

Misconceptions about Islam, Part 7

Another misconception about Islam is that the Quran (the holy book of Islam), carries a curse. Even worse, some think it is a book of black magic! I rarely have met people who told me they read some chapters of the Quran. Many have not even touched the book, fearing they might be cursed. Of course, other things are being said about the Quran, but I won't mention them here.

No one can refute these claims better than the Quran itself. The Quran has one hundred and fourteen (114) chapters. All of them still read the same today as they were revealed the first time 1,448 years ago. The first chapter of the Quran is called "Al-Fatihah" (The Opener). Muslims recite this chapter in every Raka'a (a movement that includes bowing and prostrating) of their five daily prayers. If we know that Muslims' daily prayers have a total of seventeen (17) Raka'a (distributed over the day), then we know that Muslims recite this chapter at least 17 times per day. So what is this chapter, and what does it say?

The chapter, as stated above, is called "The Opener" and this is what it says: **"In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful (1) All praise be to Allah, the Lord of**

the worlds (2) the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful (3) Master [Ruler] of the Day of Judgment (4) You alone we worship, and You alone we ask for help (5) Guide us to the straight path, (6) the path of those whom You have blessed; not of those who incurred Your Wrath, or of those who went astray (7)". Muslims always end their recitation of this chapter with "Ameen" (Ameen is the Arabic for "Amen" in English).

First, we notice that verse numbers appear after the verse rather than before, like in the Bible. The first verse begins: "In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful." As we all know, Allah is the name of God in Arabic and Aramaic (the languages used by Jesus). Arabs of other faiths also refer to God as Allah.

Allah is pronounced as the letter (L) in the word "Multiple," with emphasis on the letter (L). It should not be pronounced like the name "AL."

Allah is God's most unique name. It starts from the end of one's throat and the rest of the name comes deep from the inside of one's stomach.

The first verse also states one of the most famous statements Muslims almost always start



Guest Column

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any work with. You will always hear a Muslim start any work, especially hard ones, by saying "Bismillah," which is Arabic for "In the name of Allah." Muslims always remember God (Allah) whenever they are about to do something that requires mental or physical effort. This verse starts all chapters of the Quran. It is not written at the beginning of any chapter other than the first, though.

The second verse comes with praise to God. We remember from our previous talk that Islam is a purely monotheistic religion. This chapter emphasizes this fact, as you may have noticed, by claiming no deity is worthy of worship other than Allah. "The Lord of the Worlds" is a clear indication of the existence of different people who belong to different nations, languages, and cultures.

The third verse states two other names of God, Allah. The first is "The Most Compassionate" (in Arabic: Al-Rahman) and the other is "The Most Merciful" (in Arabic:

ar-Raheem). The name "The Most Compassionate" was not known to the Arabs when the Quran was revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him, pbuh). The disbelievers who rejected the message of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) used to ask him about the meaning of this name. "The Most Merciful" does not need an explanation but states how merciful Allah is. He has mercy for all, and that includes all His creatures. It is an assurance for anyone that no matter how many sins one has accrued or how many wrong deeds one has committed, the mercy of God is always there, more than one's bad deeds.

The fourth verse continues the description of God. It states that Allah is The Master (or The Ruler) of the Day of Judgment. We had talked about the Day of Judgment before (Stillwater News Press 5/25/24 C7 & 6/1/24 C7) and stated why it is a necessity. The Day of Judgment is when we shall all return to God to be judged by our deeds. The Most Compassionate and the Most Merciful make the idea of death and then meeting the Maker a plausible idea. One won't fear this meeting and one's hope of His mercy multiplies.

The fifth verse is a reminder to those who re-

cite it that their worship is only for God. Again, this is an emphasis that monotheism is inherent in Islam. It is everything that this faith is about. It is the main goal of one's work. Prophet Muhammad's teachings state that "God only accepts work that was performed only for Him. If one does some good work to achieve another goal than pleasing God, this work won't be totally for the Lord, and God will not accept it." It makes sense because all good deeds should be for the sake of Allah, ensuring that one's efforts are not merely for this worldly life. If one helps another, it is not to be remembered as a favor but to seek the pleasure of God, the Creator. How assuring it is when we know that our Judge is the most Compassionate and the Most Merciful!

Verse number six is a prayer to God to guide those who recite the chapter to the right path. One may ask what is the right path to God. The logical answer is it is the path that pleases the Almighty Allah. It does not require much effort to know that this path is one of obedience to Allah and the teachings of His Prophet (pbuh). Worshiping God alone and doing good deeds, irrespective of expecting a return, is what pleases Allah. Almost all

of Islam's teachings are about helping others, especially in times of hardship. "Guide us to the right path" is also a reminder that one should always be careful about their decisions and the path they choose. It is the path that leads to God's satisfaction and, ultimately, to being rewarded with the Garden of Eden (Jannah).

In the last verse of the chapter, God tells us to specifically ask for the path of those whom God has blessed with his mercy and his satisfaction. The verse also tells us that there are two paths one needs to avoid. The path of those who accrued the wrath of God through their disobedience and wrong deeds. Religious and sacred books (The Torah, the Bible, and the Quran) have many examples of people who were punished and accrued the wrath of God for committing sins that opposed the teaching of God sent through his messengers. The other path is that of those who went astray away from the right path.

This is the Opener (Al-Fatihah) and what it says. It is for the reader to decide if there is any magic in these words revealed by God to his prophet.

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For more information: icstillwater.org/islam

No drinking and only Christian music during Sunday Gospel Hour at Nashville honky tonk

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Robert's Western World is known as Nashville's most authentic honky tonk and synonymous with country music. But for an hour on Sundays, no one can drink alcohol; everyone must listen to Christian music.

This is "Sunday Gospel Hour" in the Tennessee capital known as Music City.

For nearly 20 years, worship at this honky tonk has been led by the Rev. Ron Blakely — a 71-year-old musician and Cath-

olic convert who was ordained a priest in another faith tradition.

"It's been a blessing," he said of his weekly gig. He was interviewed at his log cabin in the outskirts of Nashville where he rehearsed before the Sunday service with sheet music and scripture.

"It's not like I got a board of elders and I have to meet all the money to pay the bills," he said, comparing it to regular houses of worship. "I'm just

there, playing my guitar and giving the message that God puts in my heart."

At Robert's, some locals and dozens of tourists from across the nation instead found their church sitting on the barstools of this beloved honky tonk. It is on Lower Broadway across from Garth Brooks' multilevel entertainment space and just steps from the Ryman Auditorium — the so-called Mother Church of Country Music.

Robert's is owned by JesseL-

ee Jones, a Brazil-born longtime Nashville resident and the leader of the honky tonk's house band, "Brazilbilly."

The devout Christian likes to say that it's not about the building — for you can find God anywhere — and he doesn't mind losing money for a sober hour (or two) if "Father Ron" as he still calls him, can help everyone at Robert's have "church."

"Having church on Sunday brings a certain spirit into this

place," Jones said at a storage space above the bar surrounded by boxes of beer.

"People say, 'Oh, it's bar.' Well, I beg to differ — Robert's is not a bar. It's a honky tonk. Yeah, we sell beer and liquor, because we're in business. ... But we ain't got no televisions on the walls. It's traditional country music from the time it opens, to the time it closes. ... You have church services on Sunday."

-AP

Worship at the church of your choice this week

as far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.



Psalms 103:12

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