



إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ



Truly, my Lord enlarges the provision for whom He wills of His slaves, and (also) restricts (it) for him,

Quran English Translation & Commentary

By

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Saba'

سَبَأٍ

Introduction and Summary

Now we begin a series of Surahs Surah 34 to Surah 39 which recapitulate some of the features of the spiritual world. This Surah leads off with emphasis on Allah's Mercy and Power and Truth.

- Then (in Surah 35) we are told how angels manifest the Power of Allah, and how different is Good from Evil and Truth from Falsehood.
- Surah 36 is devoted to the Holy Prophet and the Quran that came through him.

- In Surah 37 the emphasis is on the snares of the Evil One;
- in Surah 38, on the conquest of evil by wisdom and power as in the case of David and Solomon, and by Patience and Constancy as in the case of Job; and
- in Surah 39, on the Final Judgement, which will sort out Faith from Unfaith and give to each its due.

The chronology has here no significance. This Surah belongs to the early Makkan period.

Summary- No Good or Truth is ever lost; Human Power and Prosperity are fleeting; but Allah's Power and Justice endure, and will enforce personal responsibility on man on the Last Day (34:1-30, and C. 190).

Faith and Unfaith will eventually find their true places and true values; Falsehood has no power; Truth is with Allah (34:31-54, and C. 191).

C.190 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(34:1-30)

*Allah's Mercy and power endure forever;
 Man should understand and not resist
 Allah's Revelation. Human wisdom and Power,
 As given to David, were only for establishing
 Righteousness. Human glory, like Solomon's
 Rested on slender foundations. Saba'
 But enjoyed her fair and prosperous state
 As long as she obeyed the Law
 Of Allah, but perished for unrighteousness.
 Learn, then, that the Mercy and Power, Wisdom
 And Justice, of Allah are beyond all comparison.
 Do right and prepare for Final Day.*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

... الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ ...

1. Praise be to Allah,

C3785. All Creation declares His Praises, i.e., manifests His Mercy and Power, Goodness and Truth, all the sublime attributes summed up in His Most Beautiful Names (7:180 and 17:110 and notes).

For man to contemplate these is in itself a Revelation. This sentiment opens five Surahs of the Quran evenly distributed, viz., Surah 1, 6, 18, 34, and 35. Here the point most emphasised is that His wisdom and mercy comprehend all things, extended in space or in time-here and everywhere, now and evermore. (R).

... الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ...

to Whom belong all things in the heavens and on earth:

... وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ...

to Him be Praise in the Hereafter:

... وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ (١)

and He is Full of Wisdom, acquainted with all things.

يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا...

2. He knows all that goes into the earth, and all that comes out thereof;

C3786. An ignorant man may think that water absorbed in the soil or seed sown beneath the sod is lost, but it replenishes numerous rills, and streams, and feeds and sustains numerous roots and forms of life, and throws up all kinds of vegetable life.

So with things that come out of the earth: who can count the myriad forms of herbs and trees that grow and perish, and yet sustain a continuous life for ages and ages?

Yet these are symbolical of other things or entities beyond time or space, and beyond physical form. We see the birth and death of the animal part of man: When he is buried beneath the soil, the ignorant man thinks there is an end of him.

But what countless stages still lie before him for his inner and spiritual life?

And so with the Platonic Forms of Things: Goodness, Virtue, Mercy, and the various functions of the soul. They are never lost, but go up to Allah.

... وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ...

all that comes down from the sky and all that ascends thereto:

C3787. The vapours that rise from the earth and ascend to the sky descend again as rain and snow and as symbols of Allah's Mercy. So are the prayers of the devout and the call of those in agony for help and light, answered by the descent of mercy and guidance, help and light from the Throne of Majesty.

The Imagery indicated in the last note can be worked out to moral and spiritual forces, and they all centre in Allah.

Do not forget that, just as there is the element of Mercy, so there is an element of Justice and Punishment - in the physical forces as well as in the moral and spiritual forces, all centering in Allah.

... وَهُوَ الرَّحِيمُ الْعَفُورُ (٢)

and He is the Most Merciful, the Oft-Forgiving.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَأَتَأْتِينَا السَّاعَةُ ...

3. The Unbelievers say, "Never to us will come the hour":

C3788. The last two verses prepared us to realise the position of Unbelievers in Allah's great Universe. They are the discord in the universal harmony of Prayer and Praise. Their existence is due to the grant of a limited free-will, the Trust which the Unbelievers have betrayed (see 33:72 and n. 3777-79 and n. 3780-82).

But they must and will be eliminated: see [verse 5 below](#).

For there is nothing more certain in the world, physical, moral, and spiritual, than that every cause, great or small, must have its corresponding consequences.

... قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي لَتَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ ...

say,

"Nay! but most surely, by my Lord, it will come upon you --

C3789. The strongest emphasis and the most perfect assurance of certainty are indicated by reference to the authority of Allah Himself, the Ruler of the Day of Judgment.

... عَالِمِ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِثْقَالُ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ...

by Him Who knows the unseen -- from Whom is not hidden the least little atom in the Heavens or on earth:

... وَلَا أَصْغَرُ مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُّبِينٍ (٣)

nor is there anything less than that, or greater, but is in the Record Perspicuous:

C3790. In the symbolical language of our own human experience, a record is more enduring than memory: in fact (if properly preserved) it is perpetual.

If, further, it is expressed in clear language, without any obscurity, it can always be read with perfect precision and without any doubt whatever. Apply these qualities, free from human defect to Allah's laws and decrees. They are unerring and enduring. Everything, greater or small, will receive due recognition-a Reward for Good and a Punishment for Evil.

لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ ...

4. That He may reward those who believe and work deeds of righteousness:

... أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ (٤)

for such is Forgiveness and a Sustenance Most Generous."

C3791. "Sustenance": Spiritual in things spiritual, and physical in things physical.

It implies not only the satisfaction of desire, but the provision of means for sustaining the ground won and for winning more ground in the march of progress.

وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رَّجْزٍ أَلِيمٍ (٥)

5. But those who strive against Our Signs, to **frustrate** them -- for such will be a Penalty -- a Punishment most humiliating.

C3792. Cf. 22:51.

Allah's Plan cannot be **frustrated**. It is those who work against it, who will be eliminated and destroyed.

وَيَرَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ مِن رَّبِّكَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ...

6. And those to whom knowledge has come see that the (Revelation) sent down to thee from thy Lord -- that is the Truth,

C3793. Against the doubts and vain imaginings of the Ignorant is the certainty of knowledge of the Enlightened: that Allah reveals Himself, and that His Revelation is true, and leads to the Path of true Guidance.

That Path is the Path of Allah, Who, in His infinite Love and Mercy, is Worthy of all Praise. It is possible to connect this with the "Record Perspicuous" in verse 3 above: 'it is perspicuous.... for the Enlightened do see...'

... وَيَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ (٦)

and that it guides to the Path of the Exalted (in Might), Worthy of all praise.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَلْ نَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ يُنْبئُكُمْ إِذَا مُرِّقُمْ كُلَّ مُمَرِّقٍ...

7. The Unbelievers say (in ridicule):

"Shall we point out to you a man that will tell you, when ye are all scattered to pieces in disintegration,

C3794. This is a taunt against the holy Prophet, and it is applicable to all who preach the doctrine of a Future Life.

How is it possible, say the Unbelievers, that when a man's body is reduced to dust and scattered about, the man should rise again and become a new Creation?

They add that such a preacher is inventing a deliberate falsehood or is demented.

... إِنَّكُمْ لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ (٧)

that ye shall (then be raised) in a New Creation?

أَفْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ...

8. "Has he invented a falsehood against Allah, or has a spirit (seized) him?" --

C3795. The answer is:

the Future Life is the truest of all Truths; so far is the man who teaches it from being demented, that it is those who deny it, that lack knowledge and are in real jeopardy for their souls; for they persecute Truth and must not only suffer defeat, but go farther and farther from Realities and thus suffer the worst hallucination about the next world.

...بَلِ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ فِي الْعَذَابِ وَالضَّلَالِ الْبَعِيدِ (٨)

Nay,

it is those who believe not in the Hereafter, that are in (real) Penalty, and in farthest Error.

أَقْلَمُ يَرَوْنَ إِلَى مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ...

9. See they not what is before them and behind them, of the sky and the earth?

C3796. The men who walk in spiritual darkness and laugh at a Hereafter have but to observe the Power of Allah in the nature around them.

He Who created the heavens and the earth and sustains them can surely make a new Creation! And the cosmic Laws which are so just and inevitable should surely give them an idea of the inexorable Justice that must redress all balance.

... إِنْ نَّشَاءُ نَخْسِفُ بِهِمُ الْأَرْضَ أَوْ نُسْقِطُ عَلَيْهِمْ ...

If We wished, We could cause the earth to swallow them up,

C3797. Cf. 16:45, and n. 2071.

Who are these puny creatures-skeptics that question the might and majesty of Allah?

... كِسْفًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ ...

or cause a piece of the sky to fall upon them.

C3798. Cf. 26:187.

This was actually a challenge hurled at Shu'aib and a shower of ashes and cinders came from above and overwhelmed the challengers!

... إِنْ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَةٌ لِّكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُّئْتِبٍ (٩)

Verily in this is a Sign for every devotee that turns to Allah (in repentance).

Section 2

وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُودَ مِمَّا فُضِّلْنَا ...

10. We bestowed Grace aforetime on David from Ourselves:

C3799. Cf. 21:79-80, and notes 2733-34.

David had the gift of song and sacred music, and this is shown in his Psalms.

All nature-hills and birds-sing and echo back the Praises of Allah.

... يَا جِبَالُ أَوِّبِي مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرَ ...

"O ye Mountains! sing ye back the Praises of Allah with him!
and ye birds (also)!

... وَالنَّالَةَ الْحَدِيدَ (١٠)

and We made the iron soft for Him --

C3800. Iron or steel is hard stuff: but in the hands of a craftsman it becomes soft and pliable, and with it can be made instruments for the defence of righteousness.

These, in the literal sense, are coats of mail, and defensive armour, and the manufacture of them is traditionally attributed to David. (R).

أَنْ اَعْمَلْ سَابِغَاتٍ وَقَدِّرْ فِي السَّرْدِ...

11. (Commanding),

"Make thou coats of mail, balancing well the rings of chain armor,

C3801. Coats of chain armour have to be made with cunning art, if the chains are to fit into each other and the whole garment is to be worn in comfort in fierce warfare.

... وَاعْمَلُوا صَالِحًا...

and work ye righteousness;

C3802. Note the transition from the singular, "make them coats of mail", to the plural "and work ye righteousness".

The first is addressed to David, who was the artificer of defensive armour; and the second is addressed to him and his whole people. He made the armour, but it was to be worn not only by him but all the warriors. But he and all his people were to be careful to see that they did not deviate from the paths of righteousness.

Fighting is a dangerous weapon and may well degenerate (as it so often does) into mere violence. They were to see that this should not happen, and they were told that Allah was watching over them all with the personal solicitude implied in the singular pronoun "I".

... إِيَّايَ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا (١١)

for be sure I see (clearly) all that ye do."

وَلَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ الْإِذْنُ أَنْ يَنْبَغِ عَلَيْهِمْ أَنْ يُسَلِّمَانَ الرِّيحَ غُدُوها شَهْرًا وَرَوَاحَهَا شَهْرًا...

12. And to Solomon (We made) the Wind (obedient):

its early morning (stride) was a month's (journey), and its evening (stride) was a month's (journey);

C3803. Cf. 21:81-82, n. 2736, and 38:36-38.

See also 27:38-39.

The winds are swift and can cover in a short morning's or evening's flight the distance which it takes a whole month to cover on foot or by bullock cart.

In our own day, with air speeds of 400 miles and more per hour, this seems a moderate statement.

... وَأَسْلَمْنَا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقَطْرِ...

and We made a **Font** of molten brass to flow for him;

C3804. In the Old Testament, II. Chronicles, Chapter 3, and Chapter 4, are described the various costly materials with which Solomon's Temple was built, and it was furnished with vessels, candle-sticks, lamps, censers, etc.

"Solomon made all these vessels in great abundance: for the weight of the brass could not be found out" (II. Chronicles, 4:18).

"Also he made a molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass, and five cubits the height thereof: and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about" (II. Chronicles, 4:2).

The receptacle or "sea" or Font was made of molten brass; presumably it contained flowing water for washing with.

... وَمِنَ الْجِنِّ مَن يَعْمَلُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ...

and there were Jinns that worked in front of him, by the leave of his Lord,

C3805. See 27:17, and n. 3257. (R).

... وَمَن يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنَ أَمْرِنَا نُذِقْهُ مِنِ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ (١٢)

and if any of them turned aside from Our command, We made Him taste of the Penalty of the Blazing Fire.

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحَارِبَ وَتَمَاثِيلَ...

13. They worked for him as he desired, (making) Arches, Images,

C3806. Mihrab "(Plural Maharib), translated "arch", may be applied to any fine, elevated, spacious architectural structure.

As the reference here is to the Temple of Solomon, the word "**arches**" is I think most appropriate. "**Arches**" would be structural Ornaments in the Temple.

Images would be like the images of oxen and Cherubim mentioned in II. Chronicles, 4:3 and 3:14;

the Basins (II. Chronicles 4:22) were perhaps huge dishes round which many men could sit together and eat, according to ancient Eastern custom, while the cooking Cauldrons or Pots (II. Chronicles, 4:16), were fixed in one place, being so large in capacity that they could not be moved about.

Indian readers will get some idea of them from the huge cooking Dega, which they use in the festivals.

... وَجَفَانَ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ ...

Basins as large as Reservoirs, and (cooking) Cauldrons fixed (in their places):

... اَعْمَلُوا آلَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا ...

"Work ye, sons of David, with thanks!

C3807. The building of the Temple was a great event in Israelite history. They are asked to be thankful without which all that glory and power would be out of place, and it fell away in a few generations, with the decline of the moral spirit which was at its back.

... وَقَلِيلٌ مِّنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّاكِرُونَ (١٣)

But few of My servants are grateful!"

فَلَمَّا قُضِيَْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتُ ...

14. Then, when We decreed (Solomon's) death,

... مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَوْتِهِ إِلَّا دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ مِنسَأَتَهُ...

nothing showed them his death except a little worm of the earth, which kept (slowly) gnawing away at his staff:

C3808. This allegory illustrates three points:

1. however great and glorious human power and grandeur may be, it is only for a time, and it may fade away even before people know of its decline;
2. the most remarkable events may be brought to light, not by a flourish of trumpets, but by a humble individual, unknown and unseen, who works imperceptibly and undermines even so strong a thing as staff, on which a great man may lean;
3. work done by men merely on the basis of brute Strength or fear, as in the case of the Jinns, will not endure.

This is brought up in strong contrast against the Power and Majesty of Allah, which will endure, which cannot be sapped, and which can only be fully appreciated by a training of the will and heart.

In the same way, in David's story above, his mighty strength as a warrior (see 2:251) and his skill in making armour are only to be valued when used, as it was used, in the service of Allah, in righteous works (34:11).

... فَلَمَّا خَرَّ تَبَيَّنَتِ الْجِنُّ...

so when he fell down, the Jinns saw plainly

C3809. The Jinns looked upon their work as a Penalty, and so it became to them. The people who worked at the Temple of Solomon as the People of David worked and gloried in their work as a thanksgiving to Allah, and their work became sanctified.

The Jinns knew nothing of hidden secrets; they only saw the obvious, and had not even the significance of the little worm that slowly gnawed away Solomon's staff.

... أَن لَّوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ (٤١)

that if they had known the unseen, they would not have tarried in the humiliating Penalty (of their Task).

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكَنِهِمْ آيَةٌ...

15. There was, for Saba', aforetime, a Sign in their homeland --

C3810. This is the same city and territory in Yemen as is mentioned in 27:22: see note there as to its location.

There the period was the time of Solomon and Queen Bilqis.

Here it is some centuries later. It was still a happy and prosperous country, amply irrigated from the Maarib dam. Its roads or perhaps its canals, were skirted by gardens on both sides, right and left: at any given point, you always saw two gardens. It produced fruit, spices, and frankincense, and got the name of Araby the Blest for that part of the country.

... جَنَّاتٍ عَن يَمِينٍ وَشِمَالٍ...

two Gardens to the right and to the left.

... كُلُوا مِن رِّزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ...

Eat of the Sustenance (provided) by your Lord, and be grateful to Him:

... بَلَدَةٌ طَيِّبَةٌ ...

a territory fair and happy,

... وَرَبُّ غَفُورٌ (١٥)

and a Lord Oft-Forgiving!

C3811. The land was fair to look upon; the people happy and prosperous; and they enjoyed the blessings of Allah, Who is Gracious and does not punish small human faults or weaknesses.

فَأَعْرَضُوا...

16. But they turned away (from Allah),

... فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلًا ...

and We sent against them the flood

C3812. Into that happy Garden of Eden in Arabia Felix (Araby the Blest) came the insidious snake of Unfaith and Wrongdoing.

- Perhaps the people became arrogant of their prosperity, or of their science, or of their skill in irrigation engineering, in respect of the wonderful works of the Dam which their ancestors had constructed.
- Perhaps they got broken up into rich and poor, privileged and unprivileged, high-caste and low-caste, disregarding the gifts and closing the opportunities given by Allah to all His creatures.
- Perhaps they broke the laws of the very Nature which fed and sustained them.

The Nemesis came.

It may have come suddenly, or it may have come slowly. The pent-up waters of the eastern side of the Yemen highlands were collected in a high lake confined by the Dam of Maarib. A mighty flood came; the dam burst; and it has never been repaired since. Ibis was a spectacular crisis: it may have been preceded and followed by slow desiccation of the country.

... العَرَم ...

(released) from the Dams,

C3813. "Arim" = Dams or Embankments, may have been a proper noun, or may simply mean the great earth-works fined with stone, which formed the Maarib dam, of which traces still exist.

The French traveler T.J. Arnaud saw the town and ruins of the Dam of Maarib in 1843, and described its gigantic works and its inscriptions: See Journal Asiatique for January 1874: the account is in French.

For a secondary account in English, see W.B. Harris. Journey Through Yemen, Edinburgh, 1893.

The dam as measured by Arnaud was two miles long and 120 ft. high. The date of its destruction was somewhere

about 120 A.D., though some authorities put it much later.

... وَبَدَّلْنَا لَهُم جَنَّتَيْنِ...

and We converted their two Garden (rows)

... نَوَاتِي أَكْلٍ خَمْطٍ وَأَثَلٍ وَشَيْءٍ مِّن سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ (١٦)

into "gardens" producing bitter fruit, and tamarisks, and some few (stunted) Lote trees.

C3814. The flourishing "**Garden of Arabia**" was converted into a waste.

- The luscious fruit trees became wild, or gave place to wild plants with bitter fruit.
- The feathery leaved tamarisk, which is only good for twigs and wattle-work, replaced the fragrant plants and flowers.
- Wild and stunted kinds of thorny bushes, like the wild Lote-tree, which were good for neither fruit nor shade, grew in place of the pomegranates, the date-palms and the grape-vines.

The Lote-tree belongs to the family Rhamnaceae, Zizyphus Spina Christi, of which (it is supposed) Christ's crown of thorns was made, allied to the Zizyphus Jujuba, or ber tree of India.

Wild, it is shrubby, thorny and useless. In cultivation it bears good fruit, and some shade, and can be thornless, thus becoming a symbol of heavenly bliss: 56:28.

ذَلِكَ جَزَيْنَاهُمْ بِمَا كَفَرُوا...

17. That was the Requital We gave them because they ungratefully rejected Faith:

C3815. Kafar.- intensive form:

"those who deliberately and continuously reject Allah and are ungrateful for His Mercies, as shown by their constant wrong-doing.

... وَهَلْ نُجَازِي إِلَّا الْكُفُورَ (١٧)

and never do We give (such) requital except to such as are ungrateful rejecters.

وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا فُرى ظَاهِرَةً...

18. Between them and the Cities on which We had poured Our blessings, We had placed Cities in prominent positions,

C3816. An instance is now given of the sort of covetousness on the part of the people of Saba, which ruined their prosperity and trade and cut their own throats.

The old Frankincense route was the great Highway (imam mubin 15:79; sabil muqim, 15:76) between Arabia and Syria. Through Syria it connected with the great and flourishing Kingdoms of the Euphrates and Tigris valleys on the one hand and Egypt on the other, and with the great Roman Empire round the Mediterranean.

At the other end, through the Yemen Coast, the road connected, by sea transport, with India, Malaya, and China. The Yemen-Syria road was much frequented, and Madain Salih was one of the stations on that route, and afterwards on the Pilgrim route: see Appendix No: 4 to Surah 26.

Syria was the land on which Allah **"had poured His blessings"**, being a rich fertile country, where Abraham had lived: it includes the Holy Land of Palestine. The route was studded in the days of its prosperity with many stations (cities) close to each other, on which merchants could travel with ease and safety, "by night and by day". The close proximity of stations prevented the inroads of highwaymen.

... وَقَدَرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ ...

and between them We had appointed stages of journey in due proportion:

... سِيرُوا فِيهَا لَيَالِيَ وَأَيَّامًا آمِنِينَ (١٨)

"Travel therein, secure, by night and by day."

فَقَالُوا ...

19. But they said:

C3817. Said: in this and other places in the Quran, "language" is used for thought or deed, The Commentators call it the "language of actual facts" (zabdn hal) as opposed to the "language of words" (zabdn qal).

... رَبَّنَا بَاعِدْ بَيْنَ أَسْفَارِنَا ...

"Our Lord! place longer distances between our journey-stages."

C3818. The covetous Saba people, in order to get more profit from travellers' supplies by concentrating them on a few stations which they could monopolise, tended to choke off traffic and ruin the big trade. Selfishness often runs counter to true self-interest.

It is a historical fact that the great Yemen-Syria route in Arabia declined with the decline of Yemen. There were no doubt physical causes, but supreme above all were the moral causes, the grasping nature of the people, and their departure from the highest standards of righteousness.

... وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ ...

But they wronged themselves (therein).

... فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ ...

At length We made them as a tale (that is told),

C3819. The people of Saba were given every chance. They had prosperity, skill, trade and commerce, and a healthy and beautiful country.

They also had, apparently, great virtues, and as long as they remained true to their virtues, i.e., to the Law of Allah, they remained happy and contented. But when they became covetous and selfish, and became jealous of other people's prosperity instead of rejoicing in it, they fell from grace and declined.

It may be that the climate changed, the rainfall became scantier, perhaps on account of the cutting down of hill

forests; trade routes changed, on account of the people falling off in the virtues that make men popular: behind all the physical causes was the root-cause, that they began to worship mammon, self, greed, or materialism. They fell into the snare of Satan.

They gradually passed out of history, and became only a name in a story. Moral: it is only Allah's Mercy that can give true happiness or prosperity, and happiness or prosperity is only a snare unless used for the highest service of Allah and man.

... وَمَرَقْنَاَهُمْ كُلَّ مَمْرَقٍ ...

and We dispersed them all in scattered fragments.

... إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ (١٩)

Verily in this are Signs for every (soul that is) patiently constant and grateful.

وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَ عَلَيْهِمْ إِبْلِيسُ ظَنَّهُ ...

20. And on them did Satan prove true his idea,

C3820. Cf. 17:62.

Satan out of arrogance had said, when he asked for respite from the Most High; "I will bring (Adam's) descendants under my sway, all but a few."

This was now proved true on the Saba people. He had no power to force them. It was their own will that went wrong and put them into his power.

... فَاتَّبَعُوهُ إِلَّا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٢٠)

and they followed him, all but a Party that believed.

وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِّن سُلْطَانٍ ...

21. But he had no authority over them --

... إِنْآ لِنَعْلَمَ مَن يُّؤْمِنُ بِالْآخِرَةِ مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍّ ...

except that We might test the man who believes in the Hereafter from him who is in doubt concerning it:

C3821. Might test. - the word in the original is might know.

It is not that Allah does not know all. Why does He want to test?

It is in order to help us subjectively, to train our will, to put us definitely the question, "Will you obey Allah or other than Allah?"

Cf. n. 467 to 3:154.

... وَرَبُّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيظٌ (٢١)

and thy Lord doth watch over all things.

Section 3

قُلْ ادْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ...

22. Say: "Call upon other (gods) whom ye fancy, besides Allah:

C3822. Other objects of worship, such as Self, or Money, or Power, or things we imagine will bring us luck or prosperity, though they can do nothing of the kind.

... لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ...

they have no power -- not the weight of an atom -- in the heavens or on earth;

C3823. The false gods have no power whatever either in heaven or on earth, either in influencing our spiritual life or our ordinary worldly life.

To suppose that they have some share, or that they can give some help to Allah, even though Allah is Supreme, is both false and blasphemous.

Allah is One and Supreme, without sharer, helper, or equal.

... وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهَا مِنْ شِرْكٍَ وَمَا لَهُ مِنْهُمْ مِّنْ ظَهِيرٍ (٢٢)

no (sort of) share have they therein,
nor is any of them a helper to Allah.

وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ...

23. "No intercession can avail in His Presence except for **those** for whom He has granted permission.

C3824. Cf. 20:109, n. 2634, where I have explained the two possible modes of interpretation.

Each soul is individually and personally responsible. And if there is any intercession, it can only be by Allah's gracious permission. For the Day of judgment will be a terrible Day, or Day of Wrath (*Dies Irae*) according to the Latin hymn, when the purest souls will be stupefied at the manifestation of Allah's Power.

See next note.

... حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُزِّعَ عَن قُلُوبِهِمْ ...

So far (is this the case) that, when terror is removed from their hearts

C3825. "Their hearts": the pronoun "**their**" is referred to the angels nearest to Allah.

On the Day of Judgment there will be such an irresistible manifestation of Power that even they will be silent for a while, and will scarcely realise what is happening. They will question each other, and only thus will they regain their bearings.

Or "**their**" may refer to those who seek intercession.

...قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ...

(at the Day of Judgement, then) will they say, 'What is it that your Lord commanded?'

C3826. In their mutual questionings they will realise that Allah's Judgment, as always, is right and just. Does this mean that no sort of intercession is required?

...قَالُوا الْحَقَّ...

They will say, 'That which is true and just;

... وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ (٢٣)

and He is the Most High, Most Great."

قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ...

24. Say: "Who gives you sustenance, from the heavens and the earth?"

C3827. There are six propositions introduced here with the word "**Say**", at verses 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 30.

- They clearly explain the doctrine of Unity (verse 22),
- the Mercy of Allah (verse 24),
- man's Personal Responsibility (verse 25),
- the Final Justice of Allah (verse 26),
- Allah's Power and Wisdom (verse 27),
- and the Inevitability of the Judgment, by which true values will be restored (verse 30).

... قُلِ اللَّهُ ...

Say: "It is Allah,

... وَإِنَّا أَوْ إِيَّاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًىٰ أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٢٤)

and certain it is that either we or ye are on right guidance or in manifest error!"

C3828. Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, are incompatible, one with another. In this matter we can make no compromise.

It is true that in men there may be various degrees of good or evil mixed together, and we have to tolerate men as our fellow-creatures, with all their faults and shortcomings. But this does not mean that we can worship Allah and Mammon together.

Wrong is the negation of Right as light is of darkness. Though there may be apparently varying depths of darkness, this is only due to the imperfection of our vision: it is varying strengths of light as perceived by our relative powers of sight. So we may perceive the Light of Allah in varying degrees according to our spiritual vision.

But in simple questions of Right or Wrong, we are faced by the Categorical Imperative.

قُلْ لَّا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا أَجْرَمْنَا وَلَا نُسْأَلُ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ (٢٥)

25. Say:

"Ye shall not be questioned as to our sins, nor shall we be questioned as to what ye do."

C3829. Therefore do not persecute us, or bring personal animus to bear on us. We must do our duty in declaring the universal Message, which is for you as much as for us.

قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبُّنَا ثُمَّ يَفْتَحُ بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ...

26. Say:

"Our Lord will gather us together and will in the end decide the matter between us (and you) in truth and justice:

C3830. Human controversies are vain and inconclusive. If you put your trust in Allah and we put our trust in Allah, we belong to one Brotherhood, and we shall see the perfect Truth finally when the Time comes.

... وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ الْعَلِيمُ (٢٦)

and He is the One to decide, the One Who knows all."

قُلْ أَرُونِي الَّذِينَ أَحَقُّمُ بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ...

27. Say:

"Show me those whom ye have joined with Him as partners:

... كَلَّا ...

by no means (can ye).

... بَلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ (٢٧)

Nay,

He is Allah, the Exalted in Power, the Wise."

C3831. Wisdom and Power only belong to Allah. If you put your trust in other things, they will fail you, because they do not exist-as objects of worship.

All else that you set your hearts upon will and must fail you, because they cannot in any wise be brought into rivalry with Allah.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا...

28. We have not sent thee but as a universal (Messenger) to men, giving them glad tidings, and warning them (against sin),

C3832. Allah's Revelation, through the holy Prophet, was not meant for one family or tribe, one race or set of people. It was meant for all mankind, to whom, if they turn to Allah, it is a Message of the glad tidings of His Mercy, and if they do not turn to Him, it is a warning against sin and the inevitable Punishment.

That the Punishment does not come immediately (as far as they perceive) is no reason for doubting it. It has been declared in clear and unequivocal terms, and nothing can be more certain.

Why delay?

Why ask carping questions?

Why not profit by the Message, turn to Allah in repentance, and bring forth the fruits of righteousness?

... وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٢٨)

but most men understand not.

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (٢٩)

29. They say: "When will this promise (come to pass) if ye are telling the truth?"

قُلْ لَكُمْ مِيعَادُ يَوْمٍ لَا تَسْتَأْخِرُونَ عَنْهُ سَاعَةً وَلَا تَسْتَقْدِمُونَ (٣٠)

30. Say:

"The appointment to you is for a day, which ye cannot put back for an hour nor put forward."

C3833. When that Day actually arrives, your period of probation will have passed. It will be too late. Now is the time for action and spiritual profit.

C.191 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(34:31-54)

*Unfaith has no stable foundations to rest on;
Misleaders and misled will all be responsible
For their deeds. true values are not to be judged
By the seeming good of this Life; true Good
Will come to its own in the End, however
Derided and scorned in the period of Trial.
Revelation and the Mission of the men of Allah
Will stand every test. Allah's truth will endure,
While Falsehood will perish, and its votaries find
The door of Repentance closed in the End.*

Section 4

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ بِهَذَا الْقُرْآنِ وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ...

31. The Unbelievers say: "We shall neither believe in this scripture nor in (any) that (came) before it."

C3834. To the Pagans all scriptures are taboo, whether it be the Quran or any Revelation that came before it.

The people of the Book despised the Pagans, but in their arrogant assumption of superiority, prevented them, by their example, from accepting the latest and most universal Scripture when it came in the form of the Quran. This relative position, of men who fancy themselves on their knowledge, and men whom they despise but exploit and mislead, always exists on this earth.

I have mentioned the people of the Book and the Pagan Arabs merely by way of illustration.

... وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ مَوْثُوفُونَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ ...

Couldst thou but see when the wrongdoers will be made to stand before their Lord,

... يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى بَعْضِ الْقَوْلِ ...

throwing back the word (of blame) on one another!

C3835. One disbelief is as bad as another. There is little to choose between them. But when the final account will be taken, there will be mutual recriminations between the one and the other.

... يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا ...

Those who had been despised will say to the arrogant ones:

C3836. The Pagans will naturally say to the people of the Book:

"You misled us; you had previous Revelations, and you should have known how Allah sent His Messengers; had it not been for your bad example, we should have received Allah's Revelation and become Believers."

Or the humble followers will say this to their leaders, or those less gifted will say to those by whom they were misled and exploited.

The dichotomy is between such as pretentiously held their heads high in the world and such as they profited by but held in contempt.

... لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ (٣١)

"Had it not been for you, we should certainly have been believers!"

قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعُوا ...

32. The arrogant ones will say to those who had been despised:

... أَنَحْنُ صَدَدْنَاكُمْ عَنِ الْهُدَىٰ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ ...

"Was it we who kept you back from Guidance after it reached you?"

... بَلْ كُنْتُمْ مُجْرِمِينَ (٣٢)

Nay, rather, it was ye who transgressed."

C3837. In the mutual reproaches between the misleaders and the misled ones, there will be a grain of

truth on both sides, and yet both were guilty in not realising their own personal responsibility.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا...

33. Those who had been despised will say to the arrogant ones:

... بَلْ مَكْرُ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ ...

"Nay! it was a plot (of yours) by day and by night.

C3838. The more intelligent ones who exploit the weaker ones are constantly plotting night and day to keep the latter ignorant and under their thumb. They show them the ways of Evil, because by that means they are more in their power.

... إِذْ تَأْمُرُونَنَا أَنْ نَكْفُرَ بِاللَّهِ وَنَجْعَلَ لَهُ أَنْدَادًا ...

Behold! ye (constantly) ordered us to be ungrateful to Allah and to attribute equals to Him!"

C3839. If all men worshipped the true God, and none but Him, they could not on the one hand be trampled upon, and on the other hand they could not be unjust. It is in the worship of false ideals or false gods that alluring structures of fraud and injustice are built up.

... وَأَسْرُوا النَّدَامَةَ لِمَا رَأَوْا الْعَذَابَ...

They will declare (their) repentance when they see the Penalty:

C3840. Cf. 10:54, and n. 1445.

All these mutual recriminations would be swallowed up in the general realisation of the Truth by both sides in the Hereafter. They would be prepared openly to declare their repentance, but it would be too late. The yoke of slavery to Evil will be on their necks.

Allah's justice put it there, but what else could it do?

Their own sins will cry out against them and hold them under their yokes.

... وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْطَالَ فِي أَعْنَاقِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا...

We shall put yokes on the necks of the Unbelievers:

... هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ (٣٣)

it would only be a requital for their (ill) deeds.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّنْ نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا...

34. Never did We send a Warner to a population, but the wealthy ones among them said:

C3841. Whenever the Message of Allah comes, the vested interests range themselves against it. Worldly power has made them arrogant; worldly pleasures have deadened their sensibility to Truth. They reject the Message because it attacks their false position.

... إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ (٣٤)

"We believe not in the (message) with which ye have been sent."

وَقَالُوا نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ (٣٥)

35. They said: "We have more in wealth and in sons, and we cannot be punished."

C3842. Their arrogance is openly based on their worldly power and position, their family influence, and the strength of their man-power,

Turn back again to the contrast drawn between the arrogant ones and those whom they despised, in [verses 31-33](#).

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ...

36. Say:

"Verily my Lord enlarges and restricts the provision to whom He pleases,

C3843. Provision (or Sustenance): good things of all kinds in this life, material goods as well as power, opportunities, influence, mental gifts, etc.

These do not necessarily all go to the good, nor is their denial to be interpreted to mean that it is a withdrawal of Allah's favour. Very often the contrary is the case. Their distribution is in accordance with the Universal Plan and

Purpose, which is all-wise and all-good. But ignorant people cannot understand this.

... وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٣٦)

but most men understand not."

Section 5

وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي تُقَرَّبُكُمْ عِنْدَنَا زُلْفَى...

37. It is not your wealth nor your sons, that will bring you nearer to Us in degree:

C3844. The true test of progress in spiritual life is to be measured by other things than material wealth and influence. What we have to ask ourselves is:

are we the least bit nearer to Allah?

... إِنْ مَنَ آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ الضَّعْفِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا...

but only those who believe and work Righteousness -- these are the ones for whom there is a multiplied Reward for their deeds,

C3845. Cf. 30:39.

All worldly good is but a shadow that will pass away. Its intrinsic and eternal value is small. But those who work righteousness in Faith are on the true path of self-development. The reward they will get will be infinitely more than their merits entitle them to. For they will partake of the boundless Bounties of Allah.

... وَهُمْ فِي الْعُرُقَاتِ آمِنُونَ (٣٧)

while secure they (reside) in the dwellings on high!

C3846. Their happiness will not only be great in quantity ("**multiplied**"), but it will be of a specially sublime quality ("**dwellings on high**"), and it will endure without any chance of its loss or diminution ("**secure they reside**").

وَالَّذِينَ يَسْعَوْنَ فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعَاجِزِينَ أُولَئِكَ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُحْضَرُونَ (٣٨)

38. Those who strive against Our Signs, to frustrate them, will be given over into Punishment.

C3847. Cf. 34:5, where the argument was urged that human efforts to defeat Allah's Plan will only bring humiliation to those who indulge in them.

Here the argument is rounded off by the statement that such efforts, besides their failure, will land them in an abyss of punishment contrasted with the "dwellings on high" of the blessed ones.

قُلْ إِنَّ رَبِّي يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَن يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ...

39. Say:

"Verily my Lord enlarges and restricts the Sustenance to such of His servants as He pleases:

C3848. Cf. 34:36 above, and n. 3843.

... لَهُ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ ...

and nothing do ye spend the least (in his cause) but He replaces it:

... وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ (٣٩)

for He is the Best of those Who grant Sustenance.

C3849. Even in the seeming inequality of distribution of the good things of life, Allah has a wise and merciful purpose; for nothing arises by chance.

He is the best to give us, now and evermore, just those things which subserve our real needs and advance our inner development.

وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ...

40. One day He will gather them all together, and say to the angels,

C3850. Here we have the case of the worship of angels or supposed Powers of Allah, or supposed beneficent

spirits that men turn to instead of worshipping the true God. In fact these are mere names to the false worshippers. It is not the Good that they worship but the Evil, which leads them astray.

... أَهْوَلَاءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ (٤٠)

"Was it you that these men used to worship?"

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ...

41. They will say,

"Glory to thee! Our (tie) is with thee -- as Protector -- not with them.

C3851. Wali in Arabic may mean Friend either in the sense of Protector and Benefactor or in the sense of the Beloved.

The tie of benevolence, confidence, and friendship is implied, either active or passive.

The angels first proclaim their dependence on Allah and their need of His protection, and then disclaim any idea of their having protected or encouraged the false worshippers to worship beings other than Allah.

They go further, and suggest that when men pretended to worship angels, they worshipped, not angels, but Jinns. See next note.

... بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ...

Nay, but they worshipped the Jinns:

C3852. Jinns: see 6:100 and n. 929.

The false worshippers pretended to worship the bright and radiant angels of good, but in reality worshipped the dark and hidden forces of evil,-in the life around them.

They trusted and believed in such forces of evil, although such forces of evil had really no power.

... أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ (٤١)

most of them believed in them."

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يَمْلِكُ بَعْضُكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ نَفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا ...

42. So on that day no power shall they have over each other, for profit or harm:

... وَنَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ (٤٢)

and We shall say to the wrongdoers,

"Taste ye the penalty of the Fire -- the which ye were wont to deny!"

C3853. The supposed "rivals" of Allah-the false things whereon men set their hopes and fears-will have no power whatever when true values are restored; and the Fire-the Penalty-which they doubted or derided, will become the dominating real thing in their experience.

وَإِذَا نُثِّلَى عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُنَا بَيِّنَاتٍ ...

43. When Our Clear Signs are rehearsed to them,

... قَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا رَجُلٌ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَصُدَّكُمْ عَمَّا كَانَ يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤَكُمْ ...

they say, "This is only a man who wishes to hinder you from the (worship) which your fathers practiced."

C3854. Apart from the worship of Evil in the guise of the Powers of Light, there is another form of false worship, which depends on ancestral tradition. "Why" it is said "should we not do as our fathers did?"

They reject a new prophet of Truth simply because his teaching does not agree with the ways of their ancestors. The answer to this is given in [verse 44 below](#). But meanwhile the rejecters' objection to new Truth is stated in three forms:

1. our ancestors knew nothing of this;
2. the story of inspiration is false;
it is merely an invention;
we do not believe in inspiration;
3. when in some particular points, the new Truth does work wonders in men's hearts, they account for it by saying it is magic.

'The third objection is merely traditional.

What is magic?

If it was merely deception, surely the Truth has proved itself to be above deception.

The second objection is answered by the fact that the Messenger who comes with new spiritual Truth is acknowledged to be truthful in other relations of life: why should he be false where his preaching brings him no gain but much sorrow and persecution?

For the ancestral objection see next note.

... وَقَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ مُّفْتَرَىٰ ...

And they say, "This is only a falsehood invented!"

...وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ (٤٣)

And the Unbelievers say of the Truth when it comes to them, "This is nothing but evident magic!"

وَمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ مِّنْ كِتَابٍ يَدْرُسُونَهَا ...

44. But We had not given them Books which they could study,

... وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ قَبْلَكَ مِنْ نَّذِيرٍ (٤٤)

nor sent messengers to them before thee as Warners.

C3855. The ancestors (as in the case of the Arabs of the Times of Ignorance) had received no revelation of the dear kind which a messenger and a Book bring them. This is a reason for welcoming, not for rejecting new Truth.

وَكَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ...

45. And their predecessors rejected (the Truth);

... وَمَا بَلَّغُوا مِعْشَارَ مَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوا رُسُلِي ...

these have not received a tenth of what We had granted to those: yet when they rejected My messengers,

C3856. Passing to Peoples before the immediate ancestors, the People of the Book, or the People of Saba and 'Ad and Thamud, had received favours and gifts, power and wealth, ten times more than were enjoyed by the Pagan Quraish. Yet when they turned away from Allah's Truth, Allah turned away from them, and what terrible consequences descended on them when they lost Allah's Grace! This should make everyone humble, not least the posterity of Muhammad the Messenger if they forsake Allah's Truths! For they have received a higher Teaching!

... فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ (٤٥)

how (terrible) was My rejection (of them)!

Section 6

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعْظُمُ بَوَاحِدَةٍ...

46. Say:

"I do admonish you on one point:

... أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مِثْلَ خِيَلٍ مُّتَّفَكِّرِينَ...

that ye do stand up before Allah -- (it may be) in pairs, or (it may be) singly -- and reflect (within yourselves):

C3857. A crowd mentality is not the best for the perception of the final spiritual truths. For these, it is necessary that each soul should commune within itself with earnest sincerity as before Allah: if it requires a Teacher, let it seek out one, or it may be that it wants the strengthening of the inner convictions that dawn on it, by the support of a sympathizer or friend. But careful and heart-felt reflection is necessary to appraise the higher Truths.

... مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِّنْ حِجَّةٍ...

your Companion is not possessed:

C3858. Note that in verses [46](#), [47](#), [48](#), [49](#) and [50](#), arguments are suggested to the Prophet, by which he

can convince any right-thinking man of his sincerity and truth.

Here the argument is that he is not possessed or out of his mind. If he is different from ordinary men, it is because he has to give a warning of a terrible spiritual danger to the men whom he loves but who will not understand his Message.

... إِنَّهُ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَّكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ (٤٦)

he is no less than a Warner to you, in face of a terrible Penalty."

فَلَمْ مَا سَأَلْتُمْ مِّنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ...

47. Say:

"No reward do I ask of you:

it is (all) in your interest:

...إِنَّ أَجْرِيَ إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ...

my reward is only due from Allah:

C3859. Cf. 10:72.

The second argument is that he has nothing to gain from them. His message is for their own good. He is willing to suffer persecution and insult, because he has to fulfil his mission from Allah.

... وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ (٤٧)

and He is Witness to all things."

فَلْإِنَّ رَبِّي يَفْزِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ (٤٨)

48. Say:

"Verily my Lord doth cast the (mantle of) Truth (over His servants)
-- He that has full knowledge of (all) that is hidden."

C3860. Allah's **Truth** is so vast that no man in this life can compass the whole of it. But Allah in His mercy selects His servants on whom it is cast like a mantle. They see enough to be able to teach their fellow men. It is through that mantle-that mission received from Allah-that a messenger can speak with authority to men, and this is his third argument.

قُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَمَا يُبْدِيُ الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يُعِيدُ (٤٩)

49. Say: "The Truth has arrived, and Falsehood neither creates anything new, nor restores anything."

C3861. The fourth argument is that the Truth is final: it does not come and go: it creates new situations and new developments, and if by chance it seems to be defeated for a time, it comes back and restores the true balance; - unlike Falsehood, which by its very nature is doomed to perish: 17:81.

The Prophet's credentials are known by the test of Time. This was already becoming apparent to discerning eyes when this Surah was revealed in Makkah, but it became clear to the whole world with the story of Islam's progress in Madinah.

قُلْ إِنْ ضَلَلْتُ فَإِنَّمَا أَضِلُّ عَلَى نَفْسِي...

50. Say: "If I am astray, I only stray to the loss of my own soul:

...وَأِنْ اهْتَدَيْتُ فَبِمَا يُوحِي إِلَيَّ رَبِّي...

but if I receive guidance, it is because of the inspiration of my Lord to me:

C3862. If it could possibly be supposed that the Prophet was a self-deceived visionary, it would affect him only, and could not fail to appear in his personality. But in fact he was steady in his constancy and Faith, and he not only went from strength to strength, but won the enduring and whole-hearted love and devotion of his nearest and dearest and of those who most came into contact with him. How was this possible, unless he had the Truth and the inspiration of Allah behind him? 'Ibis is the fifth and last argument in this passage.

... إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ (٥٠)

it is He Who hears all things, and is (ever) near."

وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذْ فَزَعُوا قُلُوبًا فَوُتَ وَأَخَذُوا مِنْ مَّكَانٍ قَرِيبٍ (٥١)

51. If thou couldst but see when they will quake with terror:

but then there will be no escape (for them), and they will be seized from a position (quite) near.

C3863. After the arguments for the reality and triumph of Truth, we are asked to contemplate the position of the opposers of Truth when Truth is established. They will be struck with terror: for Truth is all-compelling. They will wish they could get away from that position, but that would be impossible.

They will not be able to move far; they will be held fast to the consequences of their own earlier conduct. They will be caught quite close to the point of their departure from Truth.

وَقَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ...

52. And they will say, "We do believe (now) in the (truth)":

... وَأَيُّ لَهُمُ التَّنَاطُشُ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ (٥٢)

but how could they receive (faith) from a position (so) far off --

C3864. They will now profess their faith in Truth, but of what value will such profession be?

Faith is a belief in things unseen: now everything is plain and open before them. The position in which they could have received Faith is left far off behind them, when Truth was struggling and asked for help or asylum, and they cruelly, arrogantly, insultingly repudiated Truth.

وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ...

53. Seeing that they did reject faith (entirely) before,

... وَيَقذفُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ (٥٣)

and that they (continually) cast (slanders) on the Unseen from a position far off?

C3865. Not only did they reject the Truth of the Unseen (the true Reality), but they spread all sorts of false and malicious insinuations at the preachers of Truth, calling them dishonest men, liars, hypocrites, and so on.

They did it like a coward taking up a sneaking position far from the fight and speeding arrows at a distant target.

وَحِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ ...

54. And between them and their desires, is placed a barrier,

C3866. What they desire is to suppress Truth and to indulge in the satisfaction of their own evil, selfish motives.

They will be balked in both, and that itself will be their anguish and punishment. That has always been the law in the eternal struggle between Right and Wrong. All partisans of such narrow cliques have always suffered the same fate.

... كَمَا فَعِلَ بِأَشْيَاءِهِمْ مِّن قَبْلُ ...

as was done in the past with their partisans:

C3867. Note that verses 51-54 are a powerful description of the conflict between right and wrong, and may be understood in many meanings.

1. The description applies to the position in the final Hereafter, as compared with the position in this life.
2. It applies to the position of triumphant Islam in Madinah and later as compared with the position of persecuted Islam in its early days in Makkah.
3. It applies to the reversal of the position of right and wrong at various phases of the world's history,
4. or of individual history.

... إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا فِي شَكٍّ مُّرِيبٍ (٥٤)

for they were indeed in suspicious (disquieting) doubt.

C3868. Cf. 14:9, and see n. 1884.



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