

Sura 46: Al-Ahqaf (The Dunes)

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

This is a Meccan Sura. It deals mainly with topics which are part of the doctrine of Islam: the belief in the Oneness of God, the belief in the divine revelation, the belief in the Message, the belief in Muhammad (PBUH) as a messenger of God and that he received the Quran, and the belief in the resurrection and the accountability of people on the Day of Judgment. The doctrine provides the basic fundamentals upon which Islam was established. That is why the Quran stressed these fundamentals in all the Suras that were revealed in Mecca. The relationship between the fundamental beliefs and Islamic laws was expounded upon in the Suras of the Quran which were revealed in Medina.

Verses 1 to 14:

1. *Ha. Mim.*
2. *The revelation of the Book is from God the Eminent, the Wise.*
3. *We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that in between them except in truth, and for an appointed term. But those who disbelieve turn away from what they are warned of.*
4. *Say, "Do you see what it is you invoke besides God? Show me what they have created on earth, or do they have a share in (the creation of) the heavens? Bring me a scripture (revealed) before this, or any remnant of knowledge (you may have), if you are truthful."*
5. *And who is more astray than he who invokes besides God those who will not answer him till the Day of Resurrection and they are heedless of their call?*
6. *And when the people are gathered together (on the Day of Resurrection), they will be their enemies, and they will be deniers of their worshipping (them).*
7. *And when Our clear revelations are recited to them, those who disbelieve say of the truth when it reaches them, "This is clear magic."*
8. *Or do they say, "He has fabricated it"? Say, "Had I fabricated it, you have no power to support me against God. He knows best what you say among yourselves concerning it. He suffices as a witness between me and you. And He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy."*
9. *Say, "I am not different from the other messengers (of God), nor do I know what will be done to me or to you. I only follow that which is revealed to me, and I am only a plain warner."*
10. *Say, "Have you considered if it was from God, and you disbelieved in it while a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to something similar and believed while you were arrogant? Surely God does not guide the wrongdoers."*
11. *And those who disbelieve said of those who believe, "If it had been (any) good, they would not have preceded us in attaining it." And since they will not be guided by it, they say, "This is an ancient lie."*
12. *And before this, was the Scripture of Moses a guide and a mercy. And this Book confirms (it) in an Arabic tongue; to admonish the wrongdoers, and a glad tiding to the doers of good.*
13. *Verily those who said, "Our Lord is God," and remained firm (on the Path), on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.*
14. *These are the dwellers of the garden, abiding therein, a reward for what they did. (46: 1 – 14)*

“Ha. Mim. The Revelation of the Book is from God the Eminent, the Wise. We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that in between them except in truth, and for an appointed term. But those who disbelieve turn away from what they are warned of.” These verses refer to the fact that the Quran has been composed using the letters of the Arabic alphabet. However, the result is a Book that is different from any book a mortal can compose using the same letters of the alphabet. An implicit reference is also made to the link between the written Book of God and God’s Book that can be seen by looking at the universe. Both books are established on the truth. The revelation is a testimony of God’s Eminence and Wisdom and the creation is a testimony of God’s Power. However, the disbelievers are heedless of both Books.

It is really astounding. How can the disbelievers ignore the magnificence of the recited Book and the seen Book? The Book that has been revealed to the Messenger of God (PBUH) emphasizes the facts that there is only One God and that He is the Creator of everything; the Book of the universe which can be seen manifested in the creation of heavens and earth testifies to the same fact. If there were other gods, what did they create? *“Say, ‘Do you see what it is you invoke besides God? Show me what they have created on earth, or do they have a share in (the creation of) the heavens?’”* No one can claim that the objects that the disbelievers worshipped, whether idols, trees, jinn, or angels, did actually create anything on earth. No one can also claim that these objects could have participated in the creation of heaven. But if anyone has the audacity to make such a claim, then they should provide a proof for their claim, *“Bring me a Scripture (revealed) before this, or any remnant of knowledge (you may have), if you are truthful.”*

The idolaters of Mecca used to worship idols, statues that represent the angels, and trees. Some even worshipped the angels or Satan. These objects would never respond to them if they called upon them, and on the Day of Judgment they will deny that they had any connection with those who worshipped them, *“And who is more astray than he who invokes besides God those who will not answer him till the Day of Resurrection and they are heedless of their call? And when the people are gathered together (on the Day of Resurrection), they will be their enemies, and they will be deniers of their worshipping (them).”*

The following verses discuss the idolaters’ response to the revelation and refute their claim that it was fabricated, *“And when Our clear revelations are recited to them, those who disbelieve say of the truth when it reaches them, ‘This is clear magic.’ Or do they say, ‘He has fabricated it’? Say, ‘Had I fabricated it, you have no power to support me against God. He knows best what you say among yourselves concerning it. He suffices as a witness between me and you. And He is the All-Forgiving, the Giver of Mercy.’* The Prophet (PBUH) was told to respond to them with these questions: how could he have fabricated it? Why would he fabricate it? And what is the benefit that he would possibly gain by fabricating it? They should know that no one can protect the imposters from God’s wrath. God knows what the disbelievers say and He is sufficient as a judge to judge between the disbelievers and the Messenger (PBUH).

The Prophet (PBUH) was commanded to explain to them that his task was to deliver the message just like all other messengers before him did, *“Say, ‘I am not different from the other messengers (of God), nor do I know what will be done to me or to you. I only follow that which is revealed to me, and I am only a plain warner.’”* The Prophet (PBUH) was the last messenger of God in a long chain of messengers sent by God to guide humanity. He had no supernatural powers; he did not know what would be done to him, nor did he know what would be done to them. He was only fulfilling his task as he had been commanded by God. The Prophet (PBUH) then reminded them with the testimony of one of the scholars of the Children of Israel, *“Say, ‘Have you*

considered if it was from God, and you disbelieved in it while a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to something similar and believed while you were arrogant? Surely God does not guide the wrongdoers.” We do not know who that scholar was. There are narrations which indicate that this verse was revealed in Medina. These narrations link the verse to Abdullah ibn Salam (RA). However, it may have been someone else. The verse aimed at alerting them to be more cautious. They had no evidence that the Book was fabricated. What would then be their fate if the Book was a true divine revelation? However, if they insist on their disbelief, they should know that God does not guide the wrongdoers.

“And those who disbelieve said of those who believe, ‘If it had been (any) good, they would not have preceded us in attaining it.’ And since they will not be guided by it, they say, ‘This is an ancient lie.’” The chiefs of Mecca saw that Islam was adopted by people who were poor and some of them were slaves. Their arrogant nature put them in a state of denial. This religion could not have been good, because if it were good, we would have been the first to adopt it. This is a reflection of their irrationality in dealing with the situation. Having decided that it is not good, they tried to find a justification for their decision, so they decided that it must be a kind of sorcery.

Continuing with the issue of divine revelation, a reference is made to the Scripture that was revealed to Moses (PBUH) and the similarity between the two divine revelations, *“And before this, was the Scripture of Moses a guide and a mercy. And this Book confirms (it) in an Arabic tongue; to admonish the wrongdoers, and a glad tiding to the doers of good.”*

The verses then turn to the reward of the doers of good, *“Verily those who said, ‘Our Lord is God,’ and remained firm (on the Path), on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. These are the dwellers of the garden, abiding therein, a reward for what they did.”* Those who said, *“Our Lord is God,”* did not merely pay lip service to the statement they uttered, nor did they believe in it as a mere thought in their hearts. They made the statement because they believed that it is the divine plan for a complete way of life. This statement shapes the thought of people, it should be reflected on their deeds, and it shapes all possible human relationships in the society.

Verses 15 to 20:

15. *We have enjoined on humankind kindness to his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give birth to him. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is (a period of) thirty months. Till when he attains full strength and reaches forty years, he says, “My Lord, enable me to be grateful for the blessings which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do good which pleases You. And make my offspring righteous; surely I have repented to You, and surely I am of those who submit.*
16. *These are from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and overlook their evil deeds. (They shall be) among the dwellers of the Garden, a promise of truth, which was made to them (in this life).*
17. *But (there is one) who says to his parents, “Fie on you, do you threaten me that I shall be brought forth (again) when generations before me have passed away? And they twain cry to God for help (and say), “Woe to you, believe. The promise of God is true. But he says, “This is nothing except ancient fables.”*

18. *These are the ones upon whom the word (i.e. the decree) has come into effect among nations of the jinn and humankind which have passed on before them. They are the losers.*
19. *And for all there will be ranks from what they do, that He may pay them fully for their deeds; and they will not be wronged.*
20. *And on the day when those who disbelieve are exposed to the Fire (it will be said), "You squandered your good things in the life of the world and sought comfort therein. Now this day you are recompensed with the humiliating torment because you were arrogant in the land without a right, and because you used to transgress. (46: 15 – 20)*

God enjoined on the whole race of humankind to be kind to their parents. This is a command which has been addressed specifically to the human race. Members of this race should be kind to their parents. The word, "*Ihsan*," in Arabic which has been used in this verse to describe how a human being should treat his parents has a much wider scope than kindness. The word implies that parents should be treated in the best way possible. This is the parents' right decreed by the Creator of the human race. They deserve this right by virtue of being parents, "*We have enjoined on humankind kindness to his parents.*" This command has been repeated in the Quran and in the tradition of the Messenger of God (PBUH), while there is no mention of a similar command issued to the parents, except in very special cases. The initial natural disposition of the parents takes care of such a command. The parents are normally naturally disposed to sacrificing everything they have, even their own lives, to make their children happy.

Part of this sacrifice is mentioned here, "*In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give birth to him. The carrying of the (child) to his weaning is (a period of) thirty months.*" How can a son or a daughter repay their mother for such a sacrifice? Abdullah ibn 'Umar (RA) saw a man performing circumambulation around the Ka'ba while carrying his mother on his back. The man asked Ibn 'Umar (RA), "*Did I fulfill my obligation towards my mother?*" Ibn 'Umar (RA) replied, "*You did not even pay her for one exhalation that she made in pain.*"

The verse continues to describe the process of the growing up of the child, "*Till when he attains full strength and reaches forty years.*" The term full strength here is taken to mean forty years of age. The response of those who have been guided is given next, "*he says, 'My Lord, enable me to be grateful for the blessings which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do good which pleases You. And make my offspring righteous; surely I have repented to You, and surely I am of those who submit.'*" These people ask God to grant them three things: to enable them to express their gratitude to Him; to enable them to do good deeds that please God; and to raise their children in a way that pleases God. God's response is more generous, "*These are from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and overlook their evil deeds. (They shall be) among the dwellers of the Garden, a promise of truth, which was made to them (in this life).*" Their reward will be made on the basis of the best of their deeds; their sins will be forgiven; and their abode will be paradise.

On the other hand, there are those who reject guidance, who treat their parents harshly, "*But (there is one) who says to his parents, 'Fie on you, do you threaten me that I shall be brought forth (again) when generations before me have passed away?' And they twain cry to God for help (and say), 'Woe to you, believe. The promise of God is true. But he says, 'This is nothing except ancient fables.'*" They treat their parents harshly, refuse their sincere advice, and reject God's guidance. Their recompense will be similar to their deeds, "*These are the ones upon*

whom the word (i.e. the decree) has come into effect among nations of the jinn and humankind which have passed on before them. They are the losers.” No one will be wronged, and everyone will be recompensed according to their deeds, “And for all there will be ranks from what they do, that He may pay them fully for their deeds; and they will not be wronged.”

The next verse portrays a very brief and quick scene of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, “*And on the day when those who disbelieve are exposed to the Fire (it will be said), ‘You squandered your good things in the life of the world and sought comfort therein. Now this day you are recompensed with the humiliating torment because you were arrogant in the land without a right, and because you used to transgress.’*” They squandered the good things that God bestowed upon them during the worldly life. Instead of investing in the Hereafter, they spent everything they had enjoying the transient pleasures of the worldly life. So, on that Day they will get nothing and they will suffer the humiliating torment that they were warned about.

Verses 21 to 28:

21. *Mention the brother of ‘Ad when he warned his people at the dunes, but there have been warners before him and after him, “Worship none other than God. Truly, I fear for you the torment of a tremendous Day.”*
22. *They said, “Did you come in order to turn us away from our gods? Then bring upon us the (calamity) with which you are threatening us, if you are truthful.”*
23. *He said, “The knowledge (of when it will come) is only with God. I proclaim to you the mission on which I have been sent. But I see that you are a people in ignorance.”*
24. *Then, when they saw the cloud coming toward their valleys, they said, “This cloud will give us rain.” In fact, it is what you were asking to be hastened; a wind wherein is a painful torment.*
25. *It will destroy everything by the commandment of its Lord. And in the morning, nothing was found of them except their dwellings. Thus, do We recompense the guilty people.*
26. *And We had firmly established them in (prosperity and) power which We have not given to you (Quraish) and We had endowed them with (faculties of) hearing, seeing, and intellect; but their (faculties of) hearing, seeing, and intellect did not benefit them at all because they rejected the revelations of God; and they were beset by that which they used to mock.*
27. *And verily We have destroyed townships round about you, and displayed (for them) Our revelations, that haply they might return.*
28. *Why then was no help forthcoming to them from those whom they worshipped as gods, besides God, as a means of access (to God)? They left them in the lurch; but that was their lie, and what they used to fabricate.” (46: 21 – 28)*

“*Mention the brother of ‘Ad when he warned his people at the dunes, but there have been warners before him and after him, ‘Worship none other than God. Truly, I fear for you the torment of a tremendous Day.’*” The brother of ‘Ad is Prophet Hud (PBUH). The verse refers to him as, “*the brother of ‘Ad,*” to portray the close relationship between him and his people. It is a similar relationship that Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) had with his people who were at that time persecuting him. This is one of the stories which the Quran used to comfort the Messenger (PBUH) during the period of persecution which he received at the hands of his people. The story is also a reminder for the Arab idolaters of the inevitable fate of those who reject guidance. The people of ‘Ad were adamant in their rejection, “*They said, ‘Did you come in order to turn us*

away from our gods? Then bring upon us the (calamity) with which you are threatening us, if you are truthful.’” However, Prophet Hud (PBUH) persevered and answered their challenge quietly, *“He said, ‘The knowledge (of when it will come) is only with God. I proclaim to you the mission on which I have been sent. But I see that you are a people in ignorance.’”* He told them that his task was only to warn them. Only God knows, when and how His wrath will descend on them.

It is narrated that they suffered a severe drought and the weather became hot, so when they saw the clouds moving towards their valley, they were joyful. They thought that at last they would be getting rain to ease their suffering. They did not realize that the clouds were not bringing them the comfort they were looking for. The clouds were bringing the destruction which they were promised, *“Then, when they saw the cloud coming toward their valleys, they said, ‘This cloud will give us rain.’ In fact, it is what you were asking to be hastened; a wind wherein is a painful torment.”*

The verse portrays the wind as a living creature that fulfills the commands of its Lord, *“It will destroy everything by the commandment of its Lord. And in the morning, nothing was found of them except their dwellings. Thus, do We recompense the guilty people.”* They were completely destroyed. Only empty houses remained as a sign of a civilization that once existed, but now only its traces remained.

The verses then reminded the idolaters that these people who were destroyed were given more power and wealth than the idolaters of Quraish ever had, *“And We had firmly established them in (prosperity and) power which We have not given to you (Quraish) and We had endowed them with (faculties of) hearing, seeing, and intellect; but their (faculties of) hearing, seeing, and intellect did not benefit them at all because they rejected the revelations of God; and they were beset by that which they used to mock.”* God gave them prosperity and power, as well as senses that can make them see, hear, and think. But they did not use any of this for their benefit. The stories of the fate that the early disbelieving nations met were meant to bring the lessons of history to the attention of the idolaters, *“And verily We have destroyed townships round about you, and displayed (for them) Our revelations, that haply they might return. Why then was no help forthcoming to them from those whom they worshipped as gods, besides God, as a means of access (to God)? They left them in the lurch; but that was their lie, and what they used to fabricate.”* They should know that those whom they took as partners with God will never be able to help them.

Verses 29 to 35:

29. *And remember when We turned towards you a company of jinn to listen to the Quran. They stood in the presence thereof, they said, "Listen in silence." When the (reading) was finished, they returned to their people to warn them.*
30. *They said, "Our people, We have heard a Book revealed after Moses, confirming what came before it. It guides to the truth and to a straight path.*
31. *Our people, hearken to the one who invites to God, and believe in Him. He (God) will forgive you your sins, and deliver you from a painful torment.”*
32. *And whoso does not respond to the one who calls to God he will not be able to escape in the earth, and he has no protecting guardians besides Him. Those are in clear error.*

33. *Have they not seen that God, who created the heavens and the earth, and never wearied with their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Verily He has power over all things.*
34. *And on the Day that the disbelievers will be brought in front of the Fire, (they will be asked,) "Is this not the truth?" they will say, "Yes, by our Lord." (One will say): "Then, taste you the torment for having disbelieved."*
35. *Therefore, persevere, as did the messengers who had firm resolve; and be in no haste about the (disbelievers). On the Day that they see what they were promised, (it will be) as if they had not tarried more than an hour of the day. A clear message: shall any be destroyed save the transgressors? (46: 29 – 35)*

The following verses relate an incident involving jinn, when God sent a group of jinn to listen to the Quran. The statement indicates the existence of creatures that are called jinn. They were able to listen to the Quran and understand its meaning. The statement indicates that jinn have the ability to choose between right and wrong and some of them are believers and some are disbelievers. The mention of this in the Quran is proof enough that all of this is true. This is part of the unseen.

"And remember when We turned towards you a company of jinn to listen to the Quran. They stood in the presence thereof, they said, 'Listen in silence.' When the (reading) was finished, they returned to their people to warn them." This incident was planned to convey the message to the jinn. They recognized that the Quran embodies a message of guidance similar to that which was revealed to Prophet Moses (PBUH) before. They listened attentively, then went to their people to bring them the news, *"They said, 'Our people, We have heard a Book revealed after Moses, confirming what came before it. It guides to the truth and to a straight path. Our people, hearken to the one who invites to God, and believe in Him. He (God) will forgive you your sins, and deliver you from a painful torment.'"* Ibn Ishaq narrated that this was the end of what the group of jinn said to their people. However, the narrative indicates that the following verses are a continuation of their speech, *"And whoso does not respond to the one who calls to God he will not be able to escape in the earth, and he has no protecting guardians besides Him. Those are in clear error. Have they not seen that God, who created the heavens and the earth, and never wearied with their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Verily He has power over all things."* These two verses seem to be a natural continuation of the speech of the group of jinn who listened to the Quran and went back to warn their people. The first verse stresses the punishment for those who disbelieve and the second verse cites the miracle of the creation as supporting evidence that the Quran is a divine revelation.

The narrative then turns to one of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, *"And on the Day that the disbelievers will be brought in front of the Fire, (they will be asked,) 'Is this not the truth?' they will say, 'Yes, by our Lord.' (One will say), 'Then, taste you the torment for having disbelieved.'"* The verses are narrated in the form of a dialogue during which the disbelievers will be asked about their previous doubts and whether what they see is the truth. They will swear that it is the truth. It will then be said to them, *"Then suffer the consequences of your disbelief."*

The last verse carries a command to the Messenger of God (PBUH) to persevere. We know that the Messenger (PBUH) persevered through the suffering and the persecution; however, he needed the reminder of His Lord. The command was meant also to comfort him by reminding him of the experiences of the previous messengers, *"Therefore persevere, as did the messengers who had firm resolve; and be in no haste about the (disbelievers)."* He was told that soon the disbelievers would see the consequences of their deeds, *"On the Day that they see what they*

were promised, (it will be) as if they had not tarried more than an hour of the day. A clear message: shall any be destroyed save the transgressors?" The time until the Day of Judgment will pass as if it were only one hour.