

Al-Qalam [The Pen]

Makkan Period

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

[1] *Nun*. By the pen and what the scribes write.¹

[2] By your Lord's Grace, you are not afflicted with madness,²

[3] and surely yours shall be a never-ending reward,³

[4] and you are certainly on the most exalted standard of moral excellence.⁴

1. The great commentator on the Qur'an, Mujahid, says that the word "pen" here signifies the pen with which the Qur'an was being inscribed. From this it automatically follows that what was being inscribed was the Qur'an.

2. These words are apparently addressed to the Prophet (peace be on him), but the real purpose of the statement is to refute the unbelievers' slanderous utterances imputing madness to him. The thrust of the verse is that the Qur'an, which was being written down by scribes, was itself sufficient refutation of such slanderous statements.

3. It is being asserted that the Prophet's reward will be boundless and that it will never cease. This because he strove to direct man to the Right Way, but in return had to suffer bitter and heart-rending remarks from a great many people. Admirably enough, the Prophet (peace be on him) disregarded all this, patiently performing his duty with unabated dedication.

4. In addition to the Qur'an, the Prophet's excellent character also falsified the charge of madness that was directed at him. This because madness and high morals are mutually inconsistent.

[5] So you will soon see, and they too will see,

[6] which of you is afflicted with madness,

[7] Surely your Lord knows well those who have strayed from His Way just as He knows well those who are on the Right Way.

[8] Do not, then, yield to those who reject the Truth, decrying it as false;

[9] they would wish you to be pliant so that they too may be pliant.⁵

[10] And do not yield to any contemptible swearer,

[11] the fault-finder who goes around slandering,

[12] the hinderer of good, the transgressor, the sinful;

[13] the coarse-grained, and above all mean and ignoble;

[14] (who so acts) simply because he has wealth and sons,⁶

[15] and whenever Our verses are rehearsed to him, he says: "These are fairy- tales of times gone by."

5. The unbelievers approached the Prophet (peace be on him) with the offer that if he would slacken a bit in his drive to preach his teachings, they would relax their opposition to him. Another nuance of the offer was that if the Prophet (peace be on him) were to modify his religious stance in deference to the unbelievers' beliefs and practices, they would be willing to come to terms with him.

6. This statement can relate to the themes that both precede and follow it. In the first instance, it would mean that the Prophet (peace be on him) should not yield to such a person simply because he has an abundance of wealth and children. In the second instance, these words would mean that this person has become exceedingly arrogant because he has much wealth and numerous sons. It is because of such arrogance that when the Revelation is rehearsed to him such a person says: "These are fairy-tales of times gone by."

[16] Soon shall We brand him on his snout.⁷

[17] We have put them [i.e., the Makkans] to test even as We put to test the owners of the orchard when they vowed that they would gather the fruit of their orchard in the morning,

[18] without making any allowance (for the will of Allah).⁸

[19] Thereupon a calamity from your Lord passed over it while they were asleep,

[20] and so by morning the orchard lay as though it had been fully harvested.

[21] At day break they called out to one another:

[22] "Hurry to your orchard if you would gather its fruit-"

[23] So off they went, whispering to one another:

[24] "No destitute person shall enter it today."

[25] They went forth early, believing that they had the power (to gather the fruit).

[26] But as soon as they beheld the Orchard, (they cried out): "We have certainly lost the way;

[27] rather, We are utterly ruined."

[28] The best among them said: "Did I not say to you: why do you not give glory to (your Lord)?"⁹

[29] They cried out: "Glory be to our Lord! Certainly we were sinners."

7. Such a person considered himself to be possessed of extraordinary greatness and eminence. To controvert this arrogance, his nose is called a "snout". To say that "We shall brand him on his snout" means that God will disgrace him both in this world and the Hereafter, and will do so in such a way that the disgrace he is subjected to will endure.

8. The owners of the orchard were exceedingly confident about their power and authority. Hence they swore that they would gather the fruit of their orchard the next morning, without feeling any need to say: "We shall do so if God so wills."

9. That is, why do they not remember God? Why have they forgotten that above them is their Lord?

[30] Then they began to reproach one another.

[31] They said: "Woe to us! We had indeed transgressed.

[32] Maybe our Lord will give us a better orchard in its place; to our Lord do we penitently turn."

[33] Such is the chastisement; and the chastisement of the Hereafter is assuredly even greater, if only they knew.

[34] Surely¹⁰ the God-fearing shall have Gardens of bliss with their Lord.

[35] What! Shall We treat those who have submitted (to Our command) like those who have acted as criminals?

[36] What is the matter with you? How will do you judge!

[37] Or do you have a Book¹¹ wherein you read

[38] that (in the Hereafter) you shall have all that you choose for yourselves?

[39] Or have We sworn a covenant with you which We are bound to keep till the Day of Resurrection, (a covenant requiring that whatever you ordain for yourselves shall be yours)?

[40] Ask them: "Which of them can guarantee that?

[41] Or has something been guaranteed by any of those whom they associate with Allah in His Divinity?" If so, let them bring forth their associates, if they are truthful.

10. *This is a rejoinder to the Makkan nobility who teased the Muslims by saying that they enjoyed a great many blessings thereby indicating that they were God's favourites. Conversely, that the Muslims' lot was a miserable one which only proved that God was wroth with them. They further argued that if there were life after the present one, it would be they, the unbelievers, who would enjoy bliss in much the same way that they did in the present world; as for the Muslims, they would suffer in the Hereafter as well. The present verse as well as the verses that follow refute this claim.*

11. *That is, the Book revealed by God.*

[42] On the Day when the dreadful calamity will unfold, when people will be summoned to prostrate themselves, and yet they will not be able to prostrate.

[43] Their eyes shall be downcast and ignominy shall overwhelm them. For when they were safe and sound, they were summoned to prostrate themselves, (and they refused).

[44] So leave Me, (O Prophet), to deal with him who gives the lie to this Discourse. We shall draw them little by little (to their undoing) in a way that they will not know.

[45] I am giving them a respite. Great is My scheme!

[46] Or are you asking them for some compensation so that they feel burdened with debt?

[47] Or do they have any knowledge of the Unseen which they are now writing down?

[48] So bear with patience until the judgement of your Lord comes, and do not be¹² like the man in the fish (i.e., Jonah) who called out, choking with grief:

[49] had his Lord not bestowed His favour upon him, he would have been cast upon that barren-shore (and would have remained there) in disgrace.

[50] But his Lord exalted him, and included him among His righteous servants,

[51] When the unbelievers hear this Exhortation, they look at you as though they would knock you off your feet with their (hostile) glances. They say: "Surely he is afflicted with madness";

[52] although this is nothing but an Exhortation (to goodness) for everyone in the world.

12. *The directive is that they should stop behaving with the impatience that was displayed by the Prophet Jonah (peace be on him). For it was on account of Jonah's impatience that he was consigned to the belly of a fish.*