

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

**THE  
HOLY QURAN**

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**ENGLISH TAFSEER  
CHAPTER 37  
SURAH AS-SAFFAT**

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

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By  
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**HOLY QURAN**

**CHAPTER**

**037**

**SURAH AS-SAFFAT**

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**Introduction and Summary**

As explained in the Introduction to Surah 34, this is fourth of a series of Surahs in which the mysteries of the spiritual world are manifested in different ways, tending to defeat and final expiration of Evil. The defeat of Evil is throughout connected with Revelation, and here the ranged fight is illustrated by a reference to the angels in heaven and to the earlier Prophets in our earthly history, from Noah to Jonah. In chronology, this Surah belongs to the early middle Makkan period.

**Summary-** Through all mysteries of the heavens and the earth, there is sorting out of the evil against good: their final destinations contrasted (37:1-74, C.197).

Peace and victory came to Noah, Abraham, Moses and Aaron, Ilyas and Lut, in their conflicts with Evil (37:75-138, and C.198).

So was in with Jonah when he glorified Allah. But men ascribe to Allah what is unworthy of Him; Allah's Prophets strive for His glory, and shall be victorious (37:139-182, and C.199).

### **C.197 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)**

**(37:1-74)**

*Allah is One, the Source and Centre  
Of all affairs, and we must work  
In discipline, harmony, and unity  
To put down Evil. The Hereafter  
Is sure, when personal responsibility  
Will be enforced. For the true  
And sincere servants of Allah,  
There will be the highest Bliss,  
Unmixed and everlasting;  
For those who defy Allah's Law  
There will be the deepest enduring  
Misery. Which will men Choose?*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

وَالصَّافَّاتِ صَفًّا (۱)

1. By those who range themselves in ranks.

**C4030.** At a later stage, we shall study the general meaning of the adjurations in the Quran indicated by the particle **wa**.

See [appendix XI](#).

Here we may note that the last Surah (Yasin) practically began with the adjuration "by the Quran, full of wisdom", emphasizing the fact that Revelation was the evidence by which we could learn the highest wisdom of the spiritual world. Here our attention is called in three verses or clauses, to three definite attitudes which illustrate the triumph of Good and the frustration of Evil.

See the notes following.

**C4031.** Two questions arise:

1. are the doers of the three things noted in verses 1-3 the same persons, whose actions or qualities are differently described, or are they three distinct sets of persons?
2. in either case, who are they?

As to 1 the most authoritative view is that the three clauses describe the same set of persons in different aspects.

As to 2 some take them to refer to angels, and others understand by them the good men, the men of God, who strive and range themselves in Allah's service.

The words are perfectly general, and I interpret them to refer to both classes. The feminine form is grammatically used in Arabic idiom for the indefinite plural. In [37:165 below](#), the word **saffan** is used in the definite plural, and seems to be spoken by these beings, angels or men of God or both, according to how we interpret this verse.

فَالزَّاجِرَاتِ زَجْرًا (٢)

2. And so are strong in repelling (evil),

**C4032.** The three acts in verses 1-3 are consecutive, as shown by the particle **fa**.

I understand them to mean that angels and good men

- are ever ready to range themselves in ranks in the service of Allah and work in perfect discipline and accord at all times;
- that they check and frustrate evil wherever they find it and they are strengthened in doing so by their discipline and their ranging themselves in Tanks; and
- that this service furthers the Kingdom of Allah and proclaims His Message and His glory to all creation.

فَالثَّالِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا (٣)

3. And thus proclaim the message (of Allah)!

إِنَّ إِلَهَكُمْ لَوَاحِدٌ (٤)

4. Verily, verily, your Allah is One! –

**C4033.** That divine Message is summed up in the gospel of Divine Unity, on which the greatest emphasis is laid: "verily, verily your God is One".

It is a fact intimately connected with our own life and destiny.

- 'Your Lord is one Who cares for you and cherishes you;
- you are dear to Him. And He is One:
- it is only He that you have to look to, the source of all goodness, love, and power.
- You are not the sport of many contending forces or blind chances. There is complete harmony and unity in heaven and you have to put yourselves into unison with it-by discipline in ranks, by unity of plan and purpose in repelling evil, and by concerted action in promoting the Kingdom of Allah.

Here is the mystery of the manifold variety of creation pointing to the absolute Unity of the Creator.

رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا...

5. Lord of the heavens and of the earth, and all between them,

...وَرَبُّ الْمَشَارِقِ (٥)

and Lord of every point at the rising of the sun!

**C4034.** Allah is the Lord of everything that exists- 'the heavens and the earth, and all between them'.

He is the Lord of the Mashariq,-of every point at the rising of the sun.

As the Commentators tell us, there are in the solar year only two equinoctial days, when the sun rises due east: on every other the sun rises at a shifting point either north or south of due east.

In 7:137 we have **Mashariq al ardhi wa magaribaha**, where the plural of the words for East and West is negligible, as the conjunction of the two embraces all points.

The same may be said of 70:40, where Allah is called "Lord of all points in the East and the West".

If we are speaking of longitudes, they may embrace all latitudes. In 55:17 Allah is called "Lord of the two Easts and the two Wests", referring to the extreme points in either case.

A cursory reader may ask, why is only the East referred to here?

The reply is that it is not so much the East as the rising of the sun, on which stress is laid. The Arabic **mashriq** or **mashariq** is close enough to the root-word **sharafa**, to suggest, not so much the East as the rising of the sun, especially when the plural form is used.

The glorious sun rises from different points, as seen by us, but it illuminates the whole heaven and earth. It is an emblem of Unity.

إِنَّا زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَاكِبِ (٦)

6. We have indeed decked the lower heaven with beauty (in) the stars --

**C4035.** Cf. [72:8-9](#). (Eds.).

**C4036.** 'Stars' may be taken here in the popular sense, as referring to fixed stars, planets, comets, shooting stars, etc.

On a clear night the beauty of the starry heavens is proverbial. Here they are meant to illustrate two points:

- their marvelous beauty and their groupings and motions (apparent or real) manifest and typify the Design and Harmony of the One true Creator: and
- the power and glory behind them typify that there is a guard against the assaults of Evil (see verse 7 below).

وَحَفِظًا مِّنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ مَّارِدٍ (٧)

7. (For beauty) and for guard against all obstinate rebellious evil spirits.

**C4037.** Verses 7-11 seem to refer to shooting stars, Cf. 15:17-18, and notes 1951-53.

The 'heavens typify not only beauty but power. The Good in Allah's world is guarded and protected against every assault of Evil. The Evil is not part of the heavenly system: it is a thing in outlawry, merely a self-willed rebellion, - "cast away on every side, repulsed under a perpetual penalty" (verses 8-9).

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ الْأَعْلَى...

8. (So) they should not strain their ears in the direction of the Exalted Assembly

**C4038.** We can form a mental picture of the Court of the Most High, in the highest heaven, conforming to the highest idea we can form of goodness, beauty, purity, and grandeur.

The Exalted Assembly of angels is given some knowledge of the Plan and Will of Allah. Evil is altogether foreign to such an atmosphere, but is actuated by feelings of jealousy and curiosity. It tries to approach by stealth and overhear something from the august Assembly. It is repulsed and pursued by a flaming fire, of which we can form some idea in our physical world by the piercing trail of a shooting star.

...وَيَقْدُونَ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ (٨)

but be cast away from every side.

نُحُورًا...

9. Repulsed,

...وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ وَأَصِيبٌ (٩)

for they are under a perpetual penalty.

إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ (١٠)

10. Except such as snatch away something by stealth, and they are pursued by a flaming fire, of piercing brightness.

**C4039.** See last note and Cf. 15:18 and notes 1951-53.

...فَأَسْأَلْتَهُمْ ...

11. Just ask their opinion:

**C4040. "Their":** "they" are the doubters, the evil ones, the deniers of Allah's grace and mercy, who laugh at Revelation and disbelieve in a Hereafter.

... أَهْمُ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ مَنْ خَلَقْنَا ...

are they the more difficult to create, or the (other) beings We have created?

Are they more important or more difficult to create than the wonderful variety of beings in Allah's spacious Creation?

Do they forget their own lowly state, as having been created from muddy clay?

...إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِنْ طِينٍ لَازِبٍ (١١)

Them have We created out of a sticky clay!

**C4041.** Cf. 6:2;

بَلْ عَجِبْتَ وَيَسْخَرُونَ (١٢)

12. Truly dost thou marvel, while they ridicule,



**C4042.** It is indeed strange that unregenerate man should forget, on the one hand, his lowly-origin, and on the other hand, his high Destiny, as conferred upon him by the grace and mercy of Allah.

The indictment of him here comprises four counts:

- they ridicule the teaching of Truth;
- instead of profiting by admonition, they pay no heed;
- when Allah's Signs are brought home to them, they ridicule them as much as they ridiculed the teaching of Truth: and
- when they have to acknowledge incontestable facts, they give them false names like "sorcery", which imply fraud or something which has no relation to their life, although the facts touch the inner springs of their life intimately.

وَإِذَا ذُكِّرُوا لَا يَذْكُرُونَ (١٣)

13. And, when they are admonished, pay no heed --

وَإِذَا رَأَوْا آيَةً يَسْتَسْخِرُونَ (١٤)

14. And, when they see a Sign, turn it to mockery,

وَقَالُوا إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُّبِينٌ (١٥)

15. And say,

"This is nothing but evident sorcery!

أَيْنَا مِثْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَنِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ (١٦)

16. "What! when we die, and become dust and bones, shall we (then) be raised up (again)?

أَوْ آبَاؤُنَا الْأَوَّلُونَ (١٧)

17. "And also our fathers of old?"

**C4043.** Although the Hereafter, is the most solid facts in our intelligent existence, materialists deny them. They cannot believe that they could have any existence beyond the grave--still less their ancestors who died ages and ages ago: how could they ever come to life again?

قُلْ نَعَمْ...

18. Say thou:

"Yea,

...وَأَنْتُمْ دَاخِرُونَ (١٨)

and ye shall then be humiliated (on account of your evil)."

**C4044.** They are assured that the future life is a solid fact, but that it will be in very different conditions from those they know now.

All their present arrogance will have been humbled in the dust. There will be another plane, in which souls will have experiences quite different from those in their probationary life here. In that life the virtues they lacked will count, and the arrogance they hugged will be brought low.

فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ ...

19. Then it will be a single (compelling) cry;

**C4045.** Cf. 36:29, 49, and 53.

... فَإِذَا هُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ (١٩)

and behold, they will begin to see!

**C4046.** Their spiritual blindness will then leave them. But they will be surprised at the suddenness of their disillusion.

وَقَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا هَذَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ (٢٠)

20. They will say, "Ah! woe to us! This is the Day of Judgement!"

هَذَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ (٢١)

21. (A voice will say,)

"This is the Day of Sorting Out, whose truth ye (once) denied!"

**C4047.** The Day of Judgment is the day of sorting out. Cf. 36:59.

Good and evil will finally be separated, unlike the apparently inexplicable conditions in the present probationary life, when they seem to be mixed together.

## Section 2

احْتَسِرُوا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا وَأَزْوَاجَهُمْ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ (٢٢)

22. "Bring ye up," it shall be said, "The wrongdoers and their **wives**, and the things they worshipped --

**C4048.** That is, if their **wives** were also wrong-doers. They are separately mentioned, because the Arabic phrase for "**wrong-doers**" is of the masculine gender. All the associates in wrong-doing will be marshaled together. There will be personal responsibility: neither husband nor wife can lay the blame on the other.

مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ...

23. "Besides Allah,

فَاهْدُوهُمْ إِلَى صِرَاطِ الْجَحِيمِ (٢٣)

and lead them to the Way to the (Fierce) Fire!

وَقِفُّهُمْ...

24. "But stop them,

**C4049.** The scene here is after judgment. As, in an earthly tribunal, the prisoner or his advocate is asked why sentence should not be pronounced upon him, so here those who are proved to have been guilty of wrong are allowed to consider if anything or any one can help them. Then comes the exposure of the misleaders.

...إِنَّهُمْ مَسْئُولُونَ (٢٤)

for they must be asked:

مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَنْصَرُونَ (٢٥)

25. "'What is the matter with you that ye help not each other?'"

**C4050.** Obviously no one can stand and intercede, for it is a question of personal responsibility for each soul. No one can help another.

بَلْ هُمْ الْيَوْمَ مُسْتَسْلِمُونَ (٢٦)

26. Nay,

but that day they shall submit (to Judgment);

**C4051.** All the previous arrogance of this life will be gone, but they will face each other, and those who were given a false lead, as in the story of Pharaoh (Cf. 20:79), will question their misleaders as in the following verses.

وَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (٢٧)

27. And they will turn to one another, and question one another.

قَالُوا إِنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَأْتُونَنَا عَنِ الْيَمِينِ (٢٨)

28. They will say: "It was ye who used to come to us from the right hand (of power and authority)!"

**C4052.** This is the mutual recrimination of the sinners—those who sinned, against those whose instigation or evil example led them into sin.

The misleaders in the life here below often used their power and influence to spread evil.

The "**right hand**" is the hand of power and authority. Instead of using it for righteous purposes, they used it for evil selfishly for their own advantage, and mischievously for the degradation of others.

قَالُوا بَلْ لَمْ تَكُونُوا مُؤْمِنِينَ (٢٩)

29. They will reply:

"Nay, ye yourselves had no faith!"

**C4053.** But the fact that others mislead, or that their evil example is before us, does not justify us in falling from right conduct. Faith should save us from the fall.

But if we have ourselves no Faith-in righteousness, or a future life, or the reality of Allah's Law, how can we blame others?

The misleaders can well say, "You will be judged according to your misdeeds!"

The responsibility is personal, and cannot be shifted on to others. The others may get a double punishment,-for their own evil, and for misleading their weaker brethren. But the weaker brethren cannot go free from responsibility for their own deeds; for evil means a personal rebellion against Allah, if we believe in a personal God.

Evil has no authority over us, except in so far as we deliberately choose it.

وَمَا كَانَ لَنَا عَلَيْكُمْ مِّنْ سُلْطَانٍ...

30. "Nor had we any authority over you.

بَلْ كُنْتُمْ قَوْمًا طَاغِينَ (٣٠)

Nay, it was ye who were a people in obstinate rebellion!

فَحَقَّ عَلَيْنَا قَوْلُ رَبِّنَا...

31. "So now has been proved true, against us, the Word of our Lord

**C4054.** Allah's decree of justice requires that every soul should taste the consequences of its own sins, and that decree must be fulfilled.

No excuses can serve. It is only Allah's mercy that can save.

إِنَّا لَذَائِقُونَ (٣١)

that we shall indeed (have to) taste (the punishment of our sins):

فَاعْوَيْنَاكُمْ إِنَّا كُنَّا عَاوِينَ (٣٢)

32. "We led you astray: for truly we were ourselves astray."

**C4055.** Further, the misleaders can well urge against those who reproach them for misleading them:

"How could you expect anything better from us?"

You were already warned by Allah's Message that we were astray."

فَإِنَّهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ فِي الْعَذَابِ مُشْتَرِكُونَ (٣٣)

33. Truly, that day, they will (all) share in the Penalty.

إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ (٣٤)

34. Verily that is how We shall deal with Sinners.

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ (٣٥)

35. For they, when they were told that there is no god except Allah, would puff themselves up with Pride.

**C4056.** Selfish arrogance was the seed of sin and rebellion: 2:34 (of Satan): 28:39 (of Pharaoh); etc.

It is that kind of arrogance which prevents man from mending his life and conduct. When he speaks of ancestral ways, or public opinion, or national honour, he is usually thinking of himself or of a small clique which thrives on injustice.

The recognition of Allah, the one true God, as the only standard of life and conduct, the Eternal Reality, cuts out Self, and is therefore disagreeable to Sin. If false gods are imagined, who themselves would have weaknesses that fit in with sin, they give countenance to evils, and it becomes difficult to give them up, unless Allah's grace comes to our assistance. (R).

وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّمَا لَنَا آلهَتِنَا لِشَاعِرٍ مَّجْنُونٍ (٣٦)

36. And say: "What! shall we give up our gods for the sake of a Poet possessed?"

**C4057. Possessed** of an evil spirit, or mad. Such was the charge which the Unbelievers sometimes leveled at the holy Prophet in the early stages of his preaching.

بَلْ جَاءَ بِالْحَقِّ وَصَدَّقَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٣٧)

37. Nay!

He has come with the (very) Truth, and he confirms (the Message of) the messengers (before Him).

**C4058.** The message of Islam, so far from being "mad" or in any way peculiar, is eminently conformable to reason and the true facts of nature as created by Allah.

It is the Truth in the purest sense of the term, and confirms the Message of all true Messengers that ever lived.

إِنَّكُمْ لَذَائِقُو الْعَذَابِ الْأَلِيمِ (٣٨)

38. Ye shall indeed taste of the Grievous Penalty --

وَمَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٣٩)

39. But it will be no more than the retribution of (the Evil) that ye have wrought --

**C4059.** Justice demands that those who sow evil should reap the fruit, but the punishment is due to their own conduct and not to anything external to themselves.

إِلَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ (٤٠)

40. But the sincere (and devoted) servants of Allah --

أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ رِزْقٌ مَّعْلُومٌ (٤١)

41. For them is a Sustenance Determined,

**C4060. "Sustenance":** correlated with the Fruits mentioned below: see next verse.

**C4061. "Determined": Malum:** the reward of the Blessed will not be a chance or a fleeting thing. It will follow a firm Decree of Allah, on principles that can be known and understood.

فَوَاقِهِ...

42. Fruits (Delights),

**C4062. "Fruits":** Cf. 36:57, and n. 4003.

The Garden's Delights are figured forth from parallel experiences in our present life, and follow an ascending order:

- Food and Fruits;
- Gardens of Bliss, (with all their charm, design, greenery, birds' songs, fountains, etc.);

- the Home of Happiness and Dignity, with congenial company seated on Thrones;
- Delicious Drinks from crystal Springs, for social pleasure;
- and the society of Companions of the opposite sex, with beauty and charm but none of the grossness too often incidental to such companionship in this life.

...وَهُمْ مُكْرَمُونَ (٤٢)

and they (shall enjoy) honor and dignity.

فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ (٤٣)

43. In Gardens of Felicity.

عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ (٤٤)

44. Facing each other on Thrones (of dignity):

يُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِكَأْسٍ مِنْ مَّعِينٍ (٤٥)

45. Round will be passed to them a Cup from a clear-flowing fountain,

بَبَيَاضٍ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ (٤٦)

46. Crystal-white, of a taste delicious to those who drink (thereof),

لَا فِيهَا غَوْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ عَنْهَا يُنْزَفُونَ (٤٧)

47. Free from headiness;

nor will they suffer intoxication therefrom.

**C4063.** The passing round of the social cup, as in the case of other pleasures, is without any of the drawbacks and evil accompaniments of the pleasures of this world, which are taken as types.

In drink there is no intoxication: in fruit there is no satiety.

Cf. Dante: "the bread of Angels upon which One liveth here and grows not sated by it." (Paradiso, Canto II., Longfellow's translation.)



وَعِنْدَهُمْ قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ عَيْنٌ (٤٨)

48. And beside them will be chaste women;  
restraining their glances, with big eyes (of wonder and beauty).

**C4064.** In the emblem used here, again, the pure type of chaste womanhood is figured. They are chaste, not bold with their glances: but their eyes are big with wonder and beauty, prefiguring grace, innocence, and a refined capacity of appreciation and admiration.

كَأَنَّهُنَّ بَيْضٌ مَّكْنُونٌ (٤٩)

49. As if they were (delicate) eggs closely guarded.

**C4065.** This is usually understood to refer to the delicate complexion of a beautiful woman, which is compared to the transparent shell of eggs in the nest, closely guarded by the mother-bird; the shell is warm and free from stain.

In 55:58 the phrase used is "like rubies and coral", referring to the red or pink of a beautiful complexion.

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (٥٠)

50. Then they will turn to one another and question one another.

**C4066.** Cf. above, 37:27, where the same phrase is used in the reverse conditions.

In each case there is a going back to the earlier memories or experiences of this life.

قَالَ قَائِلٌ مِّنْهُمْ إِنِّي كَانَ لِي قَرِينٌ (٥١)

51. One of them will start the talk and say:  
"I had an intimate companion (on the earth),

**C4067.** This companion was a skeptic, who laughed at Religion and a Hereafter. How the tables are now turned! The devout man backed up his Faith with a good life and is now in Bliss: the other was a cynic and made a mess of his life, and is now burning in the Fire. (R).

يَقُولُ أَأَنْتَ لِمَنِ الْمُصَدِّقِينَ (٥٢)

52. "Who used to say,

'What! art thou amongst those who bear witness to the truth (of the Message)?

أُذِدَّا مِثْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَأَنْتَ لِمَدِينُونَ (٥٣)

53. ""When we die and become dust and bones, shall we indeed receive rewards and punishments?""

قَالَ هَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُطَّلِعُونَ (٥٤)

54. (A voice) said: "Would ye like to look down?"

فَاطَّلَعَ فَرَآهُ فِي سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ (٥٥)

55. He looked down and saw him in the midst of the Fire.

**C4068.** He is allowed a peep into the state which he so narrowly escaped by the grace of Allah.

قَالَ تَاللَّهِ إِنْ كِدْتَ لَتُرْدِينَ (٥٦)

56. He said:

"By Allah! thou wast little short of bringing me to perdition!

وَلَوْلَا نِعْمَةُ رَبِّي ...

57. "Had it not been for the Grace of my Lord,

**C4069.** And he gratefully acknowledges his shortcomings: "I should have been a sinner just like this, but for the grace of Allah!"

He sees that if he had erred it would have been no excuse to plead the other man's example. He had Faith and was saved, to walk in the path of righteousness.

... لَكُنْتُ مِنَ الْمُحْضَرِينَ (٥٧)

I should certainly have been among those brought (there)!

أَفَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَيِّتِينَ (٥٨)

58. "Is it (the case) that we shall not die,

إِنَّا مَوْتَنَّا الْأُولَىٰ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَدَّيْنَ (٥٩)

59. "Except our first death, and that we shall not be punished?"

**C4070.** After he realises the great danger from which he narrowly escaped, his joy is so great that he can hardly believe it!

Is the danger altogether past now?

Are the portals of death closed for ever?

Is he safe now from the temptations which will bring him to ruin and punishment?

إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْقَوْمُ الْعَظِيمُ (٦٠)

60. Verily this is the supreme achievement!

**C4071.** The answer is: Yes.

"Beyond the flight of Time. Beyond the realm of Death. There surely is some blessed clime, Where Life is not a breath!"

In the words of Longfellow this was an aspiration on this earth. In the Hereafter it is a realisation!

Some interpret verses 60-62 as a continuation of the speech of the man in heaven. The meaning would in that case be the same.

لِمِثْلِ هَذَا فَلْيَعْمَلِ الْعَامِلُونَ (٦١)

61. For the like of this let all strive, who wish to strive.

أَذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ نُزُلًا أَمْ شَجَرَةُ الزَّاقِقِ (٦٢)

62. Is that the better entertainment or the Tree of Zaqqum?

**C4072.** Cf. 17:60, n. 2250.

This bitter tree of Hell is in contrast with the beautiful Garden of heaven with its delicious fruits.

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاهَا فِتْنَةً لِلظَّالِمِينَ (٦٣)

63. For We have truly made it (as) a trial for the wrongdoers.

**C4073.** This dreadful bitter Tree of Hell is truly a trial to the wrong-doers.

- It grows at the bottom of Hell;
- even its fruit-stalks, which should have been tender, are like the heads of devils:
- its produce is eaten voraciously;
- on top of it is a boiling mixture to cut up their entrails (see next note); and
- every time they complete this round of orgies they return to the same game.

A truly lurid picture, but more lurid in reality are the stages of Evil.

- It takes its rise in the lowest depths of corrupted human nature;
- its tenderest affections are degraded to envy and hate;
- the appetite for Evil grows with what it feeds on;
- its "cures" serve but to aggravate the disease; and
- the chain of evil is unending; one round is followed by another in interminable succession.

إِنَّهَا شَجَرَةٌ تَخْرُجُ فِي أَصْلِ الْجَحِيمِ (٦٤)

64. For it is a tree that springs out of the bottom of Hell-fire:

طَلْعُهَا كَأَنَّه رُؤُوسُ الشَّيَاطِينِ (٦٥)

65. The shoots of its fruit-stalks are like the heads of devils:

فَإِنَّهُمْ لَأَكْلُونَ مِنْهَا فَمَالِؤُونَ مِنْهَا الْبُطُونَ (٦٦)

66. Truly they will eat **thereof** and fill their bellies therewith.

**C4074.** The parable of fruits and drinks in the contrasted fortunes of the Good and the Evil is further elaborated in 47:15, where the boiling water given to the evil ones cuts up their entrails.

ثُمَّ إِنَّ لَهُمْ عَلَيْهَا لَشَوْبًا مِّنْ حَمِيمٍ (٦٧)

67. Then on top of that they will be given a mixture made of boiling water.

ثُمَّ إِنَّ مَرْجِعَهُمْ لِلآلِ الْجَحِيمِ (٦٨)

68. Then shall their return be to the (Blazing) Fire.

**C4075.** When they eat of the zaqqum in the lowest depths of hell, they are apparently brought up to drink of the mixture as a further punishment, after which they go back to repeat the round.

إِنَّهُمْ أَلْفَوْا آبَاءَهُمْ ضَالِّينَ (٦٩)

69. Truly they found their fathers on the wrong Path;

فَهُمْ عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ يُهْرَعُونَ (٧٠)

70. So they (too) were rushed down on their footsteps!

**C4076.** A grim reproach. 'You found your fathers doing wrong; and you must rush headlong in their footsteps to perdition!'

وَلَقَدْ ضَلَّ قَبْلَهُمْ أَكْثَرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ (٧١)

71. And truly before them, many of the ancients went astray --

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا فِيهِمْ مُّنْذِرِينَ (٧٢)

72. But We sent aforetime, among them, (messengers) to admonish them --

**C4077.** It is human to err. The error is forgiven if there is repentance and amendment. The point is that Allah in His mercy at all times in history sent messengers and teachers to give His Message, and men deliberately rejected that Message.

فَانظُرْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُنْذَرِينَ (٧٣)

73. Then see what was the end of those who were admonished (but heeded not) --

**C4078.** It is on the reception or rejection of Allah's teachings and guidance that judgment will come. In this world itself, see what is the teaching of history.

Unrighteousness and wrong-doing never prosper in the long run.

إِنَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ (٧٤)

74. Except the sincere (and devoted) servants of Allah.

**C4079.** But there is always a band of sincere and devoted men who serve Allah, and the highest form of life is open to them.

Note that this verse occurs at 37:40 above, where the argument of the difference between the fates of the righteous and the unrighteous was begun. Here it is rounded off with the same phrase, and now we proceed to take illustrations from the early Prophets.

### C.198 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(37:75-138)

*The Prophets of Allah formed a series  
That worked in Allah's service to instruct  
Their fellow men. In case of distress  
Allah helped and delivered them. Men did flout  
And persecute them, but they carried out  
Their mission with constancy; and Allah's Purpose  
Always won, to the destruction of Evil.  
So was it in the story of Noah and the Flood.  
Of Abraham the True, of Ismail  
Ready for self-sacrifice, of Isaac  
The righteous, of Moses and Aaron, of Elias  
And Lut; all men of Faith, who receive  
The blessings of prosperity and Peace  
And Salutation from Allah Most Gracious.*

### Section 3

وَلَقَدْ نَادَانَا نُوحٌ...

75. (In the days of old), Noah cried to Us,

**C4080.** Cf. 21:76-77.

The story of Noah occurs in many places: here the point is that when men gird themselves against evil, Allah protects them, and Evil cannot triumph against Allah's Plan.

...فَلَنِعْمَ الْمُجِيبُونَ (٧٥)

and We are the Best to hear prayer.

وَنَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ مِنَ الْكَرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ (٧٦)

76. And We delivered him and his people from the Great Calamity.

**C4081.** The Deluge, the Flood of Noah. The main story will be found in 11:25-48.

وَجَعَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُ هُمُ الْبَاقِينَ (٧٧)

77. And made his progeny to endure (on this earth);

**C4082.** Noah's posterity survived the Flood in the Ark, while the rest perished.

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (٧٨)

78. And We left (this blessing) for him among generations to come in later times:

**C4083.** His name is remembered for ever, commencing a new era in religious history.

Note that the words in verses 78-81, with slight modifications, form a sort of refrain to the following paragraphs about Abraham, Moses, and Elias, but not about Lut and Jonah.

Lut was a nephew of Abraham, and may be supposed to belong to the story of Abraham. Jonah's career nearly ended in a tragedy for himself, and his people got a

further lease of power "for a time" (37:148). And both Lut and Jonah belong to a limited local tradition,

سَلَامٌ عَلَى نُوحٍ فِي الْعَالَمِينَ (٧٩)

79. "Peace and salutation to Noah among the nations!"

**C4084.** The story of the Flood is found in some form or other among all nations, and not only among those who follow the Mosaic tradition.

- In Greek tradition, the hero of the Flood is Deukalion, with his wife Pyrrha:
- in Indian tradition (Shatapatha Brahmana and Mahabharata) it is the sage Manu and the Fish.
- The Chinese tradition of a great Flood is recorded in Sha-King.
- Among American Indians the tradition was common to many tribes.

إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٨٠)

80. Thus indeed do We reward those who do right.

إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (٨١)

81. For he was one of Our believing Servants.

ثُمَّ أَغْرَقْنَا الْأَخْرِينَ (٨٢)

82. Then the rest We overwhelmed in the Flood.

وَإِنَّ مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ لِبَرَاهِيمَ (٨٣)

83. Verily among those who followed his Way was Abraham.

**C4085.** The main story will be found in 16:51-73; but the episode about his readiness and that of his son to submit to the most extreme form of self-sacrifice under trial (in verses 102-107 below) is told here for the first time, as this Surah deals with the theme, "Not my will, but Thine be done!"

In "**followed his way**", the pronoun "**his**" refers to Noah, "**he**", of verse 81 above.



إِذْ جَاءَ رَبَّهُ بِقَلْبٍ سَلِيمٍ (٨٤)

84. Behold, He approached his Lord with a sound heart.

**C4086. A sound heart: qalb salim:** a heart that is pure, and unaffected by the diseases that afflict others.

As the **heart** in Arabic is taken to be not only the seat of feelings and affections, but also of intelligence and resulting action, it implies the whole character.

Cf. Abraham's title of Hanif (the True): 2:135 and n. 134.

Cf. also 26:89: "only he will prosper who brings to Allah a sound heart."

إِذْ قَالَ لِأَبِيهِ وَقَوْمِهِ مَاذَا تَعْبُدُونَ (٨٥)

85. Behold, he said to his father and to his people,

"What is that which ye worship?"

أَفَنفَكَ آلِهَةً دُونَ اللَّهِ تُرِيدُونَ (٨٦)

86. "Is it a Falsehood -- gods other than Allah -- that ye desire?"

**C4087.** False worship-worship of idols or stars or symbols, or Mammon or Self-is due either to false and degrading conceptions of Allah, or to a sort of make-believe, where practice is inconsistent with knowledge or ignores the inner promptings of Conscience. Abraham's challenge to his people is: 'Are you fools or hypocrites?'

فَمَا ظَنُّكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٨٧)

87. "Then what is your idea about the Lord of the Worlds?"

**C4088.** 'Do you not realise that the real Creator is One-above all the forms and superstitions that you associate with Him?'

فَنظَرَ نَظْرَةً فِي النُّجُومِ (٨٨)

88. Then did he cast a glance at the stars.

فَقَالَ إِنِّي سَقِيمٌ (٨٩)

89. And he said, "I am indeed sick (at heart)!"

**C4089.** The grief was really preying on his mind and soul, that he should be associated with such falsehoods.

His father himself was among the chief supporters of such falsehoods, and his people were given up wholly to them. He could not possibly share in their mummeries, and they left him in disgust. Then he made his practical protest in the manner narrated in 21:56-64.

فَتَوَلَّوْا عَنْهُ مُدْبِرِينَ (٩٠)

90. So they turned away from him, and departed.

فَرَاغَ إِلَى آلِهِتِهِمْ فَقَالَ...

91. Then did he turn to their gods and said,

...أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ (٩١)

"Will ye not eat (of the offerings before you)?..."

مَا لَكُمْ لَّا تَنْطِقُونَ (٩٢)

92. "What is the matter with you that ye speak not (intelligently)?"

فَرَاغَ عَلَيْهِمْ ...

93. Then did he turn upon them,

**C4090.** See the reference in the last note.

...ضَرْبًا بِالْيَمِينِ (٩٣)

striking (them) with the right hand.

**C4091. With the right hand:** as the right hand is the hand of power, the phrase means that he struck them with might and main and broke them.

فَأَقْبَلُوا إِلَيْهِ يَزُفُونَ (٩٤)

94. Then came (the worshippers) with hurried steps and faced (him).

قَالَ أَتَعْبُدُونَ مَا تَنْحِتُونَ (٩٥)

95. He said:

"Worship ye that which ye have (yourselves) carved?"

**C4092.** His action was a challenge, and he drives home the challenge now with argument. 'Do you worship your own handiwork?

Surely worship is due to Him Who made you and made possible your handiwork!'

وَاللَّهُ خَلَقَكُمْ وَمَا تَعْمَلُونَ (٩٦)

96. "But Allah has created you and your handiwork!"

قَالُوا ابْنُوا لَهُ بُنْيَانًا...

97. They said:

"Build him a furnace,

قَالُوا فِي الْجَحِيمِ (٩٧)

and throw him into the blazing fire!"

**C4093.** The argument of Abraham was so sound that it could not be met by argument. In such cases Evil resorts to violence, or secret plotting. Here there was both violence and secret plotting.

The violence consisted in throwing him into a blazing Furnace. But by the mercy of Allah the fire did not harm him (21:69), and so they resorted to plotting. But the plotting, as the next verse (37:98) shows, was a boomerang that recoiled on their own heads.

فَأَرَادُوا بِهِ كَيْدًا...

98. (This failing), they then sought a stratagem against him,

**C4094.** Cf. 21:71.

Their plot against the righteous Abraham failed. Abraham migrated from the country (Chaldea, Babylon, and Assyria) and prospered in Syria and Palestine. It was his persecutors that suffered humiliation.

...فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ الْأَسْفَلِينَ (٩٨)

but We made them the ones most humiliated!

وَقَالَ إِنِّي ذَاهِبٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي سَيَهْدِينِ (٩٩)

99. He said: "I will go to my Lord! He will surely guide me!

**C4095.** This was the Hijrah of Abraham. He left his people and his land, because the Truth was dearer to him than the ancestral falsehoods of his people. He trusted himself to Allah, and under Allah's guidance he laid the foundations of great peoples.

See n. 2725 to 21:69.

رَبِّ هَبْ لِي مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (١٠٠)

100. "O my Lord! grant me a righteous (son)!"

فَبَشَّرْنَاهُ بِغُلَامٍ حَلِيمٍ (١٠١)

101. So We gave him the good news of a boy ready to suffer and forbear.

**C4096.** This was in the fertile land of Syria and Palestine. The boy thus born was, according to Muslim tradition, the first-born son of Abraham, viz., Ismail. The name itself is from the root *Samia*, to hear, because Allah had heard Abraham's prayer (verse 100).

Abraham's age when Ismail was born was 86 (Gen 16:16).

**C4097.** The boy's character was to be **Halim**, "**forbearing**".

This title is also applied to Abraham (in 9:114 and 11:75).

It refers to the patient way in which both father and son cheerfully offered to suffer any self-sacrifice in order to obey the Command of Allah.

See next verse.

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَ مَعَهُ السَّعْيَ...

102. Then, when (the son) reached (the age of) (serious) work with him,

...قَالَ يَا بُنَيَّ إِنِّي أَرَى فِي الْمَنَامِ ...

he said:

"O my son! I see in vision...

**C4098.** Where did this vision occur?

- The Muslim view is that it was in or near Makkah.
- Some would identify it with the valley of Mina, six miles north of Makkah, where a commemoration sacrifice is annually celebrated as a rite of the Hajj on the tenth of *Dhu al Hijjah*, the 'Id of Sacrifice, in Memory of this Sacrifice of Abraham and Ismail (see n. 217 to 2:197).
- Others say that the original place of sacrifice was near the hill of Marwa (the companion hill to Safa, 2:158), which is associated with the infancy of Ismail.

... أَنِّي أَدْبَحُكَ ...

... that I offer thee in sacrifice:

**C4099.** At what stage in Abraham's history did this occur?

See n. 2725 to 21:69.

It was obviously after his arrival in the land of Cannan and after Ismail had grown up to years of discretion.

Was it before or after the building of the Ka'bah (2:127)?

There are no data on which this question can be answered. But we may suppose it was before that event, and that event may itself have been commemorative.

...فَانظُرْ مَاذَا تَرَى...

now see what is thy view!"

...قَالَ يَا أَبَتِ افْعَلْ مَا تُؤْمَرُ...

(The son) said:

"O my father! do as thou art commanded:

...سَتَجِدُنِي إِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مِنَ الصَّابِرِينَ (١٠٢)

thou will find me, if Allah so wills, one practicing Patience and Constancy!"

... فَلَمَّا أَسْلَمَا

103. So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah),

**C4100.** Note that the sacrifice was demanded of both Abraham and Ismail. It was a trial of the will of the father and the son. By way of trial the father had the command conveyed to him in a vision. He consulted the son. The son readily consented, and offered to stand true to his promise if his self-sacrifice was really required.

The whole thing is symbolical. Allah does not require the flesh and blood of animals (22:37), much less of human beings. But he does require the giving of our whole being to Allah, the symbol of which is that we should give up something very dear to us, if Duty requires that sacrifice. (R).

... وَتَلَّهُ لِلْجَبِينِ (١٠٣)

and He had laid Him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice),

**C4101.** Our version may be compared with the Jewish-Christian version of the present Old Testament.

The Jewish tradition, in order to glorify the younger branch of the family, descended from Isaac, ancestor of the Jews, as against the elder branch, descended from Ismail, ancestor of the Arabs, refers this sacrifice to Isaac (Gen. 12:1-18).

Now Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old (Gen. 21:5), while Ismail was born to Abraham when Abraham was 86 years old (Gen. 16:16). Ismail was therefore 14 years older than Isaac.

During his first 14 years Ismail was the only son of Abraham; at no time was Isaac the only son of Abraham. Yet, in speaking of the sacrifice, the Old Testament says (Gen. 22:2): "And He said, Take now thy son, thine only son Issac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah: and offer him there for a burnt offering..."

This slip shows at any rate which was the older version, and how it was overlaid, like the present Jewish records, in the interests of a tribal religion. The "land of Moriah" is not clear: it was three days' journey from Abraham's place (Gen. 22:4). There is less warrant for identifying it with the hill of Moriah on which Jerusalem was afterwards built than with the hill of Marwa which is identified with the Arab tradition about Ismail.

وَنَادَيْنَاهُ أَنْ يَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ (١٠٤)

104. We called out to him,

"O Abraham!

**C4102.** In the Biblical version Isaac's consent is not taken; in fact Isaac asks, 'where is the lamb for sacrifice?' and is told that 'God would provide it'. It is a complete human sacrifice like those to Moloch.

In our version it is as much a sacrifice by the will of Ismail as by that of Abraham. And in any case it is symbolic:

"this was obviously a trial": "thou hast already fulfilled by vision": etc.

فَدَصَّقْتَ الرُّؤْيَا...

105. "Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!" --

...إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٠٥)

thus indeed do We reward those who do right.

إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْبَلَاءُ الْمُبِينُ (١٠٦)

106. For this was obviously a trial --

وَقَدَيْنَاهُ بِذَبْحٍ عَظِيمٍ (١٠٧)

107. And We ransomed him with a momentous sacrifice:

**C4103.** The adjective qualifying "sacrifice" here, '**azim**, (great, momentous) may be understood both in a literal and a figurative sense.

- In a literal sense it implies that a fine sheep or ram was substituted symbolically.

- The figurative sense is even more important. It was indeed a great and momentous occasion, when two men, with concerted will, "ranged themselves in the ranks" of those to whom self-sacrifice in the service of Allah was the supreme thing in life. In this sense, said Jesus, "he that loseth his life for my sake shall it". (Matt, 10:39). (R).

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (١٠٨)

108. And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times:

**C4104.** Cf. above, [37:78-81](#) and n. 4083.

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (١٠٩)

109. "Peace and salutation to Abraham!"

كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١١٠)

110. Thus indeed do We reward those who do right.

إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (١١١)

111. For he was one of Our believing Servants.

وَبَشَّرْنَاهُ بِإِسْحَاقَ نَبِيًّا مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ (١١٢)

112. And We gave him the good news of Isaac -- a prophet -- one of the Righteous.

**C4105.** Isaac was Abraham's second son, born of Sarah, when Abraham was 100 years of age. See [n. 4101](#).

He was also blessed and became the ancestor of the Jewish people. See next note.

وَبَارَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ وَعَلَىٰ إِسْحَاقَ...

113. We blessed him and Isaac:

...وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا مُحْسِنٌ وَظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ مُبِينٌ (١١٣)

but of their progeny are (some) that do right, and (some) that obviously do wrong, to their own souls.

**C4106.** So long as the Children of Israel upheld the righteous banner of Allah, they enjoyed Allah's blessing,



and their history is a portion of sacred history. When they fell from grace, they did not stop Allah's Plan: they injured their own souls.

## Section 4

وَلَقَدْ مَنَّنَا عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ (١١٤)

114. Again, (of old,) We bestowed Our favor on Moses and Aaron.

**C4107.** The story of Moses is told in numerous passages of the Quran. The passages most illustrative of the present passage will be found in 28:4 (oppression of the Israelites in Egypt) and 20:77-79 (the Israelites triumphant over their enemies when the latter were drowned in the Red Sea).

وَنَجَّيْنَاهُمَا وَقَوْمَهُمَا مِنَ الْكُرْبِ الْعَظِيمِ (١١٥)

115. And We delivered them and their people from (their) Great Calamity;

**C4108.** What could have been a greater calamity to them than that they should have been held in slavery by the Egyptians, that their male children should have been killed and their female children should have been saved alive for the Egyptians?

وَنَصَّرْنَاهُمْ فَكَانُوا هُمُ الْغَالِبِينَ (١١٦)

116. And We helped them, so they overcame (their troubles);

**C4109.** The Israelites were delivered by three steps mentioned in verses 114, 115, and 116 respectively; but the consummation of Allah's favour on them was (verses 117-118) the Revelation given to them, which guided them on the Straight Way, so long as they preserved the Revelation intact and followed its precepts.

The three steps were:

1. the divine commission to Moses and Aaron;
2. the deliverance from bondage; and
3. the triumphant crossing of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army.

وَأَتَيْنَاهُمَا الْكِتَابَ الْمُسْتَبِينَ (١١٧)

117. And We gave them the Book which helps to make things clear;

**C4110. Mustabin** has a slightly different force from **Mubin**.

I have translated the former by "which helps to make things clear", and the latter by "which makes things clear",-apt descriptions as applied to the Tawrah and the Quran.

وَهَدَيْنَاهُمَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ (١١٨)

118. And We guided them to the Straight Way.

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِمَا فِي الْأَخْرِينَ (١١٩)

119. And We left (this blessing) for them among generations (to come) in later times:

**C4111.** See above, [37:78-81](#) and n. 4083.

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ مُوسَىٰ وَهَارُونَ (١٢٠)

120. "Peace and salutation to Moses and Aaron!"

إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٢١)

121. Thus indeed do We reward those who do right.

إِنَّهُمَا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٢٢)

122. For they were two of Our believing Servants.

وَإِنَّ إِلْيَاسَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٢٣)

123. So also was Elias among those sent (by us).

**C4112.** See n. 905 to 6:85.

Elias is the same as Elijah, whose story will be found in the Old Testament in I Kings 17-19. and 2 Kings 1-2.

Elijah lived in the reign of Ahab (B.C. 896-874) and Ahaziah (B.C. 874-872), kings of the (northern) kingdom of Israel or Samaria. He was a prophet of the desert, like John the Baptist,-unlike our holy Prophet, who took part

in, controlled, and guided all the affairs of his people. Both Ahab and Azariah were prone to lapse into the worship of Baal, the sun-god worshipped in Syria. That worship also included the worship of nature-powers and procreative powers, as in the Hindu worship of the Lingam, and led to many abuses.

King Ahab had married a princess of Sidon, Jezebel, a wicked woman who led her husband to forsake Allah and adopt Baal-worship.

Elijah denounced all Ahab's sins as well as the sins of Ahaziah and had to flee for his life. Eventually, according to the Old Testament (4 Kings, 2:11) he was taken up in a whirlwind to heaven in a chariot of fire after he had left his mantle with Elisha the prophet. (R).

إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ أَلَا تَتَّقُونَ (١٢٤)

124. Behold, he said to his people,  
"Will ye not fear (Allah)?"

أَتَدْعُونَ بَعْلًا...

125. "Will ye call upon Baal

**C4113.** For Baal-worship [see last note](#).

وَتَذَرُونَ أَحْسَنَ الْخَالِقِينَ (١٢٥)

and forsake the Best of Creators --

وَاللَّهُ رَبُّكُمْ وَرَبَّ آبَائِكُمُ الْأُولِينَ (١٢٦)

126. "Allah, your Lord and Cherisher and the Lord and Cherisher of your fathers of old?"

فَكَذَّبُوهُ...

127. But they rejected him,

**C4114.** They persecuted him and he had to flee for his life. Eventually he disappeared mysteriously; see [n. 4112](#).

...فَإِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ (١٢٧)

and they will certainly be called up (for punishment) --

إِنَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ (١٢٨)

128. Except the sincere and devoted Servants of Allah (among them).

وَتَرَكْنَا عَلَيْهِ فِي الْآخِرِينَ (١٢٩)

129. And We left (this blessing) for him among generations (to come) in later times:

**C4115.** See above, [37:78-81](#), and n. 4083.

سَلَامٌ عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ (١٣٠)

130. "Peace and salutation to such as Elias!"

**C4115a. Ilyasin** may be an alternative form of **Ilyas**: Cf. Sainaa (23:20) and Sinin (95:2).

Or it may be the plural of **Ilyas**, meaning "such people as **Ilyas**'.

إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (١٣١)

131. Thus indeed do We reward those who do right.

إِنَّهُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (١٣٢)

132. For He was one of Our believing Servants.

وَإِنَّ لُوطًا لَّمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٣٣)

133. So also was Lut among those sent (by us).

**C4116.** The best illustration of this passage about Lut will be found in [7:80-84](#).

He was a prophet sent to Sodom and Gomorrah, Cities of the Plain, by the Dead Sea. The inhabitants were given over to abominable crimes, against which he preached. They insulted him and threatened to expel him. But Allah in His mercy saved him and his family (with one exception, see the following note), and then destroyed the Cities.

إِذْ نَجَّيْنَاهُ وَأَهْلَهُ أَجْمَعِينَ (١٣٤)

134. Behold, We delivered him and his adherents, all

إِلَّا عَجُوزًا فِي الْغَابِرِينَ (١٣٥)

135. Except an old woman who was among those who lagged behind:

**C4117.** Cf. 7:83, and n. 1051.

Lut's wife had no faith: she lagged behind, and perished in the general ruin.

ثُمَّ دَمَّرْنَا الْآخَرِينَ (١٣٦)

136. Then We destroyed the rest.

وَإِنَّكُمْ لَتَمُرُّونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مُصْبِحِينَ (١٣٧)

137. Verily, ye pass by their (sites), by day --

**C4118.** Cf. 15:76, and n. 1998.

The tract where they lay is situated on the highway to Syria where the Arab caravans travelled regularly, "by day and by night". Could not future generations learn wisdom from the destruction of those who did wrong?

وَبِاللَّيْلِ...

138. And by night:

...أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ (١٣٨)

will ye not understand?

### C.199 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

(37:139-182)

*So was it also with Jonah; he had  
His trials, but Allah had mercy on him,  
And his mission was successful. How  
Can men ascribe to Allah qualities  
And relations derogatory to His nature?  
High is He above all creatures.*

*The ranks of angels and messengers stand firm*

*In His service. Evil is sure to be overcome.  
So Praise and Glory to Allah, the Lord  
Of Honour and Power, and Peace to His messengers!*

## Section 5

وَإِنَّ يُونُسَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٣٩)

139. So also was Jonah among those sent (by us).

**C4119.** For illustrative passages, see 21:87-88, n. 2744, and 68:48-50.

Jonah's mission was to the city of Nineveh, then steeped in wickedness. He was rejected and he denounced Allah's wrath on them, but they repented and obtained Allah's forgiveness. But Jonah "departed in wrath" (21:87), forgetting that Allah has Mercy as well as forgiveness.

See the notes following i.e. n. 2744.

Cf. 10:98, n. 1478.

إِذْ أَبَقَ إِلَى الْفُلِّ الْمَشْحُونِ (١٤٠)

140. When he ran away (like slave from captivity) to the ship (fully) laden,

**C4120.** Jonah ran away from Nineveh like a slave from captivity. He should have stuck to his post. He was hasty, and went off to take a ship. As if he could escape from Allah's Plan!

فَسَاهَمَ فَكَانَ مِنَ الْمُدْحَضِينَ (١٤١)

141. He (agreed to) cast lots, and he was condemned:

**C4121.** The ship was fully laden and met foul weather. The sailors, according to their superstition, wanted to find out who was responsible for the ill-luck: a fugitive slave would cause such ill-luck. The lot fell on Jonah, and he was cast off .

فَالْتَقَمَهُ الْحُوتُ...

142. Then the big Fish did swallow him,

**C4122.** The rivers of Mesopotamia have some huge fishes. The word used here is **Hat**, which may be a fish or perhaps a crocodile. If it were in an open northern sea, it might be a whale. The locality is not mentioned:

in the Old Testament he is said to have taken ship in the port of Joppa (now Jaffa) in the Mediterranean (Jonah, 1:3), which would be not less than 600 miles from Nineveh.

The Tigris river, mentioned by some of our Commentators, is more likely, and it contains some fishes of extraordinary size.

...وَهُوَ مُلِيمٌ (١٤٢)

and he had done acts worthy of blame.

**C4123.** See [n. 4120](#).

فَلَوْلَا أَنَّهُ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُسَبِّحِينَ (١٤٣)

143. Had it not been that he (repented and) glorified Allah,

**C4124.** "But he cried through the depths of darkness, 'There is no god but Thee: glory to Thee! I was indeed wrong!'" (21:87).

لَلْبَيْتِ فِي بَطْنِهِ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ (١٤٤)

144. He would certainly have remained inside the Fish till the Day of Resurrection.

**C4125.** This is just the idiom. This was to be the burial and the grave of Jonah. If he had not repented, he could not have got out of the body of the creature that had swallowed him, until the Day of Resurrection, when all the dead would be raised up.

فَنَبَذْنَاهُ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ سَقِيمٌ (١٤٥)

145. But We cast him forth on the naked shore in a state of sickness,

**C4126.** Cf. [37:89 above](#).

His strange situation might well have caused him to be ill. He wanted fresh air and solitude. He got both in the open plain, and the abundantly shady Gourd Plant or

some fruitful tree like it gave him both shade and sustenance. The Gourd is a creeper that can spread over any roof or ruined structure.

وَأَنْبَتْنَا عَلَيْهِ شَجَرَةً مِّنْ يَقْطِينٍ (١٤٦)

146. And We caused to grow over him, a spreading plant of the Gourd kind,

وَأَرْسَلْنَاهُ إِلَىٰ مِئَةِ أَلْفٍ أَوْ يَزِيدُونَ (١٤٧)

147. And We sent him (on a mission) to a hundred thousand (men) or more.

**C4127.** The city of Nineveh was a very large city. The Old Testament says: "Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey" (Jonah, 3:3); "wherein are more than six score thousand persons" (Jonah, 4:11).

In other words its circuit was about 45 miles, and its population was over a hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants.

فَأَمَّنُوا...

148. And they believed;

...فَمَتَّعْنَاهُمْ إِلَىٰ حِينٍ (١٤٨)

so We permitted them to enjoy (their life) for a while.

**C4128.** They repented and believed, and Nineveh got a new lease of life. For the dates to which Jonah may be referred, and the vicissitudes of the City's history as the seat of the Assyrian Empire, see notes 1478-79

n. 1478, n.1479 to 10:98.

The lessons from Jonah's story are:

- that no man should take upon himself to judge of Allah's wrath or Allah's mercy;
- that nevertheless Allah forgives true repentance, whether in a righteous man, or in a wicked city; and
- that Allah's Plan will always prevail, and can never be defeated.



فَاسْتَفْتِهِمُ الرِّبَّكَ الْبَنَاتُ وَلَهُمُ الْبُيُوتَ (١٤٩)

149. Now ask them their opinion: is it that thy Lord has (only) daughters, and they have sons? --

**C4129.** We begin a new argument here. The Pagan Arabs called angels daughters of Allah. They themselves were ashamed of having daughters, and preferred to have sons, to add to their power and dignity.

See 16:57-59, and n. 2082. Yet they invented daughters for Allah!

أَمْ خَلَقْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِنَاثًا وَهُمْ شَاهِدُونَ (١٥٠)

150. Or that We created the angels female, and they are witnesses (thereto)?

أَلَا إِنَّهُمْ مِّنْ إِفْكِهِمْ لَيَقُولُونَ (١٥١)

151. Is it not that they say, from their own invention,

وَلَا اللَّهُ...

152. "Allah has begotten children"?

**C4130.** Any attribution to Allah of ideas derogatory to His Oneness and His supreme height above all creatures is likely to degrade our own conception of Allah's Universal plan, and is condemned in the strongest terms.

...وَأِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ (١٥٢)

But they are liars!

أَصْطَفَى الْبَنَاتِ عَلَى الْبَنِينَ (١٥٣)

153. Did He (then) choose daughters rather than sons?

**C4131.** There is the strongest irony in this passage.

مَا لَكُمْ...

154. What is the matter with you?

...كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ (١٥٤)

How judge ye?

أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ (١٥٥)

155. Will ye not then receive admonition?

أَمْ لَكُمْ سُلْطَانٌ مُّبِينٌ (١٥٦)

156. Or have ye an authority manifest?

فَأْتُوا بِكِتَابِكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (١٥٧)

157. Then bring ye your Book (of authority) if ye be truthful!

وَجَعَلُوا بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ الْجِنَّةِ نَسَبًا...

158. And they have invented a blood-relationship between Him and the Jinns:

**C4132.** The angels are at least pure beings engaged in the service of Allah. But the Pagan superstitions not only connect them with Allah as daughters but even connect Allah by relationship with all kinds of spirits, good or evil! In some mythologies the most evil powers are gods or goddesses as if they belonged to the family of Allah the Creator and had some semblance of equality with Him! This, too, is repudiated in the strongest terms.

For Jinns see n. 929 to 6:100.

...وَلَقَدْ عَلِمَتِ الْجِنَّةُ إِنَّهُمْ لَمُحْضَرُونَ (١٥٨)

but the Jinns know (quite well) that they have indeed to appear (before His judgment-seat)!

سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُصِفُونَ (١٥٩)

159. Glory to Allah!

(He is free) from the things they ascribe (to Him)!

إِنَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ (١٦٠)

160. Not (so do) the servants of Allah, sincere and devoted.

**C4133.** Those sincere in devotion to Allah never ascribe such degrading ideas to Allah.

فَإِنَّكُمْ وَمَا تَعْبُدُونَ (١٦١)

161. For, verily, neither ye nor those ye worship --

مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ بِفَاتِنِينَ (١٦٢)

162. Can lead (any) into temptation concerning Allah,

**C4134.** Evil has no power over faith, truth, and sincerity. Such power as it has is over those who deliberately put themselves in the way of Destruction. It is their own will that leads them astray. If they were fortified against Evil by Faith, Patience, and Constancy, Evil would have no power to hurt them. Allah would protect them.

إِلَّا مَنْ هُوَ صَالِ الْجَحِيمِ (١٦٣)

163. Except such as are (themselves) going to the blazing Fire!

وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ (١٦٤)

164. (Those ranged in ranks say):

"Not one of us but has a place appointed,

**C4135.** To round off the argument of the Surah we go back to the idea with which it began.

Those who range themselves in ranks for the united service of Allah (see above, 37:I and n. 4031) - whether angels or men of God-are content to keep their ranks and do whatever service is assigned to them. It is not for them to question Allah's Plan, because they know that it is good and that it will ultimately triumph. Any seeming delays or defeats do not worry them. Nor do they ever break their ranks.

وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الصَّافُونَ (١٦٥)

165. "And we are verily ranged in ranks (for service):

وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ (١٦٦)

166. "And we are verily those who declare (Allah's) glory!"

وَإِنْ كَانُوا لَيَقُولُونَ (١٦٧)

167. And there were those who said,

**C4136.** There were the skeptics or Unbelievers, - primarily the Pagan Arabs, but in a more extended sense, all who doubt Allah's providence or revelation.

لَوْ أَنَّ عِنْدَنَا ذِكْرًا مِّنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ (١٦٨)

168. "If only we had had before us a message from those of old.

لَكُنَّا عِبَادَ اللَّهِ الْمُخْلِصِينَ (١٦٩)

169. "We should certainly have been servants of Allah, sincere (and devoted)!"

**C4137.** Such men take refuge in ancestral tradition. 'If our forefathers had had an inkling of Revelation or miracles, or had worshipped as we are now taught to worship, we should gladly have accepted.

Or if they had had anything of the miracles which other nations of old are said to have received, we could then have accepted.' But now stronger and more convincing proofs have come to them in the Quran in their own tongue, and they doubt and reject it.

فَكْفَرُوا بِهِ...

170. But (now that the Qur'án has come), they reject it:

...فَسَوْفَ يَعْلَمُونَ (١٧٠)

but soon will they know!

**C4138.** Allah's Truth will manifest itself against all odds, and the whole world will see.

وَلَقَدْ سَبَقَتْ كَلِمَتُنَا لِعِبَادِنَا الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٧١)

171. Already has Our Word been passed before (this) to Our Servants sent (by Us),

إِنَّهُمْ لَهُمُ الْمَنْصُورُونَ (١٧٢)

172. That they would certainly be assisted,

وَأَنَّ جُنْدَنَا لَهُمُ الْغَالِبُونَ (١٧٣)

173. And that Our forces -- they surely must conquer.

**C4139.** The victory will be the victory of Allah's Truth by the forces of Allah, but every soldier in the army of Truth, who has done his duty, will be entitled to claim a share in the victory.

فَنَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ (١٧٤)

174. So turn thou away from them for a little while,

**C4140.** Addressed in the first instance to the holy Prophet, but good for all time. He was not to be discouraged by his initial failures. Soon came victory to him from Allah. So is it always in the struggles of truth and righteousness. The righteous can afford to ignore opposition, confident in the strength which comes from the Grace of Allah.

وَأَبْصِرْهُمْ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ (١٧٥)

175. And watch them (how they fare), and they soon shall see (how thou farest)!

**C4141.** Watch and wait, for the Right must come to its own.

أَفَبِعَذَابِنَا يَسْتَعْجِلُونَ (١٧٦)

176. Do they wish (indeed) to hurry on Our Punishment?

**C4142.** The last verse enjoined Patience under the attacks of Evil, in the knowledge that evil must be conquered at last. Evil may perhaps turn back scoffingly and say, 'If a punishment is to come, why not bring it on now?'

Why indeed?

The answer is: when it comes, it will come like a rush by night when the enemy is overpowered, when he least expects it: when the day dawns, it is a sorry plight in which the enemy finds himself.

Cf. 22:47, and n. 2826; and 26:204, n. 3230.

فَإِذَا نَزَلَ بِسَاحَتِهِمْ فَسَاءَ صَبَاحُ الْمُنذَرِينَ (١٧٧)

177. But when it descends into the open space before them, evil will be the morning for those who were warned (and heeded not)!

**C4143.** See last note.

The parable is that of an enemy camp in a plain, which is surprised and destroyed by a night attack from the hills. Evil is the plight of any survivors in the morning. Their regrets will be all the more poignant if they had had some sort of a warning before hand and had paid no heed to it!

وَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ (١٧٨)

178. So turn thou away from them for a little while,

**C4144.** This and the following verse repeat verses 174-175 (with a slight verbal alteration).

The argument in verses 176-177 brought in a new point. When that is finished, the repetition carries us back to the main argument, and rounds off the whole Surah.

وَأَبْصِرْ فَسَوْفَ يُبْصِرُونَ (١٧٩)

179. And watch (how they fare) and they soon shall see (how thou farest)!

سُبْحَانَ رَبِّكَ رَبِّ الْعِزَّةِ ...

180. Glory to thy Lord, the Lord of Honor and Power!

**C4145.** This and the following two verses recapitulate:

- Glory, Honour, and Power belong to Allah;
- No one is equal to Him;
- He sends messengers and revelations, and His aid will overcome all obstacles;
- for He loves and cherishes all His Creation.

... عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ (١٨٠)

(He is free) from what they ascribe (to Him)!

وَسَلَامٌ عَلَى الْمُرْسَلِينَ (١٨١)

181. And Peace on the Messengers!

وَالْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (١٨٢)

182. And praise to Allah, the Lord and Cherisher of the Worlds.