

‘The Disbelievers’

The surah derives its name from the prominence of the word *al-kafirun*, meaning the disbelievers. As to whether the surah is Makkan or Madinan there are differing views. In any case, it deals with matters of faith. As Surah al-Kawthar concluded on the theme of the hater of the Prophet, so this surah speaks of the divergences between him and them, such that he would not follow them on their path, and they would not follow him on his path, due to their disbelief and obstinacy.

It is narrated that a group of Quraysh said to the Prophet, 'Come, Muhammad, let us worship what you worship and you worship what we worship, so that we will be partners in a single affair. So if the path we are on is the truth you will get good fortune from it, and if what you are on is the truth we will take good fortune from it.' So the surah was sent down.

In a narration from Imam al-Sadiq, they said to the Messenger of Allah, 'You worship our gods for a year and we will worship your god, and you worship our gods for a year and we will worship your god for a year'; and so the surah came down like they had said, with similar repetitions.

*By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

A beginning *By the name of Allah*, that it become a maxim for he who begins by it, and assist him in the important matters of his life.

*The Compassionate, the Merciful*, who bestows His particular mercy upon whom He wills of His servants, while His general mercy embraces all things.

*Say: O ye the disbelievers! (1)*

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿١﴾

Say, O Messenger: O disbelievers, meaning the disbelievers who occasioned the revelation, though the intention is to include every obstinate disbeliever who does not budge from his disbelief and inordinacy.

*I worship not what ye worship (2)*

لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٢﴾

They worshipped idols and images. The meaning is that the Prophet was not worshipping what they were worshipping.

*And ye are not worshippers of what I worship, (3)*

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٣﴾

They were not worshipping what the Prophet worshipped, for they were obstinate and arrogant towards the truth. The verse summarises their position, for they were commanded to worship Allah both in the revealed law and by reason.

*And I am not a worshipper of what ye worship, (4)*

وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ ﴿٤﴾

The meaning is that the Prophet would never worship what they were worshipping.

*And ye are not worshippers of what I worship. (5)*

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ ﴿٥﴾

They will not in the future worship He whom the Prophet worshipped. These two portents have been interpreted as future-tense on account of their being noun-based phrases, which denotes constancy and continuity. The first is a verb-based phrase which at face-value indicates the present. The second was added to the first on account of the surah's flow.

*Yours is your religion, and mine is my religion. (6)*

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ ﴿٦﴾

You disbelievers have your way, so follow it until you see its evil consequences.