

So you want to read the Koran?

The Koran is the sacred book of Islam, and it is considered by Muslims to be the infallible, pure word of Allah, eternal and perfect. The verses of the Koran were delivered through the angel Gabriel to Muhammad in a series of "revelations." Muhammad started receiving such "revelations" in 610 and they continued until his death in 632.

There are 114 chapters in the Koran. But you don't need to read them all. Instead, just focus on three chapters.

Getting Ready

In terms of which translation of the Koran to use, here is the one I rely on:

Interpretation of the Meanings of The Noble Qur'an, trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali (Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2007)

It's a translation done by two Muslim scholars and published in Saudi Arabia. It is available at Amazon.com or at the Dar-us-Salam bookstore in Texas: <https://dar-us-salam.com/>. I have not yet had a Muslim question this translation.

So do you just sit down and start reading the Koran on your own? Not according to Muhammad:

Muhammad bin Jarir reported that Ibn 'Abbas said that the Prophet said, 'Whoever explains the Qur'an with his opinion or with what he has no knowledge of, then let him assume his seat in the Fire.'

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, pp. 32-33

So in order to read and understand the Koran you need at least one authoritative Koran commentary (*tafsir*) by your side. The *tafsirs* explain the meanings and the contexts of verses in the Koran. For more details about the *tafsirs*, see my brochure *Introduction to Islam*.

I recommend the following two *tafsirs*.

1. *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn* (trans. Aisha Bewley - London: Dar Al Taqwa Ltd., 2007).

It has 1,378 pages and is a good one volume, introductory *tafsir*. It is available at Amazon.com.

2. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (abr. Shaykh Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri, trans. Jalal Abualrub, et al. - Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Darussalam, 2000). This *tafsir*

is the most popular interpretation of the Qur'an in the Arabic language, and the majority of the Muslims consider it to be the best source based on Qur'an and Sunnah.

Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Vol. 1, p. 5.

This is a ten volume *tafsir* that goes into much more depth than does the *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*. If you are interested in the entire set, I recommend ordering it from the Dar-

us-Salam bookstore in Texas: <https://dar-us-salam.com/>. You can also order individual volumes from Dar-us-Salam depending on which chapters of the Koran you are reading, as we shall see below.

For a good understanding of the three Koran chapters we are focusing on, I recommend buying a copy of the *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn* and the relevant individual volume of the *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*.

The Three Koran Chapters

Chapter 1 - Al-Fatihah (The Opening)

This is the first chapter of the Koran. Muhammad said it was the "greatest" chapter in the Koran, and any Muslim prayer that did not include *Al-Fatihah* was "invalid." So even today this chapter is recited in each cycle of the Muslim prayers, which means it is recited a number of times a day. And Jews and Christians are maligned each time it is recited.

For this Koran chapter you can use my brochure *The Lord's Prayer of Islam*. And Vol. 1 is the relevant volume of the *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*.

Before considering the other two chapters of the Koran to read, we need to review the Doctrine of Abrogation.

Muhammad received "revelations" during both the Meccan Period (610-622) and the Medinan Period (622-632). The verses of the Koran "revealed" in Mecca were generally more peaceful and accommodating toward non-Muslims. The verses from Medina had a general tendency to be more belligerent and intolerant,

and more inclined to make sharp differentiations between Muslims (believers) and non-Muslims (disbelievers).

So what was to be done if there was a conflict between the message of a Meccan verse and that of a Medinan verse addressing the same general topic?

This was covered in an early Medinan verse that introduced the concept of “abrogation”:

Chapter 2, Verse 106

Whatever a Verse (revelation) do We abrogate or cause to be forgotten, We bring a better one or similar to it. Know you not that Allah is Able to do all things?

Abrogation means that if there is a conflict between the messages of two “revelations” in the Koran, then the most recent “revelation” is the one to be followed. Consequently, a “revelation” made in Medina would supersede a similar, earlier “revelation” made in Mecca if there was such a conflict. For more information see my brochure *Abrogation: The Key to Understanding Islam*.

With the Doctrine of Abrogation in mind, we now turn to the final two Koran chapters.

Chapter 9 - At-Taubah (The Repentance)

This chapter is also known as *Al-Bara'ah* (the Immunity). This was the last complete chapter of the Koran to be “revealed” to Muhammad (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 4, pp. 369-370; and *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, p. 397). This means that Allah’s words in this chapter are his final words on the matters covered here.

Ibn ‘Abbas, Muhammad’s cousin, said that Chapter 9 was “meant to humiliate” non-Muslims (*Sahih Muslim*, Vol. 8, No. 3031, p. 404).

Vol. 4 is the relevant volume of the *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*.

Chapter 5 - Al-Ma'idah (The Table)

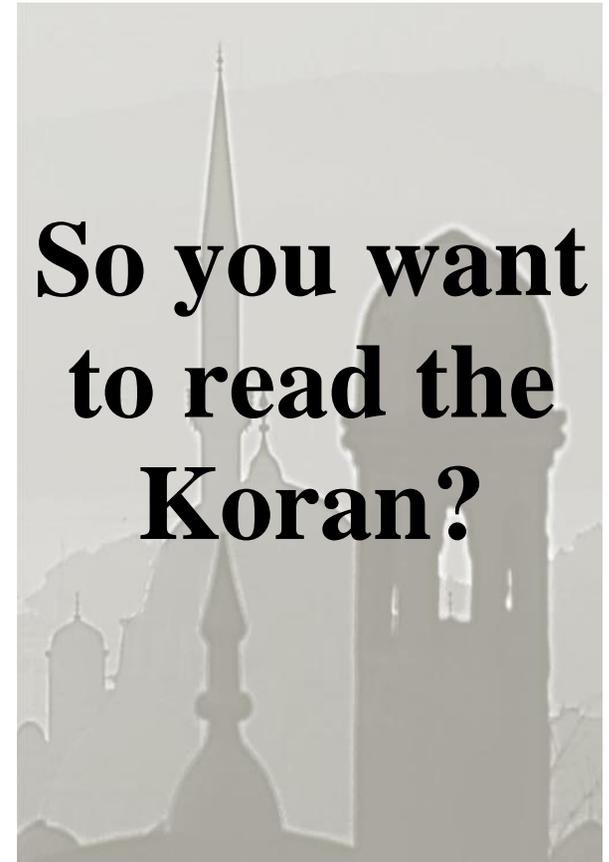
Some Muslim scholars believed that Chapter 5 was the next-to-the-last chapter to be “revealed” (e.g. *Tafsir Al-Jalalayn*, p. 397). Others said Chapter 5 was the last chapter to be “revealed” (*Tafsir Ibn Kathir*, Vol. 3, pp. 71 and 308).

Vol. 3 is the relevant volume of the *Tafsir Ibn Kathir*.

In terms of the Doctrine of Abrogation, whether Chapter 5 or Chapter 9 of the Koran was the final chapter to be “revealed” is not that important. In both we find that Islam is to be made the superior religion, and criticism of, or opposition to Islam is to be responded to with violence. In both, friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims is prohibited, and it is replaced with intolerance, hostility, and violence toward non-Muslims. These are the teachings of the last two chapters of the Koran to be “revealed,” and the final words of Allah on those matters.

Understand these three Koran chapters and you will understand much about Islam.

Dr. Kirby is the author of five books on Islam. His latest book is *The Lure of Fantasy Islam: Exposing the Myths and Myth Makers*. His books are available on Amazon.com.



Part of a series on Islam

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