
Sūrah 1: al-Fātihah**Period of Revelation**

It is one of the very earliest Revelations to the Prophet. As a matter of fact we learn from authentic Hadith (traditions) that it was the first complete Sūrah which was revealed to Prophet Muhammad. Before this only a few verses were revealed which form parts of Sūrah Alaq, Nun, Muzzammil and Muddathir.

Theme

This Sūrah is in fact a prayer which God has taught to all those who want to make a study of His Book. It has been placed at the very beginning of the Book to teach this lesson to the reader: if you sincerely want to benefit from the Qur'ān, you should offer this prayer to the Lord of the Universe.

This preface is meant to create a strong desire in the heart of the reader to seek guidance from the Lord of the Universe, who alone can grant it. Thus al-Fātihah indirectly teaches that the best thing for a man is to pray for guidance to the straight path, to study the Qur'ān with the mental attitude of a seeker-after-truth and to recognize the fact that the Lord of the Universe is the source of all knowledge. He should, therefore, begin the study of the Qur'ān with a prayer to him for guidance.

From this theme, it becomes clear that the real relation between al-Fātihah and the Qur'ān is not that of an introduction to a book but that of a prayer and its answer. Al-Fātihah is the prayer from the servant and the Qur'ān is the answer from the Master to his prayer. The servant prays to God to show him guidance and the Master places the whole of the Qur'ān before him in answer to his prayer, as if to say, "This is the Guidance you begged from Me."

Sūrah 1: al-Fātihah¹

1. In the name of God,² the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.³
2. [All] praise is [due] to God, Lord⁴ of the worlds –
3. The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful,
4. Sovereign of the Day of Recompense.⁵
5. It is You we worship and You we ask for help.
6. Guide us to the straight path –
7. The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray.

¹ *Al-Fātihah*: The Opening (of the Qur’ān). Note: *Sūrah* titles are not an integral part of the Qur’ān. A distinguishing word in a particular *sūrah* or a word defining its subject matter often became a common means of identification among the Prophet’s companions and later scholars. Although some names, such as *al-Fātihah*, were used by the Prophet in reference to a particular *sūrah*, they were not specifically designated by him as titles.

² God, Creator and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is within them, the Eternal and Absolute, to whom alone all worship is due.

³ *Ar-Rahmān* and *ar-Rabeem* are two names of God derived from the word “*rahmān*” (mercy). In Arabic grammar both are intensive forms of “merciful” (i.e., extremely merciful). A complimentary and comprehensive meaning is intended by using both together.

Rahmān is used only to describe God, while *rabeem* might be used to describe a person as well. The Prophet was described in the Qur’ān as *rabeem*. *Rahmān* is above the human level (i.e., intensely merciful). Since one usually understands intensity to be something of short duration, God describes Himself also as *rabeem* (i.e., continually merciful).

Rahmān also carries a wider meaning - merciful to all creation. Justice is a part of this mercy. *Rabeem* includes the concept of speciality - especially and specifically merciful to the believers. Forgiveness is a part of this mercy. (See al-Qurtubī’s *al-Jamī’u li Abkāmīl-Qur’an*, pp.103-107.)

However we will incorporate the translation henceforth, ‘In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful’

⁴ When referring to God, the Arabic term “*rabb*” (translated as “Lord”) includes all of the following meanings: “owner, master, ruler, controller, sustainer, provider, guardian and caretaker.”

⁵ i.e., repayment and compensation for whatever was earned of good or evil during life on this earth.