

The Quran and its Message

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Salamun Alaikum (Peace be upon you)

PRODUCE A SURAH LIKE IT - THE CHALLENGE OF THE QURAN

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The Quran is well known to have presented a challenge to its listeners to produce a Surah (Chapter) like it. The oft quoted reason for the challenge is cited as the inability of humans to be able to reproduce the divine eloquence and beauty of the text of the Quran. This would then amount to proof that the Quran was indeed the word of God. This is indeed the claim of the majority of Muslim theologians.

The Quran however makes no such claim with regards its challenge. At the heart of this majority Muslim belief is a misunderstanding of verses such as 2:23-24.

002:023

"And if you are in doubt as to that which We have revealed to Our servant, then produce a chapter (Arabic: Surah) like it and call on your witnesses besides God if you are truthful"

002:024

"But if you do not do it and never shall you do it (Arabic: **walan taf'alu**), then be on your guard against the fire of which men and stones are the fuel; it is prepared for the unbelievers"

Reading the above passages it is clear that the Quran invites its audience to bring a chapter - not a verse, but a complete unit of chapter like it. In verse 11:13 we note a similar challenge inviting the audience to bring 10 such chapters.

The first most important point to note is that the challenge is clearly directed at the immediate recipients and primary audience of the Arabic Quran. This is not a challenge to the whole world for time continuum.

If the challenge in 2:23 is read with its prophecy in 2:24 that 'never shall you do it' (Arabic: **walan taf'alu**), there is no reason given in this verse as to why.

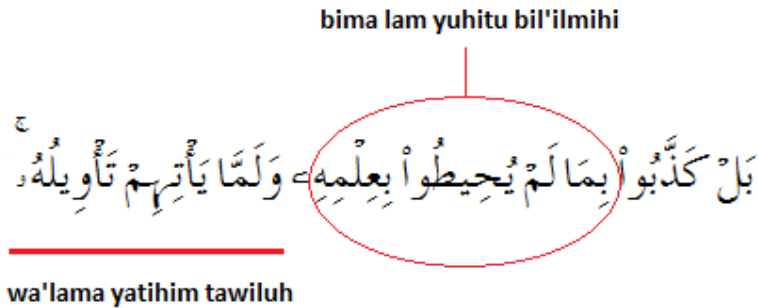
However, the reason why the listeners could never produce a Surah like the Quran is clearly elaborated in other verses of the Quran, particularly in 10:39 below.

10:038

"Or do they say: He has forged it? Say: Then bring a chapter like this and invite whom you can besides God, if you are truthful"

10:039

"Nay, but they denied that, the knowledge of it they could not encompass (**Arabic: bima lam yuhitu bil'ilmih**) and where its interpretation (**Arabic: wa'lama yatihim tawiluh**) has not yet come to them. Even so did those before them deny. Then see what was the consequence for the wrongdoers!"



[Illustration - Joseph Islam](#)

As is clear from the above verse, the reason that the challenge could never be met was **not** because the language of the Quran was far too superior for the them to emulate but because the '**bi'ilmih walama yatihim tawiluh**' (knowledge of its interpretation) had not yet been completed nor could they yet encompass its knowledge (bima lam yuhitu bi'ilmih).

Therefore claims that the listeners could never reproduce a Surah because of its superiority of language are not supported by the Quran itself.

Furthermore, the Quran makes it repeatedly clear that it is simply a discourse in clear Arabic (**15:1 - Quranin-mubin**) to a specific community of people to make the message clear to them. It is not poetry (**36:69**) nor is it revealed to represent a masterpiece in the Arabic language or to teach them Arabic (much in the same way the Torah was not revealed to the Israelites to represent a masterpiece in Hebrew).

Indeed, any language that God would make use of to impart His message would be used most effectively, but the purpose of the Arabic Quran and particularly its challenge has rather become obscured by Muslim theology.

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