

The Relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran

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Abstract

The Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an have a strong relationship, including many features. It establishes that the Qur'an is confirmation of God's word as spoken by the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. Additionally, the Qur'an instructs, supports and defends Muhammad in his mission to spread the word about Islam. Moreover, the Qur'an is the primary source of historical information about Muhammad, his life and his mission.

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For Muslims, the Qur'an (*the recitation*) is the word of God, communicated to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel and spoken to people in his human voice (Brown, P. 13, and Waines, P. 11). The Qur'an has 114 chapters (*suras*) of over 6,000 verses (*ayahs*) revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over the twenty-three years of his prophetic mission.

The words of the Qur'an represent Muhammad as the messenger (*rasul*) of God (Sells, p. 6). The primary relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an is that it establishes that Muhammad is only a man, he is the reciter (and the arbiter) of God's word and his commands for his faithful. Thus, the various *suras* of the Qur'an provide Muhammad divine guidance in his dealings with Muslims, Muslim society and others, and also defend and support his actions and teachings. The Qur'an provides a primary educational and archival resource for Islam, allowing the faithful to learn and embrace God's word, and additionally it serves as a historical source on Muhammad's life, time and mission.

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According to Islamic tradition, God gives each prophet a miracle to support his mission, and the existence of the Qur'an is considered evidence of the miracle which defines Muhammad's prophethood. In 610 CE, when Muhammad was 40 years old, his first revelation came. He was sitting praying in the cave of *Hira'*, a mountain close to Mecca. The Angel Gabriel came to him, and Gabriel said, "Read." Muhammad replied, "What shall I read?" The Angel said again, "Read!" The Prophet said, "What shall I read?" Gabriel said in the third time, "Read!" Muhammad said, "What shall I read?" The Angel said again, "Read!" The Prophet said, "What then shall I read?" The Prophet wanted to save himself from him. Then Gabriel said, (*Read in the name of your Lord who created -1- Created the human from a suspended (embryo) -2- Read! And your Lord is most bountiful -3- The One who instructed using the pen -4- Taught man what he did not know*) ('Alaq 96:1-5) The Prophet had difficult situation. (Mattson, P. 18, Brown, P. 12, Nasr, P. 30, Waines, P. 12, Brockopp, P. 4, Sells, P. 5, Lings, P. 44, and Watt, P. 19-20). The first revelation of the Qur'an verses has a powerful psychic effect on the Prophet Muhammad, who describes his experience as: "While I was walking I heard a voice from the sky. I raised my head and behold, there was the angel who had come to me in the cave of *Hira'*: he was sitting on a throne that was between heaven and earth. I was so frightened by him that I fled home and said 'Wrap me up, wrap me up,' so they covered me. Then God, exalted is he, revealed: (*O you who are wrapped up -1- Rise and give warning -2- And glorify your Lord -3- And purify your garments -4- And shun all idols -5-*) (*Mudaththir*; 74: 1-5, Muslim). It was at this time that God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad his plans that he had selected him to bring His message to the world (Mattson, p. 32).

Likewise, the Prophet Muhammad mentions God's own words about the Qur'an. Abu Sa'id, one of the *al-Ansar* who helped the Prophet and his followers travel to Medina, reported the Messenger of God said, "*The Lord, most blessed and exalted, says, 'Whoever is preoccupied by the Qur'an and My remembrance from asking Me about their needs, I will give them better than what I give those who ask Me. The superiority of God's words over all other words is like God's superiority over his creatures'*" (Tirmidhi, and Eaton, p. 60).

The Qur'an instructs the Prophet in multiple verses, especially in the Meccan *suras* and it also defends him by rejecting the charges of the Quraysh that Muhammad was a poet, a sorcerer, or a man possessed (sura 21:5, sura 36:69, sura 10:2, sura 51:52 etc.) (Mattson, p. 35). When the Prophet first began to read the Qur'an's powerful and beautiful verses, the Quraysh derisively claimed he was just a poet (Nicholson, p.159, Sells, p.7, Hassan, p.128-129, and al-Bahbity, p.113).

However, the Qur'an repeatedly refutes accusations that Muhammad is a poet and states he is God's Messenger. Specifically, it proclaims that "*We did not teach him [the Prophet Muhammad] poetry, nor does it behoove him*" (Surat 36, verse 69) (Stetkevych, 213-214). Also, when Abu Laha, (the Prophet's uncle) bothers Muhammad, the Qur'an encourages him (*Perish the hand of Abu Lahab! -1- No profit will he gain from his wealth or his earnings -2- He will burn in a flaming fire -3- And his wife will carry the wood -4- On her neck, a rope of twisted fibers -5-*) (*Masad*; 111, Mattson, p. 54). When the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad, and he worried that he was not capable of God's mission for him, and the Quraysh mocked the Prophet and that his muse had neglected him. God, then, revealed *sura Duha* (*By the bright morning light -1- By the night when it is quiet -2- You have not been abandoned by your Lord, nor is He displeased -3- Know that the end will be better for you than the beginning -4- And your Lord will give to you, then you will be pleased -5- Did He not find you an orphan, then shelter you -6- And did He not find you wandering, then guide you? -7- And did He not find you in need, then provide for you? -8- So as for the orphan, do not disdain him -9- And as for the beggar, do not repulse him -10- And for the blessings of your Lord, proclaim them! -11-*) (*Duha*: 93) Here God reminds the Prophet about his hard time before he had the mission (Mattson, p. 34).

When the Prophet started out on his mission, he had difficulty with the members of the Quraysh tribe. Therefore, the Qur'an's stories of other prophets who had difficulty with their people -- for example, when Noah's people mocked him, Hud's people rejected him, Salih's people defied him, Abraham's people tried to burn him, Yusuf was betrayed by his brothers, and when Jesus' followers abandoned him in his final hours. With these verses, the Qur'an provides an important source of strength to the Prophet, encouraging him to remain steadfast in his mission. (*We know that you are saddened by what they say, but they are not repudiating you, rather it is the signs of God the oppressors reject -33- Messengers before you were denied and they patiently bore repudiation and injury until our assistance came to them. There is no one who can alter the words of God; and indeed you have received some news of the messengers*) (*sura An'am* 6:33-34, Mattason, P. 56, and Brockopp, P. 7).

The Medinan Qur'anic verses in particular provide the Prophet with inspiration and direction in his dealings with Muslims, Muslim society and non-Muslims (*O you who believe, obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority from amongst you. If you disagree about a matter then refer it to God and the Messenger if you believe in God and the Last Day: that is best and a better end*) (*Nisa'*; 4:59).

Thus, the words of the Qur'an inspired Muhammad as he organized Muslims in Medina the society and outlined in greater detail when he came to Medina called "Covenant of Medina" (Mattson, p. 60).

The Qur'anic verses address many important social, legal and moral questions to both Muslims and non-Muslims, such as *shari'ah*, the nature of the Divine Reality, and the natural world (Nasr, p. 25). In the Qur'an, Muslims are instructed to give their faith to God, his angels, his messengers (such as Muhammad), to obey God's word in divine books, and the Day of Judgment. *"O ye who believe! Believe in God and His messenger and the Scripture which He has revealed unto His messenger and the Scripture which He revealed before. Whosoever disbelieves in God, His angels and His Scriptures and His messengers and the Last Day, he verily has wandered far away"* (Al-Nisa' 4:136, Nasr, 38). The Prophet Muhammad instructs Muslims to regularly study the Qur'an as a practice to become more learned and devout. Abu Umamah, one of the Prophet Muhammad's companions, quoted that the Messenger of God said, *"Recite the Qur'an, for the Day of Resurrection it will come as an intercessor for its companions..."* (Tabarani, and Eaton, 60). The Messenger of God said, *"Learn the Qur'an and recite it, for one who does so is like a bag that is filled with musk whose scent flows everywhere. And he who learns it (the Qur'an) and goes to sleep having it within him is like a bag with musk tied up in it"* (Tirmidhi, and Eaton, 58). The Prophet Muhammad clearly states the differences among his examples of a believer who reads the Qur'an, an example of a believer who does not read the Qur'an, an example of a hypocrite who read the Qur'an, and an example of a hypocrite who does not read the Qur'an. Abu Musa, one of the early emigrant Muslim followers of the Prophet (known as *muhajirun*) quoted him as stating; *"A believer who recites the Qur'an is like a citron whose fragrance is sweet and whose taste is sweet. A believer who does not recite the Qur'an is like a date fruit with no fragrance but a sweet taste. A hypocrite who recites the Qur'an is like basil whose fragrance is sweet but tastes bitter. A hypocrite who does not recite the Qur'an is like a colocynth with no fragrance and bitter taste."* (Bukhari, Muslim, and Eaton p. 58).

The Qur'an is also a primary historical source of the Prophet's life, and especially the most important events, such as the Nocturnal Journey, when the Prophet spoke to God face-to-face (*al-mi'raj*) (Nasr, P. 31, and Brockopp, P. 7). Some specific Qur'anic verses representing other historical events are also found in hadith under "occasions of revelation" (*asbab al-nuzul*) (Mattson, p. 31).

Clearly, the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an has many aspects and facets, all working together in furtherance of God's will for Muhammad and the spread of Islam. First and perhaps most importantly it establishes that the Qur'an is confirmation of God's word as spoken by the Angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad. Secondly, as such, the Qur'an instructs, supports and defends Muhammad in his mission to spread the word about Islam. The Qur'an gives the Prophet the authority of God's intentions in order to guide Muslims in both their religious beliefs and their social interactions. Finally, the Qur'an is the primary source of historical information about Muhammad, his life and his mission. This biographical material provides further instruction and illustration for Muslims in practicing a devout life. While not a complete study of all possible aspects of the relationship between the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an, it is these three we find to be the most significant in the early establishment of Islam and Islamic culture during the time of Muhammad.

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