

Chapter Eleven

The Contradictions of the Qur'an

Christian orientalist researchers allude to dozens of Qur'anic contradictions. They indicate that there are many contradictory verses in the Qur'an. Maybe they are right. Yet, here we are going to examine only a few of these contradictions mentioned by these orientalists, mainly because we would like to quote Muslim scholars, as we agreed upon at the beginning of the book. It is sufficient that these Muslim scholars acknowledge the existence of these contradictions even though they attempted to justify them. Their justifications proved to be feeble, as the reader will soon discover. Also, they completely ignored some other contradictions.

However, concerning the contradictions to which they produced some sensible justifications, we will accept what they offer since we are bound to recognize their interpretations of the Qur'an. Still, we believe that the refutations of the Orientalist researchers are more convincing in many cases. Never-the-less, we will continue to employ the same strategy we have been applying since the beginning of this study. We will cite Muslim scholars and refer the reader to their views.

The First Contradiction

In several verses the Qur'an indicates that it was revealed in the Arabic tongue; that is, in the Arabic language (refer to 14:4; 29:192-195; 13:37; 42:7; 39:28, and 43:3). Yet, in at least two plain verses, the Qur'an commands the deletion of any dialect other than the Arabic language in the Qur'anic text (16:103; 41:44). In his book, "The Itqan" (part 2, p. 105), the Suyuti tells us that many scholars (among them the Shafi'i, ibn Jarir al-Tabari) Their claim is based on these verses. In his book, "al-Risala", edited by Ahmad Shakir (p. 41), the Shafi'i says,

"It is said, 'What is the proof that the Book of God is in the Arabic language without being mixed with any (foreign words)?' The proof is the Book of God itself."

Then the Shafi'i quoted the above mentioned verses (16:103 and 41:44). The Shafi'i want to defend these verses but he is not able to ignore the facts which all Muslim scholars verify along with the companions and the legists such as ibn 'Abbas, Mujahid, ibn Jubayr, 'Akrama, and 'Ata. Also included in this group is the Suyuti as well as other scholars like Dr. Muhammad Rajab who expressed his views in "Solidarity" (al-Tadamun) magazine (April, 1989 issue). In his book, "The Itqan" (part 2, pp. 108-119), the Suyuti lists 118 non-Arabic words recorded in the Qur'an. Ibn 'Abbas, himself (along with other great Companions) asserts that some Qur'anic words are Persian, Ethiopian and Nabatean (p. 105). Dr. Bayyumi also confirms the Suyuti's opinions and views. Faced with these contradictions what does the Suyuti say to justify them? He says in p. 106,

"The existence of a few non-Arabic words does not make the Qur'an non-Arabic as the verses indicate."

And we say to Suyuti: "We know that the Qur'an is an Arabic book, but **the Qur'an denies** that it contains non-Arabic words (refer to verses 16:103; 41:44). It is obvious that this is a contradiction,

especially since there are about 118 non-Arabic words—not just five or ten words. The simple explanation for this contradiction is that Muhammad himself did not know that the origin of the words he employed in the Qur'an were non-Arabic. He was not aware that some of them were Persian, Ethiopian, Berber, Turkish and Nabatean; thus, he claimed that **the entire Qur'an was revealed in pure Arabic language!**

The Second Contradiction

In part 3, p. 83 of "The Itqan", the Suyuti designated many pages under the title, "What is Mistaken For a Contradiction in the Qur'an." He remarks that there is something in the Qur'an to which ibn 'Abbas stopped short of giving any answer. A man told him that one verse in the Qur'an mentions that the length of the day of resurrection is one thousand years and another verse says it is 50 thousand years (al-Sayda: 5 and al-Ma'arij: 4). Ibn 'Abbas said, "These are two days which God—may He be exalted—has mentioned in His book, and God knows best." This is an honest acknowledgment by ibn 'Abbas without any attempt of justification.

When ibn Musayyib, one of the great companions, was asked about these two days and why they contradict each other, he said,

"Ibn 'Abbas avoided talking about them and he is more knowledgeable than me." Yet we find some contemporary scholars who endeavor to justify this contradiction and claim that they are more knowledgeable than ibn 'Abbas! !

The Third Contradiction

In the same part (p. 79), the Suyuti says that the Qur'an states in chapter 6:22-23 that in the day of judgment, infidels attempt to conceal some thing from God while in chapter 4:42 the Qur'an contradicts that and indicates that they do not conceal anything from God. The Suyuti tries to justify this contradiction by saying that ibn 'Abbas was asked about it and he answered that they conceal it by their tongues but their hands and their limbs admit it. Yet the question is still without answer because if their hands admit it in spite of themselves, it should not be said that they did not conceal any fact from God because they did try to hide, but their hands gave it away, as ibn 'Abbas says.

The Fourth Contradiction

In chapter, "al Waqiha," the Qur'an talks about those who are destined to enter paradise. It states in verses 13 and 14 that the majority will be from the nations who came before Muhammad and the minority will be from peoples who believed in Muhammad. But in the same chapter (verses 39 and 40), it is said that the majority will be from those people who came before and after Muhammad also. This is a contradiction in the same chapter. Verse 14 says, "... **a few of those of later time**", but in verse 40, the Qur'an says just the opposite, "... **a multitude** of those of later time."

I have tried to limit this discussion by quoting the interpretations of these verses by Muslim scholars, but

they never presented any clear cut justification for this obvious contradiction (refer to the commentary of the Baydawi, p. 710; Zamakh-Shari in his Kash-Shaf, part 4, p. 458; and the Jalalan, p. 453). All of them just say that "... the formers are the nations from Adam to Muhammad and the latters are the people of Muhammad." Thus, one time the Qur'an remarks, "A minority from others," then it says "a majority or multitude from others." This is an obvious contradiction observed by many and no one has found any refutation against it among Muslim scholars.

The Fifth Contradiction

Pertaining to marriages, it is clear that the Qur'an calls for the possibility of marrying four women at the same time. In Chapter 4:3,

"But if ye fear that you shall not **treat them fairly**, then only one."

But in Chapter 4:129, we read,

"You will not **be able to deal equally** between your wives however much you wish to do so."

In his book, "The Itqan", the Suyuti says,

"In the first verse we understand that fairness is possible while in the second, we perceive that fairness is not possible" (Itqan, part 3, page 85).

Actually, from the Qur'anic point of view as well as according to Muhammad and the rest of the Muslims, "fairness is possible" to be practiced by the evidence that they got (and still get) married to four women. Even Muhammad's companions and his successors did so. Therefore, "**fairness**" **seemed to be possible** for them because it is not reasonable that all of them, including 'Umar, 'Ali, 'Uthman and Muhammad violated the Qur'anic teaching.

Then why does the Qur'an say in chapter 4:129 that "**fairness**" **is not possible**? This is an obvious contradiction which Muslim scholars, among them the Suyuti, realized and comprehended. In order to solve the problem, the Suyuti argued,

"The first verse (meant) fairness in regard to fulfilling the pledges while the second verse is related to the heart's inclination and it is not within the ability of a man to be fair in this matter."

The Jalalan (page 82) and Baydawi (page 130) agree with him. The Baydawi reiterates the same statement and adds,

"Muhammad himself was fair with his women in the matter of human rights, but in the inclination of the heart, he used to say to God, 'Forgive me in regard to that over which I have no control.'"

Because Muhammad, according to all the scholars, favored A'isha over the rest and he did not harbor any inclination toward Sawda bint Zamea. The Zamakh-shari asserts Muhammad's favoritism for A'isha and states that some people have interpreted the second verse to mean that you cannot be fair in love.

Sheik Kashkak indicates in his book of "Opinions" (part 5, page 52), that some favoritism is permissible! Yet, the Zamakh-shari gives another significant opinion when he explicitly says in the Kash-shaf (part 1, pages 568 and 69),

"God has relieved you of (implementing) complete fairness to that which you are able to carry out because it is obligatory to treat the women equally in dividing their portions, expenses and pledges and many other things hardly uncountable. It is something which is beyond (human) ability even if they all were beloved. How would the situation be if the heart inclined toward but some of them!"

Then the Zamakh-shari indicated, "The second verse which indicated that you will not be able to be fair" could mean "to be fair in love" as in what happened to Muhammad and A'isha. Yet, we understand from Zamakh-Shari's statement that "fairness" is not possible in division of portions, financial support, and pledges even if they were all beloved. How much harder it would be if the man's heart was inclined to some of them more than others. He said what is really required is to abstain from being fully inclined toward one woman which would be conducive to neglecting the rest of them. Zamakh-Shari's interpretation here is fully in congruence with the remainder of the verse.

Muslim scholars cited Muhammad as an example, and the issue became more complicated, for what would happen to the poor wife if her husband devoted his love to another wife? She cannot object because, based on the Qur'anic text and by the example set by Muhammad, her husband is innocent of any wrongdoing. The Qur'an asserts that you cannot, from an emotional point-of-view, treat women justly, and Muhammad himself has rejected the request of his daughter, Fatima, to treat all his wives alike and not to bestow on A'isha, his favorite spouse, more than the rest of them. He expressed his favoritism publicly several times. He planned to divorce Sauda (one of his other wives). Some said he already did then he reinstated her when she agreed to relinquish her night for A'isha. What a pity for the Muslim women!

Western orientalist also say that the Qur'an contradicts itself when it alludes to the creation of earth and heaven by saying on the one hand that heaven was created after the earth (many verses) then on the other hand, in one verse, it says the earth was created after the heavens. We have not used this but have attempted and continue to attempt to quote only the Muslim scholars such as Suyuti, Baydawi, Jalalan, and Zamakh-Shari, who endeavor to explain these verses to negate any contradiction against the proper usage of the language, such as by saying the word 'after' means 'before'. Or, as we read in Sura 90:1, they said that God does not swear in the sacred land (that is, Mecca), then in Sura 95:3 we see Him swearing in Mecca the sacred land. The contradiction between these two verses is evident, yet the Suyuti (along with other scholars) denied that there is any contradiction because the word 'no' in Chapter 90 is redundant. It is not intended to negate but to affirm!! The Suyuti mentioned this issue among many others, under the title, "What Was Mistaken to be Contradiction." He summarizes the opinions of the scholars in response to this criticism by saying:

"The people did not reject what you rejected because the Arabs may use 'not' in the context of their conversation and abolish its meaning."