

The Originator:

A Commentary on Surat Fatir

Lesson 1

Background Information

- Surat Fatir is the 35th chapter of the Quran in its sequential order.
- It contains 45 verses
- Chronologically, it is believed to have been revealed immediately after Surat al-Furqan, the 25th chapter of the Quran.
- Surat Fatir is a Meccan surah which focuses heavily on establishing a correct belief system and debunking false ideologies.
- The surah takes its name from the reference to God as the “Originator of the heavens and the earth in verse 1, but is often known as the chapter of “The Angels” since verse 1 provides the only description of some of the angels’ physical appearance in the Quran

Major Themes

- The major themes of this chapter include:
 - Affirmation of God as the sole Originator and Provider
 - Contrasting the power of God with the claims the polytheists make for their idols
 - Describing Satan as the deceiver and an enemy of human beings
 - Contrasting the state of believers and disbelievers in this life and the hereafter

The Merits of Surat Fatir

- It is reported that the Prophet (s) said:

"من قرأ سورة الملائكة، دعته يوم القيامة ثلاثة أبواب من الجنة أن ادخل من أي الأبواب
شئت

“Whoever reads Surat al-Malaikah, three gates of paradise call upon him saying, ‘Enter from any gate you wish.’”

Source: Nur al-Thaqalayn, v. 4, p. 473

Verse 1

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أجنحةٍ مثنى وثلاث ورباع
يزيد في الخلق ما يشاء إن الله على كل شيء قدير

“Praise be to God, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Who appoints the angels as messengers, of wings two, three and four, increasing creation as He will. Truly God is Powerful over all things.”

Verse 1

- This is one of five Quranic chapters that begin with “Praise be to God”.
- The five chapters are:
 - Surat al-Fatiha (The Opening)
 - Surat al-An’am (The Cattle)
 - Surat al-Kahf (The Cave)
 - Surat Fatir (The Originator)

Verse 1

- What is the meaning of “Praise be to God” **الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ**?
- It is an expression of reverence and gratitude to God for who He is and what He has bestowed upon His creatures.
- There are a multitude of traditions that speak of the merits and spiritual benefits of this sacred utterance.

Verse 1

وروي انه جاء رجل إلى أبي عبد الله عليه السلام فقال: جعلت فداك إني شيخ كبير فعلمني دعاء جامعاً فقال: ((احمد الله، فانك إذا حمدت الله لم يبق مصل إلا دعا لك يعني قوله: سمع الله لمن حمده

It is reported that a man came to Imam al-Sadiq (a) and said: I am an elderly man so teach me a supplication that is encompassing and comprehensive. The Imam replied: Praise God for if you praise God there will not remain a single worshipper except that they supplicate for you saying, 'God hears those who praise Him'.

Verse 1

- One of the beautiful names of God is **الفاطر** which is related to the verb **فَطَرَ** meaning to “split” or “cleave”.
- In the Quran **فاطر** always occurs as part of the phrase “Originator of the heavens and the earth”
- Some commentators maintain that the usage is metaphorical and refers to splitting open the darkness of non-existence with the light of existence.

Verse 1

- Others purport that God being **الفاطر** means that He cleaves open the heavens to prepare for the descent of spirits into bodies and then cleaves open the earth for the ascension of the spirits at the moment of resurrection.
- From a scientific perspective, the notion of splitting the heavens and the earth is consistent with the Big Bang theory which states that the universe was a single mass which was split and expanded into its current form.
- Thus, we praise and express our awe in the face of this supreme being who split the heavens and the earth and bestowed upon us existence and the innumerable blessings that accompany our existence.

Verse 1

جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا

“Who appoints the angels as messengers...”

- We often associate only the angel Gabriel as an angel who functions as a messenger, however the Quran asserts that ALL angels are in fact messengers.
- What type of messages are they carrying and delivering?
- Is the message legislative or creative or both?

Verse 1

- Here are some examples of angels, other than Gabriel, who are described as messengers:

إِنَّ رُسُلَنَا يَكْتُبُونَ مَا تَمْكُرُونَ

“Indeed our messengers are recording whatever they plot.” Quran 10:21

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ تَوَفَّتْهُ رُسُلُنَا

“till when death comes to you, Our messengers take him...” Quran 6:61

وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَىٰ قَالُوا إِنَّا مُهْلِكُوا أَهْلَ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ إِنَّ أَهْلَهَا كَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ

“And when Our messengers came to Abraham with glad tidings, they said, “We shall surely destroy the people of this town; truly its people are wrongdoers.”

Quran 29:31

Verse 1

أُولِي أجنحةٍ مثنى وثلاث ورباع يزيد في الخلق ما يشاء إن الله على كل شيء قدير

“...of wings, two, three and four, increasing in creation as He will. Truly God is Powerful over all things.”

- Some commentators have understood these descriptions to be literal while others have argued that wings are a metaphor for power.
- Scholars who subscribe to a figurative interpretation of this verse make the following arguments:

Verse 1

- 1. Angels are not physical beings to need physical hands or wings.
- 2. The verse confirms the number of their wings '2, 3, or 4'. Note that all birds or insects who have wings have wings in pairs, whether 2, 4, or more. This verse, however, confirms the existence of 3 wings for some angels. Furthermore, the next part of the verse implies that some angels may have more wings. According to some narrations there is an angel called 'Hezqaaeel' حزقائيل who has 18,000 wings, and the distance between each wing is 500 years. There are other angels with 600,000 wings. All of this suggests that the wings of angels are of a different nature and are unlike the physical wings we are familiar with.

Verse 1

- 3. Scholars like Allamah Tabatabaie and Ayatollah Jawadi Amuli believe that the term 'wings' – as used for angels – refers to their spiritual status and different abilities for ascension and descent. Thus, the number of their wings determines their ranks.
- 4. Therefore, the term is used for them metaphorically, with reference to their different abilities and statuses.
- 5. A similar usage is found in our traditions for Ja'far, the cousin of the Prophet (s) who was martyred in the battle of Mo'tah. The Prophet (s) said: "In lieu of his lost arms, the Almighty God granted him two wings to fly in Paradise wherever he wishes."

Verse 1

- Belief in angels is one of the articles of faith:

آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ

“The Messenger has believed in what was revealed to him from his Lord, and [so have] the believers. All of them have believed in Allah and His angels and His books and His messengers.” Quran 2:285

Verse 1

- Since angels are unseen beings, we must rely on revelation for information about them:
- 1. They are rational, sentient beings who are honored by God:

بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُّكْرَمُونَ

“No, they are not honored servants...” Quran 21:26

Verse 1

- 2. They are fully obedient to God and never disobey Him:

لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ

“They cannot precede Him in word, and they act by His command.”

Quran 21:27

Verse 1

- 3. They are given a diverse array of tasks by God.
 - Some carry the throne of God,
 - Some regulate the natural world,
 - Some take the souls of people at the time of death,
 - Some are scribes
 - Some function as guards and protectors of human beings from calamities
 - Some are responsible for the destruction of rebellious nations
 - Some aid and support the believers in battle
 - Some deliver revelation to prophets. Gabriel functions as the head of these angels

Verse 1

- 4. They perpetually praise and glorify God:

وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ

“...and the angels exalt [God] with praise of their Lord and ask forgiveness for those on earth.” Quran 42:5

- 5. They have the ability to appear in physical form by the will of God:

فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا

“We sent Our Spirit to her, who stood before her in the shape of a well-formed human being.” Quran 19:17

Verse 1

- 6. They are the most abundant of God's creation:
- The Prophet once said:

مَا مِنْ شَيْءٍ مِمَّا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ أَكْثَرَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ

“Nothing of what God created is more [numerous] than the angels.”

Verse 1

وَالَّذِي نَفْسِي بِيَدِهِ ، لَمَلَأَكُهُ اللَّهُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ أَكْثَرَ مِنْ عَدَدِ التُّرَابِ فِي الْأَرْضِ ، وَمَا فِي السَّمَاءِ
مَوْضِعُ قَدَمٍ إِلَّا وَفِيهَا مَلَكٌ يُسَبِّحُهُ وَيُقَدِّسُهُ ، وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ شَجَرٌ وَلَا مَدْرٌ إِلَّا وَفِيهَا مَلَكٌ مُوَكَّلٌ
بِهَا

“By He who owns my soul, the number of angels in the Heavens is more than the amount of sand on the earth, and there is not even the space of a footstep in Heaven that does not have an angel glorifying and sanctifying Him, nor is there a tree or a ground without having an angel responsible for it.”- Imam al-Sadiq

Verse 1

- 7. Angels do not eat, drink or copulate.

إِنَّ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَا يَأْكُلُونَ، وَلَا يَشْرَبُونَ، وَلَا يَنْكِحُونَ، وَإِنَّمَا يَعْيشُونَ بِنَسِيمِ الْعَرْشِ

“Angels do not eat or drink or copulate, rather they subsist through the breeze of the Throne.”- Imam al-Sadiq

Verse 1

- 8. They do not sleep, they do not experience fatigue, and nor are they ever heedless:

لَا يَغْشَاهُمْ نَوْمُ الْعُيُونِ، وَلَا سَهْوُ الْعُقُولِ، وَلَا فَتْرَةُ الْأَبْدَانِ، وَلَا غَفْلَةُ النَّسِيَانِ.

“The sleep of the eye or the slip of wit, or languor of the body or the effect of forgetfulness does not effect them.”- Imam Ali

Verse 1

- 9. They occupy varying spiritual ranks:

وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ

“[The angels say], "There is not among us any except that he has a known position.” Quran 37:164