

LECTURE 4: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE QUR'AN

- From the man to the book

1 Should We Read It?

- What do you think?



1

- Or listen to it?

In the name of Allah , the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful

[All] praise is [due] to Allah , Lord of the worlds –

The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful,

Sovereign of the Day of Recompense.

It is You we worship and You we ask for help

Guide us to the straight path –

The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor,

not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray.

(Surah 1, The Opener, <http://quran.com/1>)

- “No! We’re following Paul in Galatians 1:6-9” ie a different gospel (especially a Judaizing one), even if coming from “an angel in heaven” should be cursed
- “Yes! We’re following Paul in the Areopagus in Acts 17:16-31” i.e. Paul builds on the poets to preach Jesus and we can do that for the Qur’an
 - Eg “I’ve been reading something in the Qur’an which gives me great hope and encouragement. Do you have a Qur’an? I’d like to show what I’ve been reading. It’s from surah 3:42-55 – more in the Camel Method in Week 10-ish...
- Or, maybe we should read it show Islam’s flaws, eg compare Jesus with Muhammad
- Or, maybe we should read it to appreciate another Abrahamic faith

¹ No pages. Cited 15th February 2021. Online: <https://www.pinterest.com/stilluz16/holy-quran-our-guide/> (10) [Pinterest](#)

- We can read it as Christians – and there is good, bad and demonic in it, as in everything outside of Christ

2 Understanding the Qur'an from Within

2a) One Eternal Book (Kitab)

- Surah 85:21-22, Meccan: “Nay, this is a Glorious Qur'an, (inscribed) in a Tablet Preserved.”
- Surah 43:2-4, Meccan: “By the Book that makes things clear – we have made it a Qur'an in Arabic, that ye may be able to understand (and learn wisdom). And verily, it is in the Mother of the Book in Our Presence, high (in dignity), full of wisdom.”
- Surah 3:3...7, Medinan: “It is He who sent down to thee (step by step) in truth the Book confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus)...He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book, in it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); They are the foundation [literally “Mother”] of the Book.”
- The Qur'an is a recitation of the Book
 - Derived from root *qara'a* meaning to call, to proclaim, to recite, maybe from *queryana* which was a public recitation of Bible readings.²

2b) Revealed from heaven

- Given to Muhammad by God through Gabriel: “The angel came to him and asked him to read. The Prophet replied, 'I do not know how to read. The Prophet added, 'The angel caught me (forcefully) and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read and I replied, 'I do not know how to read.' Thereupon he caught me again and pressed me a second time till I could not bear it any more. He then released me and again asked me to read but again I replied, 'I do not know how to read (or what shall I read)?' Thereupon he caught me for the third time and pressed me, and then released me and said, 'Read in the name of your Lord, who has created (all that exists) has created man from a clot. Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous.'” (surah 96:1-3)³
- A slightly more modern “proof” of its divine origin: Muhammad can't have written it because he was illiterate, it contains science only God could know, no one can imitate it (s10:38, 11:13)
- Names/titles: criterion for judging right and wrong (s25:1), reminder (s15:9), revelation (s26:192), glorious (s50:1), honoured (s80:13), full of wisdom (s31:2), the book/scripture

² Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam: Classical Traditions and Contemporary Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 96.

³ No author. “Bukhari, Vol 1, Book 1, No3”. No pages. Cited 15 February 2021. Online: [Sahih Bukhari : Book of "Revelation" \(sahih-bukhari.com\)](https://sahih-bukhari.com/Revelation)

(s22:2, 21:10), clear book (s5:15), book of blessings (s6:155), distinguishes good from evil (s86:13)

2c) A Revelation of God's Will

- Surah 42:51-52, Meccan: "It is not fitting for a man that Allah should speak to him except by inspiration, or from behind a veil, or by the sending of a Messenger to reveal, with Allah's permission, what God wills: for He is Most High, Most Wise. And thus have We, by Our command, sent inspiration to you: You did not know before what was Revelation, and what was faith; But we have made the Qur'an a Light, with which we guide such of Our servants as we will."
- Allah reveals his will, not himself – "You may not have complete transcendence and self-revelation at the same time."⁴

2d) Some Practical Details

- Spoken partly in Mecca, partly in Medina⁵
 - Meccan surahs about past generations and establish Muhammad's credentials
 - Medinan surahs prescribe duties and norms for behaviour
 - Abrogation 2:106, 16:101
- 114 surahs, appearing to have little unity
- Not assembled by Muhammad, but Caliphs, completed by Uthman in 652 (cf Bukhari 6:510)
 - Yet, Dr Shady Nasser's 5 stages from *The Transmission of the Variant Readings of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2012):
 - Stage 1: Uthman = Quraishi Codex (652 AD)
 - Stage 2: Ibn Mujahid = 7 Readings (d.936 AD)
 - Stage 3: Al Shatibi = 2 Transmitters per reading (d.1388 AD)
 - Stage 4: Al Jazari = 3 Readings (d.1429 AD)
 - Stage 5: Hafs = Final Canon (1924 AD), made official in 1985 – further edition in 1936, named in honour of King Faruq, adopted almost universally, but not text-critical and only meant to establish a uniform text for education in Egypt⁶
- "Temporally assembled" but still eternally existing

⁴ Faruqi et al, *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah*, (London: Islamic Foundation, 2007), 48.

⁵ See Issa Diab, "The Honorable Qur'an: From Revelation to the Book", in Accad and Andrews, *The Religious Other*, 218-219 for more details.

⁶ Gabriel Said Reynolds, "Introduction: Qur'anic Studies and Its Controversies" in Gabriel Said Reynolds, ed., *The Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, (Oxford: Routledge, 2008), 2.

- Not to be read but recited, chanted
 - First surah given was s96:1-5 (6-19 came later):
Read/recite! In the name of your Lord who created (1)
He created man from a clinging form [meaning a clot of blood]. (2)
Read/recite! Your Lord is the Most Bountiful One (3)
Who taught by [means of] the pen, (4)
Who taught man what he did not know. (5)
 - Reciting as “Eucharistic”
- Last revelation was s9:128
- See Issa Diab, “The Honorable Qur’an: From Revelation to the Book”, in in Accad and Andrews, *The Religious Other*, 220-227, for more information on its compilation
- Like Bible eg stories of Moses, moral/legal duties, preaching
- Not like Bible eg no sustained Exodus narrative, no law-code/covenant stipulations, no preaching of Jesus, and:
 - Noah’s son not in ark s11:40-43
 - Mary/Mariam as Jesus’ mother and Aaron’s sister s3:33-45, 19:28
 - Floods are in Exodus plagues s7:133
 - David and Solomon muddled s38:21-25
 - Gideon and Saul muddled s2:249ff
 - Pharaoh and Haman and Babel together s28:38
- Same as the basic message of all earlier revelations: “Nothing is said to you which had not been said to other messengers before you.” (Surah 41:43)
- Understand Qur’an using the Qur’an and commentaries
- Translation limited
- Guarded from corruption/tahrif (s15:09) – unchanged and no different manuscripts⁷

⁷ Slides 6-16 Jay Smith’s PPT “Qira’at Conundrum” on VLE in Week 4 Additional Learning.

- Sheikh Yasir Qadhi: “One of the more appropriate definitions is as follows: The Qur’an is the Arabic speech (*kalam*) of Allah, which he revealed to Muhammad in wording and meaning, and which has been preserved in the *mus-hafs* [manuscripts] and has reached us by *mutwaatir* [universally accepted or unchallengeable] transmissions, and is a challenge to mankind to produce something similar to it.⁸ – an important guy for “holes in the narrative”...

3 How does it relate to the Other Books?

3a) A Revelation in Four Separate Books

- Surah 29:14...16...27, Meccan: “And indeed We sent Noah to his people...and (remember) Abraham when he said to his people: ‘Worship Allah, and fear Him, that is better for you if you did but know.’...And we bestowed on him (Abraham), Isaac and Jacob, and We ordained among his offspring Prophethood and the Book (Torah), the Injil (Gospel), and the Qur’an, all from the offspring of Abraham...”
- Surah 4:163, Medinan: “We have sent thee inspiration, as We sent it to Noah and the Messengers after him: We sent inspiration to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the descendants, to Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Solomon, and to David we gave the Psalms.” (cf 17:55)
- Surah 21:105, Meccan: “Before this We wrote in the Psalms, after the Message (given to Moses): My servants, the righteous, shall inherit the earth.”
 - What is “the earth”? Razi: paradise, or current world, or Palestine
 - Ali: see Psalms 25:13, 37:11, 37: 29 and Exodus 32:13 and Matthew 5:5
 - Farahi: must go to Bible to understand this verse, “the earth” = new creation⁹
- Surah 5:46-48 important, confirming the Scripture that came before it [cf 2:89, 91, 97, 101, 3:3, 81, 6:92, 10:94, 16:43, 35:31, 46:12]
- A guidance and a mercy (6:157), to all the world (38:87), and a fuller explanation of the Book (10:37 cf 3:23 previous “portions of the Book”)

3b) The Qur’an Stands Alone?

From *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam* (also at www.islam-guide.com): “Muslims believe that God revealed books to His messengers as proof for mankind and as guidance for them. Among these books is the Qur’an, which God revealed to the Prophet

⁸ Quoted in James White, *What Every Christian Should Know About the Qur’an*, 54.

⁹ See Wikipedia entry for Hamiduddin Farahi and Amin Ahsan Islahi to see their approach to the Qur’an. And, Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 1996), especially ch13.

Muhammad (pbuh). God has guaranteed the Qur'an protection from any corruption or distortion"¹⁰ (see also s15:9).

"Muslims also believe that God revealed a holy book to Jesus called the *Injeel*, some parts of which may be still available in the teachings of God to Jesus in the New Testament. But this does not mean that Muslims believe in the Bible we have today because it is not the original scriptures that were revealed by God. They underwent alterations, additions, and omissions. This was also said by the Committee charged with revising *The Holy Bible (Revised Standard Version)*. This Committee consisted of thirty-two scholars who served as members of the Committee. They secured the review and counsel of an Advisory Board of fifty representatives of the co-operating denominations. The Committee said in the Preface to *The Holy Bible (Revised Standard Version)*, p. iv, "Sometimes it is evident that the text has suffered in transmission, but none of the versions provides a satisfactory restoration. Here we can only follow the best judgment of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text." The Committee also said in the Preface, p. vii, "Notes are added which indicate significant variations, additions, or omissions in the ancient authorities (Mt 9.34; Mk 3.16; 7.4; Lk 24.32, 51, etc.)."¹¹

- How might you respond to this?

4 Some Parallels and Contrasts

- The Qur'an = the Word of God = Jesus Christ
- Text of Qur'an "more important" than text of Bible
- Tablet preserved in heaven vs. can do textual criticism
- Arabic vs. translations
- Sacred book = text and physical book therefore put on a throne
- Critique-able? No questions according to s5:101

5 To be a Little More Critical of the Qur'an

- Inimitability?
 - Who would judge? How would they judge?

¹⁰ I Ibrahim, *A Brief Illustrated Guide to Understanding Islam*, (Houston: Darussalam 1997), 48.

¹¹ I Ibrahim, *Illustrated Guide*, footnote 1, 59.

- Abd al-Masih ibn Ishaq al-Kindi (access to court of Caliph al-Ma'mun, 813-833): "if you say that there is nothing like the Qur'an in point of style and ornamentation, we reply that the style of our great poets...is pure and chaste and from the choicest Arabic...The Qur'an on the other hand, is broken in its style; hybrid in its diction and, while high sounding, often destitute of meaning."¹²
- Un-translate-able?
 - Yet, which language was the Qur'an originally in? It has Aramaic loan words, names from other languages. Indeed, "qur'an", "sura" and "aya" are not of Arabic origin. Could it be rooted in the Syriac *Diatessaron*?¹³
- One Qur'an?
 - Umar's son, "Let none of you say that he has the whole Qur'an in his possession. How does he know what the whole of it is? Much of the Qur'an has gone."¹⁴
 - How do we know Uthman got the right one? See James White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an*, 263-71.
 - A Shi'a hadith states: Jabir says, 'I heard Imam Baqar...saying: One who says that he has collected the whole Quran is a big liar...only 'Ali and the Imams collected it all and preserved it."¹⁵
 - Ibn Masud doesn't have surah 1
 - Shows that variants were around – coins and official inscriptions of last decade of 7th C also use non-Uthmanic text
 - Last verse (surah 9:128) only found by one person¹⁶
- Paper grave in Great Mosque of Sana'a in Yemen cf Dead Sea Scrolls, found in 1972, see [Sanaa manuscript - Wikipedia](#) and [History of the Quran - Wikipedia](#)
 - Suggests variants between texts¹⁷
 - Why go with Cairo in 1924?¹⁸

¹² The Apology of al-Kindi 461 quoted in Mark Beaumont, "Early Christian Interpretation of the Qur'an", Transformation 22/4 October 2005, 195-203.

¹³ Claude Gilliot, "Reconsidering the authorship of the Qur'an: is the Qur'an partly the fruit of a progressive and collective work?", in Reynolds, ed., *Qur'an in Its Historical Context*, 88-108, especially 94-101.

¹⁴ No Author, "Chapter 12 the Perversion of the Qur'an and the Loss of Many Parts of It". No Pages. Cited 15th February 2021. Online: [The Perversion of the Qur'an and the Loss of Many Parts of It \(answering-islam.org\)](#)

¹⁵ Sookhdeo, *Understanding Islamic Theology*, 181.

¹⁶ James white, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an*, 258.

¹⁷ See Issa Diab, "The Honorable Qur'an: From Revelation to the Book", in Accad and Andrews, *The Religious Other*, 228-239 for more details.

¹⁸ Slides 23-24 Jay Smith's PPT "Qira'at Conundrum" (PPT and video uploaded to Week 4's Additional Learning).

- Given to Muhammad or before eg Birmingham news and re-worked stories
 - Radiocarbon has dated two pages of Qur'an (with surah al-Kahf/18:22-31, last 5 verses of surah Maryam/19 and first few verses of surah Ta Ha/20) found at University of Birmingham as between 568-645AD¹⁹
- Eternally from God and protected?
 - Very specific to Muhammad's life: "historical, circumstantial, and relative"²⁰
 - What about Satanic influence in s22:52 re 53:19-20 and 53:62?
 - Suggests a possible invention-contradiction/discrepancy-correction-new discrepancy-invention...cycle
 - Why is there a missing verse on stoning for adultery? A goat ate it, see [Qur'an, Hadith and Scholars: Stoning - WikiIslam](#)
 - What about forgetfulness?²¹
 - Why was it not gathered together earlier? "Astonishing"²²
- "Contradictions"²³
 - What did Lot say to the people in Sodom in s7:80, 26:165-166, 27:54 and 29:28-29?
 - What did the people of Sodom say to Lot in s7:82, 26:167, 27:56 and 29:59?
 - How did Allah punish the city of Sodom in s7:84, 26:173, 27:28 and 29:31?
 - The fall of Iblis and what did Allah say to the angels in s7:11 and 38:71-72?
 - What did Iblis say to Allah when he refused to prostrate in s7:12 and 38:76?
 - How did Allah respond to Iblis's refusal in s7:13 and 38:77?
 - What did Iblis promise to do to Allah's followers in s7:16-17 and 38:82-83?
 - What did Allah say in response to Iblis's threat in s7:18 and 38:84-85?

¹⁹ See Issa Diab, 227-228 for more details.

²⁰ Mondher Sfar, *In Search of the Original Koran: the true history of the revealed text* (New York: Prometheus Books, 2008), 10. See also James White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Qur'an*, 271-273.

²¹ Sfar, *In Search*, 32, quoting from Bukhari III/538.

²² Sfar, *In Search*, 70.

²³ From James White *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur'an* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2013), 222-229.

- Four more parallel accounts: s20:65-73 with 26:41-52; s20:9-24 with 27:7-14 and 28:29-33; s11:77-83 with 15:61-75 and 29:32-34; s26:160 with 27:54-58 and 29:28-30
 - The texts are similar, but why aren't they the same if these are the very words of Allah without human intermediation? (Unlike the gospels where we can see why gospel authors use different terminology)²⁴
- Muhammad is accused of reworking legends of old in s68:15-16, 83:13-17, 25:4-5, 9, 8:30-31 and 6:25-27 and these texts span the length of Muhammad's prophethood. Examples of such legends are:
 - Mt Sinai being suspended in s2:63, 2:93, 4:154 and 7:171 appears in Babylonian Talmud
 - Jesus speaking from cradle in s3:46 and 19:27-34 found in Arabic Infancy Gospel of 5th-6thC, based on Protoevangelium of James and Infancy Gospel of Thomas (both Gnostic)
 - Mary driven to tree to give birth in s19:22-26 uses Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew
 - Qur'an's author appears to know more stories from Hebrew Scriptures and Jewish stories, eg Cain and Abel in s5:30-32 and from Jewish Mishnah, Sanhedrin 4:5
 - Abraham's destruction of idols in s21:68 is from 2ndC Midrash Rabbah
 - Solomon, bird, Sheba and glass floor in s27:17-44 comes from 2nd Targum of Esther

6 To Critique the Foundations

- Lüling's 1974 publication *A Challenge to Islam for Reformation* arguing that the Qur'an has 4 textual levels:
 - Original text, a hymnal composed by the Christian community of Mecca (who were both Trinitarian and non-Trinitarian) – in Syriac?
 - Hymnal passages edited and Islamized in Muhammad's time
 - Passages originally composed in Muhammad's time and entirely Islamic
 - Passages altered by post-Muhammadan Muslims²⁵
- Can the "Ur-Qur'an" be established?²⁶ – has "believers" or "the faithful" not "Muslims", preaching monotheism, close to Jews and Christians

²⁴ James White, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur'an*, 223.

²⁵ Reynolds, "Introduction", in Reynolds, ed., *Qur'an in its Historical Context*, 10

²⁶ Fred Donner, "The Qur'an in Recent Scholarship: Challenges and Desiderata", in Reynolds, ed., *Qur'an in its Historical Context*, 29-50.

- “...the more deeply one is familiar with the works of the major writers of the classical period, especially the composers of liturgically significant, homiletic texts such as those written by Ephraem the Syrian (c.306-73), Narsai of Edessa and Nisibis (c.399-502), or Jacob Serugh (c.451-521), the more one hears echoes of many of their standard themes and characteristic turns of phrase at various points in the discourse of the Arabic Qur’an.”²⁷
- Keith Small, *Holy Books Have a History*, (Kansas City: Avant Ministries, 2010):
 - No real textual criticism of texts, but recent cf Tokapi Mushaf, Cairo Mushaf and Samarkand Mushaf showed variants that cannot be attributed to scribal error
 - Names spellings vary within and between Qur’ans
 - Different diacritical marks
 - Some corrections made to text
 - Earliest copies of Samarkand Kufic (late 700s) and Tokapi have bits missing (eg s5:3-8 and 17:17-33 in latter, dated to early 700s)
 - Oldest dated complete Qur’an is 1002 at Rajeb Museum in Kuwait. Tokapi is oldest practically complete
 - See Jay Smith’s “Is the Qur’an Eternal, Sent Down, Complete and Unchanged?” ([1. Is the Qur'an Eternal, Sent down, Complete and Unchanged? - YouTube / https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMC-MXY3UoQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AMC-MXY3UoQ)) and Steven Masood, *The Bible and Qur’an: A Question of Integrity* (Carlisle: Authentic Publishing, 2002)
- AND, 26 Arabic Qur’ans at Speakers’ Corner in 2016 (more than dialects, or dots and vowels from the 8th-9th C): “don’t talk about this!” said Dr Yasir Qadhi (7 min segment of this interview at around 50mins here: <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=OzeoCWkWBWA>)
 - 93,000 differences so far found by Speakers’ Corner crew²⁸
 - Bernie Power compares Hafs and Warsh: has found 120 consonantal and 5,000 vowel or diacritical differences
 - Real differences in nouns or plurals, noun becoming a verb, changing person of the verb, changing verb etc
 - Eg Hafs cf Warsh:
 - surah 2:10 receive doom from lying OR accusing of lying
 - surah 2:184 receive paradise in Ramadan by feeding a poor man OR poor men
 - surah 3:79 about teaching the book OR knowing the book

²⁷ Sidney Griffith, “Christian Lore and the Arabic Qur’an: The Companions in the Cave in *Surat al-Kahf* and in Syriac Christian tradition” in Reynolds, ed., *Qur’an in its Historical Context*, 109.

²⁸ Slides 52-76 Jay Smith’s PPT “Qira’at Conundrum”.

surah 3:146 prophets fought OR prophets were killed

surah 98:6 Christians are the worst of creatures OR worst of the innocent (in Hell)

- Bible MS: 5,300 Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin Vulgates, 9,300 in other languages, 19,000+ translations, 11 languages, 2,135 Lectionaries, 86,000 Early Church father quotes, 36,000+ quotes before the 4th Century.

Quranic MS: 6 major early Arabic manuscripts, 10 – 20 lesser manuscripts, 63 fragments “prior to 719 AD”²⁹ – and doesn’t seem to be Arabic from the Hejaz³⁰

- Qur’an depicts a monotheist community, close to Judaism, in tension with some Jews and Christians, showing devotion to and fear of God through rituals, expecting judgement
 - But, no significant data about Muhammad, vaguest hints of geographical context, reveals little about opponents, leaves us guessing about specific context and sometimes about origin/meaning of vocab³¹
- And, compared to the Bible: no eyewitnesses, without beginning, end, order, structure, history or storyline – why does no one read it?
- So...the word of God? Didn’t exist? A mishmash of plagiarism? An overheard conversation? A response to previous revelation?

7 Some Resources for Further Study

Crone, P. and Cook, M., *Hagarism*, Oxford: OUP, 1977.

Holland, Tom, *In the Shadow of the Sword: the Battle for Global Empire and the End of the Ancient World* (London: Abacus 2013)

Sookhdeo, Patrick, *Understanding Islamic Theology*, McLean VA: Isaac Publishing, 2013.

Wansbrough, John, *Quranic Studies*, Oxford: OUP, 1977.

Wansbrough, John, *The Sectarian Millieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, Oxford: OUP, 1978.

White, James R, *What Every Christian Needs to Know about the Qur’an* (Grand Rapids: Bethany House, 2013)

²⁹ Much more in Jay Smith’s PPT “Qur’an the Manuscripts” (in Week 4 Additional Learning, along with video).

³⁰ Slides 48-52 in Jay Smith’s PPT “Quest – Islam in the 7th Century” (in Week 2 Additional Learning).

³¹ Daniel Brown, “What we Don’t Know about Islamic Origins”, in Accad and Andrews, *The Religious Other*, 177. See also Martin Accad, “The Quest for the Historical Muhammad” in the same book, 291-300 for its “duality” or tensions with Judaism and Christianity.