

EXPLORING THE RELEVANCE OF HISTORICAL ACCOUNTS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING AND MESSAGE OF THE HOLY QUR'ĀN

Mukhtar Umar Bunza*

Abstract

Understanding the meaning and message of the Holy Qur'ān requires the application of different methodologies: linguistic, scientific, cultural, anthropological, as well as historical approaches and endeavors. The message and meaning of some verses of the Qur'ān could only be clearly understood by use of high level scientific, mathematical and technological means. Such verses that discuss on human reproductive processes, iron/metal as a means of warfare and societal development, germination and fruition of plants, formation of clouds and rainfall, alternation of day and night, movement of the sun and moon on their orbit, aquatic life and activities, and their like, abound in the Qur'ān entail an extensive application of scientific method to be explicated for fuller comprehension.

In the same vein, some verses are historical in nature and content; therefore, understanding them within the framework of the Holy Qur'ān necessitates historical methodology and technique for appropriate elucidation. A number of verses requires historical account to give meaning and sense to the message they present; others present history in order to teach *Tawhīd*- confirm the *Risāla* of the Holy Prophet, or authenticate the Qur'ān, some use history to motivate, send warning, and at the same develop moral and psychological stamina through the historical accounts contained in them.

In this light therefore, this paper intends to examine some verses that require historical addendum, method and adage for their comprehension and explanation, and also attempts to apply historical similes demonstrated in various places in the Holy Book to deduce the in-depth wisdom and contemporary relevance of the Holy Qur'ān in the 21st century.

I. The Qur'ān, History and Humanity

The principal target of the message of the Qur'ān has consistently been the humanity. The Qur'ān singularly directs its laws and application to humankind and its general transaction on earth, the outcome of which will be realized in the next world. Simply, the Qur'ān claims to provide a general guideline, manual and *modus operandi* for the life on this planet, which serves as transit to the next life. In the context of the Qur'ān, life without the revealed guidance it presents ends up in confusion and anarchy, as well as social contradiction and moral decay, in spite of whatever physical, scientific, or technological attainments. Deliberately the Qur'ān maintains that role and responsibility as it attests: 'This is Book which We have revealed to you, in order that you might lead mankind out of darkness into light by their Lord's leave to the path of the Almighty, the Owner of all Praise'(Q:14:1).

The historical linkage and continuity of the divine messages exemplified by the Qur'ān shows that the message brought by the messengers, and generations they lived with, as well as the encounters between the messengers and their people as part of historical principle binding humanity together till end of time. That has been epitomized by the Qur'ān as binding historical chain and dynamics of humankind, where it stresses that "And verily, We have sent among every

* Prof. Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Department of History, Sokoto/NIGERIA.

generation a Messenger (proclaiming); Worship Allah (alone), and avoid false deities”, (Q; 16:36). It was under this premise that the Qur’ān presents its message as the foundation of justice, strengthening the resolve of the weak against oppression and continuous struggle between right and wrong as inescapable historical reality.

History on the other hand, from its definition, essence and relevance squarely revolves round dynamics and transformation of humankind from one historical stage to another. It is an unending dialogue for humanity. Arthur Marwick considers history as ‘every trace and every vestige of everything that man has done or thought since he first appeared on the earth planet.’¹ Therefore, history is an organized study of such past activities of human beings as has produced significant effect on subsequent course of events or on other human beings in the course of events. It is not just a study of the past, nor is it an uncritical cataloging of significant past events’.² The philosophy and wisdom behind relating historical epochs as well as events of past to the present, is ‘teaching by example how to conduct ourselves in all the situations of private and public life, that therefore we apply ourselves to it in a philosophical spirit and manner, that we must rise from particular to general knowledge, and that we must fit ourselves for the society and business of mankind.’³ According to Marc Bloch, a French Historian, ‘misunderstanding of the present is the inevitable consequences of ignorance of the past. But a man may wear himself out just as fruitless in seeking to understand the past, if he is totally ignorant of the present...’.⁴ Fafunwa aptly captured the relevance of history to humanity where he confirms that, ‘history is to a people what memory is to the individual. A people with no knowledge of their past would suffer from collective amnesia, groping blindly into the future without guide-posts of precedence to shape their course.’⁵ That was because, ‘men are made according to the law of imitation, under the influence of the behavior, treatment, resolution, moral habits and companionship of their fellowmen.’⁶ It is for this reason that the Qur’ān has paid an extraordinary attention to the history of the nations and civilizations to serve as lessons and method of teaching and guidance for subsequent generations. This, the Qur’ān has done so perfectly in order to give opportunity to the people to derive from the laws of history the best systems suited to them based on records of experiences of the past generations. History helps man in deriving general laws.⁷ Through understanding and taken cognizance of the past accounts of historical happenings, Hockett asserts the relevance of history as a means and vehicle for overcoming of personal and communal problems, training, self-understanding and self-respect as well as intellectual honesty are the end result of history in human society.⁸ Professor Kenneth Dike stresses that: ‘The nation suffers which has no sense on history. Its values remain superficial and a perception of success and achievement that transcends acquisition of temporary power or transient wealth. Such a nation cannot achieve a sense of purpose or direction or stability, and without them the future is bleak’.⁹

¹ Marwick Arthur, *The Nature of History*, (Macmillan Press Limited, 1983), 287

² Akinjogbin, I. A., “History and Nation Building”, (Inaugural Lecture, Obafemi Owolowo University, Ife, 1977), 4

³ Connell-Smith, G., and Lloyd, H. A., *The Relevance of History*, (Heinemann Educational Books: London, 1972), 17

⁴ see Connell-Smith and Lloyd, *The Relevance of History*, 57

⁵ Fafunwa, A. B., *History of Education in Nigeria*, (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1974), 8

⁶ See Mutahhari, M. M., *Society and History*, (Iran: Organization for propagation of Islam 1985), 49

⁷ See Al-Sadr, M. B. *Trends of History in Qur’ān*, online, Rafed. net, see particularly Introduction, p. 4.

⁸ See Hockett, H. C., *The Critical Method in Historical Research and Writing*, (New York: The Macmillan Company Sixth edition, 1963), 4-5.

⁹ See Uya, O. E. “The Historian as a Citizen: The K. O. Dike Challenge”, in Ogbogbo, C. B. N. and Okpoh, O. O., (eds) *Interrogating Contemporary Africa: Dike Memorial Lectures 199-2007*, Historical Society of Nigeria, 2008, p. 87.

It was in consideration and appreciation of this fact in relation between history and humanity as inseparable component that Qur'ān bluntly acknowledges utilization of history to extend its message and teachings in all facets and ramifications. Categorically Qur'ān affirms: “Verily, We have sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān in order that you may understand. We relate to you the best of stories through our Revelations to you, of this Qur'ān. And before this you are among those who knew nothing about it (Q: 12:2-3). “Indeed in their stories (related in the Qur'ān), there is a lesson for men of understanding. It (Qur'ān) is not a forged statement but a confirmation of Allah's existing Books, which were before it, and other scriptures of Allah, and a detailed explanation of everything and a guide and a mercy for a people who believe' Q;12;111).

That was the reason why the Qur'ān maintains continuity and direct attachment to the historical accounts it relates and appeals consistently that people should take lessons out of them. Aptly that was captured in the following conclusion,

So the Qur'ān teaches us a new way to look upon history. It is not “ancient stories” but living truths. It teaches us to erase the distance between ourselves and the past and to call forth the past like memories, till a total picture of the history of truth is formed- a history which spans all times and all places and is not restricted by any chronology. Memories are not distinct from us; they are an integral part of us. They define and shape us; they are not intellectual abstractions but are a living part of us, shaping our consciousness and our personalities.¹⁰

Unlike the position of Angelika Neuwirth,¹¹ there was no complexity or difficulty in relationship between Qur'ān and history. The history of the Qur'ān is the record of human encounter with divine message, relations between humans and free will to discern or to act on particular way and behavior. It is thus a historical process that extends both the later and the former, thus, historical forces continue to influence the community guided by certain laws of history. The prophet Muhammad (SAW) was instructed to follow and observe the teaching of Abraham, the same chain of historical tradition of Ummah/ community which was extended to Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, Zachariah, John, Jesus, Elias, Ishmael, Elisha, Jonah, and Lot (Qur'an6:83-86). Thus, the Qur'anic message considers itself as the same in purpose and tenacity with the preceding messengers, and further claims finality and perfection of such revelations to humanity. History therefore, in the acuity of the holy Qur'ān is the milestone, signposts, and yardstick through which the society assesses itself, being a byproduct of historical processes.

II. Historical Accounts as Embodiment of Qur'anic Message

The application of history by the Qur'ān to teach and expound its message is immeasurable. Qur'ān is not a book of history however does not locate itself outside history or beyond history;¹² but uses history to buttress and strengthen its mission, message and purpose. The major messages of the holy Qur'ān are three. Fundamentally and primarily *Tawhīd*, the oneness of Allah, followed by issues of law- the *Sharia*, and *Mu'āmalah*- social relations. The same way the Qur'ān uses direct call and commanding language exhorting people to heed to its command, so it applies the melodious historical tune to appeal in the same direction. In this

¹⁰ Ansari, N. A., “The Holy Qur'ān; Its Historical Authenticity”, (www.islam.org.uk), accessed 10th September, 2011.

¹¹ See her argument in “Qur'ān and History- A Disputed Relationship: Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'ān”, *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, Vol. 1.

¹² This is contrary to the position of Angelika Neuwirth, see “Qur'ān and History- A Disputed Relationship”, p.1

regard, historical accounts are consistently and repeatedly used in the Qur'ān in order to send forth its message and teaching to humanity.

In the story of Prophet Joseph –Yusuf- with all the length and sequence of presentation of what transpired between him and his brothers up to his imprisonment, and enthronement, the Qur'ān remained conscious of its *tawhīd* message, and way of sending it through the narrative. Yusuf was imprisoned together with other inmates. His fame and dignity grew in considerable proportion, and was highly respected among the inmates and was always consulted by them, seeking guidance on all their affairs private or public. The two inmates asked about the interpretation of their dreams from Yusuf, the stories which aim among other several issues to teach the listeners the relevance of *tawhīd* advanced in the story where it says:

No food will come to you (in wakefulness or in dream) as your provision, but I will inform you its interpretation before it comes. This is of that which my Lord has taught me. Verily, *I have abandoned the religion of a people that believe not in Allah and are disbelievers in the hereafter. And I followed the religion of my father, Ibrahim (Abraham), Ishaq, (Isaac) and Ya'qub, (Jacob) and never could we attribute any partners whatsoever to Allah. This is from the grace of Allah to us and to mankind, but most men thank not. Oh two companions of the prison. Are many different gods better or Allah the One, the Irresistible?* (Q: 12:37-39).

Through this story the fundamental teaching of the Qur'ān of establishing the supremacy of Allah over all other false gods has been established. In addition, there are a number of lessons the story as obtainable in this chapter represent. Mawdūdī in his tafsir *Tafhim al-Qur'ān* - The Meaning of the Qur'ān, explained some major lessons that could be deduced in the historical account during the period of revelation and to the present moment and beyond.¹³ At the end of the account Prophet Joseph concludes again with *tawhīd* message to terminate the entire scenario, he says: “My Lord. You have indeed bestowed on me the sovereignty, and taught me of the interpretation of dreams- the only Creator of heavens and the earth. You are my Helper, Supporter, and Guardian in this world and the hereafter. Cause me to die as a Muslim and join me with the righteous” (Q12: 101). Ordinarily this conclusion should not have served as the end this story if not of the Qur'anic way and manner of extending its teaching and message in the most specialized and systematic approach.

The same *tawhīd* message could be found in the accounts of the story of Abraham, when he said to his father, *'Do you take idols as gods...'*, he continued to challenge his people in a very logical manner by calling their attention to the sun, moon, and stars and their inconsistency and inefficiency thereby concluding to them as Yusuf did say, “I have turned my face towards Him who has created the heavens and the earth, Hanif, and I am not polytheists”(Q:6:74-79). Whatever, the object of the story, the primary duty of calling humanity to the unalloyed worship of Allah alone has been fulfilled. In a related account in Sura al-Shua'ara' teaching of *tawhīd* was explicated as seem it was the theme of the scene. It says;

Recite to them the story of Ibrahim-Abraham. When he said to his father and his people, what do you worship? They said: We worship idols, and to them we are ever devoted. He said: Do they hear you, when you call them? Or do they benefit you or do they harm you? They said (Nay) but we found our fathers doing so. He said do you observe that which you have been worshipping- you and your ancient fathers? Verily, they are enemies to me except the Lord of

¹³ See Mawdūdī, A. A., *Tafhim al-Qur'ān - The Meaning of the Qur'ān*, pp.826-830

the worlds, who has created me, and it is He who guides me, and it is He who feeds me and gives me drink, and when I am ill, it is He who cures me, and who will cause me to die and then bring me to life again...’ (Q: 26:69-81).

The above accounts apart from relating the encounter between Abraham and his people, identified some unique qualities and attributes of Allah such as creation, power to cause illness, harm and cure, death and resurrection as singularly under the sole control of the God of Abraham, which the false gods of his people did not have the authority. Similar teaching was embodied in the account of Abraham which begins with the statement: “Have you not considered (the story of) the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [merely] because Allah had given him kingship?...” Q: 2: 257. In the account of the encounter with Nimrud or Biblical Nimrod of the ancient city of Mesopotamia the aim of the story was to expose the deficiency and incapability of the emperor, who claimed powers that were exclusively of Allah. Abraham challenged him vehemently, and at the end of the account the emperor was overwhelmed with logical evidence and superior argument and was flabbergasted.

Historical accounts in the Qur’ān also convey approval, disapproval, and correction of given verdicts in the administration of justice without losing its structure, form, and style of presentation. The account of David and his son Solomon has been presented to fill certain gaps in the adjudication of justice. The verse starts saying: “Has the story of the litigants reached you?... The story which the Qur’ān relates, aims at teaching those charged with judicial duties to avoid some identified mistakes as indicated in the account. Primarily, a judge must listen to all parties and critically and impartially examines all the versions before passing a judgment. It is also pointed out in the story that sympathy of the weak had influenced the decision of Prophet David. Thus in concluding the narrative, a specific and general call was made in the following: “O Dawud (David)! Verily, We have placed you as a successor on earth; so judge you between men in truth (and justice) and follow not your desire for it will mislead you from the path of Allah”, (Q:38:26). In sura al-Anbiya’a, a similar account where a case was brought to Prophet David against shepherd and farmers. The sheep had postured at night and destroyed crops of the farmers, David passed the judgment, which his son Solomon held a contrary view. In the two historical accounts Ibn Kathīr reported in his *tafsir* that the lessons to be deduced from the accounts are: “judges not to allow themselves to sell thereby for some miserable price, not to follow their own whims and desires, and not to fear anyone concerning their judgments”.¹⁴ These and similar accounts abound in the Qur’ān principally to redress and teach humanity the way to administer justice and equitably.

In the field of *mu’āmalah*, social relations, also a number of historical accounts thrive in the Qur’ān with the aim of redirecting people to what is acceptable and blameless for emulation. Two examples in Sura al-Kahf and Sura al-Qalam could suffice for making a case in this direction. In Kahf Q: 18: 32-44 the account starts: “Put forward to them the example of two men...”. This is an account of two men (possibly friends), one of them was endowed with bounteous garden full of grapes, and surrounded with dates-palms. The wealthy of the two men continued to be pompous and boastful in arrogance to the other man who had not. Again, he refused to consider the rights of needy and destitute by denying giving out charity. Finally, the account shows that as a result of this unruly behavior, oppressive nature and miserliness he lost all his belonging. In sura al-Qalam Q: 68:17-30, another allegory was given similar to the one in

¹⁴ See A Compilation of the abridged *Tafsir Ibn Kathīr*, Vols 1-10, p. 3226

Kahf. The owners of a garden were reported to have prevented the poor in their society from benefiting from the products of their farm in spite of the fact they were in dire need of assistance and help from the wealthy. Consequent upon that act of transgression by the wealthy in the community against the poor and weak, their garden which was the source of their wealth and possessions was destroyed. The aim and message of these stories were to sensitize people towards their social responsibilities in the society especially to the weak and indigent.

Warning against exploitative tendencies of the wealthy persons against the poor and less privileged in the society has been one of the Qur'anic philosophies of teaching through historical accounts. In a narrative of Qarun-or Korah who was hitherto a companion of Moses, but was distracted and deceived by his wealth to rebel against his cousin and messenger of Allah Moses and boasted that accumulation of his wealth was due to his knowledge and expertise, thus nothing out of it goes to charity and social services. The account says: "Verily, Qarun was of Musa's people, but he behaved arrogantly towards them..." (Q28:76-83). Fundamentally, he denied using his wealth in the propagation of truth and helping the poor on the basis that he acquired his wealth and fortune through his personal expertise, business acumen and knowhow. According to Mawdūdī, 'This moral of the story of Qarun/Korah has been mentioned only in the Qur'ān. The Bible and the Talmud are without it'. The historical accounts helps in understanding the meaning and message of the Qur'ān in the following: People are encouraged to seek wealth lawfully and use it judiciously in the right course, and seek through it the life after, by spending on the need of the poor and avoid excess affluent spending pageantry and showoff. Refusal to heed to this by Qarun, he was decisively dealt with and finally swallowed by earth.¹⁵

The Qur'ān intends to teach and lay bare some moral codes and ethics in historical accounts in addition to a number strong unequivocal comments and commands. A narrative of Luqman was presented in only one place in the Qur'ān. Luqman was presented as an actor advising and admonishing his son guiding him in many issues of personal and public significance. The story is not presented in order to give a story alone but to inculcate virtues through it. In its usual historical teaching, the Qur'ān commands, 'Remember when Luqman said to his son when he was advising him...(Q: 31:12-29)' Some major lessons in the account include merits of goodness to parents, god consciousness, enjoin good and forbidden evil, shunning away from arrogance, pride and insolence, as well as imbibing the style of moderation in all affairs. The tale presents Luqman addressing his son and imparting the moral message conveyed to humanity by the Qur'ān in a most pleasant tune and scenery.

III. Imperative of Historical accounts for explaining of some verses of the Holy Qur'ān

Due to the importance and significance of history in Qur'anic perspective, some verses are deliberately not expounded enough in the text of the Qur'ān, but allowed some further information to come either from other verses in the Qur'ān to supplement the required part of information, or from the Prophetic accounts, i. e. Hadith. The Qur'anic narratives always centered on the provision of the most important aspects or most critical parts of the story, while elaborate details to be sourced from other authentic sources.

We observe quite a number of verses that need supplementary and marginal addendum from some historical account to convey adequate meaning and message. These types of instances

¹⁵Mawdūdī, *Tafhim al-Qur'ān*, p. 1864

abound in the Qur'ān, which require historical account to provide name of actors, place of the acts, period, or sometimes circumstances surrounding the events, in order to provide a comprehensive picture and view of the episodes. For instances in Sura al-Baqarah, (chapter two of the Holy Qur'ān) an account has been narrated inter alia:

Have you not considered (the story of) those who left their homes in many thousands, fearing death? Allah said to them, "Die"; then He restored them to life. And Allah is full of bounty to the people, but most of the people do not show gratitude.2:244

The likely questions that the listener or reader would possibly ask are: who were these people? Where were they from? And when did the event take place? All these answers are not provided in this account in the text of the Qur'ān. It is the application of the further historical information that will avail the reader or logical questioner of this curiosity. According to Ibn Kathīr these thousands of people were from a city during the time of the children of Israel. Epidemic broke out in the city due to bad weather and they fled out of the city for fear of death. And God caused them to die instantly, but were returned to life again during the time of Prophet Hizqil (Ezekiel).¹⁶

In a similar occurrence the Qur'ān calls our attention to an event in Baqarah Q2:258 that: "Have you not considered (the story of) the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord [merely] because Allah had given him kingship?" The Qur'ān did not tell us about the person that challenged Abraham about his lord; although that information was very important in understanding the complete message and significance of this verse. Again, Ibn Kathīr reporting from Mujahid in another chain of narration, that it was King Nimrod, son of Canaan, son of Kush, son of Sam, son of Noah.¹⁷ His challenge to Abraham was in his attempt to arrogate power of life and death to himself. In a very simple logical and rational disposition he was routed. The Qur'ān was more interested in sending the message and consequences of the action, as well as lessons that could be derived out of them than the details about characters and persons.

Information provided in tafsir books, hadiths, and sirah, shed further light and add significantly towards understanding the meaning and message of the referred verses.

Another important account was presented as a parable to show the power of Allah in raising the dead at any time He decreed. The episode was presented in a historical account without mentioning the name of the principal actor, the town/ place in which the act took place, and the period of action. The account reads: "Or [consider such an example] as the one who passed by a township which had fallen into ruin. He said, "How will Allah bring this to life after its death?" So Allah caused him to die for a hundred years; then He revived him..."(Q2:259). According to some commentators of the Qur'ān, the person who asked the question and was caused to die was (Uzayr) Ezra. Detail history about the town that was in ruin, name of the person, his position, period of time and what followed after he was raised again into life were provided in Sira and tafsir books. Indeed, the information provided significantly help in understanding the meaning of the verse. Ali Ibn Abi Talib was reported saying that the man was Uzayr-Ezra, and the town was Jerusalem, and period was when it was destroyed, and its people killed by Nebuchadnezzar. That was also reported by Ibn Jarir al-Tabari in his Tafsir.¹⁸

Some verses such as one referred in Q6:6: "Do they not see that We destroyed before them many a people who were dominant in the world during their time? We had given them such

¹⁶ See Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, P.640

¹⁷ See Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, P.641

¹⁸ See Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr, P. 642

power in the land as We have not given you. We sent down for them abundant rains from heavens and made canals flow beneath them. But (when they showed ingratitude), We destroyed them because of their sins and raised up other people in their place”. To complement the meaning and expound the message of these verses more clearly some examples of those strong and well established generations that had passed away and were decisively dealt with by Allah such as Ad, Thamud, and Pharaoh, are significant parables to expatiate on the content and message they set forth.

With specific reference to the challenges faced by Prophet Muhammad (SAW), from tyrannical opposition against him during the Makkan period. The Qur’ān exhorts him as follows:

Many Messengers before you have also been treated as impostors, but they bore with fortitude the charge of imposture and persecution (by the disbelievers), till Our help came down to them. None has the power to change the Law of Allah and *you have already received the (history) news of what happened to the Messengers before you.* (Q6:34).

The text of this particular verse did not provide illustrations of such generations or communities that treated their prophets unfairly and cruelly; because several cases were presented in some selected places in the Qur’ān. In elucidating this verse and explaining its content it is necessary to explore such variety of examples as narrated in different cases and time epochs in the history of messengers and their encounters.

In al-Ahqaf, Q47:35, another exhortation was directed to the Prophet and was attached to the past occurrences against the previous prophets like him who endured the severity of the persecution of their people against them. The verse says: “Therefore, be patient (O Muhammad) as did **the messengers of strong will...**”. The common inquiries with regard to the content of this verse are: who are those messengers of strong will, and what were their pattern and nature of patients which the Prophet, and by implication, his followers should emulate? The answers were not available in the verse. But in reference to the historical accounts presented in various places in the Qur’ān will provide a more comprehensive narrative and well explained message that could be deduced from the verse. Therefore understanding even if briefly about those great messengers, people of high esteem, tolerance, forbearance, patience and leniency, is a prerequisite to knowing the meaning of the verse.¹⁹ According to Ibn Kathīr, those of great determination among messengers are: Noah, Ibrahim, Musa, Isa and Muhammad (SAW).²⁰

In a case where a woman complained to the Prophet about her husband, and argued with him thoroughly in her case, more complementary information are required to portray clearer meaning of the verse. The Qur’ān states: “Indeed Allah has heard the statement of her that disputes with you concerning her husband, and complaints to Allah. And Allah hears the argument between you both” (Q58:1). It adds to a thorough understanding of the verse to know who were that woman and her husband; and what was the nature of her case? Sources around the Qur’ān- Hadith and Sirah give the name of the woman as Khaulat bint Tha’alabah, and husband was Aus bin Al-Samit. This is a very important historical event which served a land mark in the history of Islam regarding the right and freedom of women. Khaulat or Khuwailat did not only approach the Prophet publicly about her case, but refused to accept his initial verdict demanding some much better than the previous offer, until a divine intervention arrived, and she was vindicated in the revelation as shown above. The detail of the case, names of actors and

¹⁹ See Abd al-Rahman bin Nasir Al-Sa’dee, *Taiseer Al-Kareem al-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalam al-Mannan*, Vol. 2, p. 930.

²⁰ See detail in Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr... , p. 4712.

circumstances surrounding the whole episode are supplied from a different source in a wider historical scope to fully expound the meaning and the message of the verse.

A metaphor describing an anonymous person was presented in Sura al-Qalam - Nuun, the verses indirectly described an individual among the Makkan Quraish who was a staunch opponent of the Prophet. The verse did not mention any name but characters and even some physical features of the particular person. However, further historical support is necessary to complement the provision of the verse in conveying its message to readers, especially for the latter generations of Qur'ān reciters. The account is presented thus:

Therefore, do not at all yield to the beliers of the Truth. They indeed wish that you should compromise a little, then they also would compromise Do not at all yield to any mean swearer of many oaths, who is a slanderer and a backbiter, a hinderer of good and a transgressor, wicked and oppressive, and above all, ignoble by birth, only because he has abundance of wealth and children. When Our Revelations are recited to him, he says, "These are tales of the ancient times." Soon We shall brand him on the snout.

In order to provide the corresponding name of the referred character Maududi shows that there are varying opinions as who was the exact person described in the verse. He says: "The views of the commentators with regard to the person who has been described in these verses are different. Someone says it was Walid bin Mughirah; another one says it was Aswad bin `Abd-i Yaghuth, and still another has applied this description to Akhnas bin Shurayq, and some other people have pointed to some other persons. But the Qur'ān has only described his attributes without naming him. This shows that in Makkah the man concerned was so notorious for his such qualities that there was no need to name him definitely. Hearing his description every person could understand who was being referred to".²¹ This is for those who were contemporaries of the event. The information regarding who really was the actual person, as suggested above, although not provided in the Qur'ān is very useful in understanding the meaning of the verses. There are quite a number of such verses in the Qur'ān, that really need additional historical information for understanding the meaning and message of the Qur'ān, thus the imperative of historical accounts in explaining the meaning of the Holy Qur'ān.

IV. Conclusion

The paper attempted to relate the position accorded to history in the Qur'ān as a medium of communicating, extending, and expounding its message and meaning of some verses. It also established that, based on the available examples, parables and episodes contained in the Qur'ān hardly some verses could be clearly understood without given reference to historical background related to them to provide further auxiliary detail which always the Qur'ān curtails. Further, the paper submits that, similar to understanding some linguistic as well as technical methods in providing commentaries of the Qur'ān, the imperativeness of knowing basic historical and cultural milieu circumstantial to the revelation of some verses and chapters help in attaining balance and clear message of the Qur'ān.

²¹Mawdūdī, A. A., *Tafhim al-Qur'ān - The Meaning of the Qur'ān*, Sura al-Qalam, verses 6-9.