

## A Critique of the Theory of the Qur'an's Revelation in one Single Package

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### Introduction:

Manner of the Qur'anic revelation is one of the most significant issues in the Qur'anic studies. Muhammad 'Abdul 'Azam al-Zurqani is of the view that knowledge of the Qur'an's revelation from Allah forms the very basis of Islamic faith and also serves as the originating point for all the issues in the Qur'anic studies.<sup>1</sup> Almost all the known scholars of the Qur'anic Studies ('*Ulūm al-Qur'ān*) and majority of *mufasssirūn* have mentioned two kinds of revelation of the Qur'an: in one single package and in stages. As for the latter, there is no controversy over it as it is a fact beyond any doubt, stated very clearly in the Qur'an, Hadīth literature as well as in the history. But the scholars are not unanimous in their approach to the former. It seems that the controversy among the scholars over this matter has arisen from their differences in the interpretation of certain Qur'anic *ayāt*, the mention of which will be made later. Thus tafsiri differences have led to the emergence of two theories, one supporting the idea of the Qur'an's revelation (*nazūl*) all at once and the other rejecting it as unacceptable. Among the supporters are Abu Shamah al-Maqdisi (d.665A.H.),<sup>2</sup> Badr al-Din al-Zarkashi (d.794A.H.)<sup>3</sup>, Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d.911A.H.)<sup>4</sup>, Muhammad 'Abdul 'Azam al-Zurqani<sup>5</sup>, Manna' al-Qattan<sup>6</sup> and others. And among those not supporting it are 'Umir al-Sha'bi (d.109 A.H.)<sup>7</sup>, Muhammad b. Ishaq (d.153 A.H.)<sup>8</sup>, Muqatil b. Sulaiman (d.150 A.H.)<sup>9</sup>, Abu

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'Abdullah al-Halami (d. unknown)<sup>10</sup>, Amin Ahsan Islahi<sup>11</sup>, Muhammad Asad<sup>12</sup>, Muhammad Qubli al-Qalil<sup>13</sup>, 'Abdullah Yusuf'Ali<sup>14</sup> and others. But the supporters of the Qur'an's revelation in one single package present their view as the only valid theory on the subject and try to project it as a part of Islamic faith concerning the Qur'an, making a claim that the others' views are unsubstantiated.<sup>15</sup> This article is a humble attempt to make a critical analysis of the arguments advanced by the proponents of the Qur'an's revelation all at once in support of their belief, so as to bring out a clear picture of who, the proponents and the opponents of the theory, stands where and to see whose approach is more logical and close to the truth.

### **The Theory:**

It is said that the Qur'an, the revelation of which was completed in over two decades, had been revealed, in its entirety, from the protected tablet (*al-Lauh al-Mahfuz*) to the honored place (*Bait al-'Izzah*) in the lowest heaven bordering the mundane world. And this revelation took place in the night of power (*Lailat al-Qadr*) which is also known as the blessed night (*al-Lailat al-Mubarakah*) in the month of Ramadan. Al-Sakhawi<sup>16</sup> says that the Qur'an's revelation in one single package may have been made to honour the children of Adam and glorify them before the angels.<sup>17</sup> Al-'Asqalani<sup>18</sup> affirms that this theory is reliably right.<sup>19</sup>

### **Arguments:**

In order to support the above view four main arguments are advanced: 1) Qur'anic *ayat*, 2) Hadith, 3) 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas' statement, and 4) *ijma'*. The relevant Qur'anic *ayat* are:

1. It is the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was revealed. (al-Baqarah :185)
2. Verily, We revealed it (the Qur'an) in the blessed night. (al-Dukhan :3)
3. Verily, We revealed it (the Qur'an) in the night of power. (al-Qadr :1)

Al-Qurtabi<sup>20</sup> (d.671A.H.) states that these three *ayat* serve as evidence to

the fact that the whole Qur'an was transferred from *al-Lauh al-Mahfūz* to *Bait al-'Izzah* in the *Lailat al-Qadr*.<sup>21</sup> Ibn Kathir (d.774A.H.) argues, in the light of these ayat, that as the previous Scriptures like *Suhuf*, *Taurāt*, *Zabūr* and *Injīl* had been revealed to respective prophets in one single package, the Qur'an had been sent down in the same way but not to its Prophet but to a place in the lowest heaven.<sup>22</sup> Al-Zurqani finds in these ayat a convincing reference to the revelation of the whole Qur'an in a powerful blessed night in the month of Ramadan, which is certainly not a reference to the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) who received the messages in gradual manner.<sup>23</sup> Manna' al-Qattan says that these ayat signify the transfer of the entire Qur'an to the lowest heaven with a view to demonstrating the honorable position of the Qur'an to the angels.<sup>24</sup> The following Hadith is quoted to support the theory:

Wathilah B. al-Asqa' reports that the Prophet (SAAS) said: "*Suhuf Ibrahim* were revealed in the first night of Ramadan, *Taurāt* on the sixth of Ramadan, *Injīl* on 13th of Ramadan, and the *Furqān* (i.e. the Qur'an) on 24th of Ramadan."<sup>25</sup> While commenting on this Hadith Ibn Hajar maintains: This Hadith corresponds with Allah's statements in 2:185 and 97:1. It is probable that the *Lailat al-Qadr* occurred in the 24th night of that year Ramadan and the Qur'an was revealed all at once in that night to the lowest heaven, and afterwards the first revelation comprising 96:1-5 came down to the earth on 24th of Ramadan."<sup>26</sup>

Various sources such as al-Bazzar (d.292A.H.), al-Nasai (d.303A.H.), Ibn Abi Hatim (d.327A.H.), al-Tabarani (d.360A.H.), al-Hakim (d.405A.H.), and al-Baihaqi (d.457A.H.) have recorded the view of 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas through three authorities, 'Ikrimah, Sa'id b. Jubir and Miqsam. Reports of 'Ikrimah and Sa'ad b. Jubir as quoted by al-Hakim and that of Miqsam as recorded by Ibn Abu Hatim, Ibn Marduwaih, and al-Baihaqi are given here below:

1. 'Ikrimah reports from 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas' who said: "The Qur'an was revealed all at once to the lowest heaven in a night of power, and thereafter it was revealed (to the Prophet) for twenty years."<sup>27</sup>

2. Sa'ad b. Jubir reports from `Abdullah b. 'Abbas who said while referring to the *āyah* 97:1 (Verily, We revealed it in the night of power.): "The Qur'an was revealed in one single package in the night of power to the lowest heaven."<sup>28</sup>
3. Miqsam narrates that 'Atiyya b. al-Aswad said to 'Abdullah b. `Abbas: "The Qur'an came down in different months, Shawwal, Zi al-Qa'dah, Zi al-Hajj, Muharram, Safar and Rabi', but the two ayat 2:185 and 97:1 have cast doubt in my heart. In response to this observation Ibn 'Abbas said: "The Qur'an was indeed revealed all at once in the night of power in the month of Ramadan and then revealed in stages over days and months."<sup>29</sup>

The claim of *ijma'* to support the theory has been made by Muhammad b. Ahmad Al-Qurtabi who says that there is a consensus of opinion among 'ulama over the view that the Qur'an was revealed in its entirety.<sup>30</sup>

### Critical Evaluation

The three ayat (2:185; 44:3; 97:1) refer to the Qur'an's revelation in Ramadan, in a blessed night, and in a night of power respectively. It is obviously a mention of the time of Qur'an's revelation rather than that of manner of revelation, which is the focal point of the above mentioned theory. These ayat make no indication to the Qur'an's transfer from *al-Lauh al-Mahfuz* to *Bait al-'Izzah* in one single package comprising the whole Qur'an.

It seems that the word 'al- Qur'an', as mentioned in the above three *ayat* has been used to derive a meaning of the whole Qur'an. This approach may be considered untenable as the word 'al- Qur'an' is applicable to both the whole Qur'an and any part thereof. There are *ayāt* of Makka period using the word 'al- Qur'an' in the sense of the revealed parts of the Qur'an. In surah *al-Muzzammil*, for instance, Allah advised the Prophet (SAAS): "And recite Al- Qur'an in a slow style".<sup>31</sup> This *sūrah* is one of the earliest revelations. So, the divine advice to the Prophet is to read the revealed portions of the Qur'an.

Umir b. Sharahil al-Sha'bi (d.109A.H.) says that the three *ayāt* in view refer to the beginning of revelation of the Qur'an in the form of first-five *ayāt*, and there is no other revelation of the Qur'an except the one to the Prophet (SAAS).<sup>32</sup>

Muhammad b. Ishaq (d.150A.H.) sees in the three *ayāt* the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an to the prophet (SAAS)<sup>33</sup>

Amin Ahsan Islahi (d.1997 C.E.) while explaining the *āyah* 44:3 says: "Revelation of the Qur'an in that night does not necessitate that of the complete Qur'an, but it indicates to the blessed beginning of its revelation."<sup>34</sup>

Historically, the first five *ayāt* (96:1-5) had been received by the Prophet (SAAS) in Ramadan and the date was 17 or 24.

Al-Uabari says that as for the day of the Prophet's appointment and revelation to him, it was Monday and there is no controversy among 'ulama but there is a difference of opinion over the date which is, according to Abu Qalabah 17 and according to Abu al- Jald 24 in the month of Ramadan.<sup>35</sup> It is obvious that the three ayat refer to the historical fact concerning beginning of the Qur'an's revelation.

Another statement of 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas quoted by 'Ikrimah (when the Prophet reached the age of 40 al- Qur'an was revealed to him)<sup>36</sup> conforms to what 'Amir al-Sha'bi, Muhmmad b. Ishaq, and Islahi, suggest and also corresponds to what the history has recorded.

Abu Shima al-Maqdisi identifies an argument in the three ayat. He says that the use of the past tense in reference to the Qur'an's revelation indicates to the fact that the revelation all at once occurred long before the revelation in stages.<sup>37</sup> Yes, al-Maqdisi is correct in his approach that the past tense refers to something that has already taken place. By using the same line of argument it may also be said that these ayat talk about the first revelation, which had already become a matter of the past, as the three ayat in view came down later. *Sūrat al-Baqarah* is a combination of ayat and passages revealed at various times during the Prophet's stay in Madinah,<sup>38</sup> surat al-Dukhan is reported to have come down around 5th year of the Makkan period. Syed Maududi (d.1979 C.E.) says that information about surat al-Dukhan's revelation is not available in the sources but the issues discussed

therein indicate that its period of revelation time is the same as that of surat al-Zukhruf (43), surat al-Shura (42), and surah Hamim al-sajdah (41), and according to reliable reports the last one was revealed before 'Umar's accepting Islam.<sup>39</sup> As for surat al-Qadr, it is, according to Abu Hayyan (d.745A.H.), 'Ali b. Ahmad al-Wahidi (d.468A.H.), a surah revealed at Madinah.<sup>40</sup> Thus the difference between the revelation of the first five ayat in surat al-'Alaq (96:1-5) and surat al-Dukhan, surat al-Qadr and surat al-Baqarah is 5 to 15 years.

Deriving from the above-mentioned three ayat the information about the Qur'an's revelation in one single package actually represents an interpretation of these Qur'anic statements. In order to see whether such an interpretation can be deemed as valid certain objective and universally acceptable criteria are to be applied in tafsir methodology. Those criteria are but the tools of Qur'anic tafsir. A brief introduction to them will not be out of place here. They are of two kinds: internal and external. The former comprises the Qur'anic language, its diction, coherence in its ayat and surahs, as well as the Qur'an itself. The latter consists of Hadith, history, classical Arabic poetry and sermons, Judeo-Christian literature, *Ṣahābah's* views, and *ijtihād*.<sup>41</sup> It is not necessary to use all these tools simultaneously. It depends upon the nature of the ayat and passages selected for the purpose of their interpretation as to which of these tools are to be applied and which of them to be dropped. As for the application of internal tools in Tafsir, it is unavoidable whereas the external aids may and may not be required everywhere. It will be difficult to reach the original import of an ayah or a passage of the Qur'an if the internal dimensions of Tafsir methodology are totally or partially ignored. The most important of these internal tools is the coherence in the Qur'an. It is said that the main factor that caused the division of Islamic community into so many camps and sects was the total or partial avoidance of the theory of coherence in the Qur'an by certain Muslim scholars.<sup>42</sup> It is noteworthy that each of these different schools of thought lay the claim that it is the only group exemplifying original Islam. The basis of such belief is the interpretation of the Qur'an. Undoubtedly, not all the camps that are hostile to one another represent the truth. Only one of them deserves

to be called as the true representative of Islam. It is quite surprising that the different interpretation of the Qur'anic ayat is not the result of different methodology and tools; almost all the scholars of these hostile camps have applied almost the same external tools in their tafsir. It seems that the differences in tafsir are mainly due to the non-application of internal tools particularly the coherence theory. In order to identify coherence between an ayah and the surah in which it occurs one has to develop, among other things, the understanding of the central theme of the surah concerned, the context of the ayah in view and the addressees of the surah and the ayah.<sup>43</sup>

The central theme of surat al-Baqarah is the transfer of the civilizational leadership from the Jews to the followers of the last Prophet (SAAS), hence clear references to the religious blunders and deviations on the part of the former and the advices to the latter on their required qualities and characteristics. Every ayah of this surah revolves around this theme. Its ayah no. 185 as mentioned earlier has its link to this theme and it also has an immediate context. Its preceding ayat (143-184) talk about certain important obligations in Islamic life such as Salah, Hajj, Zakah, Qisas, and Fasting in the month of Ramadan. The context of these ayat continues in the ayah no. 185 onward. The immediate context of the ayah can be formed by taking into consideration the statement in its two preceding ayat (183-184). These two ayat mention the divine prescription of the fasting in the month of Ramadan. And the ayah no. 185 refers, among other things, to the significance of the month of Ramadan by saying that this month had been chosen by Allah for the revelation of the Qur'an so as to guide the humanity. When we read the ayah in the light of the central theme of surat al-Baqarah, it becomes manifest that the revelation of the Qur'an was made to ensure the change of leadership from the unfaithful followers of the prophets ('alaihimussalam) to the sincere adherents of the last Prophet (SAAS). For this change the time scheduled was a month of Ramadan. It is this reality that has been highlighted in the ayah 2:185. It means that the ayah makes a mention of the Qur'an's revelation to the Prophet (SAAS) and not that of the Qur'an's transfer from one point in the heaven to another point in the heaven.

Mention of the latter does not relate the ayah to the central theme of surat al-Baqarah. Religious leadership practically changed only after the arrival of the Qur'an to the earth.

By reading only half of an ayah one may not necessarily derive the original message of the ayah. It is in no way an appreciable method to choose only one part of an ayah and try to interpret it in isolation of the whole ayah or at least, if the ayah in view is a bit long, the complete statement. The ayah in view (2:185) that has been used as an evidence to substantiate the theory in view is not quoted in full. Its partial quotation may serve the purpose but the full statement may not support the idea of the Qur'an's revelation in one single package. The complete relevant portion of the said ayah which is a bit long reads: "It is the month of Ramadan in which was revealed the Qur'an, which is *hudā* for mankind, and *bayyanāt* for guidance, and *al-Furqān*." The three words Huda, Bayyanat, and al-furqan as mentioned in the above ayah provide an answer to the question as to which revelation this ayah is referring to, heaven to heaven or heaven to earth. The ayah says that the Qur'an was sent down in Ramadan to serve as *Hudā* (source of guidance), *Bayyanāt* (irrefutable evidence to the authority of the Qur'an) and *al-Furqān* (a criterion for right and wrong). If it is said that this ayah states about the Qur'an's revelation in the heaven itself, it is meaningless to say that the Qur'an was sent to serve the purpose of guidance to the mankind who lives on the earth. Man could benefit from the Qur'an only when it came to him, hence the three ayat talk very obviously about the revelation of the Qur'an to the earth from the heaven and not about that to the lowest heaven from the highest one.

Surat al-Dukhan is one of the seven surahs that begin with abbreviated letters Ha Mim. All these surahs emphasize the fact that the Qur'an is not a compilation made by Muhammad (SAAS) but it is a revelation from Allah. Surat al-Dukhan also stresses the same contradicting the claim of the Prophet's enemies. Its ayat 2-3 ("By the Book that makes things clear-We sent it down during a blessed night".) form a rebuttal of the Makkans' criticism of the Qur'an, which could be seen apparent in the 9th ("Nay, but they are toying with their doubt".)

and 14th ( "Yet they turn away from him and say: Tutored, a mad man". ) ayat. When the disbelievers denied that the Qur'an was from Allah and claimed that it was a projection of Muhammad's own mind, the answer came down in the ayat 44:2-3.<sup>44</sup> If it is said that these ayat refer to the Qur'an's revelation in the heaven itself, it is meaningless to mention the Quraish's observation concerning the Qur'an's revelation to the Prophet (SAAS). Their objection was about the revealed portions of the Qur'an that the Prophet (SAAS) would read to them, hence the answer given was about the same. The word *al-kitāb* in the ayah no. 2 does not occur here in the sense of the entire Qur'an but it signifies the revelations of the Qur'an to the Prophet (SAAS) before the revelation of Surat al-Dukhan because the Quraish had raised their eyebrows against the available form of the Book of Allah. Generally, only half of the ayah 44:3 is quoted to read the message of revelation of the Qur'an at once. When read the complete ayah, it would be almost impossible to infer the same. The portion unread is ( "We have always been warning" ). It very clearly refers to the Qur'an's revelation from the heaven to the earth. The warning to the people began with the revelation of the first five ayat of Surat al-'Alaq. Thus the ayat 44:2-3 mention the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an. Sayyid Maududi, while commenting on these ayat, says that the mufassirin have got divided into two camps over the meaning of these ayat. One of them finds in these ayat a reference to the beginning of the revelation of the Qur'an, while the other derives from them the news about the entire Qur'an's transfer from the *umm al-kitāb* to the angels responsible for that task. Sayyid Maududi concludes his comment in these words: "Allah knows better as to which of the two opinions is correct".<sup>45</sup> If we read the two ayat in its textual as well as historical context, the first opinion may appear to be more valid than the second one.

Surat al-Qadr:1 is also to be read in its context. Placement of the surahs of the Qur'an in the available order is very significant. Each surah is connected to its preceding as well as its succeeding surahs from textual and contextual point of view. The preceding surah of Surat al-Qadr is Surat al-'Alaq. There is a wisdom in this order. The first ayah of Surat al-Qadr ("Verily We revealed it in the night of

power".) indicates to the connection between the two surahs. The above-mentioned ayah uses pronoun "it". Wherever this pronoun in the sense of the Qur'an has been used there has certainly been stated in the immediate context either the word al-Qur'an or any of its attributive names. But this is the only place in the Qur'an where this pronoun has been put without any reference to its noun. Deep deliberation will show that the pronoun concerns the previous surah in which the first revelation comprising five ayat has been placed. It seems that when the Quraish doubted the authenticity of the Prophet's claim regarding the first revelation of the Qur'an surat al-Qadr came down revealing the truth about it. There is also an internal evidence of that. For this purpose the entire surah will have to be deliberated over. It describes the significance of the night of power in which the most important events take place such as descending of angels and archangel Gabriel to the earth. The night of the Qur'an's revelation was also such an eventful night. That significant night was an earthly phenomenon in which the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS) and archangel Gabriel were two main participants, the former as the receiver of the divine words and the latter as the deliverer of that trust. Amin Ahsan Isahi, in his commentary of this ayah, says: "That the Qur'an was revealed in that night does not necessarily mean that the whole Qur'an was revealed in the very night in which only the decision of the Qur'an's revelation was made. This task was entrusted to Gabriel and the first revelation was made in that very night."<sup>46</sup> 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, in his introduction to the surah, explains the message of its opening statement in these words: "The subject-matter is the mystic night of power, in which revelation comes down to a benighted world."<sup>47</sup> It is interesting to note that in the recently published version of 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali's translation of the Qur'an, which has been revised by a committee of learned scholars of the Qur'an, under the auspices of The Presidency of Islamic Researches, IFTA, Call and Guidance (*Al-Riasah al-Ummah li-Idarat al-Buhuth al-'Ilmiyyah wal-Ifta wal-Da'wah wal-Irshad*), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the above statement has been modified, thus: "The subject-matter is the night of power, in which revelation came down to the Prophet for the first time through Angel Gabriel."<sup>48</sup> Muhammad Asad, in his commentary

of the first ayah of the surah in view, says: "...thus describing the night on which the Prophet received his first revelation. On the basis of several Traditions it may be assumed that it was one of the last ten nights-probably the twenty-seventh-of the month of Ramadan, thirteen years before the Prophet's emigration to Madinah."<sup>49</sup>

As regards the Hadith quoted above is on the authority of Wathilah b. al-Asqa' a Sahabi, (d.85A.H.), the chain of narrators of this Tradition as recorded by Ahmad b. Hanbal is: "Abdullah < his father < Abu Sa'ed Mawla Bani Hashim < 'Imran Abul 'Awwam < Qatadah < Aba al-Mulaih < Wathilah b. al-Asqa' (*sahābi*) who reported that the Prophet (SAAS) said ..." Abu Sa'ed Mawla Bani Hashim, according to Ahmad b. Hanbal, is a person making too many errors (*kathīr al-khūṭā*).<sup>50</sup> Another narrator 'Imran Abul 'Awwam whose full name is 'Imran b. Diwar al-'Ama Abul 'Awwam al-Qattan al-Basari is considered a weak reporter. Ibn Ma'an says: "He is not strong."<sup>51</sup> According to Murrah he is unreliable.<sup>52</sup> And to al-Nasai he is weak.<sup>53</sup> Due to the weakness of two reporters in the chain of narrators the Tradition is to be considered weak. Such a weak Tradition may hardly serve the purpose of supporting a view. If this report is given any weight, it supports the historical beginning of the Qur'an's revelation to the Prophet (SAAS) and not the theory of the Qur'an's revelation in full to the lowest heaven. Historians like al-Tabari,<sup>54</sup> Ibn Kathir<sup>55</sup>, and Ibn al-Athir<sup>56</sup> have used this Tradition to refer to the beginning of the Qur'an's revelation to the Prophet (SAAS). There is another report on the authority of Jabir b. 'Abdullah which opens what remains ambiguous in the report of Wathilah b. al-Asqa'. The report is: "Jabir b. 'Abdullah says, "Allah revealed *Suḥuf Ibrāhīm* in the first night of Ramadan, *Taurāh* was revealed to Musa on 6th of Ramadan, *Zabūr* was sent down to Daud in the 11th night of Ramadan and the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad (SAAS) on 24th of Ramadan".<sup>57</sup> The Wathilah's report does not speak about the place where the Books of Allah were sent down, whereas the report of Jabir mentions in no uncertain terms that the heavenly scriptures were given to Ibrahim, Musa, Da'ud and Muhammad (SAAS), in the month of Ramadan. It seems very strange that Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani and Ibn Kathir have read in the report of Wathilah the

event of the Qur'an's revelation from heaven to heaven.<sup>58</sup> Had they come across the report of Jabir they would never have reached that conclusion.

As it appears from the Traditions containing the view of 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas, it is an *'athār* and not a Hadith of the Prophet (SAAS). It means what Ibn 'Abbas says, represents his own personal view which may and may not be right. 'Abdullah Ibn 'Abbas has been extensively quoted in the field of tafsir of the Qur'an but not all of his views, even though authentic from the angle of Hadith criticism, are accepted by scholars. For example, the view of Ibn 'Abbas on certain ayat as *mansūkh* has been rejected by Ibn al-Jauzi. Ibn 'Abbas is of the opinion that the ruling in the ayah 8:33 stands abrogated by the following ayah 8:34, but Ibn al-Jauzi rejects this view as untenable.<sup>59</sup> According to Ibn 'Abbas ayah 9:39 is *mansūkh* by the ayah 9:122, but Ibn al-Jauzi does not find any justification in his classification.<sup>60</sup>

'Abdul 'Azim al-Zurqani considers Ibn 'Abbas' statement *marfū'* (linked to the Prophet). If all the statements that have authentically been attributed to Ibn 'Abbas or any other Sahabi are taken as *marfū'*, why, then, scholars such as Ibn al-Jauzi reject his and other Sahabah's view. It would not be out of place to refer to what is *al-marfū'*. Whatever is related to the saying, doing, approval and characteristic feature of the Prophet (SAAS) is called *al-marfū'*.<sup>61</sup> Apart from this, Sahabi's statement is also defined as *marfū'* (linked to the Prophet) provided that the statement contains information about the timings of Islamic rituals and practices, the Day of Judgement, and the account of the previous people.<sup>62</sup> Ibn 'Abbas' statement in view talks neither about any legal ruling, nor the Day of Judgement nor the people of the past. Thus the view of Ibn 'Abbas may not be categorized as *marfū'*. Islamic scholars have differences of opinion over whether the views of Sahabah in matters related to Islamic life are binding on Muslims. Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Islam, al-Sarkhasi, Malik b. Anas and Ahmad b. Hanbal see the Sahabah's views as an authoritative source but other scholars from Hanafi school of thought as well as al-Shafi'i do not give to them that status on the ground that their views might have been the result of their own *ijtihad* or they might have

obtained this information from a source other than the Prophet (SAAS).<sup>63</sup> From the above Tradition on the authority of 'Ikrimah and Sa'ed b. Jubir it is clear that Ibn 'Abbas is giving an interpretation of the ayat 2:185; 44:3; 97:1. And tafsir given by a Sahaba falls under the category of *ijtihad*<sup>64</sup> that carries the possibility of both right and wrong.<sup>65</sup> Ahmad Muhammad Shakir in his commentary of Ibn Kathir's work on Hadith studies maintains:

As for classifying the Sahabah's tafsir and other views as marfu' by some people, it is not appropriate because the Sahabah made, in most cases, *ijtihad* in the interpretation of the Qur'an, hence they differed in their views.<sup>66</sup>

Ibn Kathir has recorded in his work of Hadith studies a statement of a great scholar of Hadith, Ibn al-Salah: "Undoubtedly, 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas, 'Abdullah b. 'Umar and 'Abdullah b. 'Amr b. al-'as have reported from Ka'b al-Ahbar".<sup>67</sup> It is a well known fact that Ka'b al-Ahbar was a Jew before his Islam and shared his expertise and in-depth knowledge of Judeo-Christian literature with others in Islamic world.<sup>68</sup> Dr. Muhammad Hussain al-Dhahabi says: "Ibn 'Abbas and others from the Sahabah who were famous for their tafsiri contribution used to look toward what they heard from the Prophet (SAAS), develop their own views through deliberation and *ijtihad* and with the help of socio-historical background of the Qur'an's revelation. And Ibn 'Abbas used to take information from the people of Scriptures".<sup>69</sup> Hence there is a possibility that Ibn 'Abbas developed the idea of the Qur'an's revelation all at once on the basis of some probable information in the Judeo-Christian traditions about the transfer of previous heavenly Scriptures from the protected tablet in the highest heaven to the lowest one. Moreover Ibn 'Abbas' interpretation does not conform to what the ayah 2:158 itself refers to, the mention of which has been made earlier.

The news of the whole Qur'an's transfer from the protected Tablet to the Honored house is a spectacularly significant news but it does seem to have been popular among Sahabah. If the source of this information was the Prophet (SAAS) it would not have remained confined to Ibn 'Abbas alone but would certainly have

been known to at least those Sahabah who had been confirmed by the Prophet (SAAS) as experts of the Qur'an, such as 'Abdullah b. Mas'ud, Salim, Ubayy b. Ka'b, and Mu'az b. Jabal.<sup>70</sup> 'Abdullah b. Mas'ad is reported to have said that he possessed complete knowledge of the meaning of all the Qur'anic ayat. He had established a school of tafsir in Iraq from which had graduated highly recognized scholars of the Qur'an like 'Alqamah b. Qais (d.61 A.H.), Masruq b. al-Ajda' (d.63 A.H.), 'Amir al-Sha'bi (d.109 A.H.) and al-Hasan al-Basari (d.110 A.H.). Naturally, they must have learned the meaning of the ayat (2:185; 44:2-3; 97:1). Sources do not mention from any of these *mufasssirūn* the idea of the Qur'an's revelation in one single package. And 'Umir al-Sha'bi, as we have seen earlier, brings out another meaning of these ayat, which he might have heard from his learned teacher Ibn Mas'ud. Abu Hurairah who has narrated the most number of traditions is also silent making no reference to such report at all.

Bukhari and Muslim have both made a separate section under the title "Fadail al-Qur'an" in their respective Hadith compilations in which they have recorded *ahadith* concerning significance of the Qur'an and its surahs. But there is no mention of Qur'an's revelation from *al-lauh al-Mahfūz* to *Bait al-'Izzah*, although this information is remarkably significant. It seems this significance may not have been so popular or Bukhari and Muslim did not consider Ibn 'Abbas' view worthy of recording. Ahmad b. Hanbal has compiled in his voluminous work *Musnad* traditions on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas that are 1694 in number spreading between the report no.1814 and no.3437, including many views of Ibn 'Abbas through the sources of 'Ikrimah and Sa'ad b. Jubir. But in such a lengthy compilation there is no report on the theory of Qur'an's revelation at once. It means that the very report concerning Ibn Abbas' view may not have been available during the period of Ibn Hanbal or if it was available the author of *Musnad* may not have regarded it noteworthy. Al-Nasa'i, one of the six noted scholars of Hadith, recorded the above mentioned view of Ibn 'Abbas on the authority of 'Ikrimah and Sa'ud b. Jubir in his voluminous work *al-Sunan al-Kubrā* but excluded it from his another compilation, *al-Mujtabā Min al-Sunan*, which is actually an abridged form of the

former one. The apparent reason for his exclusion of Ibn 'Abbas' statement from the latter one may be derived from the very reason of its compilation. After the completion of al-Sunan al-Kubra, he presented it to the then governor of Ramlah who asked him whether the book consisted of only authentic Traditions. When the *muḥaddith* answered in the negative, the governor advised him to prepare for him a compilation comprising only authentic Traditions. And al-Nasai compiled *al-Mujtaba* which the 'ulama consider the most authentic work after the works of al-Bukhari and Muslim.<sup>71</sup> He did not include the view of Ibn 'Abbas in the second work probably because he considered it weak either from the angle of its chain of narrators or from the point of validity of its message as available in the report.

It is more likely that the attribution of the view to Ibn 'Abbas is not correct. Undoubtedly, the chain of narrators is strong but other factors may lead one to doubt the authenticity of this report. Non-availability of such information among the Sahabah particularly senior ones, avoidance of this report by Bukhari and Muslim and non-inclusion of this statement in the *Musnad* of 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas by Ahmad b. Hanbal, its exclusion from al-Nasai's authentic work *al-Mujtabā*, all these things indicate that Ibn 'Abbas might not have uttered what is attributed to him. Dr. Qubhi al-Qaleh is of the view that the matter related to the Qur'an's revelation all at once in the heaven is news about the unseen world which can be accepted as authentic and certain only through the Qur'an or highly popular *ahādīth* (*al-mutawātir*), but merely on the pretext of Ibn 'Abbas' view being unquestionable from the angle of its chain of reporters it can not be made obligatory for the people to believe in this theory.

The Tradition on the authority of Miqsam consists of this chain of transmitters as al-Suyuti has quoted : Ibn Marduwaih and al-Baihaqui have both derived from al-Suddi < Muhammad < Ibn Abu al-Majahid < Miqsam who reports from 'Abdullah b. 'Abbas.<sup>72</sup> In this chain the first reporter is al-Suddi and the last is Miqsam. Al- Sudda is a surname of three reporters: 1) Isma'al b. 'Abdul Rahman b. Abi Karamah al-Suddi al-Kabir (d.127A.H.), 2) Isma'al b. Musa al-Fazari al-Suddi (d.245 A.H.), 3) Muhammad b. Marwan b. 'Abdullah al-Suddi al-Saghir.

In the above chain it is not clear which of the three Suddis is referred to. If it is the first one, according to Yahya b. Ma'an his Traditions are weak,<sup>73</sup> al-Jauzjani declares him a liar (*kādhīb*)<sup>74</sup>, and to Abu Hatim his reports cannot be made the basis of an argument.<sup>75</sup> As for the second name, Abu Bakr b. Abu Shaybah regards him as iniquitous (*fāsiq*)<sup>76</sup>, and Ibn 'Adi found him staunch supporter of shi'ite approach.<sup>77</sup>

As regards the third person, Salih b. Ya'qub regards him weak and fabricator of Hadith,<sup>78</sup> and according to Abu Hatim his report is not acceptable.<sup>79</sup> The last reporter is Miqsam b. Bajrah. Bukhari has counted him among weak reporters,<sup>80</sup> Ibn Hazm does not find him a strong transmitter,<sup>81</sup> and according to Ibn Sa'd he was weak.<sup>82</sup> Thus due to the weakness of the two reporters this Tradition may not be considered reliable.

Authenticity of the chain of narrators should not be considered the only criterion to check the authenticity of a report. Its text is also to be scrutinized. Strangely enough, scholars of Hadith have paid very little attention to this aspect of Hadith criticism. They appear to have felt satisfied with their ascertaining the reliability of the reporters. To them, trustworthiness of the transmitters of information is a measure more than sufficient to ensure the truth. Undoubtedly, this criterion is of very much significance but there is a need of using the criteria suggested by the Qur'an itself. According to it there are two criteria to differentiate between what is desirable and what is undesirable: the Qur'an and the Prophet's sunnah.<sup>83</sup> The said statement of Ibn 'Abbas is controversial. In order to know whether it can be accepted as valid it is to be seen whether there is any compatibility between this statement and any idea mentioned in the Qur'an. The assumption that the Qur'an had been revealed in one single package does not fit into the Islamic framework. This view contradicts the Qur'anic theory of examination which has been mentioned in many ayat such as 18:7 (Verily, We have made that which is on earth as an adornment for it, in order that We may test them as to which of them are best in deeds.) and 67:2 (He it is who created death and life so that He may test you as to which of you is best in deed). Both these ayat speak of the human life and opportunity given to it for the sake of test that requires free will to think, choose, initiate and

act. But the said theory as appears from the statement of Ibn 'Abbas suggests otherwise. It implies the entire happenings during the two decades of the Prophet's mission had already been determined, fixed, and written before they occurred. The Qur'an condemns the disbelievers opposing the Prophet's message, criticizes Muslims' approach on certain occasions, reproaches the Prophet (SAAS) for some minor errors on his part, gives glad tidings to the Prophet and his followers for their achievements, and warns the enemies of Islam, particularly Quraysh of dire consequences of their opposition to the Qur'anic call. The Qur'an curses Abu Lahb and his wife in surat al-Masad, comments in surat al-Anfal and Ali-'Imran on the mistakes of Muslims in the battle of Uhad, refers to the Prophet's mistakes in 8:67; 9:43; 66:1; 80:111, praises Muslims and censures formidable opponents in a number of places. Why all these condemnation, admiration, correction, and observation? If the Muslims, and non-Muslims, and the Prophet (SAAS) did what was already written, they should not be held responsible. One of the main factors that has always caused Muslim ummah's downfall is the concept of predestination. And Ibn 'Abbas' view as referred to above seems to have strengthened the ummah's approach toward the fatalistic theory of predetermination. This theory, undoubtedly, provides a shot in the arm for those advocating the fatalistic philosophy of cynicism and stoicism and validating the claim that what man thinks and acts is pre-destined.

The claim of *ijmā'* as made by al-Qurtubi seems to be untenable. None of the known scholars of *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* have made this claim. Rather, they have referred to the controversy among scholars over this matter. Al-Zarkashi and Al-Suyuti have both begun the discussion on this issue in their books with a statement: "there is a controversy over the manner of revelation of the Qur'an."<sup>84</sup> *Al-Zurqāni* presents four different interpretations made by different scholars and refers in the end to his preference of the first view based on Ibn 'Abbas' statement.<sup>85</sup> Manna' al Qattan gives three views but in his introduction to the issue he says that there are basically two schools of thought.<sup>86</sup> Thus the matter concerning Qur'an's revelation at once is a controversial one and not consensual. Al-Suyuti and Manna' al-Qattan have both quoted al-Qurtubi's claim of *ijmā'* with no comment on its validity. It

appears that they, somehow or the other, are inclined to favor the ijma' theory.<sup>87</sup> Scholars like Amir al-Sha'bi, Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Jarir al-Tabari, 'Abdullah Yusuf 'Ali, Amin Ahsan Islahi, Muhammad Asad, and Subhi al-Saleh, as we have seen above, do not agree to the idea. This situation indicates to *ikhtilāf* (differences of opinion) and not to *ijmā'* (consensus of opinion).

### **Conclusion**

The theory of the Qur'an's revelation all at once is based on four grounds: Qur'anic ayat, a Hadith, statement of Ibn 'Abbas, and claim of *ijma'*. When the Qur'anic ayat are read in their contextual flow and backdrop, it is found out that they mention the Qur'an's revelation to the Prophet and not that in the heaven itself. The Hadith first of all is not a strong Tradition and secondly it indicates to the Qur'an's revelation to the earth. Statement of Ibn 'Abbas has been reported through three sources, Miqsam, 'Ikrimah, and Sa'ed b. Jubair. As for the report through Miqsam, it may not be regarded as authentic due to two of its reporters being weak. The remaining two reports are strong in terms of chain of narrators but its text is in conflict with the Qur'anic theory of examination, hence the Qur'anic theory will be preferred. Claim of *ijmā'* is not correct. Well-known scholars have presented this issue as a controversial one. Thus the theory of the Qur'an's revelation in one single package may not be considered a strong theory. The Qur'an as well as the authentic history speaks about only one kind of revelation of the Qur'an and that is from Allah to the Prophet Muhammad (SAAS.) in stages, which began in a blessed night of the month of Ramadan, which the Qur'an calls as *lailatun mubārakah* (blessed night) and *lailatul qadr* (night of power).

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