

242365 - There is no contradiction between the description of the Qur'an as being clear and explained in detail, and the appearance of the huroof muqatta'ah in it

the question

Quranic verses are considered fassilat, that is explained in details in Surah Hud 11:1 and fassilat 41:3 but Huroof Muqomatats (qur'anic verses) meaning according to scholars are not explained by the prophet, that is not fassilat (which is contradictory).

Since Qur'an cannot contradict itself, how can we reconcile both?

Detailed answer

There is no contradiction between the Qur'an being described as clear and explained in detail, as Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“We have (indeed) explained in detail Our Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, Revelations, etc.) for people who know” [al-An ‘aam 6:97]

“Certainly, We have brought them a Book (the Qur'an) which We have explained in detail with knowledge, – a guidance and a mercy to a people who believe”

[al-A ‘raaf 7:52]

and the huroof muqatta'ah [groups of letters that appear at the beginning of some soorahs].

Ibn Katheer (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“We have (indeed) explained in detail Our Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, Revelations, etc.)” means: We have explained them and clarified them.

End quote from Tafseer al-Qur'an al-'Azeem (3/305).

There is no contradiction between that and the fact that the Holy Qur'an contains the huroof muqatta'ah at the beginning of some soorahs, for several reasons:

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The idea of being clear and explained in detail is applicable to the Qur'an and to its soorahs and verses, in general, not to every single word in it, which means that the idea of being explained in detail does not rule out exceptions. The Holy Qur'an itself states that there are exceptions, as is seen in the verse in which Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“It is He Who has sent down to you (Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him)) the Book (this Qur'an). In it are Verses that are entirely clear, they are the foundations of the Book [and those are the Verses of Al-Ahkâm (commandments), Al-Farâ'id (obligatory duties) and Al-Hudud (legal laws for the punishment of thieves, adulterers)]; and others not entirely clear. So as for those in whose hearts there is a deviation (from the truth) they follow that which is not entirely clear thereof, seeking Al-Fitnah (polytheism and trials), and seeking for its hidden meanings, but none knows its hidden meanings save Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it; the whole of it (clear and unclear Verses) are from our Lord.’ And none receive admonition except men of understanding”

[Aal 'Imraan 3:7].

Shaykh Muhammad al-Ameen ash-Shinqeeti (may Allah have mercy on him) said in al-'Adhb an-Nameer (2/168):

“it is He Who has sent down unto you the Book (the Qur'an), explained in detail” [al-An 'aam 6:114] means: in it, beliefs are explained clearly; in it the truth is explained and made distinct from falsehood, what is beneficial is made distinct from what is harmful, what is good is made distinct from what is bad. In it Allah explains: beliefs; halaal and haraam; what brings a person closer to Allah and what leads to His Paradise; what takes a person further away from Allah and incurs His wrath, and leads a person to His Hell; and He explains the ultimate destiny of both groups; what He has prepared for His close friends and what He has prepared for His enemies.

All of that is explained in detail in the Qur'an. Even though there are some ambiguous verses in the Qur'an (those that are not entirely clear), they are to be understood in the light of the clear verses, and their meanings are to be understood in the light of the clear verses.

As we mentioned above in Soorat Aal 'Imraan regarding the meaning of the verse (interpretation of the meaning): "in it are Verses that are entirely clear, they are the foundations of the Book" [Aal 'Imraan 3:7].

What this means is that the clear (muhkam) verses are the foundations of the book in the light of which anything that is unclear of the ambiguous (mutashaabih) verses is to be interpreted and understood. This is the meaning of the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"it is He Who has sent down unto you the Book (the Qur'an), explained in detail" [al-An'aam 6:114].

Explaining in detail is the opposite of speaking in general terms; it means explaining and making clear. End quote.

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The clear and detailed explanation of the verses of the Book does not mean that the verses do not include general or ambiguous statements, or verses that need to be interpreted, or verses that abrogate, or statements that may have more than one meaning. In fact all these types of verses exist in reality, but the Holy Qur'an – at the same time – includes verses that explain in detail matters that are mentioned elsewhere in general terms or are subject to interpretation or abrogation and the like. It contains some verses which explain others, and there are verses that explain what people need to know.

Hence we may regard the scholars' discussion of the meaning of the huroof muqatta'ah as being another detailed explanation, i.e., a clarification thereof; so that there is no contradiction between the existence of those letters and the description of the Qur'an as being the book that is clear and explained in detail.

The scholars said: If the Qur'an was all the same in its level of clarity and ease of understanding its meanings, the scholars would not have differed in their ways of interpreting and understanding it. But Allah decreed that there should be people who would be raised in status because of their knowledge, and that people would vary in their level of knowledge; therefore their explanations varied, according to their level of knowledge.

End quote from 'Aaridat al-Ahwadhi (1/124).

He also said:

With regard to it all being described as beautifully put together with the utmost conciseness and eloquence, using few words with abundant meanings, it is as Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, said concerning it (interpretation of the meaning): "a Book, the Verses whereof are perfected (in every sphere of knowledge), and then explained in detail" [Hood 11:1].

With regard to it all being mutashaabih (parts of it resembling other parts), because it discusses throughout these meanings that have been explained in detail, without falling short, going to excess, adding unnecessary detail or contradicting itself, it is as Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Do they not then consider the Qur'an carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein many contradictions"

[an-Nisa' 4:82]

"Allah has sent down the Best statement, a Book (this Qur'an), its parts resembling each other (in goodness and truth)"

[az-Zumar 39:23].

With regard to its verses being of two types, some of which are clear (muhkam) and some are ambiguous (mutashaabih), what is meant is that some verses are clear in meaning and others are subtle in meaning. If our Lord, may He be glorified, had so willed, He could have made all its verses equal in clarity. But He decreed that among people there would be some who are

knowledgeable and others who are ignorant, some who are well-versed in knowledge and others who are lacking therein, and He made them vary with regard to their level of understanding as He, may He be glorified and exalted, said (interpretation of the meaning):

“Allah will exalt in degree those of you who believe, and those who have been granted knowledge”

[al-Mujaadilah 58:11].

Here Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, tells us that He raises people in status by means of their faith, and raises them further by means of their knowledge. The one who does not understand its interpretation may limit himself to believing in it and accepting its meaning as Allah intended it to mean.

The one who is well versed in knowledge may examine it and understand the ambiguous (mutashaabih) verses in the light of the clear (muhkam) verses and whatever possible interpretation of the ambiguous verses is in accordance with the meaning of the clear verses, he may adopt that interpretation, and whatever interpretation contradicts it, he may ignore it. If it is possible, he may find a report from the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) to support the conclusion he reached.

End quote from al-Qabas fi Sharh Muwatta' Maalik ibn Anas (p. 1058)

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The huroof muqatta'ah are simply there to begin the soorahs, like something to alert the reader at the beginning. They are not necessarily connected to the topics discussed in the chapters, or the topics of the verses that the Qur'an speaks of and describes as being clear and explained in detail, based on the fact that the description of clarity and detail most often comes directly after the huroof muqatta'ah. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Alif-Lâm-Râ. [These letters are one of the miracles of the Qur'an and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings]. (This is) a Book, the Verses whereof are perfected (in every sphere of

knowledge), and then explained in detail from One (Allah), Who is All-Wise Well-Acquainted (with all things)”

[Hood 11:1]

“HâMîm [These letters are one of the miracles of the Qur’an, and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings.]

A revelation from (Allah) the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.

A Book whereof the Verses are explained in detail — a Qur’an in Arabic for people who know”

[Fussilat 41:1-3].

If this was a contradiction, it would not be like this, which could be easily avoided by any human being, let alone the Lord of mankind, to Whom belongs absolute perfection.

Therefore it is clear that what is referred to when the Qur’an is described as being explained in detail is the verses that discuss the main objectives of the Holy Qur’an, which is to explain Allah’s Oneness in His Lordship, His divinity, and His names and attributes; to deny that He has any partner; to state that absolute rulership belongs to Him alone, may He be glorified and exalted; and similar basic concepts that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) was sent to correct among the disbelievers of Quraysh. But if some verses were not made explained in detail, such as verses that speak of historic events, matters of the unseen, or issues having to do with rules and regulations, there is nothing wrong with that.

The wisdom behind that is so as to leave room for putting effort into understanding the verses (ijtihaad) and to create motives for academic research and discussion by those who are well-versed in knowledge. This is one of the greatest reasons for there being some ambiguous verses in the Qur’an and Sunnah.

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It may also be said that what is meant by the Qur’an being explained in detail is that it is clear in the minds of the well-versed scholars, and even the huroof muqatta‘ah and the ambiguous

(mutashaabih) verses are within the realm of their thinking and understanding.

Based on that, there is no contradiction at all. With regard to those who are not well-versed in knowledge, the verses that are not clear to them are many, not just the huroof muqatta‘ah, as the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “That which is halaal is clear and that which is haraam is clear, and between them are doubtful matters which many people do not understand.” Narrated by al-Bukhaari (52) and Muslim (1599). So the ambiguity and lack of clarity is not something that affects the scholars; rather it is something that affects the ordinary people only.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Ambiguity or lack of clarity is something relative. Something may be unclear to one person, but not to others. But there are some verses that are clear and there is no ambiguity in them for anyone. With regard to the ambiguous verses, once the meaning is known, they become no longer ambiguous. Rather everything in the Qur’an is clear, as Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“(This is) a Book, the Verses whereof are perfected (in every sphere of knowledge), and then explained in detail”

[Hood 11:1].

End quote from Majmoo‘ al-Fataawa (13/144).

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This confusion only arises if we understand the explaining in detail of the Qur’an as indicating that it is clear in its meanings, as was narrated above from Ibn Katheer. But if we understand the word fassilat (explained in detail) in accordance with other interpretations, then it will become clear that there is no contradiction with the huroof muqatta‘ah.

Describing the Qur’an as mufassil (explained in detail) does not mean that the meanings and interpretation are clear, according to many scholars. Rather what it means is that it makes a

clear distinction between truth and falsehood, or between halaal and haraam. And there are other views and interpretations. So if we interpret being explained in detail in this manner, then there is no contradiction between the Qur'an being explained in detail and the presence of the huroof muqatta'ah at the beginning of some soorahs, because the presence of these letters does not affect the fact that the Qur'an makes truth distinct from falsehood, and halaal distinct from haraam.

Imam al-Maawardi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Then he said regarding the verse (interpretation of the meaning), "We have (indeed) explained in detail Our Ayât (proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, Revelations, etc.) for people who know" [al-An'aam 6:97]:

There are four interpretations of what is meant by it being explained in detail. They are:

1. its meanings are explained in detail so that so that it becomes clear and not ambiguous;
2. it makes the one who is truthful distinct from the liar;
3. it makes truth distinct from falsehood, and guidance distinct from misguidance, as was the view of al-Hasan;
4. it makes commands distinct from prohibitions, what is recommended distinct from what is prohibited, and what is halaal distinct from what is haraam.

End quote from an-Nukat wa'l-'Uyoon (2/160).

He (may Allah have mercy on him) also said:

With regard to the verse (interpretation of the meaning), "A Book whereof the Verses are explained in detail" [Fussilat 1:3], there are five interpretations:

1. that it is explained and interpreted, as was suggested by Mujaahid;
2. that it was explained by mentioning promises and warnings, as was suggested by al-Hasan;

3. that it was explained by mentioning the reward and punishment, as was suggested by Sufyaan;

4. that it was explained by distinguishing between halaal and haraam, obedience and disobedience, as was suggested by Qataadah;

5. that it was explained with regard to Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), thus judgement was passed between him and those who opposed him, as was suggested by ‘Abd ar-Rahmaan ibn Zayd.

End quote from an-Nukat wa’l-‘Uyoon, 5/167

And Allah knows best.