

## **The Tafsīr of the Qur'ān: The Stages of Documentation**

Yasir Sulaiman Almuways<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

This article briefly reviews the history of the Science of Tafsīr in relation to the stages of the documentation of the Tafsīr of the Qur'ān from the time of our Prophet Muḥammad ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam until the time it was officially documented. From then until now, different perspectives have existed in relation to how the Tafsīr of the Qur'ān has been approached. Therefore, this article provides an introductory and historical overview on relevant terminology; different sources, schools, and types of Tafsīr; as well as the different characteristics of Tafsīr stages. An understanding of these aforementioned points will provide the key to answering the research question posed here: What are the stages of the documentation of the Tafsīr of the Qur'ān?

**Key Words:** Tafsīr, the Science of Tafsīr, the Tafsīr of the Qur'ān, the Documentation of the Tafsīr, Qur'ān, Qur'ānic Semantics.

---

<sup>1</sup> Yasir Sulaiman Almuways is a Lecturer at Al-Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University; holds a PhD in Qur'ān and Sunnah Studies, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM); and is a PhD candidate in the Department of Linguistics, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick. Email: ysalmuways@imamu.edu.sa

## 1. Introduction

The *Qur'ān* is universally acknowledged to be the guiding framework by which Muslims all over the world live their lives. Yet, despite the unanimous belief that the *Qur'ān* is a direct revelation from Allāh to His Prophet Muḥammad *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* through the angel Jibrīl (Gabriel), modern Muslims sometimes have varying differences in regards to its rulings and meanings which was not the case among the classical Muslims.<sup>2</sup> These variations are a result of not understanding and comprehending the history of the documentation, not of the *Qur'ān* itself, but of the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān*. The history of its documentation can be divided into three stages culminating in the first physical copies of the *Tafsīr*. Following will be an explanation of how the timing and the sources of each stage influenced the *Tafsīr* itself.

### The Definition and Meaning of the Term *Tafsīr*

The word *Tafsīr* has two meanings, one is the linguistic meaning, and the other is the Islamic or *Sharī'ah* (*Shar'ī*) meaning. The linguistic meaning of the word *Tafsīr* is *al-'Idāḥ wa al-Tabyīn* which can be translated into English as 'clarification,' 'illustration,' or 'demonstration'. In terms of its etymology, the word *Tafsīr* goes back to the word *al-Fasrī* which means *al-'Ibānah wa al-Kashf* which is equivalent to 'revelation' and 'uncovering' in English. Thus, in terms of linguistics, the word *Tafsīr* is more related to 'the meaning that is being cleared up and illustrated.' However, the meaning of the word *Tafsīr* in the sight of *Sharī'ah* and Islam is that it is the science that focuses and concentrates on the demonstration and illustration of the semantics (meaning) of the *Qur'ān* by interpreting the wordings of the *Qur'ān* with a set of rules and approaches in order for the *Qur'ān* to be understood by people in terms of its meaning and rulings.<sup>3</sup>

### The Distinction between *Tafsīr* and *Ta'wīl*

<sup>2</sup> Badr al-Dīn 'Abdillāh al-Zarkashī. *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (1<sup>st</sup> edn.). (Al-Qāhirah: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1957), vol. 1, 13-15.

<sup>3</sup> 'Abd al-Rahmān Jalāludīn al-Suyūfī. *al-Iṭqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Taḥqīq Markaz al Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah. (Riyadh: Wizārat al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyyah Wa al-Dā'awah Wa al-Irshād al-Sa'ūdiyyah, 1426 A.H.), vol. 2, 174; Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabī. *Ilm al-Tafsīr*. (Palestine: Maktabat Falasṭīn li al-Kutub al-Muṣawwarah, 1977), 5.

It is very important to mention the difference between these two words and their relation to each other because both of these words have been used and mentioned in the books of *Tafsīr*, and also because the classical scholars and the contemporary scholars of Islam have viewed these two words differently. The linguistic meaning of the word *Ta'wīl* in terms of its etymology refers to the word *al-'awwal* which means *al-rajū* ' which means 'return to' in English. The rhetoric of this goes back to the core meaning intended in the speech. And the Islamic meaning of the word *Ta'wīl* takes the same definition and meaning of the word *Tafsīr* which makes both of these words synonymous to one another. However, this view is the view of the classical scholars of *Tafsīr* like Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, whereas the contemporary scholars of Islam define the word *Ta'wīl* with the meaning of twisting the truth, or twisting the true or most accurate meaning (opinion) to the least or less accurate meaning (opinion).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, there are some scholars who make another distinction between these two words with their definitions that the word *Tafsīr* is the study of the interpretation of the *Qur'ān* in terms of its narrations and how accurate they are and *al-Ta'wīl* is the study of the entailments and rulings involved in the meaning and the interpretation of the *Qur'ān*.<sup>5</sup>

### Types of *Tafsīr*

There are five types of *Tafsīr* and they are as follows:

1. ***al-Tafsīr al-Ma'thūr*** is a narration based *Tafsīr* that has been reported and narrated from the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*, his companions, and the followers, even though the inclusion of the followers in this category has been debated. However, the main characteristic and trait for this type of *Tafsīr* is that it refers the narrations of *Tafsīr* to the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*, who has initially interpreted the *Qur'ān*, and the companions who have understood it purely from the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* directly and from their own skills of *Ijtihād*. Thus this type of *Tafsīr* has not been spoiled or distorted by any type of shortcoming in its beliefs nor its understanding.<sup>6</sup> However, this type of *Tafsīr* has been exposed to a lot of weak narrations due to the chains of narrators which contain either weak narrators, un-

<sup>4</sup> Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabī, 6-7.

<sup>5</sup> 'Abd al-Rahmān Jalāludīn al-Suyūṭī, vol 2, 250.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 40.

known narrators, or an incomplete chain of narrators. It also contains many of *al-ʿIsrāʿiliyyāt* as well as fabricated narrations which have been put in and inserted intentionally in order to get people confused and doubt the *Qurʾān*. This was a result of the division and disunity of Muslims in 41 A.H. which was taken advantage of by the enemies of Islam who had entered Islam only for the sake of destroying it from the inside.<sup>7</sup> However, the scholars of *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīth* have worked together hand in hand in order to distinguish between the accurate and the inaccurate narrations entered into the books of *Tafsīr*.

2. **The Opinion-Based *Tafsīr*** or the Rational *Tafsīr* which is called *al-Tafsīr Birraʿiy* or *al-Tafsīr al-ʿAqlī* in Arabic. This type of *Tafsīr* is the *Tafsīr* that comes from the in-depth analysis that is taken from many aspects and elements, like the Arabic language and the reasons of revelations amongst several others, without depending mainly on the narrations that have been narrated from the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ʿalayh wa sallam* nor his companions who have witnessed the *Qurʾān* getting revealed, or the followers who have taken the *Tafsīr* directly from the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ʿalayh wa sallam*. And this type of *Tafsīr* is debatable in terms of its acceptance and rejection. Some scholars think it is forbidden to take this approach of *Tafsīr*, as they believe we should stop where the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ʿalayh wa sallam* and his companions have stopped in terms of the interpretation of the *Qurʾān* and we cannot go beyond what we have in our hands from the narrations. And other scholars think that it is allowed to have this kind of extraction of opinions in *Tafsīr* unconditionally. While some others have established a set of conditions if this approach is used and applied in *Tafsīr* because the Opinion-based *Tafsīr* is so broad with its concepts and cannot be either black or white, right or wrong; rather, it is about the principles and the set of conditions that should be taken into consideration before conducting this type of *Tafsīr*.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 43-46.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 47-65.

3. **The Topic-Based Tafsīr** which is the *Tafsīr* that concentrates on a specific topic or aspect in the *Qur'ān* and attempts to encompass it from all its dimensions and branches.<sup>9</sup>
4. **The Indicational Tafsīr** or what is called in Arabic *al-Tafsīr al-'Ishārī* which is the *Tafsīr* that indicates and points out the hidden meanings that are not obvious or do not appear in the literal meaning of the speech. Under this category, there are some narrations that have been accepted and some that have been rejected due to their violation and contradiction to other authentic narrations.<sup>10</sup>
5. **The Scientific Tafsīr or Science-Based Tafsīr** which is the *Tafsīr* that focuses and applies the scientific approaches from all disciplines in order to extract the gems of the *Qur'ān* in relation to all the scientific fields we have today. And this type of *Tafsīr* has been promoted by some scholars and discouraged by some scholars as well.<sup>11</sup>

#### The Different Stages and Phases of the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān*

The knowledge of *Tafsīr* has been given care and attention since the *Qur'ān* began to be revealed to our Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*; however, as time went by, the attention given to *Tafsīr* began increasing due to many factors. One of the main driving factors behind an increased need for more attention to be given to the study of *Tafsīr*, was the death of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*, and subsequently the death of the elites from amongst the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*; especially those who were mastered in the understanding and the interpretation of the *Qur'ān*. Another reason was because of the waning strength of the Arabic language. At the time of revelation, the Arabic language was closer to the *Qur'ānic* language; however, with the passing of time, the spoken Arabic language began to slowly morph away from that of the Arabic used in the *Qur'ān*. This is why you find that the Arabs at that time needed less explanation and interpretation of the *Qur'ān* than the Arabs today.<sup>12</sup> And these factors mentioned above were some of the reasons why *Tafsīr* has gone through the following stages which will be outlined below.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 70- 72.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 73- 75.

<sup>12</sup> Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabī, 12-13.

### The First Stage

The first stage refers to the time period of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* and his companions in which the *Qur’ān* was getting revealed. During this time, the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* would ask the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* about anything ambiguous or unclear that they would face or come across in regards to the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur’ān*. Thus arises the dispute on whether or not the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* has interpreted and given the whole explanation of the *Qur’ān* in its entirety. Some scholars say yes, and others say no and each one of these two different schools of opinions has their own proofs about their conclusions and beliefs.<sup>13</sup> However, according to ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās, the father and the master of the scholars of *Tafsīr*, the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur’ān* is under four categories: the first is the *Tafsīr* that is known and taken from the speech of the Arab because it reflects on the language and the practices that are already known by Arabs. The second, is the *Tafsīr* which no one is excused from not knowing or understanding because of how clear it is. The third, is the *Tafsīr* that is known only by the mastered scholars (*al-‘Ulamā’ al-Rasikhūn*) because it needs deep understanding, analysis, and prior knowledge. The fourth, is the *Tafsīr* that is not known by anyone except Allāh.<sup>14</sup> So, from this it is possible to conclude that the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* has not interpreted the whole *Qur’ān*, and only interpreted what was unclear to the Muslims in his time.

### The Sources of the *Tafsīr* of the First Stage

Once again, the sources for the *Tafsīr* of this first stage go back to the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* and his companions *raḍīya Allāh ‘anhum*. Regarding the source of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam*, he has only one source which is Allāh almighty and this source manifested itself by two pathways. The first of which was by a direct revelation from Allāh, where an *‘āyah* would be cited to explain another *‘āyah*, and the second was from the opinion and teaching of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* himself. All this is classified to be under one source because Allāh says about our Prophet *ṣallallāhu ‘alyh wa sallam* in *Sūrat*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 13-15.

<sup>14</sup> Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. *Jāmi‘u al-Bayān ‘an T’wīl Āyi al-Qur’ān*. (Al-Qāhirah: Dār Hajar li al-Ṭibā‘at Wa al-Nashr, 2001), vol 1, 52; Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabī, 15-19.

*al-Najim*, as translated in 'āyah number 3-4 "He does not speak out of desire, it is naught but revelation that is revealed."<sup>15</sup>

Regarding the companions, they have four sources and methods for the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān*. One is the *Qur'ān* itself, in which the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* would interpret the *Qur'ān* through the *Qur'ān*.<sup>16</sup> Another source is the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* himself; the companions used to go back to the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* to ask him about whatever they found difficult or unclear to understand.<sup>17</sup> Their third source was their skills of deduction, extraction, and reasoning with the tools that they obtained from the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*, and this varied from one companion to another. And this method would only be undertaken after having gone through the first and the second sources of *Tafsīr*. This method, or source, entailed making use of a number of different fields of knowledge to reach a conclusion about the various 'āyāt in question. For example, under this source they would look into the linguistic aspects of the given 'āyah from all its dimensions. They would also look into the Arabian conventions, habits, and practices and their links to what had been revealed in the *Qur'ān*. Furthermore, they would pay attention to the conventions, practices, and the affairs of the Jews and the Christians while the *Qur'ān* was getting revealed to relate those to what has been mentioned in the *Qur'ān* about them. Also, they would not ignore the main tool of understanding the *Qur'ān* which is the reasons behind the revelations and the stories related to that. Lastly, they would go back to the most knowledgeable companion among them in order to ask him or her about certain aspects and equations because they certainly knew that some companions were better than others in certain fields. For instance, Ibn 'Abbās was very knowledgeable regarding the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān*, Bilāl was known to be knowledgeable regarding the 'Adhān and anything relating to the 'Adhān because this was his practice and profession, and lastly 'Ā'ishah was known to be knowledgeable about the personal affairs of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*.<sup>18</sup> The fourth source utilized by the companions were the people of the books from Christians and Jews. However, this source is not really a source of interpreting the *Qur'ān* as much as it can be considered an expansion of knowing more

<sup>15</sup> Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabī, 19.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-24.

about the details of the stories and the history of the previous prophets. This is because the Torah and *al-'Injīl* (the New Testament) used to have more detailed stories whereas the *Qur'ān* only contains a brief overview about them, like the story of 'Īsā (Jesus) for example. So, the companions would take more information about the history of those stories and prophets from the scholars of Jews and Christians who accepted Islam and became Muslims afterwards.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, this fourth source is not considered to be one of the main sources of interpreting the *Qur'ān* but it is one of the methods by which people at that time could reach a better understanding of where the Christians and Jews were coming from in terms of their beliefs and understanding. However, this is not applicable in our time because as Muslims we believe that the previous books have been distorted and changed by its own people and Islam has come and abrogated all the previous religions.

In this first stage of *Tafsīr*, these are the most famous companions who have mastered *Tafsīr*:

- 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās
- 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd
- 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib
- 'Ubay ibn Ka'b

However, there are more companions who have been known to be interpreters of the *Qur'ān* such as Abū Bakir al-Ṣaddīq, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān, Zayd ibn Thābit, Abū Mūsā al-'Sh'arī, 'Abdullāh ibn al-Zubayr, Anas ibn Mālik, Abū Hurayrah, and 'Ā'ishah the wife of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alayh wa sallam*. However, the first four are the most famous *Mufasssīrīn* among the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alayh wa sallam*.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Characteristics of the *Tafsīr* of the First Stage**

The first stage occurred during the era and the time of the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alayh wa sallam*.

- In this stage, the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* contained only that which the companions had asked the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alayh wa sallam* about due to its vagueness. Thus, the *Tafsīr* of the whole *Qur'ān* had not been completed or compiled at this time.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>20</sup> 'Abd al-Rahmān Jalāludīn al-Suyūṭī, 155-166; Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabī, 25.

- The disputes and the differences regarding the *Tafsīr* were very little.
- The companions used to stick with the abstract of the whole meaning without going in depth. An example of this is when 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was asked about the *āyah* number 31 in *Sūrat 'Abasa* where Allāh says “*Fākihātan wa 'Abbā*” he interpreted the entire *āyah* as a whole, and when he was asked specifically about the word *'Abbā* he said this is what is called being burdened and extreme.
- They always tended to conciseness and being brief with their *Tafsīr* unless they would mention the reason of the revelation.
- They had less *Fiqh* extraction and reflections from the *Qur'ān* because they mostly had the same orientation due to the fact that the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* was amongst them and the different schools of opinions were formed after them.
- In this stage, the *Tafsīr* didn't get written down or compiled in books, it was only narrations learned and heard from each other by heart. The *Tafsīr* only began to be written down and kept in books in the second century.
- The *Tafsīr* in this stage is like the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* in terms of the way it has been learned, taught, and delivered.<sup>21</sup>

### The Second Stage

The second stage of the *Tafsīr* occurred during the time of the followers. The followers are classified as those who have seen the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* but not the Prophet himself. Thus, this stage began after the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* died and his companions began having their own students leaning from them.<sup>22</sup>

### The Sources of the *Tafsīr* of the Second Stage

Each era has some features and aspects that are not found in other eras; however, since these two eras, the first and the second, are close to each other in time, the sources of *Tafsīr* are not that different. They are as follows:

<sup>21</sup> Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabī, 27-28.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 28.

- The *Qur'ān*.
- The *Sunnah* of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*.
- The interpretation of the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*.
- The skills of deduction, extraction, and reasoning with the tools that the followers have obtained from the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam*, and this varied from one follower to another.
- The conveyance from the books of Christians and Jews; however, some followers were very lenient in this matter in a way that they did not verify the authenticity of the narrations that they narrated from the Torah nor *al-'Injīl* (The New Testament).<sup>23</sup>

### **The Movement and Schools of *Tafsīr***

It can be safely taken as fact that there is a direct relation between the passing of time and the increasing vagueness that would occur in relation to the understanding of the *Qur'ān* due to many factors. One of these factors, is the death of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* and the separation of the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alyh wa sallam* who had moved and migrated to different regions in the world such as Madīnah, 'Irāq, and al-Shām in order to spread the word of Allāh and the religion of Islam. Therefore, because of the movement of the companions, we have come across many schools of *Tafsīr* that were established in different places during that time because each companion would be teaching the interpretation and the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* according to his knowledge and ability.<sup>24</sup> Some of the famous and popular schools that were developed during this era are:

1. The school of *Tafsīr* in Makkah which belonged to 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās whose famous students are Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, Mujaḥid ibn Jabir, 'Ikrimah (the servant of 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās), Ṭāwūs ibn Kīsān al-Yamāni, and 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ.
2. The school of *Tafsīr* in Madīnah which belonged to 'Ubay ibn Ka'b whose famous students are Abū al-'Āliyah, Rafī' ibn Mahrān al-Riyāḥy, Muḥammad ibn Ka'b al-Qarzy, and Zayd ibn 'Aslam.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

3. The school of *Tafsīr* in Iraq which belonged to 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd whose famous students are 'Alqamah ibn Qays al-Nakh'ī, Masrūq ibn al-'Ajda' al-Hamadānī, al-'Aswad ibn Yazīd al-Nakh'ī, Murrah al-Hamadān, 'Āmir al-Sha'bī, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and Qatādah al-Sadūsī.<sup>25</sup>

### The Characteristics of the *Tafsīr* in the Second Stage

In the time of the followers, the followers over mentioned many narrations taken from the books of the previous religions without verifying the authenticity of many of those narrations. These particular narrations are called *al-'Isrā'iliyyāt* due to the lenience of some of the followers at that time. These followers attempted to imitate the companions of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alayh wa sallam* in this matter but they did so without following and abiding by some of the principles that the companions had set for themselves. Therefore, this is one of the reasons why some scholars believe that the *Tafsīr* should only be taken from the first stage not the second and onwards, while some other scholars have allowed taking the *Tafsīr* from those in the second stage as long as it is done so while following a set of conditions.<sup>26</sup>

The *Tafsīr* in this time was kept in the same way it had been in the time of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alayh wa sallam* and his companions in terms of how it was learned, narrated, and delivered. However, the field of specialization came up in this time in a way that the narrators of Makkah took the knowledge and the *Tafsīr* related to Makkah and from their Scholar 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, and the same thing would apply with the other narrators from other regions, like Madīnah, 'Irāq, and al-Shām, and their scholars.<sup>27</sup>

Another characteristic of this stage was that some disputes began appearing in the *Tafsīr* which were triggered by the ideologies and beliefs of the followers. For example, Qatādah al-Sadūsī, who started breaking into *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar* (the fate and destiny) until he had disputed with the majority of the people in his time; and on the other hand, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī who has given the *Tafsīr* based on the affirmation of *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar* (the fate) and believed that whoever did not believe in that concept is not a Muslim.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

However, even though the disputes that arose in the *Tafsīr* of the followers in the second stage were becoming more and more obvious compared to the companions' era, they were still significantly less compared to the disputes that would arise in the generations and stages who would come after them.<sup>29</sup>

### **The Third and Final Stage of *Tafsīr***

The third and last stage of *Tafsīr*, which was also known as The Era of Inscription, was when the *Tafsīr* had finally begun being written down and inscribed. And this happened at the end of the leadership of Banī 'Umayyah and at the beginning of the leadership of al-'Abbāsiyīn. Before this time period, the *Tafsīr* was only a collection of oral narrations that were narrated and conveyed by hearing until then. However, after the era of the followers, those who came after them began paying more attention to the different narrations they were receiving. They especially paid attention to the narrations of the *Ḥadīth* of the Prophet *ṣallallāhu 'alayh wa sallam* and initiated inscribing them. This is why the *Tafsīr* was first classified under the category of *Ḥadīth*, and it was not given a separate category until later.<sup>30</sup> And from those who initially compiled the narrations of *Ḥadīth*, including those related to the *Tafsīr*, are Yazīd ibn Hārūn al-Sulamī who died in 117 A.H. and Shu'bah ibn al-Ḥajjāj who died in 160 A.H. After their death, the *Tafsīr* got separated from the narrations of the *Ḥadīth* in a way that the narrations related to the *Tafsīr* were compiled based on the order of *al-Suwar* (the chapters) of the *Qur'ān āyah* by *āyah*. And from those who compiled the narrations of *Tafsīr* with this approach are Ibn Mājah who died in 273 A.H. and Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī who died in 310 A.H. And in their *Tafsīr*, they would only mention the narrations that had chains from the companions, the followers, and the followers of the followers, except Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī who slightly expanded on this but still remained within the same framework.

After this, many scholars started writing in the field of *Tafsīr* within the same framework of the previous scholars who had narrated the narrations with its chains. Of course, their work would contain some similarities and some differences from their predecessors and from one another; but, they remained diligent for the sake of keeping the authenticity of those narrations without going beyond what they had heard and known

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 35.

from the previous scholars or narrators.<sup>31</sup> Whereas many of the books of *Tafsīr* which have been written since the leadership of *al-'Abbāsiyīn* until our time today, have gone beyond the authentic narrations of the classical scholars and have broadened to include ideas relating to logics, philosophy, personal understanding, and ideological understanding. And this is when the fabrications and lies have occurred in the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* because people began to be divided and each would give victory to their ideology and tendencies in general.<sup>32</sup> As a result, we can see these tendencies very obviously in the books of *Tafsīr* that follow the third stage. The linguists in general, whether they are syntacticians, morphologists, or phonologists, tend to interpret the *Qur'ān* based on the principles of their fields and make mention of the linguistic disputes regarding the *Qur'ān*. And those who are historians and interested in history would tend to focus on the stories and history mentioned in the *Qur'ān* to the point that they would include many narrations from *al-'Isrā'iliyyāt* which are not authentic.<sup>33</sup> And those who tend to philosophy, they tend to measure the *Tafsīr* with the measurement and the scale of the mind and whatever goes along with the mind, they will accept it even if it is weak; and whatever goes against the mind, they will reject it even if it is authentic. Note that in Islam, the mind and the *Shari'ah* go hand in hand together in terms of understanding and comprehending the rules of Islam and Islam in general. Therefore, in the human life, the scales that we weigh people with are different from the scales that we measure sugar with and so on. Thus, if the measurements with its scales are right then the results definitely will be right and correct. As a result, logics and analogy should be measured with the right measurement and we must apply them holistically while making the necessary distinction between the creations and the creator. In addition, those who tend to certain schools of creed and beliefs, they will try to prove and understand *Qur'ān* with what is going along with their beliefs. And those who tend to *Fiqh*, they will do the *Tafsīr* based on *Fiqh* and its principles. And by reading various books of *Tafsīr*, it is easy to see the different approaches and schools by which the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* has been interpreted. And this is the core and primary reason for why we have different types of *Tafsīr* today.<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

### Conclusion

This article explored and discussed the three stages involved in the documentation of the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān*. The first two stages mirrored the oral transmission of the *Tafsīr* of the *Qur'ān* and tried to remain as organic as possible. However, along with the physical spread of Islam, came the ideological spread as well. The stages outlined above clearly demonstrate how the concentric movement of Islam ultimately influenced how the *mufasssīrīn* of each respective stage and time reached their conclusions and meanings regarding the *Tafsīr*. This is essential knowledge for Muslims today because it is of utmost importance to trace the pathways of knowledge in order to identify when and where changes or an introduction of new ideas occurred. This insight will lead Muslims towards making informed decisions regarding which *Tafsīr* or *mufasssīr* they should take knowledge from, and which should be avoided.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### *The Noble Quran*

ʿAbd al-Rahmān Jalāludīn al-Suyūfī. (1426 A.H). *al-Itqān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*. Taḥqīq Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Qur'āniyyah. Al-Riyād: Wizārat al-Shuūn al-Islāmiyyah wa al- Daawah wa al-Irshād al-Sa'ūdiyyah.

Badr al-Dīn ʿAbdillāh al-Zarkashī. (1957). *al-Burhān fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān* (1<sup>st</sup> edn.). Al-Qāhirah: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Kutub al-ʿArabiyyah.

Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabī. (1977). *'Ilm al-Tafsīr*. Falasṭīn: Maktabat Falasṭīn li al- Kutub al-Muṣawwarah.

Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. (2001). *Jāmi'u al-Bayān 'an T'wīl Āyi al-Qur'ān* (1<sup>st</sup> edn.). Al-Qāhirah: Dār Hajar li al-Ṭibā'at Wa al-Nashr.