

## **The Role of Religious Presuppositions and Precomprehensions in Selecting Narratives Related to the Cause of Revelation (Asbab al-Nuzul)**

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### **ملخص البحث**

أسباب النزول لها دور مهم في تفسير القرآنية. من ناحية أخرى ، مواجهة هذه الروايات ، تلعب الافتراضات المسبقة والفهم المسبق دورًا مهمًا في تحديدها. يحاول هذا البحث دراسة روايات أسباب النزول في تفسير المنير حول العقيدة والشريعة والمنهاج (بقلم وهبة الزحيلي) وشرح دور افتراضات وهبة الزحيلي. تستخدم هذه الدراسة طريقة بحث الوصف المكتبية التي كانت تناقش الموضوع مع المنهج الوصفي التحليلي. يوضح هذا البحث أنه في العديد من الحالات ، تأثر وهبة الزحيلي بالافتراضات الدينية وقبل الفهم واستعملها لتطوير أهدافه التفسيرية.

*كلمات المفتاحية: وهبة الزحيلي، تفسير المنير، أسباب النزول*

### **Abstract**

The narratives of the cause of revelation (Asbab al-Nuzul) play a decisive role in the interpretation of Quranic verses. On the other hand, when coming across with these narratives, presuppositions, and precomprehensions play an important role in selecting them. This research tries to study the narratives of the cause of revelation in the *Tafsir al Munir fi al Aqidah wa al Shariah wa al Manhaj* (by Karya Wahbah al Zuhaili) and explain the role of Wahbah al Zuhaili's religious presuppositions and precomprehensions in selecting narratives related to the cause of revelation (Asbab al-Nuzul). This study uses library research method that has been discussing the subject with a descriptive-analytical approach. This research shows that in many cases, Wahbah al Zuhaili has been influenced by religious presuppositions and precomprehension and has used them to develop his interpretative goals.

*Keywords: Wahbah al Zuhaili, Tafsir al-Munir, Asbab an-Nuzul*

## A. Introduction

During the history of Islam, Part of Quranic researches has been devoted to the narratives on the cause of Quranic verses revelation. An event for which a Quranic verse has been revealed to explain its commandment at the time of its occurrence is the cause of revelation. In other words, cause of revelation is an event that occurred at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) or it is a question which has been asked Prophet (PBUH) and following that event or responding that question, God has sent a Quranic verse or verses<sup>1</sup>. Most of the Quran researchers and the commentators believe that knowing about the causes of revealing the verses is necessary for understanding the correct referent of the verses and commenting their real purpose so without knowing about the cause of revealing the verses, it is impossible to understand the correct meaning of the verses.

The narratives on the cause of revelation have an outstanding role in understanding and interpreting the Quranic verses so they have always been at serious damages. One of these damages is the entry of the religious presuppositions and precomprehensions to these narratives. The role of this damage becomes more apparent when some people choose to adapt narratives in accordance with their religious presuppositions and precomprehensions. Thus, they accept or reject a particular opinion or personality, and try to benefit these narratives in favor of their thoughts, using a critique and analysis in accordance with their interests.

In this regard, the present research tries to study the narratives on the cause of revelation in *Tafsir al Munir fi al Aqidah wa al Shariah wa al Manhaj* and evaluate the effect of the commentator's religious precomprehensions and presuppositions on the selection of narratives on the cause of revelation. This way, an appropriate opportunity will be provided to identify the weak and strong points of *Tafsir al Munir fi al Aqidah wa al Shariah wa al Manhaj*.

A series of constant or non-constant, scientific or non-scientific data, religious and sectarian thoughts and tendencies, which has been used as the entry to understanding, cognition, and interpretation, and affect the result of understanding are called<sup>2</sup>. In other words, it can be said that presuppositions are a set of knowledge that the commentator does not directly express them when interpreting Quranic verses, but prior to interpreting the verses, he had accepted them. As presuppositions have become the interpreter's mentally accepted fact, he pays attention to them. It has long been the accepted principle of understanding the Quran that

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<sup>1</sup> Badruddin Mohammad bin Abdullah Zerkashi, *Al-Burhan Fi Oloom Al-Quran*, (Beirut: Dar al-Ahya al-Kotoab al-Arabiya, 1988), 35. Seyyed Mohammad Bagher Hojjati, *Asbab Al-Nazoul* (Tehran: Islamic Culture Publishing House, 1990), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, *The Number of Readings* (Qom: Imam Khomeini Institute of Education and Research, 2003), 25.

the Holy Quran is understandable. Quran is not a mystery that cannot be understood in any way, nor understanding it, is so easy that anyone can deep down it. Therefore, the Quran should be interpreted. Hence, a danger that is always a threat to the interpretation of the Quran is its interpretation based on the commentator's mental background, interests, expectations and religious and sectarian preconceptions. The reason is that when one's mind is disconcerted and is adhered to certain theories, in fact, he is wearing colorful glasses by which he considers the Quran as he desires and he wants to impose his theory on the Quran and adapt the Qur'an to it. Therefore, it should be called "adaptation" and not "commentary"; therefore, one who contributes his ideas to the interpretation of the Quran and based on those theories interpret the verses, presents the meaning other than the meaning of the verse itself<sup>3</sup>.

Therefore, the commentator of the Quran should not take his views and opinions as "criterion" and interpret the Quran with his presupposition and preconception. The true understanding occurs when a person with a mind free of any predetermined prejudices and expectations interprets the Book of God.

## **B. Evaluating the effect of narratives on the cause of revelation on understanding and commentary of Quranic verses**

There are two groups of Quranic verses and surahs: a group of them is revealed without any relation to events and is not the answer to any question. But another group of verses has been revealed following good or evil events or in response to the addressees' questions. These events are related to the time of the revelation, but as these verses refer to the problems of the human society, they have provided solutions to them<sup>4</sup>. In such cases, the meaning of the verses may also be clear without being aware of their cause of revelation. However, knowing about their causes of revelation is beneficial since the individuals know about the details of the subject under discussion. Furthermore, being aware of the causes of revelation makes it easier to understand the meaning and the purpose of the verses<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the commentators and Quran researchers have emphasized on the role of the causes of revelation in understanding and interpreting the verses, and have considered them as one of the most important preconditions of interpretation. In this regard, some even believe that interpreting without knowing about the

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<sup>3</sup> Mohammad Hussein Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan Fei Tafsir Al-Quran* (Beirut: Institute of Literature, 2011), 10.

<sup>4</sup> Anaye Ghazi, *Asbab Al-Nazwol Al-Qurani* (Beirut: Dar al-Jil, 1991), 10.

<sup>5</sup> Hojjati, *Asbab Al-Nazoul*, 20. Ali akbar Babaei, *Methodology of Quran Interpretation* (Tehran: The field of research and university, 2002), 145.

cause of revealing Quranic verses is forbidden. They also believe that it is impossible to understand the teachings of the Quran without knowing about the cause of revealing the verses.

**a. The position of narratives on the cause of revelation in Tafsir al-Munir**

Since the causes of revealing Quranic verses are wars, events, and questions related to the religious rules, the interpretations whose historical and jurisprudential aspects are heavier and are quoted by Imams, mainly state more narratives on the cause of revealing verses. Considering what was said, Tafsir al-Munir is considered as such interpretations since its jurisprudential and narrative aspect is highlighted and it allocated significant parts for expressing historical events and its author selected the narratives with the Sunnis' criteria. On the other hand, Wahbah al Zuhaili places more importance on the causes of revelation and believes that knowing the causes of revealing the verses has many benefits and plays an important role in the interpretation and understanding of divine verses<sup>6</sup>. But Wahbah al Zuhaili is more criticised for the influence of his religious presuppositions and precomprehension in selecting the narratives related to the causes of revealing Quranic verses. These presuppositions and precomprehensions are presented in Tafsir al-Munir in different ways which are discussed in below:

Some of the causes of revelation expressed in the commentary of Al-Munir are in contrast with the dignity of the Moslems' Prophet (PBUH) while, Wahbah al Zuhaili defends the innocence and high position of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). For instance, he believes that the first verses of Surah Abasa which is about the Prophet (PBUH) and his frown are made by ibn Umm-Maktum (one of Prophet Muhammad's companions). Of course, he considers this behavior of the Prophet as failure to do the better; therefore, his innocence is not damaged, but this behavior originated from his human nature, such as pleasure, anger, laugh and cry and these are the things that the religious duties are removed from them<sup>7</sup>.

Although Wahbah al Zuhaili has tried to justify the revelation of these verses, accepting that fictitious cause of revelation calls the Prophet's (PBUH) innocence into question calls it into doubt. On the other hand, it is not fair to attribute such behavior to the Prophet (PBUH), as in Quran, God has introduced him as an example of humanity, and praises his moral ethos.

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<sup>6</sup> Wahbah Zuhaili, *Al-Tafsir Al-Munir Al-i-Al-Iqidah and Al-Shariah and Al-Munhaj* (Dameshgh: Dar al-Fakr, 1991), 62.

<sup>7</sup> Wahbah Zuhaili, *Al-Tafsir Al-Munir Al-i-Al-Iqidah and Al-Shariah and Al-Munhaj* (Dameshgh: Dar al-Fakr, 1991), 60-61.

Therefore, most Shiite commentators do not confirm the so-called narratives that express this event and consider these quotations far from the prophet's dignity.

**b. Fictitious cause of revelation about Prophet Mohammad's (PBUH) companions**

Sunnis consider a high position for the Prophet's companions. They believe that all Prophet's companions are fair, deserve to be in paradise, patristic and at a lower rank than the prophet, they are God's the best creatures<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, as some commentators could not find a specific virtue in them, they have tried to attribute some fictitious virtues to them through false reports. Therefore, some causes of revelation which are introduced by the author of Tafsir al-Monir when interpreting some verses, mention the virtues and position of some of the Companions, especially the two first caliphs. Some examples are given in below:

About the cause of revealing verse 67 of Surah Al-Anfal, Wahbah al-Zuhaili refers to a narrative which states that the Prophet (PBUH) consulted Abu Bakr and Umar. According to that narrative, that verse confirmed Umar's opinion while it criticized Abu Bakr's suggestion and the Prophet's act<sup>9</sup>. In Al-Durr Al-Manthur Fi Tafsir Bil-Ma'thur (book) there is another narrative which says that people disagreed about Badr captives. The Prophet (PBUH) consulted Abu Bakr and Umar. Abu Bakr said: "order them to pay ransom". Umar said that as they wanted to kill the Prophet (PBUH) and deteriorate Islam but Abu Bakr says that they should pay the ransom. Another one said that if among the prisoners, one was Umar's father or brother, he would not order to kill him. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) accepted Abu Bakr's idea and ordered them to pay the ransom. Thus, the verse "Had it not been for a previous ordainment from God, a severe penalty would have reached you for the (ransom) that ye took" was revealed and the Prophet (PBUH) said that due to disagreement with Umar, we were going to be punished by God and if it would happen, no one could be saved except Umar.

The weakness and inaccuracy of these narratives are obvious since if these verses were actually revealed in agreement with Omar's opinion and his suggestion on killing the captives, then why did not the Messenger of God kill them as the verse confirmed Omar's opinion? Does not one say that the messenger of God has opposed God's command? If it is said that the above verses were revealed after the captives had been released, could it be accepted that God would send a command to a particular case after the Prophet decided about it?

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<sup>8</sup> Mohammed ibn Ahmad Qartabi, *Al-Jame Alahkame Al-Quran* (Tehran: Naser Khosrow Publication, 1985), 299.

<sup>9</sup> Zuhaili, *Al-Tafsir Al-Munir Al-i-Al-Iqidah and Al-Shariah and Al-Munhaj*, 67.

On the other hand, evidences show that the word penalty which is expressed in this verse is not related to the Prophet since the verse is about captivation and the word penalty refers to those who sought to follow the previous rules of the war according to which they could make the captured enemy to pay ransom thus, the winners could possess some property<sup>10</sup>.

### **c. Fictitious cause of revelation about Imam Ali**

The most important dispute between Shiites and Sunnis is the succession to the Prophet Muhammad and the leadership of the Islamic community after Him. The Shiites believe that based on God's command, the Prophet has selected and introduced the innocent and capable people as His succession first of whom is Imam Ali. In contrast, the Sunni believe that the Prophet of Islam has not chosen anyone to succeed him. Therefore, they have tried to destroy Imam Ali's unique personality through fictitious and directed reports.

Wahbah al Zuhaili introduces a narrative about the Quranic verse of "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 (purification after sex), 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 Forgiving" (Surah An-Nisa: 43) according which Imam Ali and some of His companions had drunk wine and had prayed while they were drunk<sup>11</sup>.

According to Sunnis' viewpoint, attributing the unpleasant act of drinking wine to Imam Ali has no problem since they believe that this act was conducted before forbidding Muslims to drink wine. Thus, at that time drinking wine was not a sin which deserved punishment. Shiites believe that attributing this act to Imam Ali is not acceptable even before the Muslims were forbidden to drink wine. The reason is that in Quran it has been clarified that wine is foul and God has released the Prophet's family from any abomination.

About this narrative, Hakim Neishabouri says that there is an important point in this narrative which mentions that Khawarij (members of a school of thought, that appeared in the first century of Islam during the First Fitna, the crisis of leadership after the death of Muhammad ) attributed this drunkenness and wrong way of praying to Amir al-Mu'minin Ali ibn Abi Talib (PBUH) not to another person but God absolved Him from this accusation<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Tabatabai, *Al-Mizan Fei Tafsir Al-Quran*, 136.

<sup>11</sup> Zuhaili, *Al-Tafsir Al-Munir Al-i-Al-Iqidah and Al-Shariah and Al-Munhaj*, 50.

<sup>12</sup> Abdi Abdullah Mohammed bin Abdullah Al-Hakam Nishabouri, *Al-Mustadrak Ali Al-Sahihin* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rafa, 1998), 345.

Furthermore, according to the narratives existing in Sunni's books, the cause of revealing this verse was the second caliph i.e. Umar<sup>13</sup>. So it can be concluded that another reason for the fictitious aspect of such narratives is that the interpreter considered a partner for the act of drinking wine and justified their guilt since they could not deny the fact that the verse was revealed to blame the one who was praying while he was drunk. Based on that narrative, some innocent people were blamed for the others' wrong doing. In other words, the wrong doer's act was justified while the innocent one was blamed.

### **C. Denying Imam Ali's moral virtues by making fake the causes of revelation**

In some cases, Wahbah Zuhaili has tried to deny the causes of revelation which are about the virtues of Imam Ali or, reduce the importance of that virtue by partnering with that Imam. At below we review some cases:

The first case: Wahbah Zuhaili, about this verse "your only guardians are god and his prophet and those who believe, pray and pay Zakat (Surah Al-Ma'idah: 55)" says: Some narratives mention that this verse has been revealed about Imam Ali but Fakhr Razi has proved that this verse is specific to Abu Bakr. He then writes in the commentary on this verse: "The correct is that the verse is general and about all the believers because the Alazina is a plural noun, in the verse"<sup>14</sup>.

It is clear that the interpreter has tried to reject the revelation of this verse by expressing an unrealistic cause of revelation and using the wrong interpretation of the verse, about Imam Ali. Here are a few points to consider:

- 1) The meaning of the revelation of the verse about Abu Bakr is totally inaccurate, and it is not clear how it was revealed about him.
- 2) Many of the Sunni interpreters have considered the revelation of the verse about Imam Ali, and they did not mention it to anyone else.
- 3) In the field of generalization in the verse of "Alazina Amanoo"(those who believe), which Wahbah Zuhaili, has relied on that, one must say that the will of a person from a plural noun has not any problem from the point of view and word, Because this method has been very common and widely used a in Arabic and other languages from the beginning to the present day, and it has been widely observed that to respect someone, we use plural noun instead singular noun.to answer this problem alame tabatabaei has

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<sup>13</sup> Mahmoud bin Umar Zamakhshari, *Rabi'l-Al-Anwar and Fusows Al-Akbar* (Qom: Sharif Radi publishing, 1990), 398.

<sup>14</sup> Zuhaili, *Al-Tufsir Al-Munir Al-i-Al-Iqidah and Al-Shariah and Al-Munhaj*, 232–236.

said: Where a plural noun is said and used in the singular meaning, the use of the word is virtual. But in the case where the plural noun is used in its own meaning, but only applies to one instance, this application is not virtual. In other words, there is a difference between word's external concept and its meaning, reality and virtuality are in concept and meaning, in terms of word usage axis, not in matching with an external example that is of the second type and Quran has used it many times.

On the other hand, using a plural noun is for encouraging people to act like Imam Ali and do a good deed for poor people while praying<sup>15</sup>. However, the examination of the appearance of the verse, as it is clear, rejects this generalization and clearly shows a particular case. It seems that the claim is based on religious pre-assumptions and comprehensions that the interpreter believes in and has a particular prejudice towards them.

The second case: Another verse that was revealed for Imam Ali and Hazrat Fateme because of 3 days fasting is "certainly righteous people drink from the cup that is mixed with a happy smell, from the fountain that only special slaves drink from that and flow it wherever they want. They will do their vow, and they are afraid of the day which its guilt and evil are wide, they give their food to poor people while they need it and say: we do this work because of god and do not want any reward for it. Wahbah Zuhaili, who is trying to deny this issue, first narrates a number of narratives about the cause of revelation of these verses, then he considers the commentators' s view incorrect who believe that these verses are about Imam Ali, and at the end accepts the Gortabi' s view that believes these verses are about all of the righteous people.

The view of Wahbah Zuhaili, can be reviewed from different aspects:

- 1) Denying the cause of revelation of these verses about Ahl Beyt does not harm their position, because if we say this surah has not been revealed for Imam Ali and Hazrat Fateme, it does not reduce their magnitude because their being in the title of Abrar is obvious for everyone (Alusi, 1995, 15: 174).
- 2) Many sources of Sunnis have attributed the cause of revelation of these verses to Imam Ali, and have introduced examples of these verses (Haskani, 1991, 2: 394, Fakhr al-Razi, 2000, 30: 746, Zamakhshari, 1987, 4: 670). Alame Amini names 34 sources of Sunni which referred to Imam Ali as the cause of revelation of Surah Insan.
- 3) The generality of the word "Abrar" in the verse does not lead to a rejection of cause of revelation, because although "inal Abrar" is a plural noun and refers to general verses

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<sup>15</sup> Zamakhshari, *Rabi'l-Al-Anwar and Fusows Al-Akbar*, 287.

emphasize that it is personal, so we say: alef and lam of alabar refers to these five persons, (Ali, Fateme, Hasan, Hosein, and Fezzeh) and it is not general. Therefore, the generality of the concept of the verse does not conflict with its revelation, most of the verses of Quran have a general concept, but the cause of revelation is an exception and it is unusual to consider generality of a verse, as a rejection of its cause of revelation.

#### **D. None expression of the cause of revelation**

Another part of the interpreter's pre comprehensions which shows itself in the commentary of Al Munir is about none expressing the causes of the revelation of some Quran verses. In the following we review a sample:

Today I completed your religion and I finished my blessing upon you, and I accepted Islam as your religion (Surah Al-Ma'idah, 5: 3).

Thinking about interpretations which are related to the mentioned verse, indicates differences in Shia and Sunni's approaches. Shia in spite of Sunni believes that this verse is about Imam Ali's nomination for Muslim's guardianship (velayat) in Ghadir day. They believe that although these texts are not match with their Sentences before and after but themselves are match with together, therefore alyoum (the day) mention to a same day that is Ghadir. They attribute the completion of religion to the velayat issue and relate it to the disappointment of kafirs.

Wahbah Zuhaili for showing the lack of relationship between Ekmal verse and Ghadir event considers the time of the revelation of this verse as Arafah Hojat Alveda day and He believes that Al Yum refers to that day in this verse. He also considers the "hopelessness of kafirs" as their disappointment in the destruction of Islam and the overcoming of Muslims and their lack of return to their disbelief<sup>16</sup>.

The reasons expressed by Wahabah Zuhaili are not acceptable because: Although he has considered the time of the revelation of the verse as Arafah day he has not expressed the reason of revelation of this verse in this day. On the other hand, in Sunni sources, it is stated that the verse of Sharife was revealed on the day of Ghadir and Following the province of Ali.

#### **E. Conclusion**

1. The narrations that have been made about the cause of revelation have an important role in the correct understanding of some of the verses of the Holy Quran and the recognition of this

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<sup>16</sup> Zuhaili, *Al-Tufsir Al-Munir Al-i-Al-Iqidah and Al-Shariah and Al-Munhaj*, 285.

kind of narratives reveals many verses. Pre comprehensions are effective on the selection of these narratives.

2. Although Wahabah Zuhaili has been seriously concerned with the traditions of the instruments in the commentary of Al-Munir unwillingly or willingly, pre comprehensions have influenced the choice of these narratives

3. Under the influence of these pre comprehensions, he sometimes expresses narratives that the prophet's dignity is beyond them.

4. He acts in two ways about the cause of revelations which have been brought about Ahl Beyt, especially Imam Ali; in some cases, he passes away without expressing the cause of revelation and in others, he tries to deny the virtues of Ahle Beyt by expressing fake cause of revelation.

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