

## تفسير سورة الفاتحة

Shaykh Sālih ibn Fawzān ibn 'Abdullāh Ibn Fawzān

# EXEGESIS OF THE CHAPTER OF AL-FATIHA<sup>1</sup>

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

### 1 – its status and its position

This particular chapter holds a tremendous status in the Qur'an [simply] because it is the greatest of all chapters, just as the verse of the Footstool (الْكَرْسِيِّ) is the greatest of all verses. Due to the significance of this chapter, it was written down as the first Qur'anic chapter, and for this reason it was called **“the Opening of the Book”** (فَاتِحَةُ الْكِتَابِ). This title serves as a signification of its importance and status because it was only given priority and made the first chapter of the Qur'an due to its importance.

Another sign of its importance is that Allah made its recitation in every unit of prayer compulsory. The majority of the people of knowledge hold the view that its recitation in the prayer is compulsory and that the prayer of the one who does not recite it is invalid based on the Prophet's (ﷺ) statement,

لَا صَلَاةَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَفْرَأْ بِفَاتِحَةِ الْكِتَابِ

**There is no [valid] prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book.<sup>2</sup>**

This is with respect to the person who is able to recite it. With regard to the person who cannot recite it, due to an inability to memorise it, instead of it he should recite whatever Qur'anic verses

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by Abu Ameenah AbdurRahmān Bennett from the Shaykh's book *Durūs fil Qur'an al-Kareem*.

<sup>2</sup> Sunan Abi Dāwūd 822

he has learned. If, however, he knows nothing of the Qur'an, he should resort to remembrance of Allah by saying *Subhānallah, al-Hamdulillah, La ilaha illa Allah, Allahu Akbar, la hawla wa la qawwa illa* based on the Prophet's (ﷺ) statement:

إِذَا قُمْتَ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ فَتَوَضَّأْ كَمَا أَمَرَكَ اللَّهُ ثُمَّ تَسْتَهْدِ وَأَقِمْ فَإِنْ كَانَ مَعَكَ قُرْآنٌ فَزُكِّرْهُ وَإِلَّا فَاحْمَدِ اللَّهَ وَكَبِّرْهُ وَهَلِّلْهُ ثُمَّ ارْكَعْ

**When you are to perform prayer, make wudu as Allah has instructed you. Then say the Tashahhad, and the iqāmah. If you know any Quran then recite it, otherwise praise Allah, mention His greatness, and say la ilaha illa Allah.**<sup>3</sup>

The majority of the people of knowledge hold the view that its recitation is compulsory on both the person leading the prayer and the one who prays alone but they differed with regards to those who are being led in prayer. There are three views:

**The first view** is that it is compulsory for everyone who prays to recite *al-Fātiha*—the imam, his congregants and the individual praying alone, due to the Prophet's (ﷺ) statement,

لَا صَلَاةَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَقْرَأْ بِفَاتِحَةِ الْكِتَابِ

**“There is no [valid] prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book”.**<sup>4</sup>

This statement is general and thus applies to anyone who is praying. The Prophet (ﷺ) also stated,

إِنِّي أَرَاكُمْ تَقْرءُونَ وَرَاءَ إِمَامِكُمْ قَالَ قُلْنَا يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ إِي وَاللَّهِ قَالَ : فَلَا تَفْعَلُوا إِلَّا بِأَمِّ الْقُرْآنِ فَإِنَّهُ لَا صَلَاةَ لِمَنْ لَمْ يَقْرَأْ بِهَا

**“I think that you are reciting behind your Imam?” He said: “We said: “Yes, Messenger of Allah, by Allah!” He said: “Do not do that, except for Umm Al-Kitab, for there is no prayer for one who does not recite it”.**<sup>5</sup>

This is the view of Imam ash-Shāfi'ee and a group of hadith scholars, like al-Imam al-Bukhāri etc. They hold the view that its recitation is compulsory for the Imam, congregants and the individual praying alone.

<sup>3</sup> Jami` at-Tirmidhi 302

<sup>4</sup> Sunan Abi Dāwūd 822

<sup>5</sup> Jami` at-Tirmidhi 311

The **second view** is that reciting *al-Fatiba* is not compulsory for the congregants because the Imam’s recitation suffices for them, due to the Prophet’s statement:

مَنْ كَانَ لَهُ إِمَامٌ فَإِنَّ قِرَاءَةَ الْإِمَامِ لَهُ قِرَاءَةٌ

“Whoever has an Imam, the recitation of the Imam is his recitation”.<sup>6</sup>

However, this hadith has some weakness in its chain of narration. They also use as evidence the statement of the Most High:

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

204. So, when the Quran is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy.

The evidential point here is that Allah has commanded that when the Qur’an is being recited, one should listen and remain quiet, and this verse was revealed in regard to listening that takes place during the prayer—that is to say, when the Imam recites, the congregants have to listen and remain silent. This verse suggests that there is no reciting for the congregants because the Imam recites for himself and for the congregants. This is the view of Abu Haneefah and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.

The **third view**, which is the view of Shaykh al-Islam ibn Taymiyyah and a group of scholars, is that its recitation is compulsory for congregants during the quiet prayers in which the Imam does not recite aloud, such as *Dhubr* and *‘Asr*. With regard to the audible prayers then it is enough for the Imam to recite and the congregants should remain quiet and listen. They stated that this view harmonises all the conflicting evidences. So, the evidences that necessitate the recitation of *al-Fātiha* bears upon the quiet prayers, and this is the more balanced view.

This chapter has numerous names, with each name shedding light on another facet of its meaning. The more names a thing is given, the more indicative it is of virtue and merit. It is called **the Opening of the Book** because it was the first chapter to be written in the written copies of the Qur’an. It is also called **the Mother of the Qur’an** because this chapter comprises all the conceptual themes contained in the Qur’an. So, all the conceptual themes which are included in the Qur’an and detailed in its verses are succinctly included in this chapter. Another of its names

<sup>6</sup> Sunan Ibn Mājah 850 (weak hadith)

is **the Incantation** because by means of it the sick person is treated. The evidence for this can be found in an authentic hadith:

أَنَّ نَاسًا، مِنْ أَصْحَابِ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ كَانُوا فِي سَفَرٍ فَمَرُّوا بِحَيٍّ مِنْ أَحْيَاءِ الْعَرَبِ فَاسْتَضَافُوهُمْ فَلَمْ يُضِيفُوهُمْ . فَقَالُوا لَهُمْ هَلْ فِيكُمْ رَاقٍ فَإِنَّ سَيِّدَ الْحَيِّ أَلْدِيغُ أَوْ مُصَابٌ . فَقَالَ رَجُلٌ مِنْهُمْ نَعَمْ فَأَتَاهُ فَرَقَاهُ بِفَاتِحَةِ الْكِتَابِ فَبَرَأَ الرَّجُلُ فَأَعْطِي قَطِيعًا مِنْ غَنَمِ قَابِي أَنْ يَقْبَلَهَا . وَقَالَ حَتَّى أَدُكَّرَ ذَلِكَ لِلنَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ . فَأَتَى النَّبِيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَذَكَرَ ذَلِكَ لَهُ . فَقَالَ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهِ مَا رَفِئْتُ إِلَّا بِفَاتِحَةِ الْكِتَابِ . فَتَبَسَّمَ وَقَالَ " وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ أَنَّهَا رُفِيَةٌ " . ثُمَّ قَالَ " خُذُوا مِنْهُمْ وَاصْرُبُوا لِي بِسَنِهِمْ مَعَكُمْ

Some of the Companions of Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) set out on a journey and they happened to pass by a tribe from the tribes of Arabia. They requested hospitality from the members of that tribe, but they did not extend any hospitality to them. They said to them, “Is there any incantator amongst you, since the chief of the tribe has been stung by a scorpion?” A person amongst us said, “Yes”. So, he came to him and he performed incantation by means of chapter al-Fātiha and the person became cured. He was given a flock of sheep (as recompense), but he refused to accept that, saying, “I shall make a mention of it to Allah’s Prophet (ﷺ), and if he approves of it then I shall accept it”. So, we came to Allah’s Prophet (ﷺ) and made a mention of that to him and he (that person) said, “O Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), I only performed incantation by means of the Opening of the Book”. He (ﷺ) smiled and said, “How did you come to know that this could be used as an incantation?”. He (ﷺ) then said, “So distribute them (amongst those who had been present there with him) and allocate a share of mine also”.<sup>7</sup>

He (ﷺ) also said,

إِنَّ أَحَقَّ مَا أُحْدِثْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا كِتَابُ اللَّهِ

“The most worthy thing for which you receive payment is Allah’s Book”.<sup>8</sup>

Another name for this chapter is **the Healer** (الشفافية) because, by the permission of Allah, it heals ailments. It heals the hearts and it heals the bodies—it cures a heart that suffers from doubts, misgivings and devilish whisperings and it cures the bodies from pain and discomfort, as it did for

<sup>7</sup> Sahih al-Bukhāri 5736.

<sup>8</sup> Sahih al-Bukhāri 5737.

that person who suffered from a scorpion sting. From its names is **The Seven oft-Repeated [verses]** (السَّبْعُ الْمَثَانِي). Allah says,

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعًا مِّنَ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْءَانَ الْعَظِيمَ ﴿٨٧﴾

87. And We have certainly given you, [O Muhammad], seven of the often repeated [verses] and the great Qur'an.

The intended meaning of **The Seven oft-Repeated [verses]** is the chapter of *al-Fātiha* because it consists of seven verses, and these seven verses are described as **oft-Repeated** because they are repeatedly recited in each unit of prayer. The Prophet (ﷺ) said about these verses,

هِيَ السَّبْعُ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْءَانَ الْعَظِيمُ الَّذِي أُوتِيْتُهُ

“It is the Seven oft-Repeated [verses] and the magnificent Qur'an which has been given to me”.<sup>9</sup>

It has also been named **The Prayer** (الصَّلَاة), as stated in the Hadith Qudsi:

فَسَمَّتُ الصَّلَاةَ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ عَبْدِي نَصْفَيْنِ وَلِعَبْدِي مَا سَأَلَ

“I have divided the prayer into two halves between Me and My servant, and My servant will receive what he asks”.<sup>10</sup>

#### 4 – the number of its verses

This chapter numbers seven verses by ordinance of the Qur'an as mentioned previously:

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَاكَ سَبْعًا مِّنَ الْمَثَانِي وَالْقُرْءَانَ الْعَظِيمَ ﴿٨٧﴾

87. And We have certainly given you, [O Muhammad], seven of the often repeated [verses] and the great Qur'an.

<sup>9</sup> Sahih al-Bukhari 4474.

<sup>10</sup> Sahih Muslim 395a.

Allah states, “[All] praise is [due] to Allah, Lord of the worlds”. This is the first verse. **The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful**. The second verse. **“Sovereign of the Day of Recompense”**. The third verse. **“It is You we worship and You we ask for help”**. The fourth verse. **“Guide us to the straight path”**. The fifth verse. **“The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour”**. The sixth verse. **“Not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray”**. The seventh verse.

This is the view of most of the scholars with respect to the number of its verses. Imam Shāfi’ee, however, holds the view that **“The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour”** and **“Not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray”** consists of one verse and thus counts this as the seventh verse with its first verse being “In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful”. As a result of this scholarly difference, some of the copies of the Qur’an have the number (1) written after the *Basmallah* to numerically indicate that this is the first chapter of *al-Fātiha*, and in other copies there is no number after it in view of it not being one of its verses.

So, according to ash-Shāfi’ee, the *Basmallah* is a verse from *al-Fātiha*, but in the view of the majority of the scholars, the *Basmallah* is not one of its verses and nor is it a verse from any of its other chapters except for the chapter of the Ant. By scholarly consensus, this is a verse of this chapter and it is the verse wherein Allah states,

إِنَّهُ مِنْ سُلَيْمَانَ وَإِنَّهُ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ﴿٣٠﴾

**30. Indeed, it is from Solomon, and indeed, it reads: ‘In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful’.**

Regarding the *Basmallah* in all other verses then it is an independent verse that sits alone and it is not specific to any chapter. Consequently, you will not find in any copy of the Qur’an the number (1) at the end of this verse except for the chapter of *al-Fātiha*. The reason for this is that it is an independent verse which was revealed as a chapter divider except for *al-Fātiha*. And this explains why it is found at the head of every chapter except for the Chapter of Disassociation [or Tawbah] because it was not revealed at the beginning of its revelation to the Messenger (ﷺ), as was the case with the rest of the chapters. It has been said that the chapter of Disassociation is a continuation

and thus a completion of the Chapter of The Spoils of War. It has also been said that because of the revelation to take up arms, punishment and the chapters opening declaration of disassociation, it was not appropriate to preface the verse with the mentioning of mercy and compassion—and Allah knows best.

### 5 – an exegesis of the *Isti'ātha* and the *Basmallah*

Regarding “**I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Shaytān**” then this is unquestionably not a part of *al-Fātiha*. This prescription is purely for purposes of seeking refuge with Allah [from the devils of man and jinn] in pursuance of His statement:

فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ ﴿٩٨﴾

**98. So when you recite the Quran, seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Shaytān.**

So whenever a Muslim wishes to recite the Qur'an, he should seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Shaytān at the beginning of his recitation in order to fortify himself from his devilish whispers so that he does not distract him during his recitation.

The meaning of the words “**I seek refuge**” (أَعُوذُ) are “**I seek protection with Allah and take shelter with Him from this enemy**”. Thus, the term refuge (العُودُ) refers to seeking refuge with Allah from the Shaytān. The word “**Shaytān**” (الشَّيْطَانُ) refers to every rebellious and insolent being from amongst man, jinn and beast. The word “**shaytān**” is a derivative of the verb شَطَّ which means **to be fuming with rage** or **to scorch** or it is a derivative of the verb شَطَّنَ which means **to be far away** since the Shaytān is far away from all good. The term الرَّجِيمُ (accursed) is formed on the pattern of فَعِيلٌ with the meaning of the past participle, i.e., المَرْجُومُ (the outcast). This is because the devils are bombarded with burning flames from the heavens so that they cannot eavesdrop and steal preordained information [made privy to the angels]. They are also pelted with projectiles through the remembrance of Allah. Thus, the shaytān is accursed and doomed in the sense that he is a pariah and someone who has been banished [from the lands] of all good. So the Muslim seeks shelter and refuge with his Lord from this shaytān so that he is not harmed by him, and he also seeks refuge from his madness (هَمْزِهِ), his arrogance (نَفْحِهِ) and his poetry (نَفْيِهِ).

The meaning of الهمز is الصرع (epilepsy) because the shaytān on occasions can induce in people epileptic fits and caused them to be possessed and touched by madness—Allah states,

الَّذِي يَتَخَبَّطُهُ الشَّيْطَانُ مِنَ الْمَسِّ ۗ

...except as one stands who is being beaten by Satan into insanity

[Al Baqarah 275]

Another meaning of الصرع is that the shaytān infiltrates a person and circulates in the body like blood and sometimes causes him to have seizures. If Allah does not safeguard him against the Shaytān then he will trouble him through his devilish whispers, misgivings and seizures.

The meaning of النفخ is arrogance because pride and arrogance are from the Shaytān, and so he fills man with pride and gives him an inflated sense of self.

The meaning of التفت is poetry. Allah states,

وَالشُّعْرَاءُ يَتَّبِعُهُمُ الْغَاوُونَ ۗ

And the poets - [only] the deviators follow them; (224)

Thus, poetry is from the spitting of the Shaytān except for morally pleasant poetry, in that case, it is commendable. Allah’s Messenger (ﷺ) said,

إِنَّ مِنَ الْبَيَانِ سِحْرًا وَإِنَّ مِنَ الشُّعْرِ حُكْمًا

“In eloquence there is magic and in poetry there is wisdom”.<sup>11</sup>

However, most poetry is evil and it is from the spitting of the Shaytān. It has also been said that the meaning of نفخه is sorcery. Allah states,

مِن شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ ۚ

<sup>11</sup> Sunan Abi Dāwūd 5011



**And from the evil of the blowers in knots (4)**

Saying the *Isti'atha* before recitation in the prayer and elsewhere (e.g., reciting Qur'an) it a recommended act based on Allah's statement:

فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ ﴿٩٨﴾

**98. So when you recite the Quran, seek refuge with Allah from the accursed Shaytān.**

This recommendation applies generally to the prayer and to other matters wherein it is recommended to say the *Isti'atha*.



The particle *بِ* is for purposes of seeking assistance and recourse (الاستعانة). This clause contains an implied verb which is semantically evaluated as **“I seek the assistance by means of Allah’s name”** (أَسْتَعِينُ بِاسْمِ اللَّهِ) or **“I protect myself by means of Allah’s name”** (أَتَحَصَّنُ بِاسْمِ اللَّهِ). The name Allah is a name assigned to Allah, alone and it includes and prevails over all His names. So you are [effectively] saying, **“I protect myself and seek blessings by means of Allah’s names”** because the names of Allah are blessed—Allah states,

تَبَارَكَ اسْمُ رَبِّكَ ذِي الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٧٨﴾

**78. Blessed be the name of your Lord, the Lord of Glory and Honour!**

The Prophet (ﷺ) used to say in the opening supplication,

وَتَبَارَكَ اسْمُكَ

**“Blessed is Your Name”.<sup>12</sup>**

<sup>12</sup> Sahih Muslim 399c.

Thus, Allah’s name is blessed and you seek blessings through the names of Allah. Your statement **“In the Name of Allah”** is a prepositional phrase which is attached to an elided verb—in other words, **“I seek blessings and assistance by means of Allah’s name”**.

The name **‘Allah’** is proper name for the Deity who deserves to be worshipped in truth, and it is from the greatest names of Allah. It’s meaning is the One who is divine and worshipped—it is a derivative of **أله – يؤله** (to be deified, worshipped). So He is the One who is deified and worshipped—the One who is sought for fulfilling every need.

The name **الرَّحْمَن** is one of the names of Allah which comprises one of His attributes, namely mercy, and likewise the name **الرَّحِيم**. So, these are two of the names of Allah and mercy is one of His attributes since every name of Allah comprises an attribute. The difference between **الرَّحْمَن** and **الرَّحِيم** is that **الرَّحْمَن** is the possessor of a type of mercy that is creature all-encompassing, whereas **الرَّحِيم** is a type of mercy reserved for the believers. Allah states,

وَكَانَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَحِيمًا ﴿٤٣﴾

43. And ever is He, to the believers, Merciful.

## 6 – an exegesis of the verses of al-Fātiha

Allah’s statement,

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.

The word **الْحَمْدُ** is to heap praise on Allah, so Allah is praised in the sense that praise is heaped on Him due to His names, attributes and actions. The term **الْحَمْدُ** is broader in its meaning than **الشُّكْرُ** (gratitude) because **الشُّكْرُ** is a response to actions [done as favours], whereas **الْحَمْدُ** is a response to [

the perfection and beauty] of names and attributes and also to actions. Thus, الحَمْدُ is broader in its semantic scope than الشُّكْرُ,<sup>13</sup> and this is the difference between both.

The definite article أل which is prefixed to الحمد لله conveys the meaning of **the universal inclusion of a genus** (الإسْتِعْرَاق)—that is to say, praise, in its entirety and unrestrictedly, is deserving for Allah alone, and no one besides Allah deserves to be praised entirely and unrestrictedly. That is because Allah is the Benefactor, the Possessor of absolute bestowment, and therefore He is deserving of absolute praise. As for created beings, they are to be praised according to the amount of good that transpires from them, yet Allah is the One who has placed in them this good and so the reason for praise sources back to Allah.

His statement, رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (**the Lord of the worlds**). The word الرَّبُّ means the One who nurtures, cherishes and cultivates His creation through His favours and He is their King who reigns supremely over it. So sometimes the term ‘Lord’ means the Cherisher and Cultivator and other times it means the Sovereign King. So he is the King who reigns supreme over all creation. The word ‘Lord’ can also mean the One who puts matters in order (المُصَلِّح), and so He is the One who puts in order the affairs of His slaves and takes care of them. The term ‘Lord’ is only applied to Allah unrestrictedly. As for His creatures, the term must be applied restrictively. For instance we say the ‘Landlord’ (رب الدار) or the ‘Lord of the camel’ (رب الإبل)—in other words, its proprietor and owner. If, however, the word ‘Lord’ is applied unrestrictedly or qualified by the genitive word ‘the worlds’ then it is reserved for Allah and it is unlawful to identify anyone else via them.

The world الْعَالَمِينَ (worlds) is the plural form for عَالَمٌ (world), and it includes everything that exists besides Allah. These worlds that exist are numerous and their realities are only known to Allah. Of these worlds that we know are the world of man, the world of jinn, the world of angels, the world of inanimate objects and the animal world. Every single kind of world falls under the word عَوَالِم (worlds) and the Lord of all these worlds is Allah. There is no single thing outside of the scope of His Lordship!

His statement,

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<sup>13</sup> [TN]: From another angle, الشُّكْرُ is broader in its scope than الحَمْدُ because الحَمْدُ can only be expressed verbally, whereas الشُّكْرُ can be expressed verbally, in the heart or by one’s physical actions.

الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٣﴾

**The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful.**

We have familiarised ourselves with the exegesis of these two names of Allah in our commentary on the *Basmallah*.

His statement,

مَلِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

**Master of the Day of Judgment.**

In recitation is مَالِكٌ (with an *alif*) and the second is مَلِكٌ (without the *alif*). Both modes of recitation are correct, for He is the مَالِكٌ (the Master) and مَلِكٌ (the King). The words يَوْمِ الدِّينِ means reckoning and recompense. Allah states,

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالَّذِينَ ﴿٩﴾

**No! But you deny the Recompense. (9)**

Allah also states,

فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِالَّذِينَ ﴿٧﴾

**So what yet causes you to deny the Recompense? (7)**

In other words, the reckoning, requital and repayment on the Day of Judgement. Thus, the Day of Recompense is [another term for] the Day of Judgement and it is called such because it will be a day of requital and reckoning.

Why did Allah state **“the Master of the Day of Recompense”** even though He is the Master of the Day of Judgement and everything else? The Day of Recompense has been mentioned here because only Allah will have sovereignty on that Day, just as He Himself states:

لِمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ لِلَّهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ ﴿١٦﴾

**To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Prevailing. (16)**

All the monarchs and the people they ruled over will be equal on that Day and only Allah will have sovereignty, and on account of that, He has given it particular mention in His statement **“the Master of the Day of Recompense”**. And even if there were other kings besides Him, their time for being kings will expire on that Day. For this reason, it has been reported in a hadith:

يَقُولُ أَنَا الْمَلِكُ أَيُّنَ الْجَبَّارُونَ أَيُّنَ الْمُتَكَبِّرُونَ

**He will say, “I am the Master and King. Where are the tyrants? Where are the haughty?”**<sup>14</sup>

And this is similar to Allah’s statement,

لِمَنِ الْمُلْكُ الْيَوْمَ لِلَّهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ ﴿١٦﴾

**To whom belongs [all] sovereignty this Day? To Allah, the One, the Prevailing. (16)**

All people on this Day will be equal—the kings, their subjects, the poor, the rich and the nobles. There will be nothing to distinguish one person from another except for righteous deeds. His statement,

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

**It is You we worship and You we ask for help.**

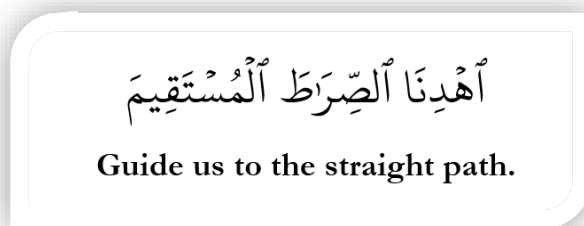
<sup>14</sup> Sahih Muslim 2788a.

The words **إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ** mean “**We single You out alone in all acts of worship**”. The detached pronoun **إِيَّاكَ** is prioritised over the verb **نَعْبُدُ** to bespeak specification and individualisation and that nothing deserves to be singled out in worship except for Allah and this is compositionally conveyed by way of restriction and confinement, since fronting the governed word (**إِيَّاكَ**) over the word that governs (**نَعْبُدُ**) semantically conveys the concept of restriction and confinement (**الْحَصْرُ**)—explicitly meaning: **only You, and You alone, deserves to be worshipped**.

The words **إِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ** mean “**We seek from You assistance and help**”. Seeking assistance and support is a type of worship, but why did Allah single it out despite it being included in His statement “**It is You we worship**”? The scholars state that this is **mentioning something specific after something general** (**عَطْفُ الْخَاصِّ عَلَى الْعَامِ**).<sup>15</sup> This is because worship is the sole right of Allah and seeking aid is the right of His creatures, since His creatures seek assistance and aid through Him and appeal to Him for their needs.

Allah repeated the **إِيَّاكَ** and did not say **You alone we worship and ask for help**, to intensify the concept of specification and individualisation and that only Allah, and Allah alone, deserves to be worshipped and only He deserves to be sought for assistance and help. The whole religion revolves around worship and seeking assistance, and thus, based on these two tremendous expressions “**It is You we worship and You we seek help**”.

His statement,


**أَهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ**  
**Guide us to the straight path.**

This statement is a supplication (**دُعَاءٌ**) and it is a type of supplication for asking (**دُعَاءٌ مَسْأَلَةٌ**), and what has been aforesaid at the start of this chapter, “**Allah praise is due to Allah**” is a type of supplication for worship (**دُعَاءٌ عِبَادَةٌ**). This is because supplication is divided into two types: (1)

<sup>15</sup>[TN]: **عَطْفُ الْخَاصِّ عَلَى الْعَامِ** means that you first mention something general followed by a coordinator and then something specific that was already included in the general term.

supplication of worship, which is to praise Allah, and (2) supplication for asking. The words **“Guide us to the straight path”** and the words after it are supplication for asking.

The words **“Guide us”** (أَهْدِنَا) refers to the guidance of direction and instruction—that is to say, **“Direct us and instruct us”**. Guidance is of four types but the most important of these four are the first two:

- ❖ **Guidance of direction and instruction** (هُدَايَةُ الدَّلَالَةِ وَالْإِرْشَادِ). This is a type of general guidance from two viewpoints: in terms of guidance itself which can be attained by the believer and disbeliever, since Allah could guide a disbeliever in the sense of directing, instructing and clarifying to him the path of true guidance. Allah states,

وَأَمَّا ثَمُودُ فَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ فَاسْتَحَبُّوا الْعَمَىٰ عَلَىٰ الْهُدَىٰ ﴿١٧﴾

17. And as to Thamud, We showed them the right way, but they chose error above guidance.

In other words, **“We gave them instruction”**. This type of guidance is also general in terms of the person who guides and instructs, and included in this are the messengers and those who follow them:

وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِي إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

52. and most surely you show the way to the right path:

- ❖ **The guidance that causes someone to accept the truth** (هُدَايَةُ التَّوْفِيقِ). This type of guidance is specific from two viewpoints: this type of guidance can only be attained by a believer and thus it is a type of guidance exclusive to Allah; consequently, Allah denied this type of guidance for His Messenger (ﷺ):

إِنَّكَ لَا تَهْدِي مَنْ أَحْبَبْتَ وَلَٰكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ ﴿٥٦﴾

56. Surely you cannot guide whom you love, but Allah guides whom He wills.

Thus, His statement **“Guide us”** includes two types of guidance: **guidance of direction and instruction** (هُدَايَةُ الدَّلَالَةِ وَالْإِنْشَادِ) and **guidance that causes someone to accept the truth** (هُدَايَةُ التَّوْفِيقِ). In other words, **“Direct us and instruct us. Make us firm [on your Path] and cause us to accept the truth”**.

The word **“Path”** (الصِّرَاطِ) in the Arabic language means **“a way”** (طَرِيقٌ) and **“route”** (جَادَةٌ) which the people and their livestock move along. The meaning of path here is Islam, the Qur’an and the Messenger (ﷺ). All of these can be referred to as paths, routes or ways because they all lead to Allah.

The word **“straight”** (الْمُسْتَقِيمِ) means here a path without any twists and turns and thus crookedness or lack of visibility. It is a clear, straight path that never leads astray its traveller unlike all other contrasting, crooked paths. For anyone who travels these paths will be led astray. On account of this, Allah states,

وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَن سَبِيلِهِ  
ذَٰلِكُمْ وَصَّيْتُكُمْ بِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿١٥٣﴾

**And, [moreover], this is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways, for you will be separated from His way. This has He instructed you that you may become righteous. (153)**

The path of Allah is one single path free of any division, crookedness or transparency. As for all those paths with twists and turns then these are all paths that lead astray—refuge is sought with Allah! Furthermore, when the Prophet (ﷺ) recited,

وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ

**And, [moreover], this is My path, which is straight, so follow it; and do not follow [other] ways,**



he proceeded to draw a straight line [in the sand] and other lines to its left and its right, and then he said, **“This is the path of Allah”** pointing to the straight path. He then said about the other paths, **“These are paths and at the head of each one is a shaytān calling to it”**.<sup>16</sup>

His statement,

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

**The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour.**

Sometimes Allah annexes the word الصِرَاط to Himself, such as His statement,

وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ ۗ

**And, [moreover], this is My path, which is straight, so follow it. (153)**

Allah annexes the word الصِرَاط to Himself because He is the One who has legally prescribed this path, marked its way and made it plain for mankind to follow and also because it is the path which leads to Him. Thus, He annexed this word to Himself by way of honouring and exalting this path and to mark out this path that leads to Him. Sometimes, however, he annexes the path to its people, as seen in this verse:

صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ

**The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour.**

And so He has annexed this path to those upon whom He has bestowed favour because they are the ones who [steadily] walk this path, as opposed to the people of misguidance, for indeed they been diverted to the paths that go astray.

<sup>16</sup> Related by Ahmad (1/435) and *an-Nasaa'ee* (7/49), from Ibn Mas'ood. It was authenticated by al-Albāni in *Dhilalul-Jannah fee Takbrejīs-Sunnah* (no.16).

“[t]hose upon whom You have bestowed favour” whereby He has guided them to successfully proceed along this path. This is the greatest of all favours from Allah. However, who exactly are these people? Allah details these people in His statement:

وَمَنْ يُطِيعِ اللَّهَ وَالرَّسُولَ فَأُولَئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ  
وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ وَحَسُنَ أُولَئِكَ رَفِيقًا ﴿٦٩﴾

And whoever obeys Allah and the Messenger - those will be with the ones upon whom Allah has bestowed favour of the **prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous**. And excellent are those as companions. (69)

And so, who are those who [steadily] walk this path? Those upon whom Allah has bestowed His favour: the Prophets. This is the first category of people that walk this path and then the steadfast affirmers of truth because they are the best of creation after the Prophets. After them come the martyrs, who are slain for the sake of Allah, and then the righteous which includes the rest of the believers. We ask Allah to make us [steadily] walk this straight path in the company these:

وَحَسُنَ أُولَئِكَ رَفِيقًا ﴿٦٩﴾

And excellent are those as companions. (69)

Every single person who treads this straight path in this world will encounter harassment, hardships and harm, and will feel alienated from people, and perhaps they attack him by hitting, taunting, threatening or belittling him. However, if he reminds himself of the companions upon whom Allah has bestowed favour amongst the Prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous then he will feel tranquillity and reassured and thus endure whatever he encounters along this path. Treading along this path is fraught with displeasures, hardships and difficulties and it is not a bed of roses. And, on account of this, it is a must that one proceeds along this path with patience and perseverance and sturdy resolve. From the things that will aid you in proceeding along this path whilst reducing its hardships is to remember that you are companionship those [who tread this path]. However, this requires [true] faith since few are those who are fortuitous enough to stay the course:

وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَمَا يُلْقَاهَا إِلَّا ذُو حَظٍّ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٣٥﴾

**But none is granted it except those who are patient, and none is granted it except one having a great portion [of good]. (35)**

Those upon whom Allah has bestowed His favour are the people of beneficial knowledge and righteous deeds from amongst the Prophets, the steadfast affirmers of truth, the martyrs and the righteous.

His statement,

غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ

**not of those who have evoked [Your] anger**

So who are those who have evoked Allah’s anger? They are those who know but do not act on what they know—they learned beneficial knowledge and understood what they learned but they never acted on what they knew. These are the ones who have evoked Allah’s anger because they knowingly disobeyed Allah. This includes everyone who refuses to act accordingly, for indeed they invoke Allah’s anger. The foremost of these people are the Jews because the Jews are a people who possess knowledge, and Allah named them as the People of the Book and a people who possess knowledge. However, given that they did not act according to their knowledge, Allah became angry with them but not just with them! Rather, it applies to anyone who adopts their habit of learning knowledge but not acting accordingly.

Those who are astray refers to whoever acts in the absence of knowledge because they are not rightly guided. Their similitude is that of a person who walks a path but he does not know the way. Is not the one who attempts to walk the path of godliness whilst not knowing the path rightly named ‘astray’ (ضال) and that he is in a perilous situation? The one who acts with knowledge is legally labelled ‘astray’ (ضال) and refuge is sought with Allah! Even if such a person were to labour and go to the trouble of striving to seek closeness to Allah, crying and calling out to Allah, wishing for Paradise—but all along he was on he wrong path, none of this would benefit him. Included

amongst those who are astray are the Christians owing to acting in the absence of knowledge, and also amongst them are the myth-peddling Sufis and the innovators because they act in the absence of knowledge.

The praying person who recites the chapter of al-Fātiha asks Allah to steer him clear of these two paths and its people: those who possess knowledge but do not act accordingly and those who act but in the absence of knowledge. There are some groups that purposely shun gaining knowledge and they even say to the people, **“Busy yourselves with worship and remembrance and go out in the path of Allah!”** So they mean by the **“path of Allah”** travelling and sightseeing whilst shunning seeking knowledge and belittling it and the people who acquire it! This is the path of misguidance and refuge is sought with Allah! Gaining knowledge is a must before anything due to Allah’s statement:

فَاعْلَمْ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لِذَنْبِكَ ﴿١٩﴾

**So know (O Muhammad) that none has the right to be worshipped but Allah, and ask forgiveness for your sin. (19)**

So Allah started [His command] with knowledge before speech and action.

As evidenced by the aforementioned verses, the people with respect to knowledge and action are of three types: (1) those who combine beneficial knowledge with righteous deeds, and they are those upon whom Allah bestows favour. (2) Those, from another religion or sect amongst the Muslims, who acquire knowledge but do not act according to it, and they are those who have evoked Allah’s anger. (3) Those who act but in the absence of knowledge and they are the astray. Both groups are set to lose [in the hereafter], and we ask Allah for wellbeing!

If we ponder carefully over this chapter, we will discover the secret of its greatness and that Allah has not legally required it to be recited in every single unit of prayer except due to its lofty status and magnitude amongst all other chapters. Amongst the things included in this chapter is the great supplication which starts with the supplication for worship (دُعَاءُ عِبَادَةٍ) and ends with the supplication for asking (دُعَاءُ مَسْأَلَةٍ). Thus, the whole chapter is a supplication, and on account of this, it is recommended in the prayer that when the Imam and the congregants finish reciting this

chapter that they say *Aameen* (O Allah respond to our innovation). This is a means of insuring a response to the supplication contained in this chapter. However, the saying *Aameen* is not obligatory but rather it is recommended to say it out loud in the audible prayers when you are the imam, a congregant or praying alone. As for when the prayer is recited inaudibly, it should be said inaudibly.

### 7 – with regards to its virtues and merits

From the magisterial greatness of the chapter is what has been reported in the Hadith Qudsi that Allah said,

قَسَمْتُ الصَّلَاةَ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَ عَبْدِي نَصْفَيْنِ وَلِعَبْدِي مَا سَأَلَ

**I have divided the prayer into two halves between Me and My servant, and My servant will receive what he asks.**

The meaning of prayer here is ‘al-Fātiha’ and it is called the prayer because it is recited in the prayer since the word *salah* in the Arabic language means supplication and the chapter of al-Fātiha is indeed a supplication. His statement, **“into two halves between Me and My servant”**. Thus, there are seven verses: three and a half verses for Allah and three and a half verses for His slaves. So when a slave states, **“All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,”** Allah states, **“My slave has praised Me”**. And when he recites, **“the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful,”** Allah states, **“My slave has heaped praise on Me”**. And when he states, **“Sovereign of the Day of Recompense,”** Allah states, **“My slave has glorified me magisterially”**. When he states, **“It is You we worship and You we ask for help,”** Allah states, **“This [verse] is divided between Me and my slave and for My slave is whatever he asks”**. Thus, the words, **“It is You we worship”** is for Allah and **“You we ask for help”** is for His slave. So from the words **“You we ask for help”** until the end of this chapter is the section for His slave because via these words, His slave is supplicating to Him. Whereas, His words, **“All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds”** up until **“It is You we worship”** are for Allah because the whole section consists of heaping praise on Allah. This demonstrates the greatness of this chapter, and on account of this, Allah states, when he recites, **“Guide us to the straight path - The path of those upon whom You have bestowed favour, not of those who have evoked [Your] anger or of those who are astray,”** this is for My slave and for My slave is whatever he asks”.

## 8 – the benefits derived from this chapter

Regarding other topical meanings related to this chapter that demonstrate its greatest are meanings which have been spoken about by the scholars. They stated that this chapter contains sublime and magnificent topical meanings. From them:

1. This chapter is an affirmation for tawheed and its three types. So, his statement, **“All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,”** affirms *Tawheed ar-Rubboobiyyah*. His statement, **“the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful”** and **“Sovereign of the Day of Recompense”** affirm *Tawheed al-Asmā wa as-Sifāt*. And his statement, **“It is You we worship and You we ask for help,”** affirms *Tawheed al-Uloobiyyah*.
2. This chapter contains an affirmation of divine messengership because He stated, **“the Lord of the worlds”** which affirms His Lordship towards the whole of creation, and a necessary corollary of His Lordship is that He does not leave His slaves without providing them the means to thrive and prosper and from the most prosperous of provisions is the despatching of messengers.
3. This chapter contains a refutation against all misguided groups. This chapter includes a refutation against the atheists and God-deniers who do not believe in a Lord. For indeed His statement **“the Lord of the worlds”** is a refutation against the atheists who postulate that the universe has no Lord and that it brought itself into existence! [They argue that] nature is the force that brought into existence and originated everything!! However, this [postulation] conspires against basic reasoning because the existence of creation is impossible in the absence of a creator. It is not possible for an act to take place in the absence of an agent. This whole universe points to the Creator and that He alone originated it, controls its course, regulates, forms and fashions it. This chapter also contains a refutation against the polytheists who believe in the Lord but ascribe to Him partners in their acts of worship. In His statements **“All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,”** **“It is You we worship and You we ask for help”** and **“Guide us to the straight path”** is a complete refutation against the polytheists who worship Allah and other created entities along with or instead of Him.

There is also a refutation against the Jahmiyyah and the Mu'tazilah and those who deny the attributes of Allah. This chapter also refutes those who deny the Day of Resurrection, and this refutation can be found in His words **“Sovereign of the Day of Recompense”**. The meaning of the term *Deen* here is recompense and reckoning, which affirms resurrection.

In this chapter is a refutation against the Jews and Christians and anyone else who chooses to walk the paths of **acquiring knowledge while forsaking acting upon said knowledge** or **doing acts in the absence of knowledge**. In this chapter is a refutation against every scholar who does not act on his knowledge and every performer of deeds who does not act based on knowledge. On account of this, the scholars state, **“Indeed, this chapter is a refutation of all groups [that are misguided]”**.

This chapter has every right and thus every right to be named **the Mother of the Book** because the mother of a thing is the source of the thing and the entire Qur'an sources back to this chapter, since the whole Qur'an revolves around these topical meanings which are all contained within this chapter. This magnificent chapter is recited by copious amounts of people who neither give thought to its contents nor comprehend its topical meanings. They are merely words that are expressed by the tongue as if they are uttered by a foreigner!! This is a mighty mistake and a massive shortcoming, for indeed the Qur'an was revealed for its meaningful verses to be ponder over and understood and Allah knows best.