

SURAH 108

Al-Kawthar

(Abundance)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.

We have certainly given you abundance. (1)

إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ ﴿١﴾

So pray to your Lord and sacrifice to Him. (2)

فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَأَنْحَرْ ﴿٢﴾

Surely, he who hates you is the one cut off. (3)

إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ ﴿٣﴾

Overview

Similar to *Sūrah*s 93 and 94, The Morning Hours and Solace, this *sūrah* exclusively concerns the Prophet, seeking to cheer him up and assure him of happier prospects in his struggle. In it God threatens his enemies with destruction while directing the Prophet to the path of thanksgiving.

The *sūrah* represents a glimpse of the Prophet's life and the course of his mission in the early period at Makkah. It deals with the plots and insults directed against the Prophet and the divine message he conveys. The *sūrah* is an example of God's protection of His servant, the Prophet Muḥammad, and the few who followed him and believed in God. It is an instance of God's direct support to the believers in their struggle, supplying them with fortitude, restraint and promise, while threatening a terrible fate on their antagonists.

In this way, the *sūrah* symbolizes the reality of guidance, goodness and faith on the one hand and that of error, evil and disbelief on the other; the former category is one of abundance, profusion and expansive goodness, the latter one of scantiness,

shrinking resources and annihilation.

Background

Among the people of the Quraysh, the Arab tribe which controlled Makkah, there were some impudent folk who viewed the Prophet and his mission with no small degree of antagonism. They would resort to machinations and taunts against him to deter the people from listening to the truth which he conveyed to them in the form of a divine message. Among them were people like Al-`Āṣ ibn Wā'il, `Uqbah ibn Abī Mu`ayṭ, Abū Lahab, Abū Jahl and others. They said about the Prophet that he was a man with no posterity, referring to the early death of his sons. One of them once remarked, "Do not be bothered with him; he will die without descendants and that will be the end of his mission."

Such a trivial and cunning taunt had a wide impact on the Arab society of the time, which set great store by sons. Such taunting delighted the Prophet's enemies and undoubtedly this was a source of depression and irritation to his noble heart. This *sūrah* 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.

Blessings in Abundance

"We have certainly given you abundance." (Verse 1) The word used in the *sūrah* and 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. He will find it in Muḥammad'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?

He will also find it in this Qur'ān which was revealed to Muḥammad, every chapter of which is a fountain of richness that flows incessantly.

Moreover, he will find this *kawthar*, or abundance, manifest in Muslims' following of the Prophet's *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

millions of hearts that cherish his example and memory even to the Day of Resurrection.

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. 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 *sūrah*, therefore, does not give it a specific definition. Several accounts relate that '*al-kawthar*' is a river in heaven granted to the Prophet. However, Ibn `Abbās, the Prophet's learned cousin, contends that the river is but one part of the abundance which God has furnished for His Messenger. Keeping the circumstances and the whole context in mind, Ibn `Abbās's view is the more valid.

"So pray to your Lord and sacrifice to Him." (Verse 2) 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, taking no heed whatsoever of any form of idolatry and refusing to participate in the worship rituals offered by idolaters, especially when they invoke anyone other than God in their offerings.

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.

"Surely, he who hates you is the one cut off" (Verse 3) In the first verse, God specified that Muḥammad was not the one who had no posterity but, on the contrary, was the one endowed with abundance. In this verse, God throws back the taunt on those who hated and reviled the Prophet. Indeed, God's promise has come true. For, the influence and legacy of Muḥammad's enemies were short-lived, while his 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'ān 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.

God's criteria are different from the criteria laid down by man. Men are often deceived when they vainly believe their sense of judgement to be the criterion. Before us is the eloquent and enduring example of the Prophet. Of what value or interest to humanity have Muḥammad's slanderers and foes been to anyone?

On the other hand, calling others to the religion of God, 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, God, 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!