

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 78
SURAH AN-NABA

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

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HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

078

SURAH AN-NABA

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Introduction and Summary

This beautiful Makkan Surah is not quite so early as the last (Sura 77) nor quite so late as Sura 76, but nearer in time to the later

It sets forth Allah's loving care in a fine nature passage, and deduces from it the Promise of the Future, when Evil will be destroyed and Good will come to its own; and invites all who have the will, to seek refuge with their Lord.

C.258 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*The Great News for man, in his spiritual Destiny,
Is the Judgement to come, the Day of Sorting Out.
Do not the Power, the Goodness, and the Justice
Of Allah reveal themselves in all nature?
The Panorama around us, the voice in our souls,
And the harmony between heaven and earth?
That Day is sure to arrive at its time
Appointed, when behold! the present order
Will pass away. Then will the Fruits
Of Evil appear, and the Fruits of Righteousness.
Allah's blessings will be more than the merits of men;
But who can argue with the Fountain of Grace?
And who can prevent the course of Justice?
Let us then, before it becomes too late,
Betake ourselves to our Lord Most Gracious!*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ (١)

1. Concerning what are they disputing?

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ (٢)

2. Concerning the Great News,

C5889. Great News: usually understood to mean the News or Message of the Resurrection or the Hereafter, about which there are various schools of thought among the Jews and Christians and other nations. There is practically nothing about the Resurrection in the Old Testament, and the Jewish sect of Sadducees even in the time of Christ denied the Resurrection altogether.

The Pagan ideas of a future life -if any- varied from place to place and from time to time. Even in the early Christian Church, as we learn from Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, there were contentions in that little community (1, Corinthians, i. 11), and some definitely denied the resurrection of the dead (ib., xv. 12).

Great News may also be translated Great Message or a Message Supreme as I have translated at 38:67. In that case it would refer to the Quran, or the Message of Revelation, or the Message of the Holy Prophet, about which there was great contention in those days. As this Message also lays great stress on the Day of Judgment and the Resurrection, the practical result by either mode of interpretation amounts to the same.

الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ (٣)

3. About which they cannot agree.

كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ (٤)

4. Verily, they shall soon (come to) know!

ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ (٥)

5. Verily, verily they shall soon (come to) know!

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهَادًا (٦)

6. Have We not made the earth as a **wide** expanse,

C5890. See n. 2038 to 16:15. Cf. also 13:3 and 15:19.

The spacious expanse of the earth may be compared to a carpet, to which the mountains act as pegs. The Sips of Allah are thus enumerated:

- the great panorama of outer nature (verses 6-7);
- the creation of Man in pairs, with the succession of rest and work fitting in with the succession of night and day (verses 8-11);
- the firmaments above, with their splendid lights (verses 12-13); and

- the clouds and rain and abundant harvests, which knit sky and earth and man together (verses 14-16).

These point to Allah, and Allah's Message points to the Future Life.

وَالْجِبَالِ أَوْتَادًا (٧)

7. And the mountains as pegs?

وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا (٨)

8. And (have We not) created you in pairs,

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا (٩)

9. And made your sleep for rest,

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا (١٠)

10. And made the night as a covering,

C5891. The darkness of the night is as a covering. Just as a covering protects us from exposure to cold or heat, so this covering gives us spiritual respite from the buffets of the material world, and from the tiring activities of our own inner exertions. The rest in sleep (in verse 9) is supplemented by the covering of the night with which we are provided by Allah.

وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا (١١)

11. And made the day as means of subsistence?

C5892. "Subsistence" in English only partly covers the idea of **maash**, which includes every kind of life activity. The Day is specially illuminated, so runs the figure of speech, in order that these life-activities of all kinds may be fully exercised.

وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شِدَادًا (١٢)

12. And (have We not) built over you the seven firmaments,

C5893. See n. 5526 to 65:12 and n. 2876 to 23:17, also 37:66 and notes there.

وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا (١٣)

13. And placed (therein) a Light of Splendor?

C5894. That is, the sun.

Cf. 25:61; 33:46 (where it is used metaphorically for the holy Prophet); and 71:16.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا (١٤)

14. And do We not send down from the clouds water in abundance,

C5895. Note how the evidences of Allah and His beneficence are set out in four groups.

1. Look to external nature on the earth around you (verses 6-7);
2. your own nature, physical, mental and spiritual (verses 8-11);
3. the starry heavens, and the glory of the sun (verses 12-13); and

1. the interdependence of earth, air, and sky in the cycle of water, clouds, rain, corn and gardens, all serving in their several ways to further the whole plan of the World as it affects us.

Can you not then believe that a Creator who does this will sort out Good and Evil on an appointed Day with real justice and power?

لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا (١٥)

15. That We may produce therewith corn and vegetables,

وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا (١٦)

16. And gardens of luxurious growth?

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفُصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا (١٧)

17. Verily the Day of Sorting Out is a thing appointed --

C5896. Cf. 37:21, n. 4047, and 36:59, n. 4005 (end),

The Day of Judgment is the Day of Sorting Out, as between Good and Evil.

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا (١٨)

18. The Day that the Trumpet shall be sounded, and ye shall come forth in crowds;

C5897. The angel charged with the sounding of the Trumpet is Israfil. It will herald Judgment. Cf. 50:20; also 39:68, and n. 4343; and 69:13, n. 5648.

وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا (١٩)

19. And the heavens shall be opened as if there were doors,

C5898. A sign that the present order of things will have ceased to exist, and a new world will have come into being. Such a figure applies to the heavens in this verse and to the earth in the next verse. The mystery of what is beyond the heavens will have vanished through the doors which will then be opened. The solid mountains, as we suppose them to be, will have vanished like an unsubstantial mirage.

وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا (٢٠)

20. And the mountains shall vanish, as if they were a mirage.

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا (٢١)

21. Truly Hell is as a place of ambush --

C5899. Hell, the embodiment of evil, is lying in wait like an ambush for every one. We should be on our guard. For the transgressors, those who have willfully rebelled against Allah, it will be a definite destination, from which there is no return, except, it may be, after ages, i.e., unless Allah so wills:

Cf. 6:128, and n. 951.

لِلطَّاغِينَ مَأْبَأ (٢٢)

22. For the transgressors a place of destination:

لَابِثِينَ فِيهَا أَحْقَابًا (٢٣)

23. They will dwell therein for ages.

لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا (٢٤)

24. Nothing cool shall they tastes therein, nor any drink,

إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَغَسَّاقًا (٢٥)

25. Save a boiling fluid and a fluid, dark, murky, intensely cold --

C5900. Cf. 10:4, and n. 1390; also 38:57, and n. 4213.

جَزَاءٍ وَفَاءًا (٢٦)

26. A fitting recompense (for them).

C5901. Their transgressions go on progressively as they refuse to repent and turn to Allah. The fire of misery begins to blaze forth more and more fiercely, an there is nothing to cool that blaze; their food and drink themselves are tainted with the disorder of contradictory elements,-boiling hot drink, with intensely cold, murky, and disgusting fluids. These are fitting punishments for their crimes, which are inconsistent with the pure and gentle mould in which Allah had originally cast their nature.

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا (٢٧)

27. For that they used not to fear any account (for their deeds),

C5902. It was not isolated acts, but a continued course of evil conduct; they repudiated the moral and spiritual responsibility for their lives; and they impudently called Truth itself by false names and disdained Allah's Signs, which were vouchsafed for their instruction. These are not mere impressions; these are hard facts "preserved on record", so that every deed can have its due weight in making up the account,

وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كَذَابًا (٢٨)

28. But they (impudently) treated Our Signs as false.

وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا (٢٩)

29. And all things have We preserved on record.

فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا (٣٠)

30. "So taste ye (the fruits of your deeds); for no increase shall We grant you, except in Punishment."

C5903. Just as there is a progressive deterioration in the sinner's soul when he surrenders himself to evil, so there is a progressive increase in the Penalty which he suffers.

Section 2

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا (٣١)

31. Verily for the righteous there will be a fulfillment of (the Heart's) desires;

C5904. This is true Salvation. It is not only safety and felicity, but the attainment of the final Goal, the supreme Achievement, the Fulfilment of the highest in human nature, the satisfaction of the true and pure desires of the heart,-seeing the "Face of Allah". See n. 4733 to 44:57.

حَدَائِقَ وَأَعْنَابًا (٣٢)

32. Gardens enclosed, and Grapevines;

C5905. The supreme Achievement, or the Fulfilment of the Heart's Desires, spoken of in the last verse, is now described in three illustrations (verses 32-34), as further explained by two negatives (verse 35).

- The first is the enclosed Fruit-Garden, represented by the Grape. The Garden in its many aspects is the most frequent expression adopted for Bliss. The most carefully-tended Garden is a Fruit-Garden, with walls all round to protect it, and the most characteristic fruit mentioned here is the luscious Grape. (R).

وَكَوَاعِبَ أُنْرَابًا (٣٣)

33. Companions of Equal Age;

C5906.

- The second symbol is Companions of Equal Age. Maidens or Virgins, symbols of purity, grace, innocence, truth, and sympathy. (R).

وَكَأْسًا مِّمَّا قَالَا (٣٤)

34. And a Cup full (to the Brim).

C5907.

- The third symbol, the Cup, takes us partly to the Grapes mentioned in verse 32 and partly to the Springs or Rivers mentioned with the Garden in so many places.

Full to the brim brings to our mind the unbounded Bounty of Allah.

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِدَابًا (٣٥)

35. No Vanity shall they hear therein, nor Untruth --

C5908. The explanation of the three illustrations is made further clear by the two negatives.

1. There will be no talk of vanities, such as are usually associated on this earth with pleasant Gardens, Companions of equal age, or generous Cups flowing in Assemblies.
2. There will be no Untruth or Falsehood. Insincerity or Hollowness there. Everything will be on a plane of absolute Truth and Reality.

جَزَاءَ مِّنْ رَبِّكَ عَطَاءَ حِسَابًا (٣٦)

36. Recompense from thy Lord, a Gift, (amply) sufficient --

C5909. The Recompense is not exactly a Reward in proportion to merit, but is rather a Gift or a Bounty from the Merciful- a Gift most amply sufficient to satisfy all desire on that plane of purity.

"A Gift (amply) sufficient" might almost be translated: a liberal and bountiful gift.

Cf. the phrase, **A 'ta fa ahsaba** = he gave generously, or bountifully. (R).

رَبِّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمَنَ ...

37. (From) the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all between --
(Allah) Most Gracious:

C5910. No one has the right or the power to argue with Allah about the Gifts which He may bestow on His devotees beyond their deserts, (verse 36 above) or about the Penalty which His justice may inflict for sin or wrong-doing. He is high above all Creation. But He is also Most Gracious. Therefore He may permit special Dignitaries, of honour in His eyes, to plead for sinners, but they will only plead in truth and righteousness:

See verse 38 below.

... لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا (٣٧)

none shall have power to argue with Him.

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا لَّا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ ...

38. The Day that the Spirit and the angels will stand forth in ranks,
none shall speak except any who is permitted by (Allah) Most Gracious,

C5911. The Spirit. - see n. 5677 to 70:4.

Some Commentators understand by "the Spirit" the angel Gabriel as he is charged specially with bringing Messages to human prophets:

see 27:93, n. 3224. (R).

... وَقَالَ صَوَابًا (٣٨)

and he will say what is right.

C5912. See n. 5910 above.

No one has the right to speak before the Judgment-Seat; but certain great Dignitaries may be given permission to plead for mercy for sinners, and they will only so plead if the mercy is not negatory of Allah's universal justice.

ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الْحَقُّ ...

39. That Day will be the sure Reality:

C5913. Cf. 69:1 and n. 5635.

Judgment is sure to come, and Truth will then be free from all veils. Why should not man, therefore, now in this life of probation, turn back to Allah, and understand and do His Will?

... فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَآبًا (٣٩)

therefore, whoso will, let him take a (straight) Return to his Lord!

إِنَّا أَنْذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا ...

40. Verily, We have warned you of a Penalty near --

C5914. Is Judgment very near? Yes.

There are three stages of Judgment.

1. Many of our sins and wrong-doings find their penalty in this very life. It may not be an open or striking event, but it corrodes the soul and conscience all the time. Let us therefore turn back to Allah in repentance and ask for forgiveness.
2. Where the Penalty is not actually perceived or is not visible in this life, Death is considered the Lesser Judgment for each individual soul: see n. 5822 to 75:22. Death may come to anyone at any time, and we must all be ready for it.
3. Then there is the final Judgment, when the whole of the present order passes away, and there is a New World. Time as we know it will not exist. Fifty thousand years as we reckon now will be but as a Day: 70:4. According to those standards even this Final Judgment is quite near, and we must prepare for it. For it will be too late then for repentance.

... يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ ...

the Day when man will see (the Deeds) which his hands have sent forth,

... وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ يَا لَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُرَابًا (٤٠)

and the Unbeliever will say,

"Woe unto me! Would that I were (mere) dust!"

C5915. The Unbeliever, the Rejecter of Allah, will then find himself in a world of absolute Reality, in which there will be no place for him. He will neither live nor die: 20:74. He will wish that he could be reduced to nothingness, but even that would not be possible.