

Sura 74: Al-Muddathir (The Cloaked One)

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

Verses 1 to 56:

1. *You, wrapped up in your cloak*
2. *Arise and warn,*
3. *And your Lord magnify,*
4. *And your garments purify,*
5. *And all abomination shun;*
6. *And do not confer a favor to acquire more.*
7. *Persevere in your Lord's cause.*
8. *And when the trumpet sounds;*
9. *Certainly, that day will be a difficult day,*
10. *Not easy for the disbelievers.*
11. *Leave Me alone, (to deal) with the (creature) whom I created alone.*
12. *Then gave him vast wealth,*
13. *And sons dwelling in his presence,*
14. *And made (life) smooth for him.*
15. *Yet he desires that I should give more.*
16. *By no means, he has been stubbornly hostile to Our revelations.*
17. *Soon I will impose a spiraling torment on him.*
18. *He thought and he plotted;*
19. *And woe to him, how he plotted.*
20. *Woe to him; how he plotted.*
21. *Then he looked around.*
22. *Then he frowned and he scowled.*
23. *Then he turned back and was haughty.*
24. *Then said he, "This is nothing but magic from the past.*
25. *This is nothing but the speech of a mortal."*
26. *I will cast him into Hellfire.*
27. *And what will explain to you what the Hellfire is?*
28. *It leaves nothing; it spares nothing.*
29. *It scorches the mortal.*
30. *Over it are nineteen.*
31. *We have appointed only angels to be wardens of the Fire, and We made their number to be a trial for those who disbelieve; that those to whom the Scripture has been given may have certainty, and that the believers may increase in faith; and that those to whom the Scripture has been given and the believers may not doubt; and that those in whose hearts there is disease, and the disbelievers, may say, "What does God mean by this similitude?" Thus, God sends astray whom He wills, and guides whom He wills. None knows the hosts of your Lord save Him. This is nothing else than a reminder to mortals.*
32. *I swear by the moon,*
33. *And by the night as it retreats,*

34. *And by the dawn as it shines,*
35. *This is but one of the greatest,*
36. *A warning to humankind,*
37. *To him among you who wishes to go forward or remain behind.*
38. *Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds;*
39. *Except the companions of the right hand.*
40. *(They will be) in gardens; they will ask each other,*
41. *Concerning the guilty,*
42. *“What led you into Hellfire?”*
43. *They will say, “We were not of those who prayed;*
44. *Nor did we feed the poor;*
45. *And we used to enter into vain discourses with those who enter into vain discourses.*
46. *And we used to deny the Day of Judgment,*
47. *Till the Inevitable came to us.”*
48. *So the intercession of the intercessors shall not avail them.*
49. *Then what is the matter with them that they turn away from admonition?*
50. *As if they were frightened asses,*
51. *Fleeing from a lion.*
52. *Each one of them desires that he should be given pages spread out.*
53. *By no means, they do not fear the Hereafter.*
54. *This is surely an admonition;*
55. *So whoever pleases may heed it.*
56. *And they will not heed unless God wills (it). He is the Lord who should be heeded and He is the Lord of forgiveness. (74: 1 – 56)*

There are different narrations about the time of revelation of this Sura. One narration states that it was revealed subsequent to the revelation of Surat Al-‘Alaq (Chapter 96) but another narration indicates that it was revealed just after the proclamation of Islam had become public.

It seems from the narrative that the first seven verses of the Sura were revealed in the early days of the Message, because they set the stage for the public proclamation of the Message. These verses provided the psychological preparation that the Prophet (PBUH) needed to be able to convey the Message to Quraish. The remaining verses would have been revealed after the Message had become public because they describe the stubbornness of Quraish in resisting the call of the Prophet (PBUH) and the harassment and persecution that the Muslims received at the hands of the idolaters.

“*You, wrapped up in your cloak, arise and warn.*” This was a divine command for the Prophet (PBUH) to fulfill the undertaking that has been entrusted to him: to warn humankind, to awaken them, to rid them of the evil in this life, and to grant them salvation from the torment in the Hereafter. Then the command was issued to the Prophet (PBUH), “*And your Lord magnify.*” God alone deserves to be magnified. Then, “*And your garments purify.*” Purifying one’s garment is a figure of speech in the Arabic language. It means the purification of the heart, behavior, and deeds. It is the purification of the psyche to become suitable for receiving the revelation. It is necessary for the person who is calling to the Message to be morally pure in order to be able to

ask others to rid themselves from the impurity of their sins.

“And all abomination shun.” The prophet (PBUH) has been known to have shunned all abomination even before he was given the responsibility of conveying the Message. His sound initial natural disposition protected him from indulging in any of the bad habits that were prevalent in the Arabic society at that time. The command then means that the Prophet (PBUH) should declare that all abominations are forbidden by Islam. Muslims should shun all these abominations.

“And do not confer a favor to acquire more.” This was a command issued to the Prophet (PBUH) to be altruistic in his endeavors. The Prophet (PBUH) should be prepared to make many and great sacrifices and it was not fitting for him to expect a worldly reward for these sacrifices. The final command was a command to persevere in pursuing his mission, *“Persevere in your Lord’s cause.”* The message to the Prophet (PBUH) was that the battle which he was about to embark on will be long and severe. It will require steadfastness and patience to see it through.

A general warning was issued to the deniers, *“And when the trumpet sounds, certainly, that day will be a difficult day, not easy for the disbelievers.”* The coming of the Day of Judgment will be announced by a trumpet that will hammer the ears. This day will be a difficult day for the disbelievers.

A warning was then directed to a single individual from among the disbelievers. This individual had a major role in leading the resistance against Islam. The warning was a dire one and the verses paint a humiliating picture for that individual, *“Leave Me alone, (to deal) with the (creature) whom I created alone. Then gave him vast wealth, and sons dwelling in his presence, and made (life) smooth for him. Yet he desires that I should give more. By no means, he has been stubbornly hostile to Our revelations. Soon I will impose a spiraling torment on him. He thought and he plotted; and woe to him, how he plotted. Woe to him; how he plotted. Then he looked around. Then he frowned and he scowled. Then he turned back and was haughty. Then said he, ‘This is nothing but magic from the past; this is nothing but the speech of a mortal.’ I will cast him into Hellfire.”*

There are several narrations which indicate that the verses refer to Al-Waleed ibn Al-Mughirah Al-Makhzoumi. This man came to the Prophet (PBUH) and listened to him reciting the Quran. It seemed that Al-Waleed was touched by the Quran. Abu Jahl ibn Hesham, one of the chiefs of Quraish, came to know about this and was afraid that Al-Waleed would accept Islam. Abu Jahl was a wicked, scheming man. He wanted to embarrass Al-Waleed. So he pledged, in the name of Quraish, a great sum of money to Al-Waleed; if the latter promised not to go again to listen to the recitation of the Quran. Al-Waleed expressed his indignation saying, *“Quraish knows that I am one of the richest among them.”* Abu Jahl then told him that he should express publicly his rejection of what Muhammad (PBUH) was saying. Al-Waleed thought about it; he wondered what to say about the Quran. He said *“What could I say about the Quran? I am most familiar with poetry and the jinn inspired poetry. The Quran is different from the poetry that we know. The Quran is sweat. It is superior to all other known forms of expression.”* Abu Jahl was

annoyed and told Al-Waleed your people will not accept you unless you make your rejection of the Quran public. Al-Waleed wanted some time to think about this. Then he came back saying, *“This is magic received from old magicians.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) was told to leave this individual alone, God promised to deal with him directly. The verses mentioned above start by describing the bounty that God bestowed on this individual in spite of his expressed ingratitude. He was obstinate in his hostility. As a result, God promised to subject him to an escalating process of torment. The verses then describe the struggle of the individual to find something wrong with the Quran. He tried very hard but he could not find anything wrong with it, so he decided to make up something. He decided that it is magic. There was no logic behind his conclusion; his arrogance barred him from accepting the truth. As a result, he will be admitted to Hell. But what is this Hell, *“And what will explain to you what the Hellfire is?”* It is beyond human comprehension, *“It leaves nothing; it spares nothing. It scorches the mortal.”*

God appointed nineteen angels to guard it, *“Over it are nineteen.”* Who are these nineteen? *“We have appointed only angels to be wardens of the Fire, and We made their number to be a trial for those who disbelieve; that those to whom the Scripture has been given may have certainty, and that the believers may increase in faith; and that those to whom the Scripture has been given and the believers may not doubt; and that those in whose hearts there is disease, and the disbelievers, may say, “What does God mean by this similitude?” Thus, God sends astray whom He wills, and guides whom He wills. None knows the hosts of your Lord save Him. This is nothing else than a reminder unto mortals.”* They are angels. They do what they are told. The verse mentions that this number was given as a trial for the disbelievers. The idolaters of Mecca were always argumentative. However, this is a matter of the unseen and we have no way of knowing the meaning of this number except that which we understand from the Quran. The people of the Scripture must have had something in the Scripture that corroborates the story mentioned here. It was mentioned that was meant to make them certain about the truthfulness of the Quran. The believers’ hearts are always open to receive more assurances from the Quran. On the other hand, those who doubt and the hypocrites will always find a reason for doubt. God guides whomsoever He wills and lets whomsoever He wills to go astray. Only God knows His hosts, because they are part of the unseen.

“I swear by the moon, and by the night as it retreats, and by the dawn as it shines, this is but one of the greatest, a warning to humankind.” This is an oath by some of the signs of God in the universe. It evokes many feelings in the hearts of the believers. The oath was made to emphasize the gravity of the responsibility and to warn those who are heedless.

“To him among you who wishes to go forward or remain behind. Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds.” Every soul is responsible for its own deeds. People are held accountable for what they advance for themselves. The believers will be given their rewards, *“Except the companions of the right hand. (They will be) in gardens; they will ask each other, concerning the guilty.”* They will be given the right to question the criminals, *“What led you into Hellfire?”* The criminals will confess their crimes, *“We were not of those who prayed; nor did we feed the poor;*

and we used to enter into vain discourses with those who enter into vain discourses. And we used to deny the Day of Judgment.” The disbelievers did not pray. This means they did not believe. The verse highlights the importance of prayer by referring to it as the symbol of faith. Prayer is a hallmark for the believers. The second crime is that they did not care for the poor and the needy. Feeding the poor is an act of worship. They approached the concept of faith in jest; they were not serious about it. The most important crime was that they did not believe in the Day of Judgment. This upsets all standards and values. Those who disbelieve in the Day of Judgment lose the goal that humankind should endeavor to achieve. Their lives become confused and chaotic until they die, *“Till the Inevitable came unto us.”* There is no chance for intercession after death, *“So the intercession of the intercessors shall not avail them.”*

The following verses paint a scene describing the attitude of the disbelievers towards guidance. Their similitude in turning away from guidance is like wild asses fleeing an approaching lion, *“Then what is the matter with them that they turn away from admonition? As if they were frightened asses, fleeing from a lion.”* This is their image: frightened asses fleeing a lion.

Not only their outward appearance will be humiliated but also their psyche will be confused, *“Each one of them desires that he should be given pages spread out.”* Their obstinate hostility was motivated by their jealousy. Why was not each one of them chosen to be a messenger and to receive a scripture? Another reason for their hostility was that they really did not believe in the Hereafter, *“By no means, they do not fear the Hereafter.”* This motivated them to turn their backs to guidance.

The Sura then concludes by a reminder, *“This is surely an admonition; so whoever pleases may heed it. And they will not heed unless God wills (it). He is the Lord who should be heeded and He is the Lord of forgiveness.”* The Quran is only an admonition. Those who wish to heed the admonition will be guided, and those who refuse to heed it will be left to go astray. Ultimately, it is God who will decide who will be guided and who will be left to go astray. He has the power and He controls everything. Indeed, He is the Lord who deserves to be heeded and He is the Lord of forgiveness.