

Sura 71: Nuh (Noah)

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

Verses 1 to 28:

1. *We sent Noah to his people (with the command), "Warn your people before there comes to them a painful torment."*
2. *He said, "My people, I am a plain warner to you."*
3. *Serve God, be conscious of Him, and obey me.*
4. *He will forgive your sins and grant you a reprieve to an appointed term; surely the term of God when it comes is not postponed; if you only knew."*
5. *He said, "My Lord, I have called my people night and day;*
6. *But my call only added to their flight;*
7. *And every time I called them, that you might forgive them, they have (only) thrust their fingers into their ears, covered themselves up with their garments, grown obstinate, and given themselves up to arrogance.*
8. *And I have called them openly;*
9. *I called them publicly and I appealed to them in private.*
10. *Saying, 'Ask forgiveness from your Lord; for He is All-Forgiving;*
11. *He will send rain to you in abundance;*
12. *And will increase you in wealth and sons; and provide for you gardens and rivers.*
13. *What is the matter with you, that you do not appreciate God's Majesty?*
14. *Seeing that it is He who created you in stages?*
15. *Do not you see how God has created the seven heavens one above another.*
16. *And He set the moon in their midst a light, and made the sun a lamp?*
17. *And God has made you grow out of the earth as a growth;*
18. *And in the end He will return you into the (earth), and raise you forth (again at the Resurrection)?*
19. *And God has made the earth for you as a wide expanse*
20. *That you may go about therein in spacious roads.'"*
21. *Noah said, "My Lord, they have disobeyed me, and followed one whose wealth and children increase him in nothing but ruin;*
22. *And they have devised a tremendous plot.*
23. *And they have said (to each other), 'Do not abandon your gods. Do not abandon Wadd nor Suwa', neither Yaguth nor Ya'uq, nor Nasr;'*
24. *They have already misled many; and do not increase the wrongdoers except in going astray."*
25. *Because of their sins they were drowned, and were made to enter the Fire. And they found no helpers besides God.*
26. *And Noah, said, "My Lord, do not leave on the earth a single one of the disbelievers.*
27. *If You leave them they will mislead Your servants, and they will beget none but wicked ungrateful ones.*
28. *My Lord, forgive me, my parents, all the believers who enter my house, and (all) believing men and believing women. And increase the wrongdoers in perdition."* (71: 1-28)

This Sura was revealed in Mecca.

This Sura narrates the experience that Prophet Noah (PBUH) had with his people. The Sura presents an example of obstinate and arrogant people who follow their leaders blindly. They refuse to think or benefit from the guidance offered to them.

Another dimension of the narrative is the divine mercy which opens the doors to guidance to humankind. This dimension is reflected in the fact that God sent many Messengers to guide people to the straight path. A third dimension of the narrative is the description of the struggle which the Messengers' of God had to go through to deliver God's Message to people, their hard work, patience, and persistence. They did not gain a personal benefit nor did they aspire to a material reward in the life of this world for their hard work.

The Sura starts with a statement about the source of the Message, "*We sent Noah to his people,*" God sent the Messengers with the Message. God is the Creator. He instilled in humankind the initial natural disposition to discover and worship God. When the people swerved away from God's path He sent the Messengers with the Message to guide people to the straight path. Noah (PBUH) was the first Messenger to come after Adam (PBUH). The Quran does not mention that Adam (PBUH) was given a Message. However, he was the teacher who taught his children and grandchildren the principles of submission to God. They may have strayed away from the straight path after his death, so God sent Noah (PBUH) to bring people back to the straight path and to the belief in the Oneness of God.

The verses then continue to outline Noah's (PBUH) task, "*Warn your people before there comes to them a painful torment.*" Noah (PBUH) was sent to warn his people of the consequences of practicing idolatry. So, Noah (PBUH) started to fulfill the undertaking that he was entrusted with, "*He said, 'My people, I am a plain warner to you.'*" He started with a clear statement of the task that he was sent to accomplish, "*Serve God, be conscious of Him, and obey me. He will forgive your sins and grant you a reprieve to an appointed term; surely the term of God when it comes is not postponed; if you only knew.*" He called them to worship God alone, to be conscious of Him, and to obey the Messenger that came to them with the Message. These are the basic principles of the Message brought by all God's Messengers.

Serving God alone is a way of life. It is based on understanding the nature of Godliness and the nature of being human. This understanding delineates the correct relationship between the creature and the Creator. This relationship controls and shapes the way of life of people on earth. The commitment to live according to this way of life is only guaranteed by being always conscious of God. Obeying the Messenger is essential because he is the medium through which the details of the way of life are conveyed. People who are committed to this way of life are rewarded by God. God promised to forgive their sins and to delay their reckoning to a specific predetermined Day. This means that they will not be punished in the life of this world for their sins. However, the predetermined Day will certainly come, and no one can change it. Some scholars indicated that the predetermined day means the time of death.

Noah (PBUH) tried hard to fulfill his task, "*He said, 'My Lord, I have called my people night and day; but my call only added to their flight; and every time I called them, that you might forgive them, they have (only) thrust their fingers into their ears, covered themselves up with their garments, grown obstinate, and given themselves up to arrogance.'*" These verses summarize Noah's struggle to fulfill his commitment and outline the results of his persisting efforts. His people did not respond favorably to his call; every time he called them they turned away and fled. They were fleeing from God, the source of their existence and their life; the source of the blessings and bounties; the source of guidance and light. When they could not flee, they put their fingers in their ears so that they would not listen to Noah's (PBUH) call. Noah

(PBUH) adopted different strategies in calling his people, *“And I have called them openly; I called them publicly and I appealed to them in private.”* He also tried to use different approaches to call them to guidance. He warned them and he detailed to them the benefits that they will gain in this life and in the Hereafter. He described the great rewards that await those who ask God for forgiveness; God will, *“send rain to you in abundance; and will increase you in wealth and sons; and provide for you gardens and rivers.”* The verse emphasizes the direct relationship between asking for forgiveness and the provisions that God bestows on His servants. This message was repeated in many places in the Quran, e.g. *“And if only they had upheld the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to them from their Lord, they would have consumed (provision from above them and from beneath their feet.”* (5: 66) *“And if only the people of the cities had believed and were conscious of God, We would have bestowed upon them blessings from the heaven and the earth.”* (7: 96) *“Seek forgiveness of your Lord and repent to Him, He will let you enjoy a good provision for a specified term and give every doer of good his reward.”* (11: 3) This is a basic principle based on God’s promise. The history of human civilization supports this principle as well. The rule applies to nations not to individuals. Every nation that established its way of life on God’s law, sought sincerely God’s forgiveness, and remained conscious of God was rewarded by God’s blessings and bounties. Such nations were not only able to establish safe and secure environment for their people but they also enjoyed God’s support.

Sometimes we see a nation whose laws are not based on God’s law and whose people are not conscious of God, and yet it enjoys abundance in provisions and material possessions. Such nation is being tested by God. God tests nations and people sometimes by granting them abundant provision and sometimes by making them face adverse conditions.

Noah (PBUH) tried to reason with his people by directing their attention to the signs of God, *“What is the matter with you, that you do not appreciate God’s Majesty? Seeing that it is He who created you in stages?”* The stages that Noah’s (PBUH) mentioned must have been a reference to a phenomenon that they were aware of at that time. These stages could very well be the stages of the development of the embryo. This is the opinion of most of the scholars. It is easy to imagine that this is something they have been aware of, because they must have seen incomplete embryos delivered. Then he continued to ask them to reflect on the cosmic signs that they would see around them, *“Do not you see how God has created the seven heavens one above another, and He set the moon in their midst a light, and made the sun a lamp?”*

Noah (PBUH) pointed to the fact that humankind was created from the earth, will go back to the earth, and then will be resurrected, *“And God has made you grow out of the earth as a growth; and in the end He will return you into the (earth), and raise you forth (again at the Resurrection)?”* Finally, Noah (PBUH) mentioned the blessings of God in making life easy on this earth, *“and God has made the earth for you as a wide expanse, that you may go about therein in spacious roads.”*

The verses refer to a connection between the beginning of human life and plant life, both grew out of the earth. This connection has been mentioned in other Suras in the Quran as well. This is an interesting point that deserves to be contemplated. It indicates that the primary elements which constitute both humans and plants came from the earth. Their lives continue because both humans and plants feed on elements that are provided by the earth.

Noah (PBUH) used different strategies and various approaches to reach the hearts of his people to call them to his Lord. He persevered and persisted for a long time, nine hundred and fifty years. But finally, he went back to God to report his work and to complain about the response of

his people, *“Noah said, ‘My Lord, they have disobeyed me, and followed one whose wealth and children increase him in nothing but ruin; and they have devised a tremendous plot. And they have said (to each other), ‘Do not abandon your gods. Do not abandon Wadd nor Suwa’, neither Yaguth nor Ya’uq, nor Nasr;’”*” After his long struggle to guide them, they left him and followed their chiefs who had the wealth and the power; wealth and power that only bring loss to their owners. These chiefs plotted against Prophet Noah (PBUH). They warned their people not to abandon the idols they were worshipping. Noah’s response was to ask God to punish them, *“They have already misled many; and do not increase the wrongdoers except in going astray.”*

They were punished right there and then, *“Because of their sins they were drowned, and were made to enter the Fire. And they found no helpers besides God.”* They were drowned then they were admitted to Hellfire. Their wealth, their leaders, and their idols did not avail them anything. They did not find any supporter besides God.

Noah (PBUH) continued his prayer, *“And Noah, said, ‘My Lord, do not leave on the earth a single one of the disbelievers. If You leave them they will mislead Your servants, and they will beget none but wicked ungrateful ones.’”* Noah (PBUH) realized that a drastic measure was needed to cleanse the earth from the transgression of the wrongdoers. Sometimes this would be the only viable solution. The wrongdoing must have been so entrenched in the land that no other solution would have been possible to enable those who wanted to worship God alone to survive. Then Noah (PBUH) prayed God to forgive him, *“My Lord, forgive me.”* This is a proper prophetic etiquette. He did not forget that he was a human being and human beings do err and they have shortcomings. Noah (PBUH) knew that he can be admitted to paradise only by the grace of God. Then he prayed God to forgive his parents, the believers who enter his house and all the believers in general, *“my parents, all the believers who enter my house, and (all) believing men and believing women.”* These prayers express Noah’s (PBUH) kindness towards his parents and his fellow believers. These prayers express the power of faith which binds all the believers with the bond of brotherhood. His final prayer expressed his hate of the disbelievers, *“And increase the wrongdoers in perdition.”*