

284278 - What Imam ash-Shafa'i said about Surat al-'Asr and its being sufficient for people

the question

Is it true that Imam ash-Shafa'i (may Allah have mercy on him) said: "If this surah was the only surah to be revealed, it would have been sufficient for the people"? In which book did he say this?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

These words were narrated from Imam ash-Shafa'i (may Allah be pleased with him) by more than one of the scholars. See: *Tafsir al-Imam ash-Shafa'i* (3/1461), *Majmu' al-Fatawa* (28/152), *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* (1/203) and *at-Tahrir wa't-Tanwir* (30/528).

There are a number of versions of this comment, but they all boil down to the same meaning. These versions include the following:

- 1.. "If Allah had not sent down any proof after which people can have no excuse except this surah, that would have been sufficient for them."
- 2.. "If the people reflected on this surah, that would have been sufficient for them."

Secondly:

This surah begins with Allah swearing by al-'asr – which is the time in which man lives, which contains wonders and signs that point to the might and wisdom of Allah – that mankind is in a state of loss (and decline) except those who attain four characteristics, namely: faith, righteous deeds, advising one another to hold fast to the truth and advising one another to be patient.

See: *at-Tafsir al-Munir* (30/390), and *Asma' Suwar al-Qur'an wa Fada'iluhu*, by Munirah ad-Dawsari (p. 592).

Thirdly:

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: [In this surah,] Allah, may He be exalted, divided humanity into two categories, losers and winners. The winner is the one who does what is beneficial to himself, by believing and doing righteous deeds, and shows sincerity to people by advising them to hold fast to the truth, which includes teaching them and trying to show them the right path. And he advises them to be patient, including himself in this advice. Thus the surah refers to showing sincerity towards oneself and towards others, and striving to perfect oneself and others, and to attain a perfect level in adhering to both truth and patience, in the most concise and elegant words, beautifully put together, reflecting a gentle approach.

The two types of sincerity are sincerity to one's own self and to one's brother in advising adherence to the truth and patience in doing so.

The two types of perfection are perfecting one's own self and perfecting one's brother.

As for attaining a perfect level in adhering to both truth and patience, that should be based on knowledge and proper understanding, and that is to be perfected through faith, willpower, love and striving in doing righteous deeds, and that cannot be done except through patience.

Here we have six components:

Three that a person should strive to attain himself and enjoin others to attain them: perfecting his knowledge through faith, perfecting his actions by doing righteous deeds, and persisting in that by means of patience.

He should enjoin others to do these three things too, so he complies with them and tells others to comply with them. Thus they become part of his character, and he teaches them to others and calls people to them.

This is the ultimate winner, and whatever he misses out on of winning is commensurate with what he missed out on with regard to these qualities, and he will incur losses. Allah is the One Whom we ask for help and on Him we rely."(*Al-Kalam 'ala Mas'alat as-Sama'* 279).

And Allah knows best.