

# **Al-Kahf** [The Cave]

## **Makkan Period**

*In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate*

[1] Praise be to Allah Who has revealed to His servant the Book devoid of all crookedness;

[2] an unerringly Straight Book, meant to warn of a stern punishment from Allah, and to proclaim, to those who believe and work righteous deeds, the tiding that theirs shall be a good reward

[3] wherein they shall abide for ever;

[4] and also to warn those who say: "Allah has taken to Himself a son,"

[5] a thing about which they have no knowledge, neither they nor their ancestors. Dreadful is the word that comes out of their mouths. What they utter is merely a lie.

[6] (O Muhammad), if they do not believe in this Message, you will perhaps torment yourself to death with grief, sorrowing over them.

[7] Surely We have made all that is on the earth an embellishment for it in order to test people as to who of them is better in conduct.

[8] In the ultimate, We shall reduce all that is on the earth to a barren plain.

[9] Do you think that the people of the Cave and the Inscription<sup>1</sup> were one of Our wondrous signs?

[10] When those youths sought refuge in the Cave and said: "Our Lord! Grant us mercy from Yourself and provide for us rectitude in our affairs."

*1. The young men who, in order to protect their Faith, had taken refuge in a cave at which an epitaph was later erected.*

[11] We lulled them to sleep in that cave for a number of years

[12] and then roused them so that We might see which of the two parties could best tell the length of their stay.

[13] We narrate to you their true story. They were a party of young men who had faith in their Lord, and We increased them in guidance<sup>2</sup>

[14] and strengthened their hearts when they stood up and proclaimed: "Our Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth. We shall call upon no other god beside Him; (for if we did so), we shall be uttering a blasphemy."

[15] (Then they conferred among themselves and said): "These men, our own people, have taken others as gods beside Him; why do they not bring any clear evidence that they indeed are gods? Who can be more unjust than he who foists a lie on Allah?"

[16] And now that you have dissociated yourselves from them and from whatever they worship beside Allah, go and seek refuge in the Cave. Your Lord will extend His mercy to you and will provide for you the means for the disposal of your affairs."

*2. According to traditions these young men were among the earliest followers of Jesus (peace be on him) and among the subjects of the Roman Empire who at the time were unbelievers and hostile to those who believed in the One True God.*

[17] Had you seen<sup>3</sup> them in the Cave it would have appeared to you that when the sun rose, it moved away from their Cave to the right; and when it set, it turned away from them to the left, while they remained in a spacious hollow in the Cave. This is one of the Signs of Allah. Whomsoever Allah guides, he alone is led aright; and whomsoever Allah lets go astray, you will find for him no guardian to direct him.

[18] On seeing them you would fancy them to be awake though they were asleep; and We caused them to turn their sides to their right and to their left, and their dog sat stretching out its forelegs on the threshold of the Cave. Had you looked upon them you would have certainly fled away from them, their sight filling you with terror.

[19] Likewise, We roused them in a miraculous way that they might question one another.<sup>4</sup> One of them asked: "How long did you remain (in this state)?" The others said: "We remained so for a day or part of a day." Then they said: "Your Lord knows better how long we remained in this state. Now send one of you to the city with this coin of yours and let him see who has the best food, and let him buy some provisions from there. Let him be cautious and not inform anyone of our whereabouts.

[20] For if they should come upon us, they will stone us to death or force us to revert to their faith where after we shall never prosper."

*3. In the course of this narration, mention of the youths' collective decision to take refuge in a cave in this mountainous region such that they might avoid being subjected to lapidation or compelled apostasy has been omitted.*

*4. The manner in which these youths were roused from their long slumber was no less wondrous than the manner in which they were made to sleep, beyond the reach of the whole world.*

[21] Thus did We make their case known to the people of the city<sup>5</sup> so that they might know that Allah's promise is true, and that there is absolutely no doubt that the Hour will come to pass. But instead of giving thought to this, they disputed with one another concerning the People of the Cave, some saying: "Build a wall over them. Their Lord alone knows best

about them.”<sup>6</sup>But those who prevailed over their affairs said: "We shall build a place of worship over them.”<sup>7</sup>

5. *When one of those youths went to the city to buy food, a world of change had already taken place. Pagan Rome had long since been Christianized. Perceptible changes were evident in the language, culture, civilization and dress of the people; in sum, almost everything had changed. Similarly, this young man from the cave, who in fact belonged to a period about two centuries earlier, also struck everybody as an oddity since his overall demeanour, his dress, and his language were all antiquated. So, when he presented a coin dating from the time of Decius, the shopkeeper was simply baffled and looked at him with dazed eyes. In the course of investigations it was discovered that the youth was one of the followers of Jesus Christ who had fled some two centuries ago for fear of his faith. This news instantly spread among the Christians of the city. A huge crowd of people, accompanied by government officials, therefore, soon went to the cave. On realizing that they had been awakened from a sleep which had lasted for three\* hundred years, the People of the Cave greeted their fellow-Christians, and then lay down to rest and breathed their last.*

6. *The context indicates that this statement was made by a group of righteous Christians. They were of the opinion that the People of the Cave should be left to lie in the positions in which they were found and that the mouth of the cave should be sealed off by erecting a wall against the side of the cave. In other words, it was not right to go about investigating about them for their Lord knew best who they were, what their status was, and what treatment should rightly be meted out to them.*

7. *This happened because by that time common Christians had come under the influence of polytheistic ideas. They now had deities to worship in place of the old idols.*

\*The original mentions two hundred years which is an obvious oversight.  
See verse 25 -- Editor's note.

[22] Some will say concerning them: “They were three and their dog, the fourth”, and some will say: “They were five, and their dog, the sixth” - all this being merely guesswork; and still others will say: “They were seven, and their dog, the eighth.”<sup>8</sup> Say: “My Lord knows their number best. Only a few know their correct number. So do not dispute concerning their number, but stick to what is evident, and do not question anyone about them.”<sup>9</sup>

[23] And<sup>10</sup> never say about anything; “I shall certainly do this tomorrow”

8. *This shows that at the time of the revelation of the Qur'an, approximately three hundred years after the incident, a number of stories were in circulation among the Christians about the People of the Cave. It also shows that no authentic version of the incident was available in all its details. We note, however, that the Qur'an does not contradict the third statement mentioned here which says that the People of the Cave numbered seven. Hence, there is some basis for believing that their actual number was indeed seven.*

9. *The purpose of the statement is to emphasize the fact that the number of the People of the Cave is not a matter of much consequence.*

*10. We believe this to be a parenthetical statement which is thematically linked to the preceding verse. The preceding verse states that God alone knows the exact number of the People of the Cave and that it is pointless to try to ascertain their true number. At this stage, before proceeding to the next point, both the Prophet (peace be on him) and the believers are directed not to make categorical statements as to what they would do on the morrow. For no one knows what they will in fact be able to do.*

[24] unless Allah should will it. And should you forget (and make such a statement), remember your Lord and say: "I expect my Lord to guide me to what is nearer to rectitude than this."

[25] They remained in the Cave for three hundred years; and others added nine more years.

[26] Say: "Allah knows best how long they remained in it, <sup>11</sup> for only He knows all that is hidden in the heavens and the earth. How well He sees; how well He hears! The creatures have no other guardian than Him; He allows none to share His authority"

[27] (O Prophet), recite to them from the Book of your Lord what has been revealed to you for none may change His words; (and were you to make any change in His words) you will find no refuge from Him.

[28] Keep yourself content with those who call upon their Lord, morning and evening, seeking His pleasure, and do not let your eyes pass beyond them. Do you seek the pomp and glitter of the world? Do not follow him <sup>12</sup> whose heart We have caused to be heedless of Our remembrance, and who follows his desires, and whose attitude is of excess.

[29] And proclaim: "This is the Truth from your Lord. Now let him who will, believe; and let him who will, disbelieve. We have prepared a Fire for the wrong-doers whose billowing folds encompass them. If they ask for water, they will be served with a drink like dregs of oil that will scald their faces. How dreadful a drink and how evil an abode!

*11. The period of stay of the People of the Cave is variously speculated, as indeed is their number. There is, however, no need to research the matter. God alone knows how long they remained in that state.*

*12. That is, one ought not to follow a person who is heedless of God, nor submit to him, nor accept his command. Here the word "obedience" means all this, having been used in its widest, most comprehensive sense.*

[30] As for those who believe and do good We shall not cause their reward to be lost.

[31] They shall dwell in the Gardens of Eternity, beneath which streams flow. There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold, <sup>13</sup> will be arrayed in green garments of silk and rich brocade, and will recline on raised couches. How excellent is their reward, and how nice their resting-place!"

[32] (O Muhammad), propound a parable to them. There were two men of whom We bestowed upon one of the two vineyards, surrounding both of them with date-palms and putting a tillage in between.

[33] Both the vineyards yielded abundant produce without failure and We caused a stream to flow in their midst

[34] so the owner had fruit in abundance and he said to his neighbour, while conversing with him: "I have greater wealth than you and I am stronger than you in numbers."

[35] Then he entered his vine-yard and said, wronging himself: "Surely, I do not believe that all this will ever perish.

*13. In ancient time's kings used to wear bracelets of gold. This has been mentioned with regard to the People of Paradise to emphasize that the believers will be clothed in regal attire as a mark of honour. In the Hereafter even those unbelievers, who are highly placed in this world, including kings, will be made to suffer humiliation. On the contrary, righteous believers - even if they had occupied humble positions in this world - will be shown the honour usually reserved for kings.*

[36] Nor do I believe that the Hour of Resurrection will ever come to pass. And even if I am returned to my Lord, I shall find a better place than this."

[37] While conversing with him his neighbour exclaimed: "Do you deny Him Who created you out of dust, then out of a drop of sperm, and then fashioned you into a complete man?"

[38] As for myself, Allah alone is my Lord, and I associate none with my Lord in His Divinity.

[39] When you entered your vineyard, why did you not say: 'Whatever Allah wills shall come to pass, for there is no power save with Allah!' <sup>14</sup> If you find me less than yourself in wealth and children

[40] it may well be that my Lord will give me something better than your vineyard, and send a calamity upon your vineyard from the heavens and it will be reduced to a barren waste,

[41] or the water of your vineyard will be drained deep into the ground so that you will not be able to seek it out."

[42] Eventually all his produce was destroyed and he began to wring his hands in sorrow at the loss of what he had spent on it, and on seeing it fallen down upon its trellises, saying: "Would I had not associated anyone with my Lord in His Divinity."

[43] And there was no host, beside Allah, to help him, nor could he be of any help to himself.

[44] (Then he knew) that all power of protection rests with Allah, the True One. He is the best to reward, the best to determine the end of things.

[45] (O Prophet), propound to them the parable of the present life: it is like the vegetation of the earth which flourished luxuriantly when it mingled with the water that We sent down from the sky, but after that the same vegetation turned into stubble which the winds blew about. Allah alone has the power over all things.

*14. Whatever God alone wills comes to pass, for man does not have the power to make things happen according to his wishes. Whatever man does is only by God's aid and support.*

[46] Wealth and children are an adornment of the life of the world. But the deeds of lasting righteousness are the best in the sight of your Lord in reward, and far better a source of hope.

[47] Bear in mind the Day when We shall set the mountains in motion and you will find the earth void and bare. On that Day We shall muster all men together, leaving none of them behind.

[48] They shall be brought before your Lord, all lined up, and shall be told: "Now, indeed, you have come before Us in the manner We created you in the first instance, although you thought that We shall not appoint a tryst (with Us)."

[49] And then the Record of their deeds shall be placed before them and you will see the guilty full of fear for what it contains, and will say: "Woe to us! What a Record this is! It leaves nothing big or small, but encompasses it." They will find their deeds confronting them. Your Lord wrongs no one.

[50] And recall when We said to the angels: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam"; all of them fell prostrate, except *Iblis*. He was of the *jinn* and so disobeyed the command of his Lord.<sup>15</sup> Will you, then, take him and his progeny as your guardians rather than Me although they are your open enemies? What an evil substitute are these wrong-doers taking!

*15. This means that Satan did not belong to the species of angels (as sometimes people fancy). Instead, he was a Jinn. That is why it was possible for him to disobey Gods command. The nature of angels is so constituted that they can never disobey God. In contrast to angels, the jinn-like human beings - are invested with free-will. They are not inherently obedient; instead, they have the freedom to choose between belief and unbelief, between obedience and disobedience.*

[51] I did not call them to witness the creation of the heavens and the earth, nor in their own creation. I do not seek the aid of those who lead people astray.<sup>16</sup>

[52] What will such people do on the Day when the Lord will say: "Now call upon all those whom you believed to be My partners?" Thereupon they will call upon them, but they will not respond to their call; and We shall make them a common pit of doom,

[53] and the guilty shall behold the Fire and know that they are bound to fall into it, and will find no escape from it.

[54] And surely We have explained matters to people in the Qur'an in diverse ways, using all manner of parables. But man is exceedingly contentious.

[55] What is it that prevented mankind from believing when the guidance came to them, and from asking forgiveness of their Lord, except that they would like to be treated as the nations of yore, or that they would like to see the scourge come upon them face to face?

[56] We raise Messengers only to give good news and to warn. But the unbelievers resort to falsehood in order to rebut the truth with it, and scoff at My revelations and My warnings.

*16. The verse puts a straight question to man: "What right do the satans have to be obeyed and served by mankind?" For, far from having any share in the creation of the heavens and the earth, they were themselves created by God.*

[57] Who is more wicked than the man who, when he is reminded by the revelations of his Lord, turns away from them and forgets (the consequence of) the deeds wrought by his own hands? We have laid veils over their hearts lest they understand the message of the Qur'an, and We have caused heaviness in their ears. Call them as you may to the Right Path, they will not be ever guided aright.

[58] Your Lord is All-Forgiving, full of mercy, Had He wished to take them to task for their doings, He would have hastened in sending His scourge upon them. But He has set for them a time-limit which they cannot evade.

[59] All the townships afflicted with scourge are before your eyes. When they committed wrong, We destroyed them. For the destruction of each We had set a definite term.

[60] (And recount to them the story of Moses) when Moses said to his servant: "I will journey on until I reach the point where the two rivers meet, though I may march on for ages."<sup>17</sup>

[61] But when they reached the point where the two rivers meet, they forgot their fish, and it took its way into the sea, as if through a tunnel.

*17. No authentic information is available as to where and when this journey of Moses took place and which were the two rivers on the confluence of which this incident took place. When we reflect over the details of the story we feel that the incident belongs to the period Moses lived in Egypt and the conflict with the Pharaoh was in progress. The two rivers alluded to appear to be the Blue Nile and the White Nile at the convergence of which Khartoum is located. The evidence in support of this assumption has been presented in the course of my exegesis of Surah al- Kahf 18:60 in towards understanding the Quran, ed. And tr. Z.I. Ansari, (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1995), Vol. V, n. 57, pp. 116 ff.*

[62] When they had journeyed further on, Moses said to his servant: "Bring us our repast. We are surely fatigued by today's journey."

[63] The servant said: "Did you See what happened? When we betook ourselves to the rock to take rest, I forgot the fish -and it is only Satan who caused me to forget to mention it to you - so that it made its way into the sea in a strange manner."

[64] Moses said: "That is what we were looking for."<sup>18</sup> So the two turned back, retracing their footsteps,

[65] and there they found one of Our servants upon whom We had bestowed Our mercy, and to whom We had imparted a special knowledge from Ourselves.<sup>19</sup>

[66] Moses said to him: "May I follow you that you may teach me something of the wisdom which you have been taught?"

[67] He answered: "You will surely not be able to bear with me.

[68] For how can you patiently bear with something you cannot encompass in your knowledge?"

[69] Moses replied: "You shall find me, if Allah wills, patient; and I shall not disobey you in anything."

[70] He said: "Well, if you follow me, do not ask me concerning anything until I myself mention it to you.

[71] Then the two went forth until, when they embarked on the boat, he made a hole in it, whereupon Moses exclaimed: "Have you made a hole in it so as to drown the people in the boat? You have certainly done an awful thing."

*18. Moses exclaimed that it was precisely the disappearance of the fish in the sea that was the indicator of the place where he would encounter the person whom he wanted to meet.*

*19. According to authentic traditions, this person was called Khidr.*

[72] He replied: "Did I not tell you that you will not be able to patiently bear with me?"

[73] Moses said: "Do not take me to task at my forgetfulness, and do not be hard on me."

[74] Then the two went forth until they met a lad whom he slew, whereupon Moses exclaimed: "What! Have you slain an innocent person without his having slain anyone? Surely you have done a horrible thing."

[75] He said: "Did I not tell you that you will not be able to patiently bear with me?"

[76] Moses said: "Keep me no more in your company if I question you concerning anything after this. You will then be fully justified."

[77] Then the two went forth until when they came to a town, they asked its people for food, but they refused to play host to them. They found in that town a wall that was on the verge of

tumbling down, and he buttressed it, whereupon Moses said: "If you had wished, you could have received payment for it."

[78] He said: "This brings me and you to a parting of ways. Now I shall explain to you the true meaning of things about which you could not remain patient.

[79] As for the boat it belonged to some poor people who worked on the river, and I desired to damage it for beyond them lay the dominion of a king who was wont to seize every boat by force.

[80] As for the lad, his parents were people of faith, and we feared lest he should plague them with transgression and disbelief,

[81] and we desired that their Lord should grant them another in his place, a son more upright and more tender-hearted.

[82] As for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys in the city; and under it there was a treasure that belonged to them. Their father was a righteous man and your Lord intended that they should come of age and then bring forth their treasure as a mercy from your Lord; I did not do this of my own bidding. This is the true meaning of things with which you could not keep your patience."<sup>20</sup>

[83] (O Muhammad), they ask you about Dhu al-Qarnayn. Say: "I will give you an account of him."

[84] We granted him power in the land and endowed him with all kinds of resources.

[85] He set out (westwards) on an expedition,

[86] until when he reached the very limits where the sun sets,<sup>21</sup> he saw it setting in dark turbid waters,<sup>22</sup> and nearby he met a people. We said: "O Dhu al-Qarnayn, you have the power to punish or to treat them with kindness."

*20. What is clear in this story is that the three acts performed by Khidr were in compliance with God's own command. It is also evident that two of his acts were such as are never allowed under any of God's revealed laws: No man is authorized, even on the basis of some inspiration (ilham), to either damage the boat belonging to another person under the plea that it would at some later stage be confiscated by a usurper, or to kill a boy for the reason that he would grow up to be an unbeliever or commit excesses. The conclusion is therefore inescapable that Khidr performed these acts not under any Divine law revealed as an imperative for man but in accordance with God's cosmic laws. Divine commands of this nature are carried out through a kind of creature other than man. The very nature of this story shows that God directed Moses to this creature of His - Khidr - in order that he might get some idea of the kinds of exigencies that sometimes necessitate things to happen in a manner incomprehensible to man. The fact that God has described Khidr as His servant is not sufficient for us to assume that he is a human being. At several places in the Qur'an, including Surah al-Anbiya' 21: 26 and Surah al-Zukhruf 43: 19 the word "servant" has been used for angels.*

21. *That is, to the extreme limits of land in the west.*

22. *That is, at sunset it appeared that the sun was setting in the blackish muddy water of the sea.*

[87] He said: “We will chastise him who does wrong, whereafter he will be returned to his Lord and He will chastise him grievously

[88] But as for him who believes and acts righteously his will be a goodly reward and we shall enjoy upon him only mild commands.”

[89] Then he set out on another expedition

[90] until he reached the limit where the sun rises<sup>23</sup> and he found it rising on a people whom We had provided no shelter from it.

[91] Thus was the state of those people, and We encompassed in knowledge all concerning Dhu al- Qarnayn.

[92] Then he set out on another expedition

[93] until when he reached a place between the two mountains, he found beside the mountains a people who scarcely understood anything.

[94] They said: “O Dhu al-Qarnayn, Gog and Magog<sup>24</sup> are spreading corruption in this land. So shall we pay you taxes on the understanding that you will set up a barrier between us and them?”

23. *That is, to the extreme limits of land in the east.*

24. *Gog and Magog were the wild peoples who inhabited the north-eastern region of Asia. From time to time they carried out predatory raids against civilized lands, pouring over both Asia and Europe like tidal waves. The Book of Ezekiel states that their land was comprised of Meshech (presently Moscow) and Tubal (presently Tubalsek). The Jewish historian, Josephus, identifies them with the Scythians who inhabited the area lying north and east of the Black Sea. According to Jerome, the Magog lived to the north of Caucasia, near the Caspian Sea.*

[95] He answered: “Whatever my Lord has granted me is good enough. But help me with your labour and I will erect a rampart between you and them.

[96] Bring me ingots of iron.” Then after he had filled up the space between the two mountain-sides, he said: “(Light a fire) and ply bellows.” When he had made it (red like) fire, he said: “Bring me molten copper which I may pour on it.”

[97] Such was the rampart that Gog and Magog could not scale, nor could they pierce it.

[98] Dhu al-Qarnayn said: "This is a mercy from my Lord: but when the time of my Lord's promise shall come, He will level the rampart with the ground. My Lord's promise always comes true."

[99] And on that Day<sup>25</sup> We shall let some of them surge like waves against others and the Trumpet shall be blown. Then We shall gather them all together.

[100] That will be the Day We shall place Hell before the unbelievers

[101] whose eyes had become blind against My admonition and who were utterly disinclined to hear it.

[102] Do the unbelievers, then, believe that they can take any of My creatures as their guardians beside Me? Verily We have prepared Hell to welcome the unbelievers.

[103] Say; (O Muhammad): "Shall We tell you who will be the greatest losers in respect of their works?"

[104] It will be those whose effort went astray in the life of the world and who believe nevertheless that they are doing good.

*25. "On that Day" refers to the Day of Resurrection. Dhu al- Qarnayn had alluded to the Day of Resurrection as a day that is bound to come about because God had so decided. What is being said here is in that context and is an addition to the statement made by Dhu al-Qarnayn (see verse 98 above).*

[105] Those are the ones who refused to believe in the revelations of their Lord and that they are bound to meet Him. Hence, all their deeds have come to naught, and We shall assign no weight to them on the Day of Resurrection.

[106] Hell is their recompense for disbelieving and their taking My revelations and My Messengers as objects of jest.

[107] As for those who believe and do good works, the Gardens of Paradise shall be there to welcome them;

[108] there they will abide for ever, with no desire to be removed from there."

[109] Say: "If the sea were to become ink to record the Words of my Lord, indeed the sea would be all used up before the Words of my Lord are exhausted, and it would be the same even if We were to bring an equal amount of ink."<sup>26</sup>

[110] Say (O Muhammad): "I am no more than a human being like you; one to whom revelation is made: 'Your Lord is the One and Only God. Hence, whoever looks forward to meet his Lord, let him do righteous works, and let him associate none with the worship of his Lord.'"

26. *The term kalimat ("Words") here signifies God's marvellous acts, and the excellent and wondrous manifestations of His power and wisdom.*