

Sura 21: Al-Anbiya (The Prophets)

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

Verses 1 to 35:

1. *Their reckoning has drawn near to people, while they turn away in heedlessness.*
2. *Never comes to them a new reminder from their Lord but they listen to it while they play,*
3. *With hearts preoccupied. And they confer in secret. The wrongdoers say, "Is this other than a mortal like you? Will you then yield to magic while you see (it)?"*
4. *He said, "My Lord knows what is spoken in the heaven and the earth. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient."*
5. *Nay, they say, "(these are but) medleys of dreams. Nay, he fabricated it. Nay, he is a poet. Let him then bring us a sign like the ones that were sent to those (Prophets) of old."*
6. *Not a township before them believed, of those which We destroyed, would they then believe?*
7. *And We did not send before you other than men, whom We gave revelations. Ask the followers of the pervious Scriptures if you do not know?*
8. *And We neither made them bodies that did not eat food nor were they immortal.*
9. *Then, We fulfilled what they were promised, and We delivered them and those whom We willed, and We destroyed those who were given to excesses.*
10. *Indeed, We have revealed to you a Book in which there is a reminder for you. Have you then no understanding?*
11. *How many a community that committed wrongdoings have We shattered, and raised up after them another people.*
12. *And, when they felt Our might coming upon them, they fled.*
13. *Do not flee, but return back to the pleasures that you reveled in and to your dwellings, that you may be questioned.*
14. *They said, "Woe to us. We were indeed wrongdoers."*
15. *And that cry of theirs did not cease until We made them as reaped corn, lifeless.*
16. *And We did not create the heaven and the earth and all that is in between in jest.*
17. *If We had wished to find a pastime, We would have surely taken it from the things nearest to Us, if We would do (such a thing).*
18. *Nay, We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it destroys it, and there upon the falsehood perishes. Woe is to you for the (false) things you ascribe (to Us).*
19. *To Him belong all (the creatures) that are in the heavens and on earth. Those who are in His (very) Presence are not too proud to worship Him, nor are they (ever) weary (of His service).*
20. *They celebrate His praise night and day, tirelessly.*
21. *Or have they taken (for worship) gods from the earth who can raise (the dead)?*
22. *If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, both would have been corrupted. Glorified be God, the Lord of the Throne, from all that they ascribe (to Him).*
23. *He will not be questioned as to that which He does, but they will be questioned.*

24. *Or have they taken for worship (other) gods besides him? Say, "Bring your proof; this is the Message of those with me and the Message of those before me." But most of them know not the truth, and so they turn away.*
25. *And We did not send a messenger before you but We reveal to him, (saying), "There is no God save Me, so worship Me."*
26. *And they say the Lord of Mercy has begotten a son; Glory to be Him. They are only honored servants.*
27. *They speak not until He has spoken, and they act by His command.*
28. *He knows what is before them, and what is behind them, and they cannot intercede except for him whom He accepts, and they tremble in awe of Him.*
29. *If any of them should say, "I am a god besides Him", such a one We do recompense with Hell; thus do, We recompense the wrongdoers.*
30. *Do not the disbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), then We separated them? And We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?*
31. *And We have set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shift with them, and We have made therein broad highways (between mountains) for them to pass through; that they may be guided.*
32. *And We have made the heavens as a canopy, well-guarded; yet they turn away from its signs.*
33. *It is He who created the night and the day; and the sun and the moon. All swim along, each in its own orbit.*
34. *We did not grant immortality to any one before you; so if you die, would they be immortal?*
35. *Every soul shall have a taste of death; and We try you with evil and with good, and to Us you will return. (21: 1 – 35)*

This is a Sura which was revealed in Mecca. It deals with the fundamental issue that has been dealt with in all other Meccan Suras, the doctrine. The Sura deals with the aspects of the belief in the Oneness of God, the Message and the concept of resurrection. The narrative uses the cosmic phenomena as a vehicle to discuss these aspects. The doctrine is part of this universe. It has been established on the truth which is the basis of the creation of the universe. God did not create His creation in jest. The Sura then takes the reader on a trip around the heavens and earth, pointing to the unity of the laws that govern both. The narrative links the unity of the creation to the Oneness of God. The Sura indicates that the lives of all living creatures start from water and end by death. All living things share the same beginning and end.

Hawwa stipulates that this Sura elaborate on verses 6 and 7 of Surat al-Baqarah, *"Surely, those who reject faith, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they will not believe. God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and a veil on their eyes; great torment is theirs."*

Since the doctrine is a part of the universal law, truth will prevail and falsehood will perish. God will destroy the wrongdoers and will support the believers. The Sura then explores the experience of a number of God's messengers. Accounts of some messengers were given in more details than others. Finally, some of the scenes of the Day of Judgment are explored. These different topics fit together to serve the presentation of the main theme of the Sura and to motivate people to seek the truth that the Message of Muhammad (PBUH) brought.

"Their reckoning has drawn near to people, while they turn away in heedlessness. Never comes to them a new reminder from their Lord but they listen to it while they play, with hearts preoccupied." A very strong commencement, it shakes the heedless and alerts them to the coming reckoning. It rebukes the disbelievers for being blind to God's signs which are portrayed in front of their eyes.

"And they confer in secret" The disbelievers used to meet secretly to discuss the nature of the Message which Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) brought and ways of counteracting it, some of them would say, *"Is this other than a mortal like you? Will you then yield to magic while you see (it)?"* They were overwhelmed by the language of the Quran. They tried to explain why they were impressed by the Quran by making excuses. Some claimed that the Quran is a product of magic. They rebuked each other for being awed by this magic. The Prophet (PBUH) sought God help, saying, *"My Lord knows what is spoken in the heaven and the earth. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient."* God is aware of all talks, whether made in the open or in secret. In their deliberations about the nature of the Quran, some said it was magic. Others said it is nothing but dreams, *"(these are but) medleys of dreams."* Yet a third group said, *"he fabricated it,"* and a fourth group said, *"he is a poet."* None of these explanations was convincing so, they took another course of action, *"Let him then bring us a sign like the ones that were sent to those (Prophets) of old."* They asked for a material miracle. They should have known that God's miracles usually herald catastrophic events which lead to the destruction of the communities, *"Not a township before them believed of those which We destroyed, would they then believe?"* This scenario happened several times in the past, why would it be different this time?

"And We did not send before you other than men, whom We gave revelations. Ask the followers of the previous Scriptures if you do not know? And We neither made them bodies that did not eat food nor were they immortal." It was the divine will that the Message is delivered by human messengers. The Messengers were ordinary human beings with physical bodies that need nourishment just like anyone else. It was logical to send human beings as Messengers. God's Messengers should be able to lead a life like normal human beings and feel the same emotions and pains like normal people so that they would be able to relate to the human beings whom they were sent to guide. Asking people to emulate a creature that is different than them is futile. How can an individual who does not feel like they feel; does not enjoy life like they enjoy it; and does not appreciate the failings of human beings be a role model for them.

God's choice of a human being to carry His Message to the people is an honor that God bestowed on the human race. This was God's will and it was also His will to deliver the righteous and to destroy the transgressors, *"Then, We fulfilled what they were promised, and We delivered them and those whom We willed, and We destroyed those who were given to*

excesses.”

“Indeed, We have revealed to you a Book in which there is a reminder for you. Have you then no understanding?” The Quran is an eternal miracle that will last for all future generations to see and experience. It is not like other material miracles which would have a real impact only on the generation that witnessed it. The Arabs were unknown before they received the Quran. The Quran was the only reason the world knew about the Arabs. The contribution of the Muslims to the world civilisation was a direct product of the way of life that the Quran preached. It was God’s mercy that He did not respond to the request of the Arabs to send a material miracle; instead He gave them this eternal miracle.

“How many a community that committed wrongdoings have We shattered, and raised up after them another people.” God completely demolished the habitations of those who transgressed in the past and brought about new generations who built their own towns on the remains of previous towns. When people sensed the threat of destruction they tried to flee, “And, when they felt Our might coming upon them, they fled.” They thought they could escape God’s punishment. They did not realize that God’s power can reach them anywhere. The verse describes sarcastically their futile effort, “Do not flee, but return back to the pleasures that you reveled in and to your dwellings, that you may be questioned.” Go back to your comfortable lodging and the pleasures in which you indulgent yourselves, so that you would be questioned about how you spent your lives? When they realized the perilous situation that surrounded them they tried to ask for forgiveness, “They said, ‘Woe to us. We were indeed wrongdoers.’” But it was too late. They could cry as much as they want; their fate has already been settled, “And that cry of theirs did not cease until We made them as reaped corn, lifeless.”

The playful attitude that the disbelievers expressed when they received the Quran is juxtaposed against the seriousness of the creation of the heavens and the earth, “And We did not create the heaven and the earth and all that is in between in jest. If We had wished to find a pastime, We would have surely taken it from the things nearest to Us, if We would do (such a thing).” God created the universe for a reason and controlled its affairs wisely. God sent the Messengers to guide the people to the straight path. God promised to hold people to account on the Day of Judgement. This is a very serious process. The creation was not made in jest. Had God wanted to have fun (which is a rhetorical assumption) He could have had this in His own way. However, God would not do this anyway as is clear from the statement, “if We would do (such a thing).” But it is a reminder of the gravity of the playful attitude of the disbelievers. God’s law is to establish the truth and to abolish falsehood, “Nay, We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it destroys it, and there upon the falsehood perishes. Woe is to you for the (false) things you ascribe (to Us).”

A model for the obedient creatures of God is presented in the following verse, “To Him belong all (the creatures) that are in the heavens and on earth. Those who are in His (very) Presence are not too proud to worship Him, nor are they (ever) weary (of His service).” They

continuously worship and serve tirelessly. Only God knows who His creatures in the heavens and the earth are. We are only sure about the existence of the human beings on earth. The believers know that there are angels and jinn because they believe in the Quran. However, we do not know anything about them except for the information that was mentioned in the Quran. When we read, *“To Him belong all (creatures) that are in the heavens and on earth,”* we acknowledge our ability to know that the human beings exist and we leave alone those whom we have no knowledge of. Those are part of the unseen.

The verse, *“They celebrate His praise night and day, tirelessly.”* may be referring to the angels or other creatures of God, that only He knows. The angels continuously praise God. Human beings could also praise God continuously since each and every human activity can be considered an act of worship if the individual has the intention that these activities are done for the sake of God.

“Or have they taken (for worship) gods from the earth who can raise (the dead)? If there were, in the heavens and the earth, other gods besides God, both would have been corrupted in both. Glorified be God, the Lord of the Throne, from all that they ascribe (to Him).” This rhetorical question carries the tone of rebuke. Can these gods raise the dead? Obviously, they cannot. The first attribute of the true God is that He has the power to raise the dead. In addition, they should have known that confusion would have prevailed in the heaven and the earth had there been more than one God. There is one law that governs the whole universe. This law has been created by God and is maintained by Him. The different components of the universe work together in perfect harmony because they are all governed by the same law. Had there been more than one god, there would have been more than one will and more than one law. These wills would have contradicted each other and these laws would have contravened each other. God is above all what they ascribe to Him. *“He will not be questioned as to that which He does, but they will be questioned.”* Who can question the One who is in control of the whole universe? Who can question the Creator whose power is limitless? He is the one who created the standards and the measures that we know and He is exalted above all these standards and measures. Some people have the audacity to question why did God do specific things? Or what is the rationale behind these things? They cross the limits set for humans by God. These matters are beyond the understanding of mortals.

“Or have they taken for worship (other) gods besides him? Say, ‘Bring your proof; this is the Message of those with me and the Message of those before me.’” Do they have any credible evidence that these idols are gods? Previous messages came with the doctrine of the Oneness of God. However, people turned away from guidance, *“most of them know not the truth, and so they turn away.”* All previous messengers preached the same doctrine, *“And We did not send a Messenger before you but We reveal to him, (saying), ‘There is no God save Me, so worship Me.’”* The Oneness of God is the fundamental truth that all previous messages were based upon.

“And they say the Lord of Mercy has begotten a son. Glory be to Him. They are only honored servants. They speak not until He has spoken, and they act by His command. He knows what is before them, and what is behind them, and they cannot intercede except for him whom He accepts, and they tremble in awe of Him. If any of them should say, ‘I am a god besides Him’,

such a one We do recompense with Hell; thus do, We recompense the wrongdoers.” The claim that God has children came in different forms in different polytheistic religions. The idolaters of Mecca claimed that the angels were the daughters of God. The verses rebut this false claim. The angels are honored servants of God. They follow His command and they do not intercede on behalf of anyone except by the leave of God. They are always in awe of God. They never claimed to be gods. The destination of anyone who dares to make such claim will be Hellfire.

The narrative then takes the human heart on a trip around the huge universe. The verses explore the signs that lead to the belief in the Oneness of God, many people see these signs but they turn away from them in disbelief, *“Do not the disbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), then We separated them? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe?”* This description of how the universe started may agree with present day scientific knowledge. However, scientific facts may change from one time to the other depending on the discovery of new evidence, but the Quran is unchangeable. This is why we do not try to use the Quran to prove or disprove scientific facts. We believe in the truth of the Quran. The Quran does not offer us a scientific treatise but it offers us a way of life. What we can state now is that the present day theories regarding the formation of heavens and earth do not contradict the text of the Quran. Another scientific fact that these verses state is that water is the origin of all living things.

The verses continue to explore other cosmic phenomena, *“And We have set on the earth mountains standing firm, lest it should shift with them, and We have made therein broad highways (between mountains) for them to pass through; that they may be guided.”* The mountains were created to maintain the earth’s equilibrium. Broad highways were made between these high mountains to guide people in their passage. There is also a subtle reference to the guidance that people should seek in their search for God.

“And We have made the heavens as a canopy well-guarded, yet they turn away from its signs.” The Arabic term for heavens refers to anything that is held high. People look at the sky and see a canopy. God maintains this canopy well guarded. It is kept flawless to maintain the integrity of the universe and it is kept pure as a place from which the revelation is brought down. But people turn away from these signs.

The day and night are two cosmic phenomena that are closely related to human life on earth, *“It is He who created the night and the day; and the sun and the moon. All swim along, each in its own orbit.”* The sun and the moon regulate human life on earth. They are set in perpetual motion that does not deviate from its set path. This is one of the signs of the Oneness of God.

At the end of this group of verses, the law that governs human life is enunciated, *“We did not grant immortality to any one before you; so if you die, would they be immortal?”* God did not grant immortality to any one before the Prophet (PBUH). Every life ends with death. Do they think that they will live forever? Since they will eventually die, why do not they heed this fact and work for the Hereafter? *“Every soul shall have a taste of death; and We try you with evil and with good, to Us you will return.”* Every human being will eventually die. Life on earth is only a trial. People are sometimes tested with evil and sometimes they are tested with good. People’s perseverance and trust in God is tested with adversity. One may also be tested with good things

in life. This is a harder test than being tested with adversity. Many are able to persevere in adversity but only few are able to successfully pass the test when they are tested with abundance. Many succumb to their desires when they are given power, health, and wealth. People should be alert to the dangers that good things in life bring. The believer is fully aware of these dangers and is able to deal with both kinds of testing. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said, *“I wonder about the believer all his conditions are good and this is only true for the believer. If he is blessed with a bounty from God, he shows his gratitude and this is good. If he is faced with an adversity, he perseveres and this is good also.”*

Verses 36 to 47:

36. *And when those who disbelieve see you, they mock you, (saying), “Is this he who mentions your gods?” And they reject all mention of the Lord of Mercy.*
37. *Humankind is a creature of haste, soon I will show you My Signs; so do not ask Me to hasten them.*
38. *They say, “When will this promise come to pass, if you are telling the truth?”*
39. *If only the disbelievers knew when they will not be able to ward off the fire from their faces, nor from their backs, and they will not be helped.*
40. *Nay, it may come to them all of a sudden. They will then be confounded and no power will they have then to avert it, nor will they be reprieved.*
41. *Messengers before you were indeed mocked, but those who mocked them were beset by what they used to ridicule.*
42. *Say, “Who guards you in the night or in the day from the Lord of Mercy? Nay, but they turn away from the mention of their Lord.”*
43. *Or do they have gods that can guard them from Us? They have no power to aid themselves, nor can they be defended from Us.*
44. *Nay, We gave the good things of this life to these (disbelievers) and their fathers until life grew long for them; do not they see that We gradually reduce the land from its outlying borders? Is it then they who will prevail?*
45. *Say, “I warn you only by the revelation.” But the deaf will not hear the call, (even) when they are warned.*
46. *And if a breath of your Lord's torment were to touch them, they assuredly would say, “Alas for us. We were wrongdoers.”*
47. *And We set a just balance for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul is wronged in the least. And even if there was the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And We suffice as reckoners. (21: 36 - 47)*

“And when those who disbelieve see you, they mock you, (saying), “Is this he who mentions your gods? And they reject all mention of the Lord of Mercy.” The disbelievers who rejected the belief in the Lord of Mercy, the Creator of the heavens and earth were angry at the Messenger of God (PBUH) when he denounced their idols. They did not have any qualms in rejecting the Lord of Mercy and they refused to let the Prophet (PBUH) denounce their gods. They mocked the Prophet (PBUH) and dared him to bring the promised punishment, *“Humankind is a creature of*

haste, soon I will show you My Signs; so do not ask Me to hasten them. They say, ‘When will this promise come to pass, if you are telling the truth?’” Human beings are, by nature, always in haste; they are always looking to what is next. Quran warned them of the consequences of the challenge they posed to the Prophet (PBUH), *“If only the disbelievers knew when they will not be able to ward off the fire from their faces, nor from their backs, and they will not be helped. Nay, it may come to them all of a sudden. They will then be confounded and no power will they have then to avert it, nor will they be reprieved. Messengers before you were indeed mocked, but those who mocked them were beset by what they used to ridicule.”* Had they known what the consequences of their rejection will be, they would have been able to avoid the inevitable doom, and they would have not persisted in mocking the Messenger (PBUH). They were told that the promise will be fulfilled as it had been fulfilled before. The punishment will be sudden because they wanted God to hasten the punishment. The sudden occurrence of doom will stop them in their tracks, they will neither be able to think nor will they be able to act. In addition to the torment in the Hereafter, they will receive punishment in this life. They will meet the same end that other nations who mocked their messengers met before.

“Say, ‘Who guards you in the night or in the day from the Lord of Mercy? Nay, but they turn away from the mention of their Lord.’” Who can protect them other than the Lord of Mercy? This is a rhetorical question which has a tone of rebuke. Do they think that there is anyone else who can protect them other than the Lord of Mercy? The question is repeated in another way, *“Or do they have gods that can guard them from Us? They have no power to aid themselves, nor can they be defended from Us.”* How can these gods that they worship protect them when they are unable to protect themselves? These gods are not only helpless but they cannot even seek help from God.

“Nay, We gave the good things of this life to these (disbelievers) and their fathers until life grew long for them; do not they see that We gradually reduce the land from its outlying borders? Is it then they who will prevail?” In spite of their rejection, God gave them good things in this life. The indulgence in the pleasures of this life obliterated their spirituality, sealed their hearts, and weakened their insight. They lost touch with God. They should reflect on the history of huge empires before them which suffered decline and degeneration. Will they then be able to avoid the same end?

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded to issue them an ultimatum, *“Say, ‘I warn you only by the revelation.’ But the deaf will not hear the call, (even) when they are warned. And if a breath of your Lord’s torment were to touch them, they assuredly would say, ‘Alas for us. We were wrongdoers.’”* The word, “breath” is usually associated with mercy. Its usage here means that even the slightest punishment will be devastating and will make them cry out, *“Alas for us, we were wrong doers.”* However, the submission will be too late.

The following verse ends the scene of the Day of Judgement, *“And We set a just balance for the Day of Resurrection so that no soul is wronged in the least. And even if there was the weight of a grain of mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And We suffice as reckoners.”* A grain of mustard seed is a tiny seed that can be hardly seen with the naked eye. Its weight is negligible. However, it will not be lost on the Day of Judgment. It will be accounted for on the Day of Judgement.

Verses 48 to 92:

48. *And We verily gave Moses and Aaron the Criterion (to differentiate between right and wrong) and a light and a reminder for those who remain conscious of God,*
49. *Those who fear their Lord in secret, and who dread the Hour (of Judgment).*
50. *And this is a blessed message which We have sent down, will you then reject it?*
51. *And We verily gave Abraham his sound judgment before, and We were aware of him,*
52. *When he said to his father and his people, "What are these idols to which you are devoted?"*
53. *They said, "We found our fathers worshipping them."*
54. *He said, "Verily, you and your fathers were in manifest error."*
55. *They said, "Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of those who jest?"*
56. *He said, "Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He who created them (from nothing); and I bear witness to this.*
57. *And by God, I will plan against your idols, after you turn your backs and go away."*
58. *So he broke them to pieces, (all) but the biggest of them that they may return to it.*
59. *They said, "Who did this to our gods? He must indeed be one of the wrongdoers."*
60. *They said, "We heard a young man called Abraham speaks of them."*
61. *They said, "Then bring him before the people's eyes that they may testify."*
62. *They said, "Abraham, did you do this to our gods?"*
63. *He said, "Nay, this was done by this, their biggest one. Ask them, if they can speak."*
64. *So they turned to themselves and said, "Surely you are the wrongdoers."*
65. *Then they were utterly confounded. (They said), "You know full well that these (idols) do not speak."*
66. *(Abraham) said, "Do you then worship, besides God, things that can neither benefit nor harm you?"*
67. *Fie upon you, and upon the things that you worship besides God. Do you not have any understanding?*
68. *They said, "Burn him and protect your gods, if you do (anything at all)."*
69. *We (God) said, "Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham."*
70. *Then, they planned to harm him, but We made them the greatest losers.*
71. *And We delivered him and Lot (and brought them) to the land which We have blessed for all peoples.*
72. *And We gave him Isaac and, as an additional gift, (a grandson) Jacob, and We made both of them righteous men.*
73. *And We made them leaders who guide by Our command, and We inspired in them the doing of good deeds and establishing prayer and the giving of alms, and they worshipped Us (alone).*
74. *And to Lot, too, We gave wisdom and knowledge, and We saved him from the town which practised abominations. Truly, they were evil people and transgressors.*
75. *And We brought him into Our mercy. He was one of the righteous.*
76. *And (remember) Noah, when he cried to Us before, We listened to his (prayer) and delivered him and his family from the great distress.*

77. *And delivered him from the people who denied Our revelations. They were evil people, therefore We drowned them all.*
78. *And (remember) David and Solomon, when they gave judgment in the matter of the field into which the sheep of certain people had strayed by night, and We did witness their judgment.*
79. *And We made Solomon to understand (the case); and We gave wisdom and knowledge to both of them. And we subdued the hills and the birds to hymn (His) praise along with David. We were the doers (thereof).*
80. *It was We who taught him the making of coats of mail for your benefit, to guard you from each other's violence. Will you then be grateful?*
81. *(It was Our power that made) the violent wind to flow (tamely) for Solomon according to his command, to the land which We had blessed, for We do know all things.*
82. *And of the devils (jinn) some dived for him and did other work, and We kept them under our guard.*
83. *And (remember) Job, when He cried to his Lord, "Truly I have been afflicted with adversity. You are the Most Merciful of those who are merciful."*
84. *So We heard his prayer and removed the adversity which he suffered, and We gave him his household (that he had lost) and the like thereof along with them, a mercy from Us, and a remembrance for the worshippers;*
85. *And (remember) Ishmael, Idris, and Dhu'l-Kifl. All were perseverant.*
86. *And We brought them into Our mercy. They are among the righteous.*
87. *And remember Dha-nun (the one with the whale), when he went off in anger and deemed that We would not decree anything over him, but he cried out in the darkness, saying, "There is no God save You. Be You Glorified, I have been a wrongdoer."*
88. *So We heard his prayer and We delivered him from the anguish. Thus We save the believers.*
89. *And (remember) Zachariah, when he cried to his Lord, "My Lord, leave me not without offspring, You are the best of inheritors."*
90. *Then We heard his prayer, and bestowed upon him John, and adjusted his wife (to bear a child) for him. They used to vie one with the other in doing good deeds, and they cried to Us in longing and in fear, and were submissive to Us.*
91. *And (remember) her who guarded her chastity, We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.*
92. *Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord therefore worship Me (and no other). (21: 48 – 92)*

The previous verses mentioned the fact that the disbelievers used to discredit the Prophet (PBUH) because they did not imagine that God would send a mortal as His messenger. They called the revelation poetry, magic, or fables. The Quran responded by reminding them that God did indeed send messengers before Muhammad (PBUH), *"And We verily gave Moses and Aaron the Criterion (to differentiate between right and wrong) and a light and a reminder for those who remain conscious of God."* The verse describes the Scripture that was given to Moses (PBUH) *"The Criterion,"* the same name that was given to the Quran. All the divine revelations are called Criteria because they provide the criteria which differentiate between truth and falsehood. The verse labels the Torah as "light," because it lights the flame of faith in the hearts,

and thus removes the darkness of falsehood that enshrouds the disbelieving hearts. The Torah, like the Quran, is a reminder for those who remain conscious of God. The Quran becomes their reminder. It reminds them of God and in the process it raises their status among people. Those who remain conscious of God, they fear His anger and work hard for the Hereafter. They benefit from the flame of light and use it to guide them to the right path, *“Those who fear their Lord in secret, and who dread the Hour (of Judgment).”* This Quran embodies the blessed message, will you then reject it, *“And this is a blessed message which We have sent down, will you then reject it?”*

“And We verily gave Abraham his sound judgment before, and We were aware of him,” God gave Abraham (PBUH) the sound judgement and He was well aware of the ability of Abraham (PBUH) to carry the responsibility of the message. He said to his father and his people, *“What are these idols to which you are devoted?”* This was a sign of his sound judgment. He did not refer to the stone statues and the wooden carvings, which his people were worshiping, as gods. He called them idols, which exactly what they were. He rebuked them for being devoted to the worship of such unanimated things. The only excuse they had was that, *“We found our fathers worshipping them.”* This was a lame excuse that reflected a lack of independent thinking. It reflected a shaky faith. They did not have any reason to worship the idols except that they found their forefathers doing the same. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) explained to them the error they had committed both them and their forefathers, *“He said, ‘Verily you and your fathers were in manifest error.’”* They replied back by a question, *“Have you brought us the truth, or are you one of those who jest?”* This is a question which reflects their shaky state of mind. They asked Prophet Abraham (PBUH) whether he was serious. Contrast this with the confidence that Prophet Abraham (PBUH) exhibited in his unequivocal statement, *“He said, ‘Nay, your Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He who created them (from nothing); and I bear witness to this.’”* He was certain beyond any doubt of who created the heavens and earth to the extent that he can bear witness to the fact that God created them. Prophet Abraham (PBUH) did not actually see the creation of the heavens and earth but it was clear in his mind that God is the Creator. Everything in the universe testifies to that.

Prophet Abraham (PBUH) told them that he had a plan to deal with their idols, *“And by God, I will plan against your idols, after you turn your backs and go away.”* He did not mention the details of the plan. The Quran does not state the response of his people to his declaration. They may have been sure that he could not harm their idols, so his statement did not bother them. He broke them into pieces but he left the biggest idol intact, *“So he broke them to pieces, (all) but the biggest of them that they may return to it.”* When they came back, they saw what the broken idols and they started wondering, who did this? They did not reflect on what happened or how it could have happened. Idol worship disabled their ability to think rationally. So they started wondering who was the culprit, *“Who did this to our gods? He must indeed be one of the wrongdoers.”* Those who were aware of Abraham’s (PBUH) argument against their idols remembered his threat, *“They said, ‘We heard a young man called Abraham speaks of them.’”* It is obvious from the verse that Abraham (PBUH) was a young man when God bestowed on him the ability of sound judgement. We do not know whether at this time he was given God’s revelation or not. God may have inspired him to reject idol worship and to criticise his father and

his people for committing this sin. This seems to be the case. They may have called him a “young man” to belittle his influence.

“They said, ‘then bring him before the people's eyes that they may testify.’” They wanted to question him in front of everyone. When he was brought in front of them, *“They said, ‘Abraham, did you do this to our gods?’”* They still insisted that these were gods, even after they saw them broken into pieces. Abraham (PBUH) responded sarcastically, *“Nay, this was done by this, their biggest one. Ask them, if they can speak.”* It seems that this sarcastic answer brought them back to their senses, *“So they turned to themselves and said, ‘Surely you are wrongdoers.’”* But this short awakening did not last long, they quickly lapsed into their previous state of ignorance, they said, *“You know full well that these (idols) do not speak.”* Abraham (PBUH) lost his patience and rebuked them for their nonsensical behaviour, he said, *“Do you then worship, besides God, things that can neither benefit nor harm you? Fie upon you, and upon the things that you worship besides God. Do you not have any understanding?”* They were confounded and could not give him a rational answer. Their exit from this embarrassing situation was to say, *“Burn him and protect your gods, if you do (anything at all).”* God said to the fire, *“Fire, be cool and safe for Abraham.”* How did this happen? It is God’s will, He says be and it is. But look at the precise language of the Quran. God commanded the fire to be, “cool and safe.” Had the command been for the fire to be cool, it could have been unsafe for Abraham (PBUH). God foiled their plans and saved Abraham (PBUH), *“Then they planned to harm him, but We made them the greatest losers.”* God made them the losers. God saved Abraham and his nephew, Lot (PBUH) and brought them to Syria, *“And We delivered him and Lot (and brought them) to the land which We have blessed for all peoples.”* The reference here is to the Greater Syria which became the land of prophet-hood for a long time. This is the area which was blessed by having the second holy Mosque (the Aqsa Mosque) and the Holy Land. God’s blessings made its land fertile and made it the place where His messengers received His revelations, generation after generation.

Abraham (PBUH) left his homeland, his people, and his family and migrated to the Greater Syria, so God replaced his loss, *“And We gave him Isaac and, as an additional gift, (a grandson) Jacob, and We made both of them righteous men.”* He gave him a son and a grandson who were both righteous and from them came a huge nation. They carried the flame of guidance to guide people to goodness, establishing prayers, and paying the poor-dues. Abraham (PBUH) persevered in face of adversity, so God rewarded him the best reward, *“And We made them leaders who guide by Our command, and We inspired in them the doing of good deeds and establishing prayer and the giving of alms, and they worshipped Us (alone).”*

“And to Lot, too, We gave wisdom and knowledge, and We saved him from the town which practised abominations. Truly, they were evil people and transgressors. And We brought him into Our mercy. He was one of the righteous.” This is a quick reference to Lot (PBUH). His story was detailed elsewhere. God saved him from the evil people and admitted him into His mercy. God’s mercy is a refuge for people where they can find security and safety.

Noah (PBUH) was also referenced quickly, *“And (remember) Noah, when he cried to Us before, We listened to his (prayer) and delivered him and his family from the great distress. And delivered him from the people who denied Our revelations. They were evil people, therefore We drowned them all.”*

The following verses mention Prophets Solomon and David (PBUT) in some detail, *“And (remember) David and Solomon, when they gave judgment in the matter of the field into which the sheep of certain people had strayed by night, and We did witness their judgment. And We made Solomon to understand (the case); and We gave wisdom and knowledge to each of them. And We subdued the hills and the birds to hymn (His) praise along with David. We were the doers (thereof). It was We who taught him the making of coats of mail for your benefit, to guard you from each other's violence. Will you then be grateful?”* The verses narrate a story about two men who came to Prophet David (PBUH) to resolve a dispute which arose between them. The first man had a planted field and the second man had a flock of sheep. The sheep entered the field by night and ate whatever plants they found. David (PBUH) decided that the owner of the flock should give his flock to the owner of the field as a replacement for the loss that the sheep caused. The Sheppard went to Prophet Solomon (PBUH) and told him about the dispute and David's (PBUH) decision. Solomon (PBUH) had a better way for resolving the dispute. He told his father that it would be better if the Sheppard worked in the field to bring it back to its condition before the sheep entered it. In the meantime, the owner of the field would keep the flock of sheep to benefit from its milk; once his field was reclaimed he should give back the flock of sheep to the Sheppard and he would take back his field. David (PBUH) accepted this decision. Both David and Solomon (PBUT) did their best to arrive at a just resolution. David's (PBUH) aimed at replacing the loss of the owner of the field, while Solomon's (PBUH) resolution, which came as an inspiration from God, aimed not only at replacing the loss but also at reclaiming the field. Not only justice was served but also the field was reclaimed. God bestowed wisdom and knowledge on both of them. Each one of them was given special traits as a bounty from God. God subdued the hills and the birds to hymn (His) praise along with David (PBUH) and taught him how to make coats of mail to guard against violence. The Psalms of David (PBUH) were his way of singing God's praise with hills and the birds. God subjected the wind to flow under Solomon's (PBUH) command, *“(It was Our power that made) the violent wind to flow (tamely) for Solomon according to his command, to the land which We had blessed, for We do know all things. And of the devils (jinn) some dived for him and did other work, and We kept them under our guard.”* God also subjected the jinn to work under Solomon's command.

The next verse touches upon the trials of Prophet Job (PBUH), *“And (remember) Job, when He cried to his Lord, ‘Truly I have been afflicted with adversity. You are the Most Merciful of those that are merciful.’”* This is one of the most moving stories. The Quran only gave the highlights of the story; no details were given. The verses in this Sura only outline Job's (PBUH) prayer and God's response to his prayer. Job's (PBUH) prayer was brief, simply stating his general condition. He did not even ask for a relief from his condition trusting in God's mercy. He gave the highest example of the perseverant servant of God. God responded, *“So We heard his prayer and removed the adversity which he suffered, and We gave him his household (that he had lost)*

and the like thereof along with them, a mercy from Us, and a remembrance for the worshippers;” God gave him health and replaced the family he had lost. In addition, God gave him more children and grandchildren. This was a mercy from God. The story is a reminder for the worshippers because they are the most likely to suffer such trials. The believers carry a grave responsibility; they are more likely to be tested in the course of fulfilling their responsibility.

The trait of perseverance is again highlighted in connection with three prophets: Ishmael, Idris, and Dhu'l-Kifl (PBUH), *“And (remember) Ishmael, Idris, and Dhu'l-Kifl. All were perseverant. And We brought them into Our mercy. They are among the righteous.”* The Quran narrated the story of Ishmael (PBUH) elsewhere, but no details were mentioned about the other two prophets. The message is that they persevered so God brought them into His mercy.

Prophet Yunus’ (PBUH) experience with the whale is then narrated, *“And remember Dhanun, when he went off in anger and deemed that We would not decree anything over him, but he cried out in the darkness, saying, ‘There is no God save You. Be You Glorified, I have been a wrongdoer.’”* He was labelled the *“companion of the whale,”* because the whale swallowed him then spat him out. He was sent as a messenger of God to a town. The people of the town rejected him and he did not exercise patience and became angry with them; so he decided to abandon them. He did not wait to be told by God what to do. He thought that he can travel in the land and his travel will not be restricted. This is the interpretation of the phrase, *“We would not decree anything over him.”* He left the town and went to the seashore where he boarded a ship. The ship was overloaded and the people onboard decided that they should throw someone overboard to lighten the ship’s weight. They made a toss and he was chosen to be thrown overboard. He was then swallowed by the whale. When he was in the darkness of the whale’s belly he called upon his Lord saying, *“There is no God save You. Be You Glorified, I have been a wrongdoer.”* God heard his prayer and responded to it and delivered him from his predicament, *“So We heard his prayer and We delivered him from the anguish. Thus we save the believers.”*

We need to stop at this point and reflect on Yunus’ (PBUH) experience. It is clear from the verses that Yunus (PBUH) was impatient with his people. When he was faced by rejection, he simply relinquished his task and left the town. Consequently, he was faced with a much harder affliction. When he realized his mistake he repented. God relieved him of his adversity and delivered him from the anguish. The lesson is that those who are calling people to the straight path will always face difficulties. They will be rejected. They may even be subjected to torture and persecution. They must persevere and they must remain steadfast in face of these adverse conditions. Perseverance is a condition for success. God’s promise will be fulfilled, *“Thus we save the believers.”*

The next prophet to be discussed is Prophet Zachariah (PBUH), *“And (remember) Zachariah, when he cried to his Lord, ‘My Lord, leave me not without offspring, You are the best of inheritors.’”* The story of the birth of John (PBUH) was narrated before in Surat Al-Imran (Chapter 3) and in Surat Mariam (Chapter 19). Here a brief mention is made. The story starts with Zachariah’s (PBUH) prayer, *“My Lord, leave me not without offspring.”* Zachariah (PBUH) was entrusted with the upkeep of the temple before the birth of Jesus (PBUH). Zachariah

(PBUH) did not lose sight of the fact that God will ultimately inherit everything, *“You are the best of inheritors.”* However, he wanted someone to carry the responsibility of his family, his faith and his wealth after him. God’s response was quick and to the point, *“Then We heard his prayer, and bestowed upon him John, and adjusted his wife (to bear a child) for him.”* Zachariah’s (PBUH) wife was barren but the verses simply ignored the details and addressed the request directly. The response was fast because Zachariah (PBUH) and his family used to, *“vie one with the other in good deeds, and they cried to Us in longing and in fear, and were submissive to Us.”* Zachariah (PBUH) and his wife deserved the blessing of God who bestowed on them a righteous son because they had such high traits.

The final prophet to be mentioned is Jesus (PBUH) and his story started with a reference to his mother, *“And (remember) her who guarded her chastity, We breathed into her of Our spirit, and We made her and her son a sign for all peoples.”* The verse did not mention Mariam by name because the Sura is about God’s prophets. The mention of Mariam came in relation to her son. The verse emphasized the fact that she guarded her chastity which indicates that she did not engage, at any time, in any intimate relationship with a man whether legitimate or illegitimate. She was a pure virgin. She and her son were a sign for all people. Nothing like this had ever happened before.

Having presented examples of the messengers of God, the tests that they met, and the bounties of God which were bestowed upon them; the narration comes to the ultimate goal of the discourse, *“Verily, this brotherhood of yours is a single brotherhood, and I am your Lord therefore worship Me (and no other).”* Your nation is a single nation. The brotherhood of the messengers is a single brotherhood. They belong to the same faith and they believe in the same doctrine, the doctrine of the belief in the Oneness of God; one nation on earth and one God in heaven. There is no deity but He.

Verses 93 to 112:

93. *And they have divided their religion (into fragments) among them, (yet) all are returning to Us.*
94. *Whosoever does good deeds and is a believer, there will be no rejection of his effort. We will record (it) for him.*
95. *And it is prohibited for any community, which We have destroyed, to return,*
96. *Until the Gog and Magog are let loose, and they will descend from every high land.*
97. *And the true promise draws near; then, the disbelievers will be staring with their eyes wide open in terror. (They say), “Alas for us, we did not heed this during our lives. Nay, we were wrongdoers.”*
98. *Verily you, (idolaters) and that which you worship beside God are the firewood of Hell; to it you shall come.*
99. *If these had been gods, they would not have gotten there, but each one will abide therein.*
100. *There, sobbing will be their lot, and therein they will not hear.*
101. *Those for whom Our kindness has been decreed before, will be removed far therefrom.*
102. *They will not hear the slightest sound thereof, while they abide in that which their souls desire.*

103. *The great terror will bring them no grief, and the angels will welcome them saying, "This is your Day which you were promised;"*
104. *The Day when We roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books (completed). As We began the first creation, so shall We repeat it, a promise We have undertaken. Truly shall We fulfil it.*
105. *And verily we have written in the Scripture, after the reminder, My righteous servants will inherit the earth.*
106. *Verily in this (Quran) is a Message for people who are devout.*
107. *We sent you not, but as a mercy to the worlds.*
108. *Say, "It is only revealed to me that your God is One God. Will you therefore submit?"*
109. *But if they turn away, Say, "I have proclaimed the Message to you all alike and in truth; but I know not whether that which you are promised is near or far.*
110. *It is He who knows what is said openly and what you hide (in your hearts).*
111. *I do not know; may be it is a trial for you and enjoyment for a while."*
112. *He said, "My Lord, judge You in truth. Our Lord is the Lord of Mercy the One whose help should be sought against the blasphemies you utter." (21: 93 – 112)*

"And they have divided their religion (into fragments) among them, (yet) all are returning to Us. Whosoever does good deeds and is a believer, there will be no rejection of his effort. We will record (it) for him." The brotherhood of the Messengers is a single brotherhood. They all belong to one faith, a faith that is founded on the belief in the Oneness of God. All God's messages came to call people to worship the One God. The different messages came with different ways of life. Each message was appropriate to the time, place, and the people to whom it was revealed. However, in spite of the fact that all these messages had the same fundamental foundation their adherents went in different ways. Each group took a piece of the original message for themselves. Arguments and differences erupted among the adherents of the different messages. Even the adherents of one message were divided among themselves. They used these differences as a reason to kill each other. They will return to God in the Hereafter and He will judge among them. The good deeds will be accepted and recorded and their owners will be rewarded. Good deeds are grounded in the belief in God. The belief in God is the basis of life. It is the true link between the human being and the universe and the link between the universe and God. Good deeds are like a building and the belief in God is the foundation of that building. Good deeds are the fruits of the belief in God. Good deeds are the manifestation of the true faith. This is why good deeds are always mentioned in conjunction with the belief in God in the Quran.

The accountability of people will be in the Hereafter, even if a part of it was manifested during this life. Thus, the nations which were punished in their lives will receive their ultimate punishment in the Hereafter, *"And it is prohibited for any community, which We have destroyed, to return."*

The following verses describe a scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgement. The verses start with a mention of one of the signs of the approach of the Day of Judgement, *"Until the Gog and Magog are let loose, and they will descend from every high land."* This will signal the approach

of the Day of Judgement. However, there is no mention of the timing but the focus is on the surprise that will overwhelm people, *“And the true promise draws near; then the disbelievers will be staring with their eyes wide open in terror. (They say), ‘Alas for us, we did not heed this during our lives. Nay, we were wrongdoers.’”* The horror will overtake the wrongdoers and their eyes will remain wide open. They will regret what they have done in their life time. The judgement will be announced, *“Verily you, (idolaters) and that which you worship beside God are the firewood of Hell; to it you shall come.”* They will be shown the evidence which proves that their claims were false, *“If these had been gods, they would not have got there, but each one will abide therein. There, sobbing will be their lot, and therein they will not hear.”* The verse also describes their lot in Hell.

The verses then turn to the other side, the side of the believers, *“Those for whom Our kindness has been decreed before, will be removed far therefrom. They will not hear the slightest sound thereof, while they abide in that which their souls desire.”* They will be saved by the grace of God; they will not hear even the slightest sound of Hellfire. They will be saved from the great terror that will be inflicted upon the wrongdoers. The angels will welcome them into heaven and they will live forever getting what their hearts desire, *“The great terror will bring them no grief, and the angels will welcome them saying, ‘This is your Day which you were promised;’”*

“The Day when We roll up the heavens like a scroll rolled up for books (completed). As We began the first creation, so shall We repeat it, a promise We have undertaken. Truly shall We fulfil it.” This is another scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgment. The heavens will be rolled up signalling the end. God will then restart the creation as He did the first time.

The narrative then turns to a new theme, the theme of God’s established rules regarding the believers, *“And verily we have written in the Scripture, after the reminder, My righteous servants will inherit the earth.”* The Scripture may be referring to the Psalms of David (PBUH); in this case the reminder would be the Torah. The Scripture may be also a reference to every one of God’s revealed Books. In this case the reminder would be the Sacred Tablets kept by God which embodies all the revelations. At any rate, God’s established rule is that, *“My righteous servants will inherit the earth.”* What is meant by the term, *“inherit the earth,”* and who are God’s righteous servants?

God created Adam to establish a civilization on earth. God established a divine project for humanity to follow so that they are able to perform their task. The divine project is based on the belief in God and doing good deeds. The divine project was not meant only to enable the establishment of a material civilization but was concerned in the first place with nurturing the spirituality of humankind to raise him to the level of civility that God wanted for him and to protect him from succumbing to the material desires that are usually part of any material civilization. The divine project aims at balancing the material and the spiritual. As we go through the history of humankind we see nations which lost this balance. However, the nations which base their good deeds on a foundation of strong belief in God are the heirs of this earth. God’s promise will be fulfilled.

“Verily in this (Quran) is a Message for people who are devout.” The Quran brought a message that can be understood only by those who are devout, because they open their hearts to God’s words. God sent Muhammad (PBUH) as a mercy to humankind, *“We sent you not, but as a mercy to the worlds.”* The divine project that Muhammad (PBUH) brought from God guides people to the right path and to a happy way of life. The divine project helps humankind achieve the perfection that God wants them to have. This message was not sent to humankind until humanity reached its maturity. The message included the fundamentals of a way of life befitting humans; it is a way of life that does not change with time. However, these fundamentals provide a methodology which allows people to cope with the ever changing needs of a human society. The divine project guaranteed the freedom of thought and it removed all obstacles that may hinder human creativity. Islam called for a human society in which all geographical and ethnic barriers are removed. It brings all people to one doctrine and one social structure.

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded to confront the disbelievers, *“Say, ‘It is only revealed to me that your God is One God. Will you therefore submit?’”* This is the true element of the mercy which frees the human society from the shackles of idol worship and the oppression of ignorance and myth. This is the road of mercy, will you then submit? However, if they turn away, *“Say, ‘I have proclaimed the Message to you all alike and in truth; but I know not whether that which you are promised is near or far. It is He who knows what is said openly and what you hide (in your hearts). I do not know; maybe it is a trial for you and enjoyment for a while.’”*

Finally, the Prophet (PBUH), having fulfilled his task, turns to his Lord asking for His help, *“My Lord, judge You in truth. Our Lord is the Lord of Mercy the One whose help should be sought against the blasphemies you utter.”*