

Al-Fatihah

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Introduction

Surah *Al-Fatihah* is one of the very earliest revelations. Infact, we learn from authentic traditions that it was the first complete surah revealed to the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*). Before this, only a few miscellaneous verses were revealed which form parts of surah *Al-Alaq*, *Al-Muzzammil* and *Al-Muddathir*.

This surah is called *Al-Fatihah*; the Opener of the Book, and the surah with which prayers are begun. It is the greatest *surah* in the *Qur'an*, and it is also called *Umm Al-Kitab* (Mother of the Book), because it contains the meanings of the entire *Qur'an*. Other names for this surah are; *Salah*, *Al-hamd*, *Umm al-Qur'an*, *Al-Sab al-Mathani*, *As-Shifa*, *Ar-Ruqya*, and so on. Infact more than fifty names have been enumerated by Jalal Al-Din Al-Suyuti [12], in his famous book "*Al Itqan fi Ulum al Qur'an*".

Number of Ayat

There is consensus of majority of the scholars; from early generations that surah *Al-Fatihah* contains seven *ayat*. However, they disagree over whether *Bismillah* is a part of *Al-Fatihah*, and likewise every surah, or it is a separate *ayah*. The first opinion, that *Bismillah* is a part of every surah except surah *Al-Tauba*, is attributed to some Companions (*May Allah be pleased with them all*), Imam Az-Zuhri, Imam As-Shafi, and Abdullah bin Al-Mubarak. They state that *Bismillah* is a part of *Al-Fatihah* and the last *ayat*, "*The Way of those whom You have favored*" and "*not of those who have earned Your wrath, or of those who have lost The Way.*" are not separate *ayat* but a single *ayah*. On the other hand, Imam Malik, Imam Abu Hanifa and their followers say that *Bismillah* is not an *ayah* in *Al-Fatihah* or any other surah, and it is a separate *ayah* in the beginning of every *ayah*. But there is no disagreement over the matter that *Al-Fatihah* has seven *ayat*. Those who consider last two *ayat* as one *ayah*, include *Bismillah* in it, and those who consider the last two as separate say *Bismillah* is not a part of it.

Virtues of Al-Fatihah

This is the most important surah in the *Qur'an*, and there are a lot of *Ahadith* which narrate the virtues of this surah. In *Musnad of Imam Ahmed*, he recorded that Abu Hurayrah (*May Allah be pleased with him*), said, “The Messenger of Allah went out while Ubayy bin Ka’b was praying and said, “O’ Ubayy!”, Ubayy did not answer him. The Prophet said, “O’ Ubayy!”, Ubayy prayed faster then went to the Messenger of Allah saying, “Peace be unto you, O’ Messenger of Allah!” He said, “Peace be unto you. O’ Ubayy, what prevented you from answering me when I called you”, Ubayy said, “O’ Messenger of Allah! I was praying”. He said, “Did you not read among what Allah has sent down to me”,

‘Answer Allah and Messenger when he calls you to that which gives you life’. He said, “Yes, O’ Messenger of Allah! I will not do it again.” the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) said; “Would you like me to teach you a surah the likes of which nothing has been revealed in the Torah, the Injeel, the Zabur (Psalms) or the Furqan (the Qur’an)”, He said, “Yes, O’ Messenger of Allah!”, the Messenger of Allah said, “I hope that I will not leave through this door until you have learned it.” He (Ubayy) said, “The Messenger of Allah held my hand while speaking to me, meanwhile I was slowing down fearing that he might reach the door before he finished his conversation. When we came close to the door, I said: “O’ Messenger of Allah! what is the surah that you have promised to teach me”. He said, “What do you read in the prayer”. Ubayy said, “So I recited Umm Al-Qur’an to him”. He said, “By Him in Whose Hand is my soul! Allah has never revealed in the Torah, Injeel, Zabur or the Furqan a surah like it. It is the seven repeated verses that I was given”.

Al-Fatihah and Salah

Al-Fatihah is also called *Salah*, because it is itself a prayer and reciting it is a condition for the correctness of *Salah*-The Prayer, as recorded by Muslim that Abu Hurayrah (*May Allah be pleased with him*) said, that the Prophet(*Peace be upon him*) said;

“Whoever performs any prayer in which he did not read Umm Al-Qur’an (Al-Fatihah), then his prayer is incomplete.” He said it thrice. [13]

There is another hadith, narrated by Abu Hurayrah (*May Allah be pleased with him*) that the Prophet (*Peace be upon him*) said; “Allah the exalted said, ‘I have divided the prayer (*Al-Fatihah*) into two halves between Me and My servant. A half of it is for Me and a half for My servant, and My servant shall acquire what he asked for.

If he says, ‘*All praise and thanks be to Allah, the Lord of existence*’, Allah says, ‘*My servant has praised Me.*’

When the servant says, ‘*The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful.*’ Allah says, ‘*My servant has glorified Me.*’

When he says, ‘*Master of the Day of Judgment.*’

Allah says, ‘*My servant has glorified Me.*’

When he says, ‘*You (alone) we worship, and You (alone) we ask for help.*’,

Allah says, ‘*This is between Me and My servant, and My servant shall acquire what he sought.*’

When he says, ‘*Guide us to the straight path. The way of those on whom You have granted Your grace, not (the way) of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray*’,

Allah says, ‘*This is for My servant, and My servant shall acquire what he asked for.*’” [14]

In the above hadith, the word *Salah* is used in reference to the *Qur’an* (*Al-Fatihah*), which also testifies the importance of this surah and reciting it during every prayer, in every *rak’ah*.

Al-Fatihah is not merely an introduction to *Qur’an*, rather it is a prayer from man and the *Qur’an* is the answer from his Lord. Thus it has a relationship of a prayer and a response. If a person is an earnest seeker after truth, and recognizes that the Lord of the Universe is the source of all knowledge, then he prays to Allah to show him guidance and Allah places the whole of the *Qur’an* before him in answer to his prayer.

All praise is for Allah, the Sustainer and Cherisher of the Worlds. Al-Fatihah starts with the praise of Allah, who is the Lord and Creator of this world and

the Hereafter. It states that all thanks and praise are due purely to Allah alone, and nothing is to be worshipped except Him. He is the Sustainer and Owner of all that He has created in both *Alams* (Worlds).

The Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. *Ar-Rahman* (Most Gracious) and *Ar-Raheem* (Most Merciful) are two words of the same root *Ar-Rahmah* (the mercy). One of them is softer than the other, meaning, it carries more implications of mercy. Allah is *Ar-Rahman* for all humankind irrespective of their belief in Allah, whether they are good-doers or evil-doers; they all obtain their sustenance from Allah, this is because Allah is *Ar-Rahman*. Allah is also *Ar-Raheem* for the believers in Him. They receive special blessings from Allah, that is, happiness and contentment in this life and reward in the Hereafter.

Master of the Day of Judgment. After Allah describes that He is *Ar-Rahman* and *Ar-Raheem*, He immediately gives a warning, that along with His mercy, He is also the Master of the *Day of Judgment*. So that a person should not forget that along with His mercy He is also Just.

You Alone we worship and You Alone we call on for help. After the person has praised Allah and thanked Him, now he stands before Him, addressing Him directly; O' Allah our worship, obedience, submission and devotion is only for You alone, and we only serve You. O' Allah we know that You are the Lord of the Universe and You have the power over everything, therefore, we only turn to You for help, for our needs and requirements.

Guide us to The Right Way. i.e. Make us firm on the straight path and don't let us deviate. The straight path mentioned here and elsewhere in the *Qur'an* refers to Islam. We already mentioned the hadith in which the servant proclaims, '*Guide us to The Right Way*', and Allah says, "This is for My servant and My servant shall acquire what he has asked for.

The Way of those whom You have favored. i.e. The servant prays to Allah to guide him towards the straight path in every walk of life, and the path of those upon whom You have bestowed Your mercy i.e. people who are obedient to Allah and His Messengers.

Not of those who have earned Your wrath, or of those who have lost The Way. A servant also prays to Allah, to help him avoid the path of those whom Allah is angry with, whose intentions are corrupt and who know the truth, yet they deviate. And also help us to avoid the path of those who were led astray. These

two paths are of *Jews* and *Christians*. ‘*Not of those who have earned Your wrath*’, refers the *Jews* and “ *or of those who have lost The Way*” is for the *Christians*.

After finishing *Al-Fatihah*, it is recommended to say *Amin*, which means, ‘*O Allah accept our invocation*’, for those who are not praying and strongly recommended for those who are praying. As the Messenger of Allah (*Peace be upon him*) said:

“ *When any of you says in the prayer Amin, and the angels in the heaven say, Amin, in unison, his previous sins will be forgiven.*”^[15]

Foot Notes

[1] The Arabic word 'qur'an' is derived from the root qara'a, which has various meanings, such as to read, [Sura 17: 93.] to recite, [Sura 75:18:17: 46.] etc. *Qur'an* is a verbal noun and hence means the 'reading' or 'recitation'. As used in the *Qur'an* itself, the word refers to the revelation from Allah in the broad sense [Sura 17: 82.] and is not always restricted to the written form in the shape of a book, as we have it before us today.

[2] Surah *Al-Hijr*(15) : 9.

[3] Surah *Burooj*(85) : 21, 22. *Al-Lawh*: every wide, flat surface or sheet of wood.

Al-Azhari said: *al-Lawh* is a flat surface of wood, and a shoulder-blade [of an animal], if it is written on, may be called a *lawh*. *Al-Lawh* is something that is written on. *Al-Lawh*: *al-Lawh al-Mahfooz*, as in the ayah means, the place where the decrees of Allah are kept. Every wide bone is a *lawh*. The plural form is *alwaah*.

(*Lisaan al-'Arab*, 2/584).

[4] Surah *Al-Waqi'ah*(56) : 77, 78.

[5] (*al-Tabyaan fi Aqsam al-Qur'an*, p. 62).

[6] Surah *Bani Israel* (17) and Surah *Al-Furqan* (25).

[7] The last section of the *Qur'an* beginning with surah Qaf, (50-114).

[8] Musnad Ahmed, Sunan Abi Dawood, Ibn Majah in his sunan.

[9] The *Qur'an* in a single volume.

[10] *Kitab al-masabih* by Ibn Abi Dawud.

[11] The Life of Muhammad, Ibn Hisham.

[12] Abd al-Rahman ibn Kamal al-Din Abi Bakr ibn Muhammad ibn Sabaq al-Din, Jalal al-Din al-Misri al-Suyuti, also known as Ibn al-Asyuti (849-911), the mujtahid imam and renewer of the tenth Islamic century, foremost hadith master, jurist, and historian, he authored works in virtually every Islamic science.

[13] Sahih *Muslim*.

[14] Sahih *Muslim* and Sunan *An-Nisai*.

[15] Sahih *Muslim* 1:307.