

How the Qur'an was revealed and preserved

Sent down in a blessed night, then delivered in pieces across the years of the mission; memorised before it was bound, and bound twice within the first thirty years.



★ In a blessed night

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

“Indeed, We sent it down during the Night of Decree.” The first of the two things the Qur'an says about its own timing.

Qur'an 97:1

★ In the month of Ramadan

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ

“The month of Ramadan is that in which was revealed the Qur'an, a guidance for the people.” The second.

Qur'an 2:185

★ In portions, on purpose

وَقُرْآنًا فَرَقْنَاهُ لِتَقْرَأَهُ عَلَى النَّاسِ عَلَى مُكْثٍ وَنَزَّلْنَاهُ تَنْزِيلًا

“And it is a Qur'an which We have divided into parts, that you might recite it to the people at intervals.” Spread, by the standard chronology, over thirteen years in Makkah and ten in Madinah.

Qur'an 17:106 · the standard sirah chronology

★ They wanted it all at once

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَوْلَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً

“And those who disbelieve say: why was the Qur'an not revealed to him all at once?” The answer given is the strengthening of his heart.

Qur'an 25:32

★ How it came

Al-Harith b. Hisham asked how revelation reached him.

“Sometimes it is like the ringing of a bell — this is the hardest of all — and it passes off after I have grasped it. Sometimes the angel comes in the form of a man.”

Sahih al-Bukhari 2

★ The first command

In the cave of Hira' the angel told him to read. “I do not know how to read.” Three times pressed, and then: “Read in the name of your Lord who created — created man from a clot.”

Sahih al-Bukhari 3 · Qur'an 96:1-3

★ Gathered under Abu Bakr

After the dead of Yamama, 'Umar pressed Abu Bakr to collect it before the memorisers were gone, and Zayd b. Thabit was set to gather it — from pieces of leather and from the chests of men.

Sahih al-Bukhari 4986

★ Copied under 'Uthman

Hudhayfah warned 'Uthman of differences in recitation between the armies. 'Uthman sent for Hafsa's manuscript, had copies written from it, and sent one to each province.

Sahih al-Bukhari 4987

★ Seven ahruf

'Umar dragged Hisham b. Hakim to him over a reading of al-Furqan he had not been taught. Both were told “it was revealed in this way”, and: “This Qur'an has been revealed to be recited in seven ways.” What the seven are is disputed among the scholars.

Sahih al-Bukhari 4992 · the scholars differ on the seven