

Surah Nuh (Noah)

Name

"Nuh" is the name of this Surah as well as the title of its subject matter, for in it, from beginning to the end, the story of the Prophet Noah has been related.

Period of Revelation

This also is one of the earliest Surahs to be revealed at Makkah, but the internal evidence of its subject matter shows that it was sent down in the period when opposition to the Holy Prophet's message of Islam by the disbelievers of Makkah had grown very strong and active.

Theme and Subject

In this surah the story of the Prophet Noah has not been related only for the sake of story telling, but its object is to warn the disbelievers of Makkah, so as to say: "You, O people of Makkah, are adopting towards Muhammad (upon whom be Allah's peace and blessings) the same attitude as the people of the Prophet Noah had adopted towards him; if you do not change this attitude, you too would meet with the same end." This had not been said in so many words anywhere in the Surah, but in the background of the conditions under which this story was narrated to the people of Makkah, this subject itself became obvious.

Vv. 2-4 briefly explain how he began his mission and what he preached.

Then after suffering hardships and troubles in the way of preaching his mission for ages the report that he made to his Lord has been given in vv. 5-20. In it he states how he had been trying to bring his people to the right path and how his people had stubbornly opposed him.

After this, the Prophet Noah's final submission has been recorded in vv. 21-24, in which he prays to his Lord, saying: "These people have rejected my invitation: they are blindly following their chiefs, who have devised a tremendous plot of deceit and cunning. Time now has come when these people should be deprived of every grace to accept guidance." This was not an expression of impatience by the Prophet Noah, but when after having preached his message under extremely trying circumstances for centuries he became utterly disappointed with his people, he formed the opinion that no chance whatever was left of their coming to the right path. His this opinion fully conformed to Allah's own decision. Thus, in the next verse (25), it has been said: "The torment of Allah descended on those people because of their misdeeds."

In the concluding verse, the Prophet Noah's supplication that he made to his Lord, right at the time the torment descended, has been recorded. In it he prays for his own and for all the believers' forgiveness, and makes a submission to Allah to the effect: "Do not leave any of the disbelievers alive on the earth, for they have become utterly devoid of every good: they will not beget any but disbelieving and wicked descendants."

While studying this Surah one should keep in view the details of the Prophet Noah's story which have been given in the Qur'an above. For this see Al-Araf: 59-64 Yunus: 71,73, Hud: 25-49, Al-Mu'minun: 23-31, Ash- Shua'ra: 105-122, Al-Ankabut: 14,15, As-Saaffat: 75-82, Al-Qamar: 9-16.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرْ قَوْمَكَ مِن قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابٌ
أَلِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

[1] We sent Noah to his people (as a Messenger, with the instruction): "Warn your people before there comes upon them a painful torment."¹

قَالَ يَتَقَوْمِ إِنِّي لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٢﴾

أَنْ أَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَطِيعُوا ﴿٣﴾

يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ مِّنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُؤَخِّرْكُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى إِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ إِذَا جَاءَ

لَا يُؤَخَّرُ لَوْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

[2-4] He said, "O my people, I am a plain warner to you. (I warn you) that you should worship Allah, and fear Him and obey me.² Allah will forgive you your sins,³ and will give you respite till an appointed time.⁴ The fact is that when the appointed time of Allah comes, it cannot be deferred.⁵ Would that you know it."⁶

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُ قَوْمِي لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا ﴿٥﴾

فَلَمْ يَزِدْهُمْ دُعَائِي إِلَّا فِرَارًا ﴿٦﴾

وَإِنِّي كُلَّمَا دَعَوْتُهُمْ لِتَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ جَعَلُوا أَصْبِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ وَأَسْتَغْشَوْا
ثِيَابَهُمْ وَأَصْرُوا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا وَاسْتَكْبَارًا ﴿٧﴾

ثُمَّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُهُمْ جِهَارًا ﴿٨﴾

ثُمَّ إِنِّي أَعْلَنْتُ لَهُمْ وَأَسْرَرْتُ لَهُمْ إِسْرَارًا ﴿٩﴾

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا ﴿١٠﴾

يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا ﴿١١﴾

وَيُمِدُّكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَيْنَ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ جَنَّتٍ وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ
أَنْهَرًا ﴿١٢﴾

مَّا لَكُمْ لَا تَرْجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارًا ﴿١٣﴾

وَقَدْ خَلَقَكُمْ أَطْوَارًا ﴿١٤﴾

أَلَمْ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا
﴿١٥﴾

وَجَعَلَ الْقَمَرَ فِيهِنَّ نُورًا وَجَعَلَ الشَّمْسَ سِرَاجًا ﴿١٦﴾

وَاللَّهُ أَنْبَتَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ نَبَاتًا ﴿١٧﴾

ثُمَّ يُعِيدُكُمْ فِيهَا وَيُخْرِجُكُمْ إِخْرَاجًا ﴿١٨﴾

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ الْأَرْضَ بِسَاطًا ﴿١٩﴾

لِتَسْلُكُوا مِنْهَا سُبُلًا فِجَاجًا ﴿٢٠﴾

[5-20] Noah submitted,⁷ "O my Lord, I called my people night and day, but my calling has only increased their aversion.⁸ And whenever I called them that You might pardon them,⁹ they thrust their fingers into their ears and covered their faces with their garments,¹⁰ and grew obstinate and showed great arrogance.¹¹ Then I invited them openly and preached to them in public as well as in private. I said, "Seek forgiveness from your Lord: indeed He is All-Forgiving. He will send abundant rains for you from heaven, will help you with wealth and children, will create gardens for you, and provide flowing rivers for you.¹² What is the matter with you that you do not expect for Allah any dignity,¹³ although He has created you in successive stages?¹⁴ Do you not see how Allah has created seven heavens, one above the other and made the moon a light in them and the sun a lamp? And Allah has caused you to grow out of the earth in a strange way,¹⁵ then He will restore you to the same earth, and will raise you up from it suddenly. And Allah has spread out the earth as a carpet for you that you may walk in its open paths."

قَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ إِنَّهُمْ عَصَوْنِي وَاتَّبَعُوا مَنْ لَمْ يَزِدْهُ مَالُهُ

وَوَلَدُهُ إِلَّا خَسَارًا ﴿٢١﴾

وَمَكَرُوا مَكْرًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٢٢﴾

وَقَالُوا لَا تَذَرُنَّ آلِهَتَكُمْ وَلَا تَذَرُنَّ وَدًّا وَلَا سُوَاعًا وَلَا يَغُوثَ وَيَعُوقَ

وَنَسْرًا ﴿٢٣﴾

وَقَدْ أَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا ۗ وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا ضَلَالًا ﴿٢٤﴾

[21-24] Noah said, "O my Lord, they have disobeyed me and followed those (chiefs) whose wealth and children have increased them only in loss. They have devised a

mighty plot.¹⁶ They said, "Do not at all abandon your gods, and do not abandon Wadd nor Suwa, nor Yaghuth and Ya `uq and Nasr."¹⁷ They have led many people astray, and so (O Lord), increase not the wrongdoers in anything but deviation."¹⁸

مِمَّا خَطِيئَتِهِمْ أُغْرِقُوا فَأَدْخَلُوا نَارًا فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْصَارًا ﴿٢٥﴾

وَقَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ دَيَّارًا ﴿٢٦﴾

إِنَّكَ إِن تَذَرُهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبَادَكَ وَلَا يَلِدُوا إِلَّا فَاجِرًا كَفَّارًا ﴿٢٧﴾

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِيَ مُؤْمِنًا وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ
وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا تَبَارًا ﴿٢٨﴾

[25-28] Only because of their sins they were drowned and were cast into Fire.¹⁹ Then they found no helper to save them from Allah.²⁰ And Noah prayed: "My Lord, leave not on the earth any dweller from among the disbelievers. If you leave them, they would lead Your servants astray, and would beget none but sinners and disbelievers. My Lord, forgive me and my parents and whoever has entered my house as a believer, and all believing men and all believing women, and increase not the wrongdoers in anything but ruin."

¹"Warm your people ... ": Warn them that the errors and moral evils that they were involved in, would only earn them Allah's punishment, if they did not desist from them, and tell them what way they should adopt in order to ward off that punishment.

²The three things which the Prophet Noah presented before his people at the outset of his mission of Prophethood were:

- (1) Worship of Allah,
- (2) adoption of piety (taqwa) and

(3) obedience of the Messenger.

Worship of Allah meant that they should give up worship and service of all others and should acknowledge Allah alone as their Deity and should worship and carry out His commands alone. Taqwa (piety) meant that they should refrain from all those works which caused Allah's anger and displeasure, and should instead adopt such attitude in their lives as the God fearing people should adopt. As for "obey me", it meant that they should obey the commands that he gave them as Allah's Messenger.

3The sentence yaghfir la-kum min dhunub-i-kum in the original does not mean that Allah will forgive some of their sins, but its correct meaning is: "If you accept and acknowledge the three things which are being presented before you, He will forgive all the sins that you have committed in the past."

4That is, "If you accepted these three things, you would be given respite to live in the world until the time that Allah has appointed for your natural death."

5"The appointed time of Allah .. ": the time fixed by Allah for sending down a torment on a people. In this regard the Qur'an has at several places stated explicitly that when Allah's torment has been decreed for a certain people, they are not pardoned even if they affirm the faith after it.

6That is, "If you come to know fully well that the time which is now passing after you have received Allah's message through me, is, in fact, a period of respite that has been granted to you for affirming the faith-and there is no chance of escape from Allah's torment after the term of respite has elapsed-you would testify to the faith without delay and would not like to postpone it until the torment actually started descending on you."

7Omitting the history of a long period of preaching, now the Prophet Noah's petition that he made to Allah in the last stage of his worldly mission is being related.

8That is, "As I went on calling them towards You, they went on fleeing farther and farther away from You."

9"That you might pardon them": that they might give up their attitude of disobedience and beg forgiveness of Allah, for in that way alone they could be forgiven by Allah.

10They covered their faces either because they did not even like to have a look at the Prophet Noah's face, not to speak of listening to what he said, or they did so in order to hide their own faces from him as they passed by him so that he could not recognize and address them. This precisely was the attitude and conduct which the disbelievers of Makkah were adopting towards the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace). In Surah Hud: 5, their attitude has been described thus: "Behold, they turn aside their chests in order to hide themselves from him: Beware, even when they cover themselves up with their garments, Allah knows alike what they hide and what they show; He indeed

knows even the secrets they conceal in their breasts." (For explanation, see E.N, 5, 6 of Hud).

11"Arrogance" implies that they thought it was below their dignity to bow before the Truth and accept the admonition of Allah's Messenger. As for example, if a gentleman admonishes a perverted person and he, in response, shakes his head and walks away haughtily, this would amount to rejecting the admonition with arrogance.

12This theme has been expressed at several places in the Qur'an that the rebellious attitude against God causes man to lead a wretched life not only in the Hereafter but also in this world, Contrary to this, if a nation adopts the way of faith and piety and obedience to Divine Commands, instead of disobedience, it benefits it not only in the Hereafter but also in the world; it is favored with every kind of blessing. In Surah Ta Ha it has been said: "And whoever turns away from My Admonition, will have a wretched life in the world, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Resurrection." (v. 124). In Surah Al-Ma'idah it has been said: "Had the people of the Book observed the Torah and the Gospel and the other Books which had been sent down by their Lord, abundance of provisions would have been given to them from above and from beneath." (v. 66). In Al-A'raf: "Had the people of the settlements believed and adopted the way of piety, We would have opened on them doors of blessings from the heavens and the earth." (v. 96). In Surah Hud, the Prophet Hud addressed his people, saying: "And O my people, beg forgiveness of your Lord, then turn to Him in penitence, and He will open the gates of heavens for you and add more strength to your present strength." (v. 52). Through the Holy Prophet himself in this very Surah Hud, the people of Makkah have been admonished to the effect: "And you should beg forgiveness of your Lord, then return to Him, and He will provide you with good provisions of life till an appointed term." (v. 3). According to the Hadid, the Holy Prophet said to the Quraish: "There is a word which, if you accept, would enable you to rule over the Arab as well as the non-Arab world." (For explanation, see E.N. 96 of Al-Ma'idah, E.N.'s 3, 57 of Hud, E.N. 105 of Ta Ha; Introduction to Surah Suad),

Acting on this same instruction from the Qur'an, once during a famine Hadrat `Umar came out to invoke Allah for the rain and begged only forgiveness of Him. The people said: "O Commander of the Faithful, you have not prayed for the rain." He replied: "I have knocked at the doors of heaven where from the rain is sent down", and then he recited these verses of Surah Nuh to them. (Ibn Jarir, Ibn Kathir). Likewise, when in the assembly of Hadrat Hasan Basri, a person complained of drought, he said to him "Beg forgiveness of Allah." Another person complained of poverty, a third one said that he was not being blessed with children, a fourth one said that his harvest had failed, and he continued to remind everyone to beg forgiveness of Allah. The people asked: "How is it that you have suggested to all the people one and the same cure for the different complaints? He in response recited these verses of Surah Nuh to them" (Al-Kashshaf).

13It means: "As for the petty chiefs of the world, you think it would be dangerous to do anything against their dignity, but as for the Creator and Lord of the universe, you do

not expect that He would also be a Being endowed with dignity. You rebel against Him, associate others in His Divinity, disobey His Commands, and yet you are not at all afraid that He would punish you for your misconduct."

14That is, "He has brought you to the present stage after passing you through different stages of creation and phases of development. In the beginning you lay in the form of sperm and ovum separately in the loins of your father and mother. Then the two were combined by the power of Allah and you were conceived. Then for nine months in the womb of the mother you were gradually formed into a perfect human form and were endowed with all those capabilities which you needed to function as a man in the world. Then you came out as a child from the mother's womb, and you were developed from one state to another constantly until you attained to full youth and then old age. While passing through all these stages you lay wholly in the power of Allah at all times. Had He so willed He would not have allowed you to be conceived but allowed another person to be conceived in your place. Had He so pleased He would have made you blind, deaf, dumb, or a cripple, in the mother's womb itself, or made you mentally deficient. Had He so liked you would not have been born as a living child. Even after your birth He could have destroyed you any time by causing you to fall a victim to one or other accident suddenly. About that God under Whose power you are so powerless, how could you have taken it into your head that you could commit any insolence against Him, could regard Him with every treachery and ingratitude, could rebel against Him as and when you pleased, and could do all this with impunity?

15Here, the creation of man out of the substances of the earth has been compared to the growth of vegetation. Just as at one time there was no vegetation on the earth, then Allah caused it to grow, so at one time man did not exist, then Allah created him.

16"Mighty plot": All those deceits, deceptions and frauds which the chiefs and religious guides were employing in an attempt to mislead the common people against the teachings of the Prophet Noah. For example, they said; "Noah is no more than a mere man like yourselves. How can one believe that Allah sends down Revelations to him? (Al-A'raf: 63, Hud: 27). "We also see that only the meanest of us have become his followers without due thought. Had there been some weight in what he says, the elders of the people would have believed in him." (Hud: 27). "Had Allah willed, He would have sent down angels." (Al-Mu'minun: 24). "Had he been sent by Allah, he would possess treasures, he would know the un-seen, and he would be free from all human needs, like the angels (Hud: 31). "We tied nothing in him that might give him superiority over us. " (Hud: 27). "He merely intends to obtain superiority over you. " (Al-Mu'minun: 24). "Obviously, this man is possessed." (Al-Mu'minun: 25). Similar were the things that the Quraish chiefs said to mislead the people against the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace).

17Of the gods of the Prophet Noah's people only those gods have been mentioned whom later the people of Arabia also had started worshipping and whose shrines were found all over the country at the advent of Islam. It is not impossible that the later

generations heard the names of the ancient gods of Noah's people from the people who were saved from the flood, and when ignorance once again spread among their children, they made idols of the same gods and started worshipping them again.

Wadd was the god of the Bani Kalb bin Wabash, a branch of the Quda`ah tribe, whose shrine had been built at Daumat al-Jandal. In the ancient Arabian inscriptions he has been named as Waddam ibam (father Wadd). Kalbi has stated that the image built to him was of a man of enormous size. The Quraish also acknowledged him as god and called him Wudd. It is after him that a person has been named 'Abd-i Wudd (slave of Wudd) in history.

Suwa was the goddess of the Hudhayl tribe and her idol was a female figure. Her temple was situated at Ruhat near Yanbu.

Yaghuth was the god of An'um, a branch of the Tay tribe, and of some branches of the Madhjih tribe. The people of Madhjih had installed its idol, the image of a lion, at Jurash, a place between Yaman and Hijaz. Among the Quraish also some people had been named `Abd-i Yaghuth.

Ya'uq was the god of Khaywan, a branch of the Hamdan tribe, in the territory of Hamdan in Yaman; its idol was of the horse's figure.

Nasr was the god of Al-i dhul-Kula', a branch of the Himyar tribe, in the territory of Himyar; it had its idol installed at Balkha` and had the image of the vulture. In the ancient inscriptions of Saba its name has been written as Nador. Its temple was called bayt Nador (house of Nador) and its devotees ahl Nador (people of Nador). The ruins of the ancient temples that are found in Arabia and in the adjoining lands have the image of the vulture made on the doors of most of them.

18As we have explained in the introduction to this Surah, the Prophet Noah did not invoke this curse out of impatience but he invoked it when, after doing full justice to the preaching of his mission for many centuries, he became totally despaired of any success with his people. Similar were the conditions under which the Prophet Moses also had cursed Pharaoh and his people, thus: "Lord, destroy their wealth and harden their hearts in a manner so that they do not believe until they see the painful torment." And Allah, in response, had said: "The prayer of you both has been granted" Yunus: 88-89). Like the Prophet Moses', the Prophet Noah's curse also was in complete conformity with Divine Will. Thus, in Surah Hud it has been said: "And it was revealed to Noah: No more of your people will believe in you now than those who have already believed. So, do not grieve at their misdeeds." (v. 36).

19That is, "Drowning was not their end, but after death their souls were immediately subjected to the punishment of the Fire." This precisely was the treatment that was meted out to Pharaoh and his people, as has been stated in Surah Al-Mu'min: 45-46. (For explanation, see E.N. 63 of Al-Mu'min). This verse also is of those verses which

prove the punishment of barzakh (intermediary stage between death and Resurrection).

20 That is, "None of the gods whom they looked upon as their supporters and helpers came to their rescue." This, in fact, was a warning to the people of Makkah, as if to say: "If you too are subjected to the torment of Allah, these gods on whom you have placed all your reliance, will avail you absolutely nothing."