

Surah al-^ʿAsf (103)

'The Era'

سورة العصر

The surah derives its name from the prominence of the word ^ʿasf, meaning 'era' or 'period'. Like the other Makkan surahs it undertakes to explain matters of faith. As Surah al-Takathur concluded with a warning to whoever is distracted by worldly rivalry, so this surah opens on a similar theme.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah ... We seek help from the name of Allah, whose are all things and who is capable of every form of assistance.

The Compassionate, the Merciful, who blesses mercy on all things by creating them and perfecting them; and who blesses the human being with the forgiveness of his sins and the healing of his wounds.

By the era, (1)

وَالْعَصْرِ

That is, an oath by the era (*al-^ʿasf*), meaning the era of the Prophethood, or the era of time itself, or the era of the last Imam, on him be peace, or the afternoon, as opposed to the forenoon, like the earlier oath Allah gave, glory be to Him, 'By the forenoon ...' [93: 2].

Mankind surely is at a loss; (2)

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِفِي خُسْرٍ

Man by the nature of things is on a path of continuing loss; as he advances towards destruction, his ethics advance in their descent. For the more a person engrosses himself in the world, so his desires and vices increase. Moreover, for every hour that passes without him engaging in goodliness he is a loser, as his capital, which enables him to acquire the loftiest level, uselessly goes up in smoke – and that is on the assumption that he does not spend that hour in disobedience.

Save those who believe and do the virtuous deeds, and encourage to the Truth and encourage to steadfastness. (3)

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَّصَوْا

بِالصَّبْرِ

Except those who believe in Allah and His Prophet and what he brought; and perform good deeds without polluting them with evil works; and urge one another to recognize the Truth and act accordingly; and urge steadfastness in face of the wiles of the world. This means to be steadfast in obedience, and to be resolute against disobedience and in the face of calamity and hardship. The revelation highlights these two matters after their being a part of good deeds, on account of their dire importance as being inseparable from the life of good deeds, of which they are two pillars.