



وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ



This Qur'án is not such as can be produced by other than Allah;

Quran English Translation & Commentary

By

Abdullah Yusuf Ali

A'raf

الأعراف

Introduction and Summary

This Surah is closely connected, both chronologically and in respect of the argument, with the previous Surah. But it expounds the doctrine of revelation and man's spiritual history by illustrations from Adam onwards, through various Prophets, and the details of Moses' struggles, to the time of the Prophet Muhammad, in whom Allah's revelation is completed.

Summery- The note "learn from the past," is struck from the very beginning. The opposition of Evil to Good is illustrated by the story of Adam and Iblis. Arrogance leads to rebellion; the rebel is jealous and tempts the natural man, who is warned against deceit and all excess (7:1-31, C. 83).

If the warning is not heeded, the future penalties are indicated, while the privileges and the bliss and peace of the righteous are shown in a picture of the Hereafter, as well as in the power and goodness of Allah in the world that we see around us (7:32-58, C. 84).

The story of Noah and the Flood, and the stories of Hud, Salih, Lut, and Shu'ayb, all point to the lesson that the Prophets were resisted and rejected, but truth triumphed in the end, and evil was humbled, for Allah's Plan never fails (7:59-99, C. 85).

The story of Moses is told in greater detail, not only in his struggles with Pharaoh, but in his preparations for his mission, and his struggles with his own rebellious people. Even from the time of Moses, the coming of the unlettered Prophet was foreshadowed (7:100-157, C. 86).

But the people of Moses frequently lapsed from Allah's Law as promulgated to them, and transgressed Allah's Covenant, and they were scattered through the earth in sections (7:158-171, C. 87).

The children of Adam have multiplied, but many of them have rejected truth and go by degrees to destruction in ways that they do not realise. The righteous listen to the Message of Allah, and serve Him in humility (7:172-206, C. 88).

C.83 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(7:1-31)

*Revelation should ease the difficulties
Of heart and mind, for it tells
The story of man's spiritual past,
And teaches the end of good and evil.
Iblis fell from jealousy and arrogance,
And Adam fell because he listened
To his deceit. But Allah did grant
In His Mercy gifts and guidance
To men, warned them against excess
And taught them moderation and justice.*

(۱) المص

1. Alif Lam Mim Sad.

C989. This is a combination of four Abbreviated Letters. For Abbreviated Letters generally, see [Appendix I](#) (at the end of Surah 2).

The combination here includes the three letters *Alif*, *Lam*, *Min*, which occurred at the beginning of Surah 2, and are discussed in [n.25 to 2:1](#).

The additional letter *Sad* occurs in combination here and in Surah 19, and by itself -it the beginning of Surah 38, and nowhere else.

The factor common to Surah 7, Surah 19, and Surah 38, is that in each case the core of the Surah consists in the stories (*qasas*) of the Prophets.

In this Surah we have the Stories of Noah, Hud, Salih, Lut, Shu'ayb, and Moses, leading up to Muhammad, and in Surah 38, the stories of David Solomon, and Job similarly lead up to Muhammad, occupying three out of the five sections. Surah 19 consists almost entirely of such stories.

Can we understand *Sad* to stand for *qasas*, of which it is the most characteristic letter?

In this Surah 7, we have also the spiritual history of mankind traced-the Beginning the Middle, and the End, which as explained in n. 25, might be represented symbolically by *Alif*, *Lam*, *Min*. If so, this Surah, dealing with the Beginning, Middle, and the End of man's spiritual story, and illustrating it by the stories of the Prophets, might well be represented symbolically by the letters, *Alif*, *Lam*, *Mim*, *Sad*. But no one can dogmatic about these symbols. (R).

كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ فَلَا يَكُنْ فِي صَدْرِكَ حَرَجٌ مِّنْهُ لِتُنذِرَ بِهِ...

2. A Book revealed unto thee, so let thy heart be oppressed no more by any difficulty on that account, that with it thou mightest warn (the erring)

C990. Heart: in the original, breast. I have used the word most appropriate to the English idiom.

The meaning is that Al-Mustafa is consoled for all the difficulties which he encountered in his mission, with the fact that he had clear guidance in the Book for his preaching.

...وَذَكِّرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٢)

and teach the believers.

اتَّبِعُوا مَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكُم مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا مِن دُونِهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ...

3. Follow (O men!) the revelation given unto you from your Lord, and follow not, as friends or protectors, other than Him.

...قَلِيلًا مَّا تَذَكَّرُونَ (٣)

Little it is ye remember of admonition.

C991. This is added in order that men might not be puffed up with such little knowledge as they possessed, for there are great heights to be scaled in the spiritual kingdom.

وَكَمْ مِّن قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا فَجَاءَهَا بَأْسُنَا بَيَاتًا أَوْ هُمْ قَائِلُونَ (٤)

4. How many towns have We destroyed (for their sins)?

Our punishment took them on a sudden by night or while they slept for their afternoon rest.

فَمَا كَانَ دَعْوَاهُمْ إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ بِأَسْنَا إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ (٥)

5. When (thus) our punishment took them, no cry did they utter but this:

"Indeed we did wrong."

C992. The spiritual story of man begins with a prelude. Think of the towns and nations ruined by their iniquity. Allah gave them many opportunities, and sent them

warners and teachers. But they arrogantly went on in their evil ways, till some dreadful calamity came and wiped out their traces.

In a warm climate the disturbance in the heat of the midday rest is even more than the disturbance at night. It was when the catastrophe came that the people realized their sins, but it was too late.

فَلَنَسْأَلَنَّ الَّذِينَ أُرْسِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَنَسْأَلَنَّ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٦)

6. Then shall We question those to whom Our Message was sent and those by whom We sent it.

C993. In the final reckoning, the warners and teachers will give evidence of their preaching the truth, and the wicked will themselves have to acknowledge the truth.

We picture it like a court scene, when the story is related, but the Judge knows all, even more than the parties can tell.

فَلَنَقُصِّنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ بَعْلَمَ وَمَا كُنَّا غَائِبِينَ (٧)

7. And verily We shall recount their whole story with knowledge, for We were never absent (at any time or place).

C994. Allah (being all-knowing) is never absent from any place or at any time, for Time and Place are relative conceptions for our limited natures, while He is the Absolute, independent of such relative conceptions. (R).

وَالْوَزْنُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ...

8. The balance that day will be true (to a nicety):

...فَمَنْ تَقَلَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ (٨)

those whose scale (of good) will be heavy, will prosper.

وَمَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ فَأُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ خَسِرُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ...

9. Those whose scale will be light, will find their souls in perdition,

...بِمَا كَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَظْلِمُونَ (٩)

for that they wrongfully treated our signs.

وَلَقَدْ مَكَّنَّاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَجَعَلْنَا لَكُمْ فِيهَا مَعَايِشَ...

10. It is We who have placed you with authority on earth, and provided you therein with means for the fulfillment of your life:

C995. That is, all the material things which are necessary to sustain, beautify, and refine life, as well as all those powers, faculties, and opportunities which are instrumental in bringing up life to a higher plane and preparing man for his high destiny.

... قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ (١٠)

small are the thanks that ye give!

Section 2

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ...

11. It is We who created you and gave you shape;

C996. Shape or form must be interpreted not only to refer to the physical form, which changes day by day, but also the various forms or shapes which our ideal and spiritual existence may take from time to time according to our inner experience; Cf. 82:8.

It was after Adam (as standing for all mankind) had been so taught that the angels were asked to prostrate to him, for, by Allah's grace, his status had actually been raised higher.

Note the transition from "you" (plural) in the first clause to "Adam" in the second clause: Adam and mankind are synonymous: the plural is reverted to in 7:14, 16-18. (R).

... ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ...

then We bade the angels bow down to Adam, and they bowed down; not so Iblis;

... لَمْ يَكُن مِّنَ السَّاجِدِينَ (١١)

he refused to be of those who bow down.

C997. Iblis not only refused to bow down: he refused to be of those who prostrated.

In other words he arrogantly despised the angels who prostrated as well as man to whom they prostrated and he was in rebellion against Allah for not obeying His order.

Arrogance, jealousy, and rebellion were his triple crime.

قَالَ مَا مَنَعَكَ أَلَّا تَسْجُدَ إِذْ أَمَرْتُكَ...

12. (Allah) said: "What prevented thee from bowing down when I commanded thee?"

...قَالَ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ...

He said:

"I am better than he:

...خَلَقْتَنِي مِنْ نَّارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِنْ طِينٍ (١٢)

thou didst create me from fire and him from clay."

C998. Notice the subtle wiles of Iblis: his egotism in putting himself above man, and his falsehood in ignoring the fact that Allah had not merely made man's body from clay, but had given him spiritual form, - in other words, had taught him the nature of things and raised him above the angels.

قَالَ فَاهْبِطْ مِنْهَا فَمَا يَكُونُ لَكَ أَنْ تَتَّكِبَ فِيهَا ...

13. (Allah) said:

"Get thee down from this: it is not for thee to be arrogant here:

C999. "This": the situation as it was then- a rebellious creature impertinent to His Creator. At every step Iblis falls lower;

- arrogance,
- jealousy,
- disobedience,
- egotism and
- untruth.

...فَأَخْرَجُ إِيَّاكَ مِنَ الصَّاعِرِينَ (١٣)

get out, for thou art of the meanest (of creatures)."

قَالَ فَأَنْظِرْنِي إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ (١٤)

14. He said: "Give me respite till the day they are raised up."

قَالَ إِنَّكَ مِنَ الْمُنْظَرِينَ (١٥)

15. (Allah) said: "Be thou among those who have respite."

C1000. Are there others under respite?

Yes, Iblis has a large army of wicked seducers, and those men who are their dupes. For though degradation takes effect at once, its appearance may be long delayed.

قَالَ فَبِمَا أَغْوَيْتَنِي لَأَقْعُدَنَّ لَهُمْ صِرَاطَكَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ (١٦)

16. He said:

"Because Thou hast thrown me out of the way, lo! I will lie in wait for them on Thy straight way.

C1001. Another instance of Iblis's subtlety and falsehood.

He waits till he gets the respite. Then he breaks out into a lie and impertinent defiance.

- The lie is in suggesting that Allah had thrown him out of the Way, in other words misled him: whereas his own conduct was responsible for his degradation.
- The defiance is in his setting snares on the Straight Way to which Allah directs men.

Iblis now falls a step lower than the five steps mentioned in n. 999. His sixth step is defiance.

ثُمَّ لَأَتِيَنَّهُمْ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ وَعَنْ أَيْمَانِهِمْ وَعَنْ شَمَائِلِهِمْ ...

17. "Then will I assault them from before them and behind them from their right and their left:

...وَلَا تَجِدُ أَكْثَرَهُمْ شَاكِرِينَ (١٧)

nor wilt Thou find, in most of them, gratitude (for Thy mercies).

C1002. The assault of evil is from all sides. It takes advantage of every weak point, and sometimes even our good and generous sympathies are used to decoy us into the snares of evil.

Man has every reason to be grateful to Allah for all His loving care and yet man in his folly forgets his gratitude and does the very opposite of what he should do.

قَالَ اخْرُجْ مِنْهَا مَذْذُومًا مَّدْحُورًا ...

18. (Allah) said:

"Get out from this, disgraced and expelled.

...لِمَنْ تَبِعَكَ مِنْهُمْ لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (١٨)

If any of them follow thee, hell will I fill with you all."

وَيَا آدَمُ اسْكُنْ أَنْتَ وَزَوْجُكَ الْجَنَّةَ ...

19. O Adam!

dwell thou and thy wife in the garden,

C1003. Now the story turns to man. He was placed in the Garden of innocence and bliss, but it was Allah's Plan to give him a limited faculty of choice.

All that he was forbidden to do was to approach the Tree, but he succumbed to Satan's suggestions. (R).

... فَكُلَا مِنْ حَيْثُ شِئْتُمَا ...

and enjoy (its good things) as ye wish:

C1004. Enjoy: literally, "eat."

Cf. the meaning of *taama* in 6:14, n. 847 and *akala* in and 5:66, n. 776.

...وَلَا تَقْرَبَا هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةَ فَتَكُونَا مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ (١٩)

but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression."

فَوَسَّوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ ...

20. Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them,

C1005. The transition from the name "Iblis" to the name "**Satan**" is similar to that in 2:36, where it is explained in n. 52.

... لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمَا مَا وَوَرِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوْءَاتِهِمَا ...

bringing openly before their minds all their shame that was hidden from them (before):

C1006. Our first parents as created by Allah (and this applies to all of us) were innocent in matters material as well as spiritual. They knew no evil. But the faculty of choice, which was given to them and which raised them above the angels, also implied that they had the capacity of evil, which by the training of their own will, they were to reject.

They were warned of the danger. When they fell, they realized the evil. They were (and we are) still given the chance, in this life on a lower plane, to make good and recover the lost status of innocence and bliss.

... وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ ...

he said "Your Lord only forbade you this tree,

... إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَائِكَةً أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ (٢٠)

lest ye should become angels or such beings as live for ever."

وَقَاسَمَهُمَا إِنِّي لَكُمَا لَمِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ (٢١)

21. And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser.

فَدَلَّاهُمَا بِغُرُورٍ ...

22. So by deceit he brought about their fall:

...فَلَمَّا ذَاقَا الشَّجَرَةَ بَدَتْ لَهُمَا سَوْءَآئُهُمَا وَطَفِقَا يَخْصِفَانِ عَلَيْهِمَا مِنْ

وَرَقِ الْجَنَّةِ...

when they tasted of the tree, their shame became manifest to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies.

...وَنَادَاهُمَا رَبُّهُمَا أَلَمْ أَنْهَكُمَا عَنْ تِلْكَ الشَّجَرَةِ...

And their Lord called unto them:

"Did I not forbid you that tree,

...وَأَقُلْ لَكُمَا إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمَا عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ (٢٢)

and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?"

... قَالَا

23. They said:

رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا وَإِن لَّمْ تَعْفِرْ لَنَا
وَتَرْحَمْنَا

لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

"Our Lord!

we have wronged our own souls: if Thou
forgive us not and bestow not upon us
Thy mercy, we shall certainly be lost."

قَالَ اهْبِطُوا بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ عَدُوٌّ...

24. (Allah) said:

"Get ye down, with enmity between yourselves.

...وَلَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ مُسْتَقَرٌّ وَمَتَاعٌ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ (٢٤)

On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood, for a time."

قَالَ فِيهَا تَحْيَوْنَ وَفِيهَا تَمُوتُونَ وَمِنْهَا تُخْرَجُونَ (٢٥)

25. He said:

"Therein shall ye live, and therein shall ye die; but from it shall ye be taken out (at last)."

C1007. Cf. this whole passage about Adam with the passage in 2:30-39, and with other passages in subsequent Surahs. In places the words are precisely the same, and yet the whole argument is different. In each case it exactly fits the context.

In Surah 2, the argument was about the origin of man. Here the argument is a prelude to his history on earth, and so it continues logically in the next section to address the Children of Adam, and goes on afterwards with the story of the various prophets that came to guide mankind.

Truth is one, but its apt presentment in words shows a different facet in different contexts.

Section 3

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ قَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمْ لِبَاسًا يُورِي سَوَاءَتَكُمْ وَرِيثًا...

26. O ye children of Adam!

We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you,

C1008. There is a double philosophy of clothes here, to correspond with the double signification of verse 20 above, as explained in n. 1006.

Spiritually, Allah created man "bare and alone" (6:94): the soul in its naked purity and beauty knew no shame because it knew no guilt: after it was touched by guilt and soiled by evil, its thoughts and deeds became its clothing and adornments, good or bad, honest or meretricious, according to the inner motives, which gave them colour.

So in the case of the body: it is pure and beautiful, as long as it is not defiled by misuse: its clothing and ornaments may be good or meretricious, according to the motives in the mind and character: if good, they are the symbols of purity and beauty: but the best clothing and ornament we could have comes from righteousness, which covers the nakedness of sin, and adorns us with virtues. (R).

...وَلِبَاسُ التَّقْوَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ خَيْرٌ...

but the raiment of righteousness, that is the best.

...ذَٰلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ (٢٦)

Such are among the signs of Allah, that they may receive admonition!

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ لَا يَفْتِنَنَّكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ كَمَا أَخْرَجَ أَبَوَيْكُم مِّنَ الْجَنَّةِ...

27. O ye children of Adam!

let not Satan seduce you, in the same manner as he got your parents out of the garden,

C1009. That is, by fraud and deceit, - by putting you off your guard and telling lies.

Adam's story here becomes an introduction to the later religious history of mankind: [7:20-22](#). In the Garden, Satan's deceit stripped off their raiment of honour and innocence.

In this life on a lower plane he seeks to strip us of the raiment of righteousness. And he can take up positions on a vantage ground of worldly power or influence or riches, in which he and his confederates are not seen in their true colours. They may assume a fair-seeming disguise of disinterested friendship or high motives of patriotism or public spirit, or loyalty to ancestors, when beneath it there is nothing but spite and selfishness.

...يَنْزِعُ عَنْهُمَا لِبَاسَهُمَا لِيُرِيَهُمَا سَوْءَٰتِهِمَا...

stripping them of their raiment, to expose their shame:

...إِنَّهُ يَرَاكُمْ هُوَ وَقَبِيلُهُ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا تَرَوْنَهُمْ...

for he and his tribe watch you from a position where ye cannot see them:

...إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا الشَّيَاطِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ لِلَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (٢٧)

We made the evil ones friends (only) to those without faith.

وَإِذَا فَعَلُوا فَاحِشَةً قَالُوا وَجَدْنَا عَلَيْهَا آبَاءَنَا وَاللَّهُ أَمَرَنَا بِهَا...

28. When they do aught that is shameful, they say:

"We found our fathers doing so;" and "Allah commanded us thus":

...قُلْ إِنْ أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِالنَّاسِ الْفَحْشَاءَ...

say:

"Nay Allah never commands what is shameful:

...أَتَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (٢٨)

do ye say of Allah what ye know not?"

قُلْ أَمَرَ رَبِّي بِالْقِسْطِ...

29. Say:

"My Lord hath commanded justice;

...وَأَقِيمُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ عِنْدَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَادْعُوهُ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ...

and that ye set your whole selves (to him) at every time and place of prayer, and call upon him, making your devotion sincere as in his sight:

C1010. For **wajh**, see 2:112 and n. 114.

Our devotion should be sincere, not as in other men's sight, but by presenting our whole selves, heart and soul, to Allah. Even so, it may not be enough; for the sight of our heart and soul may be faulty.

We should call upon Allah to give us the light, by which our sincerity may commend itself to Him as true sincerity "as in His sight"

...كَمَا بَدَأَكُمْ تَعُودُونَ (٢٩)

such as he created you in the beginning, so shall ye return."

C1011. Cf. 6:94.

Our sincerity should be real sincerity, as in His sight for when we return to Him, we shall be stripped of all pretence, even such self-deception as may satisfy us in this life.

فَرِيقًا هَدَىٰ وَفَرِيقًا حَقَّ عَلَيْهِمُ الضَّلَالَةُ...

30. Some He hath guided:

others have (by their choice) deserved the loss of their way:

C1012. Guidance is for all. But in some it takes effect: in others the doors are closed against it, because they have taken Satan for their friend.

If they have lost their way, they have richly deserved it; for they deliberately took their choice, even though, in their self-righteousness, they may think that their sin is their virtue, and that their Evil is their Good.

...إِنَّهُمْ أَخَذُوا الشَّيَاطِينَ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ وَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ

مُهْتَدُونَ (٣٠)

in that they took the evil ones, in preference to Allah, for their friends and protectors, and think that they receive guidance.

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ ...

31. O children of Adam!

... خُذُوا زِينَتَكُمْ عِندَ كُلِّ مَسْجِدٍ وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا ...

wear your beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer: eat and drink:

but waste not by excess,

C1013. Beautiful apparel: zinat: adornments or apparel for beautiful living:

construed to mean not only clothes that add grace to the wearer, but toilet and cleanliness, attention to hair, and other small personal details which no self-respecting man or woman ought to neglect when going solemnly even before a great human dignitary, if only out of respect for the dignity of the occasion. How much more important it is to attend to these details when we solemnly apply our minds to the Presence of Allah.

But the caution against excess applies: men must not go to prayer in silks or ornaments appropriate to women. Similarly sober food, good and wholesome, is not to be divorced from offices of religion; only the caution against excess applies strictly. A dirty, unkempt, slovenly Faqir could not claim sanctity in Islam. (R).

...إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُسْرِفِينَ (٣١)

for Allah loveth not the wasters.

C.84 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(7:32-58)

*Allah has forbidden the things
That are evil, not those that are good,
For these were created for man's
Enjoyment. The transgressors
Are those who reject Allah's Signs.
They will have no share in the Bliss
Of the Hereafter. But the righteous
Will dwell in Peace, and the Hope
That was promised will be theirs.*

Section 4

فَلْ مَنْ حَرَّمَ زِينَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي أَخْرَجَ لِعِبَادِهِ وَالطَّيِّبَاتِ مِنَ الرِّزْقِ...

32. Say:

Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of Allah, which He hath produced for his servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He hath provided) for sustenance?

C1014. Asceticism often means the negation of art and beauty, it has no necessary sanctity attached to it.

...قُلْ هِيَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا خَالِصَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ...

Say:

they are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgment.

C1015. The beautiful and good things of life are really meant for, and should be the privilege of those with faith in Allah.

If they do not always have them in this life, and if there is sometimes the semblance of others having them who do not deserve them, let us at least consider the matter in another light. Our Faith in Allah's wisdom is unshaken and we know that these are but fleeting and mixed types of the things in the spiritual world.

Their pure counterparts in the spiritual world will be only for those who proved in all the trials of this world, that they had faith.

...كَذَلِكَ نَفَصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَعْلَمُونَ (٣٢)

Thus do We explain the signs in detail for those who understand.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا حَرَّمَ رَبِّي ...

33. Say: The things that my Lord hath indeed forbidden are:

C1016. The forbidden things are described in four categories:

1. what is shameful or unbecoming; the sort of things which have also legal and social sanctions, not of a

local but of a universal kind; they may be called offences against society:

2. sins against self and trespasses or excesses of every sort; these are against truth and reason; here would come in indiscipline, failure in doing intangible duties not clearly defined by law; selfishness or self-aggrandizement, which may be condoned by custom and not punished by law, etc.-
3. erecting fetishes or false gods; this is treason against the true God; and
4. corrupting religion by debasing superstitions, etc.

... الْفَوَاحِشَ مَا ظَهَرَ مِنْهَا وَمَا بَطَنَ ...

- shameful deeds, whether open or secret;

... وَالْإِثْمَ وَالْبَغْيَ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ وَأَنْ تُشْرِكُوا بِاللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزَّلْ بِهِ

سُلْطَانًا ...

- sins and trespasses against truth or reason;
- assigning of partners to Allah, for which he hath given no authority;

... وَأَنْ تَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (٣٣)

- and saying things about Allah of which ye have no knowledge.

وَلِكُلِّ أُمَّةٍ أَجَلٌ ...

34. To every people is a term appointed:

C1017. People: ummah. I do not know whether "generation" would not be more appropriate here. If so, it would refer to the Time-Spirit, for it affects a whole number of people living contemporaneously, and while we deal grammatically with a group, we really have in mind the individuals composing the group. Anyway, the lesson is what is suggested in the following verses.

There is only a limited time for an individual or for a group of people. If they do not make good during that time of probation, the chance is lost, and it cannot come

again. We cannot retard or advance the march of time by a single hour or minute.

("Hour" in the text expresses an indefinite but short period of time).

...فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ لَا يَسْتَأْخِرُونَ سَاعَةً وَلَا يَسْتَقْدِمُونَ (٣٤)

when their term is reached, not an hour can they cause delay, nor (an hour) can they advance (it in anticipation).

يَا بَنِي آدَمَ إِنَّمَا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنكُمْ يَقُصُّونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِي...

35. O ye children of Adam!

whenever there come to you Messengers from amongst you, rehearsing my signs unto you,

...فَمَنْ اتَّقَى وَأَصْلَحَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ (٣٥)

those who are righteous and mend (their lives), on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْهَا أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا

خَالِدُونَ (٣٦)

36. But those who reject our signs and treat them with arrogance, they are companions of the fire, to dwell therein (for ever).

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِآيَاتِهِ...

37. Who is more unjust than one who invents a lie against Allah or rejects his signs?

...أُولَئِكَ يَنَالُهُمْ نَصِيبُهُمْ مِّنَ الْكِتَابِ...

For such, their portion appointed must reach them from the Book (of decrees);

C1018. It must not be supposed that the rebels against Allah would at once be cut off in this life for their sins. They will get the portion allotted to them, including the good things of life and the chance of repentance and

reformation, during their probationary period on this earth.

During that period they will have a full run. After that period expires, they will be called to account. They will themselves see that the false things, in which they put their trust, were false, and they will confess their sin, but it will be too late.

...حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولُنَا يُبَيِّنُ لَهُمْ قَالُوا أَيُّنَا مَا كُنْتُمْ تُدْعُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ...

until, when Our messengers (of death) arrive and take their souls, they say:

"Where are the things that ye used to invoke besides Allah?"

...قَالُوا ضَلُّوا عَنَّا وَشَهِدُوا عَلَيَّ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا كَافِرِينَ (٣٧)

They will reply, "They have left us in the lurch,"

and they will bear witness against themselves, that they had rejected Allah.

قَالَ ادْخُلُوا فِي أُمَّةٍ قَدْ خَلَتْ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالإِنسِ فِي النَّارِ...

38. He will say: "Enter ye in the company of the peoples who passed away before you, men and Jinns, into the fire.

...كُلَّمَا دَخَلَتْ أُمَّةٌ لَعَنَتْ أُخْتَهَا...

Every time a new people enters, it curses its sister-people (that went before),

...حَتَّىٰ إِذَا ادَّارَكُوا فِيهَا جَمِيعًا قَالَتْ أُخْرَاهُمْ لِأُولَاهُمْ...

until they follow each other, all into the fire.

Saith the last about the first:

...رَبَّنَا هَؤُلَاءِ أَضَلُّونَا فَآتِهِمْ عَذَابًا ضِعْفًا مِّنَ النَّارِ...

"Our Lord! it is these that misled us: so give them a double penalty in the fire."

C1019. The earlier generations committed a double crime:

- their own sins,
- the bad example they set for those that followed.

We are responsible not only for our own misdeeds, but for those which our example and our teaching to our juniors may induce them to commit. But it does not lie in the mouth of the juniors to ask for a double punishment for seniors: the motive is not justice, but pure spite, which is itself a sin.

Further, the later generations have to answer for two things:

- their own sins, and
- their failure to learn from the past, from the experiences of those who preceded them. They should have an advantage in this respect, being "in the foremost files of Time," but they did not learn.

Thus there was nothing to choose between the earlier and later generations in the matter of guilt. But how few people understand this!

In 6:160, we were told that good was rewarded tenfold, but evil was punished according to its guilt, in perfect justice. This verse is in no way inconsistent with it. Two crimes must have a double penalty. (R).

...قَالَ لِكُلِّ لِيْضِعْفٌ وَلٰكِنْ لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ (۳۸)

He will say: "Doubled for all":
but this Ye do not understand.

وَقَالَتْ اُولٰٓءِهٖمْ لِاٰخِرٰٓهُمْ فَمَا كَانَ لَكُمْ عَلَيْنَا مِنْ فَضْلٍ...

39. Then the first will say to the last:

"See then! no advantage have ye over us;

...فَذُوْقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْسِبُوْنَ (۳۹)

so taste ye of the penalty for all that ye did!"

C1020. Wrong-doers have really no sense of honour towards each other. "Honour among thieves" is an exceptional, not an ordinary, experience.

In real life, guilt and crime are apt to indulge in mean spite and bitter recriminations against accomplices.

Section 5

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْهَا...

40. To those who reject Our signs and treat them with arrogance,

لَا نَفْتَحُ لَهُمْ أَبْوَابَ السَّمَاءِ وَلَا يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ حَتَّى يَلِجَ الْجَمَلُ فِي سَمِّ
الْخِيَاطِ...

no opening will there be of the gates of heaven nor will they enter the garden, until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle:

...وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُجْرِمِينَ (٤٠)

such is Our reward for those in sin.

لَهُمْ مِنْ جَهَنَّمَ مِهَادٌ وَمِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ غَوَاشٍ...

41. For them there is hell, as a couch (below) and folds and folds of covering above:

...وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ (٤١)

such is Our requital of those who do wrong.

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَا نُكَلِّفُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا...

42. But those who believe and work righteousness, no burden do We place on any soul, but that which it can bear,

...أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ (٤٢)

they will be companions of the garden, therein to dwell (for ever).

وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ غَلٍّ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ...

43. And We shall remove from their hearts any lurking sense of injury; beneath them will be rivers flowing;

C1021. A man who may have suffered or been disappointed may have a lurking sense of injury it the back of his mind, which may spoil his enjoyment on account of past memory intruding in the midst of felicity.

In such cases memory itself is pain. Even sorrow is intensified by memory: as Tennyson says,

"A sorrow's crown of sorrows is remembering happier things."

But that is in this our imperfect life. In the perfect felicity of the righteous, all such feelings will be blotted out. No "heartaches" then and no memories of them! The clouds of the past will have dissolved in glorious light, and no past happiness will be comparable with the perfect happiness which will have then been attained. Nor will any sense of envy or shortcoming be possible in that perfect bliss.

...وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ...

and they shall say:

"Praise be to Allah, Who hath guided us to this (felicity): never could we have found guidance, had it not been for the guidance of Allah:

...لَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلٌ رَبَّنَا بِالْحَقِّ...

indeed it was the truth that the Messengers of our Lord brought unto us."

...وَنُودُوا أَنْ تِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٤٣)

And they shall hear the cry:

"Behold! the garden before you! Ye have been made its inheritors, for your deeds (of righteousness)."

C1022. Jesus said: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth": Matt. 5:5.

Here we are told: blessed are the righteous, for they shall inherit the kingdom of heaven. The stress here is on actual practical deeds of righteousness: whether they find their rewards on earth or not is immaterial: their attention is directed to an infinitely greater reward, the kingdom of heaven.

In the Sermon on the Mount this is promised to the "poor in spirit": Matt. 5:3.

وَتَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ أَنْ قَدْ وَجَدْنَا مَا وَعَدَنَا رَبُّنَا
حَقًّا...

44. The companions of the garden will call out to the companions of the fire:

"We have indeed found the promises of our Lord to us true:

...فَهَلْ وَجَدْتُمْ مَا وَعَدَ رَبُّكُمْ حَقًّا...

have you also found your Lord's promises true?"

...قَالُوا نَعَمْ...

They shall say, "Yes;"

...فَأَدَّأَنَّ مُؤَدِّنٌ بَيْنَهُمْ ...

but a crier shall proclaim between them:

C1023. The Companions of the Fire can only answer a single word, "Yes," such is their state of misery. Even so, their voice is drowned in the voice of the Crier, who explains their state: they are in a state of curse, that is, deprivation of the grace and mercy of Allah. Such deprivation is the highest misery that souls can suffer.

... أَنْ لُعْنَةُ اللَّهِ عَلَى الظَّالِمِينَ (٤٤)

"The curse of Allah is on the wrongdoers;

الَّذِينَ يَصُدُّونَ عَنِ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَيَبْغُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَهُمْ بِالْآخِرَةِ

كَافِرُونَ (٤٥)

45. "Those who would hinder (men) from the path of Allah and would seek in it something crooked: they were those who Denied the Hereafter."

C1024. The unrighteous reflect their own crooked minds when the path of Allah is before them. Instead of going straight, they try to find something in it that suits their own crooked ideas. Frankly they have no faith in the final Goal, the Hereafter.

وَبَيْنَهُمَا حِجَابٌ...

46. Between them shall be a veil,

...وَعَلَى الْأَعْرَافِ رِجَالٌ يَعْرِفُونَ كُلًّا بِسِيمَاهُمْ...

and on the heights will be men who would know everyone by his marks:

C1025. This is a difficult passage, and Commentators have interpreted it in different ways. Three distinct schools of thought may be discerned in the interpretation.

1. One school thinks that the men on the Heights are angels, or such men of exalted spiritual dignity (e.g., the great prophets), as will be able to know the souls at sight as regards their real worth:

the Heights will be their exalted stations, from which they will welcome the righteous with a salutation of peace, even before the righteous have entered heaven; the salutation of peace being itself an assurance of salvation to those whom they salute.

2. Another school of thought thinks that the men on the Heights are such souls as are not decidedly on the side of merit or decidedly on the side of sin, but evenly balanced on a partition between heaven and hell.

Their case is yet to be decided, but their salutation to the righteous is a wistful salutation, because they hope for Allah's Mercy.

3. The third line of interpretation, with which I agree, is close to the first, with this exception, that the partition and the Heights are figurative. The higher souls will rejoice at the approaching salvation of the righteous.

...وَنَادَوْا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ...

they will call out to the companions of the garden, "Peace on you"

...لَمْ يَدْخُلُوهَا وَهُمْ يَطْمَعُونَ (٤٦)

they will not have entered, but they will have an assurance (thereof).

وَإِذَا صُرِفَتْ أَبْصَارُهُمْ تِلْقَاءَ أَصْحَابِ النَّارِ...

47. When their eyes shall be turned towards the companions of the fire,

C1026. Their eyes: according to interpretation 2 of the last note, "their" would refer to the people whose fate has not yet been decided, and the speech would be theirs;

according to interpretations 1 and 3 in that note, "their" would refer to the Companions of the Garden, who would realise the terrible nature of hell, and express their horror of it. I prefer the latter.

Then the mention of the "men on the Heights" and their speech in verse 48 comes in naturally as a different kind of speech from a different kind of men.

...قَالُوا رَبَّنَا لَا تَجْعَلْنَا مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ (٤٧)

they will say: "Our Lord! send us not to the company of the wrongdoers."

Section 6

وَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ الْأَعْرَافِ رَجَالًا يَعْرِفُونَهُمْ بِسِيمَاهُمْ...

48. The men on the heights will call to certain men whom they will know from their marks,

...قَالُوا مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْكُمْ جَمْعُكُمْ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ (٤٨)

saying: "Of what profit to you were you hoards and your arrogant ways?"

C1027. This speech is in three parts:

1. the last lines of this verse are addressed to the Companions of the Fire, reminding them (as a bench of judges might speak to a prisoner) of the futility of their wealth and riches and arrogance in their earthly life:
2. the second part, in the first half of verse 49, recalls to their minds how false was their contempt of the

good but lowly men who are now to be the inheritors of heaven: and

3. the latter part of verse 49, "enter ye the Garden" is addressed to the Blessed, to give them a welcome to their state of felicity.

أَهْوَاءَ الَّذِينَ أَقْسَمْتُمْ لَا يَنَالُهُمُ اللَّهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ...

49. "Behold! are these not the men whom you swore that Allah with His mercy would never bless?

...ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَا أَنْتُمْ تَحْزَنُونَ (٤٩)

Enter ye the garden:

no fear shall be on you, nor shall ye grieve."

وَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ أَنْ أَفِيضُوا عَلَيْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ أَوْ مِمَّا

رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ...

50. The companions of the fire will call to the companions of the garden;

"Pour down to us water or anything that Allah doth provide for your sustenance."

...قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ حَرَّمَهَا عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ (٥٠)

They will say:

"Both these things hath Allah forbidden to those who rejected Him.

C1028. The Companions of the Fire will thirst for water and not get it, and for sustenance which will not be theirs, while the Companions of the Garden will have the crystal waters of the springs and rivers and they will enjoy the bliss of Allah's Countenance, which will be their supreme nourishment and the fruit of their life of probation and seeking. These things will not be transferable.

Cf. also 37:41-47, 62-67. (R).

الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا دِينَهُمْ لَهْوًا وَلَعِبًا وَغَرَّتْهُمُ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا...

51. "Such as took their religion to be mere amusement and play, and were deceived by the life of the world."

...فَالْيَوْمَ نَنْسَاهُمْ كَمَا نَسُوا لِقَاءَ يَوْمِهِمْ هَذَا...

That day shall We forget them as they forgot the meeting of this day of theirs,

C1029. "Forgetfulness" may be involuntary, from a defect of memory, or figuratively, a deliberate turning away from, or ignoring of, something we do not want, as when we say in an argument, "you conveniently forget that so- and-so is so-and-so." Here the latter kind is meant.

If men deliberately ignored the Hereafter in spite of warnings, can they expect to be received by Allah, Whom they themselves rejected?

...وَمَا كَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يَجْحَدُونَ (٥١)

and as they were wont to reject Our signs.

وَلَقَدْ جِئْنَاهُمْ بِكِتَابٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ...

52. For We had certainly sent unto them a Book, based on knowledge, which We explained in detail,

...هُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ (٥٢)

a guide and a mercy to all who believe.

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا تَأْوِيلَهُ ...

53. Do they just wait for the final fulfillment of the event?

... يَوْمَ يَأْتِي تَأْوِيلَهُ ...

On the day the event is finally fulfilled,

C1030. If those without Faith want to wait and see what happens in the Hereafter, they will indeed learn the truth, but it will be too late for them to profit by it then. All the false ideals and false gods which they put their trust upon will leave them in the lurch.

If they thought that the goodness or greatness of others would help them, they will be undeceived on the day when their personal responsibility will be enforced. There will be no salvation except on their own record. How they will then wish that they had another chance! But their chance will be gone.

...يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ نَسُوهُ مِنْ قَبْلُ قَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِالْحَقِّ...

those who disregarded it before will say:

"The Messengers of our Lord did indeed bring true (tidings).

...فَهَلْ لَنَا مِنْ شُفَعَاءَ فَيَشْفَعُوا لَنَا أَوْ نُرَدُّ فَنَعْمَلْ غَيْرَ الَّذِي كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ...

Have we no intercessors now to intercede on our behalf?

Or could we be sent back? Then should we behave differently from our behavior in the past."

...قَدْ خَسِرُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ وَضَلَّ عَنْهُمْ مَا كَانُوا يَفْتَرُونَ (٥٣)

In fact they will have lost their souls, and the things they invented will leave them in the lurch.

Section 7

إِنَّ رَبَّكُمْ اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ...

54. Your Guardian-Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days,

C1031. A sublime verse, comparable to the Throne Verse [2:255](#).

The Creation in six Days is of course metaphorical. In [45:14](#), "the Days of Allah" refer not so much to time as to the growth in us of a spiritual sense, a sense of sin and a sense of Allah's Mercy.

In [22:47](#), we are told that a Day in the sight of Allah is like a thousand years of our reckoning, and in [70:4](#), the comparison is with 50,000 of our years.

In the history of our material earth, we may reckon six great epochs of evolution.

The significance of the figure **six** will be discussed in connection with 41:9:12, where the ,matter is referred to in more detail.

... ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ...

and is firmly established on the throne (of authority):

C1032. Here, we are told of the creation of the heavens and the earth in six days. But lest we should be obsessed with the Jewish idea that Allah rested on the seventh day, we are told that the Creation was but a prelude to Allah's work: for His authority is exercised constantly by the laws which He establishes and enforces in all parts of His Creation.

The beautiful imagery of night and day seeking out each other in rapid succession is still further enforced in the Arabic by the double accusative of the verb *yugshi*, showing the mutual interactions of the day and the night, each covering the other in turn. The heavenly bodies show an order which is evidence of His constant care and government.

Not only that, but it is only He Who creates, maintains, and governs, and no one else. (R).

... يُعْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ يَطْلُبُهُ حَثِيثًا ...

He draweth the night as a veil O'er the day, each seeking the other in rapid succession:

... وَالشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ وَالنُّجُومَ مُسَخَّرَاتٍ بِأَمْرِهِ ...

He created the sun, the moon, and the stars, (all) governed by laws under His command.

... أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٥٤)

Is it not His to create and to govern?

Blessed be Allah, the cherisher and sustainer of the worlds!

ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ تَضَرُّعًا وَخُفْيَةً ...

55. Call on your Lord with humility and in private:

C1033. In prayer, we must avoid any arrogance or show or loudness, or vanity of requests or words.

If excess is condemned in all things, it is specially worthy of condemnation when we go humbly before our Lord,- we poor creatures before the Omnipotent Who knoweth all.

...إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ (٥٥)

for Allah loveth not those who trespass beyond bounds.

وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا ...

56. Do no mischief on the earth, after it hath been set in order,

C1034. The man who prays with humility and earnestness finds the ground prepared by Allah for his spiritual advancement. It is all set in order, and cleared of weeds. He does not, like the wicked, upset that order, to introduce evil or mischief into it.

... وَأَدْعُوهُ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا ...

but call on Him with fear and longing (in your hearts):

C1035. Fear and longing: the fear of Allah is really a fear lest we should diverge from His Will, or do anything which would not be pleasing to Him:

unlike ordinary fear, it therefore brings us nearer to Allah, and in fact nourishes our longing and desire for Him.

...إِنَّ رَحْمَتَ اللَّهِ قَرِيبٌ مِّنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٥٦)

for the mercy of Allah is (always) near to those who do good.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيَّاحَ بُشْرًا بَيْنَ يَدَيْ رَحْمَتِهِ...

57. It is He who sendeth the winds like heralds of glad tidings, going before His mercy:

C1036. The Parable is complete in its triple significance.

1. In the physical world the winds go like heralds of glad tidings; they are the advance guard, behind

which is coming the great army of winds driving heavily laden clouds before it; the wise Providence of Allah is their General, who directs them towards a parched land, on which the clouds deliver their gladdening showers of mercy, which convert the dead land into a living, fertile, and beautiful land bearing a rich harvest.

2. In the spiritual world, the winds are the great motive forces in the mind of man, or in the world around him, that bring the clouds or instruments of Allah's Mercy, which descend and fertilize souls hitherto spiritually dead.
3. If we can see or experience such things in our life here below, can we doubt the resurrection?

...حَتَّىٰ إِذَا أَفْلَحْتَ سَحَابًا ثِقَالًا سُفِنَاهُ لِبَلَدٍ مَّيِّتٍ...

when they have carried the heavy-laden clouds, We drive them to a land that is dead,

...فَأَنْزَلْنَا بِهِ الْمَاءَ فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ...

make rain to descend thereon, and produce every kind of harvest therewith:

...كَذَٰلِكَ نُخْرِجُ الْمَوْتَىٰ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ (٥٧)

thus shall We raise up the dead:

perchance ye may remember.

وَالْبَلَدُ الطَّيِّبُ يَخْرُجُ نَبَاتُهُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ...

58. From the land that is clean and good, by the will of its Cherisher, springs up produce, (rich) after its kind:

C1037. The triple parable explained in the last note is here continued.

1. In the physical world, the fertilising showers of rain yield a rich harvest on good soil, but bad soil yields little or nothing.
2. In the spiritual world, also, Allah's Mercies evoke no response in some souls which have chosen evil.

3. In the final reckoning, though all will be raised, not all will achieve the fulfilment of their lives.

...وَالَّذِي خَبْتُ لَا يُخْرَجُ إِلَّا نَكِدًا...

but from the land that is bad, spring up nothing but that which is niggardly:

...كَذَلِكَ نُصَرِّفُ الْآيَاتِ لِقَوْمٍ يَشْكُرُونَ (٥٨)

thus do We explain the signs by various (symbols) to those who are grateful.

C1038. Those who are grateful are those who joyfully receive Allah's Message, and respond to it by deeds of righteousness.

C.85 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(7:59-99)

*Noah's warning was rejected by his
Generation, and they were destroyed
In the Flood. Hud was defied
By his own people 'Ad, but they were
Swept away by a terrible blast.
Their successors, the Thamud, were puffed up
With pride and injustice, but behold!
An earthquake buried them for their sins
After Salih had warned them from Allah.
With a rain of brimstone and fire
Were overwhelmed the Cities of the Plain
For their unexampled lusts, against which
Lut did warn them. The people of Midian
Were given to mischief and fraud; Shu'ayb
Did warn them, but they heeded not,
And perished in an earthquake.
Allah's punishment is sure for wickedness and sin.*

Section 8

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ ...

59. We sent Noah to his people.

C1039. The story of Noah in greater detail will be found in 11:25-48.

Here the scheme is to tell briefly the stories of some of the Prophets between Noah and Moses, and lead up thus to a lesson for the contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad himself.

When Noah attacked the wickedness of his generation, he was laughed at for a madman, for he mentioned the Great Day to come in the Hereafter. Allah's retribution came soon afterwards—the great Flood, in which his unbelieving people were drowned, but he and those who believed in him and came, into the Ark were saved.

... فَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ ...

He said: "O my people!

...اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ...

worship Allah! Ye have no other god but Him.

...إِنِّي أَخَافُ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابَ يَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ (٥٩)

I fear for you the punishment of a dreadful day!"

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِهِ إِنَّا لَنَرَاكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٦٠)

60. The leaders of his people said: "Ah! we see thee evidently wandering (in mind)."

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَيْسَ بِي ضَلَالَةٌ وَلَكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٦١)

61. He said:

"O my people! no wandering is there in my (mind):

on the contrary I am a Messenger from the Lord and Cherisher of the worlds!

أَبْلَعُكُمْ رَسُولَاتِ رَبِّي وَأَنْصَحُ لَكُمْ وَأَعْلَمُ مِنَ اللَّهِ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ (٦٢)

62. "I but fulfil towards you the duties of my Lord's mission:
sincere is my advice to you,
and I know from Allah something that ye know not.

أَوْعَجِبْتُمْ أَنْ جَاءَكُمْ ذِكْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ مِّنكُمْ ...

63. "Do ye wonder that there hath come to you a message from your Lord, through a man of your own people,

...لِيُنذِرَكُمْ وَلِتَتَّقُوا وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (٦٣)

to warn you, so that ye may fear Allah and haply receive his mercy?"

فَكَذَّبُوهُ ...

64. But they rejected him

...فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ فِي الْفُلِ...

and We delivered him, and those with him, in the ark:

...وَأَغْرَقْنَا الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا...

But We overwhelmed in the flood those who rejected our signs.

...إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَوْمًا عَمِينَ (٦٤)

They were indeed a blind people!

Section 9

وَالِى عَادٍ أَخَاهُمْ هُودًا ...

65. To the Ad people, (We sent) Hud, one of their (own) brethren:

C1040. The 'Ad people, with their prophet Hud, are mentioned in many places. See especially 26:123-140, and 46:21-26.

Their story belongs to Arabian tradition. Their eponymous ancestor 'Ad was fourth in generation from Noah, having been a son of 'Aus, the son of Aram, the son of Sam, the son of Noah.

They occupied a large tract of country in Southern Arabia, extending from Umman at the mouth of the Arabian Gulf to Hadhramaut and Yemen at the southern end of the Red Sea. The people were tall in stature and were great builders. Probably the long, winding tracts of sands (ahqaf) in their dominions (46:21) were irrigated with canals.

They forsook the true God, and oppressed their people. A three years famine visited them, but yet they took no warning. At length a terrible blast of wind destroyed them and their land, but a remnant, known as the second 'Ad or the Thamud (see below) were saved, and afterwards suffered a similar fate for their sins.

The tomb of the Prophet Hud (qabr Nabi Hud) is still traditionally shown in Hadhramaut, latitude 16 N, and longitude 49 1/2 E', about 90 miles north of Mukalla. There are ruins and inscriptions in the neighbourhood.

See "Hadhramaut, Some of its Mysteries Unveiled," by D. van der Meulen and H. von Wissmann, Leyden, 1932. (R).

... قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ ...

He said:

"O my people!

...اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ أَفَلَا تَتَّقُونَ (٦٥)

worship Allah! ye have no other god but Him.

Will ye not fear (Allah)?"

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ ...

66. The leaders of the unbelievers among his people said:

...إِنَّا لَنَرَاكَ فِي سَفَاهَةٍ وَإِنَّا لَنَظُنُّكَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ (٦٦)

"Ah! we see thou art an imbecile!" and

"We think thou art a liar!"

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَيْسَ بِي سَفَاهَةٌ وَلَكِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٦٧)

67. He said:

"O my people! I am not imbecile, but (I am) a Messenger from the Lord and Cherisher of the worlds!

أُبَلِّغُكُمْ رِسَالَاتِ رَبِّي وَأَنَا لَكُمْ نَاصِحٌ أَمِينٌ (٦٨)

68. "I but fulfil towards you the duties of my Lord's mission:
I am to you a sincere and trustworthy adviser.

أَوْعَيْبُهُمْ أَن جَاءَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَلَى رَجُلٍ مِّنكُمْ لِيُنذِرَكُمْ ...

69. "Do ye wonder that there hath come to you a message from your Lord through a man of your own people, to warn you?

...وَأَنْذِرُوا إِذْ جَعَلَكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِن بَعْدِ قَوْمِ نُوحٍ وَزَادَكُمْ فِي الْخَلْقِ
بَسْطَةً...

Call in remembrance that he made you inheritors after the people of Noah, and gave you a stature tall among the nations.

...فَاذْكُرُوا آلَاءَ اللَّهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ (٦٩)

Call in remembrance the benefits (ye have received) from Allah:
that so Ye may prosper."

قَالُوا أَجِئْنَا لِنُعْبُدَ اللَّهَ وَحْدَهُ وَنَذَرَ مَا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُنَا...

70. They said:

"Comest thou to us, that we may worship Allah alone, and give up the cult of our fathers?

...فَأْتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ (٧٠)

Bring us what thou threatenest us with, if so be that thou tellest the truth!"

قَالَ قَدْ وَقَعَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ رِجْسٌ وَغَضَبٌ...

71. He said:

"Punishment and wrath have already come upon you from your Lord:

C1041. The past tense may be understood in three ways.

1. A terrible famine had already afflicted the 'Ad as a warning before they were overwhelmed in the final blast of hot wind (see the last note).
2. The terrible insolence and sin into which they had fallen was itself a punishment.
3. The prophetic past is used, as much as to say: "Behold! I see a dreadful calamity: it is already on you!"

...أَتَجَادِلُونَنِي فِي أَسْمَاءَ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَأَبَاؤُكُمْ مَا نَزَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا

مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ...

dispute ye with me over names which ye have devised, ye and your fathers, without authority from Allah?

C1042. Why dispute over names and imaginary gods, the inventions of your minds? Come to realities. If you ask for the punishment and are waiting in insolent defiance, what can I do but also wait? -in fear and trembling for you, for I know that Allah's punishment is sure!

...فَانْتَظِرُوا إِنِّي مَعَكُمْ مِنَ الْمُنْتَظِرِينَ (٧١)

Then wait: I am amongst you, also waiting."

فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ بِرَحْمَةٍ مِنَّا...

72. We saved him and those who adhered to him, by our mercy,

...وَقَطَعْنَا دَابِرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَمَا كَانُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ (٧٢)

and We cut off the roots of those who rejected our signs and did not believe.

Section 10

وَأِلَى تَمُودَ أَخَاهُمْ صَالِحًا ...

73. To the Thamud people (We sent) Salih, one of their own brethren:

C1043. The Thamud people were the successors to the culture and civilization of the 'Ad people, for whom see [n. 1040](#) and [7:65](#) above.

They were cousins to the 'Ad, apparently a younger branch of the same race.

Their story also belongs to Arabian tradition, according to which their eponymous ancestor Thamud was a son of 'Abir (a brother of Aram), the son of Sam, the son of Noah.

Their scat was in the north-west corner of Arabia (Arabia Petraea), between Madinah and Syria. It included both rocky country (hijr, 15:80), and the spacious fertile valley (Wadi) and plains country of Qura, which begins just north of the City of Madinah and is traversed by the Hijaz Railway.

When the holy Prophet in the 9th year of the Hijrah led his expedition to Tabuk (about 400 miles north of Madinah) against the Roman forces, on a reported Roman invasion from Syria, he and his men came across the archaeological remains of the Thamud. The recently excavated rock city of Petra, near Maan, may go back to the Thamud, though its architecture has many features connecting it with Egyptian and Graeco-Roman culture overlaying what is called by European writers Nabataean Culture.

Who were the Nabataeans?

They were an old Arab tribe which played a considerable part in history after they came into conflict with Antigonus I in 312 B.C. Their capital was Petra, but they extended their territory right up to the Euphrates. In 85 B.C. they were lords of Damascus under their king Haritha (Aretas of Roman history). For some time they were allies of the Roman Empire and held the Red Sea

littoral. The Emperor Trajan reduced them and annexed their territory in A.D. 105.

The Nabataeans succeeded the Thamud of Arabian tradition. The Ibamiyd are mentioned by name in an inscription of the Assyrian King Sargon, dated 715 B.C., as a people of Eastern and Central Arabia (Encyclopedia of Islam). See also Appendix VII to Surah 26.

With the advance of material civilisation, the Thamud people became godless and arrogant, and were destroyed by an earthquake. Their prophet and warner was Salih, and the crisis in their history is connected with the story of a wonderful she-camel:'

see [next note](#).

... قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ ...

he said: "O my people!

... اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ...

worship Allah; ye have no other god but Him.

... قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ...

Now hath come unto you a clear (sign) from your Lord!

... هَذِهِ نَاقَةُ اللَّهِ لَكُمْ آيَةٌ فَذَرُوهَا تَأْكُلْ فِي أَرْضِ اللَّهِ...

This she-camel of Allah is a sign unto you: so leave her to graze in Allah's earth,

... وَلَا تَمَسُّوهَا بِسُوءٍ فَيَأْخُذَكُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (٧٣)

and let her come to no harm, or ye shall be seized with a grievous punishment.

C1044. The story of this wonderful she-camel, that was a sign to the Thamud, is variously told in tradition. We need not follow the various versions in the traditional story. What we are told in the Quran is: that

- she was a Sign or Symbol, which the prophet Salih, used for a warning to the haughty oppressors of the poor:

- there was scarcity of water, and the arrogant or privileged classes tried to prevent the access of the poor or their cattle to the springs, while Salih intervened on their behalf (26:155, 44:28);
- like water, pasture was considered a free gift of nature, in this spacious earth of Allah (7:73), but the arrogant ones tried to monopolise the pasture also;
- this particular she-camel was made a test case (54:27) to see if the arrogant ones would come to reason;
- the arrogant ones, instead of yielding to the reasonable rights of the people, ham-strung the poor she-camel and slew her, probably secretly (91:14, 54:29):

the cup of their iniquities was full, and the Thamud people were destroyed by a dreadful earthquake, which threw them prone on the ground and buried them with their houses and their fine buildings.

وَأَذْكُرُوا إِذْ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ خُلَفَاءَ مِنْ بَعْدِ عَادٍ وَبَوَّأْنَاكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ...

74. "And remember how He made you inheritors after the ad people and gave you habitations in the land:

... تَتَّخِذُونَ مِنْ سُهُولِهَا قُصُورًا وَتَنْحِتُونَ الْجِبَالَ بُيُوتًا...

ye build for yourselves palaces and castles in (open) plains, and carve out homes in the mountains;

...فَادْكُرُوا آيَاءَ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَعْتُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ (٧٤)

so bring to remembrance the benefits (ye have received) from Allah, and refrain from evil and mischief on the earth."

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لِلَّذِينَ اسْتُضِعُوا لِمَنْ أَمَنَ مِنْهُمْ...

75. The leaders of the arrogant party among his people said to those who were reckoned powerless -- those among them who believe:

C1045. As usually happens in such cases, the Believers were the lowly and the humble, and the oppressors were the arrogant, who in selfishly keeping back nature's gifts

(which are Allah's gifts) from the people, were deaf to the dictates of justice and kindness.

Salih took the side of the unprivileged, and was therefore himself attacked.

...أَتَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّ صَالِحًا مُّرْسَلٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِ...

"Know ye indeed that Salih is a messenger from his Lord?"

...قَالُوا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلَ بِهِ مُؤْمِنُونَ (٧٥)

They said: "We do indeed believe in the revelation which hath been sent through him."

C1046. Notice the relation between the question and the answer.

The godless chiefs wanted to discredit Salih, and put a personal question, as much as to say, "Is he not a liar?"

The Believers took back the issue to the higher plane, as much as to say. "We know he is a man of Allah, but look at the justice for which he is making a stand: to resist it is to resist Allah".

The answer of the godless was to reject Allah in words, and in action to commit a further act of cruelty and injustice in ham-stringing and killing the she-camel, at the same time hurling defiance at Salih and his God.

قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا إِنَّا بِالَّذِي آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ (٧٦)

76. The arrogant party said: "For our part, we reject what ye believe in."

فَعَقَرُوا النَّاقَةَ وَعَتَوْا عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِمْ وَقَالُوا يَا صَالِحُ...

77. Then they ham-strung the she-camel, and insolently defied the order of their Lord, saying: "O Salih!

...إِنِّيَأَ بِمَا تَعِدُّنَا إِن كُنْتَ مِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٧٧)

bring about thy threats, if thou art a messenger (of Allah)!"

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ (٧٨)

78. So the earthquake took them unawares, and they lay prostrate in their homes in the morning!

C1047. The retribution was not long delayed. A terrible earthquake came and buried the people and destroyed their boasted civilisation.

The calamity must have been fairly extensive in area and intense in the terror it inspired, for it is described (54:31) as a "single mighty blast" (saihatan wahidatan), the sort of terror-inspiring noise which accompanies all big earthquakes.

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ ...

79. So Salih left them, saying:

C1048. Salih was saved by Allah's mercy as a just and righteous man.

His speech here may be either a parting warning, or it may be a soliloquy lamenting the destruction of his people for their sin and folly.

... يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رَسُولًا مِنْ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ ...

"O my people! I did indeed convey to you the message for which I was sent by my Lord: I gave you good counsel,

...وَلَكِنْ لَا تُحِبُّونَ النَّاصِحِينَ (٧٩)

but ye love not good counsellors!"

وَلُوطًا ...

80. We also (sent) Lut:

C1049. Lut is the Lot of the English Bible. His story is biblical, but freed from some shameful features which are a blot on the biblical narrative, (e.g., see Gen. 19:30-36).

He was a nephew of Abraham, and was sent as a Prophet and warner to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, cities utterly destroyed for their unspeakable sins. They cannot be exactly located, but it may be supposed that they were somewhere in the plain east of the Dead Sea.

The story of their destruction is told in the 19th chapter of Genesis. Two angels in the shape of handsome young men came to Lot in the evening and became his guests by night. The inhabitants of Sodom in their lust for unnatural crime invaded Lut's house but were repulsed. In the morning, the angels warned Lut to escape with his family. "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; and He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt." (Gen. 19:24-26).

Note that Lut's people are the people to whom he is sent on a mission. He was not one of their own brethren, as was Salih or Shu'aib. But he looked upon his people as his brethren (50:13), as a man of God always does.

... إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَتَأْتُونَ الْفَاحِشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ مِّنْ

الْعَالَمِينَ (٨٠)

he said to his people:

"Do ye commit lewdness such as no people in creation (ever) committed before you?

إِنَّكُمْ لَتَأْتُونَ الرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِّنْ دُونِ النِّسَاءِ...

81. "For ye practice your lusts on men in preference to women:

...بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ (٨١)

ye are indeed a people transgressing beyond bounds."

وَمَا كَانَ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَخْرِجُوهُمْ مِّنْ قَرْيَتِكُمْ...

82. And his people gave no answer but this: they said,

"Drive them out of your city:

...إِنَّهُمْ أَنَاسٌ يَّتَطَهَّرُونَ (٨٢)

these are indeed men who want to be clean and pure!"

C1050. An instance of the withering sarcasm that hardened sinners use against the righteous. They wound with words, and follow up the insult with deeds of injustice, thinking that they would bring the righteous into disgrace. But Allah looks after His own, and in the end, the wicked themselves are overthrown when the cup of their iniquity is full.

فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ (٨٣)

83. But We saved him and his family, except his wife:
she was of those who lagged behind.

C1051. In the biblical narrative she looks back, a physical act (see n. 1049): here she is a type of those who lag behind, i.e., whose mental and moral attitude, in spite of their association with the righteous, is to hark back to the glitter of wickedness and sin.

The righteous should have one sole objective, the Way of Allah. they should not look behind, nor yet to the right or the left.

وَأَمْطَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مَطَرًا...

84. And We rained down on them a shower (of brimstone):

C1052. The shower is expressly stated in 11:82 to have been of stones.

In 15:73-74, we are told that there was a terrible blast or noise (saihat) in addition to the shower of stones,

Taking these passages into consideration along with Gen. 19:24. (see n. 1049 above), I think it is legitimate to translate: "a shower of brimstone."

...فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ (٨٤)

then see what was the end of those who indulged in sin and crime!

Section 11

وَأِلَى مَدْيَنَ ...

85. To the Madyan people

C1053. "Madyan" may be identified with "Midian".

Midian and the Midianites are frequently mentioned in the Old Testament, though the particular incident here mentioned belongs to Arab rather than to Jewish tradition.

The Midianites were of Arab race, though, as neighbors of the Canaanites, they probably intermixed with them. They were a wandering tribe: it was Midianite merchants to whom Joseph was sold into slavery, and who took him to Egypt.

Their principal territory in the time of Moses was in the northeast of the Sinai Peninsula, and east of the Amalekites. Under Moses the Israelites waged a war of extermination against them: they slew the kings of Midian, slaughtered all the males, burnt their cities and castles, and captured their cattle (Num. 31:7-11).

This sounds like total extermination. Yet a few generations afterwards, they were so powerful that the Israelites for their sins were delivered into the captivity of the Midianites for seven years: both the Midianites and their camels were without number: and the Israelites hid from them in "dens..... caves, and strongholds" (Judges 7:1-6).

Gideon destroyed them again, (Judges 7:1-25), say about two centuries after Moses. As the decisive battle was near the hill of Moreh, not far south of Mount Tabor, we may localize the Midianites on this occasion in the northern parts of the Jordan valley, at least 200 miles north of the Sinai Peninsula.

This and the previous destruction under Moses were local, and mention no town of Midian. In later times there was a town of Madyan on the east side of the Gulf of 'Aqabah. It is mentioned in Josephus, Eusebius, and

Ptolemy: (Encyclopedia of Islam). Then it disappears from geography.

In Muslim times it was a revived town with quite a different kind of population, but it never flourished. The Midianites disappeared from history.

... أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا ...

We sent Shu'aib, one of their own brethren:

C1054. Shu'ayb belongs to Arab rather than to Jewish tradition, to which he is unknown.

His identification with Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, has no warrant, and I reject it. There is no similarity either in names or incidents, and there are chronological difficulties ([see n. 1064 below](#)).

If, as the Commentators tell us, Shu'ayb was in the fourth generation from Abraham, being a great-grandson of Madyan (a son of Abraham), he would be only about a century from the time of Abraham, whereas the Hebrew Bible would give us a period of four to six centuries between Abraham and Moses. The mere fact that Jathro was a Midianite and that another name, Hobab, is mentioned for a father-in-law of Moses in Num 10:29, is slender ground for identification.

As the Midianites were mainly a nomad tribe, we need not be surprised that their destruction in one or two settlements did not affect their life in wandering sections of the tribe in other geographical regions. Shu'ayb's mission was apparently in one of the settled towns of the Midianites, which was completely destroyed by an earthquake ([7:91](#)).

If this happened in the century after Abraham, there is no difficulty in supposing that they were again a numerous tribe, three or five centuries later, in the time of Moses ([see last note](#)). As they were a mixed wandering tribe, both their resilience and their eventual absorption can be easily understood. But the destruction of the settlement or settlements (if the Wood or Aykah was a separate settlement, see n. 2000 to 15:78) to

which Shu'ayb was sent to preach was complete, and no traces of it now remain.

The name of the highest mountain of Yemen, Nabi Shu'ayb (11,000 ft.) has probably no connection with the geographical territory of the nomad Midianites, unless we suppose that their wanderings extended so far south from the territories mentioned in the last note.

...قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مَا لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرُهُ ...

he said:

"O my people! worship Allah; Ye have no other god but Him.

فَدَجَاءَتْكُمْ بَيِّنَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ...

Now hath come unto you a clear (sign) from your Lord!

...قَاوُفُوا الْكَيْلَ وَالْمِيزَانَ وَلَا تَبْخَسُوا النَّاسَ أَشْيَاءَهُمْ...

Give just measure and weight,

nor withhold from the people the things that are their due;

...وَلَا تُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ بَعْدَ إِصْلَاحِهَا...

and do no mischief on the earth after it has been set in order:

...ذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ (٨٥)

that will be best for you, if ye have faith.

وَلَا تَفْعُدُوا بِكُلِّ صِرَاطٍ تُوعِدُونَ وَتَصُدُّونَ عَنْ سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ...

86. "And squat not on every road, breathing threats, hindering from the path of Allah those who believe in Him,

مَنْ أَمَّنَ بِهِ وَتَبِعُوْنَهَا عَوْجًا...

and seeking in it something crooked;

...وَاذْكُرُوا إِذْ كُنْتُمْ قَلِيلًا فَكَثَّرَكُمْ...

but remember how ye were little, and He gave you increase.

...وَأَنْظُرُوا كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (٨٦)

And hold in your mind's eye what was the end of those who did mischief.

C1055. The Midianites were in the path of a commercial highway of Asia, viz., that between two such opulent and highly organized nations as Egypt and the Mesopotamian group comprising Assyria and Babylonia. Their besetting sins are thus characterized here:

- giving short measure or weight, whereas the strictest commercial probity is necessary for success,
- a more general form of such fraud, depriving people of rightful dues,
- producing mischief and disorder, whereas peace and order had been established (again in a literal as well as a metaphorical sense);
- not content with upsetting settled life, taking to highway robbery, literally as well as
- metaphorically, in two ways, viz., cutting off people from access to the worship of Allah, and abusing religion and piety for crooked purposes, i.e., exploiting religion itself for their crooked ends, as when a man builds houses of prayer out of unlawful gains or ostentatiously gives charity out of money which he has obtained by force or fraud, etc.

After setting out this catalogue of besetting sins Shu'ayb makes two appeals to the past:

- You began as an insignificant tribe, and by Allah's favour you increased and multiplied in numbers and resources: do you not then owe a duty to Allah to fulfil His Law?
- What was the result in the case of those who fell into sin?

Will you not take warning by their example?

So Shu'ayb began his argument with faith in Allah as the source of all virtue, and ended it with destruction as the result of all sin.

In the next verse he pleads with them to end their controversies and come to Allah.

وَأِنْ كَانَ طَائِفَةٌ مِّنْكُمْ آمَنُوا بِالَّذِي أُرْسِلْتُ بِهِ...

87. "And if there is a party among you who believes in the message with which I have been sent,

...وَأَطَائِفَةٌ لَّمْ يُؤْمِنُوا ...

and a party which does not believe,

C1056. Madyan is torn by internal conflict. Shu'ayb comes as a peace-maker, not in virtue of his own wisdom, but by appeal to the truth, righteousness and justice of God.

As we see later, the real motives of his opponents were selfishness, arrogance, violence, lawlessness, and injustice. But he appeals to their better nature, and is prepared to argue on the basis that the party which wants to suppress those who believe in God's Message and in righteousness, has some sincere mental difficulty in accepting Shu'ayb's mission.

"If," he says to them, "that is the case, do you think it justifies your intolerance, your violence, or your persecution? On the contrary, events will prove by themselves who is right and who is wrong."

To the small band who believe in his mission and follow his teaching, he would preach patience and perseverance. His argument to them would be:

"You have faith; surely your faith is strong enough to sustain you in the hope that Allah's truth will triumph in the end; there is no cause for despair or dejection."

How exactly these past experiences fit the times of our holy guide Muhammad! And it is for that analogy and that lesson that the stories of Noah, Hud, Salih, Lut, and Shu'ayb are related to us, all different, and yet all pointing to the great lessons in Muhammad's life.

... فَاصْبِرُوا حَتَّىٰ يَحْكُمَ اللَّهُ بَيْنَنَا ...

hold yourselves in patience until Allah doth decide between us:

... وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْحَاكِمِينَ (٨٧)

for He is the best to decide."

C1057. See the argument in the [last note](#).

Allah's decision may come partly in this very life, either for the same generation or for succeeding generations, by the logic of external events. But in any case it is bound to come spiritually on a higher plane eventually, when the righteous will be comforted and the sinners will be convinced of sin from their own inner conviction.

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ...

88. The leaders, the arrogant party among his people, said:

C1058. The gentle, all-persuasive arguments of Shu'ayb fell on hard hearts. Their only reply was: "Turn him out! him and his people."

When courtesy and a plea for toleration are pitted against bigotry, what room is there for logic? But bigotry and unrighteousness have their own crooked ways of pretending to be tolerant. "O yes!" they said, "we are very tolerant and long-suffering! But we are for our country and religion. Come back to the ways of our fathers, and we shall graciously forgive you!"

"Ways of their fathers!" - they meant injustice and oppression, high-handedness to the poor and the weak, fraud under cover of religion, and so on! Perhaps the righteous were the poor and the weak.

Were they likely to love such ways?

Perhaps there was implied a bribe as well as a threat. "If you come back and wink at our iniquities, you shall have scraps of prosperity thrown at you. If not, out you go in disgrace!"

لَنُخْرِجَنَّكَ يَا شُعَيْبُ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَكَ مِنْ قَرْيَتِنَا أَوْ لَتَعُوذُنَّ فِي مَلِئَتِنَا...

"O Shu'aib! we shall certainly drive thee out of our city, (thee) and those who believe with thee:

or else ye (thou and they) shall have to return to our ways and religion."

...قَالَ أَوْلَوْ كُنَّا كَارِهِينَ (٨٨)

He said: "What! even though we do detest (them)?"

قَدْ افْتَرَيْنَا عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا إِنْ عُدْنَا فِي مِلَّتِكُمْ بَعْدَ إِذْ نَجَّانَا اللَّهُ مِنْهَا...

89. "We should indeed invent a lie against Allah, if we returned to your ways after Allah hath rescued us therefrom:

C1059. The answer of the righteous is threefold.

1. "Coming back is all very well. But do you mean that we should practice the vices we detest?"
2. "You want us to lie against our conscience and our Lord, after we have seen the evil of your ways."
3. "Neither bribes nor threats, nor spacious appeals to patriotism or ancestral religion can move us: the matter rests with Allah, Whose will and pleasure we obey, and on Whom alone we rely. His knowledge will search out all your specious pretences."

...وَمَا يَكُونُ لَنَا أَنْ نَعُودَ فِيهَا إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّنَا...

nor could we by any manner of means return thereto unless it be as in the Will and plan of Allah, our Lord.

C1060. This, of course, does not mean that any one can ever return to evil ways with Allah's consent. Shu'ayb has already emphatically repudiated the idea of returning "to your ways after Allah hath rescued us therefrom."

But even if their ways had been good, the human will, he goes on to say, has no data to rely upon, and he and his followers would only be guided by Allah's Will and Plan.

وَسِعَ رَبُّنَا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا...

Our Lord can reach out to the utmost recesses of things by His knowledge.

...عَلَى اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْنَا...

In Allah is our trust.

...رَبَّنَا افْتَحْ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَ قَوْمِنَا بِالْحَقِّ...

Our Lord! decide thou between us and our people in truth,

C1061. Having answered the insincere quibblers among the godless, the righteous turn to Allah in earnest prayer.

The endless controversies in this world about abstract or speculative things never end even where both sides are sincere in their beliefs. The decision must be taken to Allah, Who sits on the throne of Truth, and Whose decisions will, therefore, be free from the errors and imperfections of all human judgment. The sincere have nothing to fear in the appeal to Him, as their motives are pure.

... وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْفَاتِحِينَ (٨٩)

for thou art the best to decide."

وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ لَنِ اتَّبَعْتُمْ شُعَيْبًا إِنَّكُمْ إِذَا

لَخَاسِرُونَ (٩٠)

90. The leaders, the unbelievers among his people, said,
"If ye follow Shu'ayb, be sure then ye are ruined!"

C1062. The answer of the Unbelievers is characteristic. As all their bribes and subtleties have failed, they resort to threats, which are worse than the argument of the stick. "All right," they say, "there is nothing but ruin before you!"

That means that the Believers will be persecuted, held up to obloquy, ostracized, and prevented from access to all means of honourable livelihood; their families and dependants will be insulted, reviled, and tortured, if they could but be got into the enemy's power: their homes destroyed, and their names held up to ridicule and contempt even when they are gone.

But, as [verse 92](#) says, their wicked designs recoiled on themselves; it was the wicked who were ruined and blotted out.

فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ فَأَصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَاثِمِينَ (٩١)

91. But the earthquake took them unawares, and they lay prostrate in their homes before the morning!

C1063. The fate of the Madyan people is described in the same terms as that of the Thamud in [verse 78](#)

above. An earthquake seized them by night, and they were buried in their own homes, no longer to vex Allah's earth.

But a supplementary detail is mentioned in 26:189, "the punishment of a day of overshadowing gloom," which may be understood to mean a shower of ashes and cinders accompanying a volcanic eruption. Thus a day of terror drove them into their homes, and the earthquake finished them.

The lament of Shu'ayb in verse 93 is almost the same as that of Salih in verse 79, with two differences:

- Shu'ayb's messages attacked the many sins of his people (see n. 1055) and are, therefore, expressed in the plural, while Salih's fight was chiefly against selfish arrogance, and his message is expressed in the singular;

- the Thamud were the more cultured people of the two, and perished in their own pride; as Salih said, "ye love not good counselors";

the Midianites were a rougher people, and their minds were less receptive of argument or faith; as Shu'ayb said, they were a people who "refused to believe."

الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْبًا كَأَن لَّمْ يَخُنُوا فِيهَا ...

92. The men who rejected Shu'aib became as if they had never been in the homes where they had flourished:

...الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا شُعَيْبًا كَأَن لَّمْ يَخَسِرِينَ (٩٢)

the men who rejected Shu'aib -- it was they who were ruined!

فَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا قَوْمِ لَقَدْ أَبْلَغْتُكُمْ رَسُولَاتِ رَبِّي وَنَصَحْتُ لَكُمْ ...

93. So Shu'aib left them, saying:

"O my people! I did indeed convey to you the messages for which I was sent by my Lord:

I gave you good counsel,

...فَكَيْفَ آسَى عَلَى قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ (٩٣)

but how shall I lament over a people who refuse to believe!

C1064. Can we get any idea of the chronological place of the destruction of the Midianites?

In [n. 1053](#) we have discussed the geographical aspects. The following considerations will help us in getting some idea of their period.

1. The stories of Noah, Hud, Salih, Lut, and Shu'ayb seem to be in chronological order. Therefore Shu'ayb came after Abraham, whose nephew Lut was.
2. If Shu'aib was in the fourth generation from Abraham, (see [n. 1590](#) to 11:89), it would be impossible for him to have been a contemporary of Moses, who came many centuries later.

This difficulty is recognised by Ibn Kathir and other classical commentators.

3. The identification of Shu'ayb with Jethro the father-in-law of Moses is without warrant; see [n. 1054](#).
4. Shu'ayb must have been before Moses; see [7:103](#).
5. The Midianites who were destroyed by Moses and by Gideon after him ([n. 1053](#)) were local remnants, as we may speak of the Jews at the present day; but their existence as a nation in their original homelands seems to have ended before Moses: "they became as if they had never been in the homes where they had flourished" ([7:92](#)).
6. Josephus, Eusebius, and Ptolemy mention a town of Madyan, but it was not of any importance ([n. 1053](#)).
7. After the first centuries of the Christian era, Madyan as a town appears as an unimportant place resting on its past.

Section 12

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّن نَّبِيٍّ إِلَّا أَخَذْنَا أَهْلَهَا بِالْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ لَعَلَّهُمْ
يَضُرَّعُونَ (٩٤)

94. Whenever We sent a prophet to a town, We took up its people in suffering and adversity, in order that they might learn humility.

C1065. Man was originally created pure. The need of a prophet arises when there is some corruption and iniquity, which he is sent to combat.

His coming means much trial and suffering, especially to those who join him in his protest against wrong. Even so peaceful a prophet as Jesus said; "I came not to send peace but a sword" (Matt. 10:34).

But it is all in Allah's Plan, for we must learn humility if we would be worthy of Him.

ثُمَّ بَدَّلْنَا مَكَانَ السَّيِّئَةِ الْحَسَنَةَ...

95. Then We changed their suffering into prosperity,

...حَتَّىٰ عَفَوْا وَقَالُوا قَدْ مَسَّ آبَاءَنَا الضَّرَّاءُ وَالسَّرَّاءُ...

until they grew and multiplied, and began to say: "Our fathers (too) were touched by suffering and affluence."...

C1066. Allah gives enough rope to the sinful. They grow and multiply, and become scornful.

Neither suffering nor affluence teaches them the lessons which they are meant to learn, viz., patience and humility, gratitude and kindness to others.

They take adversity and prosperity alike as a matter of chance. "O yes!" they say, "such things have happened in all ages! Our fathers had such experience before us, and our sons will have them after us. Thus goes on the world for all time!"

But does it?

What about the decree of Allah?

They are found napping when Nemesis overtakes them in the midst of their impious tomfoolery!

...فَأَخَذْنَا هُمْ بِعَتَّةٍ وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ (٩٥)

Behold! We called them to account of a sudden, while they realized not (their peril).

وَلَوْ أَنَّ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ آمَنُوا وَاتَّقَوْا لَفَتَحْنَا عَلَيْهِم بَرَكَاتٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ
وَالْأَرْضِ...

96. If the people of the towns had but believed and feared Allah, We should indeed have opened out to them (all kinds of) blessings from heaven and earth;

...وَلَكِن كَذَّبُوا فَأَخَذْنَا هُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (٩٦)

but they rejected (the truth), and We brought them to book for their misdeeds.

أَقَامِنَ أَهْلَ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا بَيَاتًا وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ (٩٧)

97. Did the people of the towns feel secure against the coming of our wrath by night while they were asleep?

C1067. This and the two following verses should be read together. They furnish a commentary on the story of the five prophets that has already been related.

Allah's wrath may come by night or by day, whether people are arrogantly defying Allah's laws or are sunk in lethargy or vain dreams of unreality.

Who can escape Allah's decree, and who can feel themselves outside it except those who are seeking their own ruin?

أَوْ أَمِنَ أَهْلُ الْقُرَىٰ أَن يَأْتِيَهُمْ بَأْسُنَا ضُحًى وَهُمْ يُلْعَبُونَ (٩٨)

98. Or else did they feel secure against its coming in broad daylight while they played about (carefree)?

أَقَامُوا مَكْرَ اللَّهِ فَلَا يَأْمَنُ مَكْرَ اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْقَوْمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ (٩٩)

99. Did they then fell secure against the plan of Allah?

But no one can feel secure from the plan of Allah, except those (doomed) to ruin!

C1068. This closes that chapter of the narrative which deals with Prophets who were rejected by their own people, but who stood firm on Allah's message and were able to rescue a remnant who believed.

In each case there were special circumstances and special besetting sins, which have been explained in the notes. The nations which as a body could not be won over to Allah's Law perished.

So far we have been dealing with the corruptions and iniquities within each nation. In the story of Moses we have first a struggle against the bondage of Egypt, one of the foremost powers then in the world, the rescue of the Israelites and their wanderings, and their proving themselves unworthy and being left to wander in a new sense when they rejected the new Prophet (Muhammad) who came to renew Allah's Message.

C.86 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(7:100-157)

*While the story of the prophets who preached
In vain to their people prefigures
The struggles in the early careers
Of all Prophets, the story of Moses-
His struggles, with an alien and arrogant
People, his final deliverance
Of his people from foreign domination.
And his leading them within sight
Of the Promised Land, in spite
Of the forces that resisted-prefigures
The early struggles and eventual triumph
Of Muhammad, the Holy Prophet of Allah.*

Section 13

أُولَٰئِكَ يَهْدِي لِلَّذِينَ يَرِثُونَ الْأَرْضَ مِن بَعْدِ أَهْلِهَا ...

100. To those who inherit the earth in succession to its (previous) possessors,

أَن لَّوْ نَشَاءُ أَصَبْنَاَهُم بِذُنُوبِهِمْ...

is it not a guiding (lesson) that, if We so willed, We could punish them (too) for their sins,

...وَنَطْبَعُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ قَهْمًا لَا يَسْمَعُونَ (١٠٠)

and seal up their hearts so that they could not hear?

C1069. The stories which have been related should give a warning to present and future generations which have inherited the land, the power, or the experience of the past.

They should know that if they fall into the same sins they will meet with the same fate: when through their contumacy their hearts are hardened, they do not listen to the advice that falls on their ears.

تِلْكَ الْقُرَىٰ نَقِصُ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أُنْبَاءِهَا ...

101. Such were the towns whose story We (thus) relate unto thee:

... وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا كَانُوا لِيُؤْمِنُوا بِمَا كَذَّبُوا مِن قَبْلُ ...

there came indeed to them their Messengers with clear (signs): but they would not believe what they had rejected before.

C1070. Those who have heard the Message and rejected it find it more difficult afterwards to retrace their steps. Evil has blocked the channels of Allah's grace to them. It begins with their breaking their Covenant with Allah; with each step afterwards they fall deeper and deeper into the mire.

...كَذَٰلِكَ يَطْبَعُ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِ الْكَافِرِينَ (١٠١)

Thus doth Allah seal up the heart of those who reject faith.

وَمَا وَجَدْنَا لِأَكْثَرِهِمْ مِّنْ عَهْدٍ...

102. Most of them We found not men (true) to their covenant:

...وَإِن وَجَدْنَا أَكْثَرَ هُمْ لِفَاسِقِينَ (١٠٢)

but most of them We found rebellious and disobedient.

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِم مُّوسَىٰ بِآيَاتِنَا إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ وَمَلَئِهِ فَظَلَمُوا بِهَا...

103. Then after them We sent Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his chiefs,

but they wrongfully rejected them:

...فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (١٠٣)

so see what was the end of those who made mischief.

وَقَالَ مُوسَىٰ ...

104. Moses said:

C1071. The story of Moses is told in many places in the Holy Quran, with a special lesson in each context.

In 2:49-71, the story is an appeal to the Jews from their own scripture and traditions, to show their true place in the religious history of mankind, and how they forfeited it. Here we have an instructive parallelism in that story to the story of Muhammad's mission, -how both these men of Allah had to fight against;

- a foreign foe, arrogant, unjust, faithless, and superstitious, and
- against the same class of internal foe among their own people.

Both of them won through.

- In the case of Moses, the foreign foe was Pharaoh and his Egyptians, who boasted of their earlier and superior civilisation;
- in the case of the Prophet Muhammad the foreign foes were the Jews themselves and the Christians of his day.

Moses led his people nearly to the land of promise in spite of rebellions among his own people;

Muhammad succeeded completely in overcoming the resistance of his own people by his own virtues and firmness of character, and by the guidance of Allah. What was a hope when these Makkan verses were revealed became an accomplishment before the end of his life and mission on earth.

... يَا فِرْعَوْنَ إِنِّي رَسُولٌ مِّن رَّبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٠٤)

"O Pharaoh!

I am a Messenger from the Lord of the worlds.

C1072. "Pharaoh" (Arabic, Fir'aun) is a dynastic title, not the name of any particular king in Egypt.

It has been traced to the ancient Hieroglyphic words, Per-da, which mean "Great House." The nun is an "infirm" letter added in the process of Arabisation.

Who was the Pharaoh in the story of Moses?

If the Inscriptions had helped us, we could have answered with some confidence, but unfortunately the Inscriptions fail us.

It is probable that it was an early Pharaoh of the XVIIIth Dynasty, say Thothmes 1, about 1540 B.C.

See [Appendix IV](#). on Egyptian Chronology and Israel, printed at the end of this Surah.

حَقِيقٌ عَلَىٰ أَن لَّا أَقُولَ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ...

105. "One for whom it is right to say nothing but truth about Allah.

...فَإِنِّي جئتكم ببينةٍ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ فَأَرْسِلْ مَعِيَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ (١٠٥)

Now have I come unto you (people), from your Lord with a clear (sign): so let the children of Israel depart along with me."

C1073. Notice that Moses, in addressing Pharaoh and the Egyptians, claims his mission to be not from his God, or his people's God but from "your Lord," from "the Lord of the Worlds." And his mission is not to his people only: "I come unto you (Egyptian people) from your Lord."

"The spirit of our version is entirely different from the spirit of the same story as told in the Old Testament (Exod. chapters 1-15). In Exod. 3:18, the mission of Moses is expressed to be as from "the Lord God of the Hebrews."

The essence of the whole Islamic story is this:

Joseph's sufferings and good fortune were not merely a story in a romance. Joseph was a prophet; his sufferings and his subsequent rise to power and position in Egypt were to be a lesson;

- a. to his wicked brothers who sold him into slavery,
- b. to his people who were stricken with famine and found a welcome in Egypt, and
- c. to the Egyptians, who were arrogant over their high material civilisation, but had yet to be taught the pure faith of Abraham.

Israel prospered in Egypt, and stayed there perhaps two to four centuries. (Renan allows only one century).

Times changed, and the racial bigotry of the Egyptians showed its head again, and Israel was oppressed. Moses was raised up with a threefold mission again;

- a. to learn all the learning of the Egyptians and preach Allah's Truth to them as one who had been brought up among themselves,
- b. to unite and reclaim his own people, and
- c. to rescue them and lead them to a new world, which was to open out their spiritual horizon and lead them to the Psalms of David and the glories of Solomon.

قَالَ إِنْ كُنْتَ حَقًّا بِآيَةٍ فَأْتِ بِهَا إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ (١٠٦)

106. (Pharaoh) said: "If indeed thou hast come with a sign, show it forth, if thou tellest the truth."

C1074. The ensuing dialogue shows the psychology on the two sides.

Pharaoh is sitting in his court, with his ministers and chiefs around him. In their arrogance they are only

amused at the effrontery and apparent revolt of the Israelite leaders, and they rely upon their own superior worldly power, aided by the magic which was a part of the Egyptian religion.

Confronting them stand two men, Moses with his mission from Allah, and his brother Aaron who was his lieutenant. They are confident, not in their own powers, but in the mission they had received.

The first thing they have to do is to act on the subjective mind of the Egyptians, and by methods which by Allah's miracle show that Egyptian magic was nothing before the true power of Allah.

فَأَلْقَى عَصَاهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ ثُعْبَانٌ مُّبِينٌ (١٠٧)

107. Then (Moses) threw his rod, and behold! it was a serpent, plain (for all to see)!

C1075. The serpent played a large part in Egyptian mythology.

The great sun-god Ra won a great victory over the serpent Apophis, typifying the victory of light over darkness. Many of their gods and goddesses took the forms of snakes to impress their foes with terror.

Moses' rod as a type of a serpent at once appealed to the Egyptian mentality. The contempt which the Egyptians had entertained in their minds before was converted into terror.

Here was some one who could control the reptile which their great god Ra himself had such difficulty in overcoming!

وَنَزَعَ يَدَهُ فَإِذَا هِيَ بَيْضَاءُ لِلنَّاظِرِينَ (١٠٨)

108. And he drew out his hand and behold! it was white to all beholders!

C1076. But the second Sign displayed by Moses was even more puzzling to the Egyptians. Moses drew out his hand from the folds of the garments on his breast, and it was white and shining as with divine light!

This was to counter any suggestions of evil, which the serpent might have created. This was no work of evil, - Of black magic, or a trick or illusion. His hand was transfigured -with a light which no Egyptian sorcerers could produce. In Islamic literature the "white hand" of Moses has passed into a proverb, for a symbol of divine glory dazzling to the beholders.

Section 14

قَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّ هَذَا لَسَاحِرٌ عَلِيمٌ (١٠٩)

109. Said the Chiefs of the people of Pharaoh:

"This is indeed a sorcerer well-versed.

يُرِيدُ أَنْ يُخْرِجَكُمْ مِنْ أَرْضِكُمْ فَمَاذَا تَأْمُرُونَ (١١٠)

110. "His plan is to get you out of your land then what is it ye counsel?"

C1077. The two Signs had the desired effect on the Egyptians. They were impressed, but they judged them by their own standards. They thought to themselves, "These are ordinary sorcerers: let us search out our best sorcerers and show them that they have superior power."

But like all worldly people, they began to fear for their own power and possessions. It was far from Moses' intention to drive out the Egyptians from their own land. He merely wanted to end the Egyptian oppression. But the Egyptians had a guilty conscience, and they judged other people's motives by their own. They discussed the matter in Council on quite wrong premises.

قَالُوا أَرْجِهْ وَأَخَاهُ وَأَرْسِلْ فِي الْمَدَائِنِ حَاشِرِينَ (١١١)

111. They said:

"Keep him and his brother in suspense (for a while); and send to the cities men to collect

يَأْتُوكَ بِكُلِّ سَاحِرٍ عَلِيمٍ (١١٢)

112. and bring up to thee all (our) sorcerers well-versed."

C1078. The advice of the Council to Pharaoh shows a misreading of the situation. They were in a panic about what the magic of this evidently powerful sorcerer could do against them. So they advised the Pharaoh to summon their most powerful sorcerers from all over the country, and in the meantime to hold Moses and Aaron in suspense, -neither to yield to them nor definitely to oppose them.

The Prophets of Allah could well afford to wait. Time is always in favour of Truth. (R).

وَجَاءَ السَّحَرَةُ فِرْعَوْنَ قَالُوا إِنَّ لَنَا لَأَجْرًا إِن كُنَّا نَحْنُ الْغَالِبِينَ (١١٣)

113. So there came the sorcerers to Pharaoh: they said, "Of course we shall have a (suitable) reward if we win!"

C1079. The most noted sorcerers of Pharaoh came. Their art was built up on trickery and imposture, and the first thing they could think of was to make a selfish bargain for themselves.

The Pharaoh and his Council would in their present state of panic agree to anything. And so they did.

Pharaoh not only promised them any rewards they desired if they foiled the strange power of these men, but he also promised them the highest dignities round his own person.

And so the contest begins, with due observance of the amenities observed by combatants before they come to close grips.

قَالَ نَعَمْ وَإِنَّكُمْ لَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ (١١٤)

114. He said: "Yea, (and more), for ye shall in that case be (raised to posts) nearest (to my person)."

قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى إِمَّا أَنْ تُلْقِيَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ نَكُونَ نَحْنُ الْمُلْقِينَ (١١٥)

115. They said:

"O Moses! wilt thou throw (first), or shall we have the (first) throw?"

قَالَ أَلْقُوا...

116. Said Moses: "Throw ye (first)."

...فَلَمَّا أَلْقُوا سَحَرُوا أَعْيُنَ النَّاسِ وَاسْتَرَهُبُوهُمْ وَجَاءُوا بِسِحْرِ

عَظِيمٍ (١١٦)

So when they threw,

they bewitched the eyes of the people, and struck terror into them: for they showed a great (feat of) magic.

C1080. Moses and his brother Aaron were pitted against the most skilful magic-men of Egypt, but they were calm and confident and let the magic-men have their innings first. As is usual in this world, the magicians trickery made a great impression on the people, but when Moses threw his rod, the illusion was broken, and the falsehood was all shown up.

In the Old Testament story (Exod. 7:10-12) it was Aaron that threw the rod, and he threw it before the magicians. Aaron's rod became a serpent. Then the magicians threw their rods, and they became serpents, but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

The story given to us is more dramatic and less literal.

We are told in general terms that Moses first allowed the magic-men to play their tricks. It was a simple shepherd's crook with which he used to feed his flocks. With Allah's grace behind him, he was able to expose all false trickery and establish the Truth.

وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ أَنْ أَلْقِ عَصَاكَ...

117. We put it into Moses' mind by inspiration: "Throw (now) thy rod":

...فَإِذَا هِيَ تَلْقَفُ مَا يَأْفِكُونَ (١١٧)

and behold! it swallows up straightway all the falsehoods which they fake!

فَوَقَعَ الْحَقُّ وَبَطَلَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (١١٨)

118. Thus truth was confirmed, and all that they did was made of no effect.

فَعَلَبُوا هُنَالِكَ وَانْقَلَبُوا صَاغِرِينَ (١١٩)

119. So the (great ones) were vanquished there and then, and were made to look small.

C1081. The proud ones of the Court-Pharaoh and his chiefs were hard-hearted, and the exposure of the imposture only made them wreak their rage on those whom they could reach.

On the other hand the effect on the humbler ones -those who had been made the dupes and instruments of the imposture- was quite different. Their conscience was awakened. They fell down to the ground in adoration of the Lord of the Worlds, and confessed their faith.

وَأَلْقَى السَّحَرَةُ سَاجِدِينَ (١٢٠)

120. But the sorcerers fell down prostrate in adoration.

قَالُوا آمَنَّا بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٢١)

121. Saying:

"We believe in the Lord of the worlds.

رَبِّ مُوسَى وَهَارُونَ (١٢٢)

122. "The Lord of Moses and Aaron."

قَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ آذَنَ لَكُمْ...

123. Said Pharaoh:

"Believe ye in him before I give you permission?

...إِنَّ هَذَا لَمَكْرٌ مَكْرْتُمُوهُ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ لِتُخْرِجُوا مِنْهَا أَهْلَهَا...

Surely this is a trick which ye have planned in the city to drive out its people:

...فَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ (١٢٣)

but soon shall ye know (the consequences).

C1082. Pharaoh and his Court were doubly angry:

- first because they were made to look small when confronted by the power of Allah, and

- secondly, because their dupes and instruments were snatched away from them.

These men, the sorcerers, at once recognised the Signs of Allah, and in their case the mission of Moses, and Aaron was fulfilled. They turned back on their past life of false worship, and oppression of the weak, and confessed the One true God.

As usually happens, hardened sinners resent all the more the saving of any of their companions from sin and error. Judging other people's motives by their own, they accuse them of duplicity, and if they have the power, they take cruel revenge. Here the Pharaoh threatens the repentant sinners with the extreme punishment for treason and apostasy (cutting off of hands and feet, combined with an ignominious death on the cross, as in the case of the worst malefactors).

But they remained firm, and prayed to Allah for patience and constancy. Probably their influence spread quietly in the commonalty. Ultimately it appeared on the throne itself, in the person of Amenophis IV about five or six generations afterwards.

See [Appendix V](#), on Egyptian Religion, printed at the end of this Surah.

لَأَقْطَعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ مِنْ خِلَافٍ ثُمَّ لَأَصْلَبَنَّكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ (١٢٤)

124. "Be sure I will cut off your hands and your feet on opposite sides, and I will cause you all to die on the cross."

قَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَى رَبِّنَا مُنْقَلِبُونَ (١٢٥)

125. They said: "For us, we are but sent back unto our Lord.

وَمَا تَنْقِمُ مِنَّا إِلَّا أَنْ آمَنَّا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّنَا لَمَّا جَاءَتْنَا...

126. "But thou dost wreak thy vengeance on us simply because we believed in the signs of our Lord when they reached us!

...رَبَّنَا أَفْرِغْ عَلَيْنَا صَبْرًا وَتَوَقَّنَا مُسْلِمِينَ (١٢٦)

Our Lord! pour out on us patience and constancy, and take our souls unto thee as Muslims (who bow to thy will)!"

C1083. These Egyptians, by their patience and constancy, show that their repentance was true. Thus in their case the mission of Moses was fulfilled directly, and their number must have amounted to a considerable figure.

They were martyrs to their faith, and their martyrdom affected their nation in two ways.

- In the first place, as they were the pick of those who practised magic in Egypt, their conversion and disappearance dealt a staggering blow to the whole system.
- Secondly, the indirect effect of their martyrdom on the commonalty of Egypt must have been far greater than can be measured by numbers.

The banner of Allah was planted, and the silent spiritual fight must have gone on ever since, though history, in recording outward events, is silent on the slow and gradual processes of transformation undergone by Egyptian religion.

From a chaotic pantheon of animals and animal gods, the worship of the sun and the heavenly bodies, and the worship of the Pharaoh as the embodiment of power, they gradually came to realise the oneness and mercy of the true God. After many glimpses of Monotheism on Egyptian soil itself, the Gospel of Jesus reached them, and eventually Islam.

Section 15

وَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ مِنْ قَوْمِ فِرْعَوْنَ...

127. Said the chiefs of Pharaoh's people:

...أَنْتَدِرُ مُوسَىٰ وَقَوْمَهُ لِيُفْسِدُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَيَذُرِكَ آلِهَتُكَ...

"Wilt thou leave Moses and his people, to spread mischief in the land, and to abandon thee and thy gods?"

...قَالَ سَنَقْتُلُ أَبْنَاءَهُمْ وَنَسْتَحْيِي نِسَاءَهُمْ وَإِنَّا فَوْقَهُمْ قَاهِرُونَ (١٢٧)

He said:

"Their male children will we slay; (only) their females will we save alive;

and we have over them (power) irresistible."

C1084. Pharaoh's order against the sorcerers was drastic enough. But his Council is not satisfied.

What about Moses and the Israelites?

They had a seeming victory, and will now be more mischievous than ever. They appeal to Pharaoh's vanity and his superstition and sense of power. "If you leave them alone." they say, "where will be your authority? You and your gods will be defied!"

Pharaoh has a ready answer. He was really inwardly cowed by the apparent power of Moses. He dared not openly act against him. But he had already, before the birth of Moses, passed a cunning order to destroy the whole people of Israel. Through the instrumentality of midwives (Exod. 1:15-16) all the male children were to be destroyed. and the females would then be for the Egyptians: the race of Israel would thus be at an end. This order was still in force, and would remain in force until the despised race was absorbed.

But Egyptian cunning and wickedness had no power against Allah's Plan for those who had faith.

See [verse 129 below](#).

قَالَ مُوسَى لِقَوْمِهِ اسْتَعِينُوا بِاللَّهِ وَاصْبِرُوا...

128. Said Moses to his people:

"Pray for help from Allah, and (wait) in patience and constancy:

... إِنَّ الْأَرْضَ لِلَّهِ يُورِثُهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ...

for the earth is Allah's to give as a heritage to such of his servants as He pleaseth;

...وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ (١٢٨)

and the end is (best) for the righteous.

C1085. Notice the contrast between the arrogant tone of Pharaoh and the humility and faith taught by Moses.

In the end the arrogance was humbled, and humility and faith were protected and advanced.

قَالُوا أَوْزِينَا مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ تَأْتِيَنَا وَمِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جِئْنَا...

129. They said:

"We have had (nothing but) trouble, both before and after thou comest to us."

C1086. There is a slight note of querulous-ness in the people's answer. But Moses allays it by his own example and courage, and his vision of the future: which was amply fulfilled in time.

See [verse 137](#) below.

...قَالَ عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يُهْلِكَ عَدُوَّكُمْ وَيَسْتَخْلِفَكُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ...

He said:

"It may be that your Lord will destroy your enemy and make you inheritors in the earth;

C1087. The Israelites, despised and enslaved, were to be rescued and made rulers in Palestine. David and Solomon were great kings and played a notable part in history.

But the greatness of Israel was conditional: they were to be judged by their deeds. When they fell from grace, other people were given honour and power. And so it came to be the turn of the Muslims, and so on. Allah gives His gifts to those who are righteous and obey His Law.

...فَيَنْظُرَ كَيْفَ تَعْمَلُونَ (١٢٩)

that so He may try you by your deeds."

Section 16

وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِينَ وَنَقْصِ مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ...

130. We punished the people of Pharaoh with years (of drought) and shortness of crops;

لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ (١٣٠)

that they might receive admonition.

فَإِذَا جَاءَهُمُ الْحَسَنَةُ قَالُوا لَنَا هَذِهِ...

131. But when good (times) came, they said, "This is due to us;"

وَأِنْ تُصِيبَهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَطَّيَّرُوا بِمُوسَى وَمَنْ مَعَهُ...

when gripped by calamity, they ascribed it to evil omens connected with Moses and those with him!

أَلَا إِنَّمَا طَائِرُهُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (١٣١)

Behold! in truth the omens of evil are theirs in Allah's sight, but most of them do not understand!

C1088. Their superstition ascribed the punishment of their own wickedness to some evil omen. They thought Moses and his people brought them ill-luck. They did not look within themselves to see the root of evil, and the cause of their punishment!

So it happens in all ages. People blame the righteous for something which they do, different from other men, instead of searching out their own lapses from rectitude, which are punished by Allah.

وَقَالُوا مَهْمَا تَأْتِنَا بِهِ مِنْ آيَةٍ لِّتَسْحَرَنَا بِهَا ...

132. They said (to Moses):

"Whatever be the signs thou bringest, to work therewith the sorcery on us,

C1089. A type of obstinacy and resistance to Allah's message. As they believed in sorcery and magic, they thought anything unusual was but sorcery and magic, and hardened their hearts against Truth.

... فَمَا نَحْنُ لَكَ بِمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٣٢)

we shall never believe in thee."

فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الطُّوفَانَ ...

133. So We sent (plagues) on them, wholesale death,

C1090. Tufan: a widespread calamity, causing wholesale death and destruction.

It may be a flood, or a typhoon, or an epidemic, among men or cattle. Perhaps the last is meant, if we may interpret by the Old Testament story.

See also Exod. 9:3, 9, 15; 12:29.

... وَالْجَرَادَ وَالْقُمَّلَ وَالضَّفَادِعَ وَالدَّمَ ...

Locusts, Lice, Frogs, and Blood:

... آيَاتٍ مُّفَصَّلَاتٍ ...

signs openly Self-explained;

C1091. In 17:101, the reference is to nine Clear Signs. These are:

1. the Rod (7:107),
2. the Radiant Hand (7:108),
3. the years of drought or shortage of water (7:130),
4. short crops (7:130), and mentioned in this verse, viz.,
5. epidemics among men and beasts,
6. locusts,
7. lice,
8. frogs, and
9. the water turning to blood.

... فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا وَكَانُوا قَوْمًا مُّجْرِمِينَ (١٣٣)

but they were steeped in arrogance, a people given to sin.

وَلَمَّا وَقَعَ عَلَيْهِمُ الرِّجْزُ قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى ادْعُ لَنَا رَبَّكَ بِمَا عَهِدَ عِنْدَكَ ...

134. Every time the penalty fell on them, they said:

"O Moses! on our behalf call on thy Lord in virtue of his promise to thee:

...إِن كَشَفْتَ عَنَّا الرِّجْزَ لَنُؤْمِنَنَّ لَكَ وَلَنُرْسِلَنَّ مَعَكَ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ (١٣٤)

if thou wilt remove the penalty from us we shall truly believe in thee,

and we shall send away the children of Israel with thee."

C1092. The demand of Moses was two-fold:

- come to Allah and cease from oppression, and
- let me take Israel out of Egypt.

At first it was laughed at and rejected with scorn. When the Plagues came for punishment, each time the Egyptians suffered, they promised amendment and begged Moses to intercede and cause the plague to cease. But every time it ceased, they went back to their evil attitude, until the final retribution came.

This is a type of the sinner's attitude for all times.

فَلَمَّا كَشَفْنَا عَنْهُمْ الرِّجْزَ إِلَى أَجَلٍ هُمْ بِالْغُورِ ...

135. But every time We removed the penalty from them according to a fixed term which they had to fulfil,

C1093. The intercession of Moses was to pray. Each plague or penalty had its appointed term in Allah's decree. That term was duly fulfilled before the plague ceased.

The intercession meant two things:

1. that Allah's name was invoked and His presence duly brought home to the mind and heart of the sinner who promised repentance, and
2. that the sinner was given a further chance when the prayer was accepted.

This again is a universal truth.

... إِذَا هُمْ يَنْكُتُونَ (١٣٥)

Behold! they broke their word!

فَأَنْتَقَمْنَا مِنْهُمْ...

136. So We exacted retribution from them:

C1094. When at last Pharaoh let Israel go, they selected, not the highway to Canaan, along the Mediterranean and by Gaza, because they were unarmed and would have encountered immediate opposition there, but by way of the wilderness of Sinai.

They crossed the Red Sea, while Pharaoh's host which came in pursuit was drowned. Cf. 2:50. (R).

... فَأَعْرَفْنَاهُمْ فِي الْيَمِّ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا عَنْهَا غَافِلِينَ (١٣٦)

We drowned them in the sea, because they rejected Our signs, and failed to take warning from them.

C1095. Where was the Council of Pharaoh held in which Moses addressed Pharaoh?

Egypt's primary capital in the XVIIIth Dynasty was Thebes (Not-Ammon), but that was more than 400 miles to the south of the Delta, in whose corner Israel dwelt. Memphis, on the apex of the Delta, a little south of where Cairo is now, was also over 100 miles from Israel's habitations.

The interview must have been either in a Palace near Goshen, where the Israelites dwelt, or in Zoan (Tanis), the Deltaic capital built by a former dynasty, which was of course still available for the reigning dynasty, and which was not far from the Israelite settlement.

وَأَوْرَثْنَا الْقَوْمَ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يُسْتَضْعَفُونَ مَشَارِقَ الْأَرْضِ وَمَعَارِبَهَا الَّتِي

بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا ...

137. And We made a people, considered weak (and of no account), inheritors of lands in both east and west, lands whereon We sent down our blessings.

...وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّكَ الْحُسْنَىٰ عَلَىٰ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا...

The fair promise of the Lord was fulfilled for the children of Israel, because they had patience and constancy,

...وَدَمَّرْنَا مَا كَانَ يَصْنَعُ فِرْعَوْنُ وَقَوْمُهُ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْرِشُونَ (١٣٧)

and We levelled to the ground the great works and fine buildings which Pharaoh and his people erected (with such pride).

C1096. Israel, which was despised, became a great and glorious nation under Solomon. He had goodly territory, and was doubly blest. His land and people were prosperous, and he wits blessed with wisdom from Allah. His sway and his fame spread east and west. And thus Allah's promise to Israel was fulfilled.

Note that Syria and Palestine had once been under the sway of Egypt. At the same time the proud and rebellious Pharaoh and his people were brought low. The splendid monuments which they had erected with so much skill and pride were mingled with the dust. Their great cities-Thebes (or No-Ammon), Memphis (or Noph, sacred to the Bull of Osiris), and the other splendid cities, became as if they had not existed, and archaeologists have had to dig up their ruins from the sands.

The splendid monuments-temples, palaces, tombs, statues, columns, and stately structures of all kinds-were buried in the sands. Even monuments like the Great Sphinx, which seem to defy the ages, were partly buried in the sands, and owe their rescue to the comparatively recent researches of archaeologists.

As late as 1743 Richard Pococke in his Travels in Egypt (p. 41), remarked:

"Most of those pyramids are very much ruined." (R)

وَجَاوَزْنَا بِبَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ الْبَحْرَ ...

138. We took the children of Israel (with safety) across the sea.

... فَأَتَوْا عَلَى قَوْمٍ يَعْطِفُونَ عَلَىٰ أَصْنَامِهِمُ...

They came upon a people devoted entirely to some idols they had.

C1097. Who were these people?

We are now in the Sinai Peninsula. Two conjectures are possible.

1. The Amalekites of the Sinai Peninsula were at perpetual war with the Israelites. They were probably an idolatrous nation, but we have very little knowledge of their cult.
2. From Egyptian history we know that Egypt had worked from very ancient times some copper mines in Sinai. An Egyptian settlement may have been here. Like all mining camps it contained from the beginning the dregs of the population.

When the mines ceased to be worked, the settlement, or what remained of it, must have degenerated further. Cut off from civilisation, its cult must have become still narrower, without the refining influences which a progressive nation applies even to its idolatry.

Perhaps Apis, the sacred bull of Memphis, lost all its allegorical meaning for them, and only gross and superstitious rites remained among them.

The text speaks of "some idols they had," implying that they had merely a detached fragment of a completer religion.

This was a snare in the path of the Israelites, whom many generations of slavery in Egypt had debased into ignorance and superstition.

... قَالُوا يَا مُوسَى اجْعَلْ لَنَا إِلَهًا كَمَا لَهُمْ آلِهَةٌ...

They said: "O Moses! fashion for us a god like unto the gods they have."

... قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ قَوْمٌ تَجْهَلُونَ (١٣٨)

He said: "Surely ye are a people without knowledge."

إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ مُتَّبِعُونَ مَا هُمْ فِيهِ ...

139. "As to these folk, the cult they are in is (but) a fragment of a ruin,

C1098. If conjecture 2 in the last note is correct, this idolatrous worship was but the fragment of a ruin from Egypt, and Moses' reproach is biting:

"You, who have been rescued from the bondage of living Egypt, -do you hanker after the bondage of a dead cult debased even from that from which you have been rescued?"

Mutabbar: broken in pieces, smashed into fragments, destroyed.

... وَيَاطِلُّ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (١٣٩)

and vain is the (worship) which they practice."

قَالَ أَعْبُدِ اللَّهَ أَبْغِيكُمْ إِلَهًا ...

140. He said:

"Shall I seek for you a god other than the (true) Allah,

... وَهُوَ فَضَّلَكُمْ عَلَى الْعَالَمِينَ (١٤٠)

when it is Allah who hath endowed you with gifts above the nations?"

وَأَذِّنْ لِقَوْمِكُمْ أَنْ يَحْكُمُوا لَكَ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا لَكُمْ عَذَابٌ ...

141. And remember, We rescued you from Pharaoh's people, who afflicted you with the worst of penalties,

... يُقْتَلُونَ أَبْنَاءَكُمْ وَيَسْتَحْيُونَ نِسَاءَكُمْ ...

who slew your male children and saved alive your females:

... وَفِي ذَلِكَ بَلَاءٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ عَظِيمٌ (١٤١)

in that was a momentous trial from your Lord.

C1099. This is Allah's reminder to Israel through the mouth of Moses. There was a double trial:

1. while the bondage lasted, the people were to learn patience and constancy in the midst of affliction:

2. when they were rescued, they were to learn humility; justice, and righteous deeds of prosperity.

Section 17

وَوَاعَدْنَا مُوسَى ثَلَاثِينَ لَيْلَةً وَأَتَمَمْنَاهَا بِعَشْرِ...

142. We appointed for Moses thirty nights, and completed (the period) with ten (more):

...فَتَمَّ مِيقَاتُ رَبِّهِ أَرْبَعِينَ لَيْلَةً...

thus was completed the term (of communion) with his Lord, forty nights.

C1100. The forty nights' exclusion of Moses on the Mount may be compared with the forty days fast of Jesus in the wilderness before he took up his ministry (Matt. 4:2).

In each case the Prophets lived alone apart from their people, before they came into the full blaze of the events of their Ministry.

...وَقَالَ مُوسَى لِأَخِيهِ هَارُونَ اخْلُفْنِي فِي قَوْمِي...

And Moses had charged his brother Aaron (before he went up): "Act for me amongst my people:

...وَأَصْلِحْ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ سَبِيلَ الْمُفْسِدِينَ (١٤٢)

do right, and follow not the way of those who do mischief."

C1101. When for any reason the man of God is absent from his people, his duty of leadership (Khalifah) should be taken up by his brother, -not necessarily a blood-brother, but one of his society or brotherhood.

The deputy should discharge it in all humility, remembering three things:

1. that he is only a deputy, and bound to follow the directions of his Principal,
2. that right and justice are of the essence of power, and

3. that mischief gets its best chance to raise its head in the absence of the Principal, and that the deputy should always guard against the traps laid for him in the Principal's absence.

وَلَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَىٰ لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ...

143. When Moses came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord addressed him,

...قَالَ رَبِّ ارْنِي أَنظُرْ إِلَيْكَ...

He said: "O my Lord! show (Thyself) to me, that I may look upon thee."

C1102. Even the best of us may be betrayed into overweening confidence of spiritual ambition not yet justified by the stage we have reached, Moses had already seen part of the glory of Allah in his Radiant White Hand, that shone with the glory of Divine light (7:108, n. 1076). But he was still in the flesh, and the mission to his people was to begin after the Covenant of Sinai. It was premature of him to ask to see Allah.

Having been blinded by the excessive Glory, he could not see with the physical eye. But he could get a glimpse of the reality through faith, and he hastened to proclaim his faith. (R).

...قَالَ لَنْ نَرَاكَ إِنَّا إِلَىٰ الْجَبَلِ...

Allah said: "By no means canst thou see Me (direct);

C1103. But Allah -the Cherisher of all His creatures- treats even our improper requests with mercy, compassion, and understanding.

Even the reflected glory of Allah is too great for the grosser substance of matter. The peak on which it shone became as powder before the ineffable glory, and Moses could only live by being taken out of his bodily senses.

When he recovered from his swoon, he saw the true position, and the distance between our grosser bodily senses and the true splendour of Allah's glory. He at once turned in penitence to Allah, and confessed his faith.

... فَإِنِ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ تَرَانِي...

but look upon the mount; if it abide in its place then shalt thou see Me."

... فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّى رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ مُوسَى صَعِقًا...

When his Lord manifested his glory on the mount, He made it as dust and Moses fell down in a swoon.

... فَلَمَّا أَفَاقَ قَالَ...

When he recovered his senses he said:

... سُبْحَانَكَ تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ...

"Glory be to Thee! to Thee I turn in repentance,

... وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٤٣)

and I am the first to believe."

C1104. "First to believe." Cf. the expression;

"first of those who bow to Allah in Islam" in 6:14 and 6:163.

"First" means here not the first in time, but most zealous in faith.

It has the intensive and not the comparative meaning.

قَالَ يَا مُوسَى إِنِّي اصْطَفَيْتُكَ عَلَى النَّاسِ ...

144. (Allah) said: "O Moses! I have chosen thee above (other) men,

C1105. "Above (other) men": i.e. among his contemporaries.

He had a high mission, and he had the honour of speaking to Allah.

... بِرِسَالَاتِي وَيَكَلَامِي...

by the mission I (have given thee) and the words I (have spoken to thee):

... فَخُذْ مَا آتَيْتُكَ وَكُن مِّنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ (١٤٤)

take then the (revelation) which I give thee, and be of those who give thanks."

C1106. Allah's revelation is for the benefit of His creatures, who should receive it with reverence and gratitude.

While Moses was having these great spiritual experiences on the Mount, his people below were ungrateful enough to forget Allah and make a golden calf for worship (7:147).

وَكَتَبْنَا لَهُ فِي الْأَلْوَابِ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مَوْعِظَةً وَتَفْصِيلًا لِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ...

145. And We ordained laws for him in the tablets in all matters, both commanding and explaining all things,

...فَخُذْهَا بِقُوَّةٍ وَأْمُرْ قَوْمَكَ يَأْخُذُوا بِأَحْسَنِهَا...

(and said): "Take and hold these with firmness, and enjoin thy people to hold fast by the best in the precepts:

C1107. The Tablets of the Law contained the essential Truth, from which were derived the positive injunctions and prohibitions, explanations and interpretations, which it was the function of the prophetic office to hold up for the people to follow.

The precepts would contain, as the Shariah does,

- matters absolutely prohibited,
- matters not prohibited but disapproved,
- matters about which there was no prohibition or injunction, but in which conduct was to be regulated by circumstances;
- matters of positive and universal duty,
- matters recommended for those whose zeal was sufficient to enable them to work on higher than minimum standards.

No soul is burdened beyond its capacity; but we are asked to seek the best and highest possible for us in conduct.

...سَأُرِيكُمْ...

soon shall I show you

C1108. Notice the transition from the "We" of authority and honour and impersonal dignity, to the "I" of personal concern in specially guiding the righteous.

... دَارَ الْفَاسِقِينَ (١٤٥)

the homes of the wicked, (how they lie desolate)."

C1109. There are two meanings, one literal and the other figurative.

- Literally, the homes of the wicked, both individuals and nations, lie desolate, as in the case of the ancient Egyptians, the 'Ad., and the Thamud.
- Figuratively, the "home" shows the inner and more intimate condition of people. If you are dazzled by the outward prosperity of the ungodly, examine their inner anguish and fear and insecurity, and you will thank Allah for His gracious guidance.

سَأَصْرِفُ عَنْ آيَاتِيَ الَّذِينَ يَتَكَبَّرُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ بِغَيْرِ الْحَقِّ...

146. Those who behave arrogantly on the earth in defiance of right,

وَأَن يَرَوْا كَلَّآءَ آيَةٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُوا بِهَا...

them will I turn away from My signs, they will not believe in them;

C1110. The argument may be simplified thus in paraphrase.

The right is established on the earth as Allah created it: Nature recognises and obeys Allah's law as fixed for each portion of Creation. But man, because of the gift of Will, sometimes upsets this balance. The root-cause is his arrogance, as it was in the case of Iblis.

Allah's Signs are everywhere, but if they are rejected with scorn and blasphemy, Allah will withdraw His grace, for sin hardens the heart and makes it impervious to the truth.

Want of faith produces a kind of blindness to spiritual facts, a kind of deafness to the warnings of a Day of Account. If we had contumaciously rejected faith, can we hope for anything but justice,-the just punishment of our sins? (R).

...وَأِنْ يَرَوْا سَبِيلَ الرُّشْدِ لَا يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلًا...

and if they see the way of right conduct, they will not adopt it as the way;

...وَأِنْ يَرَوْا سَبِيلَ الغَيِّ يَتَّخِذُوهُ سَبِيلًا...

but if they see the way of error that is the way they will adopt;

...ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَكَانُوا عَنْهَا غَافِلِينَ (١٤٦)

for they rejected Our signs, and failed to take warning from them.

C1111. Rejected Our Signs: again a return to the Plural of impersonal Dignity and Authority, from the singular of personal concern in granting grace and guidance to the Righteous.

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَلِقَاءِ الآخِرَةِ حَبِطَتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ..

147. Those who reject Our signs and the meeting in the hereafter, vain are their deeds:

...هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (١٤٧)

can they expect to be rewarded except as they have wrought?

Section 18

وَأَخَذَ قَوْمٌ مَوْسَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ عَجَلًا ...

148. The people of Moses made in his absence, out of their ornaments,

C1112. The making of the golden calf and its worship by the Israelites during the absence of Moses on the Mount were referred to in 2:51, and some further details are given in 20:95-97.

Notice how in each case only those points are referred to which are necessary to the argument in hand.

A narrator whose object is mere narration, tells the story in all its details, and is done with it. A consummate artist, whose object is to enforce lessons, brings out each point in its proper place. Master of all details, he does not ramble, but with supreme literary skill, just

adds the touch that is necessary in each place to complete the spiritual picture. His object is not a story but a lesson.

Here notice the contrast between the intense spiritual communion of Moses on the Mount and the simultaneous corruption of his people in his absence. We can understand his righteous indignation and bitter grief (7:150).

The people had melted all their gold ornaments, and made the image of a calf like the bull of Osiris in the city of Memphis in the wicked Egypt that they had turned their backs upon.

... جَسَدًا لَهُ خُورًا ...

the image of a calf, (for worship):

C1113. Image of a Calf: Jasad is literally a body, especially the body of a man according to Khalil quoted by Ragib.

In 21:8, it is used obviously for the human body, as also in 38:34; but in the latter case, the idea of an image, without any real life or soul, is also suggested.

In the present passage I understand many suggestions:

1. that it was a mere image, without life-,
2. as such, it could not low, therefore the appearance of lowing, mentioned immediately afterwards, was a fraud:
3. unlike its prototype, the bull of Osiris, it had not even the symbolism of Osiris behind it;

the Osiris myth, in the living religion of Egypt, had at least some ethical principles behind it.

... أَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّهُ لَا يُكَلِّمُهُمْ وَلَا يَهْدِيهِمْ سَبِيلًا ...

it seemed to low: did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor show them the way?

C1114. The lowing of the golden calf was obviously a deception practised by the promoters of the cult.

Lytton in his "Last Days of Pompeii" exposes the deception practised by the priests of Isis. Men hidden behind images imposed on the credulity of the commonalty.

...اَتَّخَذُوهُ وَكَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ (١٤٨)

They took it for worship and they did wrong.

وَلَمَّا سَقَطَ فِي أَيْدِيهِمْ وَرَأَوْا أَنَّهُمْ قَدْ ضَلُّوا قَالُوا...

149. When they repented, and saw that they had erred, they said:

...لَئِن لَّمْ يَرْحَمْنَا رَبُّنَا وَيَغْفِرْ لَنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ (١٤٩)

"If our Lord have not mercy upon us and forgive us, we shall indeed be of those who perish."

وَلَمَّا رَجَعَ مُوسَى إِلَى قَوْمِهِ غَضْبَانَ أَسِفًا...

150. When Moses came back to his people, angry and grieved,

...قَالَ بِئْسَمَا خَلَفْتُمُونِي مِنْ بَعْدِي أَعَجَلْتُمْ أَمْرَ رَبِّكُمْ...

he said:

"Evil it is that ye have done in my place in my absence:
did ye make haste to bring on the judgment of your Lord?"

C1115. Did ye make haste... ?

'In your impatience, could you not wait for me?

Your lapse into idolatry has only hastened Allah's wrath. If you had only waited, I was bringing to you in the Tablets the most excellent teaching in the commands of Allah.'

There is subtle irony in the speech of Moses.

There is also a play upon words:

- **'ijl:** calf: and
- **'ajila:** to make haste:

no translation can bring out these niceties.

...وَأَلْقَى الْأَوْحَاحَ ...

He put down the tablets,

C1116. Put down the Tablets:

we are not told that the Tablets were broken: in fact [7:154](#) (below) shows that they were whole. They contained Allah's Message. There is a touch of disrespect (if not blasphemy) in supposing that Allah's Messenger broke the Tablets in his incontinent rage, as is stated in the Old Testament:

"Moses' anger waxed hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands, and brake them beneath the Mount." (Exod. 32:19).

On this point and also on the point that Aaron (in the Old Testament story) ordered the gold to be brought, made a molten calf, fashioned it with a graving tool, and built an altar before the calf (Exod. 32:2-5), our version differs from that of the Old Testament.

We cannot believe that Aaron, who was appointed by Allah to assist Moses as Allah's Messenger, could descend so low as to seduce the people into idolatry, whatever his human weaknesses might be.

... وَأَخَذَ بِرَأْسِ أَخِيهِ يَجُرُّهُ إِلَيْهِ ...

seized his brother by (the hair of) his head, and dragged him to him.

C1117. Moses was but human. Remembering the charge he had given to Aaron ([7:142](#)) he had a just grievance at the turn events had taken. But he did not wreak his vengeance on the Tablets of Allah's law by breaking them. He laid hands on his brother, and his brother at once explained.

... قَالَ ابْنَ أُمَّ إِنَّ الْقَوْمَ اسْتَضَعُّونِي وَكَادُوا يَقْتُلُونَنِي ...

Aaron said:

"Son of my mother! the people did indeed reckon me as naught, and went near to slaying me!

...فَلَا تُشْمِتْ بِيَ الْأَعْدَاءَ وَلَا تَجْعَلْنِي مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ (١٥٠)

make not the enemies rejoice over my misfortune,
nor count thou me amongst the people of sin."

C1118. Aaron's speech is full of tenderness and regret. He addresses Moses as "son of my mother." -an affectionate term.

He explains how the turbulent people nearly killed him for resisting them. And he states in the clearest terms that the idolatry neither originated with him nor had his consent.

In 20:85, we are told that a fellow described as the Samiri had led them astray. We shall discuss this when we come to that passage.

قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِأَخِي وَأَدْخِلْنَا فِي رَحْمَتِكَ...

151. Moses prayed:

"O my Lord! forgive me and my brother! admit us to Thy mercy!

C1119. As Moses was convinced that his brother was guiltless, his wrath was turned to gentleness. He prayed for forgiveness -for himself and his brother:

- for himself because of his wrath and
- for his brother because he had been unable to suppress idolatry among his people.

And like a true leader that he is, he identifies himself with his lieutenant for all that has happened.

Even more, he identifies himself with his whole people in his prayer in [verse 155](#) below.

Herein, again, is a type of what the Holy Prophet Muhammad did for his people.

...وَأَنْتَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ (١٥١)

for Thou art the Most Merciful of those who sow mercy!"

Section 19

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا الْعِجْلَ سَيِّئًا لَّهُمْ غَضَبٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَذِلَّةٌ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا...

152. Those who took the calf (for worship) will indeed be overwhelmed with wrath from their Lord, and with shame in this life:

C1120. The consequences were twofold:

- spiritual, in that Allah's grace is withdrawn, and
- even in the present life of this world, in that godly men also shun the sinner's company, and he is isolated.

وَكَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُفْتَرِينَ (١٥٢)

thus do We recompense those who invent (falsehoods).

وَالَّذِينَ عَمِلُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ ثُمَّ تَابُوا مِن بَعْدِهَا وَأَمَّؤُوا...

153. But those who do wrong but repent thereafter and (truly) believe,

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ مِن بَعْدِهَا لَعَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ (١٥٣)

verily Thy Lord is thereafter Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

وَلَمَّا سَكَتَ عَن مُّوسَى الْعُغْصَبُ أَخَذَ الْأَلْوَابَ...

154. When the anger of Moses was appeased, he took up the tablets:

...وَفِي نُسُخَتِهَا هُدًى وَرَحْمَةٌ لِّلَّذِينَ هُمْ لِرَبِّهِمْ يَرْهَبُونَ (١٥٤)

in the writing thereon was guidance and mercy for such as fear their Lord.

وَاخْتَارَ مُوسَى قَوْمَهُ سَبْعِينَ رَجُلًا لِّمِيقَاتِنَا...

155. And Moses chose seventy of his people for Our place of meeting:

C1121. Seventy of the elders were taken up to the Mount, but left at some distance from the place where Allah spoke to Moses.

They were to be silent witnesses, but their faith was not yet complete, and they dared to say to Moses: "We shall never believe in thee until we see Allah in public" (2:55).

They were dazed with thunder and lightning, and might have been destroyed but for Allah's mercy on the intercession of Moses.

... فَلَمَّا أَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّجْفَةُ قَالَ ...

when they were seized with violent quaking, he prayed:

C1122. Rajfah: violent quaking, earthquake.

I take it to refer to the same event as is described by the word *Sd'iqat* in 2:55, the thunder and lightning that shook the mountainside.

... رَبِّ لَوْ شِئْتَ أَهْلَكْتَهُم مِّن قَبْلِ وَإِيَّايَ ...

"O my Lord! if it had been Thy will Thou couldst have destroyed, long before, both them and me:

... أَنُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَّا ...

wouldst Thou destroy us for the deeds of the foolish one among us?

... إِنَّ هِيَ إِلَّا فِتْنَتُكَ ...

This is no more than Thy trial:

C1123. Moses was guiltless, but he identifies himself with his whole people, and intercedes with Allah on their behalf.

He recognises that it was a trial, in which some of his people failed to stand the test. Such failure was worthy of punishment. But he pleads for mercy for such as erred from weakness and not from contumacy, and were truly repentant, although all who erred were in their several degrees worthy of punishment.

... يُضِلُّ بِهَا مَن تَشَاءُ ...

by it Thou causest whom Thou wilt to stray,

C1124. Cf. 2:26.

... وَتَهْدِي مَن تَشَاءُ ...

and Thou leadest whom Thou wilt into the right path.

...أَنْتَ وَلِيُّنَا فَاعْفُرْ لَنَا وَارْحَمْنَا...

Thou art our protector: so forgive us and give us Thy mercy;

...وَأَنْتَ خَيْرُ الْغَافِرِينَ (١٥٥)

for Thou art the best of those who forgive.

وَكَتُبْ لَنَا فِي هَذِهِ الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ إِنَّا هُدْنَا إِلَيْكَ...

156. "And ordain for us that which is good, in this life and in the hereafter:

for we have turned unto Thee."

...قَالَ عَذَابِي أُصِيبُ بِهِ مَنْ أَشَاءُ وَرَحْمَتِي وَسِعَتْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ ...

He said:

"With My punishment I visit whom I will; but My mercy extendeth to all things.

C1125. Allah's mercy is in and for all things. All nature subserves a common purpose, which is for the good of all His creatures.

Our faculties and our understandings are all instances of His grace and mercy. Each unit or factor among his creatures benefits from the others and receives them as Allah's mercy to itself: and in its turn, each contributes to the benefit of the others and is thus an instance of Allah's mercy to them.

His mercy is universal and all-pervasive; while His justice and punishment are reserved for those who swerve from His plan and (to use a mediaeval juridical formula) go out of His Peace.

...فَسَاكِنِبْهَا لِلَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ وَيُؤْتُونَ الزَّكَاةَ...

That (Mercy) I shall ordain for those

- who do right,
- and practice regular charity,

...وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِآيَاتِنَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (١٥٦)

- and those who believe in Our signs;

C1126. The personal grace and mercy -and their opposite- are referred to the singular pronoun "I" while the impersonal Law, by which Allah's Signs operate in His universe, is referred to the plural pronoun of authority and dignity, "**We**".

C.87 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(7:158-171)

*With the advent of the Holy Prophet,
The light and guidance which he brought
For all mankind from Allah
Superseded the earlier Law for the Jews.
The good and the upright among them
Followed the new Light, but
The rest were scattered through the earth.*

Section 20

الَّذِينَ يَتَّبِعُونَ الرَّسُولَ النَّبِيَّ الْأُمِّيَّ...

157. "Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered Prophet,

...الَّذِي يَجِدُونَهُ مَكْتُوبًا عِنْدَهُمْ فِي التَّوْرَةِ وَالْإِنْجِيلِ...

whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures); in the law and the Gospel;

C1127. In this verse is a prefiguring, to Moses, of the Arabian Messenger, the last and greatest of the messengers of Allah. Prophecies about him will be found in the Tawrah and the Injil.

In the reflex of the Tawrah as now accepted by the Jews, Moses says: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me" (Deut. 18:15):

the only Prophet who brought a Shariah like that of Moses was Muhammad Al-Mustafa, and he came of the house of Ismail the brother of Isaac the father of Israel.

In the reflex of the Gospel as now accepted by the Christians, Christ promised another Comforter (John 14:16): the Greek word Paraclete which the Christians interpret as referring to the Holy Spirit is by our Doctors taken to be Periclyte, which would be the Greek form of Ahmad. See 61:6.

...يَأْمُرُهُم بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَاهُمْ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ...

for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil:

...وَيُحِلُّ لَهُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَيُحَرِّمُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْخَبَائِثَ...

he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure);

...وَيَضَعُ عَنْهُمْ إِصْرَهُمْ وَالْأَغْلَالَ الَّتِي كَانَتْ عَلَيْهِمْ.....

He releases them from their heavy burdens and from the yokes that are upon them.

C1128. Aglal: plural of gullun, a yoke, an iron collar.

In the formalism and exclusiveness of the Jews there were many restrictions which were removed by Islam, a religion of freedom in the faith of Allah, of universality in the variety of races, languages, manners and customs.

...فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِهِ وَعَزَّرُوهُ وَنَصَرُوهُ وَاتَّبَعُوا النُّورَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ مَعَهُ...

So it is those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light which is sent down with him,

C1129. Light which is sent down with him: the words are "with him", not "to him", emphasizing the fact that the Light which he brought illumines every one who has the privilege of joining his great and universal Fellowship.

...أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ (١٥٧)

it is they who will prosper."

C1130. Falah: prosperity in its general sense as well as in its spiritual sense.

- In the general sense it means that right conduct is the only door to happiness and well-being.
- In the spiritual sense it means that Faith and its fruits (right conduct) are the only gates to salvation.

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا الَّذِي...

158. Say:

"O men! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of Allah,

C1131. Our attention having been directed to various prophets, who were sent with missions to their several peoples, and in each of whose careers there is some prefigurement of the life of the last and greatest of them, we are now asked to listen to the proclamation of Muhammad's universal mission. We contemplate no longer, after this, partial truths.

It is not now a question of saving Israel from the bondage of Egypt, nor teaching Midian the ethics of business, nor reclaiming the people of Lut from sexual sin or Thamud from the sin of oppression in power, or 'Ad from arrogance and ancestor worship. Now are set forth plainly the issues of Life and Death, the Message of Allah, the One Universal God to all mankind.

...لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ...

to Whom belongeth the dominion of the heavens and the earth:

...لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ...

there is no god but He:

it is He that giveth both life and death.

...فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ النَّبِيِّ الْأُمِّيِّ الَّذِي يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَكَلِمَاتِهِ...

So believe in Allah and His Messenger, the unlettered Prophet, who believed in Allah and His words:

C1132. "Unlettered," as applied to the Prophet here and in verse 157 above, has three special significations.

1. He was not versed in human learning: yet he was full of the highest wisdom, and had a most wonderful knowledge of the previous Scriptures. This was a proof of his inspiration.

It was a miracle of the highest kind, a "Sign", which every one could test then, and every one can test now.

2. All organized human knowledge tends to be crystallized, to acquire a partial bias or flavour of some "school" of thought. The highest Teacher had to be free from any such taint, just as a clean slate is necessary if a perfectly clear and bold message has to be written on it.
3. In 3:20 and 62:2, the epithet is applied to the Pagan Arabs, because, before the advent of Islam, they were unlearned.

That the last and greatest of the Prophets should arise among them, and they and their language be made the vehicle of the new, full and universal light, has also a meaning, which is explained in C. 12-15.

...وَاتَّبِعُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ (١٥٨)

follow him that (so) ye may be guided."

وَمِنْ قَوْمِ مُوسَى أُمَّةٌ يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ (١٥٩)

159. Of the people of Moses there is a section who guide and do justice in the light of truth.

وَقَطَعْنَا لَهُمُ اثْنَيْ عَشَرَ سَبْطًا أُمَّمًا...

160. We divided them into twelve tribes or nations.

C1133. We now come to some incidents in Jewish history, which have been referred to in 2:57-60. Here they have special reference to their bearing on the times when early Islam was preached.

The Twelve Tribes and the parable drawn from them have been explained in n. 73 to 2:60.

...وَأَوْحَيْنَا إِلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ إِذِ اسْتَسْقَاهُ قَوْمُهُ أَنِ اضْرِبْ بِعَصَاكَ الْحَجَرَ...

We directed Moses by inspiration, when his (thirsty) people asked him for water:

"Strike the rock with thy staff":

...فَانبَجَسَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا قَدْ عَلِمَ كُلُّ أُنَاسٍ مَّشْرِبَهُمْ...

out of it there gushed forth twelve springs:

each group knew its own place for water.

...وَوَضَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الْغَمَامَ وَأَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَنَّاءَ وَالسَّلْوَىٰ...

We gave them the shade of clouds, and sent down to them manna and quails, (saying):

...كُلُوا مِنْ طَيِّبَاتِ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ...

"Eat of the good things We have provided for you":

...وَمَا ظَلَمُونَا وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ (١٦٠)

(but they rebelled): to Us they did no harm, but they harmed their own souls.

C1134. Cf. 2:57 and n. 71.

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْتَضُوا لِمَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ وَإِذْ قِيلَ لَهُمْ اسْكُنُوا هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةَ وَكُلُوا مِنْهَا حَيْثُ شِئْتُمْ...

161. And remember it was said to them:

"Dwell in this town and eat therein as ye wish,

C1135. As in 7:19, we may construe "eat" here to mean not only eating literally, but enjoying the good things of life.

...وَقُولُوا حِطَّةً وَادْخُلُوا الْبَابَ سُجَّدًا نَّعْفِرُ لَكُمْ حَطِيئَاتِكُمْ...

but say the word of humility and enter the gate in a posture of humility; We shall forgive you your faults;

...سَنَزِيدُ الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٦١)

We shall increase (the portion of) those who do good."

فَبَدَّلَ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ قَوْلًا غَيْرَ الَّذِي قِيلَ لَهُمْ...

162. But the transgressors among them changed the word from that which had been given them;

...فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رَجْزًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَظْلِمُونَ (١٦٢)

so We sent on them a plague from heaven, for that they repeatedly transgressed.

C1136. Cf. 2:58-59, and n. 72.

The story is here told by way of parable for the times of Islam. Hence we have a few verbal changes: e.g., "dwell in this town" instead of "enter this town." etc.

Section 21

وَأَسْأَلُهُمْ عَنِ الْقَرْيَةِ الَّتِي كَانَتْ حَاضِرَةَ الْبَحْرِ....

163. Ask them concerning the town standing close by the sea.

...إِذْ يَعْدُونَ فِي السَّبْتِ ...

Behold! they transgressed in the matter of the Sabbath.

C1137. Cf. 2:65 and n. 79.

Fishing, like every other activity, was prohibited to Israel on the Sabbath day. As this practice was usually observed, the fish used to come up with a sense of security to their water channels or pools openly on the Sabbath day, but not on other days when fishing was open.

This was a great temptation to the law-breakers, which they could not resist. Some of their men of piety protested, but it had no effect. When their transgressions, which we may suppose, extended to other commandments, passed beyond bounds, the punishment came. (R).

... إِذْ تَأْتِيهِمْ حِيَّتْ أَنَّهُمْ يَوْمَ سَبْتِهِمْ شُرَعًا ...

For on the day of their Sabbath their fish did come to them, openly holding up their heads,

...وَيَوْمَ لَا يَسْتُرُونَ لَا تَأْتِيهِمْ ...

but on the day they had no Sabbath, they came not:

...كَذَلِكَ نَبْلُوهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ (١٦٣)

thus did We make a trial of them, for they were given to transgression.

وَإِذْ قَالَتْ أُمَّةٌ مِّنْهُمْ لِمَ نَعِظُونَ قَوْمًا اللَّهُ مُهْلِكُهُمْ أَوْ مُعَذِّبُهُمْ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا...

164. When some of them said:

"Why do ye preach to a people whom Allah will destroy or visit with a terrible punishment?"

C1138. There are always people who wonder, no doubt sincerely, what good it is to preach to the wicked. The answer is given to them here:

- every man who sees evil must speak out against it; it is his duty and responsibility to Allah;
- there is always a chance that the warning may have effect and save a precious soul.

This passage has a special meaning for the times when our Holy Prophet was preaching in Makkah, apparently without results. But it applies to all times.

...قَالُوا مَعْذِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَنْفُونَ (١٦٤)

Said the preachers: "To discharge our duty to your Lord and perchance they may fear Him."

فَلَمَّا نَسُوا مَا دُكِّرُوا بِهِ أَنْجَيْنَا الَّذِينَ يَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ السُّوءِ...

165. When they disregarded the warnings that had been given them, We rescued those who forbade evil;

...وَأَخَذْنَا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا بِعَذَابٍ بَّيْسٍ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ (١٦٥)

but We visited the wrongdoers with a grievous punishment, because they were given to transgression.

فَلَمَّا عَتَوْا عَن مَّا نُهَوُّوا عَنْهُ قُلْنَا لَهُمْ ...

166. When in their insolence they transgressed (all) prohibition, We said to them:

... كُونُوا قِرَدَةً خَاسِيِينَ (١٦٦)

"Be ye apes, despised and rejected."

C1139. Cf. 2:65 and n. 79.

وَإِذْ تَأَذَّنَ رَبُّكَ لِيُبْعَثَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ مَنْ يَسُومُهُمْ سُوءَ
الْعَذَابِ...

167. Behold! thy Lord did declare that He would send against them, to the Day of Judgment, those who would afflict them with grievous penalty.

C1140. See Deut, 11:28:

"A curse if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day":

also Deut, 28:49;

"The Lord shall bring a nation against thee from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth: a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand";

and many other passages.

...إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَسَرِيعُ الْعِقَابِ وَإِنَّهُ لَغَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (١٦٧)

Thy Lord is quick in retribution,
but he is also Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

وَقَطَّعْنَاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أُمَّمًا...

168. We broke them up into sections on this earth.

C1141. The dispersal of the Jews is a great fact in the world's history. Nor has their persecution ended yet, nor is it likely to end as far as we can foresee.

...مِّنْهُمْ الصَّالِحُونَ وَمِنْهُمْ دُونَ ذَلِكَ...

There are among them some that are the righteous, and some that are the opposite.

...وَبَلَوْنَاهُمْ بِالْحَسَنَاتِ وَالسَّيِّئَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ (١٦٨)

We have tried them with both prosperity and adversity: in order that they might turn (to us).

فَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ وَرَثُوا الْكِتَابَ يَأْخُذُونَ عَرَضَ هَذَا الْأَدْنَى...

169. After them succeeded an (evil) generation:

they inherited the Book, but they chose (for themselves) the vanities of this world,

C1142. Merely inheriting a Book, or doing lip service to it, does not make a nation righteous. If they succumb to the temptations of the world, their hypocrisy becomes all the more glaring. "High finance" is one of these temptations.

Cf. also 2:80: "the Fire shall not touch us except for a few numbered days":

and 2:88, about their blasphemous self-sufficiency.

...وَيَقُولُونَ سَيُعْفَرُ لَنَا...

saying (for excuse):

"(everything) will be forgiven us."

...وَأِنْ يَأْتِهِمْ عَرَضٌ مِثْلُهُ يَأْخُذُوهُ...

(Even so), if similar vanities came their way, they would (again) seize them.

...أَلَمْ يُؤْخَذْ عَلَيْهِمْ مِيثَاقُ الْكِتَابِ أَنْ لَا يَقُولُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ إِلَّا الْحَقَّ ...

Was not the Covenant of the Book taken from them, that they would not ascribe to Allah anything but the truth?

C1143. Cf. Exod. 19:5-8; 24:3; 34:27; and many other passages.

... وَدَرَسُوا مَا فِيهِ...

And they study what is in the Book.

...وَالدَّارُ الْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِلَّذِينَ يَنْفُونَ أَقْلًا تَعْقِلُونَ (١٦٩)

But best for the righteous is the home in the hereafter:

will ye not understand?

وَالَّذِينَ يُمَسِّكُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ

الْمُصَلِّحِينَ (١٧٠)

170. As to those who hold fast by the Book and establish regular prayer; never shall We suffer the reward of the righteous to perish.

وَإِذْ نَتَقْنَا الْجَبَلَ فَوْقَهُمْ كَأَنَّهُ ظُلَّةٌ وَظَنُّوا أَنَّهُ وَاقِعٌ بِهِمْ...

171. When We shook the mount over them, as if it had been a canopy, and they thought it was going to fall on them

...خُذُوا مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ بِقُوَّةٍ...

(We said): "Hold firmly, to what We have given you

C1144. Cf. 2:63 and n 78.

...وَاذْكُرُوا مَا فِيهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ (١٧١)

and bring (even) to remembrance what is therein; perchance ye may fear Allah."

C1145. Therein: in the Book or Revelation, in "what We have given you."

C.88 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(7:172-206)

*Mankind have the nature of good
Created within them: yet doth Allah
By His Signs keep up a constant
Reminder to men of His Holy Names.
Those who err scarce realise
How gradually they fall into sin.
Their respite has a term; the doom
Must come, and it may be on a sudden.
So humbly draw nigh to the Lord,
Declare His glory, and rejoice in His service.*

Section 22

وَإِذْ أَخَذَ رَبُّكَ مِن بَنِي آدَمَ مِنْ ظُهُورِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ...

172. When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants,

C1146. This passage has led to differences of opinion in interpretation.

According to the dominant opinion of commentators each individual in the posterity of Adam had a separate existence from the time of Adam, and a Covenant was taken from all of them, which is binding accordingly on each individual.

The words in the text refer to the **descendants of the Children of Adam**, i.e., to all humanity, born or unborn, without any limit of time. Adam's seed carries on the existence of Adam and succeeds to his spiritual heritage.

Humanity has been given by Allah certain powers and faculties, whose possession creates on our side special spiritual obligations which we must faithfully discharge: see 5:1. and n. 682. These obligations may from a legal point of view be considered as arising from implied Covenants.

In the preceding verse ([7:171](#)) a reference was made to the implied Covenant of the Jewish nation.

Now we consider the implied Covenant of the whole of humanity, for the Holy Prophet's mission was world-wide. (R).

...وَأَشْهَدَهُمْ عَلَىٰ أَنفُسِهِمْ أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ...

and made them testify concerning themselves, (saying): "Am I not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?"

...قَالُوا بَلَىٰ شَهِدْنَا... ..

They said: "Yea! we do testify!"

C1147. The Covenant is completed in this way. We acknowledge that Allah is our Creator, Cherisher, and Sustainer: therefore we acknowledge our duty to Him:

when we so testify concerning ourselves, the obligation is as it were assumed by us; for it follows from our very nature when it is pure and uncorrupted.

...أَنْ تَقُولُوا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَنْ هَذَا غَافِلِينَ (١٧٢)

(This), lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment:

"Of this we were never mindful."

...أَوْ تَقُولُوا إِنَّمَا أَشْرَكَ آبَاؤُنَا مِنْ قَبْلُ وَكُنَّا ذُرِّيَّةً مِّنْ بَعْدِهِمْ ...

173. Or lest ye should say:

"Our fathers before us may have taken false gods but we are (their) descendants after them:

...أَفَنُهْلِكُنَا بِمَا فَعَلَ الْمُبِطِلُونَ (١٧٣)

wilt thou then destroy us because of the deeds of men who were futile?"

C1148. The latent faculties in man are enough to teach him the distinction between good and evil, to warn him of the dangers that beset his life.

But to awaken and stimulate them, a personal appeal is made to each individual through the "still small voice" within him. This in its uncorrupted state acknowledges the truth and, as it were, swears its Covenant with Allah. There is, therefore, no excuse for any individual to say, either,

- that he was unmindful, or
- that he should not be punished for the sins of his fathers, because his punishment (if any) comes from his personal responsibility and is for his own rejection of faith and the higher spiritual influences. (R).

وَكَذَلِكَ نَفَصَّلُ الْآيَاتِ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ (١٧٤)

174. Thus do We explain the signs in detail! and perchance they may turn (unto Us).

وَإِثْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ الَّذِي آتَيْنَاهُ آيَاتِنَا ...

175. Relate to them the story of the man to whom We sent our signs,

C1149. Commentators differ whether this story or parable refers to a particular individual, and if so, to whom.

The story of Balaam the seer, who was called out by Israel's enemies to curse Israel, but who blessed Israel instead, (Num. 22-24) is quite different. It is better to take the parable in general sense.

There are men, of talents and position, to whom great opportunities of spiritual insight come, but they perversely pass them by. Satan sees his opportunity and catches them up. Instead of rising higher in the spiritual world, their selfish and worldly desires and ambitions pull them down, and they are lost.

...فَانسَلَخَ مِنْهَا فَاتَّبَعَهُ الشَّيْطَانُ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْعَاوِينَ (١٧٥)

but he passed them by:

so Satan followed him up, and he went astray.

وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَرَفَعْنَاهُ بِهَا وَلَكِنَّهُ أَخْلَدَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ...

176. If it had been Our will We should have elevated him with our signs; but he inclined to the earth, and followed his own vain desires.

C1150. Notice the contrast between the exalted spiritual honours which they would have received from Allah if they had followed His Will, and the earthly desires which eventually bring them low to the position of beasts and worse.

...فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ الْكَلْبِ...

His similitude is that of a dog:

... إِنْ تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْهِ يَلْهَثْ ...

if you attack him, he lolls out his tongue, or

C1151. The dog, especially in the hot weather, lolls out his tongue, whether he is attacked and pursued and is tired, or he is left alone. It is part of his nature to slobber. So with the man who rejects Allah.

Whether he is warned or left alone, he continues to throw out his dirty saliva. The injury he will do will be to his own soul. But there may be infection in his evil example,. So we must protect others. And we must never give up hope of his own amendment. So we must continue to warn him and make him think.

...أَوْ تَتْرُكُهُ يَلْهَثَ ...

if you leave him alone he (still) lolls out his tongue.

... ذَلِكَ مَثَلُ الْقَوْمِ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا ...

That is the similitude of those who reject our signs;

...فَأَقْصَصَ الْقَصَصَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ (١٧٦)

so relate the story; perchance they may reflect.

سَاءَ مَثَلًا الْقَوْمُ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَأَنْفُسَهُمْ كَانُوا يَظْلِمُونَ (١٧٧)

177. Evil as an example are people who reject Our signs and wrong their own souls.

مَنْ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِي...

178. Whom Allah doth guide, he is on the right path:

...وَمَنْ يُضِلِّلْ فَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ (١٧٨)

whom He rejects from His guidance, such are the persons who perish.

C1152. Those who reject Allah will be deprived of Allah's grace and guidance. His Mercy is always open for sincere repentance.

But with each step downwards, they go lower and lower, until they perish.

وَلَقَدْ ذَرَأْنَا لِجَهَنَّمَ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنسِ...

179. Many are the Jinns and men, We have made for Hell:

...لَهُمْ قُلُوبٌ لَّا يَفْقَهُونَ بِهَا...

They have hearts wherewith they understand not,

...وَلَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا...

eyes wherewith they see not,

C1153. Cf. 2:18.

Though they have apparently all the faculties of reason and perception, they have so deadened them that those faculties do not work, and they go headlong into hell. They are, as it were, made for Hell.

...وَلَهُمْ آذَانٌ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا...

and ears wherewith they hear not.

...أُولَئِكَ كَالْأَنْعَامِ بَلْ هُمْ أَضَلُّ...

They are like cattle, nay more misguided:

...أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْعَافِلُونَ (١٧٩)

for they are heedless (of warning).

وَلِلَّهِ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ فَادْعُوهُ بِهَا...

180. The most beautiful names belong to Allah:

so call on Him by them;

C1154. As we contemplate Allah's nature, we can use the most beautiful names to express His attributes. There are hundreds of such attributes. In the opening Surah, we have this indicated in a few comprehensive words, such as **Rahman** (most Gracious), **Rahim** (most Merciful), **Rabb-ul-'alamin** (Cherisher and Sustainer of the worlds).

Our bringing such names to remembrance is part of our Prayer and Praise. But we must not associate with people who use Allah's names profanely, or so as to suggest anything derogatory to His dignity or His unity.

Cf. 17:110.

...وَدَرُوا الَّذِينَ يُلْحِدُونَ فِي أَسْمَائِهِ...

but shun such men as use profanity in His names:

...سَيُجْزَوْنَ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (١٨٠)

for what they do, they will soon be requited.

وَمِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا أُمَّةٌ يَهْتَدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ (١٨١)

181. Of those We have created are people who direct (others) with truth, and dispense justice therewith.

Section 23

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِّنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (١٨٢)

182. Those who reject Our signs, We shall gradually visit with punishment, in ways they perceive not.

C1154a. See also 68:44 and n. 5626.

وَأْمَلِي لَهُمْ إِن كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ (١٨٣)

183. Respite will I grant unto them:

for My scheme is strong (and unfailing).

أَوَلَمْ يَتَفَكَّرُوا مَا بِصَاحِبِهِمْ مِّنْ حِنَّةٍ...

184. Do they not reflect?

Their companion is not seized with madness:

C1155. Their companion, i.e., the Holy Prophet, who lived with and amongst them. He was accused of madness because he behaved differently from them.

- He had no selfish ambitions;
- he was always true, in thought, word, and deed:
- he was kind and considerate to the weak, and was not dazzled by worldly power or wealth or position:
- he was undeterred by fear of the strong, the mockery of the cynics, the bitterness of the evil, or the indifference of the heedless.

That is why he stood out boldly against wrong: he did not mince his words, and his warnings were not mealy-mouthed.

...إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ (١٨٤)

he is but a perspicuous warner.

C1156. Mubin; perspicuous.

The reason why I have not used a simpler word, such as "plain" or "clear" is explained in n. 716 to 5:15.

Al-Mustafa's sermons were not polite reminders, with an eye to the flattery of weaknesses in high places or national vanities or crowd passions. They brought out every foible into the glare of light, by a fiery eloquence fed by inspiration from Allah.

...أَوَلَمْ يَنْظُرُوا فِي مَلَكُوتِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ...

185. Do they see nothing in the government of the heavens and the earth and all that Allah hath created?

C1157. An appeal to Allah's most wonderful universe should at once convince a thinking mind of man's nothingness, and Allah's power, glory, and goodness.

Man's term here is fleeting. If he is not warned by the great Signs, and the Messages which call his attention to them, is he capable of any faith at all?

...وَأَنْ عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونَ قَدِ اقْتَرَبَ أَجْلُهُمْ...

(Do they not see) that it may well be that their term is nigh drawing to an end?

...فَبِأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَهُ يُؤْمِنُونَ (١٨٥)

In what message after this will they then believe?

...مَنْ يُضِلِلَ اللَّهُ فَلاَ هَادِيَ لَهُ...

186. To such as Allah rejects from His guidance, there can be no guide;

...وَيَذَرُهُمْ فِي طُغْيَانِهِمْ يَعْمَهُونَ (١٨٦)

He will leave them in their trespasses, wandering in distraction.

C1158. Cf. 2:15.

If Allah's light is removed, the best of them can only wander hither and thither, like blind men, in distraction.

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا...

187. They ask thee about the (final) hour, when will be its appointed time?

...قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي لَا يُجَلِّيهَا لِوَقْتِهَا إِلَّا هُوَ...

Say:

"The knowledge thereof is with my Lord (alone): none but He can reveal as to when it will occur.

C1159. The fact of its coming is a certainty: the exact time appointed for it is not revealed by Allah. If it were it would be so momentous as to disturb our thoughts and life. It would be a heavy burden to us. Our duty is to be prepared for it at all times.

It will come when we least expect it. In the present Gospels Jesus says the same thing: he does not know the Hour, but it will come suddenly.

"But of that day and that Hour knoweth no man, no, not the angles which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." (Mark. 13:32-33).

...تَقُلْتُ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَا تَأْتِيكُمْ إِلَّا بَغْتَةً...

Heavy were its burden through the heavens and the earth.

Only, all of a sudden, will it come to you.

...يَسْأَلُونَكَ كَأَنَّكَ خَفِيٌّ عَنْهَا...

They ask thee as if thou wert eager in search thereof:

C1160. Hafiyy is usually construed to mean; "eager or anxious in search of":

the preposition following here is 'an = concerning, about.

Some commentators (including Raghib) understand it in this passage to mean "well-acquainted."

In 19:47, with the preposition *bi* following it, it signifies "well-disposed to", favourable to, good to, kind to."

...قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (١٨٧)

Say: "The knowledge thereof is with Allah (alone), but most men know not."

قُلْ لَا أَمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ...

188. Say:

"I have no power over any good or harm to myself except as Allah willeth.

...وَلَوْ كُنْتُ أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ لَأَسْتَكْتَرْتُ مِنَ الْخَيْرِ وَمَا مَسَّنِيَ السُّوءُ...

If I had knowledge of the unseen, I should have multiplied all good, and no evil should have touched me,

...إِن أَنَا إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ وَبَشِيرٌ لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ (١٨٨)

I am but a warner, and a bringer of glad tidings to those who have faith."

C1161. A warner to all, and a bringer of glad tidings to those who have faith, because they will profit by the glad tidings.

As every one is invited to faith, the glad tidings are offered to all, but they are not necessarily accepted by all.

Section 24

هُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ نَفْسٍ وَاحِدَةٍ وَجَعَلَ مِنْهَا زَوْجَهَا لِيَسْكُنَ إِلَيْهَا...

189. It is He who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love).

C1162. Cf. 4:1, and n. 504, where the construction is explained.

...فَلَمَّا تَعَشَّاهَا حَمَلَتْ حَمْلًا خَفِيفًا فَمَرَّتْ بِهِ...

When they are united, she bears a light burden and carries it about (unnoticed).

...فَلَمَّا أَثْقَلَتْ دَعَا اللَّهُ رَبَّهُمَا ...

When she grows heavy, they both pray to Allah their Lord, (saying):

C1163. The mystery of the physical birth of man, as it affects the father and the mother, only touches the imagination of the parents in the later stages when the child is yet unborn and yet the life stirs within the body of the expectant mother.

The coming of the new life is a solemn thing, and is fraught with much hope as well as much unknown risk to the mother herself.

The parents in their anxiety turn to Allah. If this feeling of solemnity, hope, and looking towards Allah were maintained after birth, all would be well for the parents as well as for the rising generation. But the attitude changes, as the verses following show.

... لئن آتَيْتَنَا صَالِحًا لَنُكُونَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ (١٨٩)

"If Thou givest us a goodly child, we vow we shall (ever) be grateful."

C1164. Goodly: salih: includes the following ideas:

- sound in body and mind;
- healthy;
- righteous;
- of good moral disposition.

...فَلَمَّا آتَاهُمَا صَالِحًا جَعَلَا لَهُ شُرَكَاءَ فِيمَا آتَاهُمَا...

190. But when He giveth them a goodly child, they ascribe to others a share in the gift they have received:

C1165. When the child is born, the parents forget that it is a precious gift of Allah, -a miracle of Creation, which should lift their minds up to the higher things of Allah.

Instead their gradual familiarity with the new life makes them connect it with many superstitious ideas or rites and ceremonies, or they take it as a matter of course, is a little plaything of the material world. This leads to idolatry or false worship, or the selling up of false standards, in derogation of the dignity of Allah.

...فَنَعَالَى اللَّهُ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ (١٩٠)

but Allah is exalted, high above the partners they ascribe to Him.

أَيُّشْرِكُونَ مَا لَا يَخْلُقُ شَيْئًا وَهُمْ يُخْلَقُونَ (١٩١)

191. Do they indeed ascribe to Him as partners things that can create nothing, but are themselves created?

وَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ لَهُمْ نَصْرًا وَلَا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَنْصُرُونَ (١٩٢)

192. No aid can they give them, nor can they aid themselves!

وَأِنْ تَدْعُوهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَى لَا يَتَّبِعُوكُمْ...

193. If ye call them to guidance, they will not obey:

...سَوَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ أَدَعَوْتُمُوهُمْ أَمْ أَنْتُمْ صَامِتُونَ (١٩٣)

for you it is the same whether ye call them or ye hold your peace!

C1166. When false worship takes root, the teacher of Truth finds much to discourage him. As far as he is concerned, it seems as if he has produced no effect. Yet his duty is to continue his work, in the spirit of verse 199 below, forgiving all opposition, teaching what is right, and not joining the ignorant in their attitude of doubt and indecision.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ عِبَادٌ أَمْثَالِكُمْ...

194. Verily those whom ye call upon besides Allah are servants like unto you:

C1167. False gods, whether idols or deified men, or ideas and superstitions, have no existence of their own, independent of Allah's creation. They are Allah's creatures, and like servants are subject to His authority.

Deified men are not real men, but false ideas of men.
They cannot help themselves: how can they help others?

...فَادْعُوهُمْ فَلْيَسْتَجِيبُوا لَكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (١٩٤)

call upon them, and let them listen to your prayer, if ye are
(indeed) truthful!

أَلَهُمْ أَرْجُلٌ يَمْشُونَ بِهَا...

195. Have they feet to walk with?

...أَمْ لَهُمْ أَيْدٍ يَبْطِشُونَ بِهَا...

or hands to lay hold with?

...أَمْ لَهُمْ أَعْيُنٌ يُبْصِرُونَ بِهَا... ..

or eyes to see with?

...أَمْ لَهُمْ آذَانٌ يَسْمَعُونَ بِهَا...

or ears to hear with?

...فَلْ ادْعُوا شُرَكَاءَكُمْ ثُمَّ كِيدُونِ فَلَا تُنظِرُونِ (١٩٥)

Say: "Call your god-partners, scheme (your worst) against me,
and give me no respite!

C1168. Here is a test and a challenge. If the false gods had any power or even existence, collect them all together, and, says the Prophet of Allah. "Let them do their worst against me."

They cannot: because the whole thing is based on a superstition and a chimera.

إِنَّ وَلِيِّيَ اللَّهُ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ الْكِتَابَ وَهُوَ يَتَوَلَّى الصَّالِحِينَ (١٩٦)

196. "For my protector is Allah, Who revealed the Book (from time to time), and He will choose and befriend the righteous.

وَالَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَكُمْ...

197. "But those ye call upon besides Him, are unable to help you,

...وَلَا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَنْصُرُونَ (١٩٧)

and indeed to help themselves."

وَأِنْ تَدْعُهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَىٰ لَا يَسْمَعُوا...

198. If thou callest them to guidance, they hear not.

...وَتَرَاهُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَيْكَ وَهُمْ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ (١٩٨)

Thou wilt see them looking at thee, but they see not.

C1169. The beauty and righteousness of Al-Mustafa's life were acknowledged on all hands, until he received the mission to preach and to fight against evil.

What happened then?

Evil erected barricades for itself. It had eyes, but it refused to see. It had ears, but it refused to hear. It had intelligence, but it blocked up its channels of understanding.

Even now, after Fourteen Centuries, a life of unexampled purity, probity, justice, and righteousness is seen in false lights by blind detractors!

خُذِ الْعَفْوَ وَأْمُرْ بِالْعُرْفِ وَأَعْرِضْ عَنِ الْجَاهِلِينَ (١٩٩)

199. Hold to forgiveness;

command what is right; but turn away from the ignorant.

C1170. Allah comforts the Prophet and directs his mind to three precepts:

1. to forgive injuries, insults, and persecution;
2. to continue to declare the faith that was in him, and not only to declare it, but to act up to it in all his dealings with friends and foes;
3. to pay no attention to ignorant fools, who raised doubts or difficulties, hurled taunts or reproaches, or devised plots to defeat the truth:

they were to be ignored and passed by, not to be engaged in fights and fruitless controversies, or conciliated by compromises.

وَأِمَّا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ...

200. If a suggestion from Satan assail thy (mind), seek refuge with Allah;

C1171. Even a Prophet of Allah is but human. He might think that revenge or retaliation, or a little tactful silence when evil stalks abroad, or some compromise with ignorance, might be best for the cause.

He is to reject such suggestions.

إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ (٢٠٠)

for He heareth and knoweth (all things).

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا إِذَا مَسَّهُمْ طَائِفٌ مِّنَ الشَّيْطَانِ تَذَكَّرُوا فَإِذَا هُمْ مُبْصِرُونَ (٢٠١)

201. Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil from Satan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance when lo! they see (aright)!

C1172. Allah protects His own, as no one else can. He is the sure refuge -and the only one- for men of faith.

If we are confused or angry, being blinded by this world, He will open our eyes.

وَإِخْوَانُهُمْ يَمُدُّوهُمْ فِي الْعَيِّ ثُمَّ لَا يُفْصِرُونَ (٢٠٢)

202. But their brethren (the evil ones) plunge them deeper into error, and never relax (their efforts).

C1173. We go back to consider the ungodly, whom we left at verse 198, in order to be taught our behaviour towards evil.

The forces of evil never relax their efforts to draw their "brethren" (those who go into their family) deeper and deeper into the mire of sin and destruction.

وَإِذَا لَمْ تَأْتِهِمْ بآيَةٍ قَالُوا لَوْلَا اجْتَبَيْتَهَا...

203. If thou bring them not a revelation, they say: "Why hast thou not got it together?"

C1174. "Ayah" here, I think, means specially an Ayah of the Holy Quran.

The infidels did not believe in revelation, and used to taunt the Holy Prophet, as much as to say that he used to put together words and promulgate them as revelation. The answer is contained in the sentence that follows.

No human composition could contain the beauty, power, and spiritual insight of the Quran. Without inspiration it is impossible to suppose that a man, with or without literary and philosophic training could produce such a book as the Quran.

...فَلْ إِنَّمَا أَتَّبِعُ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ مِنْ رَبِّي ...

Say: "I but follow what is revealed to me from my Lord:

...هَذَا بَصَائِرُ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ ...

This is (nothing but) lights from your Lord,

C1175. "Lights": eyes, faculty of spiritual insight.

The revelation is for us

1. spiritual eyes,
2. guidance, and
3. mercy,

- 1 is the highest in degree:

just as a blind man, if he is given eyes and the faculty of sight, is at once removed into an entirely new world, so those who can reach the stage of spiritual insight pass into and become citizens of a wholly new spiritual World,

- 2 is next in degree;

the man of the world can act up to the teaching about right conduct and prepare for the Hereafter,

- 3 is the Mercy of Allah, free to every one, saint and sinner, who sincerely believes and puts his trust in Allah.

...وَهُدًى وَرَحْمَةً لِّقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ (٢٠٣)

and guidance, and mercy, for any who have faith.

وَإِذَا قُرِئَ الْقُرْآنُ فَاسْتَمِعُوا لَهُ وَأَنْصِتُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (٢٠٤)

204. When the Qur'an is read, listen to it with attention, and hold your peace:

that ye may receive Mercy.

وَأَذْكُرْ رَبَّكَ فِي نَفْسِكَ تَضَرُّعًا وَخِيفَةً...

205. And do thou (O reader!) bring thy Lord to remembrance in thy (very) soul, with humility and in reverence,

...وَدُونَ الْجَهْرِ مِنَ الْقَوْلِ بِالْغُدُوِّ وَالْآصَالِ...

without loudness in words, in the mornings and evenings;

...وَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ الْعَافِلِينَ (٢٠٥)

and be not thou of those who are unheedful.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ...

206. Those who are near to thy Lord, disdain not to do him worship:

C1176. The higher you are in spiritual attainment, the more is your desire and your opportunity to serve and worship your Lord and Cherisher and the Lord and Cherisher of all the worlds: and the greater is your pride in that service and that worship.

...وَيُسَبِّحُونَهُ وَلَهُ يَسْجُدُونَ (٢٠٦)

they celebrate His praises, and bow down before Him.

C1177. At this stage a Sajdah or prostration is indicated, as a sign of our humble acceptance of the privilege of serving and worshipping Allah, - a fitting close to Surah in which we are led, through a contemplation of the stories of the Messengers of Allah, to the meaning of revelation and its relation to our moral and spiritual progress.



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