I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE QUR'AN

The first Qur'anic revelation came to Muhammad around the year AD 610. Muhammad delivered many more verses to his scribes and companions for memorization and recording over the next two decades. These verses were written on stalks of palm leaves, bones of dead animals, flat stones, and other materials. There was no complete manuscript of the Qur'an during this time.

Qur'anic revelation ceased when Muhammad died in the year 632. Shortly after his death, Caliph Abu Bakr needed to suppress a rebellion, and he sent many *huffaz* (people who had memorized portions of the Qur'an) to fight at the Battle of Yamama. Many of these *huffaz* died, and Muslim sources tell us that portions of the Qur'an were forever lost:

> **Ibn Abi Dawud, *Kitab al-Masahif*—**Many (of the passages) of the Qur'an that were sent down were known by those who died on the day of Yamama . . . but they were not known (by those who) survived them, nor were they written down, nor had Abu Bakr, Umar or Uthman (by that time) collected the Qur'an, nor were they found with even one (person) after them.

Abu Bakr decided that it was time to gather what remained of the Qur'an in order to prevent more from being lost, and he appointed Zaid ibn Thabit to this task. After Zaid completed his codex around AD 634, it remained in Abu Bakr's possession until his death, when it was passed on to Caliph Umar. When Umar died, it was given to Hafsa, a widow of Muhammad (see Sahih al-Bukhari 4986).

During Caliph Uthman's reign, approximately 19 years after the death of Muhammad, disputes arose concerning the correct recitation of the Qur'an. Uthman ordered that Hafsa's copy of the Qur'an, along with all known textual materials, should be gathered together so that an official version might be compiled. Zaid ibn Thabit, Abdullah bin az-Zubair, Sa'id bin al-As, and Abdur-Rahman bin Harith worked diligently to construct a revised text of the Qur'an. When it was finished, "Uthman sent to every Muslim province one copy of what they had copied, and ordered that all the other Qur'anic materials, whether written in fragmentary manuscripts or whole copies, be burnt" (Sahih al-Bukhari 4987). The Qur'an we have today is descended from the Uthmanic codex.

II. DISPUTES AMONG MUHAMMAD'S SCHOLARS

Not all Muslims approved of the new Qur'an. Indeed, some of Muhammad's top reciters rejected Zaid's version.

Muhammad once told his followers to "Learn the recitation of the Qur'an from four: from Abdullah bin Masud—he started with him—Salim, the freed slave of Abu Hudhaifa, Mu'adh bin Jabal and Ubayy bin Ka'b" (Sahih al-Bukhari 3808). Interestingly, Ibn Masud (first on Muhammad's list) held that the Qur'an should only have 111 chapters (today's version has 114 chapters), and that chapters 1, 113, and 114 shouldn't have been included in the Qur'an. Ibn Masud regarded these chapters as early Muslim prayers, not as part of the Qur'anic revelation.

Because of this (along with hundreds of other textual disagreements), Ibn Masud went so far as to call the final edition of the Qur'an a deception. He said, "The people have been guilty of deceit in the reading of the *Qur'an*. I like it better to read according to the recitation of him [i.e. Muhammad] whom I love more than that of Zayd Ibn Thabit" (Ibn Sa'd, *Kitab al-Tabaqat al-Kabir*, Vol. 2, p. 444).

Not surprisingly, Ibn Masud advised Muslims to reject Zaid's version of the Qur'an and to keep their own versions—even to hide them so that they wouldn't be confiscated by the Uthmanic government! He said:

> **Jami at-Tirmidhi 3104**—"O you Muslim people! Avoid copying the *Mushaf* and recitation of this man. By Allah! When I accepted Islam he was but in the loins of a disbelieving man"—meaning Zaid bin Thabit—and it was regarding this that Abdullah bin Mas'ud said: "O people of Al-Iraq! Keep the *Musahif* that are with you, and conceal them."

But Ibn Masud wasn't the only one of Muhammad's trusted teachers who disagreed with Zaid's Qur'an. Ubayy ibn Ka'b was Muhammad's best reciter and one of the only Muslims to collect the materials of the Qur'an during Muhammad's lifetime. Yet Ibn Ka'b believed that Zaid's Qur'an was missing two chapters (i.e. Ibn Ka'b's edition had 116 chapters). Later Muslims were therefore forced to reject some of Ibn Ka'b's recitation:

> **Sahih al-Bukhari 5005**—Umar said, "Ubayy was the best of us in the recitation (of the Qur'an), yet we leave some of what he recites." Ubayy says, "I have taken it from the mouth of Allah's Messenger and will not leave it for anything whatever."

Due to these disputes among Muhammad's hand-picked reciters, Muslims are faced with a dilemma. If Muslims say that the Qur'an we have today has been perfectly preserved, they must conclude that Muhammad erred when he chose his best scholars, since he selected men who disagreed with today's text. If, on the other hand, Muslims say that their prophet would know whom to select regarding the recitation of Islam's holiest book, they must conclude that the Qur'an we have today is flawed.

III. MISSING CHAPTERS

Simply knowing the facts about such disputes provides sufficient basis to dismiss the claim that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved. Nevertheless, we may go further by briefly considering certain other problems.

When Ibn Umar—a companion of Muhammad and the son of Caliph Umar—heard people declaring that they had memorized the entire Qur'an, he said to them: "Let none of you say, 'I have learned the whole of the Qur'an,' for how does he know what the whole of it is, when much of it has disappeared? Let him rather say, 'I have learned what remains thereof'" (Abu Ubaid, *Kitab Fada'il-al-Qur'an*). If Ibn Umar believed it was impossible to know the entire Qur'an (because "much of it" had disappeared), how can Muslims today say that they possess the entire Qur'an? Shouldn't they say that they only have *what is left* of the Qur'an?

One of Muhammad's companions, Abu Musa, supported Ibn Umar's claim by pointing out that the early Muslims forgot two entire surahs (chapters) of the Qur'an due to laziness:

> **Sahih Muslim 2286**—Abu Musa al-Ash'ari sent for the reciters of Basra. They came to him and they were three hundred in number. They recited the Qur'an and he said: You are the best among the inhabitants of Basra, for you are the reciters among them. So continue to recite it. (But bear in mind) that your reciting for a long time may not harden your hearts as were hardened the hearts of those before you. We used to recite a surah which resembled in length and severity to (Surah) *Bara'at*. I have, however, forgotten it with the exception of this which I remember out of it: "If there were two valleys full of riches, for the son of Adam, he would long for a third valley, and nothing would fill the stomach of the son of Adam but dust." And we used to recite a surah which resembled one of the surahs of *Musabbihat*, and I have forgotten it . . .

The verse quoted by Abu Musa is not in the Qur'an today, which means that the chapter he referred to was never recovered.

IV. MISSING PASSAGES

We know further that large sections of certain chapters came up missing. For instance, Muhammad's wife Aisha said that roughly two-thirds of Surah 33 was lost:

> **Abu Ubaid, *Kitab Fada'il-al-Qur'an*—**A'isha . . . said, "Surat al-Ahzab (xxxiii) used to be recited in the time of the Prophet with two hundred verses, but when Uthman wrote out the codices he was unable to procure more of it than there is in it today [73 verses]."

According to Aisha, the collectors simply couldn't find all of Surah 33. Why not? As we've seen, many *huffaz* were killed at the Battle of Yamama. Apparently, no one who knew the entire chapter survived.

V. MISSING VERSES

Aisha also tells us that individual verses of the Qur'an disappeared, sometimes in very interesting ways:

> **Sunan ibn Majah 1944**—It was narrated that Aishah said: "The Verse of stoning and of breastfeeding an adult ten times was revealed, and the paper was with me under my pillow. When the Messenger of Allah died, we were preoccupied with his death, and a tame sheep came in and ate it."

The verses on stoning adulterers and breastfeeding adults ten times are not in the Qur'an today. Why? It seems that Aisha had the only copy of these verses, and her sheep ate it.

Interestingly, the Qur'an recited by Muslims at the time of Muhammad's death contained not one, but two verses on breastfeeding an adult. One had been abrogated by the other, but both were still part of the Qur'an.

> **Sahih Muslim 3421**—Aisha reported that it had been revealed in the Holy Qur'an that ten clear sucklings make the marriage unlawful, then it was abrogated by five sucklings and Allah's Apostle died and it was before that time (found) in the Holy Qur'an (and recited by the Muslims).

Muslims who believe that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved should be astonished to learn that the Qur'an they have today does not contain either of these "suckling" verses.

VI. MISSING PHRASES

Since entire chapters, large portions of chapters, and individual verses of the Qur'an were lost, it should come as no surprise that short phrases were forgotten as well. Let's consider two examples.

First, Surah 33:6 declares that "The Prophet is closer to the Believers than their own selves, and his wives are their mothers." Ubayy ibn Ka'b and other early Muslims held that a specific phrase ("and he is a father of them") is missing from this verse. Even the great translator Yusuf Ali admits this in his commentary. Ali writes: "In some Qira'ahs, like that of Ubayy ibn Ka'ab, occur also the words 'and he is a father of them,' which imply his spiritual relationship and connection with the words 'and his wives are their mothers'" (Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, Note 3674). It seems that Muslims have been left with an incomplete verse.

Second, if we open a modern edition of the Qur'an, we find that Surah 2:238 commands Muslims to "Guard strictly your (habit) of prayers, especially the Middle Prayer; and stand before Allah in a devout (frame of mind)." But according to Aisha, Muhammad recited this verse as follows: "Guard strictly (the five obligatory) prayers, and the middle *Salat*, and *Salat Al-Asr*. And stand before Allah with obedience" (Jami at-Tirmidhi 2982). Hence, the phrase "and Salat Al-Asr" is missing from modern editions.

VII. ASSESSMENT

Obviously, the Qur'an has changed significantly over the years. The evidence shows that entire chapters were lost, that large sections of chapters came up missing, that individual verses were forgotten, and that phrases were left out. Muhammad's best teachers and reciters couldn't even agree on which chapters were supposed to be in the Qur'an. Uthman had to burn the earliest manuscripts in an attempt to end disputes among Muslims.

This raises an obvious question. What is the difference between a book that's been perfectly preserved, and one that hasn't been perfectly preserved? If Muslims are right, there's no difference at all. Typical characteristics of a book that hasn't been perfectly preserved are things like missing phrases, missing passages, missing chapters, disagreements about what goes back to the original, etc. But the Qur'an has all of these characteristics. Thus, Muslims who are aware of the evidence but who also want to maintain that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved must say something like this: "Yes, the Qur'an has all the features of a book that hasn't been perfectly preserved, but it's been perfectly preserved anyway." Such an assertion would make no sense.

Anyone who has read the Muslim sources (e.g. Hadith, Tafsir, etc.) knows that the Qur'an has not been perfectly preserved. Muslim scholars are well aware of the fact that the text of the Qur'an was changed and revised, and yet they tell less-educated Muslims that the Qur'an they have today is exactly the same as the Qur'an recited by Muhammad and his companions. In spreading this false claim, Muslim scholars are not only attempting to rewrite history, they are also contradicting some of Muhammad's closest companions.

Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, Aisha, Abu Musa, Ibn Masud, Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Ibn Umar, and others did not believe that the Qur'an has been perfectly preserved. Why do Muslims today cling to a view that was thoroughly rejected by Muhammad's earliest followers?

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HAS THE QUR'AN BEEN PERFECTLY PRESERVED?

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ.

"We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and We will assuredly guard it (from corruption)."

~Qur'an 15:9

(Note: This pamphlet contains verses of the Qur'an. Please handle it with care and do not dispose of it improperly.)

Muslim scholars interpret this *ayah* (verse) as a divine promise that the text of the Qur'an would be preserved perfectly, down to the smallest detail. Thus, it is quite common to hear Muslims around the world claim that the Qur'an has remained entirely unchanged since it was revealed to Muhammad. But is this how Muhammad's companions interpreted chapter 15, verse 9 of the Qur'an? Did the early Muslim community believe that Allah had miraculously preserved their most sacred text? Let's turn to Islam's historical records for guidance.