

Chapter 108: AL-KAWTHAR (The Abundance)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate

1. (إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ) Indeed, We have granted you al-Kawthar (unceasing, abundant good).
2. (فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَانْحَرْ) So pray to your Lord and sacrifice (for Him in thankfulness).
3. (إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ) Surely it is the one who offends you who is cut off (from unceasing good and posterity).

Overview:

This surah with 3 verses is the shortest surah in Qur'an. Its title comes from the word al-kawthar in the first verse. The period of revelation is disputed. Many learned companions and eminent scholars believed it is Makki. The majority of commentators held the same view. There are other scholars who believed it is Madani. The subject matter of the surah and its style however indicate that the surah is Makki, and was likely revealed at an earlier stage of Islam when Rasulullah, peace be upon him, had suffered severely discouraging conditions. Finally, there are scholars who tried to reconcile two views by suggesting that this chapter was revealed on two occasions: once in Makka and later in Madina. Allah knows best.

Reason of Revelation:

Muslim narrated from Anas bin Malik saying that "One day Rasulullah, may peace be upon him, was sitting amongst us that he dozed off; then he raised his head smiling. We said: What makes you smile, O Rasulullah? He said: A sura has just been revealed to me, and then recited basmalah and surah al-Kawthar. Then he said: Do you know what kawthar is? We said: Allah and His Messenger know best. Rasulullah, may peace be upon him, said "It is a river which my Lord has granted me in Paradise." This tradition is presented as an evidence by scholars who believed the surah was Madani since it was narrated by Anas bin Malik who entered Rasulullah's service in Madina.

Most other reports are related to Makka period. According to Ikrimah when the Rasulullah was appointed a prophet and began to call the people to Islam, some chiefs of Quraish said: "Muhammad, upon whom be Allah's peace and blessings, is cut off from his people as a tree is cut off from its root, which might fall to the ground any moment." (Ibn Jarir).

Ibn Abbas is reported to have said; "The eldest son of the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace) was Qasim; next to him was Zainab, next to her Abdullah and next to him three daughters: Umm Kulthum, Fatimah and Ruqayyah. Of them first Qasim died and then Abdullah. Thereupon As bin Wail said: "His line has come to an end: now he is abtar (i.e. cut off from root). When he dies, his memory will perish and you will be rid of him." Abu Jahl, Uqbah bin Abi Mu'ait, Abu Lahab, etc. are also reported to have said similar words. This surah was therefore revealed to comfort the Prophet and assure him of the abiding and profuse goodness which God had chosen for him and of the deprivation and loss awaiting his persecutors.

Main Themes:

There are four recurring themes that prevail in the Qur'an: namely, the unity of Divine Being (tawhid), the institution of messengership (nubuwwah), life after death (hashr), and worship and justice ('adalah). This surah establishes all four of the main themes. (Bediuzzaman)

Style:

One of the miraculous aspects of the Qur'an is its concision (icaz). Qur'an expresses a great deal of vast and deep meanings in just a few words. In addition, it also presents multiple layers of distinct meanings all at once. The icaz of the Qur'an does clearly shine in this surah.

Noble Meaning:

1. (إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ) Indeed, We have granted you al-Kawthar (unceasing, abundant good).

The word used in the surah rendered here as 'abundance' is kawthar, derived from the stem word kathrah which signifies 'abundance' or 'a multitude'. This kawthar is unrestricted and unlimited. It indicates the opposite meaning to the one the impudent Quraysh tried to attach to the Prophet. We have given you that which is plentiful, overflowing and rich, unstinting and unending.

If anyone wishes to pursue and observe this abundance which God has given to His Prophet, he will find it wherever he looks and reflects:

1. He will find it in Rasulallah's prophethood itself, which gave him a link with the great reality and the Supreme Being, who has no parallel and no partner. What indeed can the one who has found God be said to have lost?
2. He will also find it in this Qur'an which was revealed to Muhammad, every chapter of which is a fountain of richness that flows incessantly.
3. Moreover, he will find this kawthar, or abundance, manifest in Muslims' love for Rasulallah, and their following of the his sunnah, i.e. way of life, throughout the centuries, in the far-flung corners of the earth, in the millions upon millions who follow in his footsteps and pronounce his name with respectful affection. He will see it in the millions upon Al-Kawthar, millions of hearts that cherish his example and memory even to the Day of Resurrection.
4. He will find the unceasing abundant good in Rasulallah's ever-multiplying descendants who will serve his cause ardently. In truth, there is no posterity that approaches his in number, virtue, and serving God's cause.
5. He will also find this kawthar, or abundance, manifest in the goodness and prosperity which have accrued to the human race as a result of his message, and which reach those who know and believe in him as well as those who do not.
6. He will also discern this abundance in various and manifold phenomena, attempting to enumerate which give, at best, only a passing feeling of a great reality.

This indeed is abundance in its absolute and unlimited sense. The surah, therefore, does not give it a specific definition. Several accounts relate that 'al-kawthar' is a river in heaven granted to the Prophet, and a lake/cistern/pond in the Plane of Gathering that this river flows into. However, Ibn `Abbas contends that the river is but one part of the abundance which God has furnished for His Messenger.

2. (فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَأَنْحِرْ) So pray to your Lord and sacrifice (for Him in thankfulness).

Having assured the Prophet of this munificent gift, which disproves what the calumniators and wicked schemers say, God directs the Prophet to be completely and sincerely thankful to Him for His bounty. He is to devote himself to Him alone in worship and ritual slaughter. Islam frequently lays emphasis on the pronouncing of God's name when slaughtering animals. It prohibits anything that is consecrated to any other being, which indicates the importance Islam attaches to the purification of human life from all forms of idolatry and all that leads to it. Because it is based on the principle of God's oneness in its purest sense, Islam does not aim merely at purifying human imagination and conscience. It pursues idolatry in all its manifestations, striving to eliminate its marks in man's consciousness, worship rituals and general behaviour. Life, Islam says, is one indivisible entity and must be treated as such. It must be cleansed inside out and completely oriented towards God, in all its aspects: worship, tradition and social behaviour. (Qutb)

The Prayer which the Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, is ordered to perform by this verse must be the Forenoon (Duha) Prayer, which, like the Tahajjud Prayer, is obligatory for the Messenger, upon him be peace and blessings, and supererogatory for other Muslims. However, the verse also suggests the Prayer of the Religious Day of Sacrifice ('Id Prayer), which is done in the forenoon. It was ordered in Madinah as a necessary act of worship for all Muslims. By sacrifice the verse means that while God's Messenger offered sacrifices in thankfulness to God in Makkah, offering a sacrifice during the religious Festival of Sacrifice was enjoined upon the Muslims as a necessary act of worship in Madinah. The Muslims who have the required amount of wealth should sacrifice cattle (a sheep or a goat for one person, or a camel, a cow, or an ox up to seven people). Offering a sacrifice is incumbent (wajib) upon every adult Muslim who has the nisab (the required amount of wealth). (Ali Unal)

The noun 'Lord' is mentioned here to stress that the kawthar is Allah's benevolence to Rasulullah and his ummah, as the word "Lord" means the provider and sustainer. The verse therefore invites him and his ummah in his person to thanksgiving and gratitude.

3. (إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ) Surely it is the one who offends you who is cut off (from unceasing good and posterity).

In the first verse, Qur'an stressed that it was not Rasulullah who had no posterity but, on the contrary, he was the one endowed with abundance. In this verse, Qur'an throws back the taunt on those who hated and reviled the Prophet. Indeed, Allah's promise has come true. For, the influence and legacy of his enemies were short-lived, while Rasulullah's impact on human life and history has grown and deepened. Today we are witnessing the truth of this divine pronouncement as clearly as no one among those addressed by the Qur'an for the first time ever did or imagined.

Faith and goodness cannot be barren. Their influence is both profound and deep rooted. By contrast, falsehood, error and evil may grow and spread quickly, but they ultimately come to

nothing. Allah's criteria are different from the criteria laid down by man. Men are often deceived when they vainly believe their sense of judgment to be the only criterion. Before us is the eloquent and enduring example of the Prophet. Of what value or interest to humanity have Rasulallah's slanderers and foes been to anyone? On the other hand, calling others to truth and goodness can never be called futile. Neither can the righteous and the true be called deprived or cut off. How can it be when this message itself comes from and is supported by Allah, the Immortal, the Eternal? But deprived and sterile indeed are disbelief, error and evil as are their votaries, however strong and widespread they may appear to be at any moment. God affirms the truth; wily opponents are but liars!

The verse also suggests that, until the Last Day, those who are like such a one in thought or deed will also be cut off (sooner or later) from posterity; and the systems and schools they establish or support will not last long.

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May Allah help us drink the water of Kawthar in this world and in Paradise. May Allah help us understand His infinite blessings on us, offer our genuine thanks due to Him, and praise and glorify Him with a heart most sincere and truthful. May Allah protect us from hypocrisy of faith and of deeds. May Allah protect us from being removed away from Rasulallah's circle around the Kawthar lake in the plain of gathering. May Allah shower His mercy on us and place us, out of His boundless grace, near Rasulallah in Paradise.