

Sura 54: Al-Qamar (The Moon)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 55:

1. *The Hour has drawn near and the moon has split in two.*
2. *Yet when they see a sign they turn away and say, "Prolonged illusion."*
3. *They denied (the truth) and followed their own whims. Yet everything will come to what was decided for it.*
4. *There have already come to them information in which there is (enough) deterrence.*
5. *Extensive wisdom; but warnings do not avail (them).*
6. *So turn away from them (Muhammad). On the Day when the Caller will summon to a difficult thing;*
7. *With downcast eyes, they will come forth from the graves as if they were locusts spreading.*
8. *Hastening towards the Caller; the disbelievers will say, "This is a difficult day."*
9. *The people of Noah denied before them; they denied Our servant and said, "A madman;" and he was repulsed.*
10. *Then he called on his Lord, saying, "I have been overcome, so help (me)."*
11. *So We opened the gates of heaven, with pouring water.*
12. *And We caused the earth to gush forth with springs, so the waters met (and rose) to a measure already ordained.*
13. *And We carried him upon a thing of planks and nails.*
14. *She floats under our eyes (and care), a reward for the one who had been rejected.*
15. *And verily We left it as a sign; but is there any who will remember?*
16. *Then see how (dreadful) was My torment after My warnings.*
17. *And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?*
18. *(The tribe of) A'ad denied. Then how (dreadful) was My torment after My warnings.*
19. *Indeed, We sent against them a furious wind, on a Day of violent disaster,*
20. *Plucking out men as if they were roots of palm-trees torn up (from the ground).*
21. *Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings.*
22. *And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?*
23. *(The tribe of) Thamud denied the warnings.*
24. *For they said, "Is it a mortal, alone among us, that we are to follow? Then indeed we should fall into error and madness."*
25. *Has the Message been sent to him, of all the people among us? He is an insolent liar.*
26. *(It was said), "Tomorrow they will know who the insolent liar is?"*
27. *Indeed, We will send the she-camel as a test for them; so watch them and persevere;*
28. *And tell them that, the water is to be divided between them. Every drinking will be witnessed.*
29. *But they called to their companion, and he took a sword in hand, and hamstrung (her).*
30. *Then see how (dreadful) was My torment after My warnings.*
31. *For We sent against them a single mighty blast, and they became like crushed hay.*

32. *And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?*
33. *The people of Lot denied the warnings.*
34. *We sent a storm of stones upon them (all) save the family of Lot, whom We rescued in the last watch of the night,*
35. *As a Blessing from Us; thus, We reward him who gives thanks.*
36. *And he indeed did warn them of Our blow, but they disputed the warnings.*
37. *They even demanded him to deliver his guests to them. Then We obliterated their eyes (and said), "Taste now My torment and My warnings."*
38. *Early on the morrow an enduring torment seized them.*
39. *So taste My torment and My warnings.*
40. *And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?*
41. *And warnings were certainly sent to the people of Pharaoh.*
42. *The (people) denied all Our signs; so We seized them – the seizure of an Eminent, Omnipotent.*
43. *Are your disbelievers better than those, or have you some immunity in the Scriptures?*
44. *Or do they say, "We are an alliance and we will be victorious?"*
45. *The hosts will all be routed and will turn and flee.*
46. *But the Hour (of doom) is their appointed time, and the Hour will be more wretched and more bitter (than their earthly failure).*
47. *Indeed, the guilty are in error and madness.*
48. *On the Day when they will be dragged into the Fire upon their faces (it is said to them), "Feel the touch of Hell."*
49. *Verily, We have created everything in due proportion and measure.*
50. *And Our commandment is but one (commandment), as the twinkling of an eye.*
51. *And verily We have destroyed your fellows; but is there any who remembers?*
52. *And everything they did is noted in their records.*
53. *Every matter, small and great, is on record.*
54. *The God conscious will dwell among gardens and rivers;*
55. *In the seat of honor in the presence of the Omnipotent Sovereign. (54: 1 – 55)*

This Sura has dual purpose. The first, it launches a horrific attack on the disbelievers, those who defied the warnings. The second, purpose is to provide comfort and reassurance to the believers. The Sura is divided into different episodes, each one ends with a verse that shakes the human conscious to heed the warning, *"Then see how (dreadful) was My punishment and My warnings. And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?"*

The Sura deals with the same issues dealt with in the Meccan Suras. It portrays scenes of the Day of Judgment and it also introduces very quickly and briefly synopsis from the stories of peoples who rejected guidance before. However, these stories are told in a different style. The stories are narrated through a series of horrific images of the destruction of the disbelievers. The Sura ends with the comforting scene of the God conscious having secure and honored seating in the presence of their Lord.

The Sura starts with the mention of a cosmic phenomenon that had been witnessed by the Arabs at that time together with a warning of the approaching Hour, *“The Hour has drawn near and the moon has split in two.”* It has been narrated that the idolaters of Mecca asked the Messenger of God (PBUH) for a sign to support his claim that he was a messenger of God, and the sign came twice in the form of a split moon. This phenomenon has been cited by a large number of scholars. In addition, the people of Mecca heard the description of the event of the split moon from the recitation of the Quran and no one of them denied its occurrence. However, I would like to comment on these narrations; specifically, the part of the narration which indicated that the phenomenon of the split moon was a miracle that occurred in response to the request of the idolaters of Mecca that the Prophet (PBUH) should come up with a miracle to support his claim. This reasoning contradicts the meaning conveyed by one of the verses of the Quran which indicates that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was not given a physical miracle like the physical miracles which were given to the messengers who came before him as mentioned in the following verse, *“And nothing has prevented Us from sending signs except that the former peoples denied them.”* (17: 59) Every time the idolaters requested a miracle from the Prophet (PBUH) he would decline and say, *“Glory be to my Lord, was I ever but a human messenger?”* (17: 93) So, the claim that the splitting of the moon was in response to the request of the pagans of Mecca does not seem to be valid. The Quran was meant to address the human intellect without taking recourse to physical miracles. We believe that there were physical miracles that occurred at the hands of the Prophet (PBUH) but the purpose of these miracles was to provide comfort, support, and security to the heart of the Prophet (PBUH) not as a means to convince people of the authenticity of the message.

The split moon is a miracle but the moon itself is a bigger miracle. The Quran came to connect the human heart to the universe and to invite it to reflect on God’s signs. These signs are continuously available for people to reflect upon while the split moon was a momentary miracle that was witnessed only by the group of people who lived in Arabia at that time.

However, the idolaters of Mecca did not heed the warning but continued in their stubborn heedlessness, *“Yet when they see a sign they turn away and say, ‘Prolonged illusion.’ They denied (the truth) and followed their own whims. Yet everything will come to what was decided for it. There have already come to them information in which there is (enough) deterrence. Extensive wisdom; but warnings do not avail (them).”* They turned away and said this was magic. That was also what they thought about the Quran, they said it is magic. However, they had no proof of these claims. Everything around them in the universe was firmly established in its place. They received enough information to bring them into the fold of the believers; information from the cosmic phenomena around them and from the history of peoples who lived before them.

The Prophet (PBUH) was then told to turn away from them, *“So turn away from them (Muhammad). On the Day when the Caller will summon to a difficult thing; with downcast eyes, they will come forth from the graves as if they were locusts spreading. Hastening towards the Caller; the disbelievers will say, ‘This is a difficult day.’”* The verses depict one of the horrific scenes of the scenes of the Day of Judgment. It will be a difficult day.

The Sura then proceeds to the narrations of the history of those who were destroyed before, *“The people of Noah denied before them; they denied Our servant and said, ‘A madman;’ and he was repulsed.”* Similar to the response that Prophet (PBUH) received from Quraish, the people of Noah (PBUH) denied his message and persecuted him. When he tried everything and failed to convince his people, he had to turn back to his Lord asking for help, *“Then he called on his Lord, saying, ‘I have been overcome, so help (me).’”* God responded, *“So We opened the gates of heaven, with pouring water. And We caused the earth to gush forth with springs, so the waters met (and rose) to a measure already ordained.”* This was a huge universal phenomenon, water coming from the sky and water gushing from the ground. The water coming down from the sky and the water gushing out from the ground met so that what has been ordained would take place. When the flood covered the land, Noah (PBUH) and the people who believed in him were carried on the ship; the ship that Noah (PBUH) built under the care of God and which sails by His grace and under His protection, *“And We carried him upon a thing of planks and nails. She floats under our eyes (and care), a reward for the one who had been rejected.”* The verse does not mention the ship by name but it describes how it was constructed alluding to her value and magnificence. This was the reward for the one who was rejected. Then it was left as a sign for the following generations, hopefully they would remember, *“And verily We left it as a sign; but is there any who will remember?”* The story was followed by a question to awaken the heedless hearts, *“Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings;”* and a statement about the Quran, *“And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?”*

“(The tribe of) A’ad denied. Then how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings. Indeed, We sent against them a furious wind, on a Day of violent disaster, Plucking out men as if they were roots of palm-trees torn up (from the ground). Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings. And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?” This is the second scene of the scenes of God’s punishment. God sent a very cold wind over them. The wind blew over them and left their bodies to like the empty trunks of palm-trees. It is a horrific scene. The wind is one of God’s forces. God controls the wind; it fulfills whatever mission it is commanded to fulfil.

The third scene depicts the story of the tribe of Thamud, *“(The tribe of) Thamud denied the warnings. For they said, ‘Is it a mortal, alone among us, that we are to follow? Then indeed we should fall into error and madness.’ Has the Message been sent to him, of all the people among us? He is an insolent liar. (It was said), ‘Tomorrow they will know who the insolent liar is.’”* They were too arrogant to accept the fact that one of them was sent by God to guide them. God chooses whomsoever He pleases to be His messenger. God knows best who is most qualified to fulfill the mission. The remarkable thing is that they thought that they would go astray if they followed their messenger. They were quite rude calling their messenger an insolent liar. The Quran said, *“Tomorrow they will know who the insolent liar is.”*

So God sent them the she-camel as a test and everyone stood waiting to see what will happen, *“Indeed We will send the she-camel as a test for them; so watch them and persevere;”* Their messenger was commanded to tell them the conditions for the test, *“and tell them that the water is to be divided between them. Every drinking will be witnessed.”* The water was divided

between the tribe and the she-camel; one day the tribe can access the water and the next day would be allocated to the she-camel, only she would be able to drink on that day. But they did not like this arrangement and called upon one of the evil men of their tribe, *“But they called to their companion, and he took a sword in hand, and hamstringed (her). Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings.”* They failed the test so they were punished with a mighty blast that destroyed them, *“For We sent against them a single mighty blast, and they became like crushed hay. And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?”* The Quran does not explain the nature of the blast. In Surat Fussilat (Chapter 41) it was called a thunderbolt. It seems that both the blast and the thunderbolt are the same. The blast made the people to look like crushed hay.

The next episode that is mentioned in this Sura is the story of the people of Lot (PBUH). This story was mentioned in greater detail in other places of the Quran, so the objective here is to attract the attention to the inevitable end of those who reject guidance, *“The people of Lot denied the warnings. We sent a storm of stones upon them (all) save the family of Lot, whom We rescued in the last watch of the night, as a Blessing from Us; thus, We reward him who gives thanks.”* The beginning and end of the story were given in the previous verses, then some more details were given, *“And he indeed did warn them of Our blow, but they disputed the warnings. They even demanded him to deliver his guests to them. Then We obliterated their eyes (and said), ‘Taste now My torment and My warnings.’”* Lot (PBUH) warned them repeatedly but they did not heed his warning. They even had the audacity to demand that he should deliver his guests to them; not knowing that these guests were angels coming to destroy them. The destruction happened in the early morning, *“Early on the morrow an enduring torment seized them. So taste My torment and My warnings. And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember. Then is there any who will remember?”* The verse that was mentioned at the end of each of the previous episodes, *“Then see how (dreadful) was My torment and My warnings;”* was replaced in this episode by another verse, *“So taste My torment and My warnings,”* as if the scene was happening in front of our eyes. This is one of the special characteristics of the Quranic style.

The last story is the story of the people of Pharaoh, *“And warnings were certainly sent to the people of Pharaoh. The (people) denied all Our signs; so We seized them – the seizure of an Eminent, Omnipotent.”* The story was told very briefly. Only the beginning and end are mentioned. The verses emphasized two of God’s attributes, His Eminence and His unlimited power, an ending which is appropriate to the story of Pharaoh who was a tyrant and thought he was a deity for his people.

The verses turn around to address the idolaters of Mecca, *“Are your disbelievers better than those, or have you some immunity in the Scriptures? Or do they say, ‘We are a host victorious?’ The hosts will all be routed and will turn and flee. But the Hour (of doom) is their appointed time, and the Hour will be more wretched and more bitter (than their earthly failure). Indeed, the guilty are in error and madness. On the day when they will be dragged into the Fire upon their faces (it is said to them), ‘Feel the touch of Hell.’”* It is a threat of the punishment in this life as well as in the Hereafter. They have seen what happened to those who rejected guidance before them, what makes them think they will be able to escape God’s punishment? Do they

think that they have a larger army, *“We are an alliance and we will be victorious.”* They will be defeated and they will turn back and flee; not only that, but the torment of the Hereafter is more severe. They will be dragged on their faces in Hell. It will be said to them, *“Feel the touch of Hell.”*

The narrative states the fundamental truth, *“Verily, We have created everything in due proportion and measure. And Our commandment is but one (commandment), as the twinkling of an eye.”* One single word or sign and God’s commandment will come to pass. God’s power defies the constraints of time and space. One commandment started the whole universe and one commandment can bring it to its end. One commandment creates, one commandment puts to death, and one commandment raises people to be gathered for the Day of Judgment and reckoning.

Then the Quran reminded them of the fate of previous peoples who rejected the truth, *“And verily We have destroyed your fellows; but is there any who remembers? And everything they did is noted in their records. Every matter, small and great, is on record.”* Everything is recorded.

Then a new page is turned. The secure and serene scene of those who are God conscious, *“The God conscious will dwell among gardens and rivers, in the seat of honor in the presence of the Omnipotent Sovereign.”* The image reflects an opposite image to that describing the disbelievers. This is the image of bliss and honor. The most important is the bliss of the hearts when they find themselves in the presence of God. They were conscious of Him in the worldly life and now they are secure in His presence in the Hereafter. The fear of God in the life of the world and the fear of God in the Hereafter are two irreconcilable emotions; they cannot co-exist in the heart of the human being.