

# The History of Qur'anic Revelation with Particular Reference to the Earliest and the Last Verses to Be Revealed

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**Abstract:** - This paper is on the History of revelation reference to the first and the last verses to be revealed in the Holy Qur'an, the paper also discussed various opinions of scholars about the initial revelation and last revelation, thereby expressing the wisdom behind piece - meal descending of Qur'an, then a conclusion.

**Keywords:** The History of Qur'anic Revelation, Earliest and the Last Verses to be revealed

## I. INTRODUCTION

In an attempt to answer the above question it is necessary to describe the technical meaning of the glorious Qur'an. Al-Qur'an is technically defined as the words of Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad (SAW) through Angel Jibril (A.S) transmitted to us in continuity whose recitation is worship commencing with Suratul-Fatiha and ends with Suratul-Nas. The Qur'an is divided into (114) one hundred and Fourteen Chapters and contain 86,430 and 323,760 Letters and Alphabets. The total number of verses are 6,666. In order to facilitate its reading the Qur'an is divided into 30 convenient sections and 540 "Rukuni" and 7 "manazil" there are 14 places in the Qur'an as places for "Sujud" to glorify Allah (S.W.T).

The Qur'an was revealed in piece meal within a period of 22 years, 2 months and 22 days approximately 23 years according to the scholars, it had been revealed depending on the needs of time and provided solutions to the existing and non-existing problems.

## II. HISTORY OF QUR'ANIC REVELATION

The term revelation or "AL-WAHY" in Arabic means transfer of information<sup>1</sup>. In the glorious Qur'an the word: "Wahy" has been used in different places and for different meanings, an example can be seen in Surah an-Nahl, where Allah (S.W.T) used the word to mean instinctual animal habit.

*"And your Lord inspired the bee by "Wahy" (awhaa) to make its home in the mountains, tree, and what (men) build"<sup>2</sup>.*

In another place "Wahy" is also used in the Qur'an to mean natural human instincts, that Allah has placed in humans for

example; a reference is made to the mother of Prophet Musa (A.S) in Surah Qasas.

*"And I inspired Musa's mother by wahy (awhaynaa) to suckle him"<sup>3</sup>.*

In a nutshell, there were many types and forms of "al-Wahy" sometimes it comes in a form of intuition, gestures, thought, commands to Angels, by Allah (S.W.T) true dreams, direct or indirect communication.

Therefore, revelation is a message from Allah (S.W.T) conveyed to the Prophets and Messengers through Angel Jibril (A.S) as intermediary. Qur'an was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in this way in most of the time.

The History of Qur'anic revelation took place in two distinct forms, it is important to note that the first revelation was descended from the protected tablet "Al-Lawh Mahfuz" on which it was written, to the lowest heaven.

In this respect, the whole Qur'an in its totality was sent down at one time to a station in the lowest heaven referred to as (Baital Izzah) The blessed night on which this descent took place is called "Lailatul-Oadr" (the night of Decree), in the month of Ramadan<sup>4</sup>.

Allah (S.W.T) referred to the initial revelation as follows:

*"Haa Meem By the clear book, verily I revealed it in a blessed night". (Q 44:1-3)<sup>5</sup>.*

Another Verse Q97: 1 testify that:

*"Verily, I revealed. it on the night of Decree"<sup>6</sup>.*

Also Q2: 185 says:

*"The month of Ramadan in which I revealed the Qur'an as guidance to mankind"<sup>7</sup>.*

<sup>3</sup> Qur'an ch 28:V7

<sup>4</sup> Bilal Philips, A. "Usool at-Tafaseer," p. 131.

<sup>5</sup> Qur'an ch 44:V1-3

<sup>6</sup> Qur'an ch 97: V.1.

<sup>7</sup> Qur'an ch 2: 185

<sup>1</sup> See the definitions of Ibn faris and al-Raaghib al-Isfahaanee quoted in "Lama'at fee ulum Qur'an" p.23

<sup>2</sup> Qur'an ch 16: V68

The above verses referred to the initial revelation because it is a known fact that the whole Qur'an was revealed in a single night in Ramadan. "Ibn-Abbas (R.A)- stated that, the Qur'an was first separated from its station in the upper heaven and placed in "Baiyt al-izzah in the lowest heavens"<sup>8</sup>.

In this regards, Allah (S.W.T) choose to divide the revelation into two parts. The first revelation within the heavens represented an announcement to the inhabitants of the heavens that the final book of revelation was being sent down upon the last of the prophets.

*The second Revelation:* Qur'an was then taken down by the angel Jibril (A.S) to Prophet Muhammad ( S.A.W), this process of revelation continued over the 23 years of his messenger hood. This revelation began with the first five verses of Surah "al-Alaq" these verses were revealed to the prophet (peace be upon him), while he was on a spiritual retreat in the cave of Hirah, near Makkah; According to the views of some scholars the first complete Surah to be revealed was "Surahul - Fatlha" and the Last Surah to be revealed was "Surah An-nasr"<sup>9</sup>.

The revelation of the Glorious Qur'an was in a bits and piece meal. The great wisdom behind this, was to make sure that, the first Muslims learned the teachings of the Qur'an in a practical context, so that, their understanding of the message would be perfect and thus ensure correct transmission to the later generations. Allah (S.W.T) has referred to the second revelation in the following way:

*"And it is a Qur'an which I have divided into parts in order that you (Muhammad) may recite it to the people gradually, and I have revealed it by successive revelation"<sup>10</sup>*

However, there are a number of reasons why the second revelation took place in segment rather than all at once, among the reason were the followings:

#### (1) Steadying the Prophet's heart:

The Prophet (peace be upon him) faced with many challenges at the hands of unbelievers and jews concerning revelation of the Holy Qur'an as a result of which Allah (S.W.T) revealed certain verses to comfort the prophet (peace be upon him) for instance:

*"And those who disbelieved say why is the Qur'an not revealed to him all- at once? But it is like that, in order that we may steady your heart with it; and I have arranged its component parts in an orderly manner"<sup>11</sup>*

#### (2) Gentleness with the prophet (peace be upon him):

The descend of revelation was a great burden which usually left the prophet (peace be upon him) drained and weak. "A'isha (R.A) reported that once on an extremely cold day she saw him O (Prophet) when revelation came and left him. And in spite of the cold weather his forehead was dripping with sweat"<sup>12</sup>

Allah (S.W.T) referred the revelation of Qur'an as being weighty and burdensome.

"Verily, I will cast on you a heavy set of words"<sup>13</sup>

In another verse Allah says:

"If I were to have revealed this Qur'an to a mountain, you would have seen it humbly crumble into pieces out of fear of Allah"<sup>14</sup>.

#### (3) Gradation in legislation:

The method by which the Qur'anic revelation came and present the principles of Islam was a gradual method. The early chapters of the Qur'an were aimed at treating the main problem which confronted the worship of Allah and his unity. "A'isha (R.A) was reported to have said, the first thing to be revealed of the Qur'an dealt with Heaven and Hell and that it was only after sometime that issues of legal and illegal acts were death with"<sup>15</sup>,

#### (4) Facilitating the preservation of the Qur'an:

The early method of preserving the Qur'an had been memorization, in this regard, if the whole Qur'an were revealed at once the Sahaba would have been unable to memorize all of it due to its length. Thus the revelation of the Holy: Qur'an in sections made it easier for the companions to memorize the whole Qur'an and teach it to others "Umar bin al-Khattab (R.A) was reported to have said, "I learn the Qur'an five verses at a time, for verily, Jibril (A.S). used. to descend the Qur'an for the prophet (peace be upon him) five a time"<sup>16</sup>

#### (5) Dealing with Problems as they arose:

The verses of the Qur'an sometimes would be revealed to deal specifically the problem faced the prophet (peace be upon him) and his companions, sometimes people would ask the prophet (peace be upon him) about something in order to test his messenger ship, in such situation Allah (S.W.T) replied to them for e.g

"And 'they ask you about DhulQarnayn: Tell them I will read to you a report"<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>12</sup>Sahih AL-Bukhari, Vol.I, p.2, no.Z.

<sup>13</sup>Qur'an eh 7) : V5.

<sup>14</sup>Qur'an eh 59 : V21.

<sup>15</sup>Sahih AL-Bukhari, Vol.6, pp 483-4, no 515.

<sup>16</sup>AL-Bayhaqee, in Shu'ab.al-Eemaan, and quoted by As-Suyootee in alltqaan, vol. 1, pp. 124-5.

<sup>17</sup>Qur'an ch 18 : V83.

<sup>8</sup>Collected by Alc-Hakeern in al-mustadrak, Vo1.2.pp.665. no.4216

<sup>9</sup>Al-Bayhaqee in Dalaa'il an nubuwah Vol.1. pp.70-71.

<sup>10</sup>Qur'an ch17 : VI06.

<sup>11</sup>Qur'an eh 25 : V32.

*(6) An indication of the Qur'an's source:*

The revelation of the Qur'an in segments over 23 years is clear proof that it is Allah's word alone, and not that of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) or any other person.

Allah the most high says: Q 4 : 82.

"Won't they contemplate the Qur'an? If it had come from other than Allah, they would have found in it many contradictions"<sup>18</sup>.

### III. SCHOLARS VIEWS ON THE FIRST VERSE TO BE REVEALED IN THE QUR'AN

Many-views were attributed to the fact that the first five verses of Surah al-alaq chapter 96 is the earliest revelation, it was revealed on the 15th of month of Ramadan in cave of Hirah.

"Read in, the name of your Lord who has created all that exist, He created man from a clot, Read and your Lord is the most generous, who taught with the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not"<sup>19</sup>.

In Sahih Bukhari collection, concerning the above issue i.e. (the first revealed verses). the Hadith is attributed to A'isha the wife of the prophet (peace be upon him) who was reported to have said:

The commencement of the divine inspiration to the messenger of Allah was in the form of good dreams which came true like bright day light, and then the love of seclusion was bestowed on him. He used to go into seclusion in the cave of Hira, where he used to worship Allah alone" continuously for many days before he would desire to see his family. He used to take with him the Journey food for the stay and would then come back to his wife (Khadija) to take food for another stay, until suddenly the truth descended upon him while he was in the cave of Hira. The Angel came to him and asked him to read. The Prophet replied "I do not know how to read"<sup>20</sup>.

The above Hadith is similarly reported by Imam Muslim, it is the source of the consensus of scholars that chapter 96. (Surah al-alaq) verses one to five (1 : 5) where the first Qur'anic verses to be revealed. From there revelation ceased for a certain period and then resumes.' Another set of scholars went ahead with a view that Suratul - Mudaththir (ch. 74 : 1) was the first or second to be revealed:

"O you (Muhammad B.A. W) enveloped in garments!, Arise and warn; and magnify your Lord (Allah)"<sup>21</sup>.

AI-Imam Suyiti (R.A) in his renowned book "al-itqan fi ulum al qur'an" (maintained that, Jabir bin Abdullah reported a Hadith on this issue suggesting that, it was about the first complete chapter rather than the first verse.

\* Another view among which the scholars attributed the first verse in the Qur'an was that of Suratul - Fatiha (The opening). According to Abu Bakr al-Bayhaqi the first verse to be revealed is Fatiha, this is in relation to a hadith reported by Bayhaqi: (Muhammad (peace be upon him) said to Khadija) when I am alone I hear a call and I become scared about myself that this may be something bad. She said" may Allah forbid! He would not do that to you. You deliver what you are trusted with, look after your relatives and do not say but the truth. When Abu Bakr came in Khadija mentioned his Muhammad's) words to him and said to him. Go with Muhammad to Waraqa, they went I am alone I hear a call coming from behind me, so I run forward to escaped Waraqa said: Do not do that, if he (The caller) comes to you then stay put, until you hear what he has got to say then come and let me know, when later Muhammad (S.A. W) was alone he was called O. Muhammad, say:<sup>22</sup>

Scholars argued on the above Hadith, they said it is mursal and does not mean that the revelation of al-fatiha was the first revelation but it shows that the chapter of al-fatiha was revealed after Surah al-alaq.

Accordingly, the "Basmalah in the name of Allah, the merciful, the compassionate. Which starts all chapters of the Qur'an except chapter 9. (Suratul Tauba) is considered in this view which is based on a Hadith that al-wahidi in his famous book Asbab an-Nuzul attributes to Ikrama and AL- Hasan - Basri was the first verse to be revealed"<sup>23</sup>.

\* In view of the foregoing, the overwhelming majority of Muslim scholars accept that Suratul - alaq chapter 96. verse's 1 -5 were the first verses to be revealed.

### IV. SCHOLAR'S VIEWS ON THE LAST VERSE OF THE QUR'AN

Various Muslims scholars argued extensively on the last revealed verse, some were of the view that it was Surah: 2, verse 281, Imam al-Bukhari reported in his book that "Ibn Abbas (R.A). has said "that this is the last verse that was revealed to the prophet (peace be upon him).

<sup>18</sup>Qur'an ch 4: V82.

<sup>19</sup>Qur'an ch 96: V 1-5.

<sup>20</sup>Sahih AL-Bukhari, Vol 4, no. 3238.

<sup>21</sup>Qur'an ch 74: V 1-3.

<sup>22</sup>AL-Bayhaqee, in,Dala'il-an-nuboowa, Vol. 1,pp. 86-7 .

<sup>23</sup>AL-Wahidi, Asbab, an-Nuzul, Vol.I, p.61.

"Fear the day when you shall be returned to Allah, then each soul shall be paid what it has earned, and they shall not be wronged"<sup>24</sup>

An-nasa'i, also said that Ibn - Abbas has described this verse as the 'last verse of the Qur'an. He also reports a similar Hadith in which he says:

"The last thing of the Qur'an to be revealed was fear the day when you shall be returned to Allah" This view is also found in al- Tabari's commentary, some reports have claimed that this verse was revealed nine days or night before the prophet's death."<sup>25</sup>

\* It has been reported by Ibn-Jarir's on the authority of Sa'id bin al-Musayyab, that the ' last verse of the Qur'an is the longest verse in the Qur'an (Ch 2 : verse 282)<sup>26</sup>.

Another reports from Al-Bukhari reports a hadith that he traces back to Ibn - Abbas in which the latter says that:

"The last verse that was revealed to the prophet is the verse of usury" Q: Ch 2 : 278.

"O you who believe! fear Allah and abandon your remaining usury, if you are indeed believers".<sup>27</sup> It has been reported that this verse was revealed nine days, seven days, three days or three hours before the death of Al-rasul (S:A:W). Imam al-Sayuti \_\_ opined that these verses were revealed at the same time in their order in the mushaf and were last to be revealed<sup>28</sup>.

\* Similarly, regarding the last verse both al-Bukhari and Muslim reported that, Ibn - Abbas' has said that, "The following verse is "the last that was revealed and it was not abrogated (annulled) by anything".

"He who intentionally kills a believer his recompense will be hell in which he shall dwell forever, Allah shall have wrath on him, will curse him and will have for him a grave torment"<sup>29</sup>.

\* However, in the same vein, Imam al-Bukhari, Muslim, an-Nasa'i and others report on the authority of al-Bara'u bin - Azib (R.A) that the following verse was the last verse to be revealed in the Holy Qur'an. (Q Ch 4 : 176)

"They will ask you (O. Muhammad, (peace be upon him) for, a ruling say! Allah rules for you concerning the remote kinship....."<sup>30</sup>

\* In another narration, about which verse was revealed last; Imam Ahmad bin Hanbal reported on the authority of Ubay

bin Ka'ab that he said: "chapter 9 : 128, was the last verse revealed to prophet (peace be upon him).

"There has come to you a messenger from among your selves, grievous to him is your suffering, careful over you, compassionate and-merciful for the believers"<sup>31</sup>

\* Moreover, at - tabarani has reported that chapter 18 : verse 110, was the 'last verse to be revealed in the Qur'an, this is in relation to the reports on the authority of Mu'awiyah bin abi-sufyan (R.A).

"Say (O Muhammad S.A. W) I am only a human like you. It is being revealed to me that your Lord is only one (i. e Allah) let him. who hopes to meet his Lord do good works and refrain from associating anyone in worshipping Allah"<sup>32</sup>

\* Some Scholars hold that chapter 5: verse 3 was the last verse to be revealed: The opinion that says this verse was the last revelation is not sound according to many scholars, since it was revealed during the last pilgrimage of the prophet (peace be upon him), on the Day of Arafat which was a few months before his death.

It is pertinent to note that, the reports that, identifies the last verse revealed were attributed to the sayings of Sahaba (R.A) and their successors based on their understanding of the teaching of al-Qur'an. This is because that, no sound reports of such from the prophet (peace be upon him), but rather scholars agreed that Qur'an ch 2 : V 281 is the last verse to be revealed.

**Conclusively**, the paper discussed the history of Qur'anic revelation right from its revelation in a book form down to its descend on earth the studies followed with the various opinion and views of "Ulama" regarding the earliest revelation and the last verse to be revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

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<sup>24</sup>Sahih al-Bukhri, VoU, pp.102. Qur'an ch 2 :V.281.

<sup>25</sup>See Mohammad, Bakr Isma'eel, Diraasah fee uloom al-Qur'an, p.38.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.38

<sup>27</sup>Sahih al-Bukhari, VoU, p.103

<sup>28</sup>Diraasa fee uloom al-Qur'an VoU, p.39

<sup>29</sup>Sahih Muslim, Vol.2., Kitab al tafseer, p.796.

<sup>30</sup>Qur'an ch 4 : V176.

<sup>31</sup>Manna'u AL-Qaddaan,4-Mubaahith fee uloom Qur'an, VoLI, p.29.

<sup>32</sup>www.qur.anicstudies.com/Qur-an/thelastverseoftheQur-an. 2/5/2013, p.4.