

QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

Sūrah al-Anbiya' (1)

Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī

Theme and Relationship with the Previous Sūrah

This *sūrah* forms a pair with Sūrah Ṭāhā, the previous *sūrah*. It begins on the same note on which the last *sūrah* ended. In the closing verses of Sūrah Ṭāhā, the disbelievers of the Quraysh were warned that if they insist on seeing a sign of the punishment, then they should wait because the punishment is at hand. Now, this *sūrah* has begun with the same note without any prior introduction: the time of accountability of the Quraysh is now imminent but they are engrossed in frivolities. They mock at the warnings sounded by the Prophet (sws) and make fun of God's revelations. They regard this world to be a place of amusement created to entertain the creator. All their trust hinges on their self-created idols. The fact is that these are figments of their own imagination. Prophets of God have nothing to do with them. In the previous *sūrah*, only the account of Moses (sws) was cited. In this one, accounts of other prophets are also cited. At the same time, the dominance of the truth and the conquest of Makkah are also predicted in an explicit way. This formed a final warning to the disbelievers of the Quraysh and glad tidings for Muslims in the most adverse of circumstances in this conflict between good and evil.

A cursory look at the meanings of the *sūrah* shows that like the previous one, this too consists of three large sections. First the Quraysh are clearly warned of their foolish behaviour that they had adopted with the Prophet (sws). Next, all facts which are reminded and taught by the Qur'ān are highlighted through the anecdotes of previous prophets. At the end, the topic discussed in the opening section is once again taken up in the same vein and the addresses are warned in a very decisive way of the fate they will soon be encountering.

Though this introduction is sufficient to explain the theme and coherence of the *sūrah*, yet for further elucidation presented below is an analysis of the complete meanings.

Analysis of the Meanings

Verses (1-15): The Quraysh are warned that after the advent of God's messenger their accountability is at hand. Instead of seeking a lesson from it, they are foolishly making fun of the Prophet (sws). Some call him a sorcerer, some a magician, some a poet and an imposter and some regard divine revelations to be his wayward dreams. They demand from him similar miracles as the ones worked by previous prophets. The fact is that history and people of knowledge bear witness that the content of divine revelation brought by their prophet is no different from that of the previous ones. The reminder they needed for the conclusive communication of the truth has come to them. If they now reject it, they should keep in mind the fate of those nations to whom messengers came and they rejected them. They too disparagingly made fun of their messengers. When as a result, they themselves were seized by God, they could find none to seek refuge with and they were utterly routed.

Verses (16-29): The addressees are reminded that the creator of this universe has not built it to entertain Himself so that truth and falsehood, vice and virtue have the same status. In fact, its creator is just and wise. For this reason, it is essential that He bring about a day in which the truth is victorious and falsehood is vanquished. If anyone thinks that his alleged deities and intercessors will save him from God's punishment, then this is a baseless notion. None shares God's divinity. Everyone submits to Him. If there had been multiple gods of this universe having their own will and intention, it would not have survived. There is not the slightest trace of polytheism in the teachings of God's prophets and messengers. Every prophet has taught monotheism to his followers. If some people think that there are daughters of God who can intercede for them before Him, then this is mere self-deception. Angels are not daughters of God; they are His honourable servants. They cannot even utter a word before Him without His permission and obey His directives. If there is anyone who claims to be a partner of God, he will be consigned to Hell by Him.

Verses (30-33): Some clear signs of the system of this universe are presented before those who were demanding signs. If they really want to see any signs, why do they not reflect on the ones which are present before them all the time and bear witness to the providence, mercy, wisdom and justice of God as well as to

the belief in monotheism and to the Day of Judgement? All that the messenger is doing is that he is calling them to these. So when all these signs are substantiating his message, what need is there for a new sign?

Verses (34-43): People who were making fun of the Prophet (sws) are responded to by telling them that he neither is a super human nor a wealthy person. If they want to make fun of the Prophet (sws), they can do so; however, they should remember that when God seizes them, none of their deities – in supporting which they are showing disrespect to God's religion – will be able to help them.

Verses (44-47): The real reason of the arrogance of the arrogant is pointed to. It is predicted that the call of the messenger which they are trying to subvert is reaching Makkah through its whereabouts and soon it will be decided who is victorious. At the same time, it is declared from the tongue of the Prophet (sws) that he is warning them through divine revelation but it is falling on deaf ears. If they are seized by God's punishment, then they will gravely regret.

Verses (48-77): Mentioned in an ascending order are the accounts of celebrated prophets like Moses (sws), Abraham (sws) (including Lot (sws), Isaac (sws), Jacob) and Noah (sws) with their teachings and the fates of their nations. The purpose was to show that all these prophets preached the same message as the Qur'ān is presenting. Hence those who oppose it will meet no different a fate than those who opposed the previous prophets.

Verses (78-86): In a sequence that highlights character traits, those prophets are mentioned who were put through trials that severely tested their patience and gratitude. All of them succeeded in them. In the first category, by referring to David (sws) and Solomon (sws), the Quraysh are invited to be grateful like these prophets. Among the second category, mention is specially made of Job (sws), Ishmael (sws), Idrīs (sws) and Dhū al-Kifl (sws). The purpose is to encourage Muḥammad (sws) and his oppressed companions that just as God blessed these prophets with His mercy because they showed patience, if they too persevere in the wake of hardships, God will also bless them with His mercy.

Verses (87-91): Those prophets are briefly referred who were miraculously helped by God when they were facing adverse and seemingly hopeless circumstances. They include Jonah (sws), Zacharias (sws), John (sws), Mary (sws) and Jesus (sws). The purpose is to show that when God wants to show mercy to His

servants, none can impede His intentions. All means and resources are in His control.

Verses (92-112): This is the concluding part of the *sūrah*. What was stated at its beginning is further emphasized in order to sound assurance to the Prophet (sws) and his companions. They are told that all prophets of God have taught the same message they are preaching. So they should continue with this task and consign the matter of those who have created and are creating differences in it to God. These people will only profess faith when it shall be of no avail. Success of the hereafter is only reserved for pious servants of God. At the end, a decisive declaration is made from the tongue of the Prophet (sws) that the time of judgement is at hand. He who wants to gain benefit from this respite should do so because it is now going to end. In the last verse a supplication is made by him to God to judge between him and his foes.

Text and Translation

Section 1: Verses (1-15)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

اِقْتَرَبَ لِلنَّاسِ حِسَابُهُمْ وَهُمْ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿١﴾ مَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِّنْ ذِكْرٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ مُّحَدَّثٍ
إِلَّا اسْتَمَعُوهُ وَهُمْ يَلْعَبُونَ ﴿٢﴾ لَاهِيَةً قُلُوبُهُمْ ۚ وَأَسَرُّوا النَّجْوَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ۗ هَلْ هَذَا إِلَّا
بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ أَفَتَأْتَوْنَ السِّحْرَ وَأَنْتُمْ تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٣﴾ قُلْ رَبِّي يَعْلَمُ الْقَوْلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَهُوَ
السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٤﴾ بَلْ قَالُوا أَضْغَاثُ أَحْلَامٍ بَلْ افْتَرَاهُ بَلْ هُوَ شَاعِرٌ ۖ فَلْيَأْتِنَا بِآيَةٍ كَمَا أُرْسِلَ
الْأَوَّلُونَ ﴿٥﴾ مَا آمَنَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ مِّن قَوْمٍ أَنَّهُمْ أَهْلُهَا أَفَهُمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا
نُوحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَسَلُّوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧﴾ وَمَا جَعَلْنَاهُمْ جَسَدًا لَا يَأْكُلُونَ الطَّعَامَ وَ
مَا كَانُوا خَالِدِينَ ﴿٨﴾ ثُمَّ صَدَقْنَاهُمُ الْوَعْدَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُمْ وَمَنْ نَشَاءُ وَأَهْلَكْنَا الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٩﴾ لَقَدْ
أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَابًا فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٠﴾ وَكَمْ قَصَصْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِهِ كَانَتْ ظَالِمَةً وَأَنْشَأْنَا
بَعْدَهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ ﴿١١﴾ فَلَمَّا أَحْسَبُوا بِاسْنَاءِ إِذَا هُمْ مِنْهَا يُرْكَضُونَ ﴿١٢﴾ لَا تَرْكُضُوا وَارْجِعُوا إِلَى
مَا أُتْرِفْتُمْ فِيهِ وَمَسْكِنِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّعِلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾ قَالُوا يُبَيِّنْ لَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿١٤﴾ فَمَا زَالَتْ
تِلْكَ دَعْوَاهُمْ حَتَّى جَعَلْنَاهُمْ حَصِيدًا خَبِيدِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Ever-Merciful.

For people, their time of accountability has drawn near. And

being negligent they continue to show evasion. Whatever fresh reminder comes to them from their Lord, they listen to it while only making fun of it. Their hearts are engrossed in heedlessness. And these unjust, silently whispered to another: “He is only a mortal like you; then will you be fooled by his magic with your open eyes?” (1-3)

He said: “My Lord knows every word that is uttered in the heavens and the earth and He hears and knows all.” (4)

In fact, they said: “These are wayward dreams; in fact he has fabricated it from himself; in fact, he is a mere poet. Thus let him bring a sign to us the way earlier messengers had been sent with signs.” (5)

Before them, none of the people of the settlements We destroyed professed faith; so, will they profess faith? And before you, whichever messenger We sent, We have sent him from among human beings to whom We would send revelations. So, ask men of knowledge if you people do not know. And We did not give these messengers such bodies that they would not consume food and they were also not ones who would live forever. Then We fulfilled Our promise with them and saved them and those We want and We destroyed those who exceeded the limits. (6-9)

And We have also revealed a Book to you which has your share of reminder. Then do you not understand? And how many cities We destroyed whose inhabitants were unjust to themselves, and after them raised other people. Thus when they heard the sound of Our torment, they began to run away from there. We said: “Do not run away now and return to your resources you were rejoicing in and to your very houses so that you may be questioned.” They raised a hue and cry: “Alas! Our misfortune; indeed, it is we who were unjust.” They kept raising this hue and cry until We reduced them to straws and ashes. (10-15)

Explanation

اِقْتَرَبَ لِلنَّاسِ حِسَابُهُمْ وَهُمْ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مُّعْرِضُونَ^١

This *sūrah* has begun without any prior introduction. The reason, as we have already pointed out, is that it actually is a completion of the subject of warning on which the previous *sūrah* ended. Their opening and closing verses perfectly dove-

1. For people, their time of accountability has drawn near. And being negligent they continue to show evasion.

tail into one another. In the explanation of Sūrah al-Tawbah, the benefits of such proximity have been referred to.

The word “people” here refers to the Idolaters of Makkah, as is the opinion of Ibn ‘Abbās (rta). Since these people have become adamant on evading God’s reminder, they too, while being ignored by Him, are mentioned by a general word. This style signifies aversion and regret. Several examples of it can be seen in the previous *sūrahs*.

The verse does not merely sound a threat; it is a statement of fact. I have been mentioning at various instances in this exegesis to the established practice of the Almighty that when He sends His messenger to a nation, it is only given one option: embrace faith. If this option is not availed, then after conclusive communication of the truth, it is necessarily wiped out. While referring precisely to this practice, after the advent of the messenger and after his preaching, the day of accountability of the Idolaters has drawn very near. However, they are engrossed in negligence and continuing to evade the reminders and warnings of the messenger. Here two of their states are simultaneously mentioned: negligence and evasion. Negligence which refers to indifference to the realities of life in itself is a reason for the doom of a person and a great crime. However, this crime becomes manifold when a servant of God is trying his utmost to shake and jolt people from their slumber, but they insist on their negligence and are not willing to pay heed.

مَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِّنْ ذِكْرٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ مُّحَدَّثٍ إِلَّا اسْتَمَعُوهُ وَهُمْ يَلْعَبُونَ²

In verse 115 of Sūrah Tāhā, it is similarly stated: وَكَذَلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًّا وَعَرَفْنَا فِيهِ مِنَ الْوَعِيدِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ أَوْ يُحْدِثُ لَهُمْ ذِكْرًا (and similarly, We have revealed this in the form of an Arabic Qur’ān and have mentioned My warning in it in various ways so that these people remain secure from God’s wrath or it may revive My reminder in them). The implication is that God has not stopped at sounding a reminder to them just once. In fact, in order to awaken them from their slumber of negligence, He has continued to send fresh reminders. However, instead of paying heed and duly valuing them, they made fun of every reminder.

2. Whatever fresh reminder comes to them from their Lord, they listen to it while only making fun of it.

لَاهِيَةً قُلُوبُهُمْ^ط وَأَسْمُوا النَّجْوَى^ث الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا^ك هَلْ هَذَا إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ^ع أَفَتَأْتُونَ
الْبَشَرَ وَأَنْتُمْ تُبْصِرُونَ^٣

The expression لَاهِيَةً قُلُوبُهُمْ is a second accusative of state (*hāl*). The implication is that the real task of the heart is to reflect and receive reminder. However, such are these people that their hearts are so engrossed in their interest that the most serious of statements and the greatest of realities are made fun of by them.

Mentioned in this verse is the propaganda of the Quraysh which they would spread in their gatherings against the Qur'ān and the Prophet (sws) to reduce their impact among their people. They had fully realized that the Qur'ān was taking roots in the hearts of people and upright people were being influenced by it. In order to reduce this impact, they would implant this suggestion in their hearts that they should not think that if he presenting such a forceful discourse, then it is from God; he is a mortal like them and if God had to send a messenger, He would have selected someone from the angels or from some other species and not from among human beings. They would further tell them that the eloquence, fluency and potency they see in the Book he is presenting are the result of this person's magical word power they have often witnessed among their own orators and poets. They would then tell them that in the wake of this, it would be very naïve of them that in spite of knowing this they still get caught in the spell weaved by him.

Since leaders invent such pranks and then furtively spread them, the Qur'ān has called it "whispering." By the words "these unjust" it is further pointed out that the perpetrators of this whispering are people who have been unjust to their souls by sealing their own intellectual powers and also being unjust to others by fooling them.

The word "magic" in "will you be fooled by his magic" refers to the words of the divine revelation the Prophet (sws) would recite before them. The Arabs would regard all powerful and moving words and discourses as magic. This use is evident in other languages as well. As far as the eloquence and splendour of the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Prophet (sws) are concerned,

3. Their hearts are engrossed in heedlessness. And these unjust, silently whispered to another: "He is only a mortal like you; then will you be fooled by his magic with your open eyes?"

its adversaries could not dare deny it. They were compelled to accept it. However, they wanted to let the masses know that its efficacy and impact was not because it was from God. It was merely a magic of words and they should not be lured by it when they know its origin. The words “with your open eyes” is meant to incite a sense of superiority in them: they are not simpletons; they are men of understanding and hence must not be misled.

قُلْ رَبِّي يَعْلَمُ الْقَوْلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٤﴾

This verse describes the response of the Prophet (sws) to the nonsensical behaviour of his opponents. He knew that these pranks were being played by those who were fully convinced of the veracity of the Qur'ān. They were creating all this mischief to mislead people. For this reason, without addressing these people, the Prophet consigned his matter to the Lord of the heavens and the earth Who hears and knows all. The implication is that wherever these conspiracies are being hatched, they were fully known to Him. So when He knows, He will come to the rescue of His believers.

بَلْ قَالُوا أَضْغَاثُ أَحْلَامٍ بَلْ افْتَرَاهُ بَلْ هُوَ شَاعِرٌ ۖ فَلْيَأْتِنَا بِآيَةٍ كَمَا أُرْسِلَ الْأَوَّلُونَ ﴿٥﴾

The word *أَضْغَاثُ* is the plural of *ضِغْثٌ*. The latter means a handful of dry and wet grass. From here originated the idiom *أَضْغَاثُ أَحْلَامٍ* which means “wayward dreams,” or dreams which are absolutely devoid of any meaning and because of their ambiguity are not worthy of any interpretation or given importance to.

The verse implies that these people did not stop at dubbing divine revelations as magic. They went on to call them as wayward dreams and fabrications. They regarded the Prophet (sws) to be a poet and demanded that if he is from God, then he should verify his claim through some sign similar to the ones presented by earlier prophets.

The Prophet (sws) presented the Qur'ān as divine revelation received from Gabriel, a favoured angel of God and was not from his own self. When his opponents saw that this claim of his

4. He said: “My Lord knows every word that is uttered in the heavens and the earth and He hears and knows all.”

5. In fact, they said: “These are wayward dreams; in fact he has fabricated it from himself; in fact, he is a mere poet. Thus let him bring a sign to us the way earlier messengers had been sent with signs.”

further increased the importance of the Qur'ān and people were actually being led to believe him, they started to say that this claim was a mere figment of his imagination. He sees wayward dreams. Whatever thoughts he has in his mind are seen by him in his dreams and he wrongly presents them as divine revelation received through an angel in order to deceive people. It may be noted that many anti-religious elements of current times are of the same opinion. They create doubt in divine revelations. The only difference is that the ignorant Arabs of those times expressed their opinion in rather unrefined words while these pseudo intellectuals try to present it as a whole philosophy. I will discuss this in detail *insha'Allāh* while explaining the *sūrahs* of the last chapter of the Qur'ān.

The words بَلْ افْتَرَاهُ say that they also regard this Qur'ān to be a concoction which the Prophet (sws) wrongly ascribes to God.

The words بَلْ هُوَ شَاعِرٌ imply that the Prophet (sws) is a poet and the forceful nature of his discourse is similar to the one found in the composition of their own poets and orators. In other words, they meant that there is no need to give his discourse any more importance than this. It may be kept in mind that the Arabs were of the view that every great poet was accompanied with jinn who inspired him with poetry. By regarding the Prophet (sws) to be a poet, they want to mislead people into believing that he too was accompanied by his jinn who authored the words he presented.

One thing that is very evident from this response of the Qur'ān's adversaries was that they were deeply over-awed by its splendour and majesty and had fully understood that it was difficult to dispense with this awe from the hearts of the masses. All that they could do was to try to undermine its status by making people believe that it was not from God and was a human production.

After the expression كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ the word بَيِّنَاتٍ is suppressed due to concomitant indications. The implication is that when they would think that these foolish measures are not going to be effective, they would say that if this person is a messenger, then he too should bring signs the way previous messengers did. By "signs" they meant miracles or signs of torment which have been mentioned in the accounts of the previous messengers. According to their claim, this stratagem was the most effective in opposing the Prophet (sws) because the call of the Qur'ān was entirely based on arguments drawn from the world around

human beings and that within them as well as on human nature and intellect. Instead of showing miracles and signs of punishment, the Qur'ān would urge people to use their insight and intellect because the natural path that reaches faith is through the heart and intellect. Those who do not use their intellect and insight do not profess faith even after seeing miracles and the faith of those who accept it after seeing a sign of punishment has no significance. This claim of the Qur'ān was absolutely true but the opponents would regard it to be an evasion on the part of the Prophet (sws) and lead people astray. They would say that if he was really God's messenger, it would have been very easy for him to fulfil their demand; however, since he was evading it, so he is falsely claiming to be a prophet of God.

مَا آمَنَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ مِّنْ قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا أَفَهُمْ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾

This verse sounds an assurance to the Prophet (sws). He is advised to ignore the foolish behaviour of these people. They are showing the same obduracy and stubbornness which the doomed nations of the past showed. Just as they rejected their messengers and were destroyed by God, in a similar way, destruction is now destined for these people too. When they have not professed faith after seeing signs of all kinds, how can the Prophet (sws) expect them to profess faith if according to their demand they are shown another sign. They will continue to be blind and deaf to all this.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُّوحِي إِلَيْهِمْ فَسَئَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧﴾

In verses 3, an objection of the opponents of the Prophet (sws) is cited: why has God sent a prophet from among human beings? This verse answers this objection by saying that this is not the first instance that God has sent a human being as a messenger. All messengers before Muḥammad (sws) were human beings as well. The distinction messengers have is not that they are super human; it is rather that they receive divine revelation the way he is receiving it and he sees people uttering nonsense in opposing it.

Consider next the last part of the verse: فَسَئَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا تَعْلَمُونَ.

6. Before them, none of the people of the settlements We destroyed professed faith; so, will they profess faith?

7. And before you, whichever messenger We sent, We have sent him from among human beings to whom We would send revelations. So, ask men of knowledge if you people do not know.

The first part directly addresses the Prophet (sws). Now this part directly addresses his adversaries. The reference in it is to the People of the Book who were fully acquainted with the history of prophets. Making them as witnesses was tantamount to making an enemy as witness. This is because by that time, as has become evident from previous *sūrahs*, the People of the Book in their collective capacity had become very prominent in supporting the Quraysh against the Prophet (sws). By making them as witnesses, the Qur'ān has left the Quraysh with no excuse. Their supporters who are also enemies of the Prophet (sws) cannot deny this fact. They can ask them. Here the People of the Book are called “men of knowledge” and not by their common name. The eloquence found in it is that if these People of the Book have become blind in their enmity with the Prophet (sws), nothing much can be done, but those of them who remember the history of their prophets will not dare deny this fact.

The words “if you people do not know” is a sarcastic remark on the Quraysh: though they, as the progeny and claimants to Abraham’s religion, know that both Abraham (sws) and Ishmael (sws) were human beings and not super humans; however, if because of being unlettered they have forgotten this fact, they should refresh themselves of it by asking the People of the Book. All messengers that have come were all human beings. None of them were angels.

وَمَا جَعَلْنَاهُمْ جَسَدًا لَا يَأْكُلُونَ الطَّعَامَ وَمَا كَانُوا خَالِدِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

The verse implies that all these previous prophets had the same human features and traits which these people have. They would eat and drink like human beings and die.

This objection is cited at another instance in the following words:

مَا هَذَا إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ لَا يَأْكُلُ مِمَّا تَأْكُلُونَ مِنْهُ وَيَشْرَبُ مِمَّا تَشْرَبُونَ لَئِنْ أَطَعْتُم بَشَرًا مِّثْلُكُمْ إِنَّكُمْ إِذَا الْخُسُوفُ . (٢٢: ٣٣-٣٤)

He is but a mortal like you. He eats what you eat and drinks what you drink. If you accept a human being to be a messenger, you shall be in great loss. (22:33-34)

8. And We did not give these messengers such bodies that they would not consume food and they were also not ones who would live forever.

The words وَمَا كَانُوا لَاحِدِينَ refute this claim of theirs that a messenger should be immortal. In verses 34-35 ahead this refutation is made in these words: كُلُّ. وَمَا جَعَلْنَا بَشَرًا مِّن قَبْلِكَ الْخَالِدَ أَفَآيِن مَّتَّ فَهُمْ الْخَالِدُونَ. نَفْسٌ ذَآبِقَةُ الْبُؤْتِ.⁹ The implication is that death is an essential phase of this life. It is an inescapable reality. Even prophets of God pass through this phase. This is not something that negatively impacts their responsibility as envoys of God nor is it a means of shame for those who accept them in this status.

ثُمَّ صَدَقْنَاهُمُ الْوَعْدَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُمْ وَمَنْ نَّشَاءُ وَاهْلَكْنَا الْمُسْرِفِينَ¹⁰

“Promise” here refers to the same promise which the Almighty has made with His messengers: if people deny them, they will be destroyed by Him and his followers will be saved. While explaining verse 20 of Sūrah Yūnus, I have explained that messengers of God have warned their nations of two torments: one which necessarily visits in this world a nation which denies its messenger and the other one that will be encountered by it in the hereafter. Here the reference is to first of these torments.

The verse implies that these messengers were human beings but history bears witness that the promise God made with them was fulfilled: they and those whom God wanted were salvaged and those who exceeded the limits were destroyed by Him. Here the words مَنْ نَّشَاءُ (whom We want) has made the discourse relevant to the circumstances that prevailed at the time of revelation of this verse. In other words, this law just does not relate to the past; even at this time they are facing this decisive phase. If they invite God’s doom because of their stubbornness, only those will be saved whom He wants; none other has any say in this decision and none of these people will escape His grasp.

“Those who exceeded the limits” refer to people who obdurately break the bounds of God and make fun of the warnings of the messenger. These people are regarded as rebels to God and rebels are always punished.

9. And before you too, We never gave any mortal eternal life. So, if you die, will they remain forever? Each soul will certainly taste the flavour of death.

10. Then We fulfilled Our promise with them and saved them and those We want and We destroyed those who exceeded the limits.

لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَابًا فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ¹¹

The verse says that just as God sent messengers to remind previous nations and to conclusively communicate the truth to them before destroying them, God has revealed a Book to the Arabs in which they have been thoroughly reminded. Now they cannot present the excuse before Him that they had not been reminded. There is an essential consequence of this reminder which is destined to materialize. The Qur'ān is not the request of a petitioner that can be rejected by them. Its rejection will result in the same fate of these people as that of the previous nations. God's established practice in this regard will never change. The last part of the verse "then do you not understand" carries a severe reprimand and warning: what has happened to the intellect of these foolish people; why are they calling for their doom.

In order to understand the real emphasis in this verse, readers may look up the explanation of verses 133-145 of Sūrah Tāhā.

وَكَمْ قَصَبْنَا مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ كَانَتْ ظَالِمَةً وَأَنْشَأْنَا بَعْدَهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ¹²

This is a reference to the history of the previous nations: just as the Quraysh are afflicting injustice on their own selves by making fun of God's reminder, many nations before them too have been guilty of the same misconduct and as a result were decimated by God. The implication is that there is no reason that their fate would be any different.

The expression *كَانَتْ ظَالِمَةً* here means *ظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ* ie. God was not unjust to them; they inflicted injustice on their own selves. By sending His messenger, He has informed them of the danger. However, they disregarded this warning because of their own arrogance.

The last part of the verse refers to the fact that replacing one nation with another is not difficult at all for God. None should regard himself to be indispensable for this world so that with his departure the world will become desolate. When a nation takes to rebellion, God will wipe it out and bring another one in its place and judge its actions too. If the Quraysh too follows suit,

11. And We have also revealed a Book to you which has your share of reminder. Then do you not understand.

12. And how many cities We destroyed whose inhabitants were unjust to themselves, and after them raised other people.

their fate will ultimately be no different. Whether they are individuals or nations, when they are overcome with negligence in remembering God, they begin to give more than due importance to their own selves. Thus they are told that they must not regard themselves to be superior. Whenever God wants He can wipe them out and bring another nation in their place.

13. فَلَبَّأَ أَحْسُوا بَأْسَنَا إِذَا هُمْ مِّنْهَا يَرْكُضُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

The implication of this verse is that just as today these people are very arrogantly demanding God's torment, nations of the past too did so with great arrogance. However, when the torment did visit them, they could do nothing to avert it and ran away from there. But none can escape God's torment. Once He catches someone, none can run away from Him.

14. لَا تَرْكُضُوا وَارْجِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَا أُتْرِفْتُمْ فِيهِ وَمَسْكِنُكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُسْأَلُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

This is a portrayal of the situation. It is as if God's grasp itself is telling them that there is no place to run. The time to escape has expired. They should go and seek refuge in their palaces and forts residing in which they used to make fun of God's revelation and His messenger. Soon they will see their fate. The words "so that you may be questioned" here are to chasten and disgrace them. At occasions of severe anger, this style is often adopted in most languages. At other instances in the Qur'ān too, this sarcastic style has been adopted. Examples include verse 8 of Sūrah al-Takāthur and verse 93 of Sūrah al-Naḥl.

The style in *لَا تَرْكُضُوا* implies that these people were blessed with affluence as a favour from God to test their sense of gratitude. However, they regarded it to be a heritage of their forefathers and the consequence of their own ability as well as something to which they had a right to. On its basis, they rebelled against the very God Who had blessed them with these favours. So, now they should taste the flavour of this misconduct. Here since the address is to the affluent and because *مَسْكِنُكُمْ* is mentioned after mentioning the resources of luxury, it would refer to their halls and palaces.

13. Thus when they heard the sound of Our torment, they began to run away from there.

14. We said: "Do not run away now and return to your resources you were rejoicing in and to your very houses so that you may be questioned."

قَالُوا يٰوَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿١٣﴾ فَمَا زِلْتَ تِلْكَ دَعْوُهُمْ حَتَّىٰ جَعَلْنَهُمْ حَصِيدًا خَبِثِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

The verse implies that it was only after these people had been caught up in the torment that they realized what had happened and began blaming themselves. They had afflicted injustice on their own self. I have already referred to this meaning of “injustice” in verse 11. They had to confess this because God’s messenger had fully warned them of this torment but they continued to be deaf and blind. In fact, they stubbornly demanded its arrival. When it finally came, they had to admit that the fault was entirely theirs.

The word دَعْوَى means “raising a hue and cry and pleading.” Here it refers to the same wailing which is mentioned in the previous verse. In other words, they continued to raise a hue and cry but their wailings were of no benefit to them because once the torment arrives nothing is of avail. Thus God rendered them into “severed grass and extinguished ashes. What is concealed in this metaphor is that just as after grass being cut, its dry mounds are set on fire and it becomes a heap of ashes, in a similar way, these people will become dust and ashes. The word خَبِيرِينَ occurs in deference to the entity for which the metaphor is stated (grass in this case) and this is a common style of Arabic.

Section II: Verses (16-29)

Coming up is an argument for what is stated earlier: the reason that nations are held accountable in this world and in the next is that God has created this world for the manifestation of His mercy and justice and not for His amusement. The necessary consequence of this mercy and justice is that people should not live in negligence and that this world will not go on like this. A day of accountability will come in which those people will be rewarded who led their lives while being obedient to the creator of this world, and those who created anarchy in it be punished. If this world continues without any such day of accountability, it would mean that its creator is someone non-serious who has created this world for his entertainment and has no concern with

15. They raised a hue and cry: “Alas! Our misfortune; indeed, it is we who were unjust.” They kept raising this hue and cry until We reduced them to straws and ashes.

good and evil or justice and injustice. This notion is an obvious farce and totally against the attributes of justice and mercy of God. Hence, the advent of judgement day is inevitable. In this regard, polytheism is also refuted. This is because if its possibility is accepted, then in this case too this world becomes a place of amusement and entertainment. This is because if intercessors and deities exist who share governance with God to the extent that they can save their worshippers from His grasp whatever they deeds may be, then the day of judgement is just a mockery. It would mean that even of this day of accountability comes, no one should be worried. Intercession can save the day for which their own deities are enough.

Readers may proceed to study the verses in the light of this background.

Text and Translation

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الْعِبِينَ ﴿٦٦﴾ لَوْ أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نَتَّخِذَ لَهَؤُا التَّخَذْنُهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا ۖ إِنْ كُنَّا فَعِلِينَ ﴿٦٧﴾ بَلْ نَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَى الْبَاطِلِ فَيَدْمَغُهُ فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٌ ۖ وَلَكُمْ الْوَيْلُ مِمَّا تَصِفُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾ وَلَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمُوتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَمَنْ عِنْدَهُ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَلَا يَسْتَحْسِرُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ يُسَبِّحُونَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لَا يَفْتُرُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾ أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا إِلَهَةً مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ هُمْ يُنشِئُونَ ﴿٧١﴾ لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا آلِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا ۚ فَسُبْحَنَ اللَّهُ رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾ لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ ﴿٧٣﴾ أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَهَةً ۚ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ ۚ هَذَا ذِكْرٌ مِّن مَّعْنَىٰ وَذِكْرٌ مِّن قَبْلِ ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْحَقَّ فَهُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٧٤﴾ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي ﴿٧٥﴾ وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَلَدًا ۚ سُبْحَنَهُ ۚ بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُّكْرَمُونَ ﴿٧٦﴾ لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧٧﴾ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنْ ارْتَضَىٰ وَهُمْ مِّنْ خَشْيَتِهِ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾ وَمَنْ يَقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَهٌ مِّنْ دُونِهِ فَلْيُكْفِرْ بِهِ ۖ فَكُفْرُهُ جَهَنَّمُ ۚ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٧٩﴾

And We have not created the heavens and the earth and what is between them for amusement. Had We wanted to create amusement, We would have arranged for it around Ourselves, if this was Our intention. In fact We shall strike falsehood with the truth; so it shall shatter its head. Then you will see that is

destined to be annihilated. And there is great devastation for you because of the words you say. (16-18)

And to Him belong what is in the heavens and the earth and those who are in His presence, they do not desist from worshipping Him nor do they get tired. They glorify Him day and night and do not stop. (19-20)

Have they set up separate deities for the earth; they make it lush? Had there been other deities besides God in both of them, both would have been devastated. So, God, master of the throne, is exalted from what they say. Whatever He does, He is not answerable to anyone for it and all these are answerable. Have they set up other deities besides God? Tell them: Bring forth your proof. This is the teaching of those who are with me and of those also who were before me. In fact, most of them do not know the truth. For this reason, they continue to show aversion. And whichever messengers We sent before you, We only kept sending them this revelation: "There is no deity except I; so, worship Me only." (21-25)

And they say: "The Merciful God has children." He is exalted from this blame. In fact, they are favoured servants of God. They do not take the initiative in speaking to Him. They only obey His directive. Whatever is in front of them and behind them is all in His knowledge. And they will not intercede for anyone except for whom God pleases and keep trembling with His awe. And whoever among them claims: "I am a deity besides God," We shall punish him with Hell. Thus will We punish the unjust. (26-29)

Explanation

¹⁶ وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لِعِبَادٍ

What is said earlier regarding the necessity of reward and punishment is substantiated here. If there is no day of judgement after this world; it will continue like this the way it already has; whether a person is just or unjust is no matter of concern for his creator – if this is true, then it would mean that its creator has only made this world for his enjoyment; as long as he wants to, he will continue to do so and once he gets bored, he will dismantle it and make a new form of entertainment to amuse himself. The verse implies that this universe by its very existence

16. And We have not created the heavens and the earth and what is between them for amusement.

testifies that it has been made by a just and wise, merciful and gracious creator and is not a place of amusement or the battle ground of Greek gods or a fairy tale. Every entity of this universe bears witness that its Creator has made it with a great purpose and objective. The obvious consequence of His justice and wisdom is that a day come when this objective will manifest itself.

لَوْ أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نَتَّخِذَ لَهُمْ آلًا تَتَّخِذُهُ مِنْ دُونِنَا ۖ إِنْ كُنَّا مُعْلِينَ¹⁷

The verse says that in the first place such play and amusement is against God's majesty and His high attributes; however, had this been His plan, He could have made something around Him. There was no need to involve human beings and other creatures in this. It is known that Roman emperors would unleash lions on their innocent slaves in their theatres to amuse themselves with this savagery. No different an opinion can, God forbid, be formed about the creator of this universe if He is witnessing the helplessness of His creatures after making them undergo trials. This world obviously has all kinds of people: the oppressed and the oppressors, the rebels and the submissive, the grateful and the ungrateful, sincere and mean. If all these people are not held accountable on a day of judgement, it would only mean that this world too is a theatre of Roman emperors. This verse refutes this fact. The relationship of God with His creatures necessitates the advent of a Judgement day in which the truth prevails and evil is eliminated. In the absence of this judgement, the world becomes a place of amusement and this is against the attributes of God too.

The verse goes on to state that if God wanted to create some sporting activity, He did not need to create this world. There was no need for Him to create a place in which there was an eternal conflict between Adam's progeny and Satan, truth and falsehood, good and evil, justice and injustice, the oppressor and the oppressed. He could have created something in His own presence. It is against God's justice and mercy that He create such a place of conflict for His creatures and becomes a spectator to their travails. It is against these attributes that He not reward those who succeed in this struggle and not punish those who spend all their lives in serving and supporting evil.

The last part of the verse "if this was Our intention" are meant to

17. Had We wanted to create amusement, We would have arranged for it around Ourselves, if this was Our intention.

dispel this erroneous conception about God. It may be kept in mind that it is because of this conception that the polytheistic nations of this world regarded this universe to be a place of conflict between gods and goddesses and Hindu philosophers dubbed it as a fairytale of their supreme God. Because they had no clear concept about the hereafter, they reckoned that just as the kings of the world build theatres for their recreation, their own deities too have created this world to amuse themselves by making some as the oppressors and others as the oppressed and some as assassins and others as the assassinated. The atheists and non-believers of today though do not express this in words as it is quite repulsive, yet this evil concept is lodged in their minds too. This is because rejecting the hereafter in fact means that this world is a place of recreation. Without acknowledging the hereafter, this world cannot be regarded to be a place based on truth and justice. Both are counterparts that form a pair. If any of the counterparts is disregarded, the other cannot have an explanation based on wisdom.

18. **بَلْ نَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَى الْبَاطِلِ فَيَدْمَغُهُ فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٌ وَلَكُمُ الْوَيْلُ مِمَّا تَصِفُونَ**

The verb **يَدْمَغُ** means to strike and injure someone in a way that it opens up the brain.

The verse implies that if these people regard this world to be a place of amusement, then this is a baseless notion. If evil has been given respite in it along with the truth by the Almighty, it is not because both are equal. His purpose is to judge people as to who adopt the truth and who adhere to evil. Ultimately the hammer of truth is going to shatter evil into pieces and just as a decisive blow on the brain gives immediate death to a person, this decisive blow will decimate evil in no time.

The last part of the verse implies that the only consequence of the nonsense they are uttering today is devastation and destruction. The words “the words you say” refer to their view that this world is a place of sport and recreation as well as to their concept of polytheism and intercession in the hereafter. It was because of this latter concept that they had no fear of the hereafter as they reckoned that if ever the hereafter comes, their deities and

18. In fact, We shall strike falsehood with the truth; so it shall shatter its head. Then you will see that is destined to be annihilated. And there is great devastation for you because of the words you say.

intercessors will save them from every danger. All these concepts and beliefs they hold will lead them to destruction.

وَلَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَمَنْ عِنْدَكَ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُوْنَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَلَا يَسْتَحْسِرُوْنَ ﴿٢٠﴾
يُسَبِّحُوْنَ اَلَيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لَا يَفْتُرُوْنَ ﴿٢١﴾¹⁹

The earlier verses argue in favour of reward and punishment on the basis of God's attributes. Coming up now is a mention of monotheism. The purpose is to explain that utterly wrong are those who think that their deities and intercessors can save them from God's punishment. All that is in the heavens and the earth are His creatures and servants and have no position of authority with God.

The words "and those who are in His presence" refer to the favoured angels of God. They too belong to God. In spite of being close to Him, they never cease from worshipping Him nor ever get tired of it. This is a refutation of the belief of the Idolaters who would worship these angels by considering them to be daughters of God. They reckoned that these angels had a high status before God and also had their way with Him; their desires and wishes were always honoured by Him. These idolaters regarded their own worldly favours to be a gift of these angels. Regarding the hereafter they thought that if ever they are resurrected, then will reap a high status there too because of these angels.

The verse says that these people show arrogance on their basis whereas they themselves neither cease from worshipping Him nor ever feel worn-out in this act. They constantly glorify and exalt God and not stop for a moment.

اَمْ اتَّخَذُوا اِلٰهَةً مِّنْ اَرْضٍ هُمْ يُنشِئُوْنَ ﴿٢٢﴾ لَوْ كَانَ فِيْهِمَا اِلٰهَةٌ اِلَّا اللّٰهُ لَفَسَدَتَا فَسُبْحٰنَ
اللّٰهِ رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُوْنَ ﴿٢٣﴾²⁰

The expression أنشأ الله الارض means "God revived the earth and made it lush and green after it had become dry and desolate."

19. And to Him belong what is in the heavens and the earth and those who are in His presence, they do not desist from worshipping Him nor do they get tired. They glorify Him day and night and do not stop.

20. Have they set up separate deities for the earth; they make it lush? Had there been other deities besides God in both of them, both would have been devastated. So, God, master of the throne, is exalted from what they say.

Thus in Sūrah al-Zukhruf, the words are:

وَالَّذِي نَزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَنْشَرْنَا بِهِ بَلْدَةً مَيْتًا. (٤٣ : ١١)

And Who sent down water from the heavens in a certain measure. Thus We revived through it a dry land. (43:11)

This verse refutes another idolatrous notion of the polytheists. Many of them thought that the heavens and the earth had separate deities. They did believe in one God of the throne but they thought that He was sitting on His throne in the heavens. As for the earth, it had different deities. As a result of this belief, they would worship their earthly deities while disregarding the God of the heavens. If we study the history of idol worship of the Arabs, we come to know that they thought that since the earth was a very far of area in the territory of the God of the throne, its governance had been entrusted by Him to others and He Himself had become aloof of it. The verse refutes this baseless notion. If the heavens and the earth had separate deities, both would have been devastated. What was the need for the One in the heavens to rain down water on the earth after it had become dry and barren or arrange for other needs of its inhabitants? The verse implies that there exists great harmony among diverse elements of nature. If even for a moment this harmony is compromised, the whole system of the universe will be dismembered. This harmony shows that it is governed by a single mind. If it had been governed by multiple minds, the heavens and the earth could not have remained intact.

The words “so, God, master of the throne, is exalted from what they say” state the consequence of the argument just cited in favour of monotheism. The concept they have about God is totally foolish. When He is the master of the throne, then it is His directive which prevails both in the heavens and the earth. In this scenario, how can others be supposed to interfere in His plans of governance?

٢١ لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

In this verse, the Almighty has explained His majesty: He is not accountable to anyone; all else whether they are angels or human beings are accountable to Him. No one can dare disobey Him, and if some tries to, he will be taken to task. This verse

21. Whatever He does, He is not answerable to anyone for it and all these are answerable.

actually refutes the notion of the idolaters who regarded their deities to have a role in the governance of this universe. They thought that they had enough influence on God to make Him change His decision and could act independently without anyone questioning them.

أَمِ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ ۚ هَذَا ذِكْرٌ مِّنْ مَّعِيَ وَذِكْرٌ مِّنْ قَبْلِي ۚ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْحَقَّ فَهُمْ مُّعْرِضُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾ وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِيْ
إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ ﴿٢٣﴾

These verses present historical evidence in favour of monotheism and refutation of polytheism. This is a separate category of evidence distinct from the evidence presented earlier regarding the harmony in diverse elements of nature. For this reason, the question “have they set up other deities besides God?” is repeated. The reason that the advocates of polytheism are asked to present evidence in favour of their belief is that as far as God is concerned, there is no difference of opinion regarding Him. They believed in Him and thus He was an established reality. As for the claim that there are other deities besides Him, it needs proof and the onus of this proof lies with its claimants. If they have any such proof, they should present it.

The words “this is the teaching of those who are with me and of those also who were before me” highlight the fact that in the Qur’ān is enshrined the teaching given to the Prophet (sws) and his followers and also the teaching given to previous prophets. All have taught the belief of monotheism. None have ever taught polytheism. If they have any evidence to the contrary, they should bring it.

The words “in fact, most of them do not know the truth; for this reason, they continue to show aversion” reflect that it is not that these people have any proof on the basis of which they are opposing monotheism and vehemently supporting polytheism. It is their ignorance and lack of knowledge of the truth that is

22. Have they set up other deities besides God? Tell them: Bring forth your proof. This is the teaching of those who are with me and of those also who were before me. In fact, most of them do not know the truth. For this reason, they continue to show aversion. And whichever messengers We sent before you, We only kept sending them this revelation: “There is no deity except I; so, worship Me only.”

making them show aversion and refusal. These words also sound assurance to the Prophet (sws) and his followers that he should not be aggrieved by their attitude: when his opposition is not based on proof and reason and is entirely based on ignorance and oblivion, how can there be any remedy to this.

The verse وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ cited above is actually an explanation of “this is the teaching of those who are with me.” An incomplete verb is suppressed before نُوحِي. It should be kept in mind that the though there has been a lot of interpolations in the previous scriptures, but the teaching of monotheism is even today preserved in them. If their recipients adopted polytheism, it was because of their own wayward philosophies and not on the basis of their teaching. Just as in spite of the Qur’ān having very clear teachings of monotheism, its followers have been inflicted with various forms of polytheism, similarly, these nations adopted the curse of polytheism against the monotheism mentioned in their scriptures. Then they tried to furnish external reasoning to support it. The teachings of the Torah, the Gospel and the Psalms have been referred to in this exegesis earlier. In the Torah, the teachings of Abraham (sws) are also found. It is based entirely on monotheism. In short, all available record of previous scriptures corroborates the claim of the Qur’ān that every messenger of God preached monotheism. None of them ever preached polytheism. Anyone who makes a contrary claim is totally unaware of the history of the prophets and their preaching.

وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَنَهُ ۚ بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُّكْرَمُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾ لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْبَلُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

These verses refute the baseless belief of intercession held by the idolaters. They regard angels to be daughters of God and foolishly think that whatever favours and sustenance they receive in this world is because of them, and if ever there is going to be a judgement day, there too they will reap a high status because of them. This erroneous belief is refuted by saying that if such intercession is accepted, then this would render belief in the

23. And they say: “The Merciful God has children.” He is exalted from this blame. In fact, they are favoured servants of God. They do not take the initiative in speaking to Him. They only obey His directive.

hereafter redundant, as has been alluded to earlier. In other words, if bribery and intercession can convert truth into falsehood and vice versa, it would mean that this world is a meaningless place. It is based on injustice and its creator is unjust.

The first verse states that God is far beyond having a wife and children. Such ascriptions are totally against His divinity. Angels are not daughters of God as these foolish people contend; they are His honourable servants. They hold a favoured status with God. However, this status is held by them because they cannot perpetrate evil and are fully devoted to God and worship Him only and not because they can have their say before Him.

The second verse cited above states that angels cannot even take the initiative in speaking to Him, let alone have an influence on Him or have any special status before Him. They only speak when they are permitted and reply to whatever they have been asked in a very respectful way. They do not have the authority to take any step for anyone out of their own accord. They only obey what they are told by God. Thus, if such is the status of these angels, it would be outright foolishness to pin any hopes on them and think that they will secure them from God's grasp and grant them whatever rank they want to.

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَمَرَ لَهُمْ مِنْ خَشْيَتِهِ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

The Almighty is well aware of their past, present and future. Hence none can increase or decrease God's knowledge about any of them. Moreover, these angels cannot take any initiative to recommend anyone. They can only recommend those whom God chooses. Furthermore, they continue to tremble with God's fear. Thus there is absolutely no possibility of the fact that they say something against the truth.

The overall implication is that people who have pinned their hopes on their intercession should contemplate all these things and not ruin their future on the basis of a baseless notion.

وَمَنْ يَقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَهٌ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَذَلِكَ نَجْزِيهِ جَهَنَّمَ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

24. Whatever is in front of them and behind them is all in His knowledge. And they will not intercede for anyone except for whom God pleases and keep trembling with His awe.

25. And whoever among them claims: "I am a deity besides God,"

The verse points to the fact that whereas these people had given their deities such status that God was merely a pawn in their hands and they could move it wherever they wanted to, their real status is spelled out by this verse. Their fate is Hell and this punishment has been prescribed by God for all polytheists. They too are destined to encounter it. It may be kept in mind that the same threat has been sounded by God to the Christians regarding Jesus (sws) and his mother.

Section III: Verses (30-33)

The previous verses state two arguments in favour of monotheism based on human nature and intellect and on God's attributes. Verse 5 had mentioned people who were demanding signs. Here their attention is directed to signs in the world around them: why do they demand a new sign when this universe is replete with signs of God's providence, power and mercy and of the belief of monotheism and the advent of the hereafter? Why do they not reflect on them? If they have shut their eyes to all these signs, what guarantee is there that a new sign will open their eyes? The real passage that makes guidance enter the heart is the intellect. When they have blinded their intellect, how can they receive guidance?

Readers may now proceed to study these verses in the light of this background.

Text and Translation

أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا^ط وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِهِمْ^ص وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا فِجَاجًا سُبُلًا لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٣١﴾ وَجَعَلْنَا السَّيَّاءَ سَقْفًا مَحْفُوظًا^ط وَهُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِنَا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾ وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ^ط كُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

Have these disbelievers not seen that the heavens and the earth both are closed. Then We open them and We gave life to everything with water. So, even then are they not accepting faith? And We planted mountains in the earth so that it may not tilt away with them and in these mountains made passes as paths so that they find the way. And We made the heavens a secure

We shall punish him with Hell. Thus will We punish the unjust.

roof and they have turned away from its signs. And it is He Who made the night and the day, the sun and the moon. Each of them is moving in a specific path. (30-33)

Explanation

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا^ط وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ²⁶ ﴿٢٦﴾

The word كَانَ here is in the same meaning as in كَانَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهَا حَكِيمًا.

The word رَتْقٌ means “closed” and فَتَقٌ means “to open.” The implication of the verse is that the heavens are closed and do not rain down water. Similarly, the earth is closed and no vegetation sprouts from it. Then people see that the heavens open and send down water in abundance. After that, the earth too is made to open and it becomes lush and luxuriant. Hitherto, it was dry and barren; as soon as it was drenched with rain, it sprung to life.

The verse says that why don't those who deny monotheism and the hereafter and demand a sign to make them convinced observe signs that they encounter everyday. It is precisely for his reason that the Almighty has made His signs evident so that people are guided to the right path.

Reflection shows that in this observation are found the arguments presented by the Qur'ān in favour of what it wants its addressees to believe in.

A very clear argument of monotheism is found in it. If the heavens and the earth had separate deities, what was the need for the heavens to rain down water to keep bring life to the earth. This harmony found between the two – as if they are pairs – clearly evidences the fact that both have the same creator who controls them.

A second argument found in it is of the hereafter. If a dry and dead piece of land is once again brought back to life, why should being re-created after death be regarded as improbable?

A third argument found in it is that human beings will be held accountable. They should see that God has made such elaborate arrangements to nurture and nourish them. He has put the heavens and the earth, the sun and the moon, the clouds and the

26. Have these disbelievers not seen that the heavens and the earth both are closed. Then We open them and We gave life to everything with water. So, even then are they not accepting faith?

winds into their service. So how is it possible that He will let them go like this without holding them accountable for these favours.

This subject is discussed in Sūrah Qāf thus:

وَنَزَّلْنَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً مُبَارَكًا فَأَنْبَتْنَا بِهِ جَنَّاتٍ وَحَبَّ الْحَصِيدِ وَالنَّخْلَ بَسِقَاتٍ لَهَا طَلْعٌ نَضِيدٌ رِزْقًا لِلْعِبَادِ ۖ وَأَحْيَيْنَا بِهِ بَلْدَةً مَّيْتًا كَذَلِكَ الْخُرُوجُ (٥٠: ٩-١١)

And We sent down blessed water from the sky with which We thence brought forth gardens and the harvest grain and tall palm trees stacked with clusters of dates, as a means of sustenance for people. And through this water, We also revived a dead piece of land. Likewise, shall be the coming out from the graves. (50:9-11)

وَجَعَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِهِمْ ۖ وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا فِجَاجًا سُبُلًا لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

The word رَوَاسِيَ is an attribute for mountains and this attribute has become so famous for them that it has assumed the place of the very noun it qualifies. Before the expression أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِهِمْ a word to the effect كَرَاهِيَّةٌ is suppressed. The word فِجَاجًا is the plural of فِج and the latter refers to the space or gap between two mountains.

These spaces and passes have been created for people so that they can travel from one place to another. Had God not provided them with this opportunity, they would have been confined to their own territories and it would not have been possible for anyone travel and do trade.

The words “so that they find the way” mean that people are guided through these pathways as well as that God has made evident His great signs so that their eyes are opened, the majesties of His power, exaltedness and wisdom become clear and they find their way to Him. Unfortunately, human beings are inflicted with this strange blindness that they do not receive guidance from as great a sign as a mountain but if shown a miracle in accordance with their demand, then they will find guidance. How can people see a mole if they are unable to see a mountain?

In Sūrah Qāf, it is stated:

27. And We planted mountains in the earth so that it may not tilt away with them and in these mountains made passes as paths so that they find the way.

وَالْأَرْضَ مَدَدْنَاهَا وَأَلْقَيْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ وَأَنْبَثْنَا فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيمٍ تَبْصِرَةً ۚ وَذِكْرًا لِكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُنِيبٍ (٥٠ : ٧-٨)

And We spread the earth and implanted mountains in it, and brought forth in it all kinds of beautiful things for the insight and reminder for every heedful person. (50:7-8)

It is evident from the last words of the above cited verse that God's real purpose of showing these great signs is that people have insight and they are reminded. However, they can only benefit those who are attentive to them. Those who do not have this ability will remain blind even after seeing everything.

وَجَعَلْنَا السَّمَاءَ سَقْفًا مَحْفُوظًا ۖ وَهُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهَا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾

After pointing towards certain prominent signs of the earth, attention is directed to the perfection in the unbounded expanse of the heavens. They have not the slightest flaw in them. No one knows when this roof was made and even after the passage of time, it has not become decrepit or inflicted with any flaw. It is secure from every fissure and fully intact. In Sūrah Qāf, this aspect is mentioned thus:

أَفَلَمْ يَنْظُرُوا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَوْقَهُمْ كَيْفَ بَنَيْنَاهَا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا وَمَا لَهَا مِنْ فُرُوجٍ (٥٠ : ٦)

Have they not paid attention to the sky above them? How We have made and adorned it, and it has no fissure in it at any place. (50:6)

In Sūrah al-Mulk, the words are:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَّا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِنْ تَفْوُتٍ ۚ فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى مِنْ فُتُورٍ ثُمَّ ارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ كَرَّتَيْنِ يَنْقَلِبْ إِلَيْكَ الْبَصَرُ حَاسِئًا وَهُوَ حَسِيرٌ

He, Who created seven heavens one above the other. You will not find any fault with what has been created by the Most Gracious. Thus, look about: can you see any flaw? Look again and again. Your look will come back to you worn out and overcome but will not be able to discover any flaw. (67:2-4)

28. And We made the heavens a secure roof and they have turned away from its signs.

For any more explanation on this subject, readers may consult verse 99 of Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl and verses 27-33 of Sūrah al-Nāzi'āt. Some exegetes have interpreted the word “secure” of the verse under discussion to mean that the heavens are secure from the interference of devils. This issue will insha'Allāh be discussed in the explanation of Sūrah al-Mulk.

The words “and they have turned away from its signs” point to the fact that as far as signs are concerned, there is no dearth of them; yet what can they serve such people who have shut their eyes from them.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ ۚ كُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

After pointing to the signs of the heavens, attention is directed to some of their prominent signs. Even though the night and the day, the sun and the moon are diverse elements of nature yet they are complementing one another and are in total harmony with one another. This is evidence enough to show that this universe is being government by a single mind which has made these elements serve the collective benefit of the world.

In the sentence “each of them is moving in a specific path” the word “each” refers to the sun and the moon. When the word كُلٌّ (each) occurs in this way, it becomes an instrument for defining a noun and refers to it as mentioned regardless of being two or more. The implication of this sentence is that the sun and the moon dare not deviate from their prescribed paths. If this happens, it will disrupt the whole system of the universe. They follow their course with minute precision and continue to do so with this perfection. This bears evidence to the fact that they obey the master of this universe. It is utter foolishness that in spite of observing these signs in the light of the day and in the darkness of night, people are demanding another sign. Even worse are those who have regarded the sun and the moon as deities even though they by their very existence continuously show that they are submissive.

29. And it is He Who made the night and the day, the sun and the moon. Each of them is moving in a specific path.