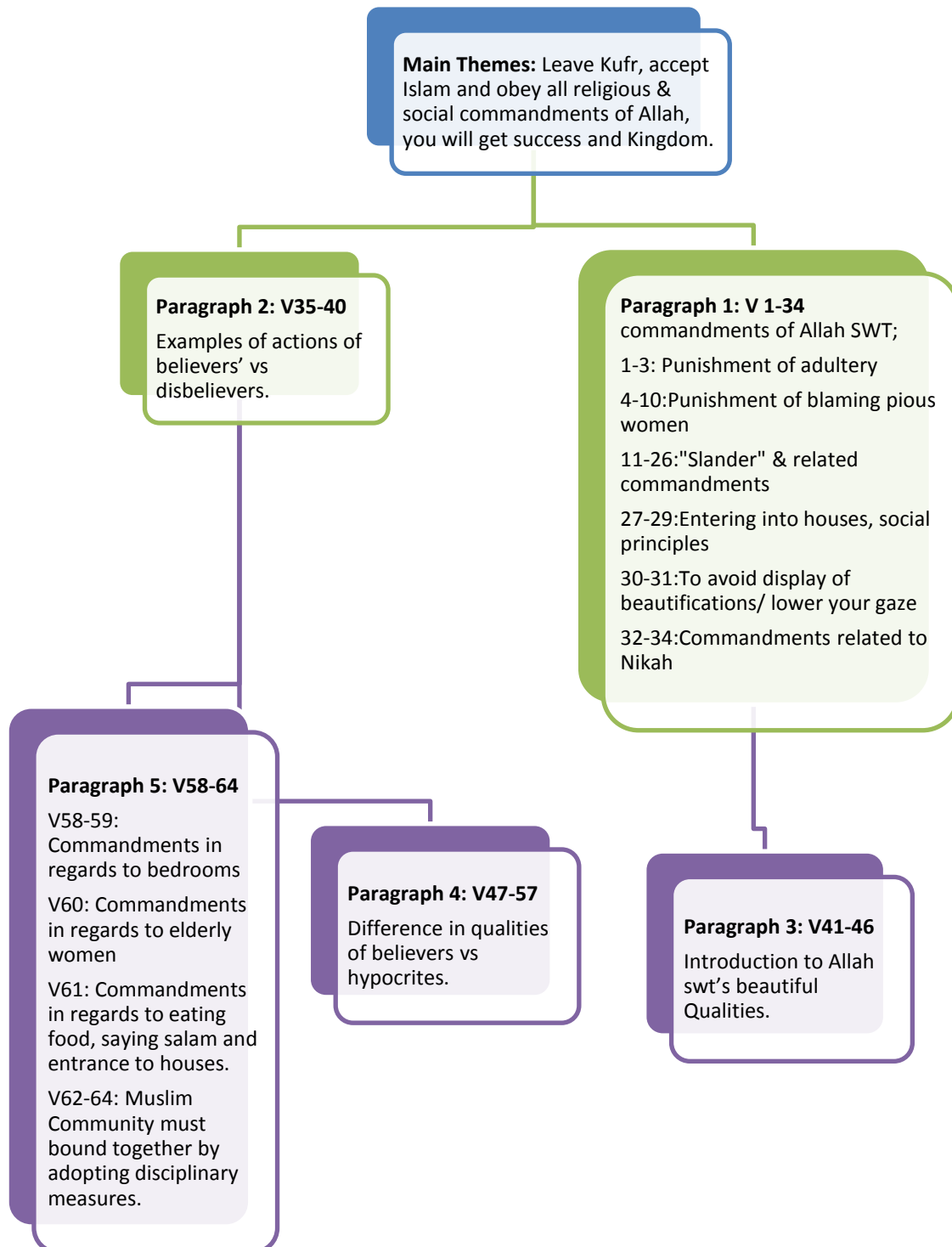


Flow Chart

Macro Structure

24. Surah An Noor (The Light) Verses: 64; Madni; Paragraphs: 5



Period of Revelation. The consensus of opinion is that it was sent down after the Campaign against Bani al-Mustaliq and this is confirmed by vv. 11-20 that deal with the incident of the "Slander", which occurred during that Campaign. But there is a difference of opinion as to whether this Campaign took place in 5 A. H. before the Battle of the Trench or in 6 A. H. after it. It is important to decide this issue in order to determine whether this Surah was sent down earlier or Surah Al- Ahzab(XXXIII), which is the only other Surah containing the Commandments about the observance of purdah by women. Surah Al-Ahzab was admittedly sent down on the occasion of the Battle of the Trench. Now if this Battle occurred earlier, it would mean that the initial instructions in connection with the Commandments of purdah were sent down in Surah Al-Ahzab and they were complemented later by the Commandments revealed in this Surah. On the other hand, if the Campaign against Bani al-Mustaliq occurred earlier, the chronological order of the Commandments would be reversed, and it would become difficult to understand the legal wisdom and implications of the Commandments of purdah.

According to Ibn Sa'd, the Campaign against Bani al Mustaliq took place in Shaban 5 A. H. and the Battle of the Trench in Zil- Qa'dah the same year. This opinion is based on some traditions from Hadrat Ayesha about the events connected with the "Slander" in which she refers to a dispute between Hadrat Sa'd bin 'Ubadah and Sa'd bin Mu'az. Hadrat Sa'd bin Mu'az, according to authentic traditions, died during the Campaign against Bani Quraizah, which took place immediately after the Battle of the Trench. It is, therefore, evident that he could not be present in 6 A. H. to take part in a dispute about the "Slander".

On the other hand, Muhammad bin Ishaq says that the Battle of the Trench took place in Shawwal 5 A. H. and the Campaign against Bani al-Mustaliq in Sha'ban 6 A. H. This opinion is supported by many authentic traditions from Hadrat Ayesha and others. According to these traditions, (1) the Commandments about purdah had been sent down in Surah Al-Ahzab before the incident of the "Slander", (2) the Holy Prophet had married Hadrat Zainab in Zil-Qa'dah 5 A. H. after the Battle of the Trench, (3) Hamnah, sister of Hadrat Zainab, had taken a leading part in spreading the "Slander", just because Hadrat Ayesha was a rival of her sister. All this evidence supports the view of Muhammad bin Ishaq.

Now let us consider the two opinions a little more closely. The only argument in favor of the first opinion is the mention of the presence of Hadrat Sa'd bin Mu'az in a dispute connected with the incident of the "Slander". But this argument is weakened by some other traditions from Hadrat Ayesha, in which she mentions Hadrat Usaid bin Hudair instead of Hadrat Sa'd bin Mu'az in this dispute. It may, therefore, be assumed that there has been some confusion regarding the two names in reporting the traditions. Moreover, if we accept the first opinion, just because of the mention of the name of Hadrat Sa'd bin Mu'az in some traditions, we encounter other difficulties that cannot be resolved in any way. For, in that case, we shall have to admit that the revelation of the Commandments of purdah and the Holy Prophet's marriage with Hadrat Zainab had taken place even earlier than the Battle of the Trench. But we learn from the Qur'an and many authentic traditions that both these events happened after that Battle and the Campaign against Bani Quraizah. That is why Ibn Hazm, Ibn Qayyim and some other eminent scholars have held the opinion of Muhammad bin Ishaq as correct, and we also hold it to be so. Thus, we conclude that Surah Al Ahzab was

sent down earlier than Surah An-Nur, which was revealed in the latter half of 6 A. H. several months after Surah Al Ahzab.

Theme and Topics

This Surah and vv. 28-73 of Surah Al-Ahzab(of which this is the sequel) were sent down to strengthen the moral front, which at that time was the main target of the attack, vv. 28-73 of Al-Ahzab were sent down concerning the Holy Prophet's marriage with Hadrat Zainab, and on the occasion of the second attack (the "Slander" about Hadrat Aishah), Surah An-Nur was sent down to repair the cracks that had appeared in the unity of the Muslim Community. If we keep this in view during the study of the two Surahs, we shall understand the wisdom that underlies the Commandments about purdah. Allah sent the following instructions to strengthen and safeguard the moral front, and to counteract the storm of propaganda that was raised on the occasion of the marriage of Hazrat Zainab:

1. The wives of the Holy Prophet were enjoined to remain within their private quarters, to avoid display of adornments and to be cautious in their talk with other persons (vv. 32, 33).
2. The other Muslims were forbidden to enter the private rooms of the Holy Prophet and instructed to ask whatever they wanted from behind the curtain.(v. 53).
3. A line of demarcation was drawn between the *mahram* and the non-*mahram* relatives. Only the former were allowed to enter the private rooms of those wives of the Holy Prophet with whom they were so closely related as to prohibit marriage with them.(v. 55).
4. The Muslims were told that the wives of the Prophet were prohibited for them just like their own real mothers; therefore every Muslim should regard them with the purest of intentions.(vv. 53, 54).
5. The Muslims were warned that they would invite the curse and scourge of Allah if they offended the Holy Prophet. Likewise it was a heinous sin to attack the honour of or slander any Muslim man or woman.(vv. 57, 58).
6. All the Muslim women were enjoined to cover their faces with their sheets if and when they had to go out of their houses.(v. 59).

On the occasion of the second attack, this Surah was sent down to keep pure and strengthen the moral fibre of the Muslim society, which had been shaken by the enormity of the slander. We give below a summary of the Commandments and instructions in their chronological order so that one may understand how the Qur'an makes use of the psychological occasion to reform the Community by the adoption of legal, moral and social measures.