

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah Fatir

Originator · Makki · 45 ayat — reflections on surah 35
of the Qur'an

QURAN

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Surah Fatir

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فاطر — Fatir, “Originator”. Surah 35 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 45 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/35/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Praise of God as Originator of the heavens and earth, who sends angels and messengers and holds creation in being; humanity is His needy servant, urged to gratitude, warned against Satan, and told that only the knowledgeable truly fear Him.

Fatir praises God as the Originator of the heavens and earth, maker of the angels with wings, and holds up His mercy as the axis of the surah: whatever mercy He opens for people none can withhold, and whatever He withholds none can release (35:2). It reminds humanity of its utter poverty before the Rich, the Praiseworthy (35:15), contrasts the living and the dead, light and darkness, the two seas, to argue that the perceptive and the blind are not equal. It teaches that a good word ascends to God and is raised by righteous deeds (35:10), that Satan is a declared enemy, and that those who truly fear God are the people of knowledge (35:28). The Book is inherited by three kinds of people — one who wrongs himself, one moderate, and one foremost in good (35:32). Al-Sa'di reads the surah as a sustained meditation on divine generosity and human need.

TWO

Its themes

- God the Originator and His mercy
- Human poverty before God
- Satan as open enemy
- Knowledge and fear of God
- Three inheritors of the Book

THREE

Key verses

What Allah out of his Mercy doth bestow on mankind there is none can withhold: what He doth withhold, there is none can grant, apart from Him: and He is the Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom.

Qur'an 35:2

'Whatever mercy God opens for people, none can withhold it' — Ibn Kathir reads this as anchoring hope in God alone, since no rival hand controls His gifts.

O ye men! It is ye that have need of Allah: but Allah is the One Free of all wants, worthy of all praise.

Qur'an 35:15

'O people, you are the poor in need of God, and God is the Rich, the Praiseworthy' — al-Sa'di makes this the true measure of the self: absolute dependence on an utterly independent Lord.

And so amongst men and crawling creatures and cattle, are they of various colours. Those truly fear Allah, among His Servants, who have knowledge: for Allah is Exalted in Might, Oft-Forgiving.

Qur'an 35:28

'Only those of His servants who have knowledge truly fear God' — al-Qurtubi reads real knowledge as that which produces awe and humility, not mere information.

Then We have given the Book for inheritance to such of Our Servants as We have chosen: but there are among them some who wrong their own souls; some who follow a middle course; and some who are, by Allah's leave, foremost in good deeds; that is the highest Grace.

Qur'an 35:32

The Book's inheritors range from the one who wrongs himself to the foremost in good — the mufasssirun note even the flawed heir is included among those God chose, a door of hope.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Surah Fatir, 'The Originator,' also known as Surah al-Mala'ika ('The Angels') from its opening verse, is a Makkan surah of forty-five verses. It belongs to the family of surahs that build the case for God through the wonder of His creation and sustenance, and it is one of the Qur'an's most sustained meditations on gratitude, mercy, and the sheer self-sufficiency of God against the utter neediness of everything else. Its opening word, Fatir, means the One who brings things into being from nothing, who splits open the void to originate the heavens and the earth.

The surah's character is bracing and beautiful. It moves through images of angels with two, three, and four wings; the withheld and released treasures of divine mercy; the two seas, one sweet and one salt; the recycling of night and day; the flight of a bird held up in the sky; and the endless variety of colours in mountains, fruits, and human beings. Woven through these signs is a steady consolation to the Prophet ﷺ — that messengers were always denied, that Satan is the declared enemy, and that God has no need of anyone. It ends by dividing the community of those who inherited the Book into three ranks, and by reminding humanity how narrowly it escapes the destruction its own deeds deserve.

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens with praise to the Originator of the heavens and earth, who made the angels messengers with wings, and it states the principle that governs everything to follow: whatever mercy God opens for people, none can withhold, and whatever He withholds, none can release after Him (35:1–2). On this basis it calls people to remember the favour of God — is there any creator besides Him who provides for you? (35:3). It warns that the promise of God is true, that the deceptions of this world and the arch-deceiver (Satan) must not delude anyone, and that Satan is an enemy to be taken as an enemy (35:5–6).

The surah then consoles the Prophet ﷺ: if they deny you, messengers before you were denied (35:4), so let not your soul waste away in grief over them (35:8). It draws a series of contrasts that run through the surah — between the good word that rises to God and the plotting of evil that perishes (35:10), between the living and the dead, the seeing and the blind, light and darkness, shade and scorching heat (35:19–22) — insisting that God can make the receptive hear, but the Prophet cannot make those in the graves of their own hardness listen (35:22).

A magnificent passage of signs follows (35:9–13, 27–28). God sends the winds that stir the clouds and revive dead land — such is the resurrection. The two seas, one fresh and sweet, one salt and bitter, both yield fresh fish and ornaments, and ships plough through them (35:12). He merges night into day and day into night, and harnesses sun and moon, each running for an appointed term. Then the surah turns to the astonishing diversity of creation: from the same rain God brings forth fruits of varied colours; the mountains have streaks of white and red

and intense black; and human beings, animals, and cattle likewise come in every hue (35:27–28). And it draws the famous conclusion: it is only those of God's servants who have knowledge who truly fear Him (35:28) — because to know Him is to stand in awe.

At its centre the surah describes 'the trade that will never fail' (35:29–30): those who recite the Book of God, establish prayer, and spend from what He provided, secretly and openly, hope for a commerce with God that cannot go bankrupt, for He will give them their due and increase them from His bounty.

Then comes the surah's pivotal classification (35:32). God caused the Book to be inherited by those He chose from among His servants, and they are of three kinds: one who wrongs himself (zalimun li-nafsihi), one who is moderate (muqtasid), and one who races ahead in good deeds by God's leave (sabiḡ bi-l-khayrat) — and it is this last group that is the great triumph. All three, the majority of scholars including Ibn Kathir hold, are within the community of the saved, for God immediately describes Gardens of Eden that they enter (35:33–35), where grief is removed and no weariness touches them.

The surah then turns to the fate of the deniers (35:36–37): the Fire whose torment is never lightened, where they will cry out to be let out to do righteousness, and be answered — did We not give you a life long enough for anyone who would take heed to take heed? And a warner came to you. So taste it. It reasserts God's knowledge of the unseen contents of every heart (35:38), and reminds humanity that they are God's successors on the earth (35:39). It challenges the idolaters to show what their

partners created (35:40), and marvels that God holds the heavens and earth from slipping away — none but He could hold them (35:41).

It closes with a sobering reflection on divine forbearance (35:45): if God were to take people to task for what they have earned, He would not leave a single creature moving on the surface of the earth — but He defers them to an appointed term. When that term comes, God is ever seeing of His servants.

The major themes, in depth

God's absolute self-sufficiency and creation's absolute need. Fatir presses one truth with unusual force: God is al-Ghani, the utterly Rich and Independent, and everything else is poor and dependent on Him. 'O people, you are the ones in need of God, and God is the Free of need, the Praiseworthy' (35:15). Whatever mercy He opens none can shut, and whatever He withholds none can release (35:2). The idols cannot create so much as the skin of a date-stone, cannot hear a call, and could not answer if they did (35:13–14). The whole cosmos hangs on His holding it up (35:41). This is not merely a doctrinal point but the ground of worship: since we bring God nothing and He needs nothing from us, our devotion is entirely for our own benefit, and gratitude is simply the truthful posture of the needy before the Generous.

Knowledge that ripens into awe. At the climax of the surah's parade of natural wonders — the varied fruits, the streaked mountains, the many-coloured peoples — comes one of the Qur'an's most quoted lines: 'It is only those of His servants who

have knowledge who fear God' (35:28). The surah has just spent several verses teaching the reader to look closely at creation, and it now tells us where that looking should lead. Real knowledge, in the Qur'anic sense, is not the accumulation of facts but a seeing-through of creation to the Creator, and its natural fruit is *khashya* — a reverent, loving fear. The more truly one knows God's power, artistry, and mercy, the more one stands in awe. Ignorance and heedlessness, by contrast, breed the arrogance and mockery the surah condemns.

The three inheritors of the Book. The surah's most distinctive contribution is its threefold division of the community entrusted with revelation (35:32): the one who wrongs himself through sins and shortcomings, the one who keeps a middle course of duty, and the one who outstrips others in good. That the surah lists even the self-wronger among the 'chosen' who inherit the Book, and then ushers all three into the Gardens of Eden, has long been a source of hope for ordinary believers: to belong to the *umma* of the Qur'an, even while struggling and falling short, is itself a chosen station, so long as one holds to the Book. Yet the surah plainly ranks them, holding up the foremost in good as 'the great bounty,' and so it summons the reader upward without casting the weak away.

Points of reflection

Fatir asks us to recognise how completely we depend on God and how little He needs us — and to let that recognition turn into gratitude rather than pride. The surah's repeated warning is against the 'deceiver' who whispers that this world is enough

and that God can be delayed or ignored. To live awake to our own poverty before the All-Rich is to be freed from that deception.

It invites us to look at the world until looking becomes worship. The two seas, the reviving rain, the mountains veined with colour, the countless shades of human faces — the surah lingers on these not as decoration but as a curriculum whose end is khashya, the awe of the knowledgeable heart. We are called to be among those whose learning about the world deepens their fear and love of its Maker, not among those who see it all and remain blind.

And the surah calls each of us to examine which of the three inheritors we are, and to aim higher. It offers the weak the mercy of belonging while gently refusing to let anyone settle there, holding up the 'trade that never fails' — reciting the Book, standing in prayer, and giving in secret and openly — as the path from the ranks of the self-wronging and the moderate toward the foremost. It is, in the end, a surah of hope disciplined by aspiration.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Seek mercy from God alone; no one can withhold what He opens or open what He withholds.
2. Own your poverty before God; it is the truest thing about you.
3. Knowledge is proven by the awe of God it produces, not by volume.
4. Even the struggling believer is counted among the heirs of the Book — a reason for hope.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Sa'di, al-Qurtubi, al-Tabari. A summary is not a tafsir: for the verse-by-verse treatment go to the works themselves, or to the close studies at deen2u.com/tadabbur/.