

THE GLORIOUS QUR'AN

From Revelation To Recitation & Beyond

ASBAB AL-NUZUOL- REASONS FOR REVELATION

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'ASBAB AL-NUZOOOL'

REASONS FOR REVELATION

The verses of the noble Qur'an are of two kinds. The first type is those that their revelation was not caused by some particular event or a question asked. Such verses generally dealt with the foundations of faith. There are, however, many verses of the Qur'an Shareef were revealed as a background to certain events or in answer to some question.

In the terminology of the Tafseer of the Qur'an Shareef, these events are called 'Asbabun Nuzool or circumstances that led to revelation'. In the Urdu commentaries of the Qur'an Shareef, these events are known as 'Shan-e-Nuzool'. The details of Asbabun Nuzool are reported by the Sahabah رضي الله عنهم of Rasulallah صلى الله عليه وسلم in narrations, some of which are reliable and some others are weak. This is the only acceptable method of recognising the reasons for revelation as the companions witnessed the revelation, or by those who investigate and research the science of revelation. Hence, the scholars have critically appraised their authenticity in a meticulous manner. If a companion who witnessed the revelation of a verse from the Qur'an states the reason, this is considered sufficient proof of its authenticity.

EVENTS GIVE CONTEXT TO REVELATION

There are many benefits to knowing the reasons behind why certain verses were revealed. The authentic reports of Asbabun Nuzool are very helpful for the study of the relevant verses in their correct perspective. It would be difficult to understand many of them correctly without the help of their Asbabun Nuzool. We are also able to recognise the ruling which occurred for a specific reason. Nevertheless, all Mufasssireen (commentators of the Qur'an) and jurists are unanimous, that if the words of a verse are general, then the ruling established from that verse is not restricted to that particular event reported as its cause of revelation. *(Meanings of the Noble Qur'an – Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani)*

Another reason is if a verse is concerning a particular Sahabi (companion) then this is a source of honour, however, if it is with regards to a disbeliever then this is a further cause of disgrace. It also removes doubtful conjecture while interpreting the original text.

BACKGROUND TO PROHIBITION OF MARRIAGE TO A POLYTHEIST

The verse 'Do not marry polytheist women unless they bring Iman (Surah Baqarah V.221) was revealed regarding a particular even. During the days of ignorance, a pagan woman named Anaq had an affair with Hazrat Marthad ibn Abi Marthad Al-Ghanavi ؓ, a Sahabi of Rasulullah ﷺ. After embracing Islam, he migrated to Madina Munawwarah while that woman stayed in Makkah Al-Mukarramah. Once, Hazrat Marthad ؓ visited Makkah on business. Anaq came to him with an intention to sin. Hazrat Marthad ؓ refused and said: 'Now Islam has come between me and you, but should you wish, I can marry you after clearing the matter with Rasulullah ﷺ. After returning to Madina Munawwarah, Hazrat Marthad ؓ sought permission to marry Anaq. Thereupon this verse was revealed. The verse prohibited him from marrying her.

This event is the Shan-e-Nuzool or Sabab of Nuzool (cause or background of revelation) behind the verse mentioned above. The background of revelation is, therefore, very important in the exegesis of the Qur'an.

(Mariful Qur'an - Mufti Mubammad Shafi - Rahimabullah)

Although it was revealed for that particular event, its general words extend the prohibition to all Muslims and thus the principle laid down by the verse has universal application. Therefore, authentic Asbabun Nuzool should be taken as a source of correct interpretation of a verse, but the principle established by it should not be restricted to any particular event, if the words are general.

(Meanings of the Noble Qur'an - Mufti Mubammad Taqi Usmani)

IMPORTANCE OF BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Another example, one may say that drinking wine is permissible by quoting the following verse: *“There is no sin, for those who believe and do good deeds, in what they might have partaken earlier, if they fear Allah, and believe, and do good deeds; and again, fear Allah, and believe, and still again fear Allah and do good deeds. Allah love those who are good in their deeds.”*

However, when considering the background behind the verse, we see that it is referring to those who did righteous deeds and died before wine was prohibited. There is no sin on them, since it was not forbidden before their death.

Similarly, the verse: *“So, whichever way you turn, there is the Face of Allah.”*

If we do not look at the reasoning behind this verse, we can take this to mean that one who is praying does not have to face the Qiblah when travelling or when a resident, which contradicts scholarly consensus. When we consider the reasoning behind this verse, we see that this refers to either supererogatory prayer when travelling; or to one who makes every effort to find the direction of the Qiblah but errs in the direction.

MULTIPLE VERSES FOR ONE ASBAB AL-NUZUOL

We also have multiple verses that were revealed regarding one incident or question.

For example, Umm Salamah, one of the wives of the Prophet ﷺ asked: *“O Messenger of Allah! I see that Allah always mentions men (in the Qur'an) but not women.”*

In response Allah Ta'ala revealed three verses:

1. “Do not covet something in which Allah has made some of you superior to others. For men, there is a share of what they earned, and for women, a share for what they earned.”
2. “Surely, Muslim men and Muslim women, believing men and believing women, devout men and devout women, truthful men and truthful women, patient men and patient women, humble men and humble women, and the men who give Sadaqah (charity) and the women who give Sadaqah, and the men who fast and the women who fast, and the men who guard their private parts (against evil acts) and the women who guard (theirs), and the men who remember Allah much and the women who remember (Him) - for them, Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward.”
3. “I do not allow the labour of any worker from among you, male or female, to go to waste.”

The verses of the Qur'an revealed against a particular background are of four kinds in relation to their general or specific application.

1. Verses where a particular person has been named and thus the subject matter applies exclusively to the person. Example: *“Perished are the hands of Abu Labab.”*

The background to revelation of this verse is that when the Prophet ﷺ stood on top of mount Safa and preached Islam to the Quraysh, Abu Lahab retorted: *'Perish be you, did you invite us for this?'*

This was the cause of revelation of the above verse and the name of Abu Lahab has been specifically mentioned. Therefore, the warning refers to him alone.

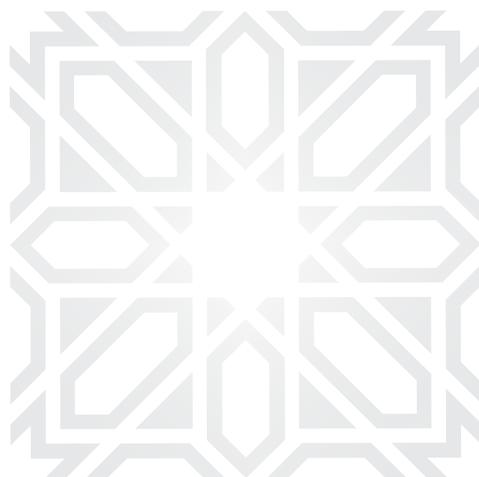
2. In other verses, attributes of a particular person or a group are mentioned without naming anyone and some injunctions are laid down on the basis of these attributes. The commandment shall be exclusively applicable to that person or group. For example: *"Far removed from it will be the most God-fearing who gives his wealth to purify himself."*

This verse was revealed about Hazrat Abu Bakr ؓ, whose practice was to purchase poor slaves and then free them. Here Hazrat Abu Bakr ؓ has not been mentioned by name but the attributes pertain to him, therefore the verse is reserved for him.

3. Verses were revealed against a particular background. However, its words apply universally and arguments also suggest that it would apply to all incidents of a similar nature. Its application shall not be specific to the incident in the background of its revelation. For example, the opening verses of Surah Mujadilah were revealed about Sayyidah Khawla (R) whose husband had said to her: 'You are to me like the back of my mother.'

The verses denote that the commandment given is not exclusively for the husband of Sayyidah Khawla (R) but is applicable to all such people who use these words for their wives.

4. The fourth category will be similar to the third however there is a difference of opinion about it among the commentators.





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