

Al-'Ankabut [The Spider]

Makkah Period

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

[1] *Alif. Lam. Mim.*

[2] Do people think that they will be let go merely by saying: "We believe," and that they will not be tested,

[3] for We indeed tested those who went before them? Allah will most certainly ascertain those who spoke the truth and those who lied.

[4] Do the evil-doers¹ suppose that they will get the better of Us? How evil is their judgement!

[5] Let him who looks forward to meeting Allah know that Allah's appointed term will surely come to pass. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

[6] Whosoever strives² (in the cause of Allah) does so to his own good. Surely Allah stands in no need of anyone³ in the whole Universe.

1. The style of the discourse suggests that the "evil-doers" here signify those who were persecuting the believers. They are the ones who resorted to the worst possible means to harm the message of Islam.

2. The word mujahadah in this verse means that one ought to exert one's utmost in encountering the unbelievers so that the true faith's standard may be raised and kept aloft.

3. The believers were required to engage in this struggle not because God stood in need of their help to attain any of His purposes. On the contrary, they were asked to strive in God's cause because that was conducive to their own moral and spiritual growth.

[7] Those who believe and do good deeds, We shall cleanse them of their evil deeds and reward them according to the best of their deeds.

[8] We have enjoined upon man kindness to his parents, but if they exert pressure on you to associate with Me in My Divinity any that you do not know (to be My associate), do not obey them.⁴ To Me is your return, and I shall let you know all that you have done.

[9] As for those who believed and acted righteously, We shall certainly admit them among the righteous.

[10] Among people there are some who say: "We believe in Allah." But when such a person is made to endure suffering in Allah's cause, he reckons the persecution he suffers at the hands of people as though it is a chastisement from Allah. But if victory comes from your

Lord, the same person will say "We were with you." Does Allah not know Whatever is in the hearts of the people of the world?

[11] Allah will surely ascertain who are the believers and who are the hypocrites.

[12] The unbelievers say to the believers: "Follow our way and we will carry the burden of your sins." (They say so even though) they are not going to carry any part of their sins. Surely they are lying.

4. The parents of the Makkan youth who had embraced Islam tried to constrain them to renounce Islam. Here those youngsters are being told that while their parents had rights over them as parents, they certainly had no right to bar them from God's Way.

[13] They will certainly carry their own burdens and other burdens besides their own.⁵ They will assuredly be called to account on the Day of Resurrection concerning the fabrications which they contrived.

[14] We did indeed send Noah to his people and he lived among them a thousand years save fifty. Eventually the Flood overtook them while they were engaged in wrong- doing.

[15] Then We rescued Noah together with the people in the Ark and made it (that is, the Ark) a lesson for all people.⁶

[16] We sent Abraham and he said to his people: "Serve Allah and fear Him. This is better for you if you only knew.

[17] Those that you worship instead of Allah are merely idols, and you are simply inventing lies (about them). Indeed those whom, you worship beside Allah have no power to provide you with any sustenance. So seek your sustenance from Allah and serve only Him and give thanks to Him alone. It is to Him that you will be sent back.

[18] And if you give the lie (to the Messenger), then many nations before you also gave the lie (to their Messengers). The Messenger is charged with no other duty than to deliver the Message in clear terms."

5. The unbelievers will bear the burden of their own straying from the Truth; additionally, they will bear the burden of prompting or compelling others to go astray.

6. That is, God made Noah's Ark, or the chastisement that visited Noah's people, a lesson and warning for others.

[19] Have they never observed how Allah creates for the first time and then repeats it? Indeed (to repeat the creation of a thing) is even easier for Allah (than creating it for the first time).

[20] Say: "Go about the earth and see how He created for the first time, and then Allah will recreate life." Surely, Allah has power over everything.

[21] He chastises whom He will and forgives whom He will. To Him all of you will be sent back.

[22] You cannot overpower Allah, neither on the earth nor in the heaven. None can protect you from Allah nor come to your aid against Him.

[23] Those who disbelieved in Allah's signs and in meeting Him, it is they who have despaired of My Mercy; ⁷ it is they for whom a painful chastisement lies ahead.

[24] The people (of Abraham) had no other answer than to say: "Kill him or burn him." But Allah delivered him from the fire. There are many Signs in this for those who believe.

[25] He said: "You have taken up idols instead of Allah as a bond of love among yourselves in the present life, ⁸ but on the Day of Resurrection you will disown and curse one another. Your refuge shall be the Fire, and none will come to your aid."

7. This means that obdurate unbelievers will have no portion of God's Mercy; in fact, they have no reason to entertain any such expectation. The fact is that the unbelievers deny the Hereafter. They do not even recognise that a Day will come when they will have to stand before God's judgement. This clearly means that, to start with, they do not even look forward to God's forgiveness.

8. The nucleus of their collective life was devotion to idols rather than to God. Even devotion to such idols can provide a workable basis for bringing about the cohesion of a people in their worldly life, for people tend to gather around both true and false beliefs. Furthermore, any kind of cohesion and unity, even if it is founded on false propositions, can serve as a means to foster and sustain friendships, family ties, and vocational bonds and also provide a basis for religious, social, cultural, economic and political fellowships.

[26] Then did Lot believe him, and Abraham said: "I am emigrating unto my Lord. He is All-Powerful, All-Wise,"

[27] and We bestowed upon him (offspring like) Isaac and Jacob, and bestowed prophethood and the Book on his descendants and granted him his reward in this world; he will certainly be among the righteous in the Hereafter.

[28] We sent Lot and he said to his people: "You commit the abomination that none in the world ever committed before you,

[29] What! Do you go to men (to satisfy your lust), engage in highway robbery, and commit evil deeds in your gatherings?" Then they had no answer to offer other than to say: "Bring Allah's chastisement upon us if you are truthful."

[30] Lot said: "My Lord, aid me against these mischievous people."

[31] When Our emissaries brought the good news to Abraham, and said (to him!); "We are surely going to destroy the inhabitants of this city; ⁹ its inhabitants are immersed in wrongdoing."

9. "This city" here alludes to the territory in which Lot's people lived. The Prophet Abraham (peace be on him) then lived in the Palestinian city of Hebron, presently known as al-Khalil. A few miles to the southeast of this lies that part of the Dead Sea which was once inhabited by Lot's people, and which is now submerged by the sea. This is a low-lying area and is easily visible from the hill-tops of Hebron. This is why the angels pointed in the direction of the city, saying to the Prophet Abraham: "We are surely going to destroy the inhabitants of this city."

[32] Abraham said: "But Lot is there." They replied: "We are well aware of those who are there. We shall save him and all his household except his wife." His wife is among those who will stay behind.

[33] When Our emissaries came to Lot he was distressed and embarrassed on their account. They said: "Do not fear nor be distressed. We shall save you and all your household except your wife who is among those that will stay behind.

[34] We shall bring down upon the people of this city a scourge from the heaven because of their evil-doing."

[35] And We have left a vestige of it in that city as a Clear Sign¹⁰ for a people who use their reason.

[36] And We sent to Midian their brother Shu'ayb. He said: "My people serve Allah and look forward to the Last Day and do not go about the earth committing mischief."

[37] But they denounced him as a liar. So a mighty earthquake overtook them, and by the morning they lay overturned in their houses.

[38] And We destroyed 'Ad and Thamud, whose dwellings you have observed. Satan had embellished their deeds for them and had turned them away from the Right Path although they were a people of clear perception.

[39] And We destroyed Qarun (Korah) and Pharaoh and Haman. Moses came to them with Clear Signs but they waxed arrogant in the land although they could not have outstripped (Us).

10. "A Clear Sign" here refers to the Dead Sea which, owing to its association with Lot, is also called the Sea of Lot. Time and again the Qur'an told the Makkkan unbelievers that there were still Signs of the chastisement that had visited those wicked people. These Signs could still be seen by people, day and night, along the highway in the course of their commercial journeys to Syria.

[40] So We seized each for their sin. We let loose upon some a violent tornado with showers of stones; some were overtaken by a mighty Cry; some were caused to be swallowed up by the earth, and some We drowned. Allah would not wrong them, but it is they who wronged themselves.

[41] The case of those who took others than Allah as their protectors is that of a spider who builds a house; but the frailest of all houses is the spider's house; if they only knew.

[42] Surely Allah knows fully what they call upon apart from Him. He is the Most Powerful, the Most Wise.

[43] These are the parables that We set forth to make people understand. But only those endowed with knowledge will comprehend them.

[44] Allah has created the heavens and the earth in Truth. Certainly there is a Sign in this for those who believe.

[45] (O Prophet), recite the Book that has been revealed to you and establish Prayer. Surely Prayer forbids indecency and evil. And Allah's remembrance is of even greater merit.¹¹ Allah knows all that you do.

[46] Argue not with the People of the Book except in the fairest manner, unless it be those of them that are utterly unjust.¹² Say to them: "We believe in what was revealed to us and what was revealed to you. One is our God and your God; and we are those who submit ourselves to Him."

11. To prevent people from committing acts of indecency is one of the benefits of Prayer, though that is a relatively modest benefit. The true blessings of Prayer-"Allah's remembrance" - is much greater and is of a much higher value.

12. This verse implies that the attitude one should take in dealing with the "utterly unjust" depends on the attitude those people themselves adopt. If they perpetrate wrongs against Muslims, the latter may depart from the gentle and lenient attitude which they are generally required to observe. In other words, there is no specific mandate that says that Muslims should always remain tender and indulgent regardless of others' attitude towards them. For this might be mistaken for weakness and timidity. Islam certainly teaches its followers to be gracious and affable in their dealings with others, but by the same token this does not mean that Muslims should resign themselves to humiliation and degradation.

[47] (O Prophet), thus have We bestowed the Book on you.¹³ So those on whom We had bestowed the Book before believe in it,¹⁴ and of these (Arabs) too a good many believe in it.¹⁵ It is none but the utter unbelievers who deny Our Signs.

13. This can be interpreted in two ways. First, that in the same manner that God revealed scriptures to Prophets in the past, He has now revealed a scripture to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). Second, that God revealed this Book -the Qur'an - and had directed people to believe in it alongside believing in the earlier scriptures.

14. *The context clearly indicates that this statement is not applicable to all the People of the Book. Rather, it applies only to those who were endowed with true knowledge and understanding of the scriptures, and were thus the "People of the Book" in the true sense of the expression.*

15. *The words "of these" here refer to the people of Arabia. What is meant is that everywhere lovers of the Truth had begun to embrace the Book revealed to the Prophet (peace be on him). Such people comprised those who believed in the scriptures as well as those who did not.*

[48] (O Prophet), you did not recite any Book before, nor did you write it down with your hand; for then the votaries of falsehood would have had a cause for doubt.

[49] But it is a set of Clear Signs in the hearts of those who have been endowed with knowledge.¹⁶ None except the utterly unjust will deny Our Signs.

[50] They say: "Why were Signs from his Lord not sent down upon him?" Say: "The Signs are only with Allah. As for me, I am no more than a plain warner."

[51] Does it not suffice for them (as a Sign) that We revealed to you the Book that is recited to them? Surely there is mercy and good counsel in it for those who believe.

[52] Say (O Prophet): "Allah suffices as a witness between me and you, He knows whatever is in the heavens and the earth. As for those who believe in falsehood and are engaged in infidelity with Allah, it is they who will be the losers."

[53] They ask you to hasten in bringing chastisement upon them. Had there not been an appointed term for it, the chastisement would have already visited them; in fact it will come down upon them all of a sudden (at its appointed time) while they will not be aware of it.

[54] They ask you to hasten the chastisement upon them although Hell encompasses the unbelievers,

[55] (They will become aware of it) the Day when the chastisement will overwhelm them from above and from under their feet, and He will say to them: "Taste now the consequence of the deeds that you used to commit."

16. *The relevant facts were that an unlettered person had come forward with a scripture as wonderful as the Qur'an. Moreover, that person had begun to display astounding qualities even though nothing in the early years of his life provided any basis for anticipating such things. These were among the facts that provided some of the most luminous and persuasive Signs of Muhammad's prophethood to people of knowledge and wisdom.*

[56] O My servants who believe, verily My earth is vast; so serve Me alone.¹⁷

[57] Every being shall taste death, then it is to Us that you shall be sent back.

[58] We shall house those who believed and acted righteously in the lofty mansions of Paradise beneath which rivers flow. There they shall remain forever. How excellent a reward it is for those who acted (in obedience to Allah),

[59] who remained steadfast and put their trust in their Lord!

[60] How many an animal there is that does not carry about its sustenance. Allah provides sustenance to them and to you. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

[61] If you¹⁸ were to ask them: "Who created the heavens and the earth and Who has kept the sun and the moon in subjection?" they will certainly say: "Allah." How come, then, they are being deluded from the Truth?

[62] Allah enlarges the sustenance of any of His servants whom He will, and straitens the sustenance of whom He will. Surely Allah has knowledge of everything.

[63] If you were to ask them: "Who sent down water from the sky and therewith revived the earth after its death?" they will certainly say: "Allah," Say: "To Allah alone be praise and thanks."¹⁹ But most people do not understand.

17. This is an allusion to the Hijrah. The purpose of the verse was to impress upon the believers that their supreme duty was to serve God. Now, if it was difficult to do so in Makkah, God's earth was immensely vast and by no means confined to any one particular place. As God's true servants, they should move somewhere else where it would be possible for them to live freely as God's servants.

18. The discourse from this point on is directed to the Makkans.

19. The words al-hamdu li Allah ("to Allah alone be praise and thanks") here suggest two things. First, if all the great tasks – the creation of the heavens and the earth, the harnessing of the sun and the moon, the bestowal of sustenance on the creatures, and the sending down of water from the sky and therewith reviving the earth after it had become dead were performed by God, then quite obviously, He alone deserves praise and thanks. Second, God should also be thanked in so far as the unbelievers also recognised that all these tasks were performed by God alone.

[64] The present life is nothing but sport and amusement. The true life is in the Abode of the Hereafter; if only they knew.

[65] When they embark in the ships they call upon Allah, consecrating their faith to Him. But when He rescues them and brings them to land, they suddenly begin to associate others with Allah in His Divinity

[66] that they may be ungrateful for the rescue that We granted them, and that they may revel in the pleasures (of the present life). Soon they shall come to know.

[67] Do they not see that We have given them a sanctuary of safety whereas people around them are being snatched away? ²⁰ So, do they believe in falsehood and ungratefully deny Allah's bounties?

20. The unbelievers are asked to consider who had brought about such wonderful peace and security that prevails in Makkah. Was it an idol like al-Lat or Hubal that brought it about? Was it possible for anyone other than God to keep Makkah secure against all kinds of violence and disorder for a period of approximately 2,500 years despite its being located in the strife-ridden country of Arabia? Who could ensure that Makkah's sanctity would remain secure?

[68] Who can be more unjust than he who foists a lie on Allah or gives the lie to the Truth after it has come to him? Is Hell not the resort of the unbelievers?

[69] As for those who strive in Our cause, We shall surely guide them to Our Ways. ²¹ Indeed Allah is with those who do good.

21. This is a great assurance from God to those who sincerely strive in His cause and expose themselves to conflicts with the rest of the world. God assures such people that He is not wont to leave them to their fate; instead, He helps and guides such people at every step and constantly opens up new avenues for them which direct them to Him. At every step He instructs them about the ways through which they can achieve His good pleasure. He also constantly illuminates for them the Right Way, making it distinct from the meandering labyrinths of Error. The greater the sincerity of the believers, the greater is the support, guidance and succour that God lavishes upon them.