كُنْتُمَا	كُنْتِ	2.f.
كُنَّا	كُنَّا	كُنْتُ	1.m.f.

The 3rd person feminine plural كُنَّ is a contraction of كُنَّ

The 1st person plural كُنَّا is a contraction of كُنَّنَا .

The 'noun' of ḵana and the 'predicate' of ḵana

Study the following sentence:

كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً - Mankind was one nation.

In this sentence, the word النَّاسُ is called in Arabic 'the noun of كَانَ '. The word النَّاسُ is nominative, ending with a dammah. The noun of كَانَ is in the nominative case .

The word أُمَّةً is the predicate or خَبَر of كَانَ . It is accusative, ending with fat-hah. The predicate of كَانَ is in the accusative case.

(The word وَاحِدَةً is an adjective of أُمَّةً and agrees with it in gender and case.)

Below are more examples with ḵana. Notice that all the nouns of ḵana are nominative and all the predicates are accusative. **Read from right to left.**

Predicate of kana	Noun of kana	kana	
أُمَّةً	النَّاسُ	كَانَ	Mankind was one nation.
غَفُورًا	اللَّهُ	كَانَ	God has been Forgiving.
مُؤْمِنِينَ		كَانُوا	They were believers.
يَهُودِيًّا	إِبْرَاهِيمُ	مَا كَانَ	Ibrahim was not a Jew.
صَادِقِينَ		إِنْ كُنْتُمْ	If you were truthful.

Notes for text on opposite page:

Line 7: The word مُسْلِمِينَ is accusative because it is the predicate of كَانُوا .

Line 9: The word خَيْرَ is accusative because it is the predicate of كُنْتُمْ .

Line 10: The word ظَالِمِينَ is accusative because it is the predicate of كُنَّا .

Line 14: The word تُرَابًا is accusative because it is the predicate of كُنْتُ .

Line 15: The word اللَّهُ is nominative because it is the noun of كَانَ .

The one who conceals
The word 'kafir' is the active participle of the verb kafara which has the basic meaning of 'to conceal' or 'to cover up'. A kafir may be described as one who 'covers up' his natural state of goodness and virtue and denies or rejects the natural belief in one God. A kafir is also one who is ungrateful for all the favours which God has bestowed on the human being.
The word kafir has two plurals: kafirun and kuffar. In one instance in the Qur'an (surah al-Hadid, 57: 20), the word kuffar is used to mean 'tillers' of the soil, people who 'cover up' seed with soil.

Mankind was one nation. 2: 213	كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً	1 ■
And he was from among the disbelievers. 2: 34	وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ	2
And indeed she was from a disbelieving folk. 28: 47	إِنَّهَا كَانَتْ مِن قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ	3
And she was one of the devout. 66: 12	وَكَانَتْ مِنَ الْقَانِتِينَ	4
(There is) no god but You. Glory be to You...	لَا إِلَـٰهَ إِلَّا أَنتَ سُبْحَانَكَ	5
Indeed, I have been one of the wrongdoers. 21: 87	إِنِّي كُنتُ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ	6
They were Muslims (submitting to God). 43: 69	كَانُوا مُسْلِمِينَ	7
They were before that doers of good. 51: 16	كَانُوا قَبْلَ ذَٰلِكَ مُحْسِنِينَ	8
You are the best community produced for mankind... 3: 110	كُنتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ	9
They said: Glory be to our Sustainer! Indeed we, we were wrong-doers. 68: 29	قَالُوا سُبْحَانَ رَبِّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ	10
So He expelled them both from where they were. 2: 36	فَأَخْرَجَهُمَا مِمَّا كَانَا فِيهِ	11
And if (it were) not for God's favour on you and His mercy,	وَلَوْ لَا فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَتُهُ	12 ■
you would certainly have been among the losers. 2: 64	لَكُنتُمْ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ	13
And the unbeliever would say, 'Oh! Would that I were dust.' 78: 40	وَقَالَ الْكَافِرُ يَـٰلَيْتَنِي كُنتُ تُرَابًا	14 ■
And God has been Forgiving, Merciful. 4: 96	وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا	15 ■

Notes for text above

■ *Line 1:* The word 'ummah' (plural: umam) means community or nation. It is used in the Qur'an to refer to the community of believers or the universal Muslim community which is described as a middle community. Other species in creation (such as birds) are also referred to in the Qur'an as 'umam' or 'communities'.

■ *Line 12:* لَوْ meaning 'if' introduces a conditional setence. This is why the following لَكُنتُمْ is translated as 'you would certainly have been'. The

initial لَ is the lam of emphasis.

■ *Line 14:* يَـٰلَيْتَنِي is a combination of لَيْتَ + نِي + يَـٰ meaning ' O!, would that I ...'.

■ *Line 15:* Note that the verb كَانَ refers not only to the past but to the present as well. It has the sense of 'was' and 'continues to be'. The past form of the verb in Arabic is often used in a past and present continuous sense. It is important to look at the context in which a verb is used to determine its tense.