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THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER

CHAPTER 77

SURAH AL-MURSALAT

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

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HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

077

SURAH AL-MURSALAT

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Introduction and Summary

This Surah belongs to the early makkan period, somewhere near to Surah 75 (Al Qiyyamah). The theme is somewhat similar. It denounces the horrors of the Hereafter, for those who rejected Truth. The refrain, "Ah woe, that day, to the Rejecters of Truth!" which occurs ten times in its fifty verses, or, on an average once in every five verses, indicates the leitmotif.

C.257 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*The winds in the world of nature are types
Of Allah's Bounty and Power: they gently bring
The beneficent rain, and when roused to wrath,
They clean the world and wipe out Infection
So works Allah's Revelation, in sun shine
And storm. It will root out Evil, and restore
True values at Judgement. Truly terrible
Will be that Day for the evil ones.*

It will be a Day of Sorting out:

*Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!
Will man not learn from his own little story,
Or from nature around him? The Blazing Fire
Will be indeed an enveloping Punishment.*

How dreadful the contrast with the Bliss of the Righteous!

*Learn, ye, therefore, Humility, and approach
Allah's Throne in Repentance and Earnest Endeavour.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

وَالْمُرْسَلَاتِ ...

1. By the (Winds) Sent Forth...

C5863. This Sura begins with an appeal to five things, as pointing to the substantive statement in verse 7, that the Day of Justice and Judgment is bound to come, and we must prepare for it. It is difficult to translate, but easy to understand, if we remember that a triple thread of allegory runs through this passage (verses 1-7). The five things or phases, which will be presently considered in detail, refer to

- a. Winds in the physical world,
- b. Angels in the Kingdom of Allah, and

- c. Prophets in the human world, connecting it with the Kingdom of Allah.

... عُرْفًا (١)

... one after another (to man's profit);

C5864. Understanding the reference to Winds, we can see that they are powerful factors in the government of the physical world.

1. They come gently as harbingers of the blessings of rain and fertility (15:22; 30:48); but
2. they can come as violent tornadoes, uprooting and destroying (51:41-42);
3. they can scatter seeds far and wide, and
4. they can separate chaff from grain, or clear the air from epidemics; and
5. they literally carry sound, and therefore Messages. All these things point to the power and goodness of Allah, and we are asked to believe that His promise of Mercy and Justice in the Hereafter is indeed true.

Cf. this passage with 51:1-6 (Al Dhariyat) with which it has many affinities,

فَالْعَاصِفَاتِ عَصْفًا (٢)

2. Which then blow violently in tempestuous Gusts,

C5865. If we understand the reference to be, not to Winds, but to Angels, they are agencies in the Kingdom of Allah, which carry out similar functions, changing and revolutionising the face of the world.

1. They come softly, on beneficent errands of Mercy;
2. they are charged with the mission of punishment and destruction for sin as in the case of the two angels who came to Lut (15:57-66);
3. they distribute Allah's Mercies as the Winds distribute good seeds;
4. they sort out the good from the evil among men; and

5. they are the agency through which Allah's Messages and Revelations are conveyed to the Prophets (see No. 5 in the last note).

وَالنَّاشِرَاتِ نَشْرًا (٣)

3. And scatter (things) far and wide;

فَالْفَارِقَاتِ فَرْقًا (٤)

4. Then separate them, one from another,

فَالْمُؤَيَّاتِ ذِكْرًا (٥)

5. Then spread abroad a Message,

C5866. If we understand the reference to Prophets or Messengers of Allah, or the verses of Revelation which would be particularly appropriate for verses 5-6, we also get a satisfactory solution of the Allegory.

1. The Prophets have followed one another in a series: the verses of the Quran came, one after another as needed; in both cases it was for man's spiritual profit;
2. they caused great disturbance in a spiritual decadent world; they pulled down evil institutions root and branch, and substituted new ones;
3. they proclaimed their truths far and wide, without fear and without favour;
4. through them were sorted out men of Faith and rebels against Allah's Law; and
5. they gave a Message, through which just men were justified through repentance, and evil men were warned of their sins.

Some Commentators take one or other of these allegories, and some apply one allegory to a few of these verses, and another to another few.

In my opinion the Allegory is wide enough to comprehend all the meanings which I have sketched. I wish a translation could do justice to those marvelously terse sentences in the original.

عُدْرًا أَوْ نُذْرًا (٦)

6. Whether of Justification or of Warning --

إِنَّمَا تُوْعَدُونَ لَوَاقِعٌ (٧)

7. Assuredly, what ye are promised must come to pass.

فَإِذَا النُّجُومُ طُمِسَتْ (٨)

8. Then when the stars become dim;

C5867. The lustre of the stars will become dim; in fact they will disappear: cf. 81:2, and 82:2.

The heaven's canopy will be torn asunder: cf. 82:1, and 73:18.

The mountains will be uprooted and fly about like dust: cf. 69:14; 81:3; etc.

All the old landmarks of the physical world as we know it will be swept away. (R).

وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ فُرِجَتْ (٩)

9. When the heaven is cleft asunder;

وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ نُسِفَتْ (١٠)

10. When the mountains are scattered (to the winds) as dust;

وَإِذَا الرُّسُلُ أُقِنَّتْ (١١)

11. And when the messengers are (all) appointed a time (to collect) -

C5868. The Resurrection will be established. In the world which will then have passed away, inspired Prophets had been sent in succession at different times to all nations. Now they will be gathered together in one place before the Judgment-seat to bear witness as to the righteous or the evil ones within their respective spheres of work.

Cf. 39:69.

لِأَيِّ يَوْمٍ أُجِّلَتْ (١٢)

12. For what Day are these (Portents) deferred?

لِيَوْمِ الْفَصْلِ (١٣)

13. For the Day of Sorting out.

C5869. Cf. 37:21 and n. 4047; also 44:40, and (n. 4718).

That will be the Day of Judgment or Day of Decision. Good will then be completely separated from Evil. And the men who rejected Truth and flourished on Falsehood will find that in the world of Realities they will be absolutely nowhere. Hence the refrain of this Surah.

"Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!"

it sounds like a dirge on Sin.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ (١٤)

14. And what will explain to thee what is the Day of Sorting out?

وَيْلٌ لِّیَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (١٥)

15. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

أَلَمْ نُهْلِكِ الْأُولِينَ (١٦)

16. Did We not destroy the men of old (for their evil)?

C5870. Allah's Law is always the same. Sin or corruption prepares its own destruction. It was so with the generation of Noah. In Arab tradition it was so with the 'Ad and the Thamud.

In our own day we see relics of prehistoric civilisations, in Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and the Aegean: these were men of wonderful skill and resource, but they went under. If our generations, which pride themselves on their science and skill, desert Allah's Law, they will be certain to meet the same fate.

ثُمَّ نَتَّبِعُهُمُ الْآخِرِينَ (١٧)

17. So shall We make later (generations) follow them.

كَذَلِكَ نَفْعَلُ بِالْمُجْرِمِينَ (١٨)

18. Thus do We deal with men of sin.

وَيَلُومُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ (١٩)

19. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

أَلَمْ نَخْلُقْكُمْ مِنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ (٢٠)

20. Have We not created you from a fluid (held) despicable? --

C5871. Cf. 32:8, n. 3638.

Man is ashamed of the process of physical creation, by which he comes into being. Yet he is arrogant in life and neglectful of the Future.

فَجَعَلْنَاهُ فِي قَرَارٍ مَّكِينٍ (٢١)

21. The which We placed in a place of rest, firmly fixed.

C5872. See n. 2873 to 23:13.

The silent growth in the mother's womb, and the protection and sustenance which the growing life receives from the life of the mother, are themselves wonders of creation.

إِلَىٰ قَدَرٍ مَّعْلُومٍ (٢٢)

22. For a period (of gestation), determined (according to need)?

C5873. The period roughly of nine months and ten days is subject to many adjustments. In fact throughout our prenatal as well as post-natal life there are wonderful and nicely-balanced adjustments of which we are ourselves unconscious. Should we not turn in love and gratitude to Allah our Creator?

فَقَدَرْنَا ...

23. For We do determine (according to need);

... فَنِعْمَ الْقَادِرُونَ (٢٣)

for We are the Best to determine (things)!

C5874. Perhaps the life in the womb, in relation to the life after birth, is an allegory for our probationary life on earth in relation to the eternal Life to come. Perhaps, also, our state when we are buried in the tomb suggests an allegory to the life in the womb, in relation to the life in the Hereafter.

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٢٤)

24. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا (٢٥)

25. Have We not made the earth (as a place) to draw together

أَحْيَاءَ وَأَمْوَاتًا (٢٦)

26. The living and the dead,

C5875. What a wonderful parable! The earth is a place where death and life, decay and growth and decay, green grass, stubble, and fuel, corruption and purification jostle together,-one often leading to the other. The drama which we see with our own eyes in this world should enable us to appreciate the wonders in the Kingdom of Allah where the despised and rejected receive the highest honour, Lazarus rests in Abraham's bosom, and the Pharaoh is led in chains for his arrogance and his sin.

وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ شَامِخَاتٍ ...

27. And made therein mountains **standing firm**, lofty (in stature);

C5876. See n. 2038 to 16:15.

The solid mountains are frequently referred to: cf. 13:3.

The parable here is that the mountains are hard, solid rock, and yet they act as sponges to collect, store up, and filter sweet and wholesome water, which on account of their altitude they are able to distribute by gravity to

the lower, dry land by means of rivers or springs. Any one who has seen the parched Makkkan valleys and the delicious springs in the mountains around, or the Zubayda Canal, which used to be the main source of Makkah's water-supply, will appreciate the aptness of the metaphor, but it applies to any country, though not to so striking a degree. If the wisdom and power of Allah can do such things before your eyes, how can you reject His teaching of a still more wonderful future Life?

... وَأَسْقَيْنَاكُمْ مَاءً فُرَاتًا (٢٧)

and provided for you water sweet (and wholesome)?

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٢٨)

28. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

انطَلِفُوا إِلَى مَا كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ (٢٩)

29. (It will be said:)

"Depart ye to that which ye used to reject as false!

انطَلِفُوا إِلَى ظِلٍّ ...

30. "Depart ye to a Shadow (of smoke ascending) ...

C5877. The Sinners, instead of reposing in cool shades, will only see the blazing Fire. The only shadow they will see will be that of Smoke, ascending in three columns, right, left, and above, i.e., completely enveloping them. But it will give no comfort or coolness. On the contrary, it will contain huge sparks. (R).

... فِي ثَلَاثِ شُعَبٍ (٣٠)

... in three columns,

لَا ظِلِيلٍ وَلَا يُعْنِي مِنَ اللَّهَبِ (٣١)

31. "(Which yields) no shade of coolness, and is of no use against the fierce Blaze.

إِنَّهَا تَرْمِي بِشَرَرٍ كَالْقَصْرِ (٣٢)

32. "Indeed it throws about sparks (huge) as Forts,

C5878. Qasr: Fort, big building, palace.

An alternative reading is **Qasar**, plural of **Qasarat** (-un), 'meaning bundies of wood used for fuel: Ibn Abbas *apud* Bukhari.

I almost prefer this latter reading.

كَأَنَّهُ جَمَالَتٌ صُفْرٌ (٣٣)

33. "As if there were (a string of) yellow camels (marching swiftly)."

C5879. The yellow sparks flying swiftly one after another suggest a string of camels marching swiftly, such as the Arabs of Nejd and central Arabia are so proud of.

There is a double allegory. It refers not only to the colour and the rapid succession of sparks, but to the vanity of worldly pride, as much as to say: "your fine yellow camels in which you took such pride in the world are but sparks that fly away and even sting you in the Hereafter!"

Smoke with sparks may also assume fantastic shapes like long-necked camels.

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٣٤)

34. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

هَذَا يَوْمٌ لَّا يَنْطِقُونَ (٣٥)

35. That will be a Day when they shall not be able to speak,

C5880. They will be dumbfounded; i.e., (when read with the next verse), they will not be in a position to put forward any valid defence or plea. Facts will speak too plainly against them. They might perversely try to deny false worship: 6:23: but their own tongues and limbs will bear witness against them: 24:24. Nor does the fighting out or settling of doctrinal disputes in the Hereafter (39:31) amount to putting forward pleas in defence.

وَلَا يُؤَدِّنُ لَهُمْ فَيَعْتَذِرُونَ (٣٦)

36. Nor will it be open to them to put forth pleas.

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٣٧)

37. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

هَذَا يَوْمُ الْفَصْلِ جَمَعْنَاكُمْ وَالْأُولَئِينَ (٣٨)

38. That will be a Day of Sorting out!

We shall Gather you together and those before (you)!

C5881. We may suppose this as spoken primarily to the Quraish who were plotting against the Prophet. You may use all your wisdom and that of your ancestors, but you will not be able to defeat Allah or His Plan.

See next verse.

فَإِنْ كَانَ لَكُمْ كَيْدٌ فَكِيدُونِ (٣٩)

39. Now, if ye have a trick (or plot), use it against Me!

C5882. The plots against the holy Prophet were plots against Allah's Truth, and therefore against Allah.

Can any one hope to profit by such plots?

Can any one defeat Allah's Plan and Purpose?

Let them try. They will only ruin themselves, as the Pagan leaders did. There can only be pity for such men. What will be their state in the Hereafter?

"Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Allah's Truth!"

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٠)

40. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

Section 2

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي ظِلَالٍ وَعُيُونٍ (٤١)

41. As to the Righteous, they shall be amidst (cool) shades and springs (of water).

C5883. This is in contrast to the triple shade of smoke and sin for the sinners, which neither gives them coolness nor protects them from the Blazing Fire.

The Shade, i.e. Covering, of Allah's Good Pleasure, will be the greatest Boon of all, and the Spring of Allah's Love will be inexhaustible. (R).

وَفَوَآكِهِ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ (٤٢)

42. And (they shall have) fruits, all they desire.

C5884. Fruits: see n. 4671 to 43:73. (R).

كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا هَنِيئًا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٤٣)

43. "Eat ye and drink ye to your heart's content:
for that ye worked (Righteousness)."

C5885. The fruits of righteousness are contentment in this life and the supreme Bliss in the next.

إِنَّا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الْمُحْسِنِينَ (٤٤)

44. Thus do We certainly reward the Doers of Good.

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٥)

45. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

كُلُوا وَتَمَتَّعُوا قَلِيلًا ...

46. (O ye Unjust!) Eat ye and enjoy yourselves (but) a little while, ...

C5886. "Eat" is symbolical of having the good things of life in this world. It may be that they are only given for a trial. Because their minds and wishes run to wrong things, the opportunities for wrong are multiplied, as the impetus for good or for evil increases progressively. They are asked to believe and repent. But if they do not, they are to be pitied, even for the good things of this life, for they will come to an evil End in the Hereafter.

... إِنَّكُمْ مُجْرِمُونَ (٤٦)

... for that ye are Sinners.

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٧)

47. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of Truth!

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ ارْكَعُوا لَا يَرْكَعُونَ (٤٨)

48. And when it is said to them, "Prostrate yourselves!"
They do not so.

C5887. Prostration is a symbol of humility and a desire to get nearer to Allah by Prayer and a good life. Those who refuse to adopt this Path are to be pitied: how will they fare at Judgment?

وَيَلَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ (٤٩)

49. Ah woe, that Day, to the Rejecters of truth!

فَبَأَيِّ حَدِيثٍ بَعْدَهُ يُؤْمِنُونَ (٥٠)

50. Then what Message, after that, will they believe in?

C5888. "That" may refer to verse 48:

they were given plain and clear Guidance, and they refused to accept it: after that what kind of Message will they accept?

The Guidance referred to is obviously that of Islam or the Quran.