

Sura 78: Al-Naba (The Announcement)

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

Verses 1 to 40:

1. *Of what do they ask one another?*
2. *About the great announcement;*
3. *About which they differ?*
4. *Verily, they will soon find out.*
5. *Most certainly, they will find out.*
6. *Did We not make the earth a cradle?*
7. *And the mountains pegs?*
8. *And We created you in pairs,*
9. *And made your sleep for rest,*
10. *And made the night a cover?*
11. *And made the day for seeking livelihood?*
12. *And We built over you the seven strong (heavens)?*
13. *And We made a blazing lamp?*
14. *And do We not send down from the clouds water in abundance?*
15. *That We may produce therewith grain and plant?*
16. *And luxuriant gardens?*
17. *Indeed, the Day of Judgment has an appointed time.*
18. *On that Day the trumpet shall be blown and you will come in hosts,*
19. *And the heavens shall be opened as if there were doors,*
20. *And the mountains will be set in motion and become a mirage.*
21. *Truly, Hell is lying in ambush;*
22. *For the transgressors a place of destination.*
23. *They will dwell therein for ages.*
24. *Nothing cool shall they taste therein nor any drink,*
25. *Except a boiling fluid, dark, and murky.*
26. *A fitting recompense (for them).*
27. *Surely they did not expect the reckoning,*
28. *And they denied our revelations,*
29. *And We have recorded everything in a book,*
30. *"So taste (the fruits of your deeds); for no increase shall We grant you, except in torment."*
31. *Verily, the God conscious will triumph;*
32. *Gardens and vineyards,*
33. *And nubile women of equal age;*
34. *And a full cup.*
35. *They will neither hear therein vain speech nor lying;*
36. *A reward from your Lord, a fitting gift;*
37. *(From) the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between, the Lord of Mercy. They will have no authority from Him to speak.*
38. *On that Day the Spirit and the angels will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any who is permitted by the Lord of Mercy and who will say what is right.*

39. *That is the Day of Truth. Therefore, whoso wills let him take a (straight) return to his Lord.*

40. *Verily, We have warned you of a torment near at hand, the Day when humankind will see what his hands have sent forth, and the disbeliever will say, "Woe to me, I wish I were mere dust."*

This Sura is the first Sura in Part 30, of the Qur'an. All the Suras in this part were revealed in Mecca except Surat Al-Bayyinah (Chapter 98) and Surat Al-Nasr (Chapter 110). All these Suras are short in length. They have short verses and quick rhythm. The verses are like hammers that hammer the psyche of the human being with the same message over and over again: wake up, see where you are going, and reflect on what you are doing; there is a God, there will be reckoning, there will be a Day of Judgment, and there will be Paradise and Hell. The verses of this part in general are very impressive from the linguistic point of view and they use expressions and images which are very eloquent. Very often figures of speech are used instead of explicit expressions.

Hawwa states that the Sura consists of four parts. The first five verses serve as an introduction; it is followed by two sections. The first section consists of eleven verses, and the second consists of twenty-three verses. Verse 40 represents the closure of the Sura.

In the introduction, a question is posed. Verse 40 gives an answer to the question posed in the introduction. The first section, verses 6 to 16, describes signs of the power of God. All these signs can be seen by humankind during their lives on earth. But, the second section, verses 17 to 39, describes the signs of the Day of Judgement. These are matters of the unseen.

The main theme of the Sura is the inevitability of the Day of Judgement. The Sura explores the signs of the power of God and warns of the consequences of disbelief. The argument could be: God the Creator, who has the power to create all these signs which can be seen by people in their lives, has the power to resurrect people after death and hold them accountable.

"Of what do they ask one another? about the great announcement, about which they differ?"

The Sura starts with a rhetorical question, *"Of what do they ask one another?"* The answer is then given, *"about the great announcement, about which they differ?"* The verses renounce the idolaters' doubt about the inevitability of the Day of Judgment. They express the astonishment that such a question should be asked. The repudiation of the way the idolaters think is then followed by a warning, *"Verily, they will soon find out. Most certainly, they will find out."* The repetition of the statement magnifies the impact of the warning.

Al-Razi states that there are three interpretations for the term, "the great announcement." The first is that it means the Day of Judgement. This is the agreed upon interpretation. The second is that it means the Qur'an, and the third, it means the prophet-hood of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Hawwa is in favor of the second interpretation. He connects between the ending of Surat al-Mursalat and the beginning of Surat al-Naba. Surat al-Mursalat ends with the verse, *"In what message, after this, will they believe,"* which refers to the Qur'an; and Surat al-Naba' starts with the mention of the, *"Great announcement."* He also refers to the statement, *"about which they differ,"* saying that the disbelievers did not differ about the Day of Judgment. They rejected the concept of the resurrection. But, they differed about the nature of the Qur'an.

The first section of the Sura after the introduction, takes us on a tour of the universe citing signs of God that move the heart, *"Did We not make the earth a cradle? And the mountains pegs? And We created you in pairs, and made your sleep for rest, and made the night a cover? And made*

the day for seeking livelihood? And We built over you the seven strong (heavens)? And We made a blazing lamp? And do We not send down from the clouds water in abundance? That We may produce therewith grain and plant? And luxuriant gardens?" The word that has been translated as "cradle" could mean that the earth was made easy for people to travel. This may be the first impression that one gets from the verse and that would be the elementary and simple meaning that one gleans from it. But the word cradle in Arabic has a much deeper meaning. The more knowledge we gain about the earth the deeper becomes the understanding of the meaning of this word. God made this earth a cradle for the life of the human race. It provides all what is needed for the maintenance and progress of human life. It may also suggest that the life of the human being on earth is only the tome of infancy of the human life. The Hereafter is the place for the mature life.

The mountains were made as pegs. The mountains do look like huge pegs. They look like the pegs which are used to hold the tent down so that it does not fall or fly with the wind. Similarly, the mountains were created to give the earth its well-balanced equilibrium.

The verses refer to another phenomenon; the fact that we were created in pairs. This was essential for the continuation of human life as we know it. But what makes a male, male? And what makes the female, female? It is the divine power that articulated the creation.

God gave us time for rest and time for work. Both are needed for the continuation of human life. People need sleep to rest their bodies and remove the stress that accumulated during the day. They wake up the next day ready for resuming another day of work and various activities.

God created seven strong heavens. The specific meaning of this is still unknown. The verse indicates the firm construction of these heavens, meaning they are built with strength enough to keep them from disintegrating.

God created the sun. It gives us light and heat which are necessary for the continuation of life on earth. Describing the sun as "Siraj Wahaj," is a very accurate description; because the word in Arabic means a source of both light and heat. God sends down the rain to provide the necessary water for plants to grow.

The narrative then moves to talk about the Day of Judgment, "*Indeed, the Day of Judgment has an appointed time. On that Day the trumpet shall be blown and you will come in hosts, and the heavens shall be opened as if there were doors, and the mountains will be set in motion and become a mirage.*" People were not created in vain. There is a purpose for the creation of people. God who created people for a purpose does not leave them to wander around aimlessly. God appointed a Day for Judgment. On that Day the universe as we have known it, will no longer exist. The trumpet will be blown to announce the beginning of that Day. People will be gathered together. Can you imagine all the people from the beginning of life on earth till the last day gathered together in one place? This is a tremendous scene. The heaven will be opened as if it has gates. The mountains will be moved as if it were a mirage.

The narrative continues to describe the final abode that will be waiting for the tyrants, "*Truly, Hell is lying in ambush, for the transgressors a place of destination. They will dwell therein for ages. Nothing cool shall they taste therein nor any drink, except a boiling fluid, dark, and murky; a fitting recompense (for them). Surely they did not expect the reckoning, and they denied our revelations. And We have recorded everything in a book. 'So taste (the fruits of your deeds); for no increase shall We grant you, except in torment.'*"

Hell was created to be the dwelling place for the tyrants and the transgressors. It is as if they went on a trip to the earth for a short while and then they will come back to settle in it. Their drinks are only boiling and murky fluids. This is a fitting recompense for what they did during their journey on earth. They denied God's verses and rejected the concept of accountability.

But the God conscious will be triumphant, *"Verily, the God conscious will triumph; Gardens and vineyards, and nubile women of equal age; and a full cup. They will neither hear therein vain speech nor lying; a reward from your Lord, a fitting gift."* These are images of physical pleasures which are used to symbolize the pleasures that await the God conscious. These are images which can be understood and appreciated by human beings. Their true meaning is beyond our understanding. In addition to the physical pleasures there will also be spiritual pleasures, *"They will neither hear therein vain speech nor lying."* This is a fitting reward from their Lord.

Another scene from the scenes of the Day of Judgment is described. The scene of Gabriel (PBUH) standing with the angels in front of God, *"(From) the Lord of the heavens and the earth, and all that is in between; the Lord of Mercy. They will have no authority from Him to speak. On that Day the Spirit and the angels will stand forth in ranks, none shall speak except any who is permitted by the Lord of Mercy and who will say what is right."* No one will speak except by permission, and when he speaks, he will speak the truth.

A cry of warning is then issued, *"That is the Day of Truth. Therefore, whoso wills let him take a (straight) return to his Lord. Verily, We have warned you of a torment near at hand, the Day when humankind will see what his hands have sent forth, and the disbeliever will say, 'Woe to me, I wish I were mere dust.'"* This is the strong shock which may bring those who are still in doubt of the inevitability of the great event to their senses. They better believe before it is too late.