

Background and Virtue

Al-Kawthar concerns the abundant good Allah granted to His Messenger ﷺ. Ibn Kathir records Anas's report that the Prophet ﷺ smiled, told those with him that a surah had just been revealed, and recited these three ayat. He then explained al-Kawthar as a river promised to him by his Lord. The report is recorded in Sahih Muslim. The surah combines a great gift, the response of sincere worship and reassurance concerning those who opposed the Prophet ﷺ.

Tafsir of the Surah

Ayah 1: Abundant good. Ibn Kathir records Ibn 'Abbas's explanation of al-Kawthar as the plentiful good given to the Prophet ﷺ. He explains that this broad meaning includes the river in Paradise. The explanations therefore need not be treated as competing definitions: the river is among the abundant gifts Allah bestowed. His commentary also records explanations mentioning blessings in this world and the Hereafter, prophethood and the Qur'an.

Ayah 1: The promised river. Ibn Kathir gathers authentic reports describing al-Kawthar as a river in Paradise. The narration of Anas in Sahih Muslim connects it with the great good promised to the Prophet ﷺ and the gathering of his community at the Hawd on the Day of Resurrection. This gives the parent a specific explanation behind the title, alongside the more general meaning of abundance.

Ayah 2: Prayer for the Lord alone. Ibn Kathir explains the command as a response to Allah's great gifts. The Prophet ﷺ is instructed to make his obligatory and voluntary prayers sincerely for his Lord. The verse connects receiving favours with worship and gratitude. Ibn Kathir relates this meaning to al-An'am 6:162-163, where prayer, sacrifice, life and death are devoted to Allah, the Lord of all worlds.

Ayah 2: Sacrifice for Allah. Ibn Kathir identifies the intended meaning of wanhar as offering the sacrificial animal. He records other explanations but prefers this one. As with prayer, the sacrifice is for Allah alone and in His name. The command concerns sincere devotion in both acts. The gift at the surah's beginning is therefore answered by worship directed to the Giver, without associating partners with Him.

Ayah 3: The opponent who is cut off. Ibn Kathir explains shani'ak as the one who hates the Prophet ﷺ and the guidance he brought. He records accounts concerning opponents who imagined that the Prophet's name and message would end, including taunts connected with the loss of his sons. The surah reverses their claim: the opponent is the one cut off from lasting good. Ibn Kathir points to the continuing honour of the Prophet's remembrance and the enduring message Allah entrusted to him.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَكَ الْكَوْثَرَ



We have given you plenty.

فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَأَنْحَرْ



So pray to your Lord and sacrifice.

إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ



He who hates you is the loser.

Parent tafsir: adapted from Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, 108:1-3.

Arabic commentary: quran.ksu.edu.sa/tafseer/katheer/sura108-aya1.html

Hadith on al-Kawthar: Sahih Muslim 400a, cited by Ibn Kathir.

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