

Al-Qamar [The Moon]

Makkan Period

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

[1] The Hour of Resurrection drew near and the moon split asunder.¹

[2] (Regardless of any Signs these people see), they turn away and say: "This is an ongoing sorcery."

[3] They also gave the lie to (the splitting asunder of the moon) and only followed their desires. Yet everything is destined to reach an end.

1. The splitting asunder of the moon signified that the Day of Resurrection had drawn near. It could now take place at any moment. It appears from this statement and what follows that the moon had actually split asunder. Those who had witnessed the event stated that the moon suddenly split asunder for a short while after its rise on the fourteenth day of a lunar month. As a result, the two separated parts of the moon were visible on the two sides of the mountain in front of them. Soon thereafter, however, the two parts rejoined. If we take into account the relevant traditions from the Prophet (peace be on him), it is evident that there is no substance in the statement made by popular preachers, viz. that the moon's splitting asunder was caused by a gesture made by the Prophet (peace be on him). Nor is there any substance in the statement that this happened in response to the unbelievers' demand for a miracle.

[4] Surely there came to them narratives (of the ancient nations) that should suffice to deter (them from transgression),

[5] narratives that are full of consummate wisdom, But warnings do not avail them.

[6] So turn away from them, (O Prophet). On the Day when a caller shall call them to a thing most terrible,

[7] with down-cast eyes they shall go forth from their graves, as though they were scattered locusts.

[8] They shall be hurrying forth towards the caller, and the unbelievers (who had once denied this Day), will say: "This is a woeful Day."

[9] Before them Noah's people also gave the lie (to his Message). They rejected Our servant as a liar, saying: "He is a madman"; and he was rebuffed.

[10] Then he called upon His Lord: "Verily I am vanquished; so come You to my aid."

[11] Thereupon We opened the gates of the sky for water to pour down,

[12] and We made the earth burst forth with springs, and all this water converged to fulfil that which had been decreed.

[13] And We bore Noah on the vessel built of planks and nails,²

[14] which sailed on under Our supervision: a reward for him who had been shown ingratitude.

[15] And We left the Ark as a Sign. Is there, then, any who will take heed?

[16] So how awesome were My chastisement and My warnings!

[17] We have made this Qur'an easy as a reminder.³ Is there, then, any who will take heed?

2. This alludes to the Ark built at God's behest by the Prophet Noah (peace be on him) before the Deluge.

3. One way of admonishing people was, as happened in the case of several rebellious nations, to visit them with a calamitous scourge. Another means of admonishing them was through the Qur'an which directs them to the Right Way by means of persuasive arguments and exhortation. Obviously, the second method is the most convenient. That being the case, why do people choose not to benefit from the Qur'an instead of waiting for God's scourge? Such an attitude defies all understanding.

[18] 'Ad also gave the lie (to Hud). So how awesome were My chastisement and My warnings!

[19] We sent a tumultuous wind against them on a day of unremitting misfortune,

[20] which tore people away and hurled them as though they were trunks of uprooted palm-trees.

[21] So how awesome were My chastisement and My warnings!

[22] We have made the Qur'an easy to derive lessons from. Is there, then, any who will take heed?

[23] Thamud gave the lie to the warnings,

[24] saying: "Are we to follow a single mortal, one from among ourselves? If we do that, we shall surely be in error and folly.

[25] Was there none but he to whom the Reminder could be vouchsafed excluding all others? Nay; he is an insolent liar."

[26] (We told Our Messenger): "Tomorrow they shall know who is the insolent liar.

[27] We shall send the she-camel as a trial for them; so watch their end with patience.

[28] Let them know that the water should be divided between them and the she-camel, each availing their turn."⁴

[29] Eventually, they summoned their companion, and he undertook the (outrageous) task and hamstringed the she-camel.

4. This explains the verse: "We shall send the she-camel as a trial for them" (v. 27 above). The trial consisted of the following: that a she-camel was sent to the Thamud who were instructed that they and the she-camel should have access to water on alternate days. The people were directed not to draw water from any well or spring, nor to bring their cattle to the water sources on those days the she-camel was entitled to water. This challenging directive was given by a Prophet about whom they said that he had no armed strength at his command.

[30] So how awesome were My chastisement and My warnings!

[31] Behold, We sent a single Blast against them, and they became like the trampled twigs of a sheep pen-builder.⁵

[32] Surely We have made this Qur'an easy as a reminder. Is there, then, any who will take heed?

[33] Lot's people also gave the lie to the warnings,

[34] and behold, We let loose upon them a tempest which rained stones upon them, except upon Lot's household whom We rescued in the last hours of the night

[35] as a favour from Us. Thus do We reward those who give thanks.

[36] Surely Lot warned his people that We shall seize them (with Our chastisement), but they doubted the warnings.

[37] Then they even solicited his guests from him, whereupon We blotted out their eyes, (telling them): "Now have a taste of My chastisement and My warnings."

[38] Indeed an abiding chastisement came upon them in the morning.

[39] So have a taste of My chastisement and My warnings.

[40] Surely We have made this Qur'an easy as a reminder. Is there, then, any who will take heed?

5. Those who maintain cattle have to build protective fences around the cattle pens. The fence is usually made of timber and twigs and pieces of bush. The bushes of the fence gradually dry up and in the course of time wither away. Furthermore, the comings and goings of the cattle and other animals trample the fence, and ground the bushes to dust. The crushed and rotten corpses of the Thamud are here likened to the trampled and trodden twigs and bushes that lie scattered around the cattle pens.

[41] Warnings also came to the Pharaonites,

[42] but they gave the lie to Our Signs, to all of them. Thereupon We seized them with the seizing of the Most Mighty, the Most Powerful.

[43] Are your unbelievers (of Makkah) any better than they?⁶ Or have you been granted any immunity in the Scriptures?

[44] Or do they say: "We are a strong legion, strong enough for victory?"

[45] Soon shall this legion be routed and shall turn their backs and flee.

[46] Nay; the Hour of Doom is their appointed time, and the Hour shall be more calamitous and bitter.

[47] The evil-doers are victims of error and madness.

[48] There shall come a Day when they will be dragged on their faces into the Fire and will be told: "Now taste the flame of Hell."

[49] We have created everything in a determined Measure.⁷

[50] Our command consists of only one Word which is carried out in the twinkling of an eye.

6. This query - "are your unbelievers any better than they?" – is addressed to the Quraysh. They were plainly told that other nations had been destroyed by God in the past because they disbelieved, gave the lie to the Truth, and acted with obduracy. Now, if the behaviour of the Makkan unbelievers does not differ from the behaviour of other nations, why do they not think they will not be subjected to the chastisement that had visited other iniquitous nations?

7. Nothing in the world is created without a purpose; on the contrary, everything is created according to a determined scheme (taqdir). In keeping with that scheme, everything comes into being at an appointed time, assumes the form determined for it, develops to a given extent, continues to exist until an appointed time, and then comes to its end at an appointed hour.

[51] We did indeed destroy many like you. is there, then, any who will heed?

[52] All their deeds are recorded in the Scrolls;

[53] everything large or small, is duly inscribed.

[54] Surely those who shun disobedience will dwell amidst Gardens and running streams

[55] where they will be honourably seated in the presence of a King, Mighty in Power.