ANALYSIS OF THE PHRASE BISMILLAH
(A THEMATIC-COMPARATIVE METHOD BETWEEN AL-
TABARI'S INTERPRETATION AND THE HADITH
PERSPECTIVE)

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Abstract

The phrase Bismillah without being followed by al-Rahman and al-Rahim appears in the Qur'an, specifically in Surah Hud, verse 41, which states bismillahi majreha wa mursaha. This indicates both explicit and implicit significance of the phrase Bismillah for deeper study. Moreover, the phrase Bismillah is repeated at the beginning of each surah except for Surah al-Taubah. Similarly, the phrase Bismillah is mentioned in authentic Hadith, highlighting its importance. Thus, Bismillah is important to study and understand not just as a mere recitation, but also to comprehend its meaning and benefits. This research specifically discusses Bismillah without the phrases al-Rahman and al-Rahim according to the interpretation of al-Tabari and the perspective of Hadith. The research methodology used is descriptive qualitative research with a thematic-comparative interpretation method. The results of this study show that al-Tabari interprets Bismillah with the meaning of tasmiyya (naming) Allah SWT, thereby negating any deity other than Allah SWT, and sometimes Bismillah precedes ta'awwudh in several Hadiths.

Keywords: Thematic-Comparative, Bismillah, al-Tabari, Hadith

Abstrak

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This research aims to analyze *Bismillah* by comparing al-Tabari's interpretation and the Hadiths of the Prophet (peace be upon him) to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning of *Bismillah* that has not been comprehensively understood so far.

**B. Research Methodology**

This study is a *qualitative-descriptive* research using a *thematic-comparative* interpretation method to obtain comprehensive and accurate results. The objects of this research are al-Tabari's exegesis, namely *Jami’al-Bayan fi Ta’wil al-Qur’an*, and Hadith books.

**C. Research Findings**

1. **Al-Tabari’s Interpretation of Bismillah**

   The pronunciation of the letter ba in *Bismillah* without using a verb (fi’l) indicates that the reader understands the implied action (verb). This is similar to how one might answer the question What are you eating? by simply saying "food" without explicitly stating I am eating food. When *Bismillah* is recited, the implied verb might be I am reading with Bismillah, or if one is sitting and wants to stand, they might say I stand with Bismillah.⁴

   Additionally, in the Hadith narrated by Ibn ‘Abbas, it is mentioned that before the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was instructed to recite *basmalah*, he was first commanded to recite *ta’awwudh*, which is *asta’i’zu bissaami’ al-aliimi min ash-shaytaan ir-rajeem*.⁵

   In al-Tabari’s interpretation, he often presents discussions about the interpretation of verses and answers them himself. For instance, if there is confusion regarding whether mentioning *Bismillah* might imply invoking a name other than Allah, he clarifies that *Bismillah* means i begin with the naming of Allah, emphasizing the invocation of Allah SWT alone.⁶

   Al-Tabari is known as a scholar who is very meticulous in quoting interpretations. This careful approach is evident in an opinion he cites, which

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⁴Muhamamd bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili, “Jami’ Al-Bayan Fi Ta’Wil Al-Qur’an.”, h. 114-115.
⁵Muhamamd bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. H. 115.
⁶Muhamamd bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. H. 115.

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states that the three letters in *bismi* (ba, sin, mim) have specific meanings: *ba* represents baha’u’hu (His magnificence), *sin* represents sana’u’hu (His highest glory), and *mim* represents mamlakatu’hu (His kingdom). This explanation is attributed to 'Isa bin Maryam, but the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) did not confirm it because it lacks relevance to the phrase *Bismillah*. Similarly, all Arab linguists unanimously reject this interpretation.7

As for the term Jalalah, which is Allah, linguistically it means that everything worships Him.8 The term Allah means the one who is worshiped, and al-ilahah is its verbal noun (masdar).9 The word Allah originates from al-Ilah, analogous to the phrase *lakinna huwallahu rabbi* (but He is Allah, my Lord). Originally, *lakinna* comes from lakin ana, where the hamzah is omitted, causing the two nuns to merge (idgham). Similarly, in al-Ilah, the hamzah is omitted because it is considered an additional letter (*za’idah*), leading the two laams to merge and ultimately form the pronunciation "Allah."10

As for al-Tabari’s interpretation of Surah Hud, verse 41, which states *bismillahi majreha wa mursaaha*, he explains it as: invoking the name of Allah SWT when the boat sets sail and when it docks.11 The phrase *Bismillah* is not directly interpreted, and instead, the focus is on the words following it.

In another instance, al-Tabari interprets the word *isma* to mean "remembrance" (*zikr*) at the beginning of Surah al-A’la: *sabbih isma Rabbika al-A’la*. According to al-Tabari, quoting some interpretations, *isma* means *salli bi zikri Rabbika ya Muhammad*, which translates to pray with the remembrance of your Lord, O Muhammad.12

The researcher found that the word *Bismillah* means both *tasmiyyatillah* (the naming of Allah) and *zikrillah* (the remembrance of

7Muhamamd bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. H. 115.
8Muhamamd bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. H. 116.
9Muhamamd bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. H. 124.
10Muhamamd bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. H. 125.
11Muhamamd bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. Jilid VX, h. 329.
12Muhamamd bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. Jilid XXIV, h. 367.
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Allah), both generally meaning to mention the name of Allah SWT. According to Al-Zamakhshari, **tasmiyyah** refers to naming the essence of Allah SWT, not His name itself.\(^{13}\) On the other hand, **zikr** according to Al-Raghib Al-Asfahani sometimes refers to the state of a person's soul, through which one can maintain knowledge, such as memorization, or it can mean the act of bringing something to mind. Remembering Allah SWT includes both the heart and the tongue.\(^{14}\)

Explicitly, Al-Tabari, in his interpretation of the meaning of **Bismillah**, said: "أبدأ بتسمية الله وذكره قبل كل شيء" which means "I begin by naming and remembering Allah SWT before everything."\(^{15}\)

Specifically, **tasmiyyah** according to Al-Tabari refers to naming or terminology, such as his interpretation of the verse *wa la> tana>bazu> bi al-alqa>b* (and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames) which refers to naming a person because of their disbelief after embracing Islam.\(^{16}\) Zikrillah in Al-Tabari's interpretation refers to remembering Allah SWT in prayer, as his interpretation of the verse *walazikrullahi akbar* is that nothing surpasses the remembrance of Allah, which is prayer, as in the verse *aqimi al-salata li zikri* (establish prayer for My remembrance). This interpretation is based on a hadith from Qatadah. Umm Al-Darda' mentioned that "zikrillah" includes various acts like prayer, fasting, doing good, and avoiding evil, with the most noble being glorifying Allah SWT.\(^{17}\) According to Al-Dahhak, "zikrillah" in the verse *ya ayyuhalla’zina amanu la tulhikum amwalukum wa la awladukum ‘an zikrillah*. (O you who have believed, let not your wealth and your children divert you from remembrance of Allah) refers to the five daily prayers.\(^{18}\)

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\(^{13}\)Abu al-Qasim Muhmd ‘Umar al-Zamakhsyari al-Khawarizmi, “Al-Kasysyaf ‘an Haqa’Iq Al-Tanzil Wa ‘Uyun Al-Ta’Wil Fi Wujuh Al-Ta’wil”, h. 655.


\(^{15}\)Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili, “Jami’ Al-Bayan Fi Ta’Wil Al-Qur’an”, jilid I, h. 115.

\(^{16}\)Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. Jilid XXII, h. 301.

\(^{17}\)Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. Jilid XX, h. 40.

\(^{18}\)Muhammad bin Jarir bin Yazid bin Kasir bin Galib al-Amili. Jilid XXIII, h. 410.
The researcher concludes, based on Al-Tabari's interpretation, that Bismillah means *tasmiyatillah* (mentioning the name of Allah SWT at the beginning of an action) and *zikrillah* (mentioning the name of Allah SWT in every situation and action, particularly in the five daily prayers). Thus, *tasmiyatillah* is part of *zikrillah*, as all good deeds are part of *zikrillah*, according to Al-Tabari's interpretation from Qatadah. Therefore, Bismillah as a Sunnah of the Prophet is one of the good deeds that fall under the category of *zikrillah*.

2. *Bismillah* in the Perspective of Hadith

*Bismillah* was known to previous communities, as Masyitah said *Bismillah* when combing the hair of Pharaoh's daughter.19 It is considered the best name, as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught in the Tashahhud of prayer that *Bismillah khair al-asma'* (Bismillah is the best of names).20 In the hadith, the Prophet (PBUH) sometimes mentioned *Bismillah* as a command like *sammillah*, meaning say Bismillah.21 The Prophet (PBUH) said:

 حدثنا علي بن عبد الله أخبرنا سفيان قال الوليد بن كثير أخبرني أنه سمع وهب بن كيسان أنه سمع عمر بن أبي سلمة يقول: كنت غلاماً في حجر رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم وكانت يدي تطيش في الصفحة فقال لي رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: يا غلام سم الله و كل بعينك وكل مما يليك. فما زالت تلك طعمتي بعد.

Translation:

‘Ali bin ‘Abdillah narrated to us, Sufyan narrated to us, Al-Walid bin Kasir said that he heard Wahb bin Kaisan, who heard ‘Umar bin Abi Salamah say: When I was a boy under the care of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), my hand would go around the plate. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said to me: O boy, say the name of Allah SWT, eat with your right hand, and eat from what is in front of you. This has been my way of eating ever since.

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21Muhammad bin Isma’il Abu ‘Abdullah al-Bukhari al-Ja’fi, “Al-Jami’ Al-Sahih Al-Mukhtasa.”, julid II, h. 2056
Also, *Bismillah* is explicitly mentioned in other hadiths, such as:

 حدثنا علي بن عبد الله حدثنا سفيان قال حدثني عبد ربه بن سعيد عن عميرة عن عائشة رضي الله عنها: أنس النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم كان يقول للمريض: "بسم الله توبة أرضنا يشفى بعضنا يشفى سمينا بذإ ربي.

Translation:

‘Ali bin ‘Abdillah narrated to us, Sufyan narrated to us, he said: ‘Abdu Rabbihi bin Sa‘id narrated to me, from ‘Amrah from ‘A‘ishah (RA) said: The Prophet (PBUH) used to say to a sick person: "In the name of Allah SWT, the dust of our land, with the saliva of some of us, our sick will be healed by the permission of our Lord."

In the hadith, *Bismillah* sometimes precedes *ta’awwudh* (seeking refuge), as in a hadith narrated by Jundub that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) encountered a group who complained about forgetting to pray until the sun had risen. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that it was not due to forgetfulness but because of the actions of Satan. Before sleeping, he advised them to say *bismillah a‘uzu billahi mina al-syaitan al-rajin.*

In another remarkable case, *Bismillah* is said to protect people from jinn and their vision of human private parts.

There was an instance where a tumor was cured by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saying *Bismillah*, and the tumor disappeared.

Similarly, for a wound, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught to use saliva on the index finger and apply it to the wound while saying *bismillahi turbatu irdina bi riqi ba‘dina li yusyfa saqimuna bi izni Rabbina.* For protection from jinn, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught to say *Bismillah arqika.*

Before sleeping, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) would say *bismillahi*
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To avoid harm, one should say *bismillahi la yadurruhu ma‘a ismihi syai*'. Similarly, before traveling, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advised saying *bismillah ‘ala al-tiklan wala hawla wala quwwata illa billah*. In marital relations, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught to say *bismillah Allahumma jannib al-syaitana ma razaqtana*. When laying the deceased in the grave, it is Sunnah to say *bismillah wa ‘ala sunnati rasulillah*. *Bismillah* also serves as a defense against Satan’s whispers, as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught to use the right index finger against the left thigh to stop Satan’s actions while saying *Bismillah*. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) taught the phrase *Bismillah* so that Satan could be defeated and become as small as a fly.

Imam Al-Shafi’i stated that when slaughtering a sacrificial animal, saying *Bismillah* or adding something to the remembrance of Allah is an act of faith and worship to Allah SWT, and it is permissible to mention Allah’s name abundantly and send blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to gain reward.

Sometimes, *Bismillah* is repeated three times in a hadith, as *bismillah salas|an*. This is intended to treat wounds on the body, followed by the prayer *a‘uzu billahi wa qudratihi min syarri ma ajid wa uhazir* which is recited

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28Ahmad bin ‘Amr bin al-Dahhak Abu Bakr al-Syaibani, “Al-Ahadu Wa Al-Masani”, juz V, h. 70.
31Muhammad bin Futuh al-Hamidi, “Al-Jam’ Baina Al-Sahihaini Al-Bukhari Wa Muslim”, jilid II, h. 30.
33Sulaiman bin Ahmad bin Ayyub Abu al-Qasim al-Tabrani, “Al-Muj’jam Al-Kabir”, jilid I, h. 192.
34Abu Ja’far Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Salamah bin ‘Abdulmalik bin Salamah al-Azdi al-Hajri al-Masri al-Tahawi, “Musykil Al-Asar”, jilid I, h. 343.
seven times. If Bismillah is forgotten when eating, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) instructed to say bismillahi fi awalihi wa akhirihu.

From the various explanations in the hadith, it can be understood that Bismillah has many benefits for both the physical and spiritual well-being of humans, serving as a remedy for both physical and spiritual ailments, even if this is not always recognized. The following is a comparison of Al-Tabari's interpretation and the perspective of hadith on Bismillah.

3. Comparative Analysis of Al-Tabari's Interpretation and Hadith Perspective

The research on Al-Tabari's interpretation of Bismillah reveals that he interprets Bismillah with two meanings: tasmiyyatillah and zikrillah. Both interpretations capture the essence of Bismillah. The difference lies in the timing of its application: a. Bismillah in the sense of "tasmiyyatillah" is said at the beginning of an action; Bismillah in the sense of zikrillah is said at the beginning, middle, and end of an action. For example, the definition of prayer starts with takbiratul ihram and ends with salam, taking into account the pillars of prayer and what invalidates it. Prayer is a form of zikrillah. Similarly, Bismillah is part of zikrillah, as Bismillah is part of the first verse of Surah Al-Fatihah and is part of the Quranic verse recited in prayer.

The study of Bismillah from the hadith perspective found that Bismillah without the phrases al-Rahman and al-Rahim has its own meaning and benefits. Previous hadith discussions show that Bismillah is the best name of Allah SWT. This explains that the best name in this world is only the name of Allah SWT and His other names, known as Asmaul Husna, because the name of God must surpass all names on earth. Several benefits of Bismillah from the hadith perspective, viewed from various situations, include: a. Bismillah is said before eating and drinking; b. Bismillah is said when someone is injured; c. Bismillah is said so that jinn cannot see human

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37Abu 'Abdullah al-Syaibani, “Musnad Al-Imam Ahmad Bin Hanbal”, jilid VI, h. 246.
private parts; d. *Bismillah* is said to protect humans from jinn disturbances, such as difficulty waking up for prayer; e. *Bismillah* can be used to heal humans from diseases like tumors, as the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) healed a tumor by saying Bismillah; f. *Bismillah* is recited to expel Satan from the body, or for ruqyah; g. *Bismillah* is said to avoid danger or disaster; h. *Bismillah* is recited before marital relations to avoid Satan’s interference; i. *Bismillah* is recited to dispel doubts or waswas (whispers) in performing an action; j. *Bismillah* is recited to fight against Satan who openly disturbs humans, causing them to shrink like a fly.

The researcher’s analysis concludes that *Bismillah* has a very important position because it is part of the pillars of Islam, faith in Allah SWT, and His scriptures. *Bismillah* is highly related to faith and the Quran and hadith of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). *Bismillah* is very necessary for lay Muslims who may not be able to read or memorize long hadith texts; simply saying *Bismillah* can protect them from Satan’s disturbances or serve as a remembrance or remedy for various ailments like memory loss, minor and major injuries, tumors, fever, and other medical conditions.

The novelty in this research is that Al-Tabari, in his interpretation, convinces readers that there is no name for God other than Allah SWT alone. The Asmaul Husna are Allah's names, which in essence are Allah Himself. The Asmaul Husna are names of Allah SWT that correspond to His essence and attributes, such as *al-Ahad* (The One) and *al-Sami’* (The All-Hearing).

In the phrase *Bismillah*, it is proven through its interpretation that *Bismillah* means *tasmiyyatillah*, which is naming Allah SWT in every situation, not just at the beginning of an action, but in every action. This is because Allah SWT is not only present and observant at the beginning but throughout all human actions. Additionally, *ta’awwudh* (seeking refuge) can precede *Bismillah*, as mentioned in the hadith. This shows that *Bismillah* is the beginning of all recitations or remembrances that should always be uttered and reflected upon.
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