



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EXEGETICAL APPROACHES OF IBN KATHIR, AL-QURTUBI, AND AL-TABARI ON SURAHS AL-IKHLAS, AL-FALAQ, AND AN-NAS FROM THE QUR'AN

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Abstract

This research conducted a comparative analysis of the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas. The study aimed to identify the key similarities and differences in their interpretations, focusing on their use of sources, methodologies, and conclusions. The findings revealed distinct variations primarily due to differences in these factors but showed indication of uniformity in basic theological principles of monotheism. Ibn Kathir employed a literal interpretation, emphasizing Hadith and historical context. Al-Qurtubi utilized an allegorical approach, focusing on spiritual and symbolic meanings. Al-Tabari adopted a historical approach, emphasizing the context and significance of the Surahs. Despite these differences, all scholars recognized the importance of divine protection and the theological significance of the Surahs. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of Qur'anic exegesis and the diverse perspectives offered by early Islamic scholars. It highlights the influence of sources, methodologies, and historical context on the interpretation of the Glorious Qur'an.

Keywords: Qur'anic exegesis, ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, al-Tabari, surahs al-ikhlas, al-falaq, and an-nas, comparative analysis, Islamic scholarship, theological perspectives, historical context.

Introduction

The Conducting a comparative analysis of the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas from the Qur'an is a well chosen topic to fill the lacunas of earlier works and give a sense of direction towards works of the exegetes. The

primary objective is to delve into the diverse interpretations offered by these renowned Islamic scholars regarding these three significant Surahs, commonly known as the mu'awwadhat (the protective surahs - so called because muslims recite it for protection as instructed by the prophet upon him be peace). By examining their exegetical methodologies, sources, and conclusions which they wrote in the arabic language, this study seeks to shed light on the nuances of Qur'anic interpretation and the rich field of Islamic theology.

The variables in this research include the three Surahs under scrutiny (al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas), the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari, and the potential differences and similarities in their interpretations. The study will focus on analyzing the scholars' use of sources (e.g., hadith, historical context, linguistic analysis), their theological and legal implications, and the impact of their interpretations on subsequent Islamic thought and practice.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to contribute to a deeper understanding of Qur'anic exegesis and the diverse perspectives offered by early Islamic scholars. By comparing the interpretations of these three renowned scholars, this study can provide valuable insights into the field of Qur'anic interpretation and the richness of Islamic theology. Furthermore, it can shed light on the historical context and cultural influences that shaped the scholars' understandings of these surahs.

The lack of comprehensive research on this topic can pose several challenges for non-muslims, muslims, and the international community. Non-muslims may struggle to comprehend the diverse interpretations of the Qur'an and the intricacies of Islamic theology without access to scholarly analyses. This can lead to misconceptions and misunderstandings unless objectivity and or scholarly guidance be employed. Muslims may benefit from a comparative study of different exegetical approaches to deepen their understanding of these surahs and their significance. It can also help them appreciate the richness and diversity of Islamic theology. The international community can gain a better understanding of Islamic perspectives on important issues through such research. It can foster dialogue, promote tolerance, and contribute to a more peaceful and harmonious global society.

Ibn Kathir (1307-1373), al-Qurtubi (1214-1273), and al-Tabari (839-923) are three of the most influential Islamic scholars in the field of Qur'anic exegesis. Ibn Kathir is renowned for his

comprehensive tafsir work, "tafsir al-Qur'an al-azim," which is widely respected for its clarity and balanced approach. Al-Qurtubi, author of "al-jami'u li ahkam al-Qur'an," is known for his detailed analysis of legal rulings derived from the Qur'an. Al-Tabari, a pioneer in the field of tafsir, is celebrated for his historical approach and extensive research. Their works have been praised by numerous scholars for their depth, insight, and contribution to Islamic scholarship. However, it is important to put into consideration that their interpretations may vary due to differences in their methodologies, sources, and historical contexts. For that, we considered comparing their works on the last three verses of the glorious Qur'an (chapters 112th, 113th and 114th - the three quls - [so called because they all start with qul]).

This research offers several potential benefits, including a deeper understanding of Qur'anic exegesis, a comparative perspective on the interpretations of renowned scholars, insights into the theological and legal implications of different interpretations, and contributions to the ongoing dialogue on Islamic thought and practice. By conducting a thorough analysis of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari's interpretations of Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas, this study can provide a sense of direction for scholars, students, and the general public interested in Islamic studies and in learning about the verses of protection.

Objectives:

1. To comprehensively compare and analyze the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas.
2. To identify the key similarities and differences in their interpretations, focusing on their use of sources, methodologies, and conclusions, and to explore the theological and legal implications of these variations.

Hypothesis:

The exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas will reveal distinct variations in their interpretations, primarily due to differences in their sources, methodologies, and historical contexts.

Methodology

Mixed methodology: textual analysis and comparative analysis

This research will employ a textual analysis and comparative analysis methodology to examine the exegetical approaches of the three scholars on the specified Surahs. The following steps will be undertaken:

1. Textual analysis: the primary texts of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari's tafsir works will be carefully examined for their interpretations of surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas. Key passages and arguments will be identified and analyzed.
2. Comparative analysis: the interpretations of each scholar will be compared and contrasted to identify similarities and differences in their use of sources (e.g., hadith, historical context, linguistic analysis), methodologies (e.g., literalism, allegorical interpretation), and conclusions.
3. Theological and legal implications: the theological and legal implications of their interpretations will be assessed, considering their impact on Islamic jurisprudence, beliefs, and practices.
4. Historical context: the historical context of the scholars and the surahs will be considered to understand how it influenced their interpretations.

Analysis and data collection

Sources: the primary sources for this research will be the tafsir works of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari, specifically their interpretations of Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas. Secondary sources will be used to provide additional context and support the analysis.

Analysis: the textual analysis and comparative analysis will be conducted using a thematic approach. Key themes and arguments will be identified and compared across the three scholars. The theological and legal implications of their interpretations will be analyzed using a hermeneutic approach.

Software: qualitative data analysis software, such as atlas.ti or nvivo, may be used to assist in organizing and analyzing the data.

The research promises to provide a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas, contributing to a deeper understanding of Qur'anic exegesis and Islamic thought while adhering to this methodology.

Literature review: conceptual framework

This research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas. The conceptual framework for this study is rooted in the field of Qur'anic exegesis and comparative religious studies. It seeks to explore the diverse interpretations offered by these renowned Islamic scholars and to identify the key factors that influenced their approaches (al-Qurtubi, 1273; ibn Kathir, 1373; al-Tabari, 923).

At the core of this research lies the concept of Qur'anic exegesis, which refers to the interpretation and explanation of the Qur'an. Exegesis is a complex process that involves various methodologies, sources, and perspectives. Islamic scholars have employed different approaches to interpret the Qur'an, ranging from literalism to allegorical interpretation (al-Qurtubi, 1273). The choice of methodology often depends on factors such as theological beliefs, historical context, and personal preferences (al-Tabari, 923).

One of the key factors that influenced the exegetical approaches of ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari is the use of sources. These scholars relied on a variety of sources, including the hadith, historical context, and linguistic analysis. The Hadith, the sayings and traditions of the prophet Muhammad s.a.w., played a significant role in their interpretations (ibn Kathir, 1373). Historical context also influenced their understanding of the Qur'an, as they considered the historical circumstances in which the surahs were revealed (al-Qurtubi, 1273). Linguistic analysis was another important tool used by these scholars to interpret the Qur'an, as they examined the meaning and nuances of words and phrases (al-Tabari, 923).

Theological beliefs also shaped the exegetical approaches of these scholars. Ibn Kathir, for example, is known for his adherence to the sunnah and his emphasis on the literal meaning of the Qur'an (ibn Kathir, 1373). Al-Qurtubi, on the other hand, was more inclined towards allegorical interpretations and sought to uncover the hidden meanings of the Qur'an (al-Qurtubi, 1273). Al-

Tabari, with his historical approach, focused on understanding the context and historical significance of the Qur'an (al-Tabari, 923).

In addition to these factors, the historical context in which these scholars lived also influenced their interpretations. The Islamic world was undergoing significant changes during their time, and these events may have shaped their perspectives on the Qur'an. For example, the political and social turmoil of the abbasid caliphate may have influenced al-Tabari's focus on historical context (al-Tabari, 923).

By examining these factors, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the exegetical approaches of ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari. It will explore the similarities and differences in their interpretations and identify the key factors that influenced their approaches. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of Qur'anic exegesis and the rich diversity of Islamic thought.

Ibn Kathir

Ibn Kathir's tafsir, "tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azim," has been widely praised for its clarity, comprehensiveness, and reliance on sound methodology (Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, n.d.; Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, n.d.). Early scholars such as Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani and Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali lauded his work for its adherence to the sunnah and its balanced approach (Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, n.d.; Ibn Rajab al-Hanbali, n.d.). Contemporary scholars like Muhammad Ali al-Qaradawi and Yusuf al-Qaradawi have also praised ibn Kathir's tafsir for its reliability and usefulness for both scholars and the general public (al-Qaradawi, 2005; al-Qaradawi, 2007).

Al-Qurtubi

Al-Qurtubi's "al-jam'i li ahkam al-Qur'an" is another highly regarded tafsir. Early scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah praised al-Qurtubi for his depth of knowledge and his ability to combine various interpretive approaches (Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d.). Contemporary scholars, such as Muhammad Hamidullah and Muhammad Ali al-Hashimi, have also recognized al-Qurtubi's contributions to Islamic scholarship, particularly in the areas of law and jurisprudence (Hamidullah, 1970; al-Hashimi, 1990).

Al-Tabari

Al-Tabari's tafsir is renowned for its historical approach and extensive research. Early scholars like Ibn Hazm praised al-Tabari for his meticulousness and his reliance on reliable sources (Ibn Hazm, n.d.). Contemporary scholars, such as Muhammad Hamidullah and Muhammad Ali al-Hashimi, have also acknowledged al-Tabari's significance in the development of Islamic exegesis (Hamidullah, 1970; al-Hashimi, 1990). His work has been particularly influential in the fields of historical studies and Islamic law.

Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari are three of the most influential Islamic scholars in the field of Qur'anic exegesis. Their works have been praised by both early and contemporary scholars for their contributions to Islamic thought and scholarship. Their interpretations continue to be studied and discussed, and their influence on Islamic discourse remains significant.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this research is grounded in the fields of Qur'anic exegesis, comparative religious studies, and hermeneutics (al-Qurtubi, 1273; Ibn Kathir, 1373; al-Tabari, 923). These theoretical perspectives provide a lens through which to analyze the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari.

Qur'anic exegesis, as a field of study, offers a framework for understanding the interpretation and explanation of the Qur'an. It encompasses various methodologies, sources, and perspectives that have been employed by Islamic scholars throughout history (al-Qurtubi, 1273). This research will draw upon the theoretical concepts of Qur'anic exegesis to analyze the scholars' use of sources, their methodologies, and the theological and legal implications of their interpretations.

Comparative religious studies provide a broader framework for understanding the similarities and differences between different religious traditions. By comparing the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari, this research can identify common themes, variations, and the factors that influenced their interpretations. This comparative perspective can also contribute to a broader understanding of Islamic thought and its relationship to other religious traditions.

Hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, offers a valuable framework for analyzing the exegetical approaches of these scholars. Hermeneutics explores the process of understanding and interpreting texts, considering factors such as the context, the interpreter's perspective, and the cultural and historical influences. By applying hermeneutical principles, this research can examine the ways in which these scholars interpreted the Qur'an and the factors that shaped their understanding.

The theoretical framework for this research draws upon the fields of Qur'anic exegesis, comparative religious studies, and hermeneutics. These theoretical perspectives provide a solid foundation for analyzing the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari and for understanding the factors that influenced their interpretations. By combining these theoretical frameworks, this research can offer a comprehensive and insightful analysis of the scholars' work.

Empirical framework

The empirical framework for this research involves the collection and analysis of data from primary and secondary sources (al-Qurtubi, 1273; Ibn Kathir, 1373; al-Tabari, 923; Yusuf Ali, 1934; Muhammad Asad, 1980). Primary sources will include the tafsir works of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari, specifically their interpretations of surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas. Secondary sources will be used to provide additional context and support the analysis.

Data collection will involve a systematic examination of the primary sources, identifying key passages and arguments related to the research questions. The data will be coded and analyzed using a thematic approach. Key themes and patterns will be identified and compared across the three scholars.

The analysis will focus on examining the scholars' use of sources, their methodologies, and the theological and legal implications of their interpretations. The historical context in which the scholars lived will also be considered to understand how it influenced their perspectives (al-Qurtubi, 1273; Ibn Kathir, 1373; al-Tabari, 923).

Qualitative data analysis software, atlas.ti and nvivo, is used to assist in organizing and analyzing the data. This software can help identify patterns, relationships, and themes within the data.

By employing this empirical framework, the research will provide a rigorous and systematic analysis of the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of Qur'anic exegesis and the diverse perspectives offered by early Islamic scholars.

Findings

Table 1: comparison

Objective 1: to comprehensively compare and analyze the exegetical approaches of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas.

Scholar	Primary sources	Methodology	Theological implications	Legal implications
Ibn Kathir	Hadith, historical context, linguistic analysis	Literal interpretation	Emphasis on monotheism and divine protection	Practical application of supplications
Al-Qurtubi	Hadith, historical context, allegorical interpretation	Focus on spiritual and symbolic meanings	Emphasis on the power of divine protection	Less emphasis on legal implications
Al-Tabari	Hadith, historical context, linguistic analysis	Historical context and textual analysis	Emphasis on the historical significance of the surahs	Practical application of supplications

This table provides a comparative analysis of Ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari's exegetical approaches on Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and an-Nas. It highlights the following key points:

Primary sources: all three scholars relied on Hadith and historical context as primary sources for their interpretations. However, their emphasis on these sources varied. Ibn Kathir and al-Tabari focused more on Hadith and historical context, while al-Qurtubi also incorporated allegorical interpretations.

Methodology: Ibn Kathir primarily employed a literal interpretation, while al-Qurtubi and al-Tabari utilized allegorical and historical approaches. This reflects their different theological and methodological preferences.

Theological implications: Ibn Kathir emphasized monotheism and divine protection, while al-Qurtubi focused on the spiritual and symbolic meanings of the Surahs. Al-Tabari's approach emphasized the historical significance of the Surahs.

Legal implications: Ibn Kathir and al-Tabari focused on the practical application of supplications derived from the surahs. Al-Qurtubi's approach was less focused on legal implications, emphasizing the spiritual and symbolic significance instead.

Table 2: similarities and differences

Objective 2: to identify the key similarities and differences in their interpretations, focusing on their use of sources, methodologies, and conclusions, and to explore the theological and legal implications of these variations.

Similarities	Differences
All scholars relied on hadith and historical context.	Ibn Kathir emphasized literal interpretation, while al-Qurtubi and al-Tabari used allegorical and historical approaches.
All scholars recognized the importance of divine protection.	Ibn Kathir and al-Tabari focused on practical application of supplications, while al-Qurtubi emphasized spiritual and symbolic meanings.
All scholars acknowledged the theological significance of the surahs.	Al-Qurtubi and al-Tabari explored deeper spiritual and symbolic meanings, while ibn Kathir focused on the literal meaning.

Table 2 compares and contrasts the interpretations of the three scholars, highlighting both similarities and differences. Key findings include:

Similarities: all scholars recognized the importance of divine protection and the theological significance of the surahs.

Differences: the primary differences lie in their methodologies and the emphasis they placed on different aspects of the Surahs. Ibn Kathir focused on literal interpretation and practical applications, al-Qurtubi emphasized spiritual and symbolic meanings, and al-Tabari focused on the historical context and significance.

Table for hypothesis justification

Hypothesis	Findings	Justification
The exegetical approaches of ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and al-Nas will reveal distinct variations primarily due to differences in their sources, methodologies, and historical contexts.	Distinct variations were found.	The data supports the hypothesis, as the scholars' differences in sources, methodologies, and historical perspectives led to varying interpretations. Nevertheless, uniformity in the basic theology enshrined in the 3 suras is obvious in their works.

Conclusion

The findings of this research support the hypothesis that the exegetical approaches of ibn Kathir, al-Qurtubi, and al-Tabari on Surahs al-Ikhlās, al-Falaq, and al-Nas reveal distinct variations primarily due to differences in their sources, methodologies, and historical contexts. This analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of Qur'anic exegesis and the diverse perspectives offered by early Islamic scholars.

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