

Background and Revelation

The first five ayat of al-‘Alaq were the first Qur’anic revelation received by the Prophet ﷺ. Ibn Kathir introduces them with ‘A’ishah’s account of the beginning of revelation, recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari. He describes these opening ayat as a mercy and blessing through which Allah taught His servants. The later passage concerns human arrogance and the opposition of Abu Jahl to the Prophet’s ﷺ prayer. The parent should distinguish the opening revelation from that later setting while following the surah’s shared call to recognise and worship the Creator.

Tafsir of the Surah

Ayat 1–2: Read in the name of your Lord. The command to read is joined to recognition of the Lord who created. Ibn Kathir draws attention to the human being’s creation from a clinging clot. The opening holds together the greatness of the Creator and the dependent beginning of His creation. Learning is introduced through the name of the One who gives life and guidance.

Ayat 3–5: The gift of knowledge. Ibn Kathir explains that Allah honoured the human being by teaching what was previously unknown. He discusses knowledge held in the mind, expressed through speech and recorded in writing. The mention of the pen points to a means through which knowledge is preserved. The passage therefore directs gratitude for learning to the generous Lord who made it possible.

Ayat 6–8: The illusion of self-sufficiency. Ibn Kathir explains the human tendency towards pride and transgression when a person sees himself as wealthy and independent. The surah answers that confidence with the certainty of returning to Allah. His commentary connects this return with accountability for wealth: how it was acquired and how it was used. Possession does not remove dependence upon the Lord.

Ayat 9–14: Preventing a servant from praying. Ibn Kathir identifies the opponent as Abu Jahl, who threatened the Prophet ﷺ for praying at the Sacred House. The questions expose the wrong of opposing a person who is rightly guided and calls to righteousness. The warning culminates in Allah’s knowledge and sight: He sees the opponent, hears his words and will repay his conduct.



Tafsir of the Surah • Continued

Ayat 15–19: A warning and a command to draw near. Ibn Kathir explains the threat against the lying, sinful forelock and the contrast between Abu Jahl's supporters and the angels of punishment. Worldly backing cannot overcome Allah's authority. The Prophet ﷺ is commanded to continue worshipping rather than obey the prohibition. The final call is to prostrate and draw near; Ibn Kathir cites the authentic report that a servant is closest to his Lord in prostration, and should make abundant supplication.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

أَقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ

١

Memorised

Read: In the name of your Lord who created.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ

٢

Memorised

Created man from a clot.

أَقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ

٣

Memorised

Read: And your Lord is the Most Generous.

الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ

٤

Memorised

He who taught by the pen.

عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

٥

Memorised

Taught man what he never knew.

كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظٍ

٦

Memorised

In fact, man oversteps all bounds.



أَنْ رَّءَاهُ اسْتَغْنَىٰ



Memorised

When he considers himself exempt.

إِنْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ أَلْجَعِي



Memorised

But to your Lord is the return.

أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَىٰ



Memorised

Have you seen him who prevents?

عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّىٰ



Memorised

A servant when he prays?

أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَىٰ الْهُدَىٰ



Memorised

Do you think he is upon guidance?

أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَىٰ



Memorised

Or advocates righteousness?



أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى

١٣



Do you see how he disbelieved and turned away?

أَلَمْ يَعْلَم بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَى

١٤



Does he not know that Allah sees?

كَلَّا لئن لَمْ يَنْتَهِ لَنَسْفَعًا
بِالنَّاصِيَةِ

١٥



No. If he does not desist, We will drag him by the forelock.

نَاصِيَةٍ كَذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ

١٦



A deceitful, sinful forelock.

فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ

١٧



Let him call on his gang.

سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ

١٨



We will call the Guards.



96 | Surah al-'Alaq

سورة العلق

Memorisation · Continued

كَلَّا لَا تُطِيعُهُ وَأَسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ ﴿١٩﴾

١٩

Memorised

No, do not obey him; but kneel down, and come near.

Parent tafsir: adapted from Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, 96:1-19.

Arabic commentary: quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura96-aya1.html

Beginning of revelation: Sahih al-Bukhari 3; prostration and supplication: Sahih Muslim 482, cited by Ibn Kathir.

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