

A Historical Interpretation of the Challenge by the Qur'ān and its Consequences

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Abstract

In some chapters of the Qur'ān, the opponents of the divinity of the Qur'ān are challenged to bring a text like that of the Qur'ān. Based on the revelation order, this challenge has been done in the chapters of the Night Journey, Jonah, Hūd, the Mount, and the Cow. The first four chapters have been revealed in Mecca, while the Cow chapter has been revealed in Medina. These have been descended during the middle one-third of the 23-year-long mission of the noble Prophet (s). A historical analysis of these verses along with their collocate verses – which have been revealed before and after these verses – clearly proves the divine nature of the qur'ānic text. More importantly, this analysis demonstrates that even if the qur'ānic challenge is limited to the Prophet (s) era and his nation, the failure of the Prophet's opponents to respond to this challenge is the best evidence for the confirmation of the divinity of the Qur'ān. Even the present-day audience of the Qur'ān can also realize the divinity of the Qur'ān by adopting a historical view toward what happened in the Challenge.

Keywords

Challenge, Miraculousness, Historical interpretation, Divinity of the Qur'ān, The Challenge process.

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Introduction

According to the Qur'ān, prophets, by God's permission, presented their audience with signs that attested their appointment as divine prophets. The salient feature of these signs was their clarity; that is to say, they should make the audience able to clearly grasp the point that the person who performs them has a divine mission. In the Iron chapter of the Qur'ān we read, "We sent aforetime our apostles with Clear Signs..." (Qur'ān 57:25). Since the word *apostles* is added to the pronoun *our*, according to the Arabic syntactic rule, its implication is attributed generally to all prophets (Sabt, 1997, vol. 2: 587). Therefore, this verse implies that all prophets have come to people with *clear signs*. In theology, a sign that is presented by prophets to prove their prophethood is called *miracle* (Mu'jizah) and is defined as a supernatural event, that is, an event which breaches the natural laws (Syūfī, 1996, vol. 2: 1001; Khu'rī, 1996: 33, 'Itir, 1989: 26).

The terms Mu'jizah and I'jaz have not been used in the Qur'ān or in the words of the prophet, the Companions, or the later generation of the Prophet's companions. Even the Muslim scholars in the first two centuries of Islam have not talked about the *miraculousness of the Qur'ān* nor have they used the words related to miracle and miraculousness in discussions about the Qur'ān. Rather, these terms have made their way into the Islamic sciences from the third century AH (Khālidī, 1992: 105; Bullātah, 2006: 6). What Muslim theologians have called *Mu'jizah* has been mentioned as *āya*, *Bayyinah*, *Burhān*, *Sulṭān*, and *Baṣīrat* in the Qur'ān (Qur'ān 57:25; 7:73; 17:101-102; 23:45; 28:32). The most common term used in the Qur'ān for this issue is *the clear sign* (Qur'ān 2:211). Therefore, not only has the word *Mu'jizah* not been used in the Noble Qur'ān, there has been no word either to imply that a prophet's sign of prophethood should necessarily be against the natural law. Rather, what the prophets are required to present as the evidence of the divinity of their invitation is an *āya bayyinah* (a clear sign); a sign that has clear implication for their audience and proves them that the invitation of the prophethood claimant is evidentially accompanied by his appointment by God. Of course, it is natural that those signs should have been such that other people were not able to perform them so that people knew the act of the prophet was divine. This known tradition caused people to ask the Prophet of Islam Muḥammad (s) upon his prophethood claim to present such signs. In response to these requests, the Prophet (s) states that the sign for the divinity of his invitation is comprised of the words that he has brought in the form of the qur'ānic chapters and verses. This was the first time when one set the "speech" as the sign for the divinity of his invitation (Khatīb, 1975: 9; 'Abd al-'Azīz, 2007: 13).

Considering the scientific and cultural backgrounds of the Prophet, many people easily understood the divinity of those words and started to have faith in them. However, many polytheists did not accept his claim and opposed him using different false accusations. For instance, they called him a poet, a soothsayer, a sorcerer, and insane. These oppositions led to the position that the opponents considered the Qur'ān a human product like the poems of the poets or the rhymed prose of the soothsayers, and so, they did not accept that a *speech* could be a sign for the divinity of the prophethood. The qur'ānic report of the reaction of this group of the Prophet's audience is as following, "'Nay,' they say, '(these are) medleys of dream! - Nay, He forged it! - Nay, He is (but) a poet! Let him then bring us a Sign like the ones that were sent to (Prophets) of old!'" (Qur'ān 21:5). Here, in order to prove the divinity of the Qur'ān and its being a sign to prove the prophethood of the Prophet of Islam, the revelation process of the Qur'ān reaches a point that we call it *tahaddī* (i.e. Challenge), and this is one of the exclusive features of the Qur'ān (Khatīb, 1975:10).

In some chapters of the Qur'ān, those opponents who have not accepted that the Qur'ān itself is a clear sign for the confirmation of the prophethood of the Prophet of Islam (s) are invited to bring a text like that of the Qur'ān. Based on the revelation order, these verses are in the Night Journey, Jonah, Hūd, the Mount, and the Cow chapters (present in the qur'ānic text as chapters 17, 10, 11, 52, and 2), which will be historically examined. In this article, first the backgrounds of the Challenge, which are related to the time before the revelation of the Night Journey chapter, will be discussed and then, the verses related to the Challenge will be addressed, and finally, the last reactions of the Prophet's opponents after the eight-year-long Challenge will be reviewed.

This article aims at responding to two questions. First, how can a study of the historical process of the Challenge verses revelation be used to prove the divinity of the Qur'ān? Second, if the Challenge is exclusive to the time of the Prophet of Islam and his contemporary Arabs – as some do believe (Bāqilānī, 1977: 10), how can these very verses be used to prove the divinity of the Qur'ān for the present-day human?

The author suggests that through a historical investigation of the Challenge verses, it is possible to clearly prove that the Noble Qur'ān is not the word of the Prophet of Islam, but rather, is the word of God. Verification of the divinity of the Qur'ān for the revelation era audience relies on proving its divinity for all ages and human generations.

No need to the Challenge to prove the divinity of the Qur'ān

Before reporting and analyzing the historical process of the Challenge verses revelation, it is necessary to emphasize that the Challenge is not and has not been among the required conditions for the confirmation of the prophethood of the Prophet of Islam (s) and the divinity of the Noble Qur'ān. If the audience of the Qur'ān in the revelation era contemplated, it would be obvious that the Qur'ān – like the noble Prophet (s) – is divine; it is not a human act. The following verses vividly present this issue.

And thou wast not (able) to recite a Book before this (Book came), nor art thou (able) to transcribe it with thy right hand: In that case, indeed, would the talkers of vanities have doubted. Nay, here are Signs self-evident in the hearts of those endowed with knowledge: and none but the unjust reject Our Signs. (Qur'ān 29:48-49)

It was formerly mentioned that to prove prophethood, it is necessary for a prophet to bring signs that help the audience know and ascertain that he has been chosen by God as His messenger and they should follow him. According to these verses, the Noble Qur'ān has the same function that the miracles of other prophets had had. Anyone who accepts the statement "*Wa mā kunta tatlū min qablihi min kitāb wa la takhuṭṭuhu biyamīnika idhan lartāba al-muḥṭilūn*" (And thou wast not (able) to recite a Book before this (Book came), nor art thou (able) to transcribe it with thy right hand), In that case, indeed, would the talkers of vanities have doubted" (Qur'ān 29:48), he/she will certainly accept that the Qur'ān is in the position of "signs self-evident". Therefore, the Qur'ān continues, "Nay, here are Signs self-evident in the hearts of those endowed with knowledge: and none but the unjust reject Our Signs" (Qur'ān 29:49). Consideration of the following points confirms this assertion. There are some points in the statement "*Wa ma kunta tatlū...*" that will be clarified in the following.

1. The word "Kitāb" (book) is used infinitively in the negative sentence "Ma kuntu tatlū" (And thou wast not (able) to recite a Book), and according to the rule "indefinite in the negative context has general usage", the meaning of this statement will be that the Prophet had not read "any book" up to the time this verse was revealed (toward the end of Meccan era).
2. Two meanings are possible for the word "Kitāb": first, a text; and second, a divine book from either Jews' or Christians' scriptures¹.

1. The set of judo-christian books are called the Testaments. The Old Testament involves 39 books and the New Testament includes 27 books. Therefore, Testaments are comprised of 66 books. The original name of the Testaments in Greek is *Biblia*, which means *books*.

Besides, it is possible that both of these are intended, that is to say, the Prophet had not read any text, either the judo-Christian books or other texts.

3. In the statement "Ma kuntu tatlū", the use of copula *Kana* along with the present tense verb *Tatlu* implies continuity, that is, the Qur'ān says that the Prophet has lived for long, continuous years among those people and they have witnessed his life and actions. However, they have never seen him to read a book or write something. It should be noted that the Prophet of Islam was not an ordinary person in his society whose ability to read books was unknown to people. Rather, he has been a socially outstanding and well-known figure. The evidence for this assertion is the title "Muḥammad Amīn" (the trustworthy Muḥammad). The word "Amīn" is a social descriptor. A person is called "Amīn" who is present in the society, interacts with people, and his trustworthiness causes people to call him so.
4. The word "Min" in the phrase "Min Kitāb" is for emphasis. Therefore, in the statement "*Wa mā kunta tatlū min qablihi min kitāb*", this fact has been emphasized that the Prophet (s) has *never* read a book. Moreover, he has never written anything himself.
5. These historical realities that were attested by people comprise the clearest sign, and remove the grounds for all doubts that the Prophet (s) has made the material of the Qur'ān himself. Therefore, it says, "In that case, indeed, would the talkers of vanities have doubted."

Therefore, the question that rises here is that if Prophet Muḥammad (s) knew how to read and write and was familiar with the books of people before his time, was it possible for people to believe what he asserted so emphatically?! If people knew that the Prophet (s) had read or written anything when the verse "*Wa ma kunta tatlū*" was revealed, the prophet in fact would rejected himself with recitation of these verses! And this was enough for people to abandon following him. William Montgomery Watt who has studied the life events of the Prophet of Islam (s) for sixty years has a precious assertion. He writes that what has been suggested in the Qur'ān about the Prophet of Islam, his proponents and opponents, and the conditions of his era in general, should be treated like a definite history; because it cannot be imagined that a person like him who was paid attention to at that time by all his opponents and proponents could make erroneous assertions about the realities of his time while they were naturally accessible to everyone (Watt, 1994, 43). If he told people that he did not knew reading and writing and had never read any book or text, it was certainly so and people knew him this way. Therefore, one who does not consider the Qur'ān

as the book of God can look at this aspect of the Qur'ān as a historical dimension and accept it. When that person accepts that this issue is an undoubted historical point, then he can be invited to make a fair judgment that how it is possible for a person who has never read a book to bring a book like the Qur'ān without the help of God. Here, he will have no choice but to testify that "here are Signs self-evident" (Qur'ān 29:49) and "None but the unjust reject Our Signs" (Ibid.). Contrary to oppression is "justice" and in contrast to oppressor is the "just". Consequently, every just and fair person will judge that this Qur'ān is itself the best "sign self-evident" for the authenticity of the Prophet's mission.

The Challenge and its historical process in the Qur'ān

Despite the fact that the Qur'ān was the clear sign of the prophetic mission of the Prophet (s) and was accompanied with divinity, some disbelievers stubbornly rejected his mission and considered it as fabricated by the Prophet, and claimed that some people helped the Prophet in this regard! Therefore, the Qur'ān stops in several points in the 23-year-long mission of the Prophet (s), calls out its opponents, and says that if they doubt the divinity of the Qur'ān, they can seek the help of whatever they have and create a book like the Qur'ān. If we divide the 23-year-long mission of the prophet of Islam (s) into three parts, all challenge points fall in the middle section. Based on their revelation order, these chapters are the Night Journey, Jonah, Hūd, the Mount, and the Cow.

It is noteworthy that this order is incongruent with what some writers have presented as the stages of the Challenge. They have considered three stages for the Challenge: (1) challenge to bring a book like the Qur'ān (Qur'ān 17:88; 52:34); (2) challenge to bring 10 chapters (Qur'ān 11:13-14); and (3) challenge to bring a chapter (Qur'ān 2:23-24; 10:38; Ibn Kathīr: 1998, vol. 4: 234; 'Itir, 1989: 116-120; 'Abd al-'aziz, 2007: 35-36). For this viewpoint to be true, it is necessary for the Mount chapter to have been revealed before the Hūd chapter, and the latter to have been descended before the Cow and the Jonah chapters. Nonetheless, according to the majority of traditions on the revelation order, the Jonah chapter has been revealed before the Hūd, the Mount, and the Cow chapters, and the Hūd chapter has also been descended before the Mount chapter. Therefore, it seems that the foregoing challenge stages are not congruent with the process of the Qur'ān revelation. Based on the Qur'ān revelation order, challenging the opponents to bring ten chapters like those of the Noble Qur'ān (Qur'ān 11:13-14) has been after inviting them to bring one chapter (Qur'ān 10:38). Of course, according to some revelation order traditions (two out of 13

traditions)¹, the Hūd chapter has been revealed before the Jonah chapter (Rāmyār, 1983: 692). In any case, regarding the historical order, the first chapter in which the Challenge has – of course implicitly – appeared is the Night Journey, and the last one is the Cow chapter.

Based on the revelation order, the Night Journey chapter has been revealed in Mecca and was the 50th chapter of the Qur'ān, while the Cow chapter was the 87th chapter which was revealed in the year two AH. The time lapse between the revelation of the first and the last challenge has been seven to eight years. Lack of Challenge in the first section of the Qur'ān revelation time is itself a reason for the assertion that despite what some have said, the Challenge is not a required necessity for the miraculousness of the Qur'ān; that is to say, whether the Qur'ān did or did not challenge, there were so many clear signs to testify its divinity that there was no need to the Challenge. Therefore, it should be investigated that what has happened in the early days of Islam that have set the ground for the revelation of the Challenge verses. Therefore, it is necessary to refer to the initial years of the Qur'ān revelation to find the Challenge backgrounds.

The atmosphere of the Qur'ān revelation before the Challenge

Before the revelation of the Night Journey chapter and the first Challenge, the stances of the Prophet's opponents have been recounted in different chapters of the Qur'ān. Here, some sets of verses from some chapters of the Noble Qur'ān are reported and specified. All of these chapters have been revealed before the Night Journey chapter.

The first set of verses

The first set of verses that present the audience with the stance of the polytheists against the Qur'ān are the initial verses of the Pen chapter. This chapter is among the first chapters revealed in Mecca. It reads,

Thou art not, by the Grace of thy Lord, mad or possessed. Nay, verily for thee is a Reward unfailing: And thou (standest) on an exalted standard of character. Soon wilt thou see, and they will see, which of you is afflicted with madness. Verily it is thy Lord that knoweth best, which (among men) hath strayed from His Path: and He knoweth best those who receive (true) Guidance.

1. Thirteen narrations on the Qur'ān revelation order have been quoted, among which only nine narrations cover the full text of the Qur'ān and other ones have only presented the order of some chapters (Ya'qūbī, n.d.: 42; Ḥaskānī, 1990, vol. 2: 411; Nikūnām, 2001: 128-129).

So hearken not to those who deny (the Truth). Their desire is that thou shouldst be pliant: so would they be pliant. Heed not the type of despicable men,- ready with oaths, A slanderer, going about with calumnies, (Habitually) hindering (all) good, transgressing beyond bounds, deep in sin, Violent (and cruel),- with all that, base-born,- Because he possesses wealth and (numerous) sons. When to him are rehearsed Our Signs, "Tales of the ancients", he cries! (Qur'ān 68:2-15).

According to these verses, polytheists accused the Prophet (s) of being "mad" and considered the Qur'ānic verses as "tales of the ancients". Therefore, in the polytheists' opinion, Prophet Muḥammad (s) was not a "messenger" and prophet, but rather, they viewed him as a "possessed" (by a jinni) who narrated the tales of the ancients and so, had done nothing supernatural to make him acceptable as a prophet. This set of verses vividly illustrates the ethical, social, and cultural character of the Prophet's opponents. They let us know those who did not want to accept that the Qur'ān is comprised of "signs self-evident" for the confirmation of the prophetic mission of the noble Prophet (s). The character that has been depicted for each of these people includes many negative traits, such as extreme swearer, mean, extremely faultfinding and scurrilous, one who goes everywhere for tattling, extreme blocker of goodness, transgressor, sinner, arrogant, and disreputable. Can you really find a person more corrupt than one who has all these traits? The Qur'ān describes the roots of the majority of these negative traits as "Because he possesses wealth and (numerous) sons". Wealth and power¹, if not controlled, bring about various types of corruptions, some of which are the cases that have been introduced in these verses. This issue was explained so that no one imagines that those who knew the prophet but strictly opposed him years after the revelation of the Qur'ān were morally healthy and their disagreement with the prophet was merely logical and the Prophet had not been able to convince them that the Qur'ān was not his own speech, but rather, it is the word of God. Contrarily, these verses show that essentially, this group of the Qur'ān audience was not interested in logic and reasoning.

The second set of verses

The second set of verses belongs to the 74th chapter of the Qur'ān, the Cloaked One. This is the fourth chapter of the Qur'ān based on the revelation order. According to this chapter, polytheists continue to insist on their previous words. The chapter reads,

1. In these verses, "sons" is a sign of the person's power. In the past, one who had sons was considered as having power, too.

Leave Me alone, (to deal) with the (creature) whom I created (bare and) alone! To whom I granted resources in abundance, and sons to be by his side! To whom I made (life) smooth and comfortable! Yet is he greedy-that I should add (yet more); By no means! For to Our Signs he has been refractory! Soon will I visit him with a mount of calamities! For he thought and he plotted; and woe to him! How he plotted! Yea, Woe to him; how he plotted! Then he looked round; then he frowned and he scowled; then he turned back and was haughty; then said he: "This is nothing but magic, derived from of old; "This is nothing but the word of a mortal!" (Qur'ān 74:11-25)

A glance at the wording and content of these verses reveals the traits of some of the Prophet's opponents. The intended person in these verses is rich and powerful. He is hostile to the divine verses. The following verses show that he has understood the rightfulness of the Qur'ān in the very first look, but his enmity has caused him to disregard fairness and oppose the Prophet. It might be said that when one sees the truth like "the sun high on sky", but says that it is not sunny, he will find it difficult to defend his stance! The statements "For he thought and he plotted; and woe to him! How he plotted! Yea, Woe to him; how he plotted! Then he looked round; then he frowned and he scowled; then he turned back and was haughty" clearly demonstrate the spiritual discomfort of this person in facing an obvious reality he wants to totally reject. The reader of the Qur'ān might ask what this person has done that has caused the Qur'ān to harshly say, "Woe to him! How he plotted! Yea, Woe to him; how he plotted!" The answer is that this person's evaluation and judgment are far from fairness and justice. For instance, imagine that the answer sheet of a student has been given to you for evaluation and when you look at it, you see that he has answered all questions correctly. However, since you feel a grudge and enmity toward him, you don't want to give him any score! It is very difficult to find a reason to give him a zero! The person intended by these verses of the Qur'ān is in such a situation. He ultimately closes his eyes on "the sun of truth" and arrogantly says, "This is nothing but magic, derived from of old": just like when you see the answer sheet completely true, suddenly and without any reason you say, "The score for this answer sheet is zero because it has been copied from another one's answer sheet!"¹ Therefore, this merely whimsical and unjust judgment has caused the Qur'ān to address that person with such a bitter language.

1. In the next set of verses, it will be shown that the opponents say these words are dictated to him by others! In other words, they claim that he copies the verses.

The third set of verses

The third set of verses belongs to the Criterion chapter. Based on the revelation order, this chapter is the 42nd chapter of the Qur'ān and has been revealed about five years after the appointment of the prophet of Islam (s).

But the misbelievers say: "Naught is this but a lie which he has forged, and others have helped him at it." In truth it is they who have put forward an iniquity and a falsehood. And they say: "Tales of the ancients, which he has caused to be written: and they are dictated before him morning and evening." Say: "The (Qur'ān) was sent down by Him who knows the mystery (that is) in the heavens and the earth: verily He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful." And they say: "What sort of an apostle is this, who eats food, and walks through the streets? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to give admonition with him? "Or (Why) has not a treasure been bestowed on him, or why has he (not) a garden for enjoyment?" The wicked say: "Ye follow none other than a man bewitched." (Qur'ān 25:4-8)

In these verses, the opponents again insist upon their previous words; they consider the Prophet "bewitched" and the Qur'ān a collection of the "tales of the ancients" that the prophet has brought by the help of others. Moreover, they pretend that they still expect the Prophet (s) to do supernatural acts and have supernatural conditions, e.g. a treasure is bestowed onto him or a garden is created for him! In response, the Qur'ān, too, insists on its previous stance that it is a divine speech and no one has generated it other than the God who knows the mystery of the heavens and the earth.

It is noteworthy that the word "iktataba" (he has caused to be written) is used to denote a situation where the person does not know writing himself and rather, someone else writes the text for him. This verse can also be an obvious sign that the polytheists admitted that the Prophet (s) was not familiar with writing at the time of being appointed to prophethood. In such an atmosphere in which the Prophet's spiteful opponents insisted that the Qur'ān is "human word" and "tales of the ancients" which have been read to the prophet and his job has only been to recite them for the people, the Qur'ān tells them that if this is the case, they do the same and bring a text like that of the Qur'ān. Therefore, the Challenge has been created in such circumstances. In fact, considering the false opinions of the polytheists, the Qur'ān tells them that if they think the Qur'ān is the word of the prophet of Islam Muḥammad (s) and he has got it from the "tales of the ancients" and has been possibly helped by others, even by the jinn, so that they could also use all their possibilities and bring a word like the Qur'ān.

The process of the Challenge verses revelation

As said before, the Challenge is mentioned in five chapters of the Qur'ān, which will be historically examined in the following.

The Night Journey chapter and the first verse of Challenge

The Challenge was first offered in the Night Journey chapter. Of course, in this chapter, the Qur'ān does not directly ask its audience to bring a text like that of the Qur'ān, but rather, it says that no one will be able to bring it. Nonetheless, the atmosphere of these verses is the same as the atmosphere of the Challenge verses. This chapter reads,

Say: "If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support. And We have explained to man, in this Qur'an, every kind of similitude: yet the greater part of men refuse (to receive it) except with ingratitude! They say: "We shall not believe in thee, until thou cause a spring to gush forth for us from the earth, "Or (until) thou have a garden of date trees and vines, and cause rivers to gush forth in their midst, carrying abundant water; "Or thou cause the sky to fall in pieces, as thou sayest (will happen), against us; or thou bring God and the angels before (us) face to face: "Or thou have a house adorned with gold, or thou mount a ladder right into the skies. No, we shall not even believe in thy mounting until thou send down to us a book that we could read." Say: "Glory to my Lord! Am I aught but a man, an apostle?" (Qur'ān 17:88-93)

Some points can be seen in this set of verses. First, the Qur'ān says that if the humans and jinns come together to bring a book like the Qur'ān, they cannot. Verily, why has the Qur'ān presented the "jinn" issue? One might pose the doubt that as we do not have access to jinns, we have not been able to bring a text like that of the Qur'ān! The answer to this question is that the presentation of the jinn issue is to emphasize this point that even if you were able to use the help of jinns, you could not bring a text like that of the Qur'ān. As was saw in the previous set of verses, the polytheists accused the Prophet (s) of being helped by others. Therefore, the Qur'ān tells them that if you really don't believe that this speech is God's words, you can also ask anyone you like, even jinns, for help to bring a speech like the Qur'ān. Moreover, the polytheists accused the Prophet (s) to be a soothsayer. For that reason, the Qur'ān has declared the Prophet innocent from this accusation in several verses. During the Ignorance days, soothsayers were people who were referred to by people to know about the forthcoming events and interpretation of

dreams, to be healed, and to eradicate the enemies. The majority of people believed that the soothsayer dealt with the jinn who knew about the divine news through eavesdropping. Soothsayers usually had a special, prose-like language. Moreover, their words were usually mysterious, so different interpretations could be made about them (Shākir, 2015: 44-47; A group of authors, 2001 42; Ṭāsh Kubrāzādeh, 1998: 530, 753-754). Therefore, since their presupposition was that the "soothsayers" used the help of jinns and also considered the Prophet a "soothsayer", the Qur'ān asked them to use jinns – as soothsayers did – and bring a book like the Qur'ān.

Second, up to the revelation of the Night Journey chapter, the opponents of the Prophet do not accept the Qur'ān and tell the Prophet that why he does not bring extraordinary signs through extremely supernatural acts. As it is seen in these verses, the opponents continue their demands concerning performance of their desired supernatural acts by the Prophet (s).

The Jonah chapter and the second verse of Challenge

According to the revelation order, the Jonah chapter is the 51st chapter of the Noble Qur'ān. In this chapter, the Qur'ān challenges the hostile opponents of the Prophet for the second time to bring a text like that of the Qur'ān. The chapter reads,

This Qur'an is not such as can be produced by other than God; on the contrary it is a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it, and a fuller explanation of the Book - wherein there is no doubt - from the Lord of the worlds. Or do they say, "He forged it"? say: "Bring then a Sura like unto it, and call (to your aid) anyone you can besides God, if it be ye speak the truth!" Nay, they charge with falsehood that whose knowledge they cannot compass, even before the elucidation thereof hath reached them: thus did those before them make charges of falsehood: but see what was the end of those who did wrong!

In this chapter, the Challenge issue has been presented more clearly. God asserts that if the polytheists consider the Qur'ānic chapters a forge by the Prophet of Islam Muḥammad (s), they can also set out and bring a chapter like the chapters of the Qur'ān. The phrase "other than God" implies that the Qur'ān is the work of God. Therefore, it notes that even if they seek the help of anyone other than God, they will not be able to bring a text like that of the Qur'ān as a divine work.

The Hūd chapter and the third verse of Challenge

With the revelation of the Hūd chapter, the Challenge issue is raised for the third time in the Qur'ān. This chapter reads,

Perchance thou mayest (feel the inclination) to give up a part of what is revealed unto thee, and thy heart feeleth straitened lest they say, "Why is not a treasure sent down unto him, or why does not an angel come down with him?" But thou art there only to warn! It is God that arrangeth all affairs! Or they may say, "He forged it," Say, "Bring ye then ten suras forged, like unto it, and call (to your aid) whomsoever ye can, other than God!- If ye speak the truth! "If then they (your false gods) answer not your (call), know ye that this revelation is sent down (replete) with the knowledge of God, and that there is no god but He! will ye even then submit (to Islam)?"

In this chapter, the opponents are asked to bring ten chapters like those of the Qur'ān if they claim that the Prophet (s) has forged the Qur'ān himself or with the help of others. In the Jonah chapter, the Qur'ān asked the opponents to bring one chapter, but in this chapter, it asks them to bring ten chapters. The reason is that the number is not the subject in question here. They cannot bring a text like that of the Qur'ān, be it one chapter or ten chapters. The reason for this increase in number from one to ten is that the opponents state that the words of the Prophet (s) are not true and are falsely attributed to God. Therefore, the Qur'ān asks them to bring ten chapters like these so-called forged chapters. In other words, since the opponents downplayed the text of the Qur'ān and considered it easy to create, the Qur'ān asks them to bring ten chapters like the ones that they claim are easy to create. The Hūd chapter leads the polytheists to the desired goal of the Qur'ān by offering the challenge and then asserting that if they could not bring a text like it, they should accept that the Prophet has not forged these chapter himself or via the help of others. If the forge claim was true, then naturally the opponents who had access to much more facilities could bring a text like that of the Qur'ān. In these verses, it is emphasized that they can use all possible facilities. The use of the condition "other than God" implies that they are only deprived of one thing: the divine support that was bestowed to the Prophet (s).

The reaction of the polytheists after being challenged in three successive chapters

After the Qur'ān challenged its opponents in the three chapters that were successively revealed, a considerable time lapses for the next obvious challenge to appear in the Mount chapter (the 76th chapter based on the revelation order). However, it would be interesting to have a look at the opponents' stance after the three challenges. Their stances could be found in the chapters that have been revealed between chapters Hūd and the Mount (chapters 52nd and 76th based on the revelation order). According to Cattle

chapter, which is the 55th chapter based on the revelation order, the opponents call the Qur'ān "magic" and "tales of the ancients" (Qur'ān 6:7, 25). Moreover, they emphasize their previous demands from the Prophet to do supernatural acts (Qur'ān 6:8). The Saba' chapter, the 58th chapter based on the revelation order, presents the opponents' stances against the Qur'ān, too. In this chapter, the Qur'ān introduces itself as the "Clear Signs", but the opponents consider it again as "magic" and accuse the Prophet of having contacts with jinns (Qur'ān 34:43-50).

The Mount chapter and the fourth verse of Challenge

In the Mount chapter, which is the 76th chapter of the Qur'ān based on the revelation order, the Qur'ān challenges its opponents for the fourth time. This chapter reads,

Therefore proclaim thou the praises (of thy Lord): for by the Grace of thy Lord, thou art no (vulgar) soothsayer, nor art thou one possessed. Or do they say: "A Poet! we await for him some calamity (hatched) by Time!" Say thou: "Await ye! I too will wait along with you!" Is it that their faculties of understanding urge them to this, or are they but a people transgressing beyond bounds? Or do they say, "He fabricated the (Message)"? Nay, they have no faith! Let them then produce a recital like unto it, If (it be) they speak the truth!

These verses reveal that some years after the first challenge, no positive answer has been given by the opponents, and according to the Mount chapter verses, they repeat their previous groundless claims. The Noble Qur'ān asks them to bring a speech like that of the Qur'ān. Repetition of the previous challenge with the statement "produce a recital like unto it" best confirms that up to that time, no speech has been offered by the opponents as a word "like unto the Qur'ān".

The Cow chapter and the fifth verse of Challenge

The Cow chapter is the last chapter in which the Qur'ān challenges its opponents. Nonetheless, there have been revealed ten other chapters between the Mount and the Cow chapters in which some stances of the polytheists toward the Qur'ān have been mentioned. The Reality, Spider, and Defrauding chapters are the ones which entail these stances. Some verses related to this issue in these chapters are as following.

- That this is verily the word of an honoured apostle; It is not the word of a poet: little it is ye believe! Nor is it the word of a soothsayer: little admonition it is ye receive. (This is) a Message sent down from the Lord of the Worlds. And if the apostle were to invent any sayings in

Our name, We should certainly seize him by his right hand, And We should certainly then cut off the artery of his heart (Qur'ān 69:40-46)

- And thou wast not (able) to recite a Book before this (Book came), nor art thou (able) to transcribe it with thy right hand: In that case, indeed, would the talkers of vanities have doubted. Nay, here are Signs self-evident in the hearts of those endowed with knowledge: and none but the unjust reject Our Signs. (Qur'ān 29:48-49)
- When Our Signs are rehearsed to him, he says, "Tales of the ancients!" (Qur'ān 83:13)

Again, in the time lapse between revelation of the Mount and the Cow chapters, no positive answer is offered by the opponents to the Challenge posed by the Qur'ān. They have just repeated their claims. This is the best sign that they have been unsuccessful in realizing their claims. For the last time, the Qur'ān repeats its challenge and asks the opponents to bring a chapter like those of the Qur'ān if they doubt its divinity,

And if ye are in doubt as to what We have revealed from time to time to Our servant, then produce a Sura like thereunto; and call your witnesses or helpers (If there are any) besides God, if your (doubts) are true. But if ye cannot- and of a surety ye cannot- then fear the Fire whose fuel is men and stones,- which is prepared for those who reject Faith (Qur'ān 2:23-24)

Using the phrase *lan taf'alū* (of a surety ye cannot), the Qur'ān ensures the polytheists and pagans that they will never be able to bring a text like that of the Qur'ān. The negation preposition *lan* in this phrase implies their lack of ability. This is not a mere claim by the Qur'ān; but rather, it is the result of several years of experience that the opponents of the Qur'ān sensed from the first verses of the Challenge in the Night Journey chapter to the last verses of Challenge in the Cow chapter, and in this period, they have given no response other than a repetition of their baseless claims. Even after the last challenge in the Cow chapter, there is no response. In the Spoils of War chapter, the 88th chapter of the Qur'ān based on the revelation order, the Qur'ān says, "When Our Signs are rehearsed to them, they say: 'We have heard this (before): if we wished, we could say (words) like these: these are nothing but tales of the ancients.'" (Qur'ān 8:31)

This verse obviously proves that despite all challenges posed by the Qur'ān, the opponents of the Prophet have not brought any speech like the Qur'ānic text up to the revelation of this chapter. Rather, many years after the first challenge of the Qur'ān, they say, "If we wished, we could say (words) like these!" without clarifying why they have not wished to do so! Then, they repeat their unsupported claim that the Qur'ān is a set of the tales of the ancients.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following points are emphasized as the conclusions of the study.

1. The Qur'ān is a text that has a clear history. The Prophet of Islam Muḥammad (s) recited it to people. It has come to us in a widely transmitted manner.
2. The Qur'ān stipulates that the Prophet (s) could not read or write. Therefore, the people living in the revelation era knew that the person who brought this book was not literate. As a result, they easily found out the divinity of the Qur'ān.
3. In the light of the wide transmission of the Qur'ān, the present-day audience of the Qur'ān can also realize the divinity of the Qur'ān, because they all can see that this book could not be generated by a person who did not know reading and writing.
4. Consequently, to prove its divinity, the Qur'ān has not needed and is not in need of any challenge. The Qur'ān itself and its presentation by a person who did not know reading and writing are the best signs for its divinity.
5. In an atmosphere in which the opponents of the Prophet insisted that the Qur'ān was a "human speech" and "tales of the ancients" dictated by others to the prophet and he only was responsible for reciting it to people, the Qur'ān asks them that if this is the case, they also do the same and bring a text like that of the Qur'ān. Therefore, the Qur'ān did not need any challenge to prove its divinity; rather, the challenge appeared as a result of these conditions to be the final argument against the opponents' excuses.
6. The Challenge verses in five chapters were revealed in a period of nearly eight years (from the seventh year after the Prophet's appointment to two AH).
7. The opponents did not respond to the Challenge in these eight years. Rather, they repeated their untrue claims that the Qur'ān was generated by humans, it was magic, and it was comprised of the tales of the ancients.
8. As confirmed by the 31st verse of the Spoils of War chapter, the polytheists did not provide any practical response, except for another claim that "if we wished, we could say (words) like these!"
9. If the opponents had presented a text as a response to the Challenge of the Qur'ān during the Challenge period, it was unacceptable for the Qur'ān to quote them in the Spoils of War chapter that "if we wished, we could say (words) like these", because in this case, they could object to the Prophet (s) that despite their presentation of a text like that of the Qur'ān, he had denied it.

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