

Surah al-Fatiha

The first juzz consists of the whole of Surah al-Fatiha and a part of Surah al-Baqarah. Surah al-Fatiha was revealed in Makkah, during the initial period at Makkah. This surah consists of 7 ayaat. Although it is a very brief surah, it contains an overview of the basic subjects of the Quran. It is for this reason, maybe, that it is also known as the Umm ul Quran or Asaas ul Quran i.e the foundation of the Quran. It can also be viewed as the preface to the Quran.

There are 3 basic subject areas in the Quran:

- i. Tawheed (Oneness of Allah),
- ii. Risalah (Messengerhood), and
- iii. Akhirah (Hereafter).

The 1st, 2nd and 4th ayaat are related to tawheed, the 3rd ayat mentions akhirah, while the 5th and 6th ayaat point towards messengerhood. This surah also mentions Allah's names and attributes and the fact that it is only He who is worthy or being worshipped, and being asked for help, steadfastness and guidance.

On the one hand there is mention of the prophets and the righteous, while on the other hand there is mention of staying away from the attitude of the nations that earned the anger of Allah due to their misdeeds. It can be said that this surah is a reflection of all the major subjects of the Quran, and it is perhaps for this reason that we are commanded to recite it in every rak'ah (unit) of each prayer.

Surah al-Baqarah

This is the largest surah of the Quran consisting of 286 ayaat. Most of it was revealed immediately after the migration to Madinah. Baqarah refers to the 'calf' whose sacrifice is mentioned in this surah. A rich person of Bani Israeel (Children of Yaqoob) killed his nephew in order to gain his inheritance, and in the darkness of night transferred the dead body out side the house of an innocent person. The families of both, the murdered and accused were close to taking up arms, when Allah instructed Musa to tell the people to offer a calf as a sacrifice and to then touch the deceased with a part of its meat in order to reveal the true murderer. At the same time, a section of the Bani Israeel rejecting the resurrection, were shown the miracle of bringing the dead back to life. Hence this incident served more than one purpose. In addition, the long standing devotion to the worship of the calf, was also corrected by this commandment.

The following is a brief overview of the major topics in this section:

1.The surah starts with the mention of the great miracle of the Prophet Muhammad (salAllahu alaihi wa sallam) i.e. the Quran. The surah starts with the huroof muqatth'aath i.e. the broken letters. This means of expression was a novelty for the Arabs, hence worthy of their attention. The surahs that start with these broken letters, usually mention the greatness, miraculous nature and uniqueness of the Quran. The challenge is then given to the people who thought of themselves as very eloquent, to use these very letters of the alphabet to bring forth a book such as the Quran. They were utterly defeated in meeting this challenge, just as they are today, and continue to be, in the future.

2. There is mention of 3 types of people:
 - a. Mo'min (true believer)
 - b. Munaafiq (hypocrites), and
 - c. Kaafir (disbeliever).

The first type i.e. the true believers have the following 5 qualities:

- i. Belief in the unseen (ghayb).
- ii. Establish the prayer (salah).
- iii. Give zakat (charity).
- iv. Believe in the previous revealed books.
- v. Believe in the hereafter (akhirah).

The point worthy of attention here is that the mo'minoon (true believers) are mentioned in 4 ayaat, the kuffaar (disbelievers) in 2 ayaat , while the munaafiqoon (hypocrites) in 13 ayaat. These 13 ayaat highlight 12 qualities of a munaafiq, which every believer needs to strive to abstain from: Lying, deceit, heedlessness, jealousy, pride, envy, deception, ridiculing the commandments of Allah, spreading mischief in the land, ignorance, misguidance, hesitance, and ridiculing the true believers.

3. The story of Adam, huwwa (eve) and shaithan/iblees is mentioned, and this is really the story of all times to come i.e. the struggle between good and evil. This story highlights the greatness of Adam: he was made the vicegerent or successor on earth, given knowledge that the angels did not have, and was prostrated to by the angels.

4. Most of the remaining portion of this part addresses the bani Israeel:

Allah did them many favours: Many prophets came to them, they had wealth, were given tawheed, were saved from Pharoah, received 'mann' and 'salwa', a special cloud to shade them, and were provided with fresh water in the Sanai desert.

Following this they became ungrateful: Started to hide the truth, rejected the last prophet, worshipped the calf, became impatient and jealous, refused to enter Jericho, unlawfully killed the prophets, broke their promises which lead to the hardening of their hearts, had immense love for this worldly life, indulged in magic and sorcery; despite all this they claimed exclusive rights to paradise.

5. Then there is mention of Ibraheem alaihis salaam, which both the Jews and Christians saw as a great figure and proudly linked themselves to him. However, if they were true to this claim, then they would certainly have followed the last prophet Muhammad salAllahu alaihi wa sallam, because he was the manifestation of the dua (supplication) of Ibraaheem. Allah mentions the fact that Ibraheem was tested by every means, and he was successful in every test; disputing with his father's people, dialogue with Nimrod, being thrown in to the fire, migration from his land, leaving his family in a deserted barren valley, and agreeing to sacrifice his beloved son Ismaeel. All these tests elevated him to the rank of Khaleel Allaah (the close and intimate friend of Allah) due to his steadfastness. It was due to this that his dua was accepted; of making Makkah a place of peace, its inhabitants being blessed with all kinds of fruits and blessings, and most of all, the coming of the last prophet, from his lineage.

6. Having mentioned the greatness of Ibraaheem, there is mention that only those people will turn away from Ibraheem's way who are unfortunate, foolish, and, slaves to their desires. The Jews and Christians despite their claim to follow him, rejected his way when invited by the last prophet.