



Introduction to Qur'an

We have revealed this Qur'an in the Arabic language so that you may understand.

The Arabic language is the most eloquent, plain, deep and expressive of the meanings that might arise in one's mind. Therefore, the most honourable Book, was revealed in the most honourable language, to the most honourable Prophet and Messenger (Peace be upon him), delivered by the most honourable angel (Gabriel), in the most honourable land on earth (Makkah), and its revelation started during the most honourable month of the year, Ramadan. Therefore, the Qur'an [1] is perfect in every respect. It is the word of the Lord of the Worlds, which He revealed to His Messenger Muhammad (Peace be upon him), to bring mankind forth from darkness into light. It is the greatest of the heavenly Books, the most complete, the most perfect and the last of them.

Central Theme

The Central Theme that runs throughout the Qur'an is the exposition of the reality and the invitation to the right way. It declares that the same reality was revealed to Adam (Peace be upon him), and all the Messengers after him, and they all preached the same right way. Thus, the real object for the Book is to call people to this "right way" and to illuminate Allah's true guidance, which has often been lost either through man's negligence and heedlessness or distorted by his wicked perversity.

Subject

The Qur'an addresses two groups of people primarily, the Arabs and the People of the Book. Arabs were from the progeny of Ismail (Peace be upon him), son of Ibrahim (Peace be upon him). These were the unlettered people who were not sent any Prophet before Muhammad (Peace be upon him). Secondly, the Qur'an addresses the previous Muslim Ummahs i.e. The Jews and the Christians. They were given all the previous scriptures and most of the Prophets were sent to them before the advent of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). But as a whole, Qur'an was revealed as a guidance and addresses all of the Mankind, and not to a particular group or a nation. It speaks to innumerable varieties of people, remote from one another in time, space, and character, and still it has such an easy way of explanation, such a purity of style, and a clear way of description

that it is as if it were addressing only a single homogenous group, and each different group thinks that it is being addressed uniquely and specifically.

Preservation of the Qur'an

Allah has guaranteed to preserve this Qur'an, and He says:

“Verily, it is We Who have sent down the Dhikr (i.e. the Quraan) and surely, We will guard it.” [2]

Unlike the case with other divinely-revealed Books which Allah revealed to the people of a particular Prophet only, and not to all of mankind, so He did not guarantee to preserve them, rather He delegated their preservation to the followers of the Prophets (Peace be upon them). But they did not preserve them, rather they introduced alterations and changes which distorted most of the meanings. The Qur'an, on the other hand, was revealed by Allah to all of Mankind until the end of time, because the message of Muhammad (Peace be upon him) is the final message, so the Qur'an is preserved in men's hearts and in written form, as is proven by the events of history.

In another ayah Allah states:

“Surely this is a Glorious Qur'an, inscribed on a Preserved Tablet (Al-Lawh al-Mahfuz)” [3].

And in surah Al-Waqi'ah, Allah says:

“This is indeed a Glorious Qur'an, in a well-guarded Book.” [4].

Allah is protecting its location, and protecting it from having anything added or taken away, or being distorted. He is protecting its meanings from being twisted, just as He is protecting its words from being changed, and He is protecting its letters so that nothing is added or taken away. [5]

And in surah Zukhruf, Allah says:

“And verily it is in the Mother of the Book in Our Presence high, full of wisdom.”

This means, that the actual Qur'an is with Allah in the Mother of the Book, and from there it was revealed to Muhammad (Peace be upon him), in two stages. At first, Allah sent the Qur'an down all at one time from the Preserved Tablet [6] to the House of Might (Baytul-Izzah), which is in the heaven of this world. Then it came down in parts to the Messenger of Allah (Peace be upon him), based upon the incidents that occurred over a period of twenty two years.

Beginning of the Revelation

The Prophet (Peace be upon him) received the first revelation in 610CE, in the

Cave of Hira, in the Mountain of Light (Jabal-e-Noor), two and a half miles away from the House of Allah in the city of Makkah. It was revealed in Laila-tul-qadr (Night of Decree) in the holy month of Ramadan, through Angel Gabriel.

The Qur'an was revealed in stages over a period of 22 years, and not as a complete book in one single act of revelation. Firstly it was done to strengthen the heart of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) by addressing him continuously and whenever the need for guidance arose. Secondly, to gradually implement the laws of Allah. And thirdly, to make understanding, application and memorization of the revelation easier for the believers.

During the 22 years of the revelation, Prophet (Peace be upon him) stayed at Makkah for about 12 years, and then he migrated to Madinah in the year 622CE, where the revelation continued for ten more years. Nearly two-third of the Qur'an was revealed in Makkah, and the remaining in Madinah, with some surahs revealed during the migration from Makkah to Madinah.

Division of Qur'an

Qur'an has been divided into units, portions and sections, according to the convenience of the readers who wish to complete it in a given time and according to the subject matter. The Arabic terms used for this division are Manzil, Juz, surah, Hizb, ruku and ayah. There are different interpretations in different translations for these Arabic terms, but there are a few terms which we will use as they are in Arabic, like the words ayah and surah.

- Ayah

Ayah is the unit of Qur'an. It is guidance from Allah to Mankind and it is therefore not at all surprising to find that its smallest divisions are called 'signs'(ayat) i.e. signs of the Wisdom of Allah. The terms sentence and verse are not appropriate to use in place of the word ayah, as the Qur'an is not a Book of poetry. The size of an ayah varies in different surahs. The smallest ayah in the Qur'an comprises of only two letters i.e. 'Ha-Mim'. On the other hand an ayah can be as big as Ayat-ul-Kursi, which is one of the biggest ayat of the Qur'an.

So the division or the length of an ayah is not based on any principal of Arabic grammar, rather it was accepted as Prophet Muhammad(Peace be upon him) told us. As far as the count of ayat of the Qur'an are concerned, there is a difference of opinion in this matter, but it is known that there are atleast 6500 ayat in the Glorious Qur'an.

- Surah

Surah, plural Suwar, literally means 'row' or 'fence'. In technical language, it is the passage-wise division of the Qur'anic text. The Qur'an has 114 surahs of unequal length, the shortest consisting of four (Al-Asr) and the longest of 286 ayat (Al-Baqarah). The surahs are not divided into topics or subjects, quite unlike the

books we are accustomed with and the reader also encounters abrupt transitions between one subject matter into another within a surah that is what makes Qur'an a unique Book. Likewise, a surah does not contain any chapters or paragraphs, thus these terms cannot be interchanged with the Arabic word 'surah'.

- Ruku

The surahs are further divided into sections called ruku. These divisions were not present at the time of the Prophet (Peace be upon him) or during the days of his Companions (May Allah be pleased with them all). They were later added on for the convenience of the readers, under the leadership of Hajjaj bin Yusuf. Rukus are indicated by the Arabic letter 'Ain' and a number on it.

- Juz

The Qur'an is also divided into thirty well known 'Juz' of approximately equal length for easy recitation during the thirty nights of a month, especially of the month of Ramadan. Usually they are indicated by the word and the number of it given alongside. This division of the Qur'an was present at the time of the Companions (May Allah be pleased with them all), as indicated by the hadith:

Aws bin Hudhayfah said, he asked the Companions (May Allah be pleased with them all) of the Prophet (Peace be upon him), during his lifetime about how they used to divide the Qur'an, they said, "A third, a fifth, a seventh, a ninth, one eleventh, one thirteenth and the Mufasssal ⁷ until the end" ⁸.

- Hizb

The Qur'an has each Juz subdivided into four Hizb. Each hizb is again subdivided into quarters, the division is as follows, Rub'u (one-fourth), Nisf (half), and Sulus (one-third).

- Manzil

The Qur'anic text is also divided into seven parts of approximately equal length, called Manzil. It is indicated by the word 'manzil' and the respective number in the margin. This arrangement was done by the Companions (May Allah be pleased with them all) of the Prophet (Peace be upon him), to enable them to recite the whole Qur'an in the course of a week. First manzil contains three surahs, excluding Al-Fatihah, second has five, third seven, then nine, eleven, thirteen and the seventh Manzil contains sixty-five surahs.

- Pairs

Some surahs in the Qur'an form pairs, like surah Al-Baqarah and surah Al-Imran. Similarly the surahs Bani Israel and Al-Kahf form a pair. They form pairs because of the similarities of the subject addressed in them. There are also some unique surahs which do not form a pair with any surah like surah Yasin.

- Makkan and Madinan Division

As part of studying the revelation of the Qur'an, scholars have categorized the surahs of the Qur'an according to the time or era of their revelation. This is the subject that came to be known as the Makkan and Madinan division of Qur'an. The surahs revealed before Hijrah are known as Makkan surahs and those revealed after Hijrah are called Madinan surahs. The Makkan surahs are 85 and Madinan surahs number 28, which are divided into seven Makkan- Madinan groups. There is a scholarly consensus on the categorization of the Makkan and the Madinan surahs except for a few, where not all the ayat in a surah are of the same category, e.g. Surah Hajj. Some say it is Makkan and others say it of the Madinan origin, both opinions are correct, as it contains some ayat of the Makkan phase as well as from the Madinan period.

Asbab al-nuzul (reasons of the revelations)

The Qur'an has been revealed for guidance, for all times and situations to come. However, various ayat were revealed at a particular time in history and in particular circumstances. So we have to know the knowledge about the reasons of the revelations (Asbab al-nuzul). i.e. the knowledge about the events and circumstances in history that are related to the revelation of certain passages from the Qur'an. With the knowledge of the reasons of revelations, it is also to be decided whether the revelation has a specific implication or whether it is of a general nature, and needs to be applied by all Muslims at all times.

The Order of Surahs and its Compilation

The complete Qur'an was revealed over a period of 22 years portion by portion, as and when it was required. The sequence of the ayat as they appear in the Mushaf [9], is different from its chronological order of revelation. The order and sequence of the Qur'an was Divinely inspired and was instructed to the Prophet (Peace be upon him) by Allah through angel Gabriel. The compilation of the Qur'an was completed in three stages. First of all, Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), received the revelation of the Qur'an through angel Gabriel. When the beloved Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), received a revelation, he dictated it to a scribe, who promptly wrote it down. That is to say, the Qur'an was not written down by his Companions (May Allah be pleased with them all), on their own initiative, but the Prophet (Peace be upon him), dictated it to them.

The Prophet had several such scribes, among whom was Zaid bin Thabit (May Allah be pleased with him), who was very prominent. Uthman (May Allah be pleased with him), said that the Prophet told his scribes where to place a particular ayah that was just revealed. He used to say: "Place these ayat in the surah, in which this and this is mentioned." And when one ayah was revealed to him, he said: "Place this ayah in the surah in which this and this is mentioned." [10].

The Revelation scribes wrote down the Qur'an, according to the order of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), on pieces of cloth, leather, bones, and stones. Its ayat were ordered and arranged according to Allah's inspiration. At the beginning, it was not gathered in one book, which was later done during the caliphate of Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him). The Oral transmission of the revelation was based on memorization and the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him), himself was the first to commit a revelation to memory after the angel Gabriel had brought it to him. Every Ramadan all the portions of the Qur'an that had been revealed, including the order of the ayat, were revised and reconfirmed by the Prophet (Peace be upon him) with Gabriel.

During the last Ramadan, before the demise of the Prophet (Peace be upon him), the Qur'an was rechecked and reconfirmed twice. The Prophet (Peace be upon him), also instructed his Companions (May Allah be pleased with them all), to memorize it. Abdullah Ibn Masud (May Allah be pleased with him), was the first man to publicly recite the Qur'an in Makkah. It is also reported that Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him) used to recite the Qur'an in front of his house in Makkah. [11]. It is therefore clearly evident that the Qur'an was compiled and authenticated by the Prophet (Peace be upon him) himself during his lifetime, both in the written form as well as in the memory of several of his Companions (May Allah be pleased with them all). In the second phase of the compilation of the Qur'an, it was collected as Suhuf (Loose pieces of writing material, such as paper and skin.), during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him). Tradition informs us that at the Battle of Yamama, a number of Muslims who had memorized the Qur'an were killed.

Hence it was feared that unless a written copy of the Qur'an were prepared, a large part of the revelation might be lost. Therefore, Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him) ordered Zaid bin Thabit (May Allah be pleased with him) to collect the Qur'an. Zaid (May Allah be pleased with him), collected it from various written materials and the memories of people. The sheets thus prepared were kept with Abu Bakr, then Umar, and then Hafsa (May Allah be pleased with them all). In these Suhuf the order of the ayat within each surah was fixed, but the sheets with the surahs on them were still in a loose arrangement, i.e. not bound into a volume.

The Qur'an was finally compiled into a Mushaf (collected Suhuf into a volume), during the Caliphate of Uthman (May Allah be pleased with him), where both the order of the ayat within each surah, as well as the order of the sheets were fixed.

It was written from the main copy gathered during the era of Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him). It was kept at the residence of Hafsah Bint Umar (May Allah be pleased with her). Abu Bakr (May Allah be pleased with him), charged the following scribes to do it:

1. Zaid Ibn Thabit.
2. Abdullah Ibn Al-Zubair.
3. Said Ibn Al-As.
4. Abdur Rahman Ibn Al-Harith Ibn Hisham.

They scribed many copies of Qur'an, reflecting in their writing the different correct readings of it; excluding any incorrect one. It was not marked with dots or vowel points. Uthman (May Allah be pleased with him), kept a copy at Madinah and sent the remaining copies to the various Islamic countries.