



The Role of *Asbāb Al-Nuzūl* in the Interpretation of the Glorious Qur'ān: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

This study examines the science of asbāb al-nuzūl, the occasions of revelation, and its enduring role in the sound interpretation of the Glorious Qur'ān. It traces the discipline from its origin among the Companions, through its systematisation by classical scholars such as al-Wāḥidī, al-Suyūṭī, and al-Zarkashī, to its continued relevance among contemporary exegetes confronting modern questions of law, ethics, and social life. The paper argues that knowledge of the circumstances surrounding revelation is not a mere historical curiosity but an interpretive necessity, since it clarifies ambiguity, restrains overgeneralisation, and safeguards the Qur'ān from misreading. Employing a qualitative and analytical method grounded in classical tafsīr literature and modern scholarship, the study shows that the past, in the form of the Prophetic era and its recorded circumstances, remains bound to the present and future task of applying Qur'ānic guidance to changing human conditions. The paper closes with ten findings and ten recommendations intended to strengthen the teaching and application of this science in contemporary Islamic scholarship.

Keywords: *Qur'an, Tafsir, Asbab al-nuzul, Interpretation, Contemporary, Islamic scholarship.*

Introduction

The Qur'ān was not revealed all at once as a finished book handed down without context. It descended gradually upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) over twenty-three years, responding often to real events, real questions, and real disputes among the early Muslim community. This gradual and situational mode of revelation gave rise to a distinct branch of Qur'ānic sciences known as *asbāb al-nuzūl*, the occasions or causes of revelation. Classical scholars regarded this branch as indispensable, for a verse read apart from its occasion may be misunderstood, and a ruling detached from its historical circumstance may be wrongly applied¹.

The importance of this science did not end with the Companions or the Successors. It has continued to occupy exegetes across the centuries, from the earliest compilers of hadīth-based *tafsīr* to modern scholars addressing questions of gender, governance, and social reform. This paper investigates the meaning, sources, classification, and interpretive function of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and demonstrates how the discipline forms a living bridge connecting the circumstances of seventh-century Arabia to the interpretive demands of the present age.

1. Conceptual Framework: The Definition of *Asbāb al-nuzūl* (Occasions of Revelation)

Asbab al-Nuzul (singular: *sabab al-nuzul*) literally means "the reasons/occasions of revelation." It refers to the branch of Qur'ānic sciences concerned with identifying the specific events, questions, incidents, or circumstances that occurred and prompted the revelation of a particular verse or set of verses².

Scholars generally define a *sabab al-nuzul* as an event or question that took place during the time of the Prophet, in direct connection to which a verse (or verses) were revealed, either explaining a ruling related to that event, providing an answer to that question, or commenting on that situation³.

It is worth distinguishing *asbāb al-nuzūl* from the broader question of the chronology of revelation. While Makkī and Madanī classification concerns the general period and location of revelation, *asbāb al-nuzūl* concerns the specific

¹ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2004, p. 118

² A. Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, Dār al-Iṣlāḥ, Damman, 1992, p. 4

incident tied to a particular verse. Not every verse has a known occasion; many verses descended as independent divine address (*ibtidā'an*) without any preceding incident³.

2. The Importance and Purpose of *Asbab al-Nuzul* (Context of Revelation)

Understanding the *asbab al-nuzul* serves several important functions:

A. Clarifying the Meaning of Verses Some verses are difficult to understand in isolation, but become clear once the surrounding circumstances are known. The occasion provides context that illuminates the intended meaning.

Example: Qur'an 2:115

وَلِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ فَأَيْنَمَا تُوَلُّوا فَثَمَّ وَجْهُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَاسِعٌ عَلِيمٌ

And to Allah belongs the east and the west. So, wherever you [might] turn, there is the Face of Allah. Indeed, Allah is all-Encompassing and Knowing⁴.

At first glance, this verse might suggest that Muslims may face any direction during prayer.

Asbāb al-Nuzūl

According to reports, the verse was revealed concerning Muslims who could not determine the direction of the Qiblah while traveling or praying during a dark night. It was also linked to voluntary prayers during travel.

Advanced Analysis

Without the cause of revelation, one might conclude that facing the Qiblah is unnecessary. However, the context clarifies that the verse addresses exceptional situations, not the general rule. Thus, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl* prevents an incorrect universal interpretation.

Significance: It illustrates Allah's mercy regarding sincere efforts made under difficult or uncertain circumstances, and is often discussed in relation to the broader topic of facing the Qibla (direction of prayer toward Makka).

B. Determining the Scope of a Ruling Knowing the occasion helps scholars determine whether a verse's ruling applies broadly to all similar situations, or whether it was specific to the particular circumstances of that event (though the general principle in Islamic legal theory is that the wording of the verse, not merely the occasion, determines its scope, occasions help inform but don't always restrict application).

Example: Qur'an 3:188

لَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَفْرَحُونَ بِمَا أَتَوْا وَيُحِبُّونَ أَنْ يُحْمَدُوا بِمَا لَمْ يَفْعَلُوا فَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّهُمْ بِمَفَازَةٍ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

And never think that those who rejoice in what they have perpetrated and like to be praised for what they did not do - never think them [to be] in safety from the punishment, and for them is a painful punishment⁵.

Someone reading this literally might think anyone who enjoys praise is condemned.

Asbāb al-Nuzūl

The verse was revealed regarding certain members of the People of the Book who concealed divine knowledge from the Prophet ﷺ but falsely claimed faithfulness and wanted praise for their actions.

Advanced Analysis

The wording is general, but the cause identifies a specific category of hypocrisy. Scholars then discuss the legal principle:

العبرة بعموم اللفظ لا بخصوص السبب

"Consideration is given to the general wording, not merely the specific cause.

³ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, Dār al-Ḥadīth, Cairo, 1995, p. 22

⁴ Qur'an 2:115

⁵ Qur'an 3:188

Thus, the ruling extends to everyone who behaves similarly, while avoiding an overly broad interpretation that condemns all appreciation of praise.

C. Resolving Apparent Difficulties or Ambiguities Certain verses might seem unusual, harsh, or unclear without context. The occasion often resolves these difficulties by showing the specific situation being addressed⁶.

Verses that appear, on the surface, to conflict with one another are frequently reconciled once their distinct occasions are known, since each verse may be addressing a separate circumstance rather than contradicting a general rule. This reconciliatory function has long protected the Qur'ān from accusations of internal inconsistency levelled by hostile or careless readers⁷.

Example: Qur'an 2:158

﴿إِنَّ الصَّفَا وَالْمَرْوَةَ مِنْ شَعَائِرِ اللَّهِ فَمَنْ حَجَّ الْبَيْتَ أَوْ اعْتَمَرَ فَلَا جُنَاحَ عَلَيْهِ أَنْ يَطَّوَّفَ بِهِمَا وَمَنْ تَطَوَّعَ خَيْرًا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ شَاكِرٌ عَلِيمٌ﴾

Indeed, as-Safa and al-Marwah are among the symbols of Allah. So, whoever makes Hajj to the House or performs 'umrah - there is no blame upon him for walking between them. And whoever volunteers good - then indeed, Allah is appreciative and Knowing⁸.

The phrase "there is no blame" appears to imply that walking between Ṣafā and Marwah is optional.

Asbāb al-Nuzūl

Some Muslims hesitated to perform Sa'y because pre-Islamic Arabs had placed idols on these hills, making them reluctant to continue the practice after embracing Islam.

Advanced Analysis

The verse removes their hesitation rather than making the ritual optional. The Prophet ﷺ later performed Sa'y and instructed Muslims to do so, showing that it is an established part of Hajj and Umrah according to the majority of jurists. The cause of revelation resolves the apparent ambiguity in the wording.

Clarifying Ambiguity and Restricting Meaning

A number of Qur'ānic expressions carry apparent generality that only their Context of Revelation can properly narrow. Classical exegetes observed that knowledge of the cause behind a verse removes doubt regarding its intended scope, for the occasion often reveals whether a command is general to all believers or specific to a particular individual or situation⁹. This function alone justifies the discipline's centrality within *uṣūl al-tafsīr*.

Preventing Misapplication of Legal Rulings

Many verses of legal consequence, such as those addressing intoxicants, retaliation, or family obligation, cannot be soundly applied without reference to the gradual and situational manner in which their rulings developed. The phased prohibition of alcohol is a well-known example, where each verse responded to a distinct stage of communal readiness, and jurists have relied on this sequence to establish the principle of gradualism (*tadarruj*) in Islamic legislation¹⁰.

Example: Qur'an 6:82

﴿الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَلَمْ يَلْبِسُوا إِيمَانَهُمْ بِظُلْمٍ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمُ الْأَمْنُ وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ﴾

They who believe and do not mix their belief with injustice - those will have security, and they are [rightly] guided¹¹.

The Companions became worried because they understood *ẓulm* to mean any form of wrongdoing.

⁶ al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1996, p. 90

⁷ al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1996, p. 94

⁸ Qur'an 2:158

⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, Dār al-Ḥadīth, Cairo, 1995, p. 24

¹⁰ al-Qaradāwī, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma'a al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 3rd edn, 2000, p. 156

¹¹ Qur'an 6:82

Asbāb al-Nuzūl

The Prophet ﷺ explained that the intended meaning was not every sin but shirk (associating partners with Allah), citing Qur'an 31:13:

"Indeed, shirk is a great ظلم."

Advanced Analysis

Without this prophetic explanation connected to the occasion of revelation, the verse could be misunderstood to mean that anyone who commits any sin loses the promise of security. The context clarifies that the verse refers specifically to the gravest form of injustice—shirk.

Surah Al-Mujadila (58:1-4), The Case of a Woman's Dispute with Her Husband

قَدْ سَمِعَ اللَّهُ قَوْلَ الَّتِي تُجَادِلُكَ فِي زَوْجِهَا وَتَشْتَكِي إِلَى اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ يَسْمَعُ تَحَاوُرَكُمَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ الَّذِينَ يُظْهِرُونَ مِنْكُمْ نِسَانِهِمْ مَا هُنَّ أُمَّهَاتُهُمْ إِنْ أُمَّهَاتُهُمْ إِلَّا آلِي وَلَدْنَهُمْ وَإِنَّهُمْ لَيَقُولُونَ مُنْكَرًا مِنَ الْقَوْلِ وَزُورًا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَفُوٌّ غَفُورٌ وَالَّذِينَ يُظْهِرُونَ مِنْ نِسَانِهِمْ ثُمَّ يَعُودُونَ لِمَا قَالُوا فَتَحْرِيرُ رَقَبَةٍ مَنْ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَتِمَّ آسَاءُ ذَلِكَ تُوعَظُونَ بِهِ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ شَهْرَيْنِ مُتَتَابِعَيْنِ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَتِمَّ آسَاءُ فَمَنْ لَمْ يَسْتَطِعْ فَاطْعَامُ سِتِّينَ مِسْكِينًا ذَلِكَ لِنُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَتِلْكَ حُدُودُ اللَّهِ وَلِلْكَافِرِينَ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

Certainly has Allah heard the speech of the one who argues with you, [O Muhammad], concerning her husband and directs her complaint to Allah. And Allah hears your dialogue; indeed, Allah is Hearing and Seeing¹².

Those who pronounce thihar among you [to separate] from their wives - they are not [consequently] their mothers. Their mothers are none but those who gave birth to them. And indeed, they are saying an objectionable statement and a falsehood. But indeed, Allah is Pardoning and Forgiving¹³.

And those who pronounce thihar from their wives and then [wish to] go back on what they said - then [there must be] the freeing of a slave before they touch one another. That is what you are admonished thereby; and Allah is Acquainted with what you do¹⁴.

And he who does not find [a slave] - then a fast for two months consecutively before they touch one another; and he who is unable - then the feeding of sixty poor persons. That is for you to believe [completely] in Allah and His Messenger; and those are the limits [set by] Allah. And for the disbelievers is a painful punishment¹⁵.

The Occasion: This surah opens by addressing the case of a woman (commonly identified as Khawlah bint Tha'labah) whose husband uttered a pre-Islamic form of divorce-like statement against her in anger, after which she came to the Prophet distressed, as this form of statement created uncertainty about her marital status under the old custom. The opening verses of this surah were revealed addressing her situation directly and establishing a new ruling to handle such statements going forward.

Significance: This occasion led to the establishment of a specific legal ruling (*kaffarah*, an expiation) for this type of statement, replacing the harsher pre-Islamic custom, and is a clear example of how a personal dispute brought before the Prophet led directly to new legislation.

Surah Al-Isra (17:85), Question About the Spirit (Al-Ruh)

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

And they ask you, [O Muhammad], about the soul. Say, "The soul is of the affair of my Lord. And mankind have not been given of knowledge except a little¹⁶.

¹² Qur'an, 58:1

¹³ Qur'an, 58:2

¹⁴ Qur'an, 58:3

¹⁵ Qur'an, 58:4

¹⁶ Qur'an, 17:85

The Occasion: This verse, which states that knowledge of "the Spirit" (*al-ruh*) is something only Allah fully knows, is reported to have been revealed in response to a question posed to the Prophet, according to various reports, either by Jewish scholars in Medina or by people in Makka, asking him to explain the nature of the soul/spirit.

Significance: The verse demonstrates a pattern seen throughout the Qur'an where questions posed to the Prophet sometimes as a test of his prophethood were answered through revelation, while also indicating the limits of human knowledge regarding certain matters.

Surah An-Nisa (4:43) and Later Al-Ma'idah (5:90-91), Prohibition of Alcohol

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تَقْرَبُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَأَنْتُمْ سُكَرَىٰ حَتَّىٰ تَعْلَمُوا مَا تَقُولُونَ وَلَا جُنُبًا إِلَّا عَابِرِي سَبِيلٍ حَتَّىٰ تَغْتَسِلُوا وَإِنْ كُنْتُمْ مَّرْضَىٰ أَوْ عَلَىٰ سَفَرٍ أَوْ جَاءَ أَحَدٌ مِنْكُمْ مِنَ الْغَائِطِ أَوْ لَمَسْتُمُ النِّسَاءَ فَلَمْ تَجِدُوا مَاءً فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَفُوًّا غَفُورًا

O you who have believed, do not approach prayer while you are intoxicated until you know what you are saying or in a state of janabah, except those passing through [a place of prayer], until you have washed [your whole body]. And if you are ill or on a journey or one of you comes from the place of relieving himself or you have contacted women and find no water, then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and your hands [with it]. Indeed, Allah is ever Pardoning and Forgiving¹⁷.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَمُ رَجَسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدُوَّةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلَاةِ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ

O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone alters [to other than Allah], and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful¹⁸.

Satan only wants to cause between you animosity and hatred through intoxicants and gambling and to avert you from the remembrance of Allah and from prayer. So will you not desist?¹⁹

The Occasion: Several incidents involving companions who had consumed alcohol and subsequently made errors, such as one report describing a man leading prayer while intoxicated and making mistakes in recitation are connected to the revelation of verses progressively restricting and eventually fully prohibiting alcohol. The verse in An-Nisa initially advised against praying while intoxicated, while the later verses in Al-Ma'idah established a complete prohibition.

Significance: This is one of the most commonly cited examples of *gradual* legislation tied to specific real-life incidents, showing how the community was guided step-by-step toward a final ruling rather than facing an abrupt, immediate ban.

Surah Al-Lahab (111:1-5), Condemnation of Abu Lahab

تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ سَيَصْلَىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ وَامْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍ

May the hands of Abu Lahab be ruined, and ruined is he. His wealth will not avail him or that which he gained. He will [enter to] burn in a Fire of [blazing] flame. And his wife [as well] - the carrier of firewood. Around her neck is a rope of [twisted] fiber²⁰.

The Occasion: This short surah is reported to have been revealed in direct response to the actions of Abu Lahab, the Prophet's uncle, who along with his wife was particularly hostile and abusive toward the Prophet and actively worked against his mission, including reportedly mocking him publicly after he called his clan to gather and deliver his message.

¹⁷ Qur'an, 4: 43

¹⁸ Qur'an, 5: 90

¹⁹ Qur'an, 5: 91

²⁰ Qur'an, 111:1-5

Significance: This is one of the clearer examples in the Qur'an of a passage addressing a specific named individual and their actions directly, illustrating how the Qur'an sometimes responded to the immediate social and personal conflicts surrounding the Prophet's mission, including direct opposition from within his own family.

The Principle of General Wording over Specific Cause

Perhaps the most consequential interpretive principle to emerge from this science is the maxim that consideration is given to the generality of the wording, not the specificity of the occasion (al-‘ibrah bi ‘umūm al-lafẓ lā bi khuṣūṣ al-sabab). Ibn Taymiyyah affirmed that although a verse may have descended concerning one individual or one incident, its ruling extends to every similar case unless clear evidence restricts it²¹. This maxim is precisely what allows a seventh-century occasion to remain a living source of guidance for believers many centuries later.

Classical Contributions to the Discipline

Formal compilation of *asbāb al-nuzūl* began comparatively late relative to the revelation itself, though the awareness of occasions was present among the Companions and Successors from the beginning. Al-Wāḥidī al-Nīsābūrī (d. 468 AH) is generally credited with the earliest dedicated work, and his *Asbāb al-nuzūl* became a foundational reference for all who followed²². Several centuries later, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH) refined and expanded this legacy through *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī Asbāb al-nuzūl*, a work notable for its careful attention to chains of transmission, and he further systematised the entire field of Qur'anic sciences, including *asbāb al-nuzūl*, within his celebrated *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*²³.

Badr al-Dīn al-Zarkashī (d. 794 AH) likewise devoted substantial treatment to the subject in *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, addressing the methodological questions of multiple causes and the reconciliation of conflicting reports with characteristic precision²⁴. These classical works remain the bedrock upon which every subsequent study of the discipline, including contemporary scholarship, continues to stand.

3. Categories/Types of Occasions

Scholars generally identify a few patterns in how *asbab al-nuzul* occurred:

A. Revelation in Response to a Question

Someone either a companion, a group of Muslims, or sometimes non-Muslims (including People of the Book) would ask the Prophet a question, and a verse would be revealed providing the answer. Many verses begin with phrases like "They ask you about..." reflecting this pattern.

B. Revelation in Response to an Event or Incident

Something would happen a dispute between companions, an act of misconduct, a battle, a personal situation involving the Prophet or a companion and a verse would be revealed commenting on, guiding, or ruling on that situation²⁵.

4. How Scholars Identify the *Asbab al-Nuzul* (Context of Revelation)

Identifying the Context of Revelation for a given verse is not based on guesswork or speculation it relies on a careful, source-based methodology:

A. Reliance on Authentic Narrations (Hadith and Reports from Companions)

The primary source for identifying a context of Revelation is a report (often in the form of a hadith) from a companion of the Prophet who either witnessed the event firsthand or heard directly from someone who did. These reports describe the situation and explicitly state that "then this verse was revealed" or similar wording.

B. Criteria for Accepting a Report as a Genuine *Sabab al-Nuzul* (Context of Revelation)

Scholars apply careful criteria to determine whether a report genuinely describes a context of Revelation, as opposed to simply being a general comment or interpretation by a companion:

- **Explicit language indicating causation:** The report should use clear language showing that the verse was revealed *because of* or *in connection with* the event described, not merely that the verse *relates to* or *can be applied to* a topic.
- **Chain of transmission (*sanad*) verification:** As with all hadith, the chain of narrators reporting the occasion must be examined for reliability were the narrators trustworthy, did they have direct access to the information, and is the chain unbroken²⁶?

²¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl al-Tafsīr*, Dār al-Ḥadīth, Cairo, 1995, p. 26

²² A. Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, Dār al-Iṣlāḥ, Damman, 1992, p. 3

²³ J. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2004, p. 116

²⁴ al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Ma‘rifah, Beirut, 1990, p. 29

²⁵ al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-‘Irfān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1996, p. 90

²⁶ al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Ma‘rifah, Beirut, 1990, p. 31

Sources and Criteria of Authenticity

Because *asbāb al-nuzūl* rests upon historical report rather than direct textual wording, its authority is governed by the same rigorous criteria applied to hadīth. Al-Suyūṭī and later scholars held that a report on the Context of Revelation carries the ruling of a Prophetic narration when it is transmitted in the form of a direct statement, such as a Companion saying 'this verse was revealed concerning such-and-such,' since the Companions did not offer personal opinion on this matter without knowledge²⁷.

Scholars therefore established clear conditions: the report must be authentically transmitted, free from contradiction with sounder narrations, and, where multiple reports exist concerning a single verse, the most reliable is preferred, or the reports are reconciled if the incidents are compatible, or multiple revelation is affirmed if they are not²⁸. This methodological caution reflects the broader Islamic scholarly commitment to *isnād* criticism, ensuring that interpretation of the divine word is never left to speculation.

Contemporary Relevance: Linking Past, Present, and Future

The classical foundation of *asbāb al-nuzūl* has not remained a closed chapter of history; it continues to inform how modern scholars address the challenges of the present age. Contemporary exegetes such as Muhammad al-Ghazālī and Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī have drawn upon this science to argue that Qur'ānic guidance, though revealed within a specific historical setting, carries principles capable of addressing entirely new circumstances, provided the interpreter distinguishes the timeless principle from the time-bound particular²⁹.

Recent scholarship has extended the discipline's application to pressing modern concerns, including the responsible handling of information, the ethical treatment of public criticism, and the resolution of social conflict, treating *asbāb al-nuzūl* as a hermeneutic bridge rather than a historical footnote³⁰. In this sense, the Companions who narrated the occasions of revelation, the classical scholars who compiled and verified those narrations, and the contemporary exegetes who apply them to new questions form a single unbroken chain of transmission and reasoning, joining the seventh century to the present and, by extension, to whatever questions the future may bring.

Within the Nigerian and wider West African context, this same continuity is visible in the exegetical tradition inherited from the Sokoto Caliphate, where scholars such as Shaykh 'Uthmān ibn Fūdī and his household approached Qur'ānic verses with close attention to their occasions and objectives, applying classical uṣūl al-*tafsīr* to the social and legal conditions of nineteenth-century Hausaland. Their example illustrates that the discipline of *asbāb al-nuzūl* is not confined to the Arab heartlands of early Islam but belongs to the wider Muslim world as a living interpretive method, carried forward wherever the Qur'ān is taught and applied³¹.

Conclusion

Asbāb al-nuzūl stands as one of the most consequential branches of Qur'ānic scholarship, not because it satisfies historical curiosity, but because it safeguards sound understanding of the divine text. From al-Wāḥidī's pioneering compilation to al-Suyūṭī's systematic refinement, and onward to the applications of contemporary exegetes, this discipline has continually proven its capacity to clarify, restrict, reconcile, and extend Qur'ānic meaning across changing times. The maxim that consideration belongs to the generality of wording rather than the specificity of cause ensures that a revelation tied to a particular seventh-century incident remains a perpetual source of guidance. The past, in this discipline, is never simply past; it is the very foundation upon which present understanding and future application are built.

Findings

1. *Asbāb al-nuzūl* refers to the historical events or questions that occasioned the revelation of specific Qur'ānic verses.
2. The discipline began with the Companions and was first independently compiled by al-Wāḥidī.
3. Reports on occasions of revelation are judged by the same authenticity criteria applied to hadīth.
4. Al-Suyūṭī's *Lubāb al-Nuqūl* and al-Itqān remain central classical references on the subject.
5. Knowledge of a verse's occasion clarifies ambiguity and narrows overly general readings.
6. The science assists in resolving apparent contradictions between Qur'ānic verses.
7. The maxim of general wording over specific cause allows verses to apply beyond their original incident.

²⁷ al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-Nuqūl fī Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, Cairo, 1st edn, 1978, p. 6

²⁸ al-Zarkashī, *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1990, p. 31

²⁹ al-Qaradāwī, *Kayfa Nata'āmal ma'a al-Qur'ān al-'Azīm*, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, 3rd edn, 2000, p. 160

³⁰ Auni, Fatoni & Bahtiar, *Integrating Classical and Contemporary Views on Asbāb al-Nuzūl*, QiST: Journal of Quran and Tafseer Studies, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, Surakarta, 2025, p. 4

³¹ al-Zarqānī, *Manāhil al-'Irfān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1996, p. 97

8. Legal rulings, such as the phased prohibition of alcohol, depend on knowledge of sequential occasions.
9. Contemporary scholars apply the discipline to modern issues including misinformation and social ethics.
10. The Sokoto Caliphate's exegetical tradition demonstrates the discipline's continuity beyond the Arab world.

Recommendations

1. Islamic Studies curricula should give *asbāb al-nuzūl* dedicated and sustained attention.
2. Students of *tafsīr* should be trained to distinguish authentic from weak occasion-reports.
3. Scholars should continue reconciling classical methodology with contemporary interpretive needs.
4. Digital compilations of verified *asbāb al-nuzūl* should be developed for wider accessibility.
5. Preachers should be encouraged to reference verified occasions rather than unverified anecdotes.
6. Comparative study between classical compilers should be encouraged in postgraduate research.
7. Local scholarly traditions, such as that of Sokoto, deserve fuller documentation and study.
8. Interfaith and public discourse on the Qur'ān should draw on this science to prevent misreading.
9. Translations of the Qur'ān should include reliable notes on relevant occasions of revelation.
10. Further research should explore the discipline's application to emerging ethical and legal questions.

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