



NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA

FACULTY OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

COURSE CODE: ISL111

COURSE TITLE: STUDIES ON THE QUR'AN



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National Open University of Nigeria
Headquarters
University Village
Plot 91, Cadastral Zone
Nnamdi Azikiwe Expressway Jabi,
Abuja

Lagos Office
14/16 Ahmadu Bello Way
Victoria Island, Lagos

Email: centralinfo@noun.edu.ng
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COURSE GUIDE

ISL111 STUDIES ON THE QUR'AN

Course Team

Dr. L. F. Oladimeji
Al-Hikmah University
(Ilorin)
Prof. A.F. Ahmed (NOUN)
Dr. A.R. Mustapha (NOUN)

Course Reviewer:
Professor Saadatu Liman

Nasarawa State University,
Keffi.

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Introduction

ISL111: Studies on the Qur'an is a one-semester fifteen credit unit course. It will be available to all students as a course in Certificate, Diploma and Degree programmes. The course is also suitable for anyone who is interested in the study of Islam.

The course consists of 15 units which involve kinds of revelation, the first revelation of the Qur'an, preservation of the Qur'an; the Makkan and Madinan *suwar*; compilation of the Qur'an; divisions of the Qur'an; the Authenticity of the Qur'an; names of the Qur'an; the manuscripts of the Qur'an and the role of the companions of the Prophet in the preservation of the Qur'an. Others are the essence and message of the Qur'an; interpreting the Qur'an (*Tafsir*); evaluation of the views of non-Muslims about the Qur'an as well as the literary forms and styles of the Qur'an. The material has been specially developed for students in the African context with particular focus on Nigeria.

There are no compulsory pre-requisites for this course. The course guide tells you briefly what the course is about, what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through these materials. It also emphasizes the need for tutor-marked assignments. Detailed information on tutor-marked assignments is found in the separate file, which will be sent to you later. There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to the course.

What you will Learn in this Course

The overall aim of ISL111: Studies on the Qur'an is to introduce you to the basic issues in the holy book of Islam; the original source from which all the principles and injunctions of Islam are drawn. The Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) bit by bit, during a period of twenty three years of the Prophet's mission.

Your understanding of the Qur'an will equip you to enlighten other people about Islam; Muslims and non-Muslims.

Studies on the Qur'an will also help you to practice Islam in a better way.

Course Aim

The aim of this course is to give you a comprehensive understanding of the following basic issues about the Qur'an: Revelation, Compilation, Standardization, Message and the style of the holy book. This will be achieved by:

- Introducing you to the meaning and purpose of the revelation of the Qur'an.
- Leading you forward to understanding the message of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as the last of the Messengers of Allah.
- Assisting you to describe the Makkan and the Madinan *Suwar*.
- Exposing you to some divisions of the Qur'an.
- Highlighting the uniqueness, inimitability and the divine status of the Qur'an.
- Explaining to you the nature of revelation and the place of the Qur'an in the life of a Muslim.
- Explaining to you the relevance, use and importance of the study of the Qur'an.

Course Objectives

To achieve the aims set out above, there are overall set objectives. In addition, each unit also has specific objectives. The unit objectives are always included at its beginning. You should read them before you start working through the unit. You may want to refer to them during your study of the unit to check your progress. You should always look at the unit objectives after completing a unit. This way you can confirm whether you have done what was required of you by the unit.

Stated below are the wider objectives of this course as a whole. By meeting these objectives, you should have achieved the aims of the course as a whole.

On successful completion of the course, you should be able to:

- Define the meaning of the Qur'an as a holy book of the Muslims.
- Explain the events that led to the revelation of the Qur'an.
- Describe the personality of the Prophet and the mission which Allah has charged him with for the whole mankind.
- Understand the significance of the names of the Qur'an.
- Identify the divisions of the Qur'an.
- Discuss the term *Tafsir* and its place in the understanding of the Qur'an.
- Relate and evaluate the views of non-Muslims about the Qur'an.

Working through this course

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and read other materials provided by the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN). Each unit contains self-assessment exercise, and at points in the course, you are required to submit assignments for assessment purposes. At the end of this course is a final examination. You will find below list of all the components of the course and what you have to do.

Course Materials

Major components of the Course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File 5. Presentation Schedule.

In addition, you must obtain the materials. They are provided by the NOUN. Obtain your copy. You may contact your tutor if you have problems in obtaining the text materials.

Each unit contains a number of self-tests. In general, these self-tests question you on the material you have just covered or require you to apply them in some ways and, thereby, help you to gauge your progress and answer your assignments. The exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

Set Textbooks

You are required to purchase any of the under listed textbooks. You need them for this and some other Islamic studies courses.

Muhammad Mustapha A'zami (2003) *History of Qur'anic Text from Revelation to Compilation, A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments*, Leicester, UK Islamic Academy.

Muhammad Taqi Usmani, (2006) *An Approach to the Qur'anic Sciences*, New Delhi, Kitab Bhavan.

Yasir Qadhi, (1999) *An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an*, Birmingham, Al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution.

Yusuf Abdallah al-Juda'i (2016) *Al-Maqaddimat al-Asasiyyah fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, leeds, UK: Al-Judai Research and Consultations.

Musaid Sulaiman at-Tyar, (2008) *Al-Muharrar fi Ulum al-Qur'an*, Jedda, Markaz al-Dirasat wa al-Ma'lumat al-Qur'aniyyah.

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Ahmad Von Denffer (1986), '*Ulum al Qur'an* (An Introduction to the Sciences of the Qur'an) United Kingdom, the Islamic Foundation, p: 11-16.

Marmaduke Pickthall, *Qur'anic Advices*, Lagos, Nigeria, Islamic Publications Bureau, p. 71-77

Sayyid Qutb, (1979), *In the shade of the Qur'an*, London, M.W.H London Publishers.

Assignment File

In this file, you will find all the details of the work you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain from these assignments will count toward the final mark you obtain for this course. Further information on assignments will be found in the Assignment File itself and later in this Course Guide in the section on assessment.

Presentation Schedule

The Presentation Schedule included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of tutor-marked assignments and attending tutorials. Remember, you are required to submit all your assignments in good time. You should guard against being late in submitting your work.

Assessment

There are two types of assessment in the course. First are the tutor-marked assignments; second, are the written examinations.

In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply information and knowledge acquired during this course.

The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment File. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will count for 30% of your total course mark.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final three-hour examination. This will also count for 70% of your course mark.

Tutor-Marked Assignment

There are fifteen tutor-marked assignments in this course. You need to submit all the assignments. The best five (i.e. the highest five of the fifteen marks) will be counted. The total marks for the four (4) assignments 30%, will be of your total course mark.

Assignment questions for the units in this course are contained in the Assignment File. You should be able to complete your assignments from the information and materials containing in your set textbooks, reading and study units. However, you are advised to use other references to broaden your view point and provide a deeper understanding of the subject.

When you have completed each assignment, send it, together with TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given in the Assignment File. If, however, you cannot complete your work in time, contact your tutor before the assignment is done to discuss the possibility of an examination.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination of ISL111 will be of two hours' duration and 70% have a value of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which reflect the type of self-testing, practice exercises and tutor-marked problems you have come across. All areas of the course will be assessed.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for the examination. You will find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and the comments of your tutor on them before the final examination.

Course Marking Scheme

This table shows how the actual course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
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Assignment 1-15	Best three marks out of fifteen count @ 10% each
	= 30% of course marks
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks
Table 1:	Course Marking Scheme

Course Overview

Units	Title of work	Week's Assessment (end activity of unit)	
	Course Guide		
1.	Kinds of Revelation	1	1
2.	The first Revelation	2	Assignment 2
3.	Preservation of the Qur'an	3	Assignment 3
4.	The Makkan and Madinan <i>Suwar</i>	4	Assignment 4
5. 6	Compilation of the Qur'an	5	Assignment 5
7	Divisions of the Qur'an	6	Assignment 6
8	The Authenticity of the Qur'an	8	Assignment 7
9.	Names of the Qur'an	8	Assignment 8
10	The manuscripts of the Qur'an	9	Assignment 9
11	Roles of Companions in the Preservation of the Qur'an	10	Assignment 10
12	The Essence and Message of the Qur'an	11	Assignment 11
13	Interpreting the Qur'an (<i>Tafsir</i>)	12	Assignment 12
14	The Translation of the Qur'an	13	Assignment 13
14	Views of non-Muslims about the Qur'an	14	Assignment 14
15	Literary Forms and style of the Qur'an	15	Assignment 15

How to Get the Most from this Course

In distance learning the study units replace the University lecturer. This is one of the great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set you some reading to do, the study units tell you when an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate points.

Each of the study units follows a common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives let you know what you should be able to do. When you have finished the units, you must go back and check

whether you have achieved the objectives. If you make a habit of doing this, you will scientifically improve your chances of passing the course.

The main body of the units guides you through the required reading from other sources.

Reading section

Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need help, don't hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

1. Read this course guide thoroughly
2. Organize a study schedule. Refer to the 'Course Overview' for more details. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates for working on each unit.
3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind with their course work. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.
4. Turn on Unit 1 and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.

5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for unit is given in the “Overview” at the beginning of each unit. You will almost always need both the study unit you are working on and one of your set books on your desk at the same time
6. Work through the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or other articles. Use the unit to guide your reading
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you are not sure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit’s objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to face your study so that you keep yourself on schedule
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor’s comments, both on the tutor-marked assignment form and also on what is written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this Course Guide)

Tutors and Tutorials

There are 8 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, times and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter. He will also provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at

least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutors and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, e-mail, or discuss with him if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you would find help necessary.

Contact your tutor if:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings.
- You have difficulty with the self assessment exercises.
- You have a question or problems with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and to ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a questions list before attending them,. You will learn a lot from participating in discussion actively.

Summary

ISL 111 intends to introduce you to the basic study of the Qur'an as a holy book for Muslims. Upon completing this course, you will be able to answer questions such as:

- What is the position of Qur'an in the life of a Muslim
- What are the previous revealed books and to which Prophets
- How was the Qur'an preserved
- Identify the Makkan and the Madinah *Suwar*
- What efforts were involved in the compilation and standardization of the Qur'an
- How authentic is the Qur'an as a divine scripture
- Where are the various manuscripts of the Qur'an
- What were the roles played by the companions of the Prophet Muhammad in the compilation and preservation of Qur'an
- What is *Tafsir* and what are the basics of this science in Islam
- Identify the literary and unique style of the Qur'an

Of course, these questions are not exhaustive as the study of the Qur'an as a branch of Islamic studies is an interesting one.

We wish you success with the course and hope that you will find it both interesting and useful.



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UNIT 1 KINDS OF REVELATION

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- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Definition of Revelation
 - 3.2 Purpose of Revelation
 - 3.3 Meaning of *Wahy*
 - 3.4 Meaning of *Kashf*
 - 3.5 Revelation through Angel
 - 3.6 The first revelation
 - 3.7 The second and subsequent revelations of the Qur'an
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/ Further
Readings.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

All the holy books recognized in Islam namely; *Tawrah*, *Injeel*, *Zabur* and Qur'an were revealed by Allah to His Prophets. To this extent, revelation is an important study in Islam. In this unit, you shall be acquainted with the various modes of revelation, especially that of the Qur'an.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Define revelation
- Explain the kinds of revelation in Islam
- Understand the first revelation of the Qur'an.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of Revelation

Revelation is the communication link between Allah and His Prophets to mankind. It is regarded as a divine gift in Islam because it is not comparable to other human communication. It is only to those whom Allah wishes. The Qur'an is one of such revelations and the medium was Prophet Muhammad.

It should be noted that Allah did not only create the heavens and earth, and everything in them, but He also created man and everything around him. Since man cannot see Allah with the naked eyes, the only means by which man can understand the dos and don'ts of the Creator is through the revelation sent to His Messengers. These messages must be followed because of their divine nature and relevance to man's needs in all facets of life.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Examine the concept of revelation in Islam.

3.2 Purpose of Revelation

A question may arise as to why does Allah communicate with man? The answer is that it is a fulfilment of Allah's pledge after the fall of Adam from the garden of Paradise:

"We said: get ye down all from here; and if, As sure there come to you guidance from Me ..." (Q2:38).

Revelation therefore, is that guidance from Allah to man. It is a code of life which Allah passed through His Prophets to warn, to admonish, to narrate, and to explain various issues of life. Man, therefore, depends on the revelation from the Almighty so that he can continue to establish spiritual contact with Him. In other words, lack of revelation would put man in darkness as to what to do in life in the areas of worship and interpersonal relationship. Qur'an states again:

"And believe in what I reveal confirming the revelation which is with you..." (Q2: 41).

Basically, there are three (3) kinds of revelation known in Islam. These are:

- *Wahy*: Divine Inspiration
- *Kashf*: Behind the veil
- *Angelic*: Angel Jibril (Archangel)

The Qur'an confirms the above three modes thus:

*"It is not fitting for a man that God should speak to him except by **inspiration**, or from behind a **veil**, or by sending a **messenger** to reveal with God's permission what God wills for He is Most High, Most Wise" (Q 42:51)*

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Outline the purposes of revelation from Allah to man.

3.3 Meaning of *Wahy*

Wahy is from the Arabic word *Waha* and it occurs many times in the Qur'an, each of them indicating the main ideal of inspiration, direction, or guiding someone. *Wahy* also means intuition as contained in Qur'an 28:7- "so We sent inspiration to the mother of Moses".

Wahy or divine inspiration given by Allah to Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is explained in the Qur'an as a confirmation of the divine nature of his message.

For example:

"Remember thy Lord inspired the Angels (with the message)..." (Q 8: 12)

According to Denffer, *Wahy* in the sense of revelation is guidance from Allah for His creation, brought by the Prophets, who received the word from Him through one of the means mentioned above. An example is a dream as contain in Q 37:102 where it is related that Prophet Ibrahim received guidance in a vision, while asleep, to sacrifice his son. Allah commanded Prophet Muhammad to say:

"...I follow but that which is revealed to me by inspiration! I am but a Warner, open and clear" (Q 46:9).

The above Qur'anic verse removes the doubt in the minds of the followers as well as detractors of the Prophet as regards his divine messengership. Even when questions are asked and the Prophet does not have the answers readily, he would wait until a revelation came to him. *Wahy* may come in form of big bang or the ringing of a bell. Only the Prophet hears such sounds, and responds to the instruction that follows.

The effects of such an inspiration on the Prophet are his sweating profusely and uneasy physical conditions while the revelation lasted.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the term *Wahy* as a form of revelation in Islam.

3.4 Meaning of *Kashf*

Revelation through *Kashf* are the direct communication between Allah and the messenger but under the cover of veil. An example of this was the communication between Allah and Prophet Musa as stated in Q7: 142-143

“We appointed for Musa thirty nights, and completed (the period) with ten more: thus was completed the term (of communication) with his Lord, forty nights. When Musa came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord addressed him...”

Similarly, the Qur'an spoke of speech hiding away as in Qur'an 27: 8 thus:

*“But when he came to the fire, a voice was heard”
blessed are those in the fire and those around, and glory to Allah the Lord of the worlds. O Moses, verily, I am Allah the Exalted in might and the wise”.*

In the case of *Kashf*, the messenger hears the voice of the Almighty God, although he may not see him physically. This is because the almighty Allah out of His power communicate with such men of God as a means of telling them how close He is to them and how spiritually elevated they were.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain the term *Kashf* as a form of revelation in Islam.

3.5 Angelic Mode of Revelation

The angelic kind of revelation is the delivery of revelation by the archangel Jibril. In this form, the angel may disguise in the form of a human being or appear to the Prophet in its angelic nature. Since only the Prophet sees him, the people around may not know the exact situation except the Prophet informs them. The Qur'an says this about the angel:

“Say: whoever is an enemy of Gabriel - for he brings down (the revelation) to thy hearts by God's will, a confirmation of what went before, and guidance and glad tidings for those who believe” (Q. 2:97).

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Explain the Angelic form of revelation in Islam.

3.6 The First Revelation

The revelation of the Qur'an began in the holy month of Ramadan, specifically, on the night of *Laylatu'l-Qadir*. This is, according to Qur'an chapter 2:185 and 97:1. The revelation of the entire book which was piece by piece took a period of twenty three years. It was revealed in Arabic language which is the mother tongue of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh).

Before his call to Prophethood, Muhammad used to go to a place outside the city of Makkah known as Hira. He would stay at this cave to meditate, contemplate and ruminate about the world and the phenomena around him. He would stay there for a number of days. One day, while Muhammad was asleep in the cave, an angel approached him. The angel said to Muhammad "Read". Muhammad answered in surprise "What shall I read". The angel repeated again "Read" and the Prophet again complained that he does not know how to read.

For the third time, the angel repeated,

"Read in the name of your Lord, the creator; who created man from a clot of blood. Read! For your Lord is most gracious. He taught man by the pen that which he does not know" (Q. 96:1-5).

Muhammad recited these verses repeating them after the angel who later withdrew after they were permanently stored in his memory. This was the beginning of revelation of the Qur'an.

After this encounter, the Prophet rushed home straight to his room terribly frightened. He asked his wife Khadijah to cover him with cloth. Khadijah, having provided the cover asked what really happened to the Prophet. He narrated his experience and Khadijah too was frightened. She later sought the elderly advice of her relation known as Waraqah b. Nawfal to please assist her husband and if possible explain the situation. The Prophet later got the command from Allah to go out and preach the message as contained in the Qur'an 74:1-4 (*Surat Al Mudathir*):

"O thou wrapped up (in a mantle). Arise and deliver thy warning. And thy Lord do though magnify. And thy garments keep free from stain..."

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

- a. Narrate the events associated with the first revelation to Prophet Muhammad.
- b. Discuss the role of Khadijah in the life of Prophet Muhammad.

3.7 The Second and Subsequent Revelations of the Qur'an

After the first revelation there was a break in communication with the Prophet. This short period is called *Fatra*. The second portion of the Qur'an revealed to the Prophet was the beginning of chapter 74:1-5. The essence of this second revelation was to challenge the Prophet and prepare him for the big task ahead. The Prophet was now being given direct instruction to go out and boldly deliver his message. His heart had always been purified by Allah, but now all his outward appearance must be dedicated to Allah.

The duty of the Prophet was a gift from Allah that could flow from his personality but no reward or appreciation was to be expected from his people. This second revelation was therefore aimed at preparing the Prophet both spiritually and politically.

Other early subsequent revelations were *suratul Fatihah* which was the third and followed by *Surah* 111, *Surah* 81, *Surah* 187, *Surah* 92, *Surah* 99 etc. The revelation continued talking about Paradise and Hell, the day and the night, the good and evil deeds etc.

The last revelation according to many scholars was Q 2:281:

“And fear the day when ye shall be brought back to God then shall every soul be paid what it earned and none shall be dealt with unjustly”.

Some scholars however said it was Q 2:282 or 2:278. It has also been suggested that all the three verses were revealed on one occasion. The Prophet died nine nights after the last revelation. Other scholars held that the last revelation was Q 5:4

“This day I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favour upon you, and I have chosen for you Islam as a religion”

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 7

- a. Discuss the aftermath of the Angelic appearance to the Prophet in the cave of Hira.
- b. Explain the significance of Q74:1-5 to the mission of Prophet Muhammad.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit you have learnt the story of how the Qu'ran was revealed and the process of disseminating the message to the Prophet Muhammad. You have also been exposed to the technical words that have to do with the concept of revelation.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this unit:

- All the holy books of Islam were revealed by Allah to His Prophets.
- Revelation is a communication link between Allah and man for the purpose of guidance
- There are three kinds of revelation: wahy, *kashf* and angelic.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the various modes of revelation and their importance to the compilation of the holy books.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 THE FIRST REVELATION

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1.0 Introduction

2.0 Objectives

3.0 Main Content

3.1 Prophet's Regular Visit to Cave Hira

3.2 The Appearance of Angel Jibril in the night of *Laylatul Qadr*.

3.3 The First revelation

3.4 Effects of the angelic encounter

3.5 Importance of the first Revelation

4.0 Conclusion

5.0 Summary

6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment

7.0 References / Further
Readings.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will learn the events associated with the first revelation of the Qur'an. Prior to the main event, Muhammad had been living an exclusive life, moving out of the city of Makkah to the outskirt for spiritual activities. This first revelation is very significant to the mission of the Prophet Muhammad and the Muslims in general.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the events associated with the first revelation of the Qur'an.
- Appreciate the experiences which Muhammad went through before his divine call to Prophethood.
- Explain the significance of the first revelation to the Muslims.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Prophet's Visit to the Cave of Hira

One Arabian custom for the pious and thoughtful devotees even before the Prophethood was to seek an empty place far away from their people where they would concentrate and reflect. Such a reclusive life was meant to increase their level of seriousness, wisdom and ethical goodness through meditation. Muhammad as a middle-aged man used to go to a cave known as Hira, outskirts of Makkah. During this period, his soul was fully convinced of the vision of truth he had been looking for.

At this cave, Muhammad used to meditate, contemplate and ruminate about the world and the phenomena around him. He would stay there for some days, Khadijah, his wife, would provide for him while going in the morning and in case he decides to stay for more than a night, she will go there to replace his provisions. Such was the life of Muhammad before his call to Prophethood.

This continued for six months. Unknown to Muhammad and Khadijah, God was preparing him by means of all these spiritual exercises for a truly great day which according to Husain Haykal was the day of great news, the day of the first revelation.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the activities of Muhammad at the Cave Hira.

3.2 The Appearance of Angel Jibril

According to Haykal, one day while Muhammad was asleep in the Cave Hira, an angel appeared to him with a sheet in his hand. The angel said to him "Read" Muhammad answered in surprise "What shall I read?" for the second time, the angel again commanded him "Read", and Muhammad again responded with the plea "What shall I read?"

For the third time, Muhammad was seized by the angel and he commanded "Read in the name of your Lord, the creator, who created man from clot of blood. Read! Your Lord is Gracious. He who taught man by the pen that which he knows not". This was the first revelation of the Qur'an and the beginning of his call to Prophethood.

Muhammad recited these verses, repeating them after the angel who later withdrew from his sight. After this encounter, the Prophet terribly frightened rushed home straight to his room. He asked his wife, Khadijah to cover him

with cloth! Khadijah, having provided the “cover”, asked what really happened to the Prophet. He narrated his experience and Khadijah too was frightened. She later sought the elderly advice of her relation known as Waraqah b. Naufal to assist her husband and explain the situation.

Waraqah explained the situation to Muhammad that the great spirit that appeared to Moses has appeared to him. That he will be denied and will be hurt by his people. He said Muhammad will be abused and pursued.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Narrate the experiences of Muhammad with angel Jibril.

3.3 The Effects of the Angelic Encounter

Muhammad had never seen an angel before, so he was frightened by its appearance to him in the cave. He was alone, and never expected anybody to come there to command him on what he knows not. The idolatry activities of the Makkans were not pleasing to Muhammad, and since he was not ready to join them, he was using the cave as a safe place to preserve himself spiritually.

The first effect was that Muhammad got a command from Allah to begin preaching Islam. After the encounter, the next verses were direct commands from Allah to the Prophet on what to do and how to carry on with his mission. He got the divine instructions from Allah.

After the angelic encounter, and the soothing words from his wife, Khadijah, Muhammad became reassured that indeed his Lord has commissioned him for a task. Exhausted, he fell asleep. This deep sleep was to be followed by a spiritual life of utmost strength. He became re-dedicated and fully prepared for a task not by force, but by argument yet more gentle, sound and more convincing than many men has known.

Another effect of the angelic encounter was that the doubts in the mind of Muhammad became dissolved, and the darkness which had enveloped the Quraish in their idol worship became exposed. He now got a divine light which illuminated the way in front of him as he got prepared to confront his own people with the new message.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Highlight the effects of the angelic appearance to Muhammad in the Cave Hira.

3.4 The Importance of the First Revelation

The first revelation of the Qur'an to Muhammad was *Suratul 'Alaq* Chapter 96 verses 1-5. The remainder of this *surah*, which now has 19 *ayat* were revealed on some later occasion.

The first importance of the verses is that they show Allah as the Creator of man, and other creatures. Again they underscore the importance of knowledge to mankind. By this, science and its importance to man is emphasized.

The first revelation shows that man can only know what is unknown to him by the permission of Allah, and that all knowledge belongs to Him alone. It also shows the importance of pen and its vital role in the dissemination of knowledge, and that Allah is the grand teacher of man.

The first revelation of the Qur'an signifies the appointment of Muhammad as a Prophet of Allah and that whatever Allah wants shall be done. Also that Allah is most Glorious who wants man to be out of darkness of *Jahiliyyah* into the light of Islam. This chapter of the Qur'an shows that teaching can lead to learning or knowledge.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Outline four importance of the first revelation of the Qur'an.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The revelation of Qur'an began with *Suratul 'Alaq*. This *Surah* is very significant in many ways. For a Muslim, it is the reference point for the birth of a religion which Allah Himself has named and directed a Prophet to proclaim to the world.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have discussed in this unit the events associated with the first revelation of the Qur'an. We have also discussed the content of this first revelation and its significance to the life of a Muslim.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Highlight the events associated with the first revelation and the significance of this *Surah* to a Muslim.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 3 PRESERVATION OF THE QUR'AN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Preservation of the Qur'an
 - 3.2 During the Prophet Lifetime
 - 3.3 The Period of Companions
 - 3.4 Objects of Preservation
 - 3.5 Memorization of the Qur'an
 - 3.6 Recording of the Qur'an
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Qur'an is the word of Allah, revealed through Prophet Muhammad as a guide to the entire mankind. It is the message from Allah to men and therefore of utmost importance. In this unit, you will be exposed to the mode and material used in the preservation of this holy book from the time of Muhammad to the present day. This is very important because the Qur'an, as we have it today was not in the present form during the Prophet's lifetime.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the importance of Qur'an to Muslims.
- Identify the mode and materials with which Qur'an was initially preserved.
- Understand the roles played by the companions of the Prophet Muhammad in the preservation of the Qur'an.

3.1 The Qur'an needed to be Preserved

Right from the beginning, the Qur'an was protected and guarded through the heart and minds of the early recipients. Since it was the word from Allah, they jealously kept the verses in their memory and used them in the five canonical prayers. The fact that these messages are

meant not only for the Arabs, but indeed the entire mankind makes its preservation necessary.

Apart from daily recitation of the Qur'an, the Prophet sent teachers to communities in other places around the Arabian provinces to teach people the Qur'an. For example, Mus'ab b. 'Umayr and Muadh b. Jabal were sent as teachers of Qur'an to other areas to disseminate the message. In view of this, there was the need to have a standard copy of the Qur'an so that only one version was in circulation.

Furthermore, the Prophet knew that the Qur'an was meant for his generation and the generation yet unborn, he encouraged the preservation of the book right from the beginning of revelation so that those coming after would have the opportunity of reading the message of Allah sent through him. For these reasons, there were needs for the preservation of the holy book.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Enumerate the reasons for the preservation of the Qur'an.

3.2 During the Prophet's Lifetime

Prophet Muhammad did not present to his followers the revelation collected and arranged in a single volume. Rather, he was transmitting them to his followers as they come to him in stages, batches, and verses. One major reason for this was that the revelation of the Qur'an did not come down in one piece, but at interval, and this continued until the end of the Prophet's lifetime.

Another reason was that even during the period of revelation, some verses were abrogated and so, the Prophet needed to explain the abrogation and the abrogated verses. Most of these verses were not revealed in their final order, but were later arranged. It was therefore during the lifetime of the Prophet that the verses were arranged and so preserved.

Since the Prophet was unlettered (Q 29:48), there were companions who were doing the writing on his behalf and were keeping the revelations in safe place. All the revealed verses and chapters were in written form during the lifetime of the Prophet. For instance, when Umar set out to kill the Prophet Muhammad, he was informed that Islam had already spread to his own family. On getting to his home, he met his brother-in-law, his nephew and his sister who had embraced Islam reciting *Suratu Taha*. Umar requested for the sheet on which the *Surah* was written. He

was refused on the ground that he was not pure and so could not touch the Qur'an. He later took the ritual bath, and accepted Islam.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

- a. Explain the mode of preservation of Qur'an during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime.
- b. How did Umar b. al-Khattab embrace Islam?

3.3 The Period of the Companions

According to Denffer, more than twenty well known companions of the Prophet memorized the Qur'an, even before the Prophet's death. Among them were - AbuBakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali, Ibn Mas'ud, Abu Huraira, Abdullahi bin Abbas, Abdullahi bin 'Amr bin Al- 'As, Aisha, Hafsa, and Umm Salamah to mention but a few.

Unfortunately, most of those who memorized the Qur'an died in the battle fought with enemies of Islam. This made the Muslims consider the preservation of the book very necessary so that its message is not lost. Some of these companions were contacted to submit the materials in which they had the Qur'an written.

The Qur'an was not only written down by those companions who did so on their own initiative. Indeed, the Prophet, when a revelation came, called for the scribe and dictated to him. Also, while in Madina, the Prophet had many scribes, among who was Zaid bin Taabit.

Another form of preservation by the followers of the Prophet was new converts who came to Madinah to see the Prophet and learn about Islam. They were provided with copies of the chapters of the Qur'an, to read and learn them by heart.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Discuss how the companions of the Prophet helped in the preservation of the Qur'an.

3.4 Objects of Preservation

Three main objects, according to popular traditions of the Prophet were used as recording materials of the Qur'an during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad. These are:

- Dry Leaves
- Bones and Skins of Animals
- Stones

According to Uthman b. Affan, the third Caliph, when portions of different chapters were revealed to the Prophet, he used to call one of those persons who used to write down revelations and say: “write the verse or verses in chapter where such and such verse occurs”. Among the early scribes of the Qur’an were Zaid bin Thabit, Abubakr, Umar, Uthman, Ali and Zubair.

As the revelation grew in volumes, these objects were kept in the room of Hafsat, wife of the Prophet Muhammad. This was why when the Prophet died, copies with Hafsat were among those collected and compiled into what is today known as Qur’an.

Dry leaves, bones and animal skins were the only available and durable objects during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad to preserve writings. With ink and pen, literary activities during this time are limited as a compliment to the human memory.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Enumerate the objects in which Qur’an was preserved during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad.

3.5 Memorization of the Qur’an

One of the major ways by which the Qur’an was transmitted orally was by memorization known as *Hifz al Qur’an*. Prophet Muhammad was the first to commit the book into memory after the angel Jibril had brought it to him. Thereafter, he would declare the revelation and instruct his companions to memorize it. A good example was Ibn Mas’ud who was the first man to publicly recite the Qur’an in the city of Makkah. It is also on record that Abubakr used to recite the Qur’an publicly in front of his house in Makkah.

The significance of this is that right from the inception, Qur’an has been kept in the memory of the Prophet first, and then his companions. Whatever is in the memory is likely to be preserved longer and also eliminate variations. The Prophet himself encouraged the memorization of the Qur’an. For example, a Hadith states:

“Narrated ‘Uthman b. Affan: The Prophet said:

“The best among you (Muslims) are those who learn the Qur’an and teach it”.

During the five canonical prayers, recitation of the Qur'an is required, hence the need for memorization of verses of the Qur'an in order to use them in prayers. The Prophet also listens to Qur'an being recited by his followers. In view of its spiritual significance, memorized verses of the Qur'an help in developing the mind spiritually and intellectually.

The tradition of memorization continued after the death of the Prophet by his companions and later among the generation that followed, that is, the Tabi'un, until today. Thus, public recitation of the Qur'an was common during the days of the Prophet, just as we have Qur'anic Recitation Competitions today at both national and international levels.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Assess the impact of memorization of the Qur'an among Muslims.

3.6 Recordings of the Qur'an

Every stage, every step and every instruction on the verses received the highest regard and record during the lifetime of the Prophet. Every care was therefore taken to ensure that no part of the revealed verses was unrecorded.

At intervals, the objects in which Qur'an was written as mentioned in 3.4 above are brought out, read through to ensure that what has been written down agrees with what has been kept in the memory of the companions. This was all done to ensure that the objects are intact and in good condition. This happens during the month of Ramadan when the recitation of the Qur'an was more frequent.

The Prophet himself encouraged the art of writing. For example, it was related that some of the Quraish, who were taken prisoners at the battle of Badr, regained their freedom after they had taught some of the Muslims the art of writing. By this, many companions became literate in writing, thus increasing the number of the Prophet scribes.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

How accurate are the recorders of the Qur'an at the early stage of Islam.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We can conclude this unit by saying that the Qur'an was carefully preserved right from the first day it started coming down to the Prophet Muhammad from Allah and the companions assisted in ensuring that the preserved materials are kept intact till his death.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have learnt in this unit the various attempts by the Prophet and his companions in the preservation of the Qur'an. The efforts of the companions and later generations of Muslims have also been discussed to broaden your knowledge on the steps taken to preserve the Qur'an up until the present day.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss the various steps taken to ensure the preservation of the Qur'an.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 4 THE MAKKAN AND MADINAN SUWAR

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Makkan *Suwar*
 - 3.2 The Madinan *Suwar*
 - 3.3 Features and Characteristics of both Makkan and Madinan *Suwar*
 - 3.4 The Essence of Studying the Makkan and Madinan *Suwar*
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, the revelation of the Qur'an in two major periods of - Makkah and Madinah shall be discussed. Although the two are contained in the Qur'an, there is the need for a Muslims to know the difference between them. This is only for the purpose of appreciating their style and content. None of the two is inferior or superior to another in terms of originality. The period of Makkah revelations cover the pre-*Hijrah* (622 CE), while the period of Madinah revelations are the post-*Hijrah* days.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the characteristics of the Makkan and Madinan *Suwar*.
- Recognize the features of both Makkan and Madinan *Suwar*.
- Understand the content of both the Makkan and Madinan *Suwar*.

3.0 Main Content

3.1 The Makkan Suwar

The Makkan *Suwar* refer to revelation of the Qur'an that occurred while Muhammad (pbuh) was in Makkah. These were the early days of Islam when the Prophet after being called to Prophethood began his mission of Islam.

The Makkan phase of the revelation lasted about 13 years, from the first revelation up to the period of *Hijra* of Muhammad (pbuh) from Makkah to Madinah. During this period, Muhammad (pbuh) was occupied mainly with invitation of people (the Makkah pagans) to Islam. These were the people whose life and times were characterized by idol worshipping, moral decadence and low moral standards.

Also, the Prophet (pbuh) during this period of revelation was playing the role of an announcer of his creator; announcing the directives of his creator; Allah, of a new faith that centres on the worship of the creator and not the created and also to warn them, of consequences of their refusal to heed the call. So, we can say that the period of revelation in Makkah marked the beginning of Islam as a monotheistic religion.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

What do you understand by the Makkan revelation?

3.2 The Madinan Revelation

The Madinan revelation (*Suwar*) were those revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) after the *Hijra*. This period lasted about ten years, from *Hijra* to the death of the Prophet (pbuh). The foundation of Islam was laid in Makkah which resulted in the formation of a Muslim community (*Ummah*) in Madinah.

The Madinah *Suwar* were addressed to four groups of people unlike those of Makkah that were specifically addressed to the Quraish and other tribes. The four were:

- The *Muhajirun*, who migrated with the Prophet from Makkah to Madinah.
- The *Ansar*, indigenes of Madinah who helped the *Muhajirun*.
- The *Munafiqun* who are from Madinah and pretended to support the Muslims.
- The *Ahl al-Kitab*, i.e. Jews and Christians with their respective scriptures.

Thus, the Madinah *Suwar* were received by more than one homogenous group unlike the Makkans.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain in brief the Madinan *Suwar*.

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3.3 Features and Characteristics of both the Makkan and Madinan *Suwar*

The Makkan *Suwar* have their main themes as follows:

- The unity of Allah (*Tawhid*)
- The coming Resurrection and Judgment Day
- Righteous conducts, and lessons of the people and Prophets of the past.

The Madinan *Suwar* on the other hand have their main themes as:

- Transformation of the Muslim Community into a state.
- The social, economic, political, military etc life of Muslims.
- The rules, regulations and ordinances of Islam.

Apart from the above, the Makkan *Suwar* are generally short, the language is poetic and the *Suwar* are full of oaths. In addition, the sentences are short, and are mostly full of warnings of hell to evil doers and promise of paradise for doers of good.

The Madinah *Suwar*, on the other hand are generally longer and more explanatory. They make direct references to battles and other encounters by Muslims. These *Suwar* also address the faithful and the people of books. They also address mankind as *an-nas*, i.e., all people. Generally, all chapters whose revelation began in Makkah are known as Makkan *Suwar* even if their parts were revealed in Madinah.

In other words, a *surah* is said to be of Makkan origin even if it contains verses from Madinah. Also a *surah* is said to be of Madinan origin when its beginning was revealed in Madinah, even if it contains verses from the Makkan period in its text.

Furthermore, there are 19 *suwar* with what some scholars called *huruf tahji* (such as *alif*, lam, min e.t.c). All these *suwar* are of Makkan origin except *Suratul Baqara* (chapter 2) and *Al-Imran* (chapter 3).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain some features and characteristics of the Makkan and Madinah *Suwar*.

3.4 The Essence of Studying the Makkan and Madinan Suwar

To know the origin and order of some of the revelations of the Qur'an is important for understanding their meaning which can often be more easily grasped if one knows the time and circumstances that relate to them.

For example, many Makkan verses of the Qur'an may be especially meaningful to Muslims living in an un-Islamic environment, whereas some Madinan verses would appeal much to Muslims who are in the process of forming a community (*Ummah*).

In addition, in cases of ruling on Islamic matters, unless one knows which of the two or more related verses were revealed first, one cannot decide which legal ruling is now binding upon the Muslims. Thus, the knowledge of chronology, i.e. which verse comes before another, is very essential in addition to their origin.

The knowledge, about the Makkan and Madinan *Suwar* is derived from the companions (*sahabah*) of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), and those who came after them (*tabi'un*). The Prophet himself did not categorize any *surah* as either Makkan or Madinan. The reason for this was simple -everybody was a witness to the revelations during the lifetime of the Prophet. After his death, there arose the need to explain the origin of these verses in order to fully understand their context and content.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain the significance of Makkan and Madinan *Suwar*.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The knowledge of Makkan and Madinan revelation is one of the important branches of *Ulum-ul- Qur'an* -Science of the Qur'an. It is not merely of historical interest, but particularly important for the understanding and interpretation of the respective verses.

5.0 SUMMARY

Both the Makkan and Madinan *Suwar* as we can see from this Unit are parts and parcel of the Qur'an. The divisions of the two are only representing the period where Muhammad (pbuh) was during their revelations. We have studied in this Unit some basic features and characteristics of the two.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Outline some basic characteristics/features of both the Makkan and Madinan *Suwar*.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 COMPILATION OF THE QUR'AN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The First Attempt of Compilation by Abubakr Siddiq
 - 3.2 The Uthmanic Collection
 - 3.3 The Harmonization of the Copies
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will learn about various efforts aimed at compilation of the Qur'an into one volume as it is today. Since the writings were done in objects during the period of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), the later generation felt the need to preserve the Holy Book for future generations, hence this attempt of compilation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the various stages of compilation of the Qur'an.
- Identify the initial problems faced by the companions of the Prophet in this effort.
- Appreciate the care and concern of the successors of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to preserve the Qur'an till the present day.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The First Attempt at Compiling the Qur'an

The last revelation of the Qur'an was received few days before the death of the Prophet (pbuh). These verses were also recorded, memorized, revised and added to others as document in the objects. Thus, we have a complete Qur'an left behind by the Prophet both in the memories of various companions as well as on writing materials.

The first attempt to compile the Qur'an was made by the first caliph,

complete revelation. His reason was that many companions who had memorized the Qur'an were killed at the Battle of Yamamah in the year 633 CE. There was therefore the fear that unless something urgent was done, many people who learnt the Qur'an by heart may no longer be available to confirm the written down verses.

Consequently, Zaid b. Thabit, on the authority of the first Caliph brought together all the revealed verses into the *suhuf* (sheets) from both oral as well as written sources. In order to confirm their genuine submissions, the Caliph demanded for two witnesses for each piece. This document remained with Abubakr.

The result of this first attempt was that during the first and second year immediately after the death of the Prophet, the entire revelation was copied onto sheets (*suhuf*).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the circumstances that led to the compilation of the Qur'an.

3.2 The Uthman's Collection

Uthman b. Affan was the third Caliph of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). He came into the caliphal position after Umar b. al-Khahab, who after the death of the first Caliph was holding the *Suhuf* of the Qur'an in custody. About this time, Islam was spreading to outside the Arabian peninsula.

By the year 653 CE, there were noticeable differences which arose among Muslims about the correct recitation of the Qur'an. Caliph Uthman then instructed Zaid b. Thabit together with three other Companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) to prepare copies from the *suhuf* kept with one of the wives of the Prophet, Hafsat. Thus, the fresh copies from the original *suhuf* were reproduced and sent to various Muslim regions where differences were noticed to replace other material in circulation. The original *suhuf* was returned to Hafsat while Caliph Uthman also kept one copy (*al-Mushaf al-Imam*).

This attempt by Uthman was very significant as it brought about uniformity of the copy of Qur'an in all the Muslim regions, thereby providing an ample opportunity to confirm the original copy of the Holy Book. It also allows more copies to be available in case there was dispute over other copies. Thus, from the loose sheets collected by Abubakr, Uthman came up with re-production of the first compilation and allowed for uniformity in the production of copies.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Highlight the significance of the Uthmanic edition of the Qur'an.

3.3 Harmonization of the Copies

It would be recalled that Abubakr made one single copy from the various verbal and written materials. This copy was later kept by Umar and there by his daughter and wife of the Prophet, Hafsa. It was from this single copy that Uthman re-produced copies and sent to various regions of the Muslim world, while the original remained with Hafsa until her death.

The original copy with Uthman was known as *al-Mushaf al-Uthmani* (Uthmanic edition) and it was in fact known as the complete Qur'an by all the Companions of the Prophet, who agreed that it contained what Allah had revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Every year, Uthman ensured that all the regions recite the copies of the Qur'an with them, while he, with the original, listens to confirm that there were no variations or interpretations. This he did in the presence of the memorizers that were still alive.

By this effort, Uthman was able to harmonize the many copies and confirm that they contain the same verses. This could be confirmed from the report on the battle of Siffin (A.H 37) 27 years after the death of the Prophet, and five years after the Uthman's copies were distributed where Mu'awiyah troops fixed sheets from the Qur'an on their spears to interrupt the battle. Nobody accused anyone else of using a 'Persian' version of the Qur'an which would have counted against the enemy of Ali b. Talib who was then the Caliph.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain how Uthman b. Affan harmonized the various version of the Qur'an.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The compilation of the Qur'an took several efforts by the companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). Beginning with Abubakr, the first Caliph, Umar, Uthman and Ali, the Qur'an as we have it today has been carefully compiled such that no verse was missing. This is why it is regarded as the Holy Book of Islam. This unit has explained the various stages of the compilation.

5.0 SUMMARY

The death of many memorizers of the Qur'an at the Battle of Yamamah necessitated the attempt to compile the revelation into one unified book. This singular event was very significant when today we see the same Qur'an being read without variation or difference. This was the fulfilment of Allah's promise to preserve the Qur'an as in Q15:19 which was actualised through the efforts of the Companions of the Prophet, who ensured that the book was preserved till date.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Assess the roles of the Companions of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) in the compilation of the Qur'an.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 6 DIVISIONS OF THE QUR'AN

CONTENTS

1.0	Introduction
2.0	Objectives
3.0	Main Content
3.1	The <i>Surah</i>
3.2	The <i>Ayah</i>
3.3	The <i>Juz 'u</i>
3.4	The <i>Hizb</i>
4.0	Conclusion
5.0	Summary
6.0	Tutor-Marked Assignment
7.0	References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be taught the various divisions of the Qur'an as a book of guidance for the Muslims. These divisions are meant to ease the recitation of the book and to fully understand its contents. Scholars, researchers and students of the Book found the divisions very convenient in their use of the book.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

It is hoped that by the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the various divisions of the Qur'an.
- Identify some signs and strokes of the Qur'an.
- Use the various divisions to understand the Qur'an better.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The *Surah*

Surah (pl. *Suwar*) literally means 'an enclosure', 'a fence' or 'an elevated plain'. In technical language, it is the passage of Qur'anic text with specific beginning and end, i.e. a chapter or part, set apart from the preceding and following text.

In the Qur'an, there are 114 Chapters or *Suwar*. This division is what Qur'an 2:23 referred to when it challenged the opponents of Islam thus:

“And if you are in doubt as to what we have revealed from time to time to our servant, then produce a Surah like it, and call your witnesses or helpers beside Allah, if you are truthful”

The chapters of the Qur'an are of varying lengths. The longest contains 286 verses. The shortest chapter contains only three verses. It should be noted that all *Suwar* with the exception of Surah 9 begins with the word *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*, which means “In the name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful”. However, Surah 27:30, the *Bismillahi* missing in *Surah Tawbah* is found thus:

*It is from Solomon, and is (as follows)
“In the name of Allah, The Gracious,
The Merciful”.*

All the 114 *Suwar* in the Qur'an have names which serve as a title or heading. The names are often derived from an important or distinguishing word in the text itself such as *al-Anfāl* (8), *al-Baqara* (2). In some cases, some *suwar* are named after the first few alphabets with which the *surah* begins such as *Ta-ha* (20), *al-Furqan* (25), *Ya-sin* (36).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the term *Surah* in the Qur'an.

3.2 Ayah

Ayah (pl. *ayat*) means ‘sign’, but in technical language it refers to the shortest division of the Qur'an, i.e. a phrase or a sentence. Since the revelation of the Qur'an is a guidance to mankind, it is therefore not surprising that its smallest divisions are called ‘signs’. The term verse is only used by English translators; it may not be the most appropriate since Qur'an is not poetry.

An *ayah* of the Qur'an may carry more than one meaning, while some need to be read along with the next in a *surah*. Some *ayat* are self-explanatory while some are allegorical. The proper understanding of these depends on the knowledge of individual who engages on the study of the Qur'an.

Both the order of the *ayat* within each *surah* and the arrangement of the *surah* were finally determined by the Prophet (pbuh) under guidance from the Angel Jibril in the year of his death, when the Angel came to him twice to revise the text with him.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Write short notes on the *ayah* in the Qur'an

3.3 Juz'u

Juz'u (pl. *ajza'a*) literally means part or portion. The Qur'an is divided into 30 portions of appropriately equal length for easy recitation during the thirty nights of Ramadan.

The learning of the Qur'an in view of its technical nature normally takes some time. Pupils learning the book often spend months and even years before graduation. One easy way of ensuring that a pupil completes the learning in good time is to divide the entire period along the *Juz'u*. By this, a child will move from one *Juz'u* to another. Some ceremonies are held for such completion in the past by local Mallams (Teachers of Qur'anic Schools).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

What are the uses of *Juz'u* in the recitation of Qur'an?

3.4 Hizb

This is a further division of *Juz'u*. There are sixty sub-divisions of the Qur'an also for easy recitation and memorization. Each *hizb* is further subdivided into quarters indicated as follows:

- a. First quarter *hizb* (*Rub'ul hizb*)
- b. Half of *hizb* (*Nisful hizb*)
- c. Third quarter *hizb* (*Thalathatu arba'aul hizb*)

This sub-division of the Qur'an also helps pupils, learning the Qur'an by engaging them to complete the *hizb* within a period of time after which they would complete recitation of a *Juz'u*. To such learners, they cannot move to another *hizb* unless they have mastered the reading of the previous ones.

In the thematic structure of the Qur'an, some *hizbs* follow a set pattern of theme while others may not. These themes are usually followed by commentators of the Qur'an (*Mufasssirun*). Both the *hizb* and *juz'u* provide an easy coverage of the Qur'an within a stipulated time frame.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Compare and contrast the *hizb* and *Juz 'u* of the Qur'an.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The division of the Qur'an into *Juz 'u* and *hizb* is for easy recitation of the Glorious Book by Muslims. Although there are further divisions of the Qur'an, those discussed in this unit are the most essential and popular among many scholars of Qur'an.

5.0 SUMMARY

This unit has presented the various terms commonly used to describe the various divisions in the Qur'an. The essence of this is to educate you on these terms and their importance in the learning of the Qur'an.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Enumerate the various divisions of the Qur'an.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 7 AUTHENTICITY OF THE QUR'AN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The Qur'an as an Authentic Source of History
 - 3.2 The Life of Muhammad
 - 3.3 Evidence from the Qur'an
 - 3.4 Predictions of the Future Fulfilled
 - 3.5 Agreement with Modern Science
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There are a lot of arguments by some non-Muslims as to the genuineness of the Qur'an as a book of Allah. In this unit, you will learn how the Qur'an and other evidences have proved that indeed the book has divine origin.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Have a full appreciation of the divine origin of the Qur'an.
- Explain to a non-Muslim the authenticity of the Qur'an both in content and in context.
- Understand through the life of the Prophet that the message he brought was to the whole world.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Qur'an as an Authentic Source of History

By authenticity, it means that the Qur'an was truly the revelation from Allah through Prophet Muhammad to mankind. Before him, as mentioned earlier, there have been Prophets sent with books such as Musa (Moses), Isa (Jesus Christ) and Dawud (David).

It therefore became evident that although Muhammad did not meet these Prophets, yet his message contained their histories, deeds and accounts of

their lives. The Qur'an contains histories of Prophets such as Musa, Dawud, Yunus, Ibrahim e.t.c. Thus, the Qur'an contains those aspects of life left out in the earlier revelations.

In addition, the Qur'an acknowledges earlier revealed books and Prophets of Allah. This goes to confirm that the revelation of the Qur'an is a continuation of Allah's communication with mankind through periodic revelation. Qur'an 46:10 says:

“Say: See you? If this teaching be from Allah, and you reject it, and a witness from among the children of Israel testifies to it. Similarly (with earlier scriptures), and has believed while you are arrogant. (How unjust are you). Truly Allah guides not a people unjust.”

Historians rely on the information from the Qur'an in their writings because it remained an original source of material for past events as it affected people and places. To this end, the Qur'an is not just a book of worship, it is also a powerful historical document which predated the birth of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) by telling the story of the old Romans or the Babylonians or even the Israelites.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

The Qur'an is not only a religious book, but also a historical document. Discuss.

3.2 The Life of Muhammad

In order to prove the authenticity of the Qur'an, the life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) could also be a good reference point.

First, he was an unlettered Prophet. For this reason, it would be difficult for such a person to sit down somewhere and write a volume as Qur'an and claim it is from Allah.

Secondly, the Makkans were known for literary activities even before Muhammad was born. Most of them were poets of high standing who used to organize competition to showcase their best material in the art of composition. But when they had contact with verses of the Qur'an, they could not but accept the unrivalled rich language and its composition which was superior in diction compared to their poetic erudition. And they accepted the Qur'an as being from a power beyond Muhammad. This was why they accepted the Qur'an as a revelation.

In addition, when Muhammad had contact with kings and rulers of countries, his first instrument of conviction was the Qur'an. Most of these rulers eventually accepted Islam not because of the eloquence of Muhammad but because of the powerful statements contained in the Qur'an. It therefore means that the Qur'an was enough a message of conviction to which even leaders had to confirm and accept.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

How did the personality of Muhammad prove that the Qur'an was an authentic book?

3.3 Evidence from the Qur'an

Unlike other holy books, the Qur'an speaks of itself as being a revelation from the supreme being; Allah. This evidence and many others put the authenticity of the book in no doubt. This is because Muhammad could not have invented such statements. For instance Qur'an 56: 77-80 states thus:

“That is indeed the Qur'an most honourable, in a Book well-guarded, which none shall touch but those who are clean. A revelation from the Lord of the worlds.”

To those who claim that the Qur'an is not divine, the Qur'an itself debunked the claim thus:

Or, do they say, he (Muhammad) has forged it? Say then, bring ten forged chapters, like it and call upon whom you can besides Allah, if you are truthful.” (Q11:13).

The above is a challenge that nobody or group has ever responded to over thousand years when the Qur'an threw it. The Qur'an went further to challenge not only men, but even the Jinn with their supernatural powers. None can produce the like of the Qur'an even if they combined their efforts in such a direction. Qur'an 17:88 states:

“If man and jinn should combined together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like of it even though some of them helped each other.”

With all these, we can deduce that the evidence of the authenticity of the Qur'an is very much abundant within the text itself. And this is a further confirmation of the divine nature of the book.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Highlight some evidence from the Qur'an to prove its authenticity.

3.4 Predictions of the Future Fulfilled

Not only is the Qur'an relevant to the history of the people and events of the past, but is also full of prediction most of which have been fulfilled. And with our human reasoning, those that are yet to be fulfilled would soon come to pass based on concrete evidences.

A good example was the Qur'anic prediction of the victory of the Roman Empire over Persia after the Persians had defeated it. This properly came to pass seven years later in 622 CE. The Qur'an 30: 2-4 states thus:

“The Roman Empire has been defeated, in a land close by, but they (even) after this defeat of theirs will soon be victorious; within a few years, with God is the decision in the past and in the future, on that day shall the Believers rejoice.”

The Qur'an also prophesized that Islam shall prevail over all other religions. This is being fulfilled today as the religion is gaining firm root in areas that used to be hostile to the Muslims. Qur'an 48:28 states:

“It is He who has sent His Apostle with Guidance and the religion of Truth, to proclaim it over all Religion; and enough is God as a witness.”

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Discuss the predictions of the Qur'an as indication of its divine status.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have discussed in this unit the various proofs for the authenticity of the Qur'an, whereas other books are limited in scope and audience. The Qur'an has proved to be a universal book for all ages, nations and tribes.

5.0 SUMMARY

The following are the major points that you have learnt in this unit:

- The life of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is a proof to the genuineness of the Qur'an

- There are several passages of the Qur'an to support the genuineness of the Qur'an.
- The fulfilment of the prophecies in the glorious Book is another assurance of its divineness.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

How will you convince a skeptic that the Qur'an is divine?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 8 NAMES OF THE QUR'AN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Al-Qur'an (that which is to be read)
 - 3.2 *Al-Kitab* (The Book)
 - 3.3 *Al-Furqan* (The Separator)
 - 3.4 *Al-Huda* (The Guidance)
 - 3.5 *Al-Tanzil* (The Revelation)
 - 3.6 *Al-Hukm* (The Judgement)
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Qur'an is known by many names. These names are of importance to the book as they depict the use of the text and its content among Muslims. Interestingly, the Qur'an itself contains many other names by which it is called. In this unit, you will learn about names of the Qur'an, their meanings and significance.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify other names by which the Qur'an is known.
- Explain meanings of these names.
- Know the spiritual significance of these names to Muslims.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Al-Qur'an

Qur'an is from the Arabic word *qara'a*, i.e. 'he read'. The word Qur'an means what is to be read or recitation. In other words, by its meaning the book we are studying in this unit is the one meant to be read either individually or collectively from time to time. No wonder, therefore that the

Qur'an has become a source of competition among the young and the old who are always eager to out-do each other in the art of reading the Qur'an.

The angel Jibril as mentioned in unit 2 began the revelation of the Qur'an with a command "Read". This is very significant because right from inception, the book was to be often repeated verses.

But we should know that reading the Qur'an is an effort that requires certain etiquettes or decorum. Thus, to read the book, the place, the manner and comportment all must follow certain guidelines. The proper reading of the Qur'an requires a special skill known as *Ilm al-Tajwid*, i.e. the Science of Recitation. This skill provides a proper pronunciation of some letters, the mode of recitation as well as observance of some rules in the book.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the meaning of Qur'an .

3.2 Al-Kitab (The Book)

The Qur'an has as another name, the Book. This is contained in Qur'an 2:2 thus:

"That is the book, in which there is no doubt, it is a guide for those who fear Allah."

Although, the Qur'an is described as a book, it is not like any other book. The term book is only in the textual nature of the compilation, we should not look at the Qur'an as a book from the same way we perceive other books we use in our day-to-day activities.

For example, most of the books we use in our daily activities have human beings as their authors; the author of the Qur'an is Allah Himself. Again, ordinary books undergo several editions, assessments, modifications and corrections. The Qur'an as we have in the days of Prophet remains the same even today. It has not and will never go through any revisions.

Even in other holy books recognized by Islam, man mixed his words with God's, but in the case of Qur'an, we find only the words of God, and in their original form. In addition, the original texts of most of the known divine books were lost altogether, and only their translations exist today. In the case of Qur'an, it is exactly intact today as it was revealed to the Prophet. Not a word, not even a syllable has been changed.

Some holy books were sent in languages which died long ago. No nation or community now speaks those languages and there are only a few people who claim to understand them. Thus, to even interpret those books and put them into practice becomes a difficult task. On the other hand, the language of the Qur'an is a living language; millions of people speak it, and millions know and understand it. Arabic is being taught and learnt in many universities of the world. Thus, it is easy to interpret the Arabic Qur'an and then follow the injunctions therein.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

To what extent would you agree that Qur'an is different from other books?

3.3 *Al-Furqan* (The Separator)

Another name by which Qur'an is known is The Separator, i.e. the one that distinguishes the truth from falsehood. This perfectly refers to the emergence of the book at a time when the Makkans were grossly involved in all forms of falsehood both in terms of worship and social life. The idolaters of Makkah thrive in falsehood by worshipping man-made gods and goddesses, and so the Qur'an came as a separator between these and worship of the only one God, Allah.

True Prophet is raised by God Himself. It is He who has sent him to mankind to convey His message to His people. It is His command that one should put one's faith in the Prophet and follow him. Thus, one who refuses to believe in God's messenger refuses to follow God's commandment and becomes a rebel. The evidence of those who are on the wrong path and those on the straight path are contained in the Qur'an, a distinguisher.

Perhaps, the position of Islam would not have been better appreciated if Muhammad was only to come out and call the people to the only one true God, without evidence that he was actually sent by Him. To separate the false and feeble kind of God (which the Makkans were worshipping) from the strong and all-encompassing, all-powerful Allah, the Qur'an provides all these through its contents.

Whatever notions the pre-Islamic Arabs had of morals, culture and civilizations were primitive in the extreme. They could hardly discriminate or distinguish between pure and impure, lawful and unlawful. Their lives were barbaric. They take pleasures in adultery, gambling and drinking. Looting and murder were part of their everyday existence. They would stand stark naked before each other without any shame or conscience. It is the Qur'an that now came to separate

between these horrible life in which the Arabs were living and the purified, neat and wholesome one, which is Islam.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain with example how the Qur'an can be described as 'The Separator'.

3.4 Al-Huda (The Guidance)

The Qur'an is a guidance from darkness to the light of Islam. The Qur'an chapter 2 verse 185 states:

“Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an, as a guide to mankind, also clear signs for guidance and judgement (between right and wrong) ...”

The guidance imparted through the Prophets of the past was not complete. Every Prophet was followed by another who effected alterations and additions in the teachings and injunctions of his predecessors, and in this way, the chain of reform and progress continued. That is why the teachings of the earlier Prophets, after the lapse of time, were lost. Obviously, there was no need to preserve their teachings when amended and improved guidance had taken place. At the last, the most perfect code of guidance was imparted to mankind through Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). By this, all the previous codes were automatically replaced.

It is futile to follow an incomplete code when the complete code exists. That complete code is the Qur'an. It guides the mind towards a perfect life and teaching which never existed in the books of the earlier Prophets who had come before Muhammad. The guidance of the Qur'an is to provide for man an entry point to the eternal pleasure of the Almighty Allah. Whoever follows it, will have an everlasting peace of mind, and whoever rejects will suffer perdition in the end.

Like the wandering shepherds in the wilderness, the Arabs before Islam needed a true guidance for their life to be secured, and for mankind in general to be provided with a complete code of life, which is Islam. This is what the Qur'an has come to do for the Arab idolaters and by extension the entire world. Thus it is found in the Qur'an a guide to one's economic, social, political, and matrimonial and indeed every facet of life. No wonder therefore that in *Suratul Fatihah*, the only prayer is “Guide us on the right path”. Whoever has been guided will never go astray in terms of worship and complete peace of mind.

The Qur'an guides us on how to behave among ourselves, how to respect our parents, how to transact businesses, how to administer inheritances, how to pilot affairs of a group or nation, how to treat the orphans and so on.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain how the Qur'an is a guide to the believers.

3.5 *Al-Tanzil* (The Revelation)

The Qur'an is not just a book written by someone, somewhere, somehow. It is a revealed message, a compendium brought together as a reference material for believers. God had revealed His Books to His Prophets before Muhammad and these books were sent down in the same way as He sent down the Qur'an. It is part of faith in Islam to believe in the previous revelations such as *Torah* (revealed to Prophet Musa), *Injil* (to Prophet Isa) and *Zabur* (to Prophet Dawud). A Muslim should believe that whatever books were sent down by God are all true.

While the original texts of most of the former divine books were lost altogether, and only their translation exists today, the Qur'an, exists exactly as it was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. Not a word is changed or even added to it. Thus, Qur'an is available in its original text as a revealed and preserved book of all times. If the Qur'an had been a man-made work, several mistakes, additions and errors would have been discovered in it. The Qur'an 26:192 states:

“Verily, this is a Revelation from the Lord of the worlds”.

That the Qur'an is a revelation from Allah should be of the nature that it is purely and absolutely God's own words, that it is perfectly true, that every word of it is preserved, that everything mentioned therein is right, that it is duty bound on every man and woman to carry out in his life and every community every command of it and that whatever be against it must be rejected.

The Qur'an within its texts also confirms the status of being a revelation from the Supreme Being, the Wise. This is why several passages in the book direct the mind to reflect on certain phenomena around man, and how these have impacted on the life of man. Prophet Muhammad was not known to be a scientist. But the message is full of scientific discoveries. This can only testify to it as being a revelation from the Almighty, the All-Knowing, Allah.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Enumerate four points to confirm the divine revelation of the Qur'an.

3.6 *Al-Hukm* (The Judgment)

The Qur'an has the name *al-hukm*, i.e. the Judgement which truly represents the supremacy of the book over the affairs of man on earth. The Qur'an 13:37 states:

*“Thus have We revealed it to be a judgement of authority in Arabic
...”*

Among the features of the Qur'an is that it contains injunctions, verdicts and rulings on the various aspects of human life. These judgments are of divine origin and this is why in over one thousand years when the Qur'an was revealed, no one has come up to fault the judgments. This is because Allah Himself is just, and will never be unjust to His creatures.

In view of the complexity of man, he needs divine judgement of the activities which he embarks upon and which require divine blessings. Thus Qur'an provides judgements on the distribution of estate of a deceased Muslim in such a manner that everyone in the family is taken care of. Similarly, in the case of divorce between man and woman, the judgement of the Qur'an provides a balanced resolution, when properly executed.

The Qur'an judgements on criminal matters have been found to be the best, and in the best interest of the larger society even by non-Muslim jurists of the world. Today, several codified laws borrow from the Qur'anic provisions (although without stating so) in view of the fairness of the Qur'anic provisions. And this makes a Muslim appreciate the blessing of the Qur'an on man, as against the man-made laws that require updating, amendments and reviews from time to time.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Examine the name of Qur'an as the Separator.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have explained in this unit the various names of the Qur'an which makes it a truly revelation from Allah. By these names, one can only appreciate the supremacy of the book over the previous books sent to other Prophets and then strive to follow it.

5.0 SUMMARY

The names by which we call the Qur'an are attributes of this divine book of Islam. The names indeed represent its use, place and position in the life of a true believer.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Mention five other names of the Qur'an and discuss their meanings in brief.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 9 THE MANUSCRIPTS OF THE QUR'AN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Old Manuscripts of the Qur'an
 - 3.2 The Damascus Manuscript
 - 3.3 The Madinah Manuscript
 - 3.4 The Samarkand Manuscript
 - 3.5 The Egyptian Manuscript
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will learn the various scripts of the Qur'an and the developments of script writing in the pre-Islamic and the Islamic era. The mode of writing in those days was done by the use of the available technology. The Qur'anic script as we have it today has therefore undergone several changes and improvements.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the various scripts of the Qur'an.
- Understand the peculiarities of some manuscripts of the Qur'an.
- Appreciate the stages of the writings of the Qur'an before modern technology.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Old Manuscript

Although writing was not very common in the pre-Islamic days, it is a well-known activity among the Arabs. History told us of many writers of poems, verses of praises and so on, and who became famous because to their writings.

The script used in the 7th century of Islam i.e. during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) consisted of very basic symbols, which expressed

only the consonantal structure of a word and which were not very clear in reading and identifying. For example, while today we have Arabic letters such as *ba*, *ta*, *tha*, *ya* with distinguishing points of one, two or three on top or below the alphabets, the early letters of Arabic alphabets contained no such points. All the letters used to be written simply as a straight line.

Consequently, from this basic system of writing, there developed over the ages, various types of script such as *Kufi*, *Maghribi*, *Naqsh*, etc., which later spread to other parts of the world. According to Denffer, this later invention by Muslims with interests in Arabic calligraphy brought about standardized types and formalization of Arabic writing began to develop. For the script of the Qur'an, there were two important steps which brought about the forms in which we have the Qur'anic text as it is today. The two steps were the introduction of:

□□ Vowelling marks(*Tashkil*)

□□ Diacritical Marks (*I'ijam*)

Taskhil is the name for signs indicating the vowels in Arabic scripts. They were unknown in the pre-Islamic times. These signs helped to determine the correct pronunciation of the word and to avoid mistakes for example *bayt*, *baytun*.

The next is *I'ijam* (diacritical marks) Arabic letters which started as lines and point which the ancient Arabic did not have was later developed with strokes which helped to distinguish the various letters which could be easily mixed up. Without *i'ijam*, word such as *bayt* cannot be easily recognized. We should note that *i'ijam* were rarely in use in the pre-Islamic days.

The very early copies of the Qur'anic manuscripts did not have signs of *ya*, *ba*, *ta*, *tha*, etc. It was during the period of the fifth Umayyad Caliph Abdul Malik b. Marwam (66-68 H) that these were introduced. The first man to introduce these points to the Qur'anic text was a successor (*Tabi'i*) known as Abu al-Aswad Al-Du'ali.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the *tashkil* and *i'ijam* in the early Qur'anic manuscript.

3.2 The Damascus Manuscript

It was reported that three out of the four of the copies of the early Qur'anic script by Uthman b. Affan were destroyed by fire and in war after the few years of their existence. But the copy to Damascus was

intact and was kept at Malatja. The destruction of the three copies gave Muslims a great concern as the only copy in Damascus may be targeted by the opponents of Islam who knew at that time that it was the only survivor out of the four original copies sent to Muslim lands.

The Damascus copy of the original Qur'an was cited by many scholars who later developed keen interest in the study of sciences of the Qur'an. Among them was Ibn Batuta (779AH/1377CE) who said he saw the copy in Granada, Marrakech, Basra and other cities. Also, Ibn Kathir (d. 774AH/1372CE) relates that he has seen a copy of the Damascus copy in the year 518 in Palestine. According to him, the copy of the Qur'an was very large, in beautiful clear strong writing with strong ink, in penchant made of camel skin.

Some people believed that this copy was later sent to Leningrad and from there to England. Others held the view that this *Mushaf* remained in the Mosque of Damascus, where it was last seen before the fire in the year 1310AH/1892CE.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Write brief notes on the Damascus manuscript of the Qur'an.

3.2 The Madinah Manuscript

This same manuscript of the Qur'an was later found in Madinah according to Ibn Jubair (d. 614AH/1217CE) who said he saw the copy in the Mosque of Madinah in 580AH/1184CE. According to other sources, this manuscript remained in Madinah until the Turks took it from there in 1334AH/1915CE. It was reported that this copy removed by the Turkish authorities to Istanbul came to Berlin during the World War I.

To confirm this, the Treaty of Versailles, which concluded the World War I, contains the following clause:

Article 246: Within six months from coming into force of the present Treaty, Germany will restore to His majesty, king of Hedjaz, the original Koran of Caliph Othman, which was removed from Madinah by the Turkish authorities and is stated to have been presented to the Ex-Emperor William II.

We should note however that the Qur'an manuscript later moved to Istanbul, not Madinah. But there were strong indications that the same text, in its original was preserved and that nothing has tampered with it. There was yet another manuscript known as Imam manuscript. This was the one

kept by Caliph Uthman himself, and was said to be reading when his assassins came to kill him. The same manuscript was to be found later in Samarkand.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Write short notes on the Madinah manuscript.

3.4 The Samarkand Manuscript

According to Denffer, this was the copy kept in Tashkent (USSR). It may be the Imam manuscript or any of the other copies made at the time of Uthman b. Affan, the third Caliph.

This manuscript came to Samarkand in 890AH/1485CE and remained there till 1917CE. A Russian Orientalist gave a detailed description of it and that many pages were damaged and missing. Efforts were made to reform the pages through the reproduction of 50 copies and sent to many Muslim rulers such as Ottoman Sultan Abdul Hamid, the Shah of Iran, the Amir of Bukhara, etc.

This Samarkand manuscript was significant in that its edition circulated among the reproduction moved to other world leaders who also kept the document jealously and for posterity. The manuscript was later returned to its former place and reached Tashkent in 1924, where it has remained since. It is good to note that the Soviet authorities had made several copies, which are presented from time to time to visiting Muslim heads of state and other important personalities.

In 1980, photocopies were produced in the United States of America, with a two-page forward by M. Hamidullah. According to the author of a book History of Mushaf of Uthman in Tashkent, a number of reasons for the authenticity of the manuscript were given as:

- a. The fact that the script is written in the first half of the first century Hijra.
- b. The fact that it is written on parchment from a gazelle, while the later Qur'anic scripts were written on paper-like sheets.
- c. The fact that it does not have any diacritical marks which were introduced around the eighth decade of the first century; hence the manuscript must have been written before them.

- d. The fact that it does not have a vowel symbols introduced by Al-Du'ali, who died in 68AH, hence it is earlier than this.

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On the whole, what was clear was that two of the copies of the Qur'an which were originally prepared by Uthman, are still available to us today and their text and arrangement can be compared with any other copy of the Qur'an be it in print or handwriting. They will be found to be identical.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Highlight the significance of the Samarkand manuscript.

3.5 The Egyptian Manuscript

The Qur'anic text in printed form now in use widely in the Muslim world is the 'Egyptian Edition'. It is also known as the 'King Fu'ad Edition', since it was introduced in Egypt under King Fu'ad of Egypt. It was first printed in Cairo in 1925. Subsequently, numerous copies have been produced.

The effort of the Egyptians in this direction was to first preserve the manuscript, reproduce the original and then begin mass reproduction. The various stages of preserving the manuscript later received the attention of the Egyptian government and a more scientific preservation was made of the document.

The various manuscripts of the Qur'an are only confirming the stages of preservation of the document up till present day. None of the manuscript was ever found with any defect that may have affected the content of the Qur'an because, as we have seen, each period of the transition, the document received the best of protection from human corruption and interpolation. But above all, Allah, the author of the Qur'an had assumed that it is He who protects the book from any form of crookedness.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Write short note on the Egyptian manuscript of the Qur'an.

4.0 CONCLUSION

In this unit, you have learnt about the various manuscripts of the Qur'an, and how they were preserved from one generation to the other. The manuscripts were the originals from where the present copy of the Qur'an emerged.

5.0 SUMMARY

The manuscripts of the Qur'an provide a good opportunity to see how the Arabic alphabet developed. It is interesting that the Arabic, which is the language of the Qur'an, is still alive today worldwide unlike the language of some other holy books that had become extinct.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Trace the various stages of development of the Qur'anic manuscripts up to the present time.

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UNIT 10 ROLES OF COMPANIONS OF THE PROPHET IN THE PRESERVATION OF THE QUR'AN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 Khadijah bint Khuwaylid
 - 3.2 Hafsa bint Umar
 - 3.3 Zaid b. Thabit
 - 3.4 Abubakr Al-Siddiq
 - 3.5 Uthman b. 'Affan
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Many companions as well as family members of the Prophet played various roles in the documentation of the Qur'an. This was because he was an unlettered Prophet and his call to Prophethood was a surprise to him. In this unit, we shall examine few of these companions and their roles.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the family members and companions who assisted the Prophet in documentation and preservation of the Qur'an.
- Understand the role played by some companions in the project of Documentation of the Qur'an.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Khadijah bint Khuwaylid

This was the first wife of Prophet Muhammad. Although a widow, she offered to marry Muhammad who was fifteen years younger than her, and also surrendered all her wealth and dignity to the Prophet. Khadijah's role in the life of the Prophet was very significant and valuable.

First, as a business woman, she was into reach merchant business, travelling from cities to cities and had wide trade connections. Initially Muhammad was to join her business as a trade partner; she quickly discovered the truthfulness and reliable qualities of the young, dynamic Muhammad. Hence, she drew him nearer to her business activities. They later got married.

Khadijah was the first recipient of the shock and bewilderment of Muhammad after his encounter with the angel at Cave Hira. She provided the needed “cover” for the man who was dear to her, but was undergoing psychological experiences. She also contacted her cousin, Waraqah b. Naufal, an experienced and knowledgeable man in Christianity who later hinted that her husband would soon be a great man.

Khadijah was the backbone for Prophet Muhammad at the initial stage of Islam. She provided a conducive environment for Muhammad to develop his Prophetic life and the much needed resources to meet the challenges of the Makkan opposition. She also made the home of the Prophet a haven of everybody so that the new faith became firmly rooted in their minds. Her acceptance of the new faith also provided the confidence needed by Muhammad to begin a universal mission.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the role of Khadijah in the growth of Islam.

3.2 Hafsah bint Umar

Hafsah was the daughter of Umar b. al-Khattab, the second Caliph in Islam. She was married to the Prophet after accepting Islam even before her father, who at that time was an ardent enemy of Islam. She was bold to tell her father never to touch the Qur'an because he was impure as a pagan.

Hafsah's role was the keeping of the original copy of the Qur'an in her custody. After the gathering of objects in which Qur'an was written such as dry leaves, bones and animal skins, these objects were collected and kept in the care of Hafsah. On the death of the Prophet, it was the copy with her that was brought out, reproduced under the command of Uthman b. Affan, and later got circulated to Muslim provinces to avoid variations in the recitations.

Hafsah was a devoted wife of the Prophet. She was reported to have memorized many parts of the Qur'an even while the Prophet was alive. She also used to teach others the Qur'an as her contribution to the

growth of Islam. In addition, Hafsa was noted to be a dedicated wife who also served the Prophet's guests and visitors even when the Prophet did not have enough provision for such guests.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Assess the role of Hafsa in the preservation of the Qur'an.

3.3 Zaid b. Thabit

Popularly known as the chief scribe of Prophet Muhammad, Zaid b. Thabit was a young man with very good talent of record keeping. The Prophet quickly discovered this in him at the early stage of Islam and brought him closer as his 'personal secretary'.

Zaid's role in the Qur'an was the accurate recordings of the revelation. A tradition had it that as soon as the Prophet received any revelation, the next thing will be to invite Zaid b. Thabit and other scribes and instruct them to write the new verse in so and so place. After writing, he will also read out the dictated verses to the hearing of the Prophet who will confirm and then ask that the materials be kept in safe place.

Zaid was a close relation of the Prophet. He used to ensure that nothing happened any day around the Prophet except he has fully recorded them down. To this, his record usually forms the basis for others to crosscheck and then amend as required.

During the treaty of Hudaibiyyah, Zaid b. Thabit was among the scribes on the side of the Prophet when the treaty was being drafted. He was usually in charge of the documents of the Prophet and the Prophet relied so much on him that he would ask other scribes to compare their notes with that of Zaid.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Who was Zaid b. Thabit?

3.4 Abubakr al-Siddiq

This was the first Caliph of Prophet Muhammad. He was the first male adult to accept Islam without any hesitation. He was a rich merchant in Makkah and was a famous businessman that later brought glamour and respect to the fold of the early Muslims.

Abubakr was very close to Prophet Muhammad, and later became his close confidant. His choice as the first caliph was not by accident but indeed a normal procedure going by the closeness, reliability and high level of commitment to the cause of Islam.

Abubakr was with Muhammad, being his only partner in the cave *Thawr*, during the *hijrah* from Makkah to Madinah. He also stood by the Prophet even when Muhammad was afraid that the Quraish who were pursuing them were close by. He entered Madinah with the Prophet and both were welcomed by the *Ansar*.

After the Prophet's death, the first move to get the Qur'an compiled started during the reign of Abubakr. Although he did not initially completely support the idea, it was out of respect and regard for the Prophet. Abubakr queried the agitators for the compilation of the Qur'an why the Prophet did not initiate such when he was alive. He later supported the idea in view of the dwindling number of memorizers of Qur'an who were killed at the battle of Yamama.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Abubakr was indeed a 'Friend in need'. Discuss.

3.5 Uthman b. 'Affan

One companion that would ever be remembered for his role in the compilation of the Qur'an was Uthman b. 'Affan, the third Caliph. Although an elderly and wealthy man, Uthman demonstrated to Muslims how best to spend one's wealth for the upliftment of the religion of Islam. He was one of the very early converts to Islam.

Uthman took a bold step in the Qur'anic project by ordering its compilation and keeping one, and reproducing other copies for the Muslim regions. Today, we talk of the Uthmanic edition of the Qur'an because it was he who standardized the document when variations in the recitation were noticed in some regions of the Muslims.

Uthman was also involved in the process of cross checking from memorizers of the book, especially during the compilation. And he would ask each memorizer to produce witnesses in support of the recitation. Uthman spent his wealth in the spread of Islam. For instance, he was the first Muslim to buy a well for the use of the Muslims as his contributions to the growth of Islam.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The companions of the Prophet played significant roles in the promotion of Islam. They were the first people to believe the Prophet out of love and sincere commitment to his mission. They therefore can be regarded as the front liners in the evolution of Islam as a religion.

5.0 SUMMARY

The compilation of the Qur'an as we have it today could be credited to the efforts of some close companions and relations of the Prophet who assisted and helped in preserving the glorious Book for the generations yet unborn. In this unit you have learnt how these people who were close to the Prophet helped him in the Qur'anic compilation project.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain the role of the following companions of the Prophet in the compilation and standardization of the Qur'an:

- a. Abubakr
- b. Khadijah
- c. Hafsah
- d. Zaid b. Thabit

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UNIT 11 THE ESSENCE AND MESSAGE OF QUR'AN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Universality of the Message of Qur'an
 - 3.2 Qur'an and Science I
 - 3.3 Qur'an and Science II
 - 3.4 Qur'an and Science III
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will learn about the essence and the message of Qur'an as a Glorious Book for the Muslims. Since the book has become an important material in the life of a Muslim, we should know what are the various messages and its essence which makes its study so important to an average Muslim.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the essence and message of the Qur'an
- Explain the Qur'anic injunctions which serve as a bases for today's scientific discoveries
- Release and evaluate the rich content of the Qur'an as a book for every generation

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Universality of the Message of the Qur'an

The previous revealed books were sent to specific people and their messages did not go beyond the territories of such groups to which they were sent so also were the Prophets through whom such messages were sent by Allah. But in the case of the Qur'an, its message is not only to the Arabs; the people of Muhammad, but indeed to the whole mankind.

For instance, the Qur'an is full of account of the rise and fall of nations and empires of the world. Supporting itself with historical facts. The

book also reviewed achievements of the old reformers, passed judgments on the various religions of the world and gave verdicts on the differences and disputes between nations. In addition, the Qur'an teaches ethical canons and principles of culture.

Furthermore, the Qur'an contains laws of social, economic organization, group conduct and international relations. All these make the Qur'an a universal document whose use cannot be restricted only to a group or tribe.

The Qur'an being the final message must contain the incomplete messages of the previous books before it. This was exactly what we have in the Qur'an. It fills the gap in the other messages and further presented itself as a universal and all-embracing book. For example, the Qur'an explains the essence of life, and how to live happily in it. It also gives picture of the vanity of the world and how to prepare only for the life hereafter.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the universal nature of the Qur'an.

3.1 The Qur'an and Science I

Science and modern inventions have come to agree with what has been revealed in the Qur'an several hundreds of years ago. A good example is the embryonic development. The Qur'an states:

"We created man from extract of clay. Then We made him as a drop in a place of settlement, firmly fixed. Then We made the drop into an alaqah (leech, suspending thing, and blood clot) then We made the alaqah into a mudghah (chew-like substance) ..." (Qur'an 23:12-14)

Modern scientists agreed that *alaqah* mentioned in the Qur'an accurately described the embryo stage. Similarly, the scientists agreed with the description of the *mudghah* stage of the child development. Questions came up again as to how could Muhammad who was never a scientist know these over hundreds of years ago? The use of advanced equipments and powerful microscopes to confirm that indeed the embryo and its sac during the *alaqah* stage is similar to a blood clot, and that the *mudghah* stage acquires the appearance of a chewed-like substance are testimony to the scientific knowledge of the Qur'an.

According to Ibrahim, as far as it is known in the history of embryology, little was known about the staging and classification of human embryos

until the twentieth century. For this reason, the description of the human embryo in the Qur'an cannot be based on scientific knowledge in the seventh century. The only reasonable conclusion is that these descriptions were revealed to Muhammad from God. He could not have known such details because he was an unlettered man with absolutely no scientific training.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

What is the teaching of Qur'an on human embryo?

3.3 Qur'an and Science II

Modern scientists have just discovered that mountains have underlying roots. These roots are deeply embedded in the ground, thus mountains have a shape like a peg. The Qur'an, many hundreds of years ago, has described this when it says:

"Have We not made the earth as a bed, and the mountains as pegs?" (Qur'an 78:6-7)

According to the modern scientists, these roots can reach several times their elevations above the surface of the ground. So the most suitable word to describe mountains on the basis of this information is word 'peg' since a properly set peg is hidden under the surface of the ground. The history of science tells us that the theory of mountains having deep roots was introduced only in the later half of the nineteenth century.

Mountains play an important role in stabilizing the crust of the earth. They prevent the shaking of the earth. According to Geologists; the whole earth would have been unstable if not for the mountains that dotted it. The Qur'an further reveals:

"And He has set firm mountains in the earth so that it would not shake with you ..." (Qur'an 16:15).

The question is this - could anyone during the time of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) have known of the true shape of the mountains? Could anyone imagine that the solid massive mountain which he sees before him actually extends deep into the earth and has a root?

The same exposition which Qur'an gave on the role of mountains was also given on the origin of the entire universe. The Qur'an, many years ago, revealed that the illuminating stars we see at night were, just as was the whole universe, in that 'smoke' material. It states:

“Then He turned to the heaven when it was smoke.”
(Qur’an 41:11)

Because the earth and the phenomena around us such as the sun, the moon, stars, planets etc have been formed from this same ‘smoke’, we can conclude that the earth and the heavens were one connected entity. They, by the power of the Almighty, were formed and then separated from each other. Qur’an says:

“Have not those who disbelieve known that the heavens and the earth were one connected entity, then We separated them?” (Qur’an 21:30)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain the Qur’anic references to the creation of the universe.

3.3 Qur’an and Science III

Still on science, the Qur’an mentioned that there is a barrier between two seas that meet and that they do not transgress.

“He has set forth the two seas meeting together. There is a barrier between them. They do not transgress.” (Qur’an 55:19-20)

Modern scientists have discovered that in the places where two different seas meet, there is a barrier between them. This barrier divides the two seas so that each sea has its own temperature as well as density. For example, the Mediterranean Sea water is warm saline and less dense compared to the Atlantic Ocean water.

When the Mediterranean Sea water meets enters the Atlantic over the Gibraltar still, moves several hundreds of kilometres into the Atlantic water at a depth of about 1,000 meters with its own warm, saline and less dense, the Mediterranean water stabilizes at this depth. Although there are large waves, strong currents and tides in these seas, they do not mix or transgress this barrier.

When the Qur’an speaks about the divider between fresh and salt water, it mentions the existence of a “forbidding partition” with the barrier thus:

“He is the one who has set free two kinds of water, one sweet and palatable, and the other salty and

bitter. And He has made between them a barrier and a forbidding partition.” (Qur’an 25:53)

We may ask this question; why did the Qur’an mention the partition when speaking about the divider between fresh and salt water, but did not mention it when speaking about the divider between the two seas?

Modern scientists explain that where fresh (sweet) and salt water meet, the situation is somewhat different from what is found in places where two seas meet. It has been discovered that what distinguishes fresh water from salt water is a kind of ‘zone’ which has a different salinity from the fresh water and the salt water.

This has just been discovered only recently, using advanced equipment to measure temperature, salinity, density, oxygen etc. The human eye cannot see the difference between the two seas that meet; rather the two seas appear to us as one homogenous sea. Similarly, the human eye cannot see the division of water in a place called estuaries into three kinds - Fresh Water, Salt Water and the Partition. The Qur’an mentioned these many hundred years ago while the scientists only discovered them recently.

“It is He Who has Let the two bodies of flowing water: One palatable and sweet, And the other salt and bitter; yet has He made a barrier between them, a partition that is not to be passed.” (Q.25:53)

“He has let free the two seas meeting together: Between them is a Barrier which they do not transgress.” (Q55:19-20)

Qur’an further describes deep sea thus:

“Or (the unbelievers’ state) is like the darkness in a deep sea. It is covered by waves, above which are waves, above which are clouds. Darkness, one above another; If a man stretches out his hand he cannot see it.” (Q24:40)

The above verse mentions the darkness found in deep seas and oceans, where if man stretches out his hand, he cannot see it. The darkness in deep seas and oceans is found around a depth of 200 meters and below. At this depth, there is no light and human beings cannot dire more than 40 meters without the aid of submarines or special equipment. All these Qur’anic expositions are no doubt beyond the comprehension of Muhammad, which further confirms that the message is divine.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain the teachings of Qur'an on the creation of seas and oceans.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The essence of the revelation of the Qur'an is to broaden the knowledge of man about the power and might of Allah through His creations. Even though we cannot see Allah, the Qur'an has made us to appreciate Him and accept Him as the All-Powerful, All-Knowing. Through the Qur'an, several things unknown to man become clear and many others yet unknown are all recorded in the revealed Book.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have come across the various expositions of the Qur'an as related to science. We have learnt in this unit that indeed science rather than opposing the Qur'an, it has come to confirm several statements from the book. No other book revealed to Prophets is as scientific as the Qur'an and these have been explained briefly in this unit.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

With various examples, explain the scientific contents of the Qur'an.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 12 INTERPRETING THE QUR'AN (TAFSIR)

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 Meaning of *Tafsir*
 - 3.2 Conditions for a *Mufasssir*
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The correct practice of Islam is based on the proper understanding of the guidance of Islam; the interpretation of the Qur'an is a vital tool toward understanding the Qur'an. Thus, in this unit you will learn about the science of interpretation of the Qur'an known as *Tafsir* (exegesis). All matters concerning the Islamic way of life are connected to it in one way or the other, and it is an important branch of knowledge in Islam.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the basic meanings of *Tafsir*
- Understand the various types of *Tafsir*
- Discuss the role of *Tafsir* in the life of a Muslim

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definition of *Tafsir*

Tafsir is derived from the Arabic verb '*fassara*', i.e. 'to explain' or 'to expound'. In technical terms, it means explanation or interpretation and commentary of the glorious Qur'an. *Tafsir* comprises of all ways of obtaining knowledge, which contributes to the proper understanding of the

Qur'an. *Tafsir* is that science of explanation of the meanings of the Qur'an so that the glorious Book could be understood clearly.

The person who interprets or explains the Qur'an is called a '*Mufasssir*' (Pl. *Mufasssirun*). This exegete or commentator is a very important person in the Islamic circle in view of the central roles of the Qur'an to the day-to-day activities of the Muslims. *Tafsir* is very close to, but not the same as the word *ta'wil*. This word derived from the Arabic root '*awwala*' also means explanation and interpretation of the Qur'an. *Ta'wil* also refers to a clarification made on verse or verses of the Qur'an.

The difference between *tafsir* and *ta'wil* is that while *tafsir* refers to explanations of the outer (*zahir*) meanings of the Qur'an, *ta'wil* is considered to be the interpretations and explanations of the inner and concealed meanings of the Qur'an. Some scholars, however, held that there is no difference between *tafsir* and *ta'wil*.

The importance of *Tafsir* to the life of a Muslim lies in the fact that Allah revealed the Qur'an as a guide and a book of reference so that man can continue to live within the limit set by Allah on various aspects of life. However, without proper understanding of these passages of the Qur'an, man cannot adequately follow the guidance. This is why *Tafsir* is very important to every Muslim who seeks to understand the words of Allah.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Define the term *Tafsir*.

3.2 Conditions for a *Mufasssir*

There are conditions which a *Mufasssir*, i.e. the commentator of the Qur'an must meet before embarking on the study. Since the Qur'an itself is a compendium of knowledge, its interpreter must also possess some qualities and qualifications so that he does not mislead the Muslims. The one who undertakes to comment on the Qur'an must first and foremost be well versed in the glorious Book. In other words, he himself must have mastered the Qur'an as a book of guidance for the Muslims.

A *Mufasssir* must be well grounded in the knowledge of Arabic and its rules as a language. Since the Qur'an was revealed and written in Arabic, the person to comment or explain it must be well versed in the language. Although Qur'an has been translated into various languages of the world, the translation cannot be adequate representation of the original source- Arabic. Thus, one basic quality of a *Mufasssir* is the working knowledge of Arabic language.

In addition, a *Mufasssir* must be well grounded in other sciences associated with the study of the Qur'an such as '*Ilm ar-Riwayah*'. This is the practice of using Qur'an to interpret the Qur'an. One can only do this if he has a wide understanding of the Qur'an. In doing so, a *Mufasssir* should avoid the use of mere opinion in the interpretation of the Qur'an.

A *Mufasssir* must have solid comprehension ability. An absent-minded person cannot be a good *Mufasssir*. In doing so, he should refer to the reports of the *Sahaba* (Companions of the Prophet) as well as the generations after them (i.e. the *tabi'un*). A *Mufasssir* must consult the opinions of other eminent scholars on *tafsir* who had written in the past. The hallmark of the duty of a *Mufasssir* is that he must read and consult wide before making any major pronouncements on issues of Islam (*fatwa*) which are the results of the interpretations of the Qur'an.

For example, while the Qur'anic injunctions on the observance of daily prayers are clear, the *tafsir* on the issue of family planning or reproductive issues in Islam may demand wide consultations of other *Mufasssirun*. The same goes for the issue of inheritance of a deceased with estates across various continents and many currencies.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Outline the qualities of a *Mufasssir*.

3.3 *Tafsir bi al-Riwayah*

There are various types of *Tafsir*, one of which is *Tafsir bi-l-Riwaya*. This type of *Tafsir* means all explanations of the Qur'an which can be traced back through a chain of transmission to a sound source. As stated above, *Tafsir* is not a mere guess work or use of mere personal opinions. Rather, it must be the one that has authorities of other sound sources which may include:

- a. The Qur'an itself
- b. The explanation of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)
- c. The opinions of the Companions of the Prophet.

In terms of ranking, the most authentic *Tafsir* of the Qur'an is that made by the Qur'an itself. This is then followed by the explanations made by the Prophet. These two are the highest and the most authentic *Tafsir*.

Next on the line of *Tafsir bi-Riwayah* are the explanations made by the Companions (*Sahabah*) of the Prophet. This is because these Companions were witnesses to the revelations and most of them were

alive when the Qur'an was being revealed. However, to accept the opinions of the *Sahbah*, the conditions governing a *Hadith* (traditions) of the Prophet must be taken into consideration.

An example of a Qur'anic verse explained by another is Qur'an 5:2 by Qur'an 5:4, concerning the permissible and prohibited meat for a Muslim. Another example is Qur'an 44:3 which was explained by Qur'an 97:1 the verses run thus:

"We sent it down during a blessed night" (Q44:3)

A question may arise as to what is the blessed night in which it was sent down. The explanation was provided thus:

"We have indeed revealed it in the night of Laylatu al-Qadr." (Q97:1)

Another example of *Tafsir* of Qur'an by Qur'an is Qur'an 2:37 which had been explained in Qur'an 7:23.

Example of the *Tafsir* of the Qur'an by Prophet Muhammad was Qur'an 2:187;

"And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from its black thread."

In a Hadith narrated by Adi b. Hatim, the Prophet was reported to have explained that what Allah meant in that verse was 'the darkness of the night and the whiteness of the day'.

As for the *Tafsir* linked to the *Sahabah* of the Prophet, the example of Ibn Abbas will be appropriate here. One day within the midst of other Companions of the Prophet, a question was asked as to the explanation of the Qur'anic verse "*when comes help of Allah, and the conquest...*" (Q110:1).

While other Companions kept quite on the explanation of the verse, Ibn Abbas explained that the verse refers to the 'sign of the death of Allah's Apostle which Allah informed him of'.

An example of the *Tafsir* of the Qur'an by the Tabi'un was Mujahid, who was from Makkah. Questions arose on the explanation of fasts of penalty of an oath. Should it be observed continuously or severally? Mujahid explained that the fasts should be three days continuously, and not severally.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Explain with examples the Tafsir bi-Riwaya.

3.4 *Tafsir Bi al-Ra'y*

This is the second type of *Tafsir* after the *Tafsir bi al-Riwayah*. This kind of interpretation and explanation of the Qur'an is not based directly on the transmission of knowledge by the companions or the later generations of the followers of the Prophet but on the use of reason.

Tafsir bi al-Ra'y does not mean explanation by mere opinion, but deriving opinion through *Ijtihad* (i.e. intellectual efforts) based on sound sources. We should note that to use one's individual reason after the Qur'an and the Prophetic sources have been consulted was approved by the Prophet himself while he was dispatching Muadh b. Jabal to Yemen.

There are two types of *Tafsir bi al-Ra'y*. These are:

- a. ***Tafsir Mahmud*** (i.e. the praiseworthy interpretation) which is in agreement with the sources of *Tafsir*, the rules of *Shar'iah*, and the Arabic language.
- b. ***Tafsir Madhmum*** (blameworthy interpretation) which is done without proper knowledge of the sources of *Tafsir*, *Shari'ah* and the Arabic language. Such a *Tafsir* is based on mere opinion and should therefore be rejected.

Many companions of the Prophet refused to involve themselves in giving explanations to the Qur'an when this science of Islam began to evolve among the Muslims. Some scholars have said that *Tafsir bi al-Ra'y* is not allowed since it cannot be traced back to the Prophet or his Companions directly. However, majority of scholars say that this type of *Tafsir* is permissible provided it is based on sound sources.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

What do you understand by the term *Tafsir bi al-Ra'y*?

3.5 *Tafsir bi al-Isharah*

This is the third type of *Tafsir* recognized in Islam. This *Tafsir* refers to explanations of the Qur'an beyond its outer meanings. Those who engage in this kind of *Tafsir* concern themselves with meanings attached to verses of the Qur'an which are not visible to anyone, but him whose heart Allah has opened.

This kind of *Tafsir* is often found among the *Sufis* (mystics) whose main concern is for *ilm al-batin* (hidden knowledge) in Islam. The Sufi masters apart from their roles as trainers of souls on the path of one *tariqah* or the other, also engage in the explanations of the Qur'an among their followers.

For example, Shaykh Ahmad Tijani and Shaykh Abdulqadir Gilani, who were two leading Sufi masters were said to have on many occasions engaged in the explanations and interpretations of the Qur'an. They had even written books on Islam and on *Tafsir*.

It has been said that because *Tafsir bi al-Isharah* is not a matter of science and scientific principles, which may be acquired and then used as are other branches of Islamic sciences. For this reason, many scholars have rejected this type of *Tafsir* in view of the fact that it is largely based on mere opinion.

However, Ibn al-Qayyim, one of the leading scholars of *Tafsir* was reported to have said that the results achieved by *Tafsir bi al-Isharah* are permissible provided it satisfies the followings:

- That there is no disagreement with the plain meaning of the verse being interpreted.
- That it is a sound meaning in itself.
- That in the wording, there is some inclination towards it.
- That there are close connections between it and the plain meaning.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Explain the differences between the *Tafsir bi al-Isharah* and *Tafsir bi al-Riwayah*.

3.6 Tafsir Literature

Several books have been written by Muslim Scholars on *Tafsir*. Various opinions were given as to which of these books is the oldest. Some say the oldest text available to us was by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310/923CE), while others held the view that the works of Zaid b. Ali (d. 122/740) and *Mujahid* (d. 104/722), the famous *Tabi'un* of Prophet Muhammad were the oldest. Yet, some scholars held that the oldest *Tafsir* work was by al-Tabari.

What is important is that through ages, there have been books on *Tafsir*, each giving opinions that reflect their period and happenings around them. For instance, the *Tafsir* work of Ibn Jarir al-Tabari was famous and voluminous based on the class of *Tafsir bi al-Riwayah*.

Other well known books of *Tafsir* are:

- Tafsir al-Samarqandi by Abu al-Laith al-Samarqandi (d. 373/983). It was titled: *Bahr al Ulum*.
- Tafsir al-Tha'labi by Ahmad bin Ibrahim al-Tha'labi al-Nisaburi (d. 383/993). It was titled: *Al-Kashf wa al-Bayan fi Tafsir al- Qur'an*.
- Tafsir al-Baghawi, by Hassan bin Mas'ud al-Baghawi (d. 510/1116). It was titled: *Ma'alim al-Tanzil*.
- Tafsir Ibn Kathir by Ismail bin 'Umar bn Kathir al-Dimashqi (d. 774/1372). It was titled: *Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim*.
- Tafsir al-Suyuti by Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505). It was titled: *al-Durr al-Manthur Fi al-Tafsir bi al-Ma'athur*.

There are many other books of *Tafsir*. They include those in the class of *Tafsir bi al-Ray'* such as:

- *Al-Kashshaf* by Abu al-Qasim Mahmud Ibn Umar al-Zamakhshari (d. 539/1114)
- *Mafatih al-Ghayb* by Muhammad b. Umar b. al-Hussain al-Razi (d. 606/1209)
- *Anwar al-Tanzil* by 'Abd Allah b. Umar al-Baidhawi (d. 685/1286)
- *Ruh al-Ma'ani* by Shihab al-Din Muhammad al-Alusi al-Baghdadi (d. 669/1270)
- *Tafsir al-Jalalayn* by Jalalud-Din al-Mahalli (d. 864/1459) and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911/1505)
- *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* by Sayid Qutb (d. 1386/1966)

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 6

Comment briefly on *Tafsir* literature.

4.0 CONCLUSION

One Islamic science to which every Muslim is spiritually attached is the study of interpretations of the Qur'an known as *Tafsir al-Qur'an*. Every Muslim learns about the Qur'an everyday while new issues are addressed as they occur, based on the proper understanding of the glorious Book of Islam. *Tafsir* is that important Islamic science for the proper understanding of the Qur'an.

5.0 SUMMARY

We have explained in this unit the definitions of *Tafsir*, its various types and its position among Muslims. In addition, we have learnt about the characteristics of a *Mufasssir* which makes the duty of *Tafsir* a specialized one among the Muslims. We have also listed some *Tafsir* literature which have been published.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Explain the role of *Tafsir* in the understanding of the Qur'an.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 13 VIEWS OF NON-MUSLIMS ABOUT THE QUR'AN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Content
 - 3.1 The People the Book (*Ahlul-Kitab*)
 - 3.2 Qur'an's Confirmation Earlier Revelations
 - 3.3 Muslims Belief in Earlier Scriptures
 - 3.4 Qur'anic View on Jesus Christ
- 4.0 Conclusion
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Having studied the contents of the Qur'an as a revealed Book and a guide for the Muslims, you will in this unit learn about some of the views of non-Muslims about the Qur'an. The non-Muslims are believers in faiths other than that preached by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as explained in the *Kalimat al Shahadah*. To know some of these views is necessary in order to understand their views about Islam, especially in a multi-religious society like Nigeria.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Understand who are the *Ahl al-Kitab* (people of the Book).
- Explain some misgivings and misrepresentations of Qur'an by non-Muslims.
- Appreciate the true position of Islam on Muslim and non-Muslim relationship.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The People of the Book (*Ahl al-Kitab*)

The term 'People of the Book', i.e. *Ahl al-Kitab* is a phrase in the Qur'an interpreted by people of various callings. It could be found in Qur'an 5:68, 3:65, 3:72, 4:153, 4:71 e.t.c.,. In view of the availability of the

Qur'an in many translations, many of its verses are misinterpreted. For instance, the following verses are typical examples:

“Say: O people of the Book! you have no ground to stand unless you stand fast by the law (Taurat) and the Gospel (Injeel), and all the revelations that has come to you from your Lord.” (Qur'an 5:68).

“O ye people of the Book! Why do you dispute about Abraham, when the law and the Gospel were not revealed till after him? Have ye no understanding?” (Q3: 65)

“O ye people of the Book! Why do you clothe truth with falsehood, and conceal the truth, while ye have knowledge?” (Q3: 71).

According to some Christians, the term people of the Book refers not just to the Jews and Christians but to the Muslims as well. Such Christians even quote Qur'an 5:68 as implying that Muslims should believe in the Bible.

However, it should be clear that the phrase is never used in the Qur'an to refer to the Muslims. The use of the term and its context makes this clear. The term refers to the Jews and Christians, as earlier believers in a revealed religion. Muslims are referred to in the Qur'an as Muslims or 'those who believe' but never as *Ahlul Kitab*.

We should note that the term, while often used for both the Jews and the Christians (as in Q3: 65) is sometimes used specifically for Jews as in Qur'an 3:72 Qur'an 3:64 and 4:17.

The people of the Book were invited to believe in Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an as in Qur'an 3:10, 5:65. They were told that the Qur'an is an embodiment (*tasdiq*) of the promises made in their scriptures with regard to the coming of Muhammad.

Some Christians quote Qur'an 3:62 and Qur'an 5:69 where Allah says:

“Those who believe in the Qur'an and those who follow the Jewish scripture, and the Christians and the sabians, and any who believe in God and the last day, and work righteousness shall have their reward with their

The above passage occurs in the Qur'an several times and only shows a breath of vision unparalleled in any other faith. There is difference in the situation of the people of the Book according to whether or not message of Islam has reached them. Because of the distortion of the earlier scriptures, the beliefs of the People of the Book have also become distorted from the pure teachings of their Prophets. In the Qur'an, God's message has been completed and preserved for people of all times and places.

Consequently, Muslims are told to call all people to the way of Islam (Qur'an 16:125) and it is expected that many pious people of the book will recognize the truth of Islam and embrace it. Indeed, many Jews and Christians, past and present, have accepted Islam and are still accepting and practicing Islam.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Explain the term '*Ahl al-Kitab*'.

3.2 Qur'an Confirming Earlier Revelations

The Qur'an never mentioned the word 'Bible' and nowhere in the Bible does it refer to itself as HOLY BIBLE. However, the Qur'an confirms previous revelations through references to *Al-Injil*, *Al-Taurat*, *Al-Zabur*, and the scrolls of Abraham (*suhuf Ibrahim*). Let us examine some of these revelations:

a. *Al-Injil*:

The word *al-Injil* in the Qur'an refers to the revelation made by God to Jesus. It is, in other words, the original Gospel of Jesus. *Al-Injil*, just like the other revelations was meant for a particular people and a particular time and so has not survived the passage of time in its pure original form. This is even evident from statements made about the Bible by Christian scholars in the prefaces and introductions to modern versions of the Bible such as Revised Standard Version, New Testament Version, New English Bible, Living Bible e.t.c.

Today, we have what remains of the Gospel according to Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, which could contain bits or portions of the original *Injil* of Jesus Christ.

b. *Al-Taurat*

This is also known as Torah, the book of Moses. It is revelation by God to Prophet Musa (Moses), and this is acknowledged by Muslims as an

article of faith. Some non-Muslims have attributed the Qur'an to be an offshoot of this book. This is not true, from the contents of the book and that of the Qur'an.

In addition, we should note that the first five books of the Old Testament (i.e. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) which some Christians attribute entirely to Moses as Torah, are not considered by Muslims to be so. This is because it can clearly be seen from these books of the Old Testament that a lot of materials was written about Moses from hearsay in the third person singular i.e. "he".

For example in Deuteronomy 34:5-12, it says: "...and Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died..." could Moses have written about his own death in the past tense (i.e. not a prophecy) and in the third person singular?

The fact is that the *Taurat*, just like other earlier revelations, was meant for a particular people and time in its pure and original form. Therefore, Muslims can say that some aspects of the five books of Moses are acceptable. These are those that are confirmed by the Qur'an and which retain their original form.

b. *Al-Zabur:*

Al-Zabur is the book revealed by God to Prophet Dawud (David) for the guidance of his people. There is no evidence that it has been preserved till date. This book has often been equated or translated as "The Psalms" which were traditionally attributed to David. However, recent study casts doubt on their authorship.

For instance, the International Bible Version of the Bible says (in "Plan of the Bible Pg.13):

"Psalms - Here are sacred songs, poems and prayers which originated in Israel's worship and her experience with God. They are traditionally associated with David but reflect centuries of individual and corporate responses to God."

In other words, they were written by a number of unknown people over a period of centuries. They cannot therefore be identified as the *Zabur*. Some of the descriptions given in Psalms such as 78: 65 "*Then the Lord awoke as from sleep, as a man awakes from the stupor of wine*" cannot be regarded as revelation from God. To Muslims, they sound blasphemous.

From the above, it should be clear that whenever the Qur'an refers to the *Injil*, *Taurat*, *Zabur* or "earlier revelations", it is not referring to what is today called the Bible. The use of such verses in the Qur'an by Christians in an attempt to prove the authenticity of the whole Bible is therefore only a sign of ignorance of the Qur'an.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain with examples the Qur'anic confirmation of previous revelations.

3.3 Muslims Believe in Earlier Revelations

Some non-Muslims quote Qur'an 10:94-95 to say that Prophet Muhammad was advised by God to ask the Jews and Christians concerning the authenticity of the Qur'an because the Bible was more authentic. We render here the full passage:

"And so, (o man) if you are in doubt about (the truth) of what we have bestowed upon from high, ask those who read the divine writ (revealed) before your time: and you will surely find that the truth has come into you from your Sustainer. Be not, then, among the doubters, and neither be among those who are bent on giving the lie to God's messages, lest you find yourself among the lost."

Some of the commentators on the above verse maintained that verses 94 and 95 were addressed to the Prophet Muhammad. This assumption is not only incorrect, it is obvious that God's chosen Prophet was never in danger of either doubting or denying the truth.

According to a Qur'anic Commentator, Ar-Razi, those two verses were addressed to man in general. This interpretation makes it clear moreover, that the above passage is closely connected with verses 57 and 58, which speak of the guidance given to mankind through the ultimate divine writ, the Qur'an.

Some even quote verses such as Qur'an 41:136; 2:136; 2:1-5 and say that Muslims are required to believe in the Bible. For example:

"O ye who believe! Believe in God, His Apostle, and the scripture, which He has sent to His Apostle, and the scriptures which He has sent before him" (Qur'an 4: 136).

We should note that what is meant in these verses is belief in the fact of earlier revelations and not in the earlier revealed scriptures themselves in their present form, which is repeatedly stated in the Qur'an. A Muslim in principle should believe that there were revealed books before the Qur'an whatever happens to those revealed books including revisions, amendments are not covered by this provision.

3.4 Qur'anic Views on Jesus Christ

Some non-Muslims quote Qur'an 2: 87 and 2: 253 to say that Jesus Christ was unique in the sense that he was "the only one" inspired or strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Some also quote these verses to say that Muslims believe in the same concept of the Holy Spirit as Christians. For example in Q 2: 87 Allah says:

"We give Jesus the son of Mary clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Sprit."

You should note that the Arabic word translated here as Holy Spirit is *ruh al-qudus* which is also translated as the 'Spirit of holiness', divine inspiration', or 'Holy inspiration'. This word recurs in the Qur'an in areas such as Qur'an 16: 2, 40: 12, 42: 52, 97: 4 etc. But you should also note that Qur'an 58:22 speaks of all believers as being strengthened by inspiration (*ruh*) from Him, and it is not peculiar to Jesus.

Other Qur'anic commentators interpret the term *ruh al-qudus* to mean Angel Jibril who brought this revelation or inspiration from Allah. It is therefore an issue of interpretation based on the context of the Qur'an in which the term is used.

Some quote Qur'an 21: 91 where Allah says about Mary (the mother of Jesus) "*We breathed into her of our Spirit*", and say that this is the evidence that Jesus was the most special of being or that it signifies that he (Jesus) was part of God as in the concept of Trinity.

The fact you should know is that the statement refers to creation of man in general as being from "My Spirit". For instance Qur'an 15: 29, and 38:72 - "*Then I formed him (man). ...And breathed into him my Spirit*". And in Qur'an 32:9 "*and thereupon He forms him fully and breathes into him of His Spirit*".

Furthermore, some quote Qur'an 3:183 where Allah tells Prophet Muhammad to say to the Jews. '*There came to you messengers before me, with clear signs and even with what you ask for, why then did you kill them if you say the truth?*'" and use it as a support that Jesus was killed.

However, at the end of the Qur'an 2:87, it was made clear that not all the messengers were killed. The Jews killed many of the Prophets sent to them, as mentioned in the Bible (Matt 23:37), but there is no place in the Qur'an that indicates that Jesus was among those killed. On the contrary, Qur'an 4:157-158 states that they did not kill him nor did they crucify him, but it was made to appear to them (as so). The same goes for the issue of rising from dead, which Islam did not support.

The Muslims' belief in Jesus, like all other Prophets, is that he was a God's Messenger, he was called to Prophethood, chosen to accomplish a mission of inviting people to the way of God. Jesus, as far as Islam is concerned has fulfilled that mission of preaching the message to his people. He is not God, and neither is he part of God.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain the belief of Muslims on Jesus Christ.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The position of the Qur'an on the personality of Jesus is very clear. And since the Qur'an was the last of the revealed books, we can hold that its message must have taken into consideration events and people of the past. Although Muslims believe in all the revealed books, the later distortions that have crept into these books have rendered them faulty; hence the Qur'an remained the only incorruptible, unadulterated book for the guidance of man.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt in this unit the position of Islam on the misinterpretations and misgivings of non-Muslims about the Qur'an. You now know who 'The People of the Book' are, the Qur'an confirming earlier revelations, The Belief of Muslim in the earlier scriptures as well as the Muslims' view of Jesus Christ.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Discuss with examples four views of the non-Muslims about the Qur'an.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 14 LITERARY FORMS AND STYLE OF THE QUR'AN

CONTENTS

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
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3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Qur'an is not Poetry

The European Orientalists and the opponents of Muhammad have described some passages of the Qur'an as more poetic than others. This was why he was even accused of being a soothsayer. The Qur'an itself refutes this thus:

“It is not the word of a poet; little it is you believe! Nor is it the word of a soothsayer; little admonition it is you receive. This is a message sent down from the lord of the worlds” (Qur'an 69:40-43).

The accusations against Muhammad refuted in the above passage are based on the usage of a particular style, employed in the Qur'an, which is said to be like a rhymed prose or something close to it.

A rhymed Prose is a literary form with some emphasis on rhythm and rhyme but distinct from poetry. It is not as sophisticated as poetry but has been employed by Arab poets, and it is the best known of the pre-Islam Arab literary works.

Such passages of the Qur'an such as *Suratul Ikhlas* are seen by some people as a poem. They look at such end rhymed of the Arabic text:

قل هو الله أحد
 الله الصمد
 لم يلد ولم يولد
 ولم يكن له كفوا أحد

There are wide differences between the English literature and the Arabic Qur'an. Ibn Khaldun (d.809 H / 1406), the well known author of the *Muqaddimah*, pointed out in a passage on literature of the Arabs the difference between literature and the Qur'an in general and between rhyme poem and Qur'an in particular.

He gave example of *Suratu Ikhlas* quoted above that has a rhyme ending with the syllable *ad*.

Qul Huwallahu ahad
Allahus Samad
Lam Yalid Wa Lam Yulad
Walam Yakun Lahu Kufwan ahad.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

The Qur'an is not a poem. Discuss.

3.2 Stories in the Qur'an

The Qur'an contains many narratives (*qasas*). It states:

*"We do relate to thee most beautiful of stories, in that
 We reveal to thee this (portion) of the Qur'an ..."*
 (Q 12:3)

These stories, which illustrate and underline important aspect of the Qur'anic message, fulfil their functions in a variety of ways. The following are some of the messages of stories in the Qur'an:

- Explanation of the general oneness of Islam.
- Reminder of the earlier Prophets, their people and their struggle.
- Providing some arguments against some non-Muslims on Islam such as Jews and Christians.
- General guidance and Reminder to the Muslims.
- Indication for the continuity and truth of Muhammad's message.
- Strengthening the conviction of the Prophet and the believers.



In the style of the Qur'an, these stories can be distinguished between the following three kinds:

- a. References to events that took place during the lifetime of the Prophet Muhammad, such as the battle of Badr (Qur'an 3:13), the battle of Uhd (Qur'an 3:121-128), the battle of Ahzab (Qur'an 33:9-27) and the Isra'i (ascension of Prophet Muhammad) in Qur'an 17:1.
- b. Stories of the Prophets of Allah, their people, their message, their call, their persecution e.t.c, such as the stories of Nuh (Q26), Musa (Q28), Yusuf (Q12) and many others.
- c. Other Qur'anic narratives about past people or events, such as the stories about the companions of the cave (Surat 18), etc.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Explain the place of stories in the understanding of the Qur'an.

3.3 Similes and Parables in the Qur'an

Another significant style prominent in the Qur'an is the use of similes known as *amthal* (Sing. *Mathal*) in many passages. These *amthal* are employed to explain certain truths or to drive home important points of the message, by likening it to something well known or describing it in a particular manner.

The *amthal* in the Qur'an are also scientific in nature as Allah draws attention of man to the phenomena around him. A deep look at such expressions in the Qur'an enriched one's knowledge of the world. Again, the *amthal* is a further confirmation that Muhammad could not have sat down somewhere and put those words together. They are superhuman statements. Few examples here would suffice.

“He sends down water from the skies, and the channels flow, each according to its measure: But the torrent bears away the foam that mounts up to the surface. Even so, from that (ore) which they heat in the fire, to make ornaments or utensils therewith, there is scum likewise. Thus doth God (by parable) show forth the Truth and falsehood. For the scum disappears like forth cast out; While that which is for the good of mankind remains on the earth. Thus doth God set forth parables” (Qur'an 13:17).

This verse is full of parable. Here God is explaining to man His power to send rain to all, both believers and non-believers. We can see how the rivers flow in different channels according to their capacities. Through the rain, Allah shows mercy, knowledge, wisdom and guidance to man.

All human beings receive it. In the physical world, water is pure and beneficial. But forth and scum will gather according to local conditions.

The message here is that the form may make a great show on the surface, but it will not last. So will there be frothy knowledge, which will disappear, but Allah's Truth will remain for life.

“Allah set forth parable (of two men); one a slave under the domination of another. He has no power of any sort: And (the other) man on whom we have bestowed goodly favours from ourselves. And he spends thereof (freely), privately and publicly. Are the two equal? (By no means). Praise be to Allah. But most of them understood not.

Allah set forth (another) parable of two men; one of them dumb, with no power of any sort; a wearisome burden is he to his master; whichever way he directs him, he brings no good. Is such a man equal with one who commands justice, and is on a straight way?” (Qur'an 16:75-76).

The first parable is of two men, one of whom is a slave completely under the domination of another, with no powers of any sort, and another a free man, who is gifted in many ways, and is generous in giving out of his wealth both privately and publicly.

While the first man represents the imaginary gods which men set-up whether power or nature, which have no independent existence, the second describes in a faint way the position of Allah, self-subsistent, to whom belongs the dominion of all that is in heaven and earth, and Who bestows freely of His gifts on all His creatures.

In the second parable, one man is dumb, he cannot explain anything, and is certainly doing nothing; such are idols when taken as false gods. The other man is in a position to command, and he commanded what is just and righteous. Such are the qualities of Allah.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Explain with examples the similes and parables in the Qur'an.

3.4 Oaths (*Aqsam*) in the Qur'an

In a number of passages in the Qur'an, Allah employs oath-like expressions. These are known in Arabic as *aqsam* (Sing. *qasam*). Their function is to strengthen and support an argument, and to disperse doubts in the minds of the listener. In the Arabic texts, these passages are often opened by the word 'wa' (و) or the phase '*La uqsim* (لا أقسم) which literally means 'Indeed I swear'.

Some may ask why Allah needs to swear to an oath before making a statement or an injunction. The response to this is that the Arabs who were the first recipient of the Qur'an usually appreciate an oath as a way of emphasizing a matter. So, most Makkan *suwar* have these *aqsam*.

It is also a way of Allah's justification to punish man if, after the oath as an emphatic statement, yet man did not heed His words, then the wrath and heavy punishment of Allah can be meted on him. Sometimes an oath is taken by Allah Himself:

"But no, by the Lord, they can have no real faith until they make thee a judge in all disputes between them and find in their souls no resistance against thy decision but accept them with fullest conviction." (Qur'an 4:65).

Other oaths are taken by Allah's creation:

"By the sun, and his (glorious) splendour, by the moon as she follows him, by the day as it shows up (the sun's) glory, by the night as it conceals it, by the firmament and its (wonderful) structure, by the earth and its (wide) expanse, by the soul and the proportion and order given to it." (Qur'an 91:1-7)

The oath taking in Islam is a very fundamental issue. Oath should only be taken by the name of Allah, the creator, but not to anything created. It is *shirk* (disbelief) in Islam for a man to take an oath with any other deity

besides Allah who alone should be called as witness. This is one of the differences between a Muslim and non-Muslim.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Highlight the Qur'anic stand on oath taking.

3.5 Abbreviated Letters in the Qur'an

The so-called 'Abbreviated Letters' are an important section of what is known as *Muqatta'at*, i.e. what is cut. It is another regular feature in the Qur'an. A glance through the chapters of the Qur'an would show that some begin with Arabic alphabets, two, three, or more.

In technical language, *Muqatta'at* is used for certain letters found at the beginning of several *suwar* of the Qur'an, called the 'abbreviated letters'. To some, these letters could just be the style of the Qur'an but indeed this forms an important topic under the science of Qur'an.

As for the frequency of these letters, there are fourteen such letters occurring in various combinations at the beginning of 29 *suwar*. The following is a list of their occurrence and distribution in the Qur'an:

- *Alif Lam Ra* (الر) Chapters 10, 11, 12, 14, 15
- *Alif Lam Mim* (الم) Chapters 2, 3, 29, 30
- *Alif Lam Mim Ra* (المر) chapters 13, 31, 32,
- *Alif Lam Mim Sad* (المص) - chapters 7
- *Ha Mim* (حم) - chapters 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46.
- *Sad* (ص) - chapters 38
- *Ta Sin* (طس) - chapters 27
- *Ta Sin Mim* (طسم) - chapters 26, 28
- *Ta Ha* (طه) - chapters 20
- *Qaf* (ق) - Chapters 50
- *Kaf Ha Ya Ain Sad* (كهيعص) - chapters 19
- *Nun* - (ن) - chapter 68
- *Ya Sin* - (يس) - chapters 36.

The meaning and purpose of these letters are uncertain. However, some scholars offered some explanations regarding their meanings and imports. Some held the view that these letters might be abbreviations for certain

Other scholars are of the view that these letters are not abbreviations but symbols and names of Allah, or something else. Some even held the view that these alphabets have some numerical significance, as the semantic letters have numerical value. Another group of scholars are of the view that these letters were used to attract the attention of the Prophet (and later his audience) for the revelation to follow.

One significance of these alphabets is that they are followed immediately by a verse that talks about the Qur'an, which again emphasizes that the alphabets are symbols of the unique nature and style of the Qur'an.

What you should know is that the meanings of the letters are known to Allah alone and only He can explain them better not even the Prophet. The Qur'an says of these letters "... *these are the symbols of the perspicuous book.*" (Qur'an 12:1).

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Explain the *Muqatta'at* in the Qur'an.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The literary style of the Qur'an makes it a special book that has to be read, not only with the tongue and voice and eyes, but with the best light that our intellect can offer. This is the best way one can appreciate the pre-eminent position of the book in the life of a Muslim. An ordinary eye cannot comprehend and grasp the depth of knowledge and wisdom of the book, hence the need to carefully study it and put its contents to practical use.

5.0 SUMMARY

You have learnt in this unit the various styles and forms of the Qur'an such as its poetic and prose-like nature; the features of the book; the similes and parables as well as the significance of the abbreviated letters. These features make the Qur'an an excellent document that could stand the test of time. No wonder in spite of many hundred years of its revelation, it has retained its originality till date.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write a detailed account on the literary style and forms of the Qur'an.

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7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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