

Unit 18

The past tense of قَالَ

In English, adjectives like big, bigger and biggest are called positive, comparative and superlative respectively.

In Arabic, there is only one form for the comparative and the superlative.

Two verbs which occur very frequently in the Qur'an are قَالَ and كَانَ in their various forms.

They are called hollow verbs. The alif in قَالَ and كَانَ stands for the letter و. So: the root letters of قَالَ are ق و ل; the root letters of كَانَ are ك و ن.

This means that if you are looking up قَالَ in a dictionary, you will need to look under ق و ل and not ق ا ل. The second root letter 'waw' is also important when we come to deal with the present tense of قَالَ.

Below is given the full conjugation of قَالَ in the past tense. You will see that the alif is dropped in all the 1st and 2nd person forms, and in the feminine plural 3rd person. Whenever the alif is dropped, the ق takes a dammah.

Plural	Dual	Singular	
قَالُوا	قَالَا	قَالَ	3.m.
قَالْنَ	قَالَتَا	قَالَتْ	3.f.
قَالْتُمْ	قَالْتَمَا	قَالْتَ	2.m.
قَالْتُنَّ	قَالْتُمَا	قَالْتِ	2.f.
قَالْنَا	قَالْنَا	قَالْتُ	1. m & f.

The passive of قَالَ is قِيلَ, it has been said, it is said.

Adjectives: comparative & superlative

In line 1 opposite, the word أَكْبَرُ meaning 'bigger' or 'greater', is the comparative form of the adjective كَبِيرٌ meaning 'big' or 'great'. Many adjectives follow the same pattern. In English, we use the terms positive, comparative and superlative for adjectives used for comparing. For example, big, bigger and biggest are positive, comparative and superlative respectively.

In Arabic, to form the comparative of a masculine adjective, an alif is added before the first root letter. A sukun is then placed on the first root letter. The second root letter takes a fat-hah. Read from right to left.

Comparative		Positive	
bigger	أَكْبَرُ	big	كَبِيرٌ
smaller	أَصْغَرُ	small	صَغِيرٌ
nearer	أَقْرَبُ	near	قَرِيبٌ
more	أَكْثَرُ	many	كَثِيرٌ
greater	أَعْظَمُ	great	عَظِيمٌ

Arabic uses the comparative form for the superlative as well. So the word أَكْبَرُ can mean both 'bigger' and 'biggest'. You can tell from the context whether an adjective is comparative or superlative.

The feminine of كَبِيرٌ is كَبِيرَةٌ, the comparative form of which is كُبْرَى which means 'greater' or 'greatest' as in آيَةُ الْكُبْرَى - the greatest sign.

We hear and we obey

The response of a believer to Divine guidance contained in the Qur'an is to accept and follow it. But this is not robotic behaviour. It is based on the clear consciousness of the absolute knowledge, wisdom and justice of God Who knows what is best for His creatures. Each person has a duty to use his or her God-given reason to ponder and reflect.

He said: This (is) my Lord. This (is) greater. 6: 78

1 قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّي هَذَا أَكْبَرُ

He said: I am better than he. 7: 12

2 قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ

She said: It is from God. 3: 37

3 قَالَتْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ

She said: My Sustainer! Indeed I have wronged myself. 27: 44

4 قَالَتْ رَبِّي إِنَّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي

They both said: Our Sustainer! We have wronged ourselves. 7: 23

5 قَالَا رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا

They (f.) both said: Our father (is) an old man. 28: 23

6 قَالَتَا أَبُونَا شَيْخٌ كَبِيرٌ

They said: We heard and disobeyed. 2: 93

7 قَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا

They said: We heard and obeyed. 2: 285

8 وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا

Did you say to people...? 5: 116

9 أَأَنْتَ قُلْتَ لِلنَّاسِ ...

I did not say to them...

10 ■ مَا قُلْتُ لَهُمْ ...

except what You commanded me. 5:117

11 ■ إِلَّا مَا أَمَرْتَنِي بِهِ

And behold! We said to the angels... 2: 34

12 وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ

And behold, you said: O Musa,

13 وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَى

we shall not bear one (type of) food. 2: 61

14 ■ لَنْ نَصْبِرَ عَلَى طَعَامٍ وَاحِدٍ

And when it is said to them: Believe, as people have believed... 2: 13

15 ■ وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ ءَامِنُوا كَمَا ءَامَنَ النَّاسُ

Notes for text above

■ **Line 10:** The first مَا negates the verb: قُلْتُ - I said; مَا قُلْتُ - I did not say.

■ **Line 11:** The مَا means 'what'. بِهِ, meaning 'with it' must be included in the Arabic but is not translated in the English.

■ **Line 14:** The word لَنْ means 'shall not'. It is followed by a verb in the subjunctive. See Unit 23.

■ **Line 15:** The word ءَامِنُوا is imperative plural. Notice the kasrah with the mjm. See Unit 33.

Finding out: Use a translation of the Qur'an to find out the following: Who is the speaker in line 1, line 2, line 3, line 4 and line 10? Who are the speakers in line 5, line 6 and lines 13-14?

Describe the context of each of these lines.

an old man
to disobey
to obey
food

شَيْخٌ
عَصَى
أَطَاعَ
طَعَامٌ