Nahw - The Anatomy of a Sentence - Part 3

In this post I will explain , Insha Allah, some points regarding the use of the relative pronoun الـَّذي in

the Arabic Language. We will use the following sentence as our example:

كانَ إسماعيلُ وَلَـداً صغيـِراً يَـجري يَـجري وَ يَـخـْرُجُ مَـعَ والـِدِهِ

(Ismail was a small boy **who** would run and go out with is father)
In English a relative pronoun is used to describe a noun whenever the noun is being described by a full

sentence rather than a single word. For example, in the sentence *The pen, which I bought yesterday, is*

unique, the word *which* is connecting the pen with its adjective. The analogous word in Arabic is الـَّذي

and it gives the meaning of *who* .The technical term for it is اِسم موصُـول .

Note that we have translated the sentence given above into English using the word *who* even though

there is no الـَّذي in it. To understand this apparent anomaly understand that وَلَـداً is an اِسم being

described by the adjective صغيـِراً (both of them form a موصُـوف and صِـفه relationship, and thus

match each other in being *indefinite*). Also, the word وَلَـداً is being described further by the verbal

sentence which starts at يَـجري and ends at والـِدِهِ. In effect, the موصُـوف has two صِـفه in the main

sentence. Plus, the second صِفه is a complete sentence in itself as opposed to the first one which is a single word. So we have an instance where a noun is being described by a sentence. To be consistent with the موصُـوف - صِفه rules, whatever is describing وَلَــداً has to be *indefinite.* In the Arabic Language, as a rule, all sentences are considered *indefinite* by default. Hence, there is no grammatical problem when connecting وَلَــداً with its adjective (i.e. the verbal sentence) since both are indefinite.

Now consider a case where the noun being described is *definite* and we have a sentence which is describing it. This will cause a problem since we need to have a way of converting the *indefinite* sentence into a *definite* sentence before letting it describe a *definite* noun. This functionality is provided by الَّــذي which transform the *value* of a sentence from *indefinite* to *definite* . An example of this can be seen in Al-Hashr [22-24]:

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ ۖ هُوَ الرَّحْمَٰنُ الرَّحِيمُ *

هُوَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْمَلِكُ الْقُدُّوسُ السَّلَامُ الْمُؤْمِنُ الْمُهَيْمِنُ الْعَزِيزُ الْجَبَّارُ الْمُتَكَبِّرُ ۚ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ

هُوَ اللَّهُ الْخَالِقُ الْبَارِئُ الْمُصَوِّرُ ۖ لَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ يُسَبِّحُ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

Note that the first two verses have الَّــذي in it since the noun االلَّه is being described by لَا إِلَٰهَ إِلَّا هُوَ which is a complete sentence. However, this is not the case with the final verse where the noun االلَّه is being described by الْخَالِق (and other adjectives) which is a *definite* noun (and single word, as well), so الَّــذي is not needed here.

I hope this will explain some basic points regarding the use of الَّذي in the Arabic Language.