

Sura 84: Al-Inshiqaq (The Splitting Asunder)

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

Verses 1 to 25:

1. *When the sky is split asunder,*
2. *Obeying its Lord as it rightly must.*
3. *And when the earth is extended out,*
4. *And casts forth what is within it and becomes empty,*
5. *Obeying its Lord as it rightly must.*
6. *Humankind, you are verily ever toiling towards your Lord until you meet Him.*
7. *Then he who is given his record in his right hand,*
8. *He will receive an easy reckoning;*
9. *And he will return to his people, rejoicing.*
10. *But he who is given his record behind his back,*
11. *He will cry for perdition,*
12. *And he will burn in a blazing fire.*
13. *Indeed, he used to live among his people rejoicing.*
14. *Surely he thought that he would never return.*
15. *Indeed, he will. His Lord was watching.*
16. *I swear by the twilight,*
17. *And the night and what it covers;*
18. *And the moon as it grows full;*
19. *You will surely travel from stage to stage.*
20. *What is the matter with them; that they do not believe?*
21. *And when the Qur'an is recited to them, they do not prostrate,*
22. *But the disbelievers are in denial;*
23. *But God has full knowledge of what they hide.*
24. *So give them tidings of a painful torment,*
25. *Except to those who believe and do righteous deeds; for them is an unfailing reward.*

The Sura starts with some of the scenes of the cosmic cataclysm which were detailed in Surat Al-Naba (Chapter 78), Surat Al-Takweer (Chapter 81), and Surat Al-Infitar (Chapter 82), respectively. But in this Sura the exposition has a special mood, the mood of submission to God, the submission of the sky and the earth in obedience and humility. The Sura then addresses humankind. The third part of the Sura describes cosmic scenes that everyone observes every day. The last part of the Sura poses a question expressing an amazement at the people who refuse to believe.

“When the sky is split asunder, obeying its Lord as it rightly must. And when the earth is extended out, and casts forth what is within it and becomes empty, obeying its Lord as it rightly must.” The rupture of the sky has been dealt with in previous Suras. What is new is the total submission of the sky to its Lord, expressing the right of God to Whom everyone should submit. Another new expression is the extension of the earth. It may mean the extension of its area or its

form as a result of the cosmic cataclysm. The expression indicates that this phenomenon is caused by an external agent. But the following verses describe the earth as if it were a living thing that casts forth what it has inside it and becomes empty. The earth will also be obedient to its Lord. The verses paint an image for the sky and the earth as if they were living creatures who listen, obey, and submit.

Then the verses address humankind, *“Humankind, you are verily ever toiling towards your Lord until you meet Him.”* Humankind, who has been created by his Lord in a perfect way and whom God blessed with a nature that makes him unique in this universe, will toil on earth till the end; when he will return to his Lord. To Him everything will return. Humankind can choose what is fitting according to the characteristics that God bestowed on him. He could be one of those who are given their records in their right hands. Those will receive easy reckoning and will return to their family rejoicing. The one who is given his record in his right hand will be happy and content. He believed and did good deeds, so God will be pleased with him. He will not be called to account. ‘Aisha (RA) said that the Messenger of God (PBUH) said, *“The one who is called to account will be tormented.”* She said, *“Did not God say, ‘His reckoning will light.’”* The Messenger (PBUH) said, *“This does not refer to the reckoning, it refers to the presentation of the record. Whoever is called to account will be tormented.”*

The one who is given his record in his right hand will present his record and will be saved, and he will go back to his people rejoicing. But, he who is given his record behind his back will cry for perdition, *“But he who is given his record behind his back, he will cry for perdition, and he will burn in a blazing fire.”* The Qur’an usually mentions the expression *“given the record in the left hand”* to describe the method by which the disbelievers will receive their records. However, in this Sura a new expression is used, *“given the book behind the back.”* That may mean he is given his record in the left hand behind his back. However, we do not really know anything about the record and how it will be given. But the important thing is that he who attained salvation will be given his record in his right hand and he who will be punished will be given his record behind his back. This poor wretched who spent all his life toiling after sin, falsehood, and disobedience will realize his end and will face his destiny. He will realize that he will continue toiling without end. He will cry for perdition. He used to live rejoicing among his people thinking that there will be no accountability, *“Indeed, he used to live among his people rejoicing. Surely he thought that he would never return.”* But God was watching him, *“Indeed, he will. His Lord was watching.”*

The narrative then turns to scenes from the universe that we live in, *“I swear by the twilight, and the night and what it covers; and the moon as it grows full; you will surely travel from stage to stage.”* The twilight is a time for quiet reflection after sunset when the soul absorbs the beauty around it and the heart feels the sadness of parting ways. It is time when one feels the awesome approach of the night and the fear which is associated with darkness. The expression *“the night and what it covers,”* is a brief ambiguous expression that can be interpreted in so many ways. However, it paints a scene engulfed in serenity. Then one sees the magnificent view of the moon as it attains its full form. *“You will surely travel from stage to stage;”* you will suffer the change from one state to another according to the predetermined plan. The change from one state to another is expressed in the form of travel to magnify the hardship that people suffer during the process of change.

Then a question is posed, *“What is the matter with them; that they do not believe?”* Yes, why do not they believe? They have seen all the signs of God all around them and they still do not believe. The Qur’an is beautiful, it evokes so many emotions when it is recited, but the disbelievers are heedless, *“And when the Qur’an is recited to them, they do not prostrate.”*

Then the reason for their heedlessness is explained, *“But the disbelievers are in denial; but God has full knowledge of what they hide, so give them tidings of a painful torment.”* Except those who believed and did good deeds, *“Except to those who believe and do righteous deeds; for them is a reward that will never fail.”* The exception mentioned in the last verse is a form of expression in Arabic called *“unrelated exception.”* The exception here does not mean that the believers were originally included in the group which received the bad tidings then they were taken out of the group. The style serves to draw the attention to what follows, *“for them is an unfailing reward.”* They will be given a perpetual and eternal reward in the Hereafter.