

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 71
SURAH NUH

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

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CHAPTER

071

SURAH NUH

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Introduction and Summary

This is an early Makkan Surah, of which the date has no significance. The theme is that while Good must uphold the standard of Truth and Righteousness, a stage is reached when it must definitely part company with Evil, lest Evil should spread its corruption. The story of Noah's agony is almost a Parable for the Holy Prophet's persecution in the Makkan period.

C.251 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*The Prophet's Message, as was that of Noah,
Is a warning against sin, and the Good News of Mercy
Through the door of Repentance: for Allah is loving
And long-suffering, and His Signs are within us
And around us. But the sinners are obstinate:
They plot against Righteousness, and place their trust
In futile falsehood. They will be swept away,
And the earth will be purged of Evil. Let us
Pray for Mercy and Grace for ourselves,
For those nearest and dearest to us,
And for all who turn in faith to Allah,
In all ages and all countries,
And and amongst all People.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ ...

1. We sent Noah to his People (with the Command):

C5705. Noah's mission is referred to in many places. See specially 11:25-49 and notes. His contemporaries had completely abandoned the moral law. A purge had to be made, and the great Flood made it. This gives a new starting point in history for Noah's People,- i.e., for the remnant saved in the Ark.

... أَنْ أَنْذِرَ قَوْمَكَ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (١)

"Do thou warn thy people before there comes to them a grievous Penalty."

قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ إِنِّي لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ (٢)

2. He said:

"O my People! I am to you a Warner, clear and open:

C5706. His Warning was to be both clear (i.e., unambiguous) and open (i.e., publicly proclaimed). Both these meanings are implied in Mubin.

Cf. 67:26.

The meaning of the Warning was obviously that if they had repented, they would have obtained mercy.

أَنْ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَانْقَرُوا وَأَطِيعُونَ (٣)

3. "That ye should

- worship Allah,
- fear Him,
- and obey me:

C5707. Three aspects of man's duty are emphasized:

- true worship with heart and soul;
- God-fearing recognition that all evil must lead to self-deterioration and Judgment;
- hence repentance and amendment of life, and obedience to good men's counsels.

يَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ مِّنْ ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُؤَخِّرْكُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى...

4. "So He may forgive you your sins and give you respite for a stated Term:

... إِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ إِذَا جَاءَ لَا يُؤَخَّرُ ...

For when the Term given by Allah is accomplished, it cannot be put forward:

C5708. Allah gives respite freely; but it is for Him to give it. His command is definite and final; neither man nor any other authority can alter or in any way modify it. If we could only realise this to the full in our inmost soul, it would be best for us and lead to our happiness.

... لَوْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ (٤)

if ye only knew."

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُ قَوْمِي لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا (٥)

5. He said:

"O my Lord! I have called to my People night and day:

فَلَمْ يَزِدْهُمْ دُعَائِي إِلَّا فِرَارًا (٦)

6. "But my call only increases (their) flight (from the Right)."

C5709. When convincing arguments and warnings are placed before sinners, there are two kinds of reactions.

- Those who are wise receive admonition, repent, and bring forth fruits of repentance, i.e., amend their lives and turn to Allah.
- On the other hand, those who are callous to any advice take it up as a reproach, fly farther and farther from righteousness, and shut out more and more the channels through which Allah's healing Grace can reach them and work for them.

وَأِنِّي كُلَّمَا دَعَوْتُهُمْ لِتَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ جَعَلُوا أَصَابِعَهُمْ فِي آذَانِهِمْ ...

7. "And every time I have called to them, that thou mightest forgive them, they have (only) thrust their fingers into their ears,

... وَاسْتَعْشَوْا ثِيَابَهُمْ وَأَصْرُوا ...

covered themselves up with their garments, grown obstinate,

C5710. The literal meaning would be that, just as they thrust their fingers into their ears to prevent the voice of the admonisher reaching them, so they covered their bodies with their garments that the light of truth should not penetrate to them and that they should not even be seen by the Preacher.

But there is a further symbolic meaning.

"Their garments" are the adoration of vanities, their evil habits, customs, and traditions, and their ephemeral interested and standards. They drew them closer round them to prevent the higher Light reaching them. They grew obstinate and gave themselves up to the grossest form of selfish arrogance.

... وَأَسْتَكْبَرُوا اسْتِكْبَارًا (٧)

and given themselves up to arrogance.

ثُمَّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُهُمْ جَهَارًا (٨)

8. "So I have called to them aloud;

ثُمَّ إِنِّي أَعْلَنْتُ لَهُمْ ...

9. "Further I have spoken to them in public ...

C5711. Noah used all the resources of the earnest preacher: he dinned the Message of Allah into their ears; he spoke in public places; and he took individuals into his confidence, and appealed privately to them; but all in vain.

... وَأَسْرَرْتُ لَهُمْ إِسْرَارًا (٩)

... and secretly in private,

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا (١٠)

10. "Saying,

'Ask forgiveness from your Lord; for He is Oft-Forgiving;

يُرْسِلُ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا (١١)

11. "He will send **rain** to you in abundance;

C5712. They had perhaps been suffering from drought or famine. If they had taken the message in the right way, the rain would have been a blessing to them. They took it in the wrong way, and the rain was a curse to them, for it flooded the country and drowned the wicked generation. In the larger Plan, it was a blessing all the same; for it purged the world, and gave it a new start, morally and spiritually.

وَيُمْدِدْكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَيُبَيِّنَ وَيَجْعَلَ لَكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ وَيَجْعَلَ لَكُمْ
أَنْهَارًا (١٢)

12. "Give you increase in wealth and sons;
and bestow on you Gardens and bestow on you Rivers (of
flowing water).

C5713. Each of these blessings-rain and crops, wealth and man-power, flourishing gardens, and perennial streams-are indications of prosperity, and have not only a material but also a spiritual meaning.

Note the last point, "**rivers of flowing water**".

The perennial springs make the prosperity as it were permanent: they indicate a settled population, honest and contented, and enjoying their blessings here on earth as the foretaste of the eternal joys of heaven.

مَا لَكُمْ لَّا تَرْجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارًا (١٣)

13. "What is the matter with you, that ye place not your hope for kindness and long-suffering in Allah --

C5713a. An alternate translation would be "... that ye fear Allah's Message"

i.e., why don't you fear Allah's Majesty, His greatness and consequent punishment for your sinfulness, and hope for His mercy, kindness and reward for your faith and good deeds. The words of the verse contain the twin strands -fear and hope-simultaneously.

وَقَدْ خَلَقْتُمْ أَطْوَارًا (١٤)

14. "Seeing that it is He that has created you in diverse stages?"

C5714. Cf. 22:5, and notes 2773-2777;
also 23:12-17, and notes 2872-2875.

The meaning here may be even wider. Man in his various states exhibits various wonderful qualities or capacities, mental and spiritual that may be

compared with the wonderful workings of nature on the earth and in the heavens. Will he not then be grateful for these Mercies and turn to Allah, Who created all these marvels?

أَلَمْ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا (١٥)

15. "See ye not how Allah has created the seven heavens one above another,

C5715. See n. 5559 to 67:3.

وَجَعَلَ الْقَمَرَ فِيهِنَّ نُورًا وَجَعَلَ الشَّمْسَ سِرَاجًا (١٦)

16. "And made the moon a light in their midst, and made the sun as a (Glorious) Lamp?

C5716. Cf. 25:61, where the sun is referred to as the glorious Lamp of the heavens:

"Blessed is He Who made the Constellations in the skies, and placed therein a lamp, and a moon giving light."

وَاللَّهُ أَنْبَتَكُمْ مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ نَبَاتًا (١٧)

17. "And Allah has produced you from the earth, growing (gradually),

C5717. Cf. 3:37, where the growth of the child Mary the Mother of Jesus is described by the same word **nabat**, ordinarily denoting the growth of plants and trees.

The simile is that of a seed sown, that germinates, grows, and dies, and goes back to the earth.

In man, there is the further process of the Resurrection.

Cf. also 20:55.

ثُمَّ يُعِيدُكُمْ فِيهَا وَيُخْرِجُكُمْ إِخْرَاجًا (١٨)

18. "And in the End He will return you into the (earth), and raise you forth (again at the Resurrection)?

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمُ الْأَرْضَ بِسَاطًا (١٩)

19. "And Allah has made the earth for you as a carpet (spread out),

C5718. Cf. 20:53.

لِتَسْلُكُوا مِنْهَا سُبُلًا فِجَاجًا (٢٠)

20. "That ye may go about therein, in spacious roads.' "

C5719. Fijaj implies valley-roads or passes between mountains.

Though there are mountain chains on the earth, Allah's artistry has provided even in such regions, valleys and channels by which men may go about. Mountain roads usually follow the valleys.

Section 2

قَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ إِنَّهُمْ عَصَوْنِي ...

21. Noah said:

"O my Lord! they have disobeyed me,

وَاتَّبَعُوا مَنْ لَمْ يَزِدْهُ مَالَهُ وَوَلَدَهُ إِلَّا خَسَارًا (٢١)

but they follow (men) whose wealth and children give them no Increase but only Loss.

C5719a. Sinners always resent it as a reproach that righteous men should speak to them for their own good. They prefer smooth flatterers, and they worship power even though the depositaries of power are selfish men, who neither profit themselves nor profit others by the wealth and manpower that they collect round themselves. They forget that mere material things may be a delusion and a snare unless the moral and spiritual factor behind them sanctifies them.

وَمَكَرُوا مَكْرًا كُبَّارًا (٢٢)

22. "And they have devised a tremendous Plot.

C5720. Having got material resources the wicked devise plots to get rid of the righteous whose presence is a reproach to them. For a time their plots may seem tremendous and have the appearance of success, but they can never defeat Allah's Purpose.

وَقَالُوا لِمَا تَدْرُونَ آلِهَتَكُمْ ...

23. "And they have said (to each other), abandon not your gods;

C5721. For an account of how these Pagan gods and superstitions connected with them originated, and how they became adopted into the Arabian Pagan Pantheon.

See [Appendix X](#) at the end of this Surah.

... وَلَا تَدْرُونَ وِدًّا وَلَا سُوعَاً وَلَا يَغُوثَ وَيَعُوقَ وَنَسْرًا (٢٣)

abandon neither Wadd nor Suwa, neither Yaghuth nor Ya'uq, nor Nasr --

وَقَدْ أَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا ضَلَالًا (٢٤)

24. "They have already misled many;

and grant Thou no increase to the wrongdoers but in straying (from their mark)."

C5722. Such Pagan superstitions and cults do not add to human knowledge or human well-being. They only increase error and wrong-doing. For example, how much lewdness resulted from the Greek and Roman Saturnalia! And how much lewdness results from ribald Holi songs! This is the natural result, and Noah in his bitterness of spirit prays that Allah's grace may be cut off from men who hug them to their hearts. They mislead others: let them miss their own mark!

See also [verse 28](#) below.

مِمَّا خَطِيئَاتِهِمْ أُغْرِقُوا ...

25. Because of their sins they were drowned (in the flood), ...

C5723. The Punishment of sin seizes the soul from every side and in every form. Water (drowning) indicates death by suffocation, through the nose, ears, eyes, mouth, throat, and lung.

Fire has the opposite effects: it burns the skin, the limbs, the flesh, the brains, the bones, and every part of the body.

So the destruction wrought by sin is complete from all points of view. And yet it is not death (20:74); for death would be a merciful release from the Penalty, and the soul steeped in sin has closed the gates of Allah's Mercy on itself. There they will abide, unless and "except as Allah willeth- (6:128).

For time and eternity, as we conceive them now, have no meaning in the wholly new world which the soul enters after death or Judgement.

... فَأَدْخِلُوا نَارًا ...

... and were made to enter the Fire (of Punishment):

... فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا لَهُمْ مِّنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْصَارًا (٢٥)

and they found -- in lieu of Allah -- none to help them.

وَقَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ دَيَّارًا (٢٦)

26. And Noah said:

"O my Lord! Leave not of the Unbelievers, a single one on earth!

C5724. The Flood was sent in order to purge all sin. The prayer of Noah is not vindictive. It simply means, "Cut off all the roots of sin".

See next note.

إِنَّكَ إِنْ تَذَرَهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبَادَكَ وَلَا يَلِدُوا إِلَّا فَاجِرًا كَفَّارًا (٢٧)

27. "For, if Thou dost leave (any of) them, they will but mislead thy devotees,

and they will breed none but wicked ungrateful ones.

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِمَن دَخَلَ بَيْتِي مُؤْمِنًا وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ
وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ...

28. "O my Lord!

Forgive me, my parents, all who enter my house in Faith,
and (all) believing men and believing women:

C5725. Indeed he prays for himself, his parents, his guests, and all who in earnest faith turn to Allah, in all ages and in all places. Praying for their forgiveness is also praying for the destruction of sin.

... وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا تَبَارًا (٢٨)

and to the wrongdoers grant Thou no increase but in
Perdition!"

C5726. This is slightly different in form from verse 24 above, where see [n. 5722](#).

See also last note.