

Sūrah 112: al-Ikhlās

Period of Revelation

Whether it is a Makki or a Madani Sūrah is disputed, and the difference of opinion has been caused by the traditions which have been related concerning the occasion of its revelation. We give them below ad serial-tum:

1. Abdullah bin Masud has reported that the Quraysh said to the Prophet: "Tell us of the ancestry of your Lord." Thereupon this Sūrah was sent down. (Tabarani).
2. Abul Aliyah has related on the authority of Ubayy bin Kab that the polytheists said to the Prophet: Tell us of your Lord's ancestry. Thereupon God sent down this Sūrah. (Musnad Ahmad, Ibn Abi Harim, Ibn Jarir, Tirmidhi, Bukhari in At-Tarikh, Ibn al-Mundhir, Hakim, Baihaqi). Tirmidhi has related a tradition on the same theme from Abul Aliyah, which does not contain any reference to Ubayy bin Kab, and has declared it to be more authentic.
3. Jabir bin Abdullah has stated that a bedouin (according to other traditions, some people) said to the Prophet: "Tell us of your Lord's ancestry." Thereupon God sent down this Sūrah. (Abu Yala, Ibn Jarir, Ibn al-Mundhir, Tabarani in Al-Ausat, Baihaqi, Abu Nuaim in Al-Hilyah)
4. Ikrimah has related a tradition from Ibn Abbas, saying that a group of the Jews, including Kab bin Ashraf, Huyayy bin Akhtab and other, came before the Prophet and said: "O Muhammad, tell us of the attributes of your Lord, Who has sent you as a Prophet." Thereupon God sent down this Sūrah. (Ibn Abi Hatim, Ibn Adi, Baihaqi in Al-Asma was-Sifat)

In addition to these, some other traditions also have been cited by Ibn Taimiyyah in his commentary of Sūrah Al-Ikhlās, which are as follows:

These traditions show that different people on different occasions had questioned the Prophet about the essence and nature of the God to Whose service and worship he invited the people, and on every occasion he recited by God's command this very Sūrah in response. First of all, the pagans of Quraysh asked him this question in Makkah, and in reply this Sūrah was sent down. Then, at Madinah, sometimes the Christians, and sometimes the other people of Arabia, asked him questions of this nature, and every time God inspired him to recite this very Sūrah in answer to them. In each of these traditions, it has been said that this Sūrah was revealed on this or that occasion. From this one should not form the impression that all these traditions are mutually contradictory. The fact is that whenever there existed with the Prophet a verse or a Sūrah previously revealed in respect of a particular question or matter, and later the same question was presented before him, God inspired him to recite the same verse or Sūrah to the people as it contained the answer to their question. The reporters of Hadith describe the same thing, saying: When such and such a question or matter was presented before the Prophet, such and such a verse or Sūrah was revealed. This has also been described as repetition of revelation, i.e. the revelation of a verse or Sūrah several times.

Thus, the fact is that this Sūrah is Makki, rather in view of its subject matter a Sūrah revealed in the earliest period at Makkah, when detailed verses of the Qur'ān dealing with the essence and attributes of God Almighty had not yet been revealed, and the people hearing, the Prophet's invitation to God, wanted to know what was his Lord like to whose worship and service he was calling them. Another proof of this Sūrah's being one of the earliest Sūrahs to be revealed is that when in Makkah Umayyah bin Khalaf, the master of Bilal, made him lie down on burning sand and placed a heavy stone on his chest, Bilal used to cry "Ahad, Ahad!" This word was derived from this very Sūrah.

Theme and Subject Matter

A little consideration of the traditions regarding the occasion of the revelation of this Sūrah shows what were the religious concepts of the world at the time the Prophet began to preach the message of Tawhid. The

idolatrous polytheists were worshipping gods made of wood, stone, gold, silver and other substances. These gods had a form, shape and body. The gods and goddesses were descended from each other. No goddess was without a husband and no god without a wife. They stood in need of food and drink and their devotees arranged these for them. A large number of the polytheists believed that God assumed human form and there were some people who descended from Him. Although the Christians claimed to believe in One God, yet their God also had at least a son, and besides the Father and Son, the Holy Ghost also had the honour of being an associate in Godhead: so much so that God had a mother and a mother-in-law too. The Jews also claimed to believe in One God, but their God too was not without physical, material and other human qualities and characteristics. He went for a stroll, appeared in human form, wrestled with a servant of His, and was father of a son, Ezra. Besides these religious communities, the zoroastrianism were fire worshipers, and the Sabaeans star worshipers. Under such conditions when the people were invited to believe in God, the One; Who has no associate, it was inevitable that questions arose in the minds as to what kind of a God it was, Who was the one and Only Lord and invitation to believe in Whom was being given at the expense of all other gods and deities. It is a miracle of the Qur'ān that in a few words briefly it answered all the questions and presented such a clear concept of the Being of God as destroyed all polytheistic concepts, without leaving any room for the ascription of any of the human qualities to His Being.

Merit and Importance

That is why the Messenger of God held this Sūrah in great esteem, and he made the Muslims realize its importance in different ways so that they recited it frequently and disseminated it among the people. For it states the foremost and fundamental doctrine of Islām (viz. Tawhid) in four such brief sentences as are immediately impressed on human memory and can be read and recited easily. There are a great number of the traditions of Hadith, which show that the Prophet on different occasions and in different ways told the people that this Sūrah is equivalent to one-third of the Qur'ān. Several hadith on this subject have been related in Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Daud; Nasai, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, Musnad Ahmad, Tabarani and other books, on the authority of Abu Saïd Khudri, Abu Hurairah, Abu Ayyub Ansāri, Abu ad-Darda, Muadh bin Jabal, Jabir bin Abdullah, Ubayy bin Kab, Umm Kulthum bint Uqbah bin Abi Muait, Ibn Umar, Ibn Masud, Qatadah bin an-Numan, Anas bin Malik, and Abu Masud (may God be pleased with all of them). The commentators have given many explanations of the Prophet's saying this. But in our opinion it simply means that the religion presented by the Qur'ān is based on three doctrines: Tawhid, Apostleship and the Hereafter. This Sūrah teaches Tawhid, pure and undefiled. Therefore, the Prophet regarded it as equal to one-third of the Qur'ān.

A tradition on the authority of Ā'isha has been related in Bukhari, Muslim and other collections of the hadith, saying that the Prophet sent a man as leader of an expedition. During the journey he concluded his recitation of the Qur'ān in every Prayer with Qul Huwa-Allahu ahad. On their return him companions mentioned this before the Prophet. He said: "Ask him why he did so." When the man was asked, he replied: "In this Sūrah the attributes of the Merciful God have been stated; therefore, I love to recite it again and again." When the Prophet heard this reply, he said to the people: "Inform him that God holds him in great love and esteem."

A similar incident has been related in Bukhari, on the authority of Anas. He says: "A man from among the Ansār led the Prayers in the Quba Mosque. His practice was that in every rakah he first recited this Sūrah and then would join another Sūrah to it. The people objected to it and said to him: 'Don't you think that Sūrah Ikhlas is by itself enough? Why do you join another Sūrah to it? You should either recite only this Sūrah, or should leave it and recite some other Sūrah'. He said: 'I cannot leave it, I would rather give up leadership in the Prayer, if you so desired'. The people did not approve that another man be appointed leader instead of him. At last, the matter was brought before the Prophet. He asked the man, 'What prevents you from conceding what your companions desire? What makes you recite this particular Sūrah in every rakah?' The man replied: 'I have great love for it.' The Prophet remarked: 'Your love for this Sūrah has earned you entry into Paradise'."

Sūrah 112: al-Ikhlās¹⁸⁷⁷

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,
the Most Merciful

1. Say, “He is God, [who is] One,¹⁸⁷⁸
2. God, the Eternal Refuge.¹⁸⁷⁹
3. He neither begets nor is born,
4. Nor is there to Him any equivalent.”

¹⁸⁷⁷ *Al-Ikhlās*: Purification, i.e., the purification of faith – the *sūrah*’s theme. In narrations by al-Bukhārī and Ahmad, the Prophet described this *sūrah* as being equivalent to one third of the Qur’ān.

¹⁸⁷⁸ i.e., single, unique and indivisible.

¹⁸⁷⁹ i.e., the one sought in times of difficulty and need, the one depended upon by all existence.