

Core Curriculum

5 The Qur'an and Hadith

5.3 The Structure of the Holy Qur'an

INTRODUCTION

Bismillāhir Rahmānir Rahīm, As-salāmu ‘Alaykum wa rahmatullāhi wa barakātuh. Peace be upon you brothers and sisters.

Welcome back to the Muslim Convert Channel!

In this lesson, we're going to be looking at the Qur'an on a more "structural" level. Here we will look into how the Qur'an is divided, the geographical and temporal division of verses, as well as the origins of its descent unto the earth and the reason why the Book was revealed in the Arabic language.

BODY OF TEXT

The Prophet Muhammad (s) once said:

"...when I was midway on the mountain, I heard a voice from heaven saying "O Muhammad! you are the apostle of Allah and I am Gabriel." I raised my head towards heaven to see who was speaking, and Gabriel in the form of a man with feet astride the horizon, saying, "O Muhammad! you are the apostle of Allah and I am Gabriel." I stood gazing at him moving neither forward nor backward, then I began to turn my face away from him, but towards whatever region of the sky I looked, I saw him as before."

Indeed, it is We who have sent down to you, [O Muhammad], the Qur'an

step by step. (Chapter 76, verse 23 of the Qur'an)

The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (s) by Allah during the month of Ramadan on what is known as the Night of Power or Laylat al-Qadr. Laylat al-Qadr, the night of the Qur'an's revelation, is the most important night of the Islamic calendar and praying on that night is the occasion through which Muslims can gain the most blessings from God. For example, the Prophet (s) said the following about the greatness of Laylat al-Qadr:

“Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan out of faith and in the hope of earning reward, all his previous sins will be forgiven, and whoever stays up during Laylat al-Qadr out of faith and in the hope of earning reward, all his previous sins will be forgiven.”

The medium through which God revealed the Qur'an was the archangel Gabriel. The Qur'an was all revealed to the Prophet (s) at once, but it was gradually revealed to people over a span of two decades.

Each verse that was revealed to the Prophet (s) was revealed in a particular context. The reason for this is because each verse in the Qur'an has practical applicability. The teachings of the Qur'an are not abstract or theoretical, they are concrete and directly relevant to human life in this world as well as the Hereafter. The occasions of revelation in the Qur'an are what are called the shan al-nuzūl.

The occasions of revelation provide us with the historical context, moment, situation as well as the persons involved when the verse was revealed. Through this we are better able to apply the Qur'an's verses in a practical way in most or all aspects of our lives. Some of the shan al-nuzūl are evident in the Qur'an, but others must be derived from the authentic hadiths or transmitted sayings of the Prophet (s) and his Ahl al-Bayt (as).

One shan al-nuzūl that the Qur'an provides us with are the divisions between Medinan and Meccan verses. Medinan verses are those verses that were revealed during the Prophet's (s) stay in Medina. The Meccan

verses were verses that were revealed during the Prophet's (s) stay in Mecca.

A major indicator on whether or not a verse is, let's say Medinan is the subject of its contents. If the verse is talking about Islamic rules, hypocrites, socio-political matters etc., we know the verse was revealed in Medina as this is where these subjects were dealt with. However, if the verses deal with matters of fundamental belief, polytheism, etc., then we know that the verse was likely to have been revealed in Mecca.

The Qur'an is divided into 114 chapters, also in non-chronological order. The order of the Qur'an, its chapters as well as its verses were all set by the Prophet Muhammad (s) himself in order to maximize the potential for guidance as we saw in our last lesson.

We know this as the Prophet Muhammad (s) himself was the one who compiled the Qur'an, it was only during the time of the third Caliph Uthman that Imām 'Alī (as) turned it into a standard book format to be mass produced.

The Qur'an is in the Arabic language. The Arabic language in itself is not holy, but the Arabic language of the Qur'an is. According to a hadīth from the sixth Imām Ja'far al-Sādiq (as), the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic because the Arabs at that time were the worst of people. Allah, as Imām al-Ṣādiq (as) explains, always sends Prophets and Scriptures to the worst of people.

According to Imām al-Sādiq (as), another reason why the Qur'an was revealed in Arabic is because the Arabs in their pride would never have accepted a book in a language other than Arabic.

As a sign of respect, Muslims must handle the Qur'an carefully and make sure to have upmost respect for it. This means that one should never leave it on the floor, or throw it. When touching the Qur'an, one must always have ritual purity, in other words, be in a state of wudū before touching its letters.