

INTRODUCTION TO SŪRAT *Sabā*, 34.

Now we begin a series of six Sūras, S. xxxiv. to S. xxxix, which recapitulate some of the features of the spiritual world. This Sūra leads off with emphasis on Allah's Mercy and Power and Truth. Then (in S. xxxv.) we are told how angels manifest the Power of Allah, and how different is Good from Evil and Truth from Falsehood. S. xxxvi. is devoted to the holy Prophet and the Qur-ān that came through him. In S. xxxvii, the emphasis is on the snares of Satan; in S. xxxviii., on the conquest of evil by wisdom and power as in the case of David and Solomon, and by Patience and Constancy as in the case of Job; and in S. xxxix. on the Final Judgment, which will sort out Faith from Unfaith and give to each its due.

The chronology has here no significance. This Sūra belongs to the early Makkan period.

Summary.—No Good or Truth is ever lost: Human Power and Prosperity are fleeting; but Allah's Power and Justice endure, and will enforce personal responsibility on man on the Last Day (xxxiv. 1-30).

Faith and Unfaith will eventually find their true places and true values; Falsehood has no power: Truth is with Allah (xxxiv. 31-54).

Sabā, or the City of Sabā

(see verse 15).

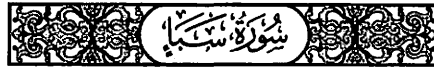
*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful.*

1. Praise be to Allah,³⁷⁸⁵

To Whom belong all things
In the heavens and on earth:
To Him be Praise
In the Hereafter:
And He is All-Wise, All-Aware.

2. He knows all that goes³⁷⁸⁶

Into the earth, and all that
Comes out thereof; all that
Comes down from the sky³⁷⁸⁷
And all that ascends thereto
And He is the Most Merciful,
The Oft-Forgiving.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ
وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ ﴿١﴾

يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ
مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا وَهُوَ الرَّحِيمُ
الْغَفُورُ ﴿٢﴾

3785. All Creation declares His Praises, i.e., manifests His Mercy and Power, Goodness and Truth—all the sublime attributes summed up in His Most Beautiful Names (vii. 180 and xvii 110 and notes). For man, to contemplate these is in itself a Revelation. This sentiment opens five Sūras of the Qur-ān evenly distributed, viz., i., vi., xviii., xxxiv., and xxxv. Here the point most emphasised is that His wisdom and mercy comprehend all things, extended in space or in time—here and everywhere, now and evermore.

3786. An ignorant man may think that water absorbed in the soil or seed sown beneath the sod is lost, but it replenishes numerous rills and streams, and feeds and sustains numerous roots and forms of life, and throws up all kinds of vegetable life. So with things that come out of the earth: who can count the myriad forms of herbs and trees that grow and perish, and yet sustain a continuous life for ages and ages? Yet these are symbolical of other things or entities beyond time or space, and beyond physical form. We see the birth and death of the animal part of man: when he is buried beneath the soil, the ignorant man thinks there is an end of him.

3787. The vapours that rise from the earth and ascend to the sky descend again as rain and snow and as symbols of Allah's Mercy. So are the prayers of the devout and the call of those in agony for help and light, answered by the descent of mercy and guidance, help and light from Allah. Do not forget that, just as there is the element of Mercy, so there is an element of Justice and Punishment.

3. The Unbelievers say,³⁷⁸⁸
 "Never to us will come
 The Hour": say, "Nay!
 But most surely,
 By my Lord,³⁷⁸⁹ it will come
 Upon you;-by Him
 Who knows the unseen,-
 From Whom is not hidden
 The least little atom
 In the Heavens or on earth:
 Nor is there anything less
 Than that, or greater, but
 Is in the Record Perspicuous."³⁷⁹⁰

4. That He may reward
 Those who believe and work
 Deeds of righteousness: for such
 Is Forgiveness and a Sustenance³⁷⁹¹
 Most Generous."

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَا تَأْتِينَا السَّاعَةُ قُلْ بَلَىٰ وَرَبِّي
 لَتَأْتِيََنَّكُمْ عَلِيمِ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْزُبُ عَنْهُ مِقَالُ
 ذَرَّةٍ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا أَصْغَرُ
 مِنْ ذَلِكَ وَلَا أَكْبَرُ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ
 مُبِينٍ ﴿٢﴾

لَيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ
 أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَرِزْقٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

3788. The last two verses prepared us to realise the position of Unbelievers in Allah's great Universe. They are the discord in the universal harmony of Prayer and Praise. Their existence is due to the grant of a limited free-will, the Trust which the Unbelievers have betrayed (see xxxiii. 72 and notes). But they must and will be eliminated: see verse 5 below. For there is nothing more certain in the world, physical, moral, and spiritual, than that every cause, great or small, must have its corresponding consequences.

3789. The strongest emphasis and the most perfect assurance of certainty are indicated by reference to the authority of Allah Himself, the Ruler of the Day of Judgment.

3790. In the symbolical language of our own human experience, a record is more enduring than memory: in fact (if properly preserved) it is perpetual. If, further, it is expressed in clear language, without any obscurity, it can always be read with perfect precision and without any doubt whatever. Apply these qualities, free from human defect to Allah's laws and decrees. They are unerring and enduring. Everything, greater or small, will receive due recognition—a Reward for Good and a Punishment for Evil.

3791. "Sustenance": Spiritual in things spiritual, and physical in things physical. It implies not only the satisfaction of desire, but the provision of means for sustaining the ground won and for winning more ground in the march of progress.

5. But those who strive
Against Our Signs, to frustrate³⁷⁹²
Them,—for such will be
A Chastisement of
Painful wrath.

وَالَّذِينَ سَعَوْا فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعْجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ
لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مِّن رَّجْزٍ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٥﴾

6. And those to whom³⁷⁹³
Knowledge has come see
That the (Revelation) sent down
To thee from thy Lord—
That is the Truth,
And that it guides
To the Path of the Exalted
(In Might), Worthy
Of all praise.

وَيَرَى الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ الَّذِي أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ
مِن رَّبِّكَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَيَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ
الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ ﴿٦﴾

7. The Unbelievers say
(In ridicule): "Shall we
Point out to you a man³⁷⁹⁴
That will tell you,
When ye are all scattered
To pieces in disintegration,
That ye shall (then be
Raised) in a New Creation?

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هَلْ نَدُلُّكُمْ عَلَىٰ رَجُلٍ يُنَبِّئُكُمْ
إِذَا مَرَقْتُمْ كُلَّ مَمَرٍ إِنَّكُمْ لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ﴿٧﴾

8. "Has he invented a falsehood
Against Allah, or is he

أَفَتَرَىٰ عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَمْ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ بَلِ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ
بِالْآخِرَةِ فِي الْعَذَابِ وَالضَّلَالِ الْبَعِيدِ ﴿٨﴾

3792. Cf. xxii. 51. Allah's Plan cannot be frustrated. It is those who work against it, who will be eliminated and destroyed.

3793. Against the doubts and vain imaginings of the Ignorant is the certainty of knowledge of the Enlightened: that Allah reveals Himself, and that His Revelation is true, and leads to the Path of true Guidance. That Path is the Path of Allah, Who, in His infinite Love and Mercy, is Worthy of all Praise.

It is possible to connect this with the "Record Perspicuous" in verse 3 above: 'it is perspicuous..., for the Enlightened do see...'

3794. This is a taunt against the holy Prophet, and it is applicable to all who preach the doctrine of a Future Life. How is it possible, say the Unbelievers, that when a man's body is reduced to dust and scattered about, the man should rise again and become a new Creation? They add that such a preacher is inventing a deliberate falsehood or is demented.

Afflicted with madness".³⁷⁹⁵

Nay, it is those who
Believe not in the Hereafter,
That are in (real) Chastisement,
And in farthest Error.

9. See they not what is
Before them and behind them,
Of the sky and the earth?³⁷⁹⁶
If We wished, We could
Cause the earth to swallow³⁷⁹⁷
Them up, or cause a piece
Of the sky to fall upon them.³⁷⁹⁸
Verily in this is a Sign
For every devotee that
Turns to Allah (in repentance).

10. We bestowed Grace aforetime
On David from Us³⁷⁹⁹
"O ye Mountains! echo ye
Back the Praises of Allah
With him! and ye birds

أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ
مِمَّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ إِنَّ نَاشِئَ خَشْفِ بِهِمْ
الْأَرْضِ أَوْ نُسْقِطُ عَلَيْهِمْ كِسْفًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ
إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُلِّ عَبْدٍ مُّنِيبٍ ﴿١٠﴾

﴿١٠﴾ وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُدَ مِنَّا فَضْلًا يٰ جِبَالُ أَوِّبِي
مَعَهُ وَالطَّيْرُ وَالنَّالَةُ الْحَدِيدَ ﴿١١﴾

3795. The answer is: the Future Life is the truest of all Truths; so far is the man who teaches it from being demented, that it is those who deny it, that lack knowledge and are in real jeopardy for their souls; for they persecute Truth and must not only suffer defeat, but go farther and farther from Realities and thus suffer the worst hallucination about the next world.

3796. The men who walk in spiritual darkness and laugh at a Hereafter have but to observe the Power of Allah in the nature around them. He Who created the heavens and the earth and sustains them can surely make a new Creation! And the cosmic Laws which are so just and inevitable should surely give them an idea of the inexorable Justice that must redress all balance.

3797. Cf. xvi. 45, and n. 2071. Who are these puny creatures—sceptics that question the might and majesty of Allah?

3798. Cf. xxvi. 187. This was actually a challenge hurled at Shu'aib and a shower of ashes and cinders came from above and overwhelmed the challengers!

3799. Cf. xxi. 79-80, and notes 2733-34. David had the gift of song and sacred music, and this is shown in his Psalms. All nature—hills and birds—sing and echo back the Praises of Allah.

(Also)! And We made
The iron soft for him;—³⁸⁰⁰

11. (Commanding), "Make thou
Coats of mail, balancing well³⁸⁰¹
The rings of chain armour,
And work ye righteousness;³⁸⁰²
For be sure I see
(Clearly) all that ye do."

أَنْ أَعْمَلَ سَيِّغَتٍ وَقَدَّرَ فِي السَّرَدِ وَأَعْمَلُوا
صَلِحًا إِنِّي بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

12. And to Solomon (We
Made) the Wind (obedient);³⁸⁰³
Its early morning (stride)
Was a month's (journey),
And its evening (stride)
Was a month's (journey);
And We made a Font³⁸⁰⁴
Of molten brass to flow

وَلَسَلِمْنَ الرِّيحَ غَدُوًّا شَرُّ رَوَّاحِهَا شَرُّ
وَأَسَلْنَاهُ لَهْ عَيْنَ الْقَاطِرِ وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ مِنْ يَعْمَلُ
بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَمَنْ يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِنَا
نَذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ ﴿١٢﴾

3800. Iron or steel is hard stuff: but in the hands of a craftsman it becomes soft and pliable, and with it can be made instruments for the defence of righteousness. These, in the literal sense, are coats of mail, and defensive armour, and the manufacture of them is traditionally attributed to David.

3801. Coats of chain armour have to be made with cunning art, if the chains are to fit into each other and the whole garment is to be worn in comfort in fierce warfare.

3802. Note the transition from the singular, "make them coats of mail", to the plural "and work ye righteousness". The first is addressed to David, who was the artificer of defensive armour; and the second is addressed to him and his whole people. He made the armour, but it was to be worn not only by him but all the warriors. But he and all his people were to be careful to see that they did not deviate from the paths of righteousness. Fighting is a dangerous weapon and may well degenerate (as it so often does) into mere violence. They were to see that this should not happen, and they were told that Allah was watching over them all with the personal solicitude implied in the singular pronoun "I".

3803. Cf. xxi. 81-82, n. 2736, and xxxviii. 36-38. See also xxvii. 38-39. The winds are swift and can cover in a short morning's or evening's flight the distance which it takes a whole month to cover on foot or by bullock cart. In our own day, with air speeds of 400 miles and more per hour, this seems a moderate statement.

3804. In the Old Testament, II. Chronicles, Chapters iii., and iv., are described the various costly materials with which Solomon's Temple was built, and it was furnished with vessels, candle-sticks, lamps, censers, etc. "Solomon made all these vessels in great abundance: for the weight of the brass could not be found out" (II. Chronicles, iv. 18).

For him; and there were
 Jinns that worked in front³⁸⁰⁵
 Of him, by the leave
 Of his Lord, and if any
 Of them turned aside
 From Our command, We
 Made him taste
 Of the Chastisement
 Of the Blazing Fire.

13. They worked for him
 As he desired, (making) Arches,³⁸⁰⁶
 Images, Basons
 As large as wells,
 And (cooking) Cauldrons fixed
 (In their places): "Exercise thanks³⁸⁰⁷
 Sons of David,
 But few of My servants
 Are grateful!"

14. Then, when We decreed
 (Solomon's) death, nothing showed
 them

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحْرِبٍ وَتَمَثِيلٍ وَجِفَانٍ
 كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَتٍ أَعْمَلُوا أَلْ دَاوُدَ
 شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ ﴿١٣﴾

فَلَمَّا قَضَيْنَا عَلَيْهِ الْمَوْتَ مَا دَلَّهُمْ عَلَى مَوْتِهِ
 إِلَّا دَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ تَأْكُلُ مِنْسَأَتَهُ

3805. See xxvii. 17, and n. 3257.

3806. *Mihrab* "(Plural *Maḥārib*), translated "arch", may be applied to any fine, elevated, spacious architectural structure. As the reference here is to the Temple of Solomon, the word "arches" is I think most appropriate. "Arches" would be structural Ornaments in the Temple. Images would be like the images of oxen and Cherubim mentioned in II. Chronicles, iv. 3 and iii. 14; the Basons (II. Chronicles iv. 22) were perhaps huge dishes round which many men could sit together and eat, according to ancient Eastern custom, while the cooking Cauldrons or Pots (II. Chronicles, iv. 16), were fixed in one place, being so large in capacity that they could not be moved about. Indian readers will get some idea of them from the huge cooking *Degs*, which they use in the festivals.

3807. The building of the Temple was a great event in Israelite history. They are asked to be thankful without which all that glory and power would be out of place, and it fell away in a few generations, with the decline of the moral spirit which was at its back.

His death except a little³⁸⁰⁸
 Worm of the earth, which
 Kept (slowly) gnawing away
 At his staff: so when he
 Fell down, the Jinns saw³⁸⁰⁹
 Plainly that if they had
 Known the unseen, they
 Would not have tarried
 In the humiliating Chastisement
 (Of their Task).

15. There was, for Sabā,³⁸¹⁰
 Aforetime, a Sign in their
 Home-land—two Gardens
 To the right and to the left.

فَلَمَّا خَرَّ تَبَيَّنَ الْجِنُّ أَنْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ
 الْغَيْبَ مَا لَبِثُوا فِي الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ ﴿١٤﴾

لَقَدْ كَانَ لِسَبَإٍ فِي مَسْكَنِهِمْ آيَةٌ جَنَّتَانِ عَنْ يَمِينٍ
 وَشِمَالٍ كُلُوا مِنْ رِزْقِ رَبِّكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ بَلْدَةٌ
 طَيِّبَةٌ وَرَبُّ غَفُورٌ ﴿١٥﴾

3808. This statement illustrates three points: (1) however great and glorious human power and grandeur may be, it is only for a time, and it may fade away even before people know of its decline; (2) the most remarkable events may be brought to light, not by a flourish of trumpets, but by a humble individual, unknown and unseen, who works imperceptibly and undermines even so strong a thing as staff, on which a great man may lean; (3) work done by men merely on the basis of brute strength or fear, as in the case of the Jinns, will not endure. This is brought up in strong contrast against the Power and Majesty of Allah, which will endure, which cannot be sapped, and which can only be fully appreciated by a training of the will and heart. In the same way, in David's story above, his mighty strength as a warrior (see ii. 251) and his skill in making armour are only to be valued when used, as it was used, in the service of Allah, in righteous works (xxxiv. 11).

3809. The Jinns looked upon their work as a Penalty, and so it became to them. The people who worked at the Temple of Solomon as the People of David worked and gloried in their work as a thanksgiving to Allah, and their work became sanctified. The Jinns knew nothing of hidden secrets; they only saw the obvious, and had not even the significance of the little worm that slowly gnawed away Solomon's staff.

3810. This is the same city and territory in Yemen as is mentioned in xxvii. 22: see note there as to its location. There the period was the time of Solomon and Queen Bilqis. Here it is some centuries later. It was still a happy and prosperous country, amply irrigated from the Ma'arib dam. Its roads or perhaps its canals, were skirted by gardens on both sides, right and left: at any given point, you always saw two gardens. It produced fruit, spices, and frankincense, and got the name of Araby the Blest for that part of the country.

"Eat of the Sustenance (provided)
By your Lord, and be grateful
To Him: a territory fair and happy,
And a Lord Oft-Forgiving!"³⁸¹¹

16. But they turned away
(From Allah), and We sent
Against them the flood³⁸¹²
(Released) from the Dams,³⁸¹³
And We converted their two
Garden (rows) into "gardens"
Producing bitter fruit,
And tamarisks, and some few
(Stunted) Lote-trees.³⁸¹⁴

فَاعْرَضُوا فَاَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَيْلَ الْعَرِمِ
وَبَدَّلْنَاهُمْ بِجَنَّتَيْهِمْ جَنَّتَيْنِ ذَوَاتِ اَكْلِ خَمَطٍ
وَاَفْئِلٍ وَشِئْنٍ مِّنْ سِدْرٍ قَلِيلٍ ﴿١٦﴾

3811. The land was fair to look upon; the people happy and prosperous: and they enjoyed the blessings of Allah, Who is Gracious and does not punish small human faults or weaknesses.

3812. Into that happy Garden of Eden in Arabia Felix (Araby the Blest) came the insidious snake of Unfaith and Wrongdoing. Perhaps the people became arrogant of their prosperity, or of their science, or of their skill in irrigation engineering, in respect of the wonderful works of the Dam which their ancestors had constructed. Perhaps they got broken up into rich and poor, privileged and unprivileged, high-caste and low-caste, disregarding the gifts and closing the opportunities given by Allah to all His creatures. Perhaps they broke the laws of the very Nature which fed and sustained them. The Nemesis came. It may have come suddenly, or it may have come slowly. The pent-up waters of the eastern side of the Yemen highlands were collected in a high lake confined by the Dam of Maārib. A mighty flood came; the dam burst; and it has never been repaired since. This was a spectacular crisis: it may have been preceded and followed by slow desiccation of the country.

3813. "Arim" (= Dams or Embankments) may have been a proper noun, or may simply mean the great earth-works lined with stone, which formed the Maārib dam, of which traces still exist. The French traveller T.J. Arnaud saw the town and ruins of the Dam of Maārib in 1843, and described its gigantic works and its inscriptions: See *Journal Asiatique* for January 1874: the account is in French. For a secondary account in English, see W.B. Harris. *Journey Through Yemen*, Edinburgh, 1893. The dam as measured by Arnaud was two miles long and 120 ft. high. The date of its destruction was somewhere about 120 A.D., though some authorities put it much later.

3814. The flourishing "Garden of Arabia" was converted into a waste. The luscious fruit trees became wild, or gave place to wild plants with bitter fruit. The feathery leaved tamarisk, which is only good for twigs and wattle-work, replaced the fragrant plants and flowers. Wild and stunted kinds of thorny bushes, like the wild Lote-tree, which were =

17. That was the Requital
We gave them because
They ungratefully rejected Faith:³⁸¹⁵
And never do We give
(Such) requital except to such
As are ungrateful rejecters.

ذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
وَهُمْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا الْكَافِرِينَ

18. Between them and the Cities³⁸¹⁶
On which We had poured
Our blessings, We had placed
Cities in prominent positions,
And between them We had
Appointed stages of journey
In due proportion: "Travel therein,
Secure, by night and by day."

وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ الْقُرَى الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا قُرًى
ظَاهِرَةً وَغَدَّرْنَا فِيهَا السَّيْرَ سِيرُوا فِيهَا لِيَالٍ
وَأَيَّامًا آمِنِينَ

19. But they said:³⁸¹⁷ "Our Lord!

فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا بَعْدَ بَيْنِ أَسْفَارِنَا وَظَلَمُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ

= good for neither fruit nor shade, grew in place of the pomegranates, the date-palms and the grape-vines. The Lote-tree belongs to the family Rhamnaceæ, *Zizyphus Spina Christi*, of which (it is supposed) Christ's crown of thorns was made, allied to the *Zizyphus Jujuba*, or *ber* tree of India. Wild, it is shrubby, thorny and useless. In cultivation it bears good fruit, and some shade, and can be thornless, thus becoming a symbol of heavenly bliss: lvi. 28.

3815. *Kafûr*: intensive form: "those who deliberately and continuously reject Allah and are ungrateful for His Mercies, as shown by their constant wrong-doing.

3816. An instance is now given of the sort of covetousness on the part of the people of Sabâ, which ruined their prosperity and trade and cut their own throats. The old Frankincense route was the great Highway (*imâm mubîn* xv. 79; *sabîl muqîm*, xv. 76) between Arabia and Syria. Through Syria it connected with the great and flourishing Kingdoms of the Euphrates and Tigris valleys on the one hand and Egypt on the other, and with the great Roman Empire round the Mediterranean. At the other end, through the Yemen Coast, the road connected, by sea transport, with India, Malaya, and China. The Yemen-Syria road was much frequented, and Madâin Şālih was one of the stations on that route, and afterwards on the Pilgrim route: see Appendix No: 4 to S. xxvi. Syria was the land on which Allah "had poured His blessings", being a rich fertile country, where Abraham had lived: it includes the Holy Land of Palestine. The route was studded in the days of its prosperity with many stations (cities) close to each other, on which merchants could travel with ease and safety, "by night and by day". The close proximity of stations prevented the inroads of highwaymen.

3817. *Said*: in this and other places in the Qur-ân, "language" is used for thought or deed. The Commentators call it the "language of actual facts" (*zabân ḥāl*) as opposed to the "language of words" (*zabân qāl*).

Place longer distances
Between our journey-stages":³⁸¹⁸
But they wronged themselves
(therein).

At length We made them
As a tale (that is told),³⁸¹⁹
And We dispersed them
All in scattered fragments.
Verily in this are Signs
For every (soul that is)
Patiently constant and grateful.

20. And on them did Satan
Prove true his idea,³⁸²⁰
And they followed him, all
But a Party that believed.

فَجَعَلْنَاهُمْ أَحَادِيثَ وَمَرَقْنَاهُمْ كُلَّ مُمَرِّقٍ
إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّكُلِّ صَبَّارٍ شَكُورٍ ﴿١٩﴾

وَلَقَدْ صَدَقَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْإِلَهُ أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا إِفْرِيقًا
مِّنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

3818. The covetous Sabā people, in order to get more profit from travellers' supplies by concentrating them on a few stations which they could monopolise, tended to choke off traffic and ruin the big trade. Selfishness often runs counter to true self-interest. It is a historical fact that the great Yemen-Syria route in Arabia declined with the decline of Yemen. There were no doubt physical causes, but supreme above all were the moral causes, the grasping nature of the people, and their departure from the highest standards of righteousness.

3819. The people of Sabā were given every chance. They had prosperity, skill, trade and commerce, and a healthy and beautiful country. They also had, apparently, great virtues, and as long as they remained true to their virtues, i.e., to the Law of Allah, they remained happy and contented. But when they became covetous and selfish, and became jealous of other people's prosperity instead of rejoicing in it, they fell from grace and declined. It may be that the climate changed, the rainfall became scantier, perhaps on account of the cutting down of hill forests; trade routes changed, on account of the people falling off in the virtues that make men popular: behind all the physical causes was the root-cause, that they began to worship mammon, self, greed, or materialism. They fell into the snare of Satan. They gradually passed out of history, and became only a name in a story. Moral: it is only Allah's Mercy that can give true happiness or prosperity, and happiness or prosperity is only a snare unless used for the highest service of Allah and man.

3820. Cf. xvii. 62. Satan out of arrogance had said, when he asked for respite from the Most High: "I will bring (Adam's) descendants under my sway, all but a few." This was now proved true on the Sabā people. He had no power to force them. It was their own will that went wrong and put them into his power.

21. But he had no authority
Over them,—except that We
Might test the man who³⁸²¹
Believes in the Hereafter
From him who is in doubt
Concerning it: and thy Lord
Doth watch over all things.

SECTION 3.

22. Say: "Call upon other (gods)³⁸²²
Whom ye fancy, besides Allah:
They have no power,—
Not the weight of an atom,—
In the heavens or on earth:³⁸²³
No (sort of) share have they
Therein, nor is any of them
A helper to Allah.
23. "No intercession can avail
With Him, except for those³⁸²⁴
For whom He has granted
Permission. So far (is this

وَمَا كَانَ لَهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ
مَنْ يُّؤْمِنُ بِالْآخِرَةِ مِمَّنْ هُوَ مِنْهَا فِي شَكٍّ وَرَبُّكَ
عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ حَفِيفٌ ﴿٣١﴾

قُلْ أَدْعُوا الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ
لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْ قَالِ ذَرْفٍ السَّمَوَاتِ
وَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا لَهُمْ فِيهِمَا مِنْ شِرْكٍَ
وَمَا لَهُ مِنْهُمْ مِنْ ظَهِيرٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ
حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُزِعَ عَنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ

3821. *Might test*: the word in the original is *might know*. It is not that Allah does not know all. Why does He want to test? It is in order to help us subjectively, to train our will, to put us definitely the question, "Will you obey Allah or other than Allah?" Cf. n. 467 to iii. 154.

3822. Other objects of worship, such as Self, or Money, or Power, or things we imagine will bring us luck or prosperity, though they can do nothing of the kind.

3823. The false gods have no power whatever either in heaven or on earth, either in influencing our spiritual life or our ordinary worldly life. To suppose that they have some share, or that they can give some help to Allah, even though Allah is Supreme, is both false and blasphemous. Allah is One and Supreme, without sharer, helper, or equal.

3824. Cf. xx. 109, n. 2634, where I have explained the two possible modes of interpretation. Each soul is individually and personally responsible. And if there is any intercession, it can only be by Allah's gracious permission. For the Day of judgment will be a terrible Day, or Day of Wrath (*Dies Irae*) according to the Latin hymn, when the purest souls will be stupefied at the manifestation of Allah's Power. See next note.

The case) that, when terror
Is removed from their hearts³⁸²⁵
(At the Day of Judgment, then)
Will they say, 'What is it
That your Lord commanded?'³⁸²⁶
They will say, 'That which is
True and just; and He is
The Most High, Most Great'."

24. Say: "Who gives you³⁸²⁷
Sustenance, from the heavens
And the earth?" Say:
"It is Allah; and certain it is
That either we or ye³⁸²⁸
Are on right guidance
Or in manifest error!"

25. Say: "Ye shall not be
Questioned as to our sins,³⁸²⁹

قَالُوا الْحَقُّ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ ﴿٣٢﴾

﴿٣٣﴾ قُلْ مَنْ يَرْزُقُكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ
قُلْ اللَّهُ وَإِنَّا أَوْيَاكُمْ لَعَلَىٰ هُدًى
أَوْ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٣٤﴾

قُلْ لَا تَسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا أُجْرِمْنَا
وَلَا تَسْأَلُ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

3825. "Their hearts": the pronoun "their" is referred to the angels nearest to Allah. On the Day of Judgment there will be such an irresistible manifestation of Power that even they will be silent for a while, and will scarcely realise what is happening. They will question each other, and only thus will they regain their bearings. Or "their" may refer to those who seek intercession.

3826. In their mutual questionings they will realise that Allah's Judgment, as always, is right and just.

3827. There are six propositions introduced here with the word "Say", at verses 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, and 30. They clearly explain the doctrine of Unity (verse 22), the Mercy of Allah (verse 24), man's Personal Responsibility (verse 25), the Final Justice of Allah (verse 26), Allah's Power and Wisdom (verse 27), and the Inevitability of the Judgment, by which true values will be restored (verse 30).

3828. Right and Wrong, Good and Evil, are incompatible, one with another. In this matter we can make no compromise. It is true that in men there may be various degrees of good or evil mixed together, and we have to tolerate men as our fellow-creatures, with all their faults and shortcomings. But this does not mean that we can worship Allah and Mammon together. Wrong is the negation of Right as light is of darkness. Though there may be apparently varying depths of darkness, this is only due to the imperfection of our vision: it is varying strengths of light as perceived by our relative powers of sight. So we may perceive the Light of Allah in varying degrees according to our spiritual vision. But in simple questions of Right or Wrong, we are faced by the Categorical Imperative.

3829. Therefore do not persecute us, or bring personal animus to bear on us. We must do our duty in declaring the universal Message, which is for you as much as for us.

Nor shall we be questioned
As to what ye do."

26. Say: "Our Lord will gather us
Together and will in the end
Decide the matter between us
(And you) in truth and justice:³⁸³⁰
And He is the One to decide,
The One Who knows all."

قُلْ يَجْمَعُ بَيْنَنَا رَبُّنَا ثُمَّ يَقْضِي بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ
وَهُوَ الْفَتَّاحُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٣٨٣٠﴾

27. Say: "Show me those whom
Ye have joined with Him
As partners: by no means
(Can ye). Nay, He is Allah,³⁸³¹
The Exalted in Power,
The Wise."

قُلْ أَرُونِي الَّذِينَ أَهْكَمْتُمْ بِهِ شُرَكَاءَ كَلَّا بَلْ
هُوَ اللَّهُ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٣٨٣١﴾

28. We have not sent thee
But as a (Messenger)³⁸³²
To all mankind, giving them
Glad tidings, and warning them
(Against sin), but most men
Know not.

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ إِلَّا كَافَّةً لِّلنَّاسِ بَشِيرًا وَنَذِيرًا
وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٨٣٢﴾

29. They say: "When will this
Promise (come to pass)
If ye are telling the truth?"

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَٰذَا الْوَعْدُ إِن كُنتُمْ
صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣٨٣٣﴾

3830. Human controversies are vain and inconclusive. If you put your trust in Allah and we put our trust in Allah, we belong to one Brotherhood, and we shall see the perfect Truth finally when the Time comes.

3831. Wisdom and Power only belong to Allah. If you put your trust in other things, they will fail you, because they do not exist—as objects of worship. All else that you set your hearts upon will and must fail you, because they cannot in any wise be brought into rivalry with Allah.

3832. Allah's Revelation, through the holy Prophet, was not meant for one family or tribe, one race or set of people. It was meant for all mankind, to whom, if they turn to Allah, it is a Message of the glad tidings of His Mercy, and if they do not turn to Him, it is a warning against sin and the inevitable Punishment. That the Punishment does not come immediately (as far as they perceive) is no reason for doubting it. It has been declared in clear and unequivocal terms, and nothing can be more certain. Why delay? Why ask carping questions? Why not profit by the Message, turn to Allah in repentance, and bring forth the fruits of righteousness?

30. Say: "The appointment to you
Is for a Day, which ye
Cannot put back for an hour³⁸³³
Nor put forward."

قُلْ لَكُمْ مِيعَادُ يَوْمٍ لَا تَسْتَفِخِرُونَ عَنْهُ سَاعَةً
وَلَا تَسْتَفِيدُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

SECTION 4.

31. The Unbelievers say:
"We shall neither believe
In this scripture nor in (any)
That (came) before it."³⁸³⁴
Couldst thou but see when
The wrong-doers will be made
To stand before their Lord,
Throwing back the word
(of blame)³⁸³⁵
On one another! Those who
Were deemed weak will say
To the arrogant ones:³⁸³⁶
"Had it not been for you,
We should certainly
Have been believers!"

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ بِهَذَا الْقُرْآنِ
وَلَا بِالَّذِي بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ
مَوْفُوقُونَ عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ يَرْجِعُ بَعْضُهُمْ
إِلَى بَعْضٍ الْقَوْلَ يَقُولُ الَّذِينَ اسْتُضْعِفُوا
لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لَوْلَا أَنْتُمْ لَكُنَّا مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

3833. When that Day actually arrives, your period of probation will have passed. It will be too late. Now is the time for action.

3834. To the Pagans all scriptures are taboo, whether it be the Qur-ān or any Revelation that came before it. The people of the Book despised the Pagans, but in their arrogant assumption of superiority, prevented them, by their example, from accepting the latest and most universal Scripture when it came in the form of the Qur-ān. This relative position, of men who fancy themselves on their knowledge, and men whom they despise but exploit and mislead, always exists on this earth. I have mentioned the people of the Book and the Pagan Arabs merely by way of illustration.

3835. One disbelief is as bad as another. There is little to choose between them. But when the final account will be taken, there will be mutual recriminations between the one and the other.

3836. The Pagans will naturally say to the people of the Book: "You misled us; you had previous Revelations, and you should have known how Allah sent His Messengers; had it not been for your bad example, we should have received Allah's Revelation and become Believers." Or the humble followers will say this to their leaders, or those less gifted will say to those by whom they were misled and exploited. The dichotomy is between such as pretentiously held their heads high in the world and such as they profited by but held in contempt.

32. The arrogant ones will say
To those who had been deemed
weak:

"Was it we who kept you
Back from Guidance after
It reached you? Nay, rather,
It was ye who transgressed."³⁸³⁷

قَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعِفُوا
أَنَحْنُ صَدَدْنَاكُمْ عَنِ الْهُدَىٰ بَعْدَ إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ
بَلْ كُنْتُمْ مُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

33. Those who had been deemed weak
Will say to the arrogant ones:

"Nay! it was a plot
(Of yours) by day and by night."³⁸³⁸
Behold! ye (constantly) ordered us
To be ungrateful to Allah
And to attribute equals to Him!"³⁸³⁹
They are filled with remorse.³⁸⁴⁰
When they see the Chastisement:
We shall put yokes
On the necks of the Unbelievers:
It would only be a requital
For their (ill) Deeds.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ اسْتَضَعِفُوا لِلَّذِينَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا
بَلْ مَكْرُ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ إِذْ تَأْمُرُونَنَا أَنْ نَكْفُرَ بِاللَّهِ
وَنَجْعَلَ لَهُ أَنْدَادًا وَأَسْرَأُ النَّدَامَةَ لَمَّا رَأَوُا
الْعَذَابَ وَجَعَلْنَا الْأَغْلَالَ فِي أَعْنَاقِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
هَلْ يُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

34. Never did We send
A Warner to a population,

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّنْ نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا
إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

3837. In the mutual reproaches between the misleaders and the misled ones, there will be a grain of truth on both sides, and yet both were guilty in not realising their own personal responsibility.

3838. The more intelligent ones who exploit the weaker ones are constantly plotting night and day to keep the latter ignorant and under their thumb. They show them the ways of Evil, because by that means they are more in their power.

3839. If all men worshipped the true God, and none but Him, they could not on the one hand be trampled upon, and on the other hand they could not be unjust. It is in the worship of false ideals or false gods that alluring structures of fraud and injustice are built up.

3840. Cf. x. 54, and n. 1445. All these mutual recriminations would be swallowed up in the general realisation of the Truth by both sides in the Hereafter. They would be prepared openly to declare their repentance, but it would be too late. The yoke of slavery to Evil will be on their necks. Allah's justice put it there, but what else could it do? Their own sins will cry out against them and hold them under their yokes.

But the wealthy ones among them³⁸⁴¹

Said: "We believe not
In the (Message) with which
Ye have been sent."

35. They said: "We have more
In wealth and in sons,³⁸⁴²
And we cannot be chastised".

36. Say: "Verily my Lord enlarges
And restricts the Provision³⁸⁴³
To whom He pleases, but
Most men know not."

SECTION 5.

37. It is not your wealth
Nor your sons, that will
Bring you nearer to Us³⁸⁴⁴
In degree: but only
Those who believe and work
Righteousness—these are
The ones for whom there is

وَقَالُوا لَنَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا
وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

قُلْ إِنْ رَفِيَ يَسْطُرُ الرِّزْقِ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَقْدِرُ وَلَكِنَّ
أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

وَمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُكُمْ بِالَّتِي تُقَرِّبُكُمْ عِندَنَا
زُلْفَىٰ إِلَّا مَنْ ءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ
لَهُمْ جَزَاءُ الْوَعْدِ بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَهُمْ فِي الْغُرُفَاتِ
ءَامِنُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

3841. Whenever the Message of Allah comes, the vested interests range themselves against it. Worldly power has made them arrogant; worldly pleasures have deadened their sensibility to Truth. They reject the Message because it attacks their false position.

3842. Their arrogance is openly based on their worldly power and position, their family influence, and the strength of their man-power. Turn back again to the contrast drawn between the arrogant ones and those whom they despised, in verses 31-33.

3843. *Provision* (or *Sustenance*): good things of all kinds in this life, material goods as well as power, opportunities, influence, mental gifts, etc. These do not necessarily all go to the good, nor is their denial to be interpreted to mean that it is a withdrawal of Allah's favour. Very often the contrary is the case. Their distribution is in accordance with the Universal Plan and Purpose, which is all-wise and all-good. But ignorant people cannot understand this.

3844. The true test of progress in spiritual life is to be measured by other things than material wealth and influence. What we have to ask ourselves is: are we the least bit nearer to Allah?

A multiplied Reward³⁸⁴⁵

For their deeds, while

Secure they (reside)

In the dwellings on high!³⁸⁴⁶

38. Those who strive against

Our Signs, to frustrate them,³⁸⁴⁷

Will be given over

Into Chastisement.

39. Say: "Verily my Lord enlarges

And restricts the Sustenance³⁸⁴⁸

To such of His servants

As He pleases: and nothing

Do ye spend in the least

(In His Cause) but He

Replaces it: for He is³⁸⁴⁹

The Best of those who

Grant Sustenance.

40. On the Day He will

Gather them all together,

وَالَّذِينَ يَسْعَوْنَ فِي آيَاتِنَا مُعْجِزِينَ أُولَٰئِكَ

فِي الْعَذَابِ مُخَضَّرُونَ ﴿٣٨﴾

قُلْ إِنْ رَفِيَ يَبْسُطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ
وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ وَمَا أَنْفَقْتُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَهُوَ يُخْلِفُهُ

وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الرَّازِقِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

وَيَوْمَ يُحْشَرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَكَةِ

أَهْتُولَاءِ إِنِّي أَتَمُّ كَأَنَّا يَعْبُدُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

3845. Cf. xxx. 39. All worldly good is but a shadow that will pass away. Its intrinsic and eternal value is small. But those who work righteousness in Faith are on the true path of self-development. The reward they will get will be infinitely more than their merits entitle them to. For they will partake of the boundless Bounties of Allah.

3846. Their happiness will not only be great in quantity ("multiplied"), but it will be of a specially sublime quality ("dwellings on high"), and it will endure without any chance of its loss or diminution ("secure they reside").

3847. Cf. xxxiv. 5, where the argument was urged that human efforts to defeat Allah's Plan will only bring humiliation to those who indulge in them. Here the argument is rounded off by the statement that such efforts, besides their failure, will land them in an abyss of punishment contrasted with the "dwellings on high" of the blessed ones.

3848. Cf. xxxiv. 36 above, and n. 3843.

3849. Even in the seeming inequality of distribution of the good things of life, Allah has a wise and merciful purpose; for nothing arises by chance. He is the best to give us, now and evermore, just those things which subserve our real needs and advance our inner development.

And say to the angels,³⁸⁵⁰
 "Was it you that these
 Men used to worship?"

41. They will say, "Glory to Thee!
 Thou art our
 Protector³⁸⁵¹ – not them.
 Nay, but they worshipped
 The Jinns:³⁸⁵² most of them
 Believed in them."

42. So on that Day
 No power shall they have
 Over each other, for profit
 Or harm: and We shall
 Say to the wrong-doers,
 "Taste ye the Chastisement"³⁸⁵³
 Of the Fire,—the which
 Ye were wont to deny!"

43. When Our Clear Signs
 Are rehearsed to them,
 They say, "This is only

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِئْسَ مِن دُونِهِمْ بَلْ كَانُوا
 يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُّؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يَمْلِكُ بَعْضُكُم لِّبَعْضٍ نَّفْعًا وَلَا ضَرًّا
 وَنَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ
 النَّارِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ بِهَا تَكْذِبُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

وَإِذَا نُنَادِيهِمْ يَتَّبِعُونَ قَالُوا مَا هَذَا إِلَّا لَارْجُلٌ

3850. Here we have the case of the worship of angels or supposed Powers of Allah, or supposed beneficent spirits that men turn to instead of worshipping the true God. In fact these are mere names to the false worshippers. It is not the Good that they worship but the Evil, which leads them astray.

3851. *Walī* in Arabic may mean Friend either in the sense of Protector and Benefactor or in the sense of the Beloved. The tie of benevolence, confidence, and friendship is implied, either active or passive. The angels first proclaim their dependence on Allah and their need of His protection, and then disclaim any idea of their having protected or encouraged the false worshippers to worship beings other than Allah. They go further, and suggest that when men pretended to worship angels, they worshipped, not angels, but Jinns. See next note.

3852. *Jinns*: see vi. 100 and n. 929. The false worshippers pretended to worship the bright and radiant angels of good, but in reality worshipped the dark and hidden forces of evil,—in the life around them. They trusted and believed in such forces of evil, although such forces of evil had really no power.

3853. The supposed "rivals" of Allah—the false things whereon men set their hopes and fears—will have no power whatever when true values are restored; and the Fire—the Penalty—which they doubted or derided, will become the dominating real thing in their experience.

A man who wishes
To hinder you from the (worship)³⁸⁵⁴
Which your fathers practised."
And they say, "This is
Only a falsehood invented!"
And the Unbelievers say
Of the Truth when it comes
To them, "This is nothing
But evident magic!"

44. But We had not given
Them Books which they could
Study, nor sent messengers³⁸⁵⁵
To them before thee
As Warners.

45. And their predecessors rejected
(The Truth); these have
Not received a tenth
Of what We had granted³⁸⁵⁶

يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَصُدَّكُمْ عَنْ مَا كَانُوا يَعْبُدُ آبَاؤُكُمْ وَقَالُوا
مَا هَذَا إِلَّا إِفْكٌ مُفْتَرٍ وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
لِلْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا أَسْحَرٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿٤٣﴾

وَمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ مِنْ كُتُبٍ يَدْرُسُونَهَا وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا
إِلَيْهِمْ قَبْلَكَ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

وَكَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَمَا بَلَّغُوا أَمْعَارَ
مَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ فَكَذَّبُوا رَسُولِيَّ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ نَكِيرِ ﴿٤٥﴾

3854. Apart from the worship of Evil in the guise of the Powers of Light, there is another form of false worship, which depends on ancestral tradition. "Why" it is said "should we not do as our fathers did?" They reject a new prophet of Truth simply because his teaching does not agree with the ways of their ancestors. The answer to this is given in verse 44 below. But meanwhile the rejectors' objection to new Truth is stated in three forms: (1) our ancestors knew nothing of this; (2) the story of inspiration is false; it is merely an invention; we do not believe in inspiration; (3) when in some particular points, the new Truth does work wonders in men's hearts, they account for it by saying it is magic. The third objection is merely traditional. What is magic? If it was merely deception, surely the Truth has proved itself to be above deception. The second objection is answered by the fact that the Messenger who comes with new spiritual Truth is acknowledged to be truthful in other relations of life: why should he be false where his preaching brings him no gain but much sorrow and persecution? For the ancestral objection see next note.

3855. The ancestors (as in the case of the Arabs of the Times of Ignorance) had received no revelation of the clear kind which a messenger and a Book bring them. This is a reason for welcoming, not for rejecting new Truth.

3856. Passing to Peoples before the immediate ancestors, the People of the Book, or the People of Sabā and 'Ād and Thamūd, had received favours and gifts, power and wealth, ten times more than were enjoyed by the Pagan Quraish. Yet when they turned away from Allah's Truth, Allah turned away from them, and what terrible consequences descended on them when they lost Allah's Grace! This should make everyone humble, =

To those: yet when they rejected
My messengers, how (terrible)
Was My punishment!

SECTION 6.

46. Say: "I do admonish you
On one point: that ye
Do stand up before Allah,-
(It may be) in pairs,³⁸⁵⁷
Or (it may be) singly,-
And reflect (within yourselves):
Your Companion is not³⁸⁵⁸
Possessed: he is no less
Than a Warner to you,
In face of a terrible
Chastisement".

47. Say: "whatever reward do I
Ask of you: it is
Yours: my reward³⁸⁵⁹
Is only due from Allah:
And He is Witness
To all things."

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَعِظُكُمْ بِوَحْدَةٍ أَنْ تَقُومُوا لِلَّهِ مَشْنَى
وَفَرْدَى ثُمَّ تَنفَكُّوْا مَا بِصَاحِبِكُمْ مِنْ جِنَّةٍ
إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ لَّكُمْ بَيْنَ يَدَيْ عَذَابٍ شَدِيدٍ ﴿٤٦﴾

قُلْ مَا سَأَلْتُكُمْ مِنْ أَجْرٍ فَهُوَ لَكُمْ إِنْ أَجْرِيَ
إِلَّا عَلَى اللَّهِ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ ﴿٤٧﴾

= not least the posterity of Muhammad the Messenger if they forsake Allah's Truths! For they have received a higher Teaching!

3857. A crowd mentality is not the best for the perception of the final spiritual truths. For these, it is necessary that each soul should commune within itself with earnest sincerity as before Allah: if it requires a Teacher, let it seek out one, or it may be that it wants the strengthening of the inner convictions that dawn on it, by the support of a sympathiser or friend. But careful and heart-felt reflection is necessary to appraise the higher Truths.

3858. Note that in verses 46, 47, 48, 49 and 50, arguments are suggested to the Prophet, by which he can convince any right-thinking man of his sincerity and truth. Here the argument is that he is not possessed or out of his mind. If he is different from ordinary men, it is because he has to give a warning of a terrible spiritual danger to the men whom he loves but who will not understand his Message.

3859. Cf. x. 72. The second argument is that he has nothing to gain from them. His message is for their own good. He is willing to suffer persecution and insult, because he has to fulfil his mission from Allah.

48. Say: "Verily my Lord
Doth cast the Truth,"³⁸⁶⁰
He that has full knowledge
Of (all) that is hidden."

49. Say: "The Truth has arrived,³⁸⁶¹
And Falsehood showeth not its face
And will not return

50. Say: "If I am astray,
I only stray to the loss
Of my own soul: but if
I receive guidance, it is"³⁸⁶²
Because of the inspiration
Of my Lord to me:
It is He Who hears
All things, and is (ever) near."

51. If thou couldst but see
When they will quake
With terror; but then

قُلْ إِنْ رَبِّي يَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَٰمِ الْغُيُوبِ ﴿٤٨﴾

قُلْ جَاءَ الْحَقُّ وَمَا يُبَدِّلُ الْبَاطِلُ وَمَا يَعْبُدُ ﴿٤٩﴾

قُلْ إِنْ ضَلَلْتُ فَإِنَّمَا أَضِلُّ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِي وَإِنِ اهْتَدَيْتُ
فَمَا يُؤْتِيهِ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي إِنَّهُ سَمِيعٌ قَرِيبٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذْ فَرَغُوا فَلَا قُوَّةَ وَاتَّخَذُوا مِنْ مَّكَانٍ
قَرِيبٍ ﴿٥١﴾

3860. Allah's Truth is so vast that no man in this life can compass the whole of it. But Allah in His mercy selects His servants on whom it is cast like a mantle. They see enough to be able to teach their fellow men. It is through that mantle—that mission received from Allah—that a messenger can speak with authority to men, and this is his third argument.

3861. The fourth argument is that the Truth is final: it does not come and go: it creates new situations and new developments, and if by chance it *seems* to be defeated for a time, it comes back and restores the true balance;—unlike Falsehood, which by its very nature is doomed to perish: xvii. 81. The Prophet's credentials are known by the test of Time. This was already becoming apparent to discerning eyes when this Sūra was revealed in Makkah, but it became clear to the whole world with the story of Islām's progress in Madinah.

3862. If it could possibly be supposed that the Prophet was a self-deceived visionary, it would affect him only, and could not fail to appear in his personality. But in fact he was steady in his constancy and Faith, and he not only went from strength to strength, but won the enduring and whole-hearted love and devotion of his nearest and dearest and of those who most came into contact with him. How was this possible, unless he had the Truth and the inspiration of Allah behind him? This is the fifth and last argument in this passage.

There will be no escape³⁸⁶³
(For them), and they will be
Seized from a position
(Quite) near.

52. And they wil say,
"We do believe (now)
In the (Truth)"; but how³⁸⁶⁴
Could they receive (Faith)
From a position (so) far off,—

53. Seeing that they did reject
Faith (entirely) before, and
That they cast³⁸⁶⁵
(Conjectures) with regard
To the unseen
From a position far off?

54. And between them
And their desires,
Is placed a barrier,³⁸⁶⁶

وَقَالُوا آمَنَّا بِهِ وَأَنَّى لَهُمُ التَّنَاقُشُ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ
بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٢﴾

وَقَدْ كَفَرُوا بِهِ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَيَقْذِفُونَ
بِالْغَيْبِ مِنْ مَّكَانٍ بَعِيدٍ ﴿٥٣﴾

وَجِيلَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَبَيْنَ مَا يَشْتَهُونَ كَمَا فُعِلَ بِأَشْيَاعِهِمْ

3863. After the arguments for the reality and triumph of Truth, we are asked to contemplate the position of the opposers of Truth when Truth is established. They will be struck with terror: for Truth is all-compelling. They will wish they could get away from that position, but that would be impossible. They will not be able to move far; they will be held fast to the consequences of their own earlier conduct. They will be caught quite close to the point of their departure from Truth.

3864. They will now profess their faith in Truth, but of what value will such profession be? Faith is a belief in things unseen: now everything is plain and open before them. The position in which they could have received Faith is left far off behind them, when Truth was struggling and asked for help or asylum, and they cruelly, arrogantly, insultingly repudiated Truth.

3865. Not only did they reject the Truth of the Unseen (the true Reality), but they spread all sorts of false and malicious insinuations at the preachers of Truth, calling them dishonest men, liars, hypocrites, and so on. They did it like a coward taking up a sneaking position far from the fight and speeding arrows at a distant target.

3866. What they desire is to suppress Truth and to indulge in the satisfaction of their own evil, selfish motives. They will be baulked in both, and that itself will be their anguish and punishment. That has always been the law in the eternal struggle between Right and Wrong. All partisans of such narrow cliques have always suffered the same fate.

As was done in the past
 With their partisans.³⁸⁶⁷
 For they were indeed
 In suspicious (disquieting) doubt.³⁸⁶⁸

مِنْ قَبْلِ إِنْهُمْ كَانُوا فِي شَكٍّ مُرِيبٍ

3867. Note that verses 51-54 are a powerful description of the conflict between right and wrong, and may be understood in many meanings. (1) The description applies to the position in the final Hereafter, as compared with the position in this life. (2) It applies to the position of triumphant Islām in Madinah and later as compared with the position of persecuted Islām in its early days in Makkah. (3) It applies to the reversal of the position of right and wrong at various phases of the world's history, or of (4) individual history.

3868. Cf. xiv. 9, and see n. 1884.