

Revisiting the Challenge of the "First Revealed Surah or Verses" and Presenting a Novel Solution Based on the Distinction between Prophethood and Mission in the Thought of Ayatollah Khamenei

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Abstract

There has long been disagreement in exegetical and hadith sources about the first revelation to the Prophet (PBUH). Four main views propose Surahs 'Alaq, Hamd, Mudaththir, or the Basmalah. This research aims to resolve this conflict by applying Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei's thought through a descriptive- analytical method. He offers a novel solution by distinguishing between Nubuwwah (Prophethood: an inner station before social mission) and Bi'that (Mission: inner resurrection and start of external movement). Accordingly, Surah Hamd is the first revealed during Prophethood, focusing on praise and worship, while Surah 'Alaq is the first during Messengership, with the command "Read" initiating the Prophet's social mission. Thus, the apparent contradiction is resolved, and both groups of narrations are affirmed as truthful.

Keywords: First Revealed Surah, Surah Hamd, Surah Alaq, Nubuwwah (Prophethood), Bi'that (Mission), Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Introduction

There has long been a difference of opinion among Muslim exegetes, hadith scholars, and historians concerning "the first surah or verses revealed to the Holy Prophet (PBUH)." This disagreement revolves around four main views: first, the well-known view that the first five verses of Surah 'Alaq constitute the first Qur'anic revelation; second, the view that Surah Hamd (Fātiḥah al-Kitāb) is the first complete surah revealed; third, the view that Surah Mudaththir is the first revelatory experience after the interval (fatrah) in revelation; and fourth, the view that the verse "Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm" is the first. Each of these opinions is supported by narrations and historical evidence, but the disagreement becomes problematic when the criteria for "being first" (verse, surah, immediate or gradual revelation) and the question of how to reconcile conflicting narrations remain unanswered. These contradictions give rise to a fundamental question: Which are the first verses revealed, and on what grounds can they be considered the first revelations? In other words, what merits and characteristics must the first revealed verses possess to qualify as the inaugural revelation? The primary aim of this research is to find a well-grounded answer to these questions. Previous studies (Musawī, Khamīh) have examined various views on the first surah, but none have applied Ayatollah Khamenei's distinction between Nubuwwah (Prophethood) and Bi'that (Mission) to this problem. This paper presents that novel solution.

1 .Views on the First Revealed Surah

In general, there are four main views regarding the first verses revealed to the Holy Prophet (PBUH), all based on transmitted evidence and narrations. In what follows, these four views are examined along with a critical analysis of each.

1.1.First View: Surah Hamd

A group of Qur'anic scholars who regard Surah Hamd as the first revealed surah offer the following reasons:

1.1.1.Name of the Surah

One of the proofs for Surah Hamd being the first is its title "Fātiḥah al-Kitāb" (the Opening of the Book). For example, in a narration transmitted by Sa'īd ibn al-Musayyib from Amīr al-Mu'minīn (Imam 'Alī) (AS) concerning the order of revelation of the surahs, mentioning this very title for Surah Hamd, he introduced it as the first surah revealed to the Messenger of Allāh (PBUH) and said: "The first thing revealed to him in Mecca was Fātiḥah al-Kitāb, then 'Iqra' bismi rabbika..." (Ṭabrisī, 1994, 10:613). Furthermore, some exegetes, in justifying the naming of this surah as "Fātiḥah al-Kitāb," have stated that it was called so because it is the first surah revealed.¹

1.1.2.Explicit Statements of the Ahl al-Bayt

There are a number of narrations transmitted from the Infallible Imams (AS) and the Companions of the Prophet that address the first and last surahs revealed. These reports are known in hadith sources as "awwalu mā nazala" and "ākhiru mā nazala." In some of these narrations, Surah Hamd is introduced as the first revealed surah. In the first narration: Yūsuf ibn Muḥammad ibn Ziyād and 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Sayyār each narrated from their fathers that Imam al-Hādī (AS) narrated from his ancestors that 'Alī (AS) said: When Allāh Almighty sent our Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) as a messenger, He said to him: "O Muḥammad! Say: 'All praise is due to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds'" ('Arūsī Ḥuwayzī, 1994, 1:19). In the second narration: Abū Maysarah 'Amr ibn Sharahbīl narrated that the Prophet told Khadījah of his fear upon hearing a voice while in seclusion. After Khadījah reassured him and consulted Warāqah, the angel called out to the Prophet: "O Muḥammad, say: In the name of Allāh, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful. All praise is due to Allāh, the Lord of the worlds... nor of those who go astray" (Suyūṭī, 1995, 1:24).

1.1.3.The Obligation of Prayer with Fatihah al-Kitab

Among the other proofs for the revelation of Surah Hamd at the beginning of the Prophet's mission (Bi'that) is the obligation of prayer coinciding with the start of his Messengership. Since Surah Hamd is an essential part of prayer and prayer is invalid without it, one must conclude that Surah Hamd was the first surah revealed.

1.1.4.Confirmation by Exegetes

Zamakhsharī, in his Tafsīr al-Kashshāf, claimed that the majority of exegetes agree that Surah Hamd was revealed as the first surah (Zamakhsharī, 1987, 4:775). Āyatollāh Javādī Āmolī, citing Zamakhsharī's statement and some narrations on the order of revelation, considered this view probable and not far from reality (Javādī Āmolī, 2006, 1:261).

¹ . "For other sources, see footnote ".¹

Critical Examination of the First View:

Based on the above, Surah Ḥamd has the merit of being the first revealed surah of the Qur'an. However, it must be borne in mind that to rely on the proof of "the obligation of prayer with Fātiḥah al-Kitāb," three points must be established: First, it must be proven that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) prayed at the beginning of his mission or even before it. Second, it must be determined that his prayer during that period included Surah Ḥamd. Third, it must be shown that the structure of Ḥamd before the mission did not differ from prayer after the mission.²

1.2.Second View: Surah 'Alaq

The second view holds that Surah 'Alaq is the first surah revealed to the Prophet (PBUH). This view benefits from multiple pieces of evidence and proofs, which are discussed below.

1.2.1.Fame and Consensus

The vast majority of exegetes have confirmed this view and at times have claimed consensus upon it. Scholars such as 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī (1996, 20:323), Sabziwārī (1986, 7:389), Mullā Ḥuwaysh (2003, 1:66), Zamakhsharī (1987, 4:775), Ṭanṭāwī (n.d., 15:451), Ibn 'Āshūr (n.d., 30:382), Marāghī (n.d., 30:197), Khaṭīb (1967, 16:1621), and Ja'far Sharaf al-Dīn (2000, 12:43) have accepted Surah 'Alaq as the first revealed surah. Some exegetes, such as Sayyid Quṭb (1992, 6:3935), have claimed agreement and consensus on this view.

1.2.2.Content of the Surah

Another reason for proponents of Surah 'Alaq being the first surah is its opening with the word "Iqra' (Read)," which informs the Prophet of his station of messengership. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains this argument as follows:

"The apparent meaning of His saying 'Read' in an absolute sense is that it is a command to read the Book, and this command itself is part of its verses. This is like the statement of any writer who, at the beginning of a letter he writes to another, advises him to read this letter and act upon it. So his saying 'this' or 'that' is itself part of the letter. From this context, two probabilities are supported: first, that these verses are the first verses revealed from the Noble Qur'ān to the Prophet of Islam (PBUH). Second, that the implied meaning is 'Read the Qur'ān' or something that conveys this meaning" (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, ١٩٩٦, ٢٠:٣٢٣).

1.2.3.Explicit Statements of the Ahl al-Bayt

Just as there are narrations introducing Surah Ḥamd as the first surah, on the other side there are a large number of narrations in which Surah 'Alaq is clearly named as the first surah revealed. This group of narrations, which serve to state "awwalu mā nazala," outnumber those that name Surah Ḥamd as the first.³

² . "For the study of the threefold evidence, refer to the article 'The Challenge of the First Revelation / A New Synthesis of the Narrations on the First Surah Revealed to the Prophet' by Muhammad Khamih Gar, pp. ١٤٠-١٤٢. Obviously, the examination of each of these points is beyond the scope of the present article".

"It has been narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq (AS): 'The first thing revealed to the Messenger of God (PBUH) was "Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm. Iqra' bismi rabbik" and the last of them was "Idhā jā'a

Critical Examination of the Second View:

Given the above, it can be accepted that Surah 'Alaq has the merit of being the first revealed surah of the Qur'an. However, the most important criticism leveled against this view is that, except for one narration transmitted from Imam al- Ṣādiq (AS), the rest of the narrations come through Sunni sources and are reported by those who were not present at the time of the mission (Bi'that) and did not hear directly from the Prophet (PBUH).

These narrations are transmitted through individuals not alive at the time of the mission (e.g., 'Ā'ishah, Ibn 'Abbās), making them disconnected (mursal) and weak (Ma'ārif, 2004, p. 43).

1.3.Third View: Surah Mudaththir

A group of scholars believe that the first surah revealed to the Prophet was Surah Mudaththir. The main evidence for this view is a narration mentioned in Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim and a number of other sources. Based on this report, some believe that the first surah revealed was Mudaththir, citing the narration of Ibn Salamah, who transmitted: "I asked Jābir ibn 'Abdullāh al-Anṣārī: 'Which was the first surah or verse sent down from the Qur'ān?' He replied: 'O you who wraps himself [in a garment] (Mudaththir).' I said: 'Then what about the verse "Read in the name of your Lord"?' He said: 'I will tell you what I heard from the Prophet (PBUH). I heard him say: "I worshipped for a while near the mountain of Hira'. When I descended from the mountain and reached the valley, I sensed a voice. I looked right and left but saw no one. Then I looked up to the sky and suddenly I saw him (Gabriel). Trembling overtook me. I went home to Khadijah and asked them to wrap me in a garment. At that moment, the verse 'O you who wraps himself [in a garment], arise and warn' was revealed'" (Muslim, 1955, 1:99; Zarkashī, 1990, 1:206; Suyūṭī, 1995, 1:24).

Critical Examination of the Third View:

The sole evidence is Jābir's narration, but it mentions the fatrat al- waḥy (interval in revelation) and the angel "who came to me at Hira'" – both indicating that revelation had occurred before. Thus Surah Mudaththir cannot be the first.

Exegetes have also rejected this view. According to 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, the verses of the surah themselves indicate that before Surah Mudaththir, the Qur'ān had been recited to the people and denied (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996, 20:123). Āyatollāh Ma'rifat believes that Jābir's understanding of the hadith was personal and that the text of the hadith does not indicate "being first"; it is possible that the event occurred after the interval in revelation (Ma'rifat, 2008, p. 44). Dr. Rāmyār also suggests the possibility of Jābir's error in his reasoning (ijtihād) or the revelation of a complete surah, deeming this view unsubstantiated (Rāmyār, 1967, p. 561).

1.4.Fourth View: The Verse "Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim"

Proponents of this view cite a narration that Wāḥidī transmitted in his Asbāb al-Nuzūl: "The first part of the Qur'ān sent down was 'Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm' and the beginning of Sūrah Iqra'" (Wāḥidī, 1991, 11:6).

Critical Examination of the Fourth View:

naṣrullāh'" (Kulaynī, 1991, 2:628). Mujāhid narrated: 'This (surah) is the first surah revealed: "Iqra' bismi rabbika alladhī khalaq", then Sūrah Nūn (al-Qalam)' (Ibn Abī Shaybah, 1989, 7:195)."

This view is incorrect and anomalous (shādh). On the one hand, only one narration supports it. In that report, Ṭabarī, in *Jāmi' al-Bayān*, narrated from Ibn 'Abbās that at the beginning of revelation, Gabriel first taught the Prophet the seeking of refuge (isti'ādha), then said: "Say: 'Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm'," and after that sent down Sūrah Iqra' (Ṭabarī, 2000, 1:38). If we are to say based on this narration what Gabriel first revealed, we would have to say that isti'ādha was revealed before the Basmalah. Moreover, what exegetes mean by the first revealed surah is the surah sent down after the revelation of isti'ādha and the Basmalah. On the other hand, Ibn Kathīr, in his *Tafsīr*, deemed this hadith weak and invalid (Ibn Kathīr, 1998, 1:30).

As can be seen, among the four views presented, only Sūrahs Ḥamd and 'Alaq are worthy of being considered the first revelatory experience of the Prophet (PBUH). Contemporary exegetes have adopted two different approaches: some have chosen and preferred one of these two views, while others have sought to find a reconciliation between them. It should not be overlooked, however, that the fundamental problem in preferring one of these views is the clarity of the expressions used in the narrations that each side has presented in their favor. As observed, the narrations that introduce either Sūrah 'Alaq or Sūrah Ḥamd as the first surah revealed to the Prophet are so explicit that they are by no means open to interpretation. On the other hand, perhaps through chain analysis (sanad) one might find a way to prefer one group of narrations over the other, but this path also leads to a dead end; because all the narrations on this topic are of the type of isolated reports (khabar wāḥid), and none has particular superiority over another. Perhaps the only superiority of the 'Alaq view over the view that considers Sūrah Ḥamd the first is the widespread fame of the 'Alaq opinion. And the only valid reason for preferring the Ḥamd view is the obligation of prayer with Sūrah Ḥamd, which indicates that Ḥamd was revealed before 'Alaq.

2 .The View of Ayatollah Khamenei

Given that the transmitted and historical evidence cannot definitively prioritize one of the two surahs, Ḥamd or 'Alaq, over the other, and considering the clarity of expressions in both groups of narrations, the original and effective solution must be sought in changing the angle of vision. By drawing on the intellectual framework of Ayatollah Khamenei and his fundamental distinction between the two stations of Nubuwwah (Prophethood) and Bi'that (Mission/Messengership), this reconciliation can be considered logical. To understand Ayatollah Khamenei's view, one must first reflect on the reality of "prophethood" and "mission" and their differences.

2.1 .Explanation of the Station of Prophethood (Nubuwwah)

Āyatollāh Khamenei believes that the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH), before attaining the station of Nubuwwah (Prophethood), was in a distinct and special condition. In his view, in the biography of every divine messenger, two matters are separately worthy of examination and reflection before the beginning of the period of prophethood.

2.1.1.Possession of Strong Inner Capacities

Āyatollāh Khamenei argues that before his mission, the Prophet possessed unparalleled inner capacities for understanding, spiritual growth, and servitude to God – far beyond any ordinary human (Khamenei, 2021, p. 261). In other words, the Prophet possessed an extraordinary

existential structure and inner capital to bear the heavy burden of Nubuwwah (Prophethood) – a task ordinary humans cannot undertake (Khamenei, 2021, p. 262).

2.1.2. Walking the Path of Ordinary Societal Life

According to Āyatollāh Khamenei, before attaining the station of Nubuwwah (Prophethood), the Holy Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) was in the natural context of social life, walking alongside and in harmony with the people. From the very beginning, he was not thinking of a fundamental transformation of society, although he was dissatisfied with the existing situation – as was natural. A wise person is naturally dissatisfied with the class inequalities of his time, the prevalence of ignorance, widespread poverty, common oppression, and in Islamic terms, the "Jāhiliyyah" of his age. But this dissatisfaction remains in the form of an inner feeling; not at a level that could become the motivation for a fundamental transformation, a comprehensive revolution, or the establishment of a path completely distinct from the normal flow of society (Khamenei, 2021, pp. 262–263). Citing Moses' statement 'I was among the astray' (Q. 26:20), Khamenei explains that before his mission, Moses lacked a revolutionary direction; after the mission, his path transformed (Khamenei, 2021, p. 265).

From Āyatollāh Khamenei's perspective, the meaning of "astray" in this verse is not committing an ordinary sin, but rather the lack of a clear revolutionary direction against the Pharaonic system. In other words, Moses at that stage had not yet arrived at a coherent idea and a path distinct from the dominant social current. In those days, like other members of society, he moved within the framework of the customs of his time, strove alongside the crowd, and walked in harmony with the general path. But after the mission (Bi'that), his way was transformed; now he negates that collective path and conventional social behavior and establishes an uprising in society. This fundamental transformation occurs precisely after being sent as a messenger (Khamenei, 2021, p. 265).

2.2 .Explanation of the Station of Messengership (Risālah/Bi'that)

From Āyatollāh Khamenei's perspective, in the Noble Qur'ān, whenever the coming of a prophet is mentioned, the issue of his Bi'that (Mission) is raised; as God says: "Indeed, We have sent a messenger to every nation" (Q. 16:36). Likewise, the Bi'that of Moses, Abraham, and other prophets is mentioned (Khamenei, 2021, p. 259). Now the question is: what is meant by Bi'that and what is its relationship with Nubuwwah (Prophethood)? In other words, within prophethood lies a Bi'that. So what does Bi'that mean and what is its reality?

2.2.1. Meaning and Types of Bi'that

In Āyatollāh Khamenei's intellectual framework, Bi'that (Mission) means "being roused" or "being stirred." What is meant by being stirred is movement and activity after a period of lethargy, torpor, and stagnation. For example, a human being who has slept for years in a grave and whose body parts have disintegrated, when he is brought to life on the Day of Resurrection by the power of the Lord, he is said to have been roused; as the Qur'ān says: "This is the Day of Resurrection" (Q. 50:20). Likewise, when a person wakes from sleep and rises from bed, or when he emerges from a state of lethargy, laziness, and inactivity and begins to move, the term "being roused" is applied to him. Therefore, the meaning of Bi'that is exiting stillness and entering dynamism and movement (Khamenei, 2021, p. 260).

As Khamenei explains, bi'that (mission) is like being roused from stillness into movement – a resurrection in prophethood (Khamenei, 2021, p. 260).

From Āyatollāh Khamenei's perspective, two kinds of transformation and change occur in the matter of Nubuwwah (Prophethood). The first transformation occurs within the prophet himself. Bi'that, resurrection, revolution, and change first take shape in the inner being and essence of the prophet. He first transforms himself, emerges from a state of stagnation and torpor. Then, after a resurrection has occurred in his soul and spirit, and after all the abundant capitals deposited by God in the prophet's being have been awakened (Khamenei, 2021, p. 261).

This inner transformation then moves from the prophet to society. According to Āyatollāh Khamenei, transformation in society must follow transformation in the person and spirit of the prophet. In other words, after a great resurrection is established in the prophet's inner being, a greater resurrection takes place in society. After a revolution occurs in his heart, a revolution is shaped in society through him, and Bi'that in its true sense is realized. Therefore, in the institution of Nubuwwah (Prophethood), all that exists is passion, change, transformation, rousing, and being roused (Khamenei, 2021, p. 261).

In explaining the true meaning of the Prophet's messengership (Risālah), Āyatollāh Khamenei believes that the day of the mission (Bi'that / mab'ath) is among the most important and fateful days in human history, such that few events can be considered its equal in the course of human transformation. The mission of the Prophet of Islam is, in truth, the starting point for the education of the perfect human being; an education whose complete and perfect model is manifested in the existence of the guiding Imams. From this Bi'that, a divine program was formed for nurturing human beings possessed of spiritual, moral, and social perfections, capable of guiding human society (Khamenei, 2026, p. 1).

The Prophet's inner resurrection enables him, after being sent, to draw the blueprint of Islamic civilization; a civilization that, from its very beginning, established its intellectual, moral, and social foundations and presented a grand, historical, and lasting plan whose effects and teachings remain available to humanity to this day. Ultimately, the day of the Mission (mab'ath) is the day of raising the ideal that forms the core of Islam's message and the mission (Risālah) of the Holy Prophet (Khamenei, 2026, p. 1).

2.2.2. The Difference between Mission (Bi'that) and Prophethood (Nubuwwah) in Surah 'Alaq

Āyatollāh Khamenei, in his interpretation of Sūrah 'Alaq, points to the difference between Nubuwwah (Prophethood) and Risālah (Messengership). In his view, until the descent of revelation, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was moving along the ordinary path of his society's collective life when suddenly divine revelation descended. This event brought about a profound transformation in his being and inner self; a transformation so amazing and intense that it even affected his body and nerves. In other words, Nubuwwah is defined as an existential and inner status, while Bi'that (Mission) and Risālah are defined as an explosion and external movement. From his perspective, Sūrah 'Alaq is the first surah revealed to the Prophet, but this revelation occurred after he had attained "inner resurrection" – the same state referred to as the "station of messengership" (Risālah) (Khamenei, 2021, p. 266).

"When the Holy Prophet was on Mount Nūr and the first flame of revelation touched his soul, he caught fire. He saw that the messenger of God was saying 'Read!' He could not read – 'What shall I read?' (or 'I do not read, I cannot read') – the fire struck the Prophet's soul, a transformation occurred; this thoughtful, upright, prepared human being suddenly underwent a revolution; a resurrection" (Khamenei, 2021, p. 266).

In other words, Sūrah 'Alaq, with the command "Read," was revealed precisely at the point of realization of this "inner resurrection" and is the starting point of the Prophet's external movement. After the revelation, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) was no longer that previous person; he was not Muḥammad of a moment before, not the human being of an hour before. Rather, he had become an entirely different element, a different essence. First, the Bi'that (Mission) occurred within him and a revolution arose in his inner being; then this inner revolution became the source enabling him to transform the world. If he himself had not been transformed, he could not have changed the world (Khamenei, 2021, p. 266).

2.3. Critical Examination of Ayatollah Khamenei's Solution

The reconciliation based on the distinction between Nubuwwah (Prophethood) and Bi'that (Mission) from the perspective of Āyatollāh Khamenei can serve as a novel and acceptable solution to the problem of the "first revealed surah," resolving the contradiction among the narrations without rejecting any of them. This reconciliation is based on the presupposition that the Holy Prophet, before being sent as a messenger, had attained the station of Nubuwwah and received revelation from God. During this period, God taught him abundant monotheistic knowledge through revelation by Gabriel. Among these, Sūrah Ḥamd was revealed to him, in which the praise of the Lord and the duties of servants toward Him are mentioned. The Prophet would recite this surah in his prayer. After this period, with the revelation of Sūrah 'Alaq, the Prophet was commissioned to teach some of the monotheistic knowledge to the people to combat polytheism and idol-worship and to rescue them from ignorance and error. For this purpose, Sūrah 'Alaq was revealed, and with its revelation, the period of the Prophet's messengership (Risālah) began. This reconciliation is supported by evidence that adds to its robustness. Three examples are mentioned here.

2.3.1. The Content of Surah 'Alaq

A content analysis of Sūrah 'Alaq indicates that this surah cannot be considered the absolute first surah revealed; rather, evidence shows that another surah was sent down before it. Based on the reasons that follow, that previous surah is Sūrah Ḥamd.

The meaning of verses nine and ten of Sūrah 'Alaq indicates that the Holy Prophet (PBUH) prayed before the revelation of this surah. These verses, which condemn the one who prevents him from praying, state: "Have you seen the one who forbids a servant when he prays?" (Q. 96:9- 10). According to Ṭabrisī (1994, 10:782), when Abū Jahl tried to prevent the Prophet from praying, he was repelled by divine intervention, confirming that the Prophet prayed before the revelation of Sūrah 'Alaq. Given that Sūrah Ḥamd is an essential part of prayer ("no prayer is valid without Fātiḥah al-Kitāb"), the revelation of Sūrah Ḥamd before Sūrah 'Alaq is necessary and essential.

To prove the claim that the prayer of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) at the beginning of the mission (Bi'that) included Sūrah Ḥamd, one must first emphasize that based on numerous narrations, the recitation of prayer is not valid without Sūrah Ḥamd. For example, in a well-known narration from the Prophet (PBUH) himself, it is stated: "No prayer is valid except with Fātiḥah al-Kitāb" (Aḥsā'ī, 1984, 1:195). Other hadiths transmit the same meaning: "Any prayer in which Fātiḥah al-Kitāb is not recited is deficient" (Ḥurr 'Āmilī, 1104 AH, 4:733). This hadith is so famous that Shaykh Ṣadūq, in the footnotes of *Man lā Yaḥḍuruh al-Faqīh*, says: "Due to the widespread fame of this hadith, I did not include it in the text" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1993, 1:564).

n.). The connection and dependence of prayer on Sūrah Ḥamd is such that in narrations this surah has also been called "prayer" (ṣalāh) (Muslim, 1955, 2:9).

On the other hand, in Sūrah 'Alaq, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is commissioned to proclaim and announce the beliefs he had previously learned in Sūrah Ḥamd. In the opening verses of Sūrah Ḥamd, "Allāh" – whom even the polytheists recognize as the Creator of the world (as the Qur'ān says: "If you ask them who created them, they will surely say, 'Allāh' – so how are they deluded?" Q. 43:87) – is introduced as "Lord of the worlds" (Rabb al-'Ālamīn). In the opening verses of Sūrah 'Alaq, the Prophet is tasked with making known his Lord – the Creator of human beings – to the people. To prove this claim, attention to two points is necessary:

First point: In the noble verse "Read in the name of your Lord," according to the more correct opinion, the particle "bi" (in/with) is redundant, and "the name of your Lord" is the object of "Read" (Ṭabrisī, 1994, 10:780). Moreover, "the name of the Lord" means that which expresses the divine essence or one of His attributes (Muṣṭafawī, 1981, 5:225). Therefore, the meaning of the aforementioned sentence becomes: "Read the attributes and characteristics of your Lord."

Now the question arises: should the Holy Prophet (PBUH) read these attributes for himself or for others? Exegetes have raised both possibilities, because in other verses of the Qur'ān, both the Prophet and Muslims are commanded to recite the Qur'ān for themselves, as in: "So recite what is easy of the Qur'ān" (Q. 73:20), and the Prophet is also commanded to recite the Qur'ān to the people, as in: "And [it is] a Qur'ān which We have divided, that you may recite it to the people at intervals, and We have sent it down progressively" (Q. 17:106).

However, considering two matters, it can be said that in the verse under discussion, the intention of recitation is to express matters concerning the Lordship (rubūbiyyah) of God to the people; in other words, the phrase "upon the people" is implied:

First matter: The issue of divine Lordship was always of concern to the Prophet and had been reminded to him before the revelation of Sūrah 'Alaq – namely in Sūrah Ḥamd – so there was no need for a reminder.

Second matter: Sūrah 'Alaq is the beginning of the Prophet's period of messengership (Risālah), not his prophethood (Nubuwwah). This means that before the revelation of Sūrah 'Alaq, the Holy Prophet (PBUH) enjoyed divine teaching and training, but with the revelation of this surah, he was commissioned to teach what he had learned to the people. Given that the most important challenge of the Prophet with the polytheists of Mecca was the issue of God's Lordship, he had to first remind the people of this point.

2.3.2. Supportive Narrations

Āyatollāh Khamenei's solution is explicitly supported by some narrations. In certain hadiths, the word "messenger" (rasūl) is specified. For example, in a hadith narrated by 'Alī ibn Sarī from Imam al- Ṣādiq (AS): "The first verse revealed to the Messenger of God was: 'Bismillāh al- Raḥmān al- Raḥīm. Read in the name of your Lord who created'" (Kulaynī, 1990, 2:628; Ibn Bābawayh, 1993, 2:6; Majlisī, 1984, 92:39).

Some narrations simply refer to the revelation of Sūrah 'Alaq as the first surah upon the Prophet of Islam. For instance, Kulaynī brings hadiths from Imam al- Sajjād, Imam al- Bāqir, Imam al- Ṣādiq, and Imam al- Riḍā (AS) mentioning the opening verses of Sūrah 'Alaq as the first

verses revealed to the Prophet (Kulaynī, 1990, 2:628). These two groups of narrations together indicate that "Ḥamd" belongs to the stage of Nubuwwah (Prophethood) and "'Alaq" belongs to the stage of Risālah (Messengership); and both are rightly called "first," each within its own realm.

Two narrations explicitly support this distinction. First, Kulaynī reports from Imam al- Ṣādiq (AS): 'The first verse revealed to the Messenger of God was: Bismillāh al- Raḥmān al- Raḥīm... Read in the name of your Lord' (Kulaynī, 1990, 2:628). Second, a narration from Ibn 'Abbās (which is weaker in chain) also implies that the Prophet received revelation before the mission (Bi'that) (Ibn Kathīr, 1977, 1:420). This narration indicates the distress and concern of the devils about the mission of the Prophet (PBUH), because with the occurrence of this event, they could no longer lead people astray as before. This narration also implies that the Prophet (PBUH) received revelation before the Bi'that (Mission).

2.3.3. The Twenty-Year Revelation of the Quran

The revelation of Sūrah 'Alaq coinciding with the beginning of the Prophet's mission (Bi'that) is also consistent with narrations reporting the twenty- year period of the Qur'ān's revelation. Shaykh Kulaynī, in al- Kāfi, narrates a hadith from Imam al- Ṣādiq (AS) that declares the period of the Qur'ān's revelation to be twenty years: "I asked Imam al- Ṣādiq (AS) about the saying of God Almighty: 'The month of Ramadan in which the Qur'ān was sent down' – while the Qur'ān was revealed over twenty years from its beginning to its end? Imam al- Ṣādiq (AS) said: 'The Qur'ān was sent down all at once in the month of Ramadan to the Bayt al- Ma'mūr, then it was sent down gradually over twenty years.' Then he said..." (Kulaynī, 1990, 2:628). Based on this narration, one might analyze that the revelation of Sūrah 'Alaq occurred simultaneously with the Bi'that (Mission) of the Prophet (PBUH) and after three years of secret invitation, at the age of forty- three. Hence, the Prophet (PBUH) received the Qur'ān over a twenty- year period from the angel of revelation. This point is consistent with the report of Sa'īd ibn al- Musayyib – one of the great Followers – that the beginning of the Qur'ān's revelation was at the age of forty- three of the Prophet (Ḥākim al- Nisābūrī, n.d., 2:610).

Despite the apparent robustness of this reconciliation, two fundamental critiques might come to mind:

First critique: Although the distinction between Nubuwwah (Prophethood) and Bi'that (Mission) is not explicitly stated in the *awwalu mā nazala* narrations themselves, this does not mean that attributing this distinction to the narrations is a kind of interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of them. The totality of the evidence (including the difference in content between the two surahs, the obligation of prayer with Ḥamd, and the story of the Prophet praying before the revelation of 'Alaq) shows that the revelation of Ḥamd and 'Alaq refer to two different time periods and two types of relationship with God (individual worship versus social propagation). Therefore, distinguishing between Nubuwwah and Bi'that is not an interpretation but rather the discovery of the logic governing the narrations (Khamenei, 2021, p. 266). His statements also affirm that the Prophet received revelation before the mission, but the revelatory mission (*waḥy al-risālah*) begins with the command "Read."

Second critique: It appears at first glance that Āyatollāh Khamenei's theory is based on the existence of a three- year period of Nubuwwah (Prophethood) before the mission (Bi'that), while authoritative historical and narrative sources do not report such a specific time interval. The available evidence suggests a simultaneity or short interval between the revelation of

Ḥamd and 'Alaq. However, it must be noted that in this research, "three years" is not treated as an unproven historical presupposition; rather, the core of the theory – namely the distinction between the two stages of Nubuwwah (related to Ḥamd) and Bi'ṭhat (related to 'Alaq) – is acceptable independently of the precise duration between them. Even if a short interval or simultaneity is assumed, the logical and content precedence of Sūrah Ḥamd over Sūrah 'Alaq (as "the first surah within the period of prophethood" versus "the first surah at the threshold of messengership") remains defensible.

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Conclusion

In this research, after reporting and critiquing the four main views on the first revealed surah ('Alaq, Hamd, Mudaththir, and Basmalah), it became clear that only the two surahs 'Alaq and Hamd enjoy acceptable narrative and content support. The narrations for each are so explicit that preference without undermining the other is impossible; chain analysis (sanad) also proved inconclusive due to most narrations being isolated reports (khabar wāḥid).

This situation necessitated a novel approach. Drawing on the intellectual framework of Ayatollah Khamenei, this paper proposes a fundamental distinction between "prophethood" (nubuwwah) – an inner station prior to social mission – and "mission" (bi'that/messengership) – the inner resurrection and beginning of external movement. According to this framework, Surah Hamd, with its content of praise and worship, was revealed during the period of prophethood, while Surah 'Alaq, with the command "Read," marked the commencement of messengership. This reconciliation is supported by three lines of evidence: the content of Surah 'Alaq (which implies prior prayer and thus prior revelation of Hamd), supportive narrations that explicitly distinguish the two stages, and the twenty-year period of Qur'anic revelation consistent with a phased mission.

Thus, the apparent contradiction is resolved: narrations that introduce "Hamd" as the first refer to the prophethood period, while those considering "'Alaq" the first refer to the messengership period. Both groups are rightly affirmed as truthful, offering a coherent resolution to an age-old challenge in Qur'anic sciences.

Footnotes

Footnote 1: Al- Itqān fī ‘Ulūm al- Qur’ān, vol. 1, p. 193; Al- Kashf wa al- Bayān ‘an Tafsīr al- Qur’ān, vol. 1, p. 126; Mafātīḥ al- Ghayb, vol. 1, p. 156; Muqtanayāt al- Durar wa Multaqatāt al- Thamar, vol. 1, p. 11; Tafsīr Rūḥ al- Bayān, vol. 1, p. 10; Tafsīr Gharā’ib al- Qur’ān wa Raghā’ib al- Furqān, vol. 1, p. 82; Al- Mawsū‘ah al- Qur’āniyyah, Khaṣā’iṣ al- Suwar, vol. 1, p. 3; Al- Mawsū‘ah al- Qur’āniyyah, vol. 2, p. 59.

Commented [sl]: این بخش در قالب ارجاعات پانویس هایی که در متن مقاله آمده بازنویسی و از اینجا حذف شود

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