

Research Paper

The Role of Context and Intra-Textual Elements in Discovering the Purpose of Surah Al-Qalam

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Identifying the main purpose (gharad) of Surah Al-Qalam through the perspectives of exegetes and intra- and extra-textual elements is one of the key methods for uncovering the surah's strategic intent. According to the contextual flow (siyaq) and the central pillars of the surah, this study presents a new model to reveal the explicit objective intended by the Divine Legislator. Based on the surah's context, the main theme centers on "warning the polytheists who accused the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) of madness." This main objective

encompasses two subthemes: honoring the character of the Prophet (PBUH) and refuting the false claims of the disbelievers, both of which align with the overall conceptual coherence of the surah.

The surah opens with an oath by the pen, denying any notion of madness in the Prophet (PBUH), and concludes with the same affirmation alongside a reminder of the Qur'an's divine nature. The middle verses depict the moral and ideological traits of the disbelievers and offer a firm response to their false accusations. Criteria for identifying the surah's purpose—such as its name, the use of the disjointed letter 'Nūn', the 'Asma al-Husna',

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contextual coherence, connections between the opening and closing verses, and the thematic unity of key stories—are all consistent with this interpretation.

2. Methods

The study adopts documentary and library research methods, employing note-taking techniques to collect relevant information. The research is descriptive-analytical in nature, combining textual analysis with exegetical comparison to reveal the surah's internal structure and purpose.

3. Findings

One of the most significant discussions in Qur'anic studies today concerns thematic orientation and the purposes (maqasid) of surahs. This field plays a crucial role in understanding the divine message by identifying the principal intent of each surah. A deep contemplation of the Qur'anic text shows that every surah has a central purpose, around which subsidiary themes revolve. The unity of purpose is not limited to monolithic surahs but can also be traced in those with multiple themes.

Surah Al-Qalam is the 68th surah of the Qur'an, containing 52 verses, 301 words, and 1,288 letters. According to many commentators, all its verses were revealed in Mecca before the Prophet's migration (see Suyuti, n.d., vol. 6, p. 249; Ma'rifat, 1415 AH, vol. 1, p. 168; Khorramshahi, 1998, vol. 2, p. 1258; Tusi, n.d., vol. 10, p. 73). Like other Meccan surahs, its central themes revolve around matters of 'faith' and 'ethics'. Some exegetes, however, maintain that parts of it were revealed in Medina (Tabataba'i, 1417 AH, vol. 19, p. 366; Tabarsi, 1993, vol. 10, p. 496; Alusi, 1415 AH, vol. 15, p. 26).

It was revealed after Surah Al-Mulk and before Surah Al-Haqqah, and is also known by the names Nun or Nun wa'l-Qalam (Darwazah, 1383 AH, vol. 1, p. 353). Among

the surahs beginning with disjointed letters, Al-Qalam is considered the first revealed, and, according to many narrations on chronological order, the second surah revealed after Al-'Alaq (Ma'rifat, 1415 AH, vol. 1, p. 133; Mahdavi Rad, 2003, p. 200). Due to its moderate length, it belongs to the group of Mufassalat surahs, constituting roughly half a hizb of the Qur'an (Khorramshahi, 1998, vol. 2, p. 1258). Some scholars also classify it among the Surat al-Mumtahanat (Ramyar, 1983, pp. 360, 596).

In recent years, scholars have paid increasing attention to the geometric or structural organization of Qur'anic surahs, arguing that this new perspective greatly aids in understanding the interrelationships among verses and in discovering both major and minor purposes. Thinkers such as Burhan al-Din al-Biq'a'i, Sayyid Qutb, Allameh Tabataba'i, Muhammad Izzat Darwazah, Sa'id Hawa, Abd al-'Ali Bazargan, and Mahmoud Bastani have each contributed to this goal-oriented interpretation of the Qur'an. The present study aims to evaluate the most significant intra-textual components of Surah Al-Qalam to achieve a more precise understanding of its primary purpose.

4. Conclusion

From various exegetical viewpoints, Surah Al-Qalam presents a coherent structure with multiple themes that serve a unified purpose. According to its contextual flow, the surah's objective is to warn those who accused the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) of madness, asserting the futility of their claims and the inevitability of divine retribution. The surah begins with an oath by the pen, affirming the Prophet's sanity and divine mission, proceeds to invalidate the disbelievers' false accusations through descriptions of their moral corruption, and concludes by emphasizing their

helplessness before the Qur'an. The narrative portions also illustrate the worldly and otherworldly consequences of disbelief.

These findings align with the surah's internal criteria—its title, the relationship between its opening and closing verses, the use of the disjointed letter 'Nūn', recurring and unique words, Asma al-Husna, embedded stories, and contextual harmony—all of which collectively confirm the surah's central theme.

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Authors' Contribution

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Conflict of Interest

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