

## INTRODUCTION TO SŪRAT *Al-Kahf*, 18

It has been explained in the Introduction to S. xvii how the five Sūras xvii to xxi develop the theme of the individual soul's religious history, and how they fit into the general scheme of exposition.

This particular Makkan Sūra may be called a lesson on the brevity and mystery of Life. First there is the story of the Companions of the Cave who slept therein for a long period, and yet thought they had been there only a day or less. Then there is the story of the mysterious Teacher who shows Moses how Life itself is a parable. And further there is the story of Zul-qarnain, the two-horned one, the powerful ruler of west and east, who made an iron wall to protect the weak against the strong. The parables refer to the brevity, uncertainty, and vanity of this life; to the many paradoxes in it, which can only be understood by patience and the fulness of knowledge; and to the need of guarding our spiritual gains against the incursions of evil.

*Summary.*—The Qur-ān is a direction and a warning. This life is brief and subject to vicissitudes. Our ideas of Time are defective, as shown in the story of the Companions of the Cave, who had faith, truth, patience, and other virtues. But their life was a mystery that can be fathomed but by few (xviii. 1-22).

Knowledge is for Allah: be on your guard against idle conjectures and cocksure hopes. Learn from the Qur-ān, Parable of the man who is puffed up with this world's goods and is brought to nought (xviii. 23-44).

This life is uncertain and variable: goodness and virtue are better and more durable. For the Day of Reckoning will come, with its Mercy and its Wrath (xviii. 45-59).

Moses in his thirst for knowledge forgot his limitations. Patience and faith were enjoined on him, and he understood when the paradoxes of Life were explained (xviii. 60-82).

*Zul-qarnain* had a wide dominion: he punished the guilty and rewarded the good: he protected the weak from the lawless: but he had faith, and valued the guidance of Allah. Allah is One, and His service is righteousness (xviii. 83-110).

*Al-Kahf, or the Cave.*

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

1. Praise be to Allah,<sup>2325</sup>  
Who hath sent to His Servant  
The Book, and hath allowed  
Therein no Crookedness:<sup>2326</sup>
2. (He hath made it) Straight<sup>2327</sup>  
(And Clear) in order that  
He may warn (the godless)  
Of a terrible Punishment  
From Him, and that He  
May give Glad Tidings  
To the Believers who work  
Righteous deeds, that they  
Shall have a goodly Reward,
3. Wherein they shall  
Remain for ever<sup>2328</sup>

سُورَةُ الْكَافِرَاتِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَى عَبْدِهِ الْكِتَابَ  
وَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ لَمْ رِعْوَجًا ۝١

فَمَّا لِيُذِيرَ بَأْسًا شَدِيدًا مَن لَّدُنْهُ  
وَيُبَشِّرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ  
الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ أَجْرًا حَسَنًا ۝٢

مَنْ كَانَتْ فِيهِ أَبَدًا ۝٣

2325. See n. 2324 to xvii. 111. The theme of the last Sūra, that Allah is good and worthy of all praise from His creatures, to whom He has granted a clear revelation, is continued in this Sūra. The spirit of man makes gradual progress upwards, through the grace and mercy of Allah.

2326. Some people's idea of a Sacred Book is that it should be full of mysteries—dark corners, ambiguous expressions, words so far removed from human speech that they cover anything or nothing. Pagan oracles were couched in language which suggested one meaning to the hearer and claimed to have the very opposite meaning in the light of events which actually happened subsequently. They were distinctly crooked, not straight. In the next verse the word "Straight" (*qaiyim*) is used to characterize the Qur-ān, in contrast to this word "crooked" (*i'waj*). See also xix. 36 n. 2488.

2327. *Qaiyim*: straight, that which has no bends and no corners to mystify people, that which speaks clearly and unambiguously, that which guides to the right path. Cf. ix. 36, where the adjective is used for a straight usage, in contrast to usages, which tend to mystify and deceive people. The Qur-ān is above all things straight, clear, and perspicuous. Its directions are plain for everyone to understand. Any book that deals with the highest mysteries of spiritual life must necessarily have portions whose full meaning is clearer to some minds than to others not so well prepared. But here there is nowhere any mystification, any desire to wrap up things in dark sayings repugnant to human reason. Allah's purpose is to give clear warning of spiritual dangers and lead up to the highest bliss.

2328. Cf. iv. 122, xliii. 71, lxx. 11, xcvi. 8.

4. Further, that He may warn  
Those (also) who say,  
"Allah hath begotten a son":<sup>2329</sup>
5. No knowledge have they  
Of such a thing, nor  
Had their fathers. It is  
A grievous thing that issues  
From their mouths as a saying.<sup>2330</sup>  
What they say is nothing  
But falsehood!
6. Thou wouldst only, perchance,  
Fret thyself to death,  
Following after them, in grief,<sup>2331</sup>  
If they believe not  
In this Message.
7. That which is on earth  
We have made but as  
A glittering show for it,<sup>2332</sup>

وَسُيِّرَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا اتَّخَذَ اللَّهُ وَلَدًا ﴿١﴾

مَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ وَلَا لِآبَائِهِمْ كَبُرَتْ كَلِمَةً  
تَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ إِنَّ يَقُولُونَ إِلَّا كَذِبًا ﴿٢﴾

فَلَعَلَّكَ بَدِيعُ خَلْقِ نَفْسِكَ عَلَى آثَرِهِمْ أَنْ لَمْ تَرْؤُوهُمْ  
بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ أَسَفًا ﴿٣﴾

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَهَا لِنَبْلُوهُمْ  
أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا ﴿٤﴾

2329. The warning is not only needed for those who deny Allah or deny His Message, but also for those whose false ideas of Allah degrade religion in supposing that Allah begot a son, for Allah is One and is High above any ideas of physical reproduction.

2330. The attribution of a son "begotten" to Allah has no basis in fact or in reason. It is only a "word" or "saying" that issues out of their mouths. It is not even a dogma that is reasoned out or can be explained in any way that is consistent with the sublime attributes of Allah.

2331. In a reasonable world the preaching of a reasonable Faith like that of Islam would win universal acceptance. But the world is not altogether reasonable. It caused great distress to the unselfish Preacher of Islam that his Message met with so much opposition. He wanted to point the way to salvation. He only got, in the Makkans period, abuse from the chiefs of the Makkans—abuse and persecution, not only for himself but for the Truth which he was preaching. A heart less stout than his might have been appalled at what seemed the hopeless task of reclaiming the world from falsehood, superstition, selfishness, wrong, and oppression. He is here consoled, and told that he was not to fret himself to death: he was nobly doing his duty, and, as after-events showed, the seed of Truth was already germinating, although this was not visible at the time. Besides, these "chiefs" and "leaders" were only strutting in false plumes: their glory was soon to fade for ever.

2332. This world's goods—worldly power, glory, wealth, position, and all that men scramble for,—are but a fleeting show. The possession or want of them does not betoken a man's real value or position in the coming world, the world which is to endure. Yet =

وَإِنَّا لَجَاعِلُونَ مَا عَلَيْهَا صَعِيدًا جُرُزًا ﴿٨﴾

- أَمْ حَسِبْتَ أَنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْكَهْفِ وَالرَّقِيمِ كَانُوا  
مِنَ الْإِنِّتِنَا عِجَابًا ﴿١﴾
- إِذْ أَوَى الْفِتْيَةُ إِلَى الْكَهْفِ فَقَالُوا رَبَّنَا إِنَّا  
مِنَ لَدُنْكَ رَحِمَةٌ وَهِيَ لَنَا مِنْ أَمْرِنَا رَشْدًا ﴿٢﴾

2337. The bare Christian story (without the spiritual lessons taught in the Qur-ān) is told in Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (end of chapter 33). In the reign of a Roman Emperor who persecuted the Christians, seven Christian youths of Ephesus left the town and hid themselves in a cave in a mountain near by. They fell =

And dispose of our affair  
For us in the right way!"<sup>2338</sup>

11. Then We drew (a veil)<sup>2339</sup>  
Over their ears, for a number  
Of years, in the Cave,  
(So that they heard not):

12. Then We roused them,<sup>2340</sup>  
In order to test which

فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَىٰ آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ  
سِنِينَ عَدَدًا

ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِنَعْلَمَ أَيُّ الْحِزْبَيْنِ

= asleep, and remained asleep for some generations or centuries. When the wall which sealed up the cave was being demolished, the youths awoke. They still thought of the world in which they had previously lived. They had no idea of the duration of time. But when one of them went to the town to purchase provisions, he found that the whole world had changed. The Christian religion, instead of being persecuted was fashionable: in fact it was now the State religion. His dress and speech, and the money which he brought, seemed to belong to another world. This attracted attention. The great ones of the land visited the Cave, and verified the tale by questioning the man's Companions.

When the story became very popular and circulated throughout the Roman Empire, we may well suppose that an Inscription was put up at the mouth of the Cave. See verse 9 and n. 2336. This inscription was probably to be seen for many years afterwards, as Ephesus was a famous city on the west coast of Asia Minor, about forty to fifty miles south of Smyrna. Later on, the Khalifa Wāthiq (842-846 A.D.) sent an expedition to examine and identify the locality, as he did about the Zul-Qarnain barrier in Central Asia.

A popular story circulating from mouth to mouth would necessarily be vague as to dates and vary very much in details. Somewhere about the 6th century A.D. a Syriac writer reduced it to writing. He suggested that the youths were seven in number; that they went to sleep in the reign of the Emperor Decius (who reigned from 249 to 251 A.D., and who was a violent persecutor of Christianity); and that they awoke in the reign of Theodosius II, who reigned from 408 to 450 A.D. In our literature Decius is known as Daqyānus (from the adjectival Latin from Decianus), and the name stands as a symbol of injustice and oppression, and also of things old fashioned and out-of-date, as *res Decianae* must have been two or three centuries after Decius.

2338. The youths hid in the cave, but they trusted in Allah, and made over their whole case to Him in prayer. Then they apparently fell asleep, and knew nothing of what was happening in the world outside.

2339. *Drew (a veil) over their ears:* i.e., sealed their ears, so that they heard nothing. As they were in the Cave they saw nothing. So they were completely cut off from the outer world. It was as if they had died, with their knowledge and ideas remaining at the point of time when they had entered the Cave. It is as if a watch stops at the exact moment of some accident, and any one taking it up afterwards can precisely fix the time of the accident.

2340. *Roused them:* or raised them up from their sleep or whatever condition they had fallen into (xviii, 18), so that they began to perceive the things around them, but only with the memories of the time at which they had ceased to be in touch with the world.

Of the two parties was best<sup>2341</sup>  
At calculating the term  
Of years they had tarried!

أَحْصَى لِمَا لَبِثُوا أَمَدًا ﴿١٢﴾

## SECTION 2.

13. We relate to thee their story  
In truth: they were youths  
Who believed in their Lord,  
And We increased them  
In guidance.<sup>2342</sup>

نَحْنُ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ نَبَأَهُم بِالْحَقِّ  
إِنَّهُمْ فِتْيَةٌ آمَنُوا بِرَبِّهِمْ وَزِدْنَاهُمْ هُدًى ﴿١٣﴾

14. We gave strength to their hearts:<sup>2343</sup>  
Behold, they stood up<sup>2344</sup>  
And said: "Our Lord is  
The Lord of the heavens  
And of the earth: never  
Shall we call upon any god  
Other than Him: if we  
Did, we should indeed  
Have uttered an enormity!

وَرَبَطْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ إِذْ قَامُوا فَقَالُوا رَبُّنَا رَبُّ  
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ لَنْ نَدْعُو مِنْ دُونِهِ إِلَهًا  
لَقَدْ قُلْنَا إِذَا سَطَطًا ﴿١٤﴾

15. "These our people have taken<sup>2345</sup>  
For worship gods other

هَؤُلَاءِ قَوْمُنَا اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً  
لَوْ لَا يَأْتُوكَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ بَيِّنٍ

2341. When they awoke to consciousness, they had lost all count of time. Though they had all entered together, and lain together in the same place for the same length of time, their impressions of the time they had passed were quite different. Time is thus related to our own internal experiences. We have to learn the lesson that men as good as ourselves may yet differ as to their reactions to certain facts, and that in such matters disputes are unseemly. It is best to say, "Allah knows best" (xviii. 19).

2342. Their Faith carried them higher and higher on the road to Truth. Faith is cumulative. Each step leads higher and higher, by the grace and mercy of Allah.

2343. So that they were not afraid to speak out openly, and protest the truth of the Unity which they clearly saw in their own minds and hearts.

2344. We may suppose them to have taken their stand and made a public protest before they betook themselves to the Cave (xviii. 16). The story really begins at xviii. 13, and the verses xviii. 9-12 may be considered as introductory. As the emphasis is on spiritual lessons, the facts stated in the introductory part are passed over lightly in the story.

2345. Besides the heathen gods, the cult of the Emperors also became fashionable in the Roman Empire in the first three centuries of the Christian Era. The statue of Diana (Artemis) at Ephesus had been one of the wonders of the ancient world. The city was =

Than Him: why do they  
Not bring forward an authority  
Clear (and convincing)  
For what they do?  
Who doth more wrong  
Than such as invent  
A falsehood against Allah?

16. "When ye turn away  
From them and the things  
They worship other than Allah,  
Betake yourselves to the Cave:  
Your Lord will shower  
His mercies on you  
And dispose of your affair  
Towards comfort and ease."<sup>2346</sup>

17. Thou wouldst have seen  
The sun, when it rose,  
Declining to the right<sup>2347</sup>  
From their Cave, and when  
It set, turning away  
From them to the left,  
While they lay in the open  
Space in the midst  
Of the Cave. Such are  
Among the Signs of Allah:

فَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ أَفْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا ﴿١٥﴾

وَإِذَا عَزَلْتَ تِلْكَ أَمْثَلَهُمْ وَمَا يَسْبُورُونَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ فَأَوْفَى  
إِلَى الْكَهْفِ بِنَشْرِكِكُمْ رَبِّكُمْ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ  
وَيَهَيِّئْ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَمْرِكُمْ مَرْفَقًا ﴿١٦﴾

وَقَرَى الشَّمْسُ إِذَا طَلَعَتْ تَزْوُورًا عَنْ كَهْفِهِمْ  
ذَاتَ الْيَمِينِ وَإِذَا غَرَبَتْ تَقَرُّضُهُمْ ذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ  
وَهُمْ فِي فَجْوَةٍ مِنْهُ ذَلِكَ مِنْ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ مَنْ يَهْدِ  
اللَّهُ فَهُوَ الْمُهْتَدِ وَمَنْ يُضِلِلْ فَلَنْ يَجِدَ  
لَهُ وَلِيًّا مُرْسِدًا ﴿١٧﴾

= a great seaport and the capital of Roman Asia. We may therefore imagine how the heathen cults must have flourished there. St. Paul spent three years preaching there, and was mobbed and assaulted, and compelled to leave (Acts, xix. 1-4).

2346. That is, 'do not be afraid of anything: put your whole case in the hands of Allah: at present you are being persecuted; he will solve your difficulties and give you ease and comfort'. The public protest ends at verse 15. In verse 16 they are taking counsel among themselves. After they go into the Cave, verse 17 introduces us to the scene where they are lying in the midst of the Cave in tranquil confidence in Allah.

2347. In the latitude of Ephesus, 38° north, i.e., well above the sun's northern declination, a cave opening to north, would never have the heat of the sun within it, as the sunny side would be the south. If the youths lay on their backs with their faces looking to the north, i.e., towards the entrance of the Cave, the sun would rise on their right side, declining to the south, and set on their left sides, leaving them cool and comfortable.

He whom Allah guides<sup>2348</sup>  
Is rightly guided; but he  
Whom Allah leaves to stray,—  
For him wilt thou find  
No protector to lead him  
To the Right Way.

## SECTION 3.

18. Thou wouldst have thought them<sup>2349</sup>  
Awake, whilst they were asleep,  
And We turned them  
On their right and on  
Their left sides: their dog<sup>2350</sup>  
Stretching forth his two fore-legs  
On the threshold: if thou  
Hadst looked at them,  
Thou wouldst have certainly  
Turned back from them in flight,  
And wouldst certainly have been  
Filled with terror of them.<sup>2351</sup>
19. Such (being their state),  
We raised them up (from sleep),  
That they might question<sup>2352</sup>  
Each other. Said one of them,

وَتَحْسَبُهُمْ أَنْفَكَاطًا وَهُمْ رُقُودٌ وَنُقَلِّبُهُمْ ذَاتَ  
الْيَمِينِ وَذَاتَ الشِّمَالِ وَكَلْبُهُمْ بَاسِطٌ ذِرَاعَيْهِ  
بِالْوَصِيدِ لَوِ اطَّلَعْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَوَلَّيْتَ مِنْهُمْ  
فِرَارًا وَلَمُلَمِثْتَ مِنْهُمْ رُغْبًا

وَكَذَلِكَ بَعَثْنَاهُمْ لِيَتَسَاءَلُوا بَيْنَهُمْ قَالَ  
قَائِلٌ مِنْهُمْ كَمْ لَبِئْتُمْ قَالُوا لَيْسَ بِيَوْمًا

2348. The youths, having faith and trust in Allah, found safety and refuge in the Cave. They were protected from the persecution and violence of the heathen. Their prayer (xviii. 16) was heard.

2349. Perhaps their eyes were open, even though their senses were sealed in sleep. They turned about on their sides as men do in sleep.

2350. The name of their dog is traditionally known as Qitmīr, but see n. 2336 above.

2351. This graphic picture of the sleepers explains the human mechanism by which their safety was ensured by Allah from their Pagan enemies.

2352. This is the point of the story. Their own human impressions were to be compared, each with the other. They were to be made to see that with the best goodwill and the most honest enquiry they might reach different conclusions; that they were not to waste their time in vain controversies, but to get on to the main business of life; and that Allah alone had full knowledge of the things that seem to us so strange, or inconsistent, or inexplicable, or that produce different impressions on different minds. If they entered the Cave in the morning and woke up in the afternoon, one of them might =



"How long have ye stayed (here)?"

They said, "We have stayed  
(Perhaps) a day, or part  
Of a day." (At length)

They (all) said, "Allah (alone)  
Knows best how long  
Ye have stayed here...

Now send ye then one of you  
With this money of yours<sup>2353</sup>

To the town: let him

Find out which is the best<sup>2354</sup>

Food (to be had) and bring some

To you, (that ye may

Satisfy your hunger therewith)

And let him behave

With care and courtesy,

And let him not inform

Any one about you.

20. "For if they should

Come upon you, they would

Stone you or force you<sup>2355</sup>

To return to their religion,

أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ قَالُوا رَبُّكُمْ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَيْسْتُمْ  
فَاعْبَثُوا أَحَدَكُمْ بِوَرِقِكُمْ  
هَذِهِ إِلَى الْمَدِينَةِ فَلْيَنْظُرْ أَيُّهَا أَزْكَى  
طَعَامًا فَلْيَأْتِكُمْ بِرِزْقٍ مِنْهُ وَلْيَتَلَطَّفْ  
وَلَا يُسْعِرَنَّ بِكُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿١٩﴾

إِنَّهُمْ إِنْ يَظْهَرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ يَرْجُمُوكُمْ  
أَوْ يُعِيدُواكُمْ فِي مِلَّتِهِمْ  
وَلَنْ تَقْلِحُوا إِذَا أَبَدًا ﴿٢٠﴾

= well think they had been there only a few hours—only part of a day. This relative or fallacious impression of Time also gives us an inkling of the state when there will be no Time, of the Resurrection when all our little impressions of this life will be corrected by the final Reality. This mystery of time has puzzled many contemplative minds. Cf. "Dark time that haunts us with the briefness of our days" (Thomas Wolfe in "Of Time and the River").

2353. They now give up barren controversy and come to the practical business of life. But their thoughts are conditioned by the state of things that existed when they entered the Cave. The money they carried was the money coined in the reign of the monarch who persecuted the Religion of Unity and favoured the false cults of Paganism.

2354. *Best food*; i.e., purest, most wholesome perhaps also most suitable for those who rejected idol worship, i.e., not dedicated to idols. For they still imagined the world in the same state in which they had known it before they entered the Cave.

2355. They think that the world had not changed, and that the fierce persecution they knew was still raging, under which a man had to pay by his life for his religious faith, if he could not conform to Pagan worship.

And in that case ye would  
Never attain prosperity."<sup>2356</sup>

21. Thus<sup>2357</sup> did We make  
Their case known to the people,  
That they might know  
That the promise of Allah  
Is true, and that there can  
Be no doubt about the Hour  
Of Judgment. Behold,  
They dispute among themselves<sup>2358</sup>  
As to their affair. (Some) said,  
"Construct a building over them":  
Their Lord knows best  
About them: those who prevailed  
Over their affair said,  
"Let us surely build a place  
Of worship over them."

22. (Some) say they were three,  
The dog being the fourth

وَكَذَلِكَ أَعْتَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ لِيَعْلَمُوا أَنَّى وَعَدَ  
اللَّهُ حَقًّا وَأَنَّ السَّاعَةَ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهَا إِذْ يَتَنَزَّعُونَ  
بَيْنَهُمْ أَمْرُهُمْ فَقَالُوا ابْنُوا عَلَيْهِمْ بُيُوتًا رَّبُّهُمْ  
أَعْلَمُ بِهِمْ قَالَ الَّذِينَ غَلَبُوا عَلَىٰ أَمْرِهِمْ  
لَنَتَّخِذَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ مَسْجِدًا ﴿٦﴾

سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةٌ رَّابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ

2356. That is, never succeed in keeping your religion. To become a renegade, to give up the Truth which you have won, simply on account of the fear of men, is the most despicable form of cowardice, and would rightly close the door of salvation if strict justice were to be done. But even then Allah's Mercy comes to the coward's aid so long as the door of repentance is open.

2357. Thus: in this way, by these means, i.e., by the sending out of one of the Sleepers with the old money to the town to buy provisions. His old-fashioned dress, appearance, and speech, and the old uncurrent money which he brought, at once drew the attention of people to him. When they learnt his story, they realised that Allah, Who can protect His servants thus and raise them up from sleep after such a long time, has power to raise up men for the Resurrection, and that His promise of goodness and mercy to those who serve Him is true and was exemplified in this striking way. On the other hand, to the men of the Cave themselves, it became clear that Allah can change the situation before we are aware, and our hope in Him is not futile, and that even when we are on the brink of despair, a revolution is surely working in the world before the world itself realises it.

2358. The perversity of man is such that as soon as ever a glimpse of truth becomes manifest, men fall into controversies about it. The Sleepers could not judge about the duration of their stay in the Cave, but they wisely left the matter and attended to the urgent business of their lives. The townsfolk could not agree as to the significance of the event; they fell to discussing immaterial details. What sort of a memorial should they raise?—a house or a place of worship or a tablet? The place of worship was built. But the real significance was missed until explained in the Our-ân.

Among them; (others) say  
They were five, the dog  
Being the sixth,—doubtfully  
Guessing at the unknown;<sup>2359</sup>  
(Yet others) say they were  
Seven, the dog being the eighth.  
Say thou: "My Lord  
Knoweth best their number;  
It is but few that know<sup>2360</sup>  
Their (real case)." Enter not,  
Therefore, into controversies  
Concerning them, except  
On a matter that is clear,<sup>2361</sup>  
Nor consult any of them  
About (the affair of) the Sleepers.<sup>2362</sup>

## SECTION 4.

23. Nor say of anything,  
"I shall be sure to do  
So and so to-morrow"—  
24. Except "If Allah so wills"<sup>2363</sup>  
And remember thy Lord  
When thou forgettest, and say,

خَمْسَةً سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ  
سَبْعَةً وَتَأْتِيهِمْ كُلُّهُمْ قُلُوبُهُمْ قُلُوبُهُمْ قُلُوبُهُمْ قُلُوبُهُمْ  
مَا يَعْلَمُهُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ فَلَا تُمَارِ فِيهِمْ إِلَّا مِرًّا ظَهَرًا  
وَلَا تَسْتَفْتِ فِيهِمْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٣﴾

وَلَا تَقُولَنَّ لِشَيْءٍ إِنِّي فَاعِلٌ ذَلِكُمْ غَدًا ﴿٢٤﴾

إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ وَادْكُرْ رَبَّكَ إِذَا نَسِيتَ وَقُلْ  
عَسَى أَنْ يَهْدِيَنِي رَبِّي لِأَقْرَبَ مِنْ هَذَا رَشَدًا ﴿٢٥﴾

2359. The controversy in after ages raged about the number of the Sleepers: were they three or five or seven? People answered, not from knowledge, but from conjecture. Gibbon's version, which has now become best known, makes the number of Sleepers seven. The point was immaterial: the real point was the spiritual lesson.

2360. The true significance of the story is known only to a few. Most men discuss futile details, which are not in their knowledge.

2361. It is unprofitable to enter such immaterial controversies and many others that have been waged about Religion by shallow men from time immemorial. Yet, if there is a matter of clear knowledge from experience that matters, we must openly proclaim it, that the world may be brought to listen to Allah's Truth.

2362. Vulgar story-mongers as such know little of the true significance of stories and parables. We have a clear exposition in the Qur-ān. What need is there to go into details of the number of men in the Cave, or of the time they remained there?

2363. Verses 23 and 24 are parenthetical. We must never rely upon our own resources so much as to forget Allah. If by any chance we do forget, we must come back to Him and keep Him in remembrance, as did the Companions of the Cave.

"I hope that my Lord  
Will guide me ever closer  
(Even) than this  
To the right course."<sup>2364</sup>

25. So they stayed in their Cave  
Three hundred years, and  
Nine (more).<sup>2365</sup>

26. Say: "Allah knows best  
How long they stayed:  
With Him is (the knowledge  
Of) the secrets of the heavens  
And the earth: how clearly  
He sees, how finely He hears  
(Everything)! They have no  
protector<sup>2366</sup>  
Other than Him; nor does

وَلَبِثُوا فِي كَهْفِهِمْ ثَلَاثَ مِائَةٍ سِنِينَ  
وَارْتَدَدُوا وَتَسْعًا ﴿٣٥﴾

قُلِ اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا لَبِثُوا لَهُ غَيْبُ السَّمَوَاتِ  
وَالْأَرْضِ أَبْصِرْ بِهِ وَأَسْمِعُ  
مَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا يُشْرِكُ  
فِي حُكْمِهِ أَحَدًا ﴿٣٦﴾

2264. In geometry the perfect circle is an ideal. Any given circle that we draw is not so perfect that we cannot draw one closer to the ideal. So in our life, there is always the hope of drawing closer and closer to Allah.

2365. This verse should be read with the next verse. In the floating oral tradition the duration of time in the Cave was given differently in different versions. When the tradition was reduced to writing, some Christian writers (e.g., Simeon Metaphrastes) named 372 years, some less. In round numbers 300 years in the solar Calendar would amount to 309 in the lunar Calendar. But the next verse points out that all these are mere conjectures: the number is known to Allah alone.

The authority on which Gibbon relies mentions two definite reigns, that of Decius (249-251 A.D.) and that of Theodosius II (408-450 A.D.). Taking 250 and 450, we get an interval of 200 years. But the point of the story does not lie in the name of any given Emperor, but in the fact that the beginning of the period coincided with an Emperor who persecuted: the Emperor's name at the end of the period may be taken as approximately correct, because the story was recorded within two generations afterwards. One of the worst Emperors to persecute the Christians was Nero who reigned from 54 to 68. If we took the end of his reign (A.D. 68) as the initial point, and (say) 440 A.D. as the final point, we get the 372 years of Simeon Metaphrastes. But none of these writers knew any more than we do. Our best course is to follow the Quranic injunction, "Say, Allah knows best how long they stayed" (xviii. 26). There is also a rebuke implied: 'do not imitate these men who love mischievous controversies!' After all, we are given the narrative more as a parable than as a story.

2366. Who are "they" in this sentence? They may be the Companions of the Cave, for they put themselves under the protection of Allah, and disowned all attribution of partners to Him. Or "they" may refer to the people in general who go wrong and become "Mushriks" i.e., attribute imaginary partners to Allah.

He share His Command  
With any person whatsoever.<sup>2367</sup>

27. And recite (and teach)  
What has been revealed  
To thee of the Book  
Of thy Lord: none  
Can change His Words,<sup>2368</sup>  
And none wilt thou find  
As a refuge other than Him.

28. And keep yourself content  
With those who call  
On their Lord morning  
And evening, seeking<sup>2369</sup>  
His Face; and let not  
Thine eyes pass beyond them,  
Seeking the pomp and glitter  
Of this Life; nor obey  
Any whose heart We  
Have permitted to neglect  
The remembrance of Us,  
One who follows his own  
Desires, and his affair has become  
All excess.<sup>2370</sup>

29. Say, "The Truth is  
From your Lord"

وَأَتْلُ مَا أُوْحِيَ إِلَيْكَ مِنْ كِتَابِ رَبِّكَ لَا مُبَدِّلَ  
لِكَلِمَاتِهِ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مُلْتَحَدًا ﴿٢٧﴾

وَأَصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ  
بِالْفُجْدَةِ وَالْعُشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ وَلَا تَعْدُ  
عَيْنَاكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا تُطِيعَ  
مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ  
أَمْرُهُ فُرْطًا ﴿٢٨﴾

وَقُلِ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ فَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ  
فَلْيُكْفُرْ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ نَارًا أَحَاطَ بِهِمْ

2367. *His Command*: i.e., Allah's sovereignty of the world, or in His Judgment on the Day of Judgment.

2368. *His Words*: His Commands, Decrees, Orders.

2369. *Cf.* vi. 52 and n. 870. The true servants of Allah are those whose hearts are turned to Him morning, noon, and night, and who seek not worldly gain, but Allah's Grace, Allah's own Self, His Presence and nearness. Even if they are poor in this world's goods, their society gives far more inward and spiritual satisfaction than worldly grandeur or worldly attractions.

2370. For those who stray from Allah's path, Allah's Grace is ever anxious: it seeks to reclaim them and bring them back to the path. If such a one resists, and follows his own lusts, a point is reached when his case becomes hopeless. Allah's Grace does not then reach him, and he is abandoned to his pride and insolence. Beware of following the example or advice of such a one or seeking his society, or hankering after his wretched idols.

Let him who will,  
Believe, and let him  
Who will, reject (it):<sup>2371</sup>  
For the wrong-doers We  
Have prepared a Fire  
Whose (smoke and flames),  
Like the walls and roof  
Of a tent, will hem  
Them in: if they implore  
Relief they will be granted  
Water like melted brass,  
That will scald their faces,  
How dreadful the drink!  
How uncomfortable a couch  
To recline on!

سَرَادِقُهَا وَإِنْ يَسْتَغِيثُوا يُغَاثُوا بِمَاءٍ كَالْمُهْلِ  
يَشْوِي الْوُجُوهُ بِئْسَ الشَّرَابُ  
وَسَاءَتْ مُرْتَقَقًا ﴿٢٩﴾

30. As to those who believe  
And work righteousness,  
Verily We shall not suffer  
To perish the reward  
Of any who do  
A (single) righteous deed.<sup>2372</sup>

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ  
إِنَّا لَا نُضِيعُ أَجْرَ مَنْ أَحْسَنَ عَمَلًا ﴿٣٠﴾

31. For them will be Gardens  
Of Eternity; beneath them  
Rivers will flow: they will  
Be adorned therein  
With bracelets of gold,  
And they will wear

أُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ  
يُحَلَّلُونَ فِيهَا مِنْ أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ ذَهَبٍ وَيَلْبَسُونَ ثِيَابًا  
خُضْرًا أَمِينًا سُدُسٍ وَيَسْتَبْرِقُونَ مَتَكِّينَ  
فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ نِعَمَ الثَّوَابِ وَحُسْنَتِ مُرْتَقَقًا ﴿٣١﴾

2371. Our choice in our limited Free-will involves a corresponding personal responsibility. We are offered the Truth: again and again is it pressed on our attention. If we reject it, we must take all the terrible consequences which are prefigured in the Fire of Hell. Its flames and roof will completely enclose us like a tent. Ordinarily there is water to quench the heat of thirst: here the only drink will be like molten brass, thick, heavy, burning, sizzling. Before it reaches the mouth of the unfortunates, drops of it will scald their faces as it is poured out.

2372. The righteous will be rewarded, as has been said again and again, beyond their merits: xxviii. 84: xxx. 39. Not a single good deed of theirs will lose its reward, and the mercy of Allah will blot out their sins.

Green garments<sup>2373</sup> of fine silk  
 And heavy brocade;  
 They will recline therein  
 On raised thrones.  
 How good the recompense!  
 How beautiful a couch  
 To recline on!<sup>2374</sup>

## SECTION 5

32. Set forth to them  
 The parable of two men:  
 For one of them We provided  
 Two gardens of grape-vines  
 And surrounded them  
 With date palms;  
 In between the two  
 We placed tillage.<sup>2375</sup>
33. Each of those gardens  
 Brought forth its produce,  
 And failed not in the least  
 Therein: in the midst  
 Of them We caused  
 A river to flow.
34. (Abundant) was the produce  
 This man had: he said  
 To his companion, in the course  
 Of a mutual argument:

وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا رَّجُلَيْنِ جَعَلْنَا لِأَحَدِهِمَا جَنَّتَيْنِ  
 مِنْ أَعْنَابٍ وَحَفَفْنَاهُمَا بِنَخْلٍ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمَا زَرْعًا ﴿٣٢﴾

كِلْتَا الْجَنَّتَيْنِ آتَتْهُمَا كُلُّهَا وَلَهُ تَنْظِيمٌ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا  
 وَفَجَّرْنَا خِلَالَهُمَا نَهْرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

وكَانَ لَهُ ثَمَرٌ فَقَالَ لِصَاحِبِهِ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ  
 أَنَا أَكْثَرُ مِنْكَ مَالًا وَأَعَزُّ نَفَرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

2373. Heaven is figured by all the pictures of ease and comfort which we can imagine in our present state: Gardens: perpetual springs of crystal water, which we can see as in a landscape from above; the finest and most costly ornaments; the most beautiful clothes to wear; green is the colour mentioned, because it is the most refreshing to the eye, and fits in well with the Garden; the wearer takes the choice of fine silk or heavy brocade; and for rest and comfort, high thrones of dignity on which the blessed ones recline.

2374. This picture is in parallel contrast to the picture of Misery in the last verse.

2375. Here is a simple parable of the contrast between two men. One was purse-proud, and forgot that what he had was from Allah, by way of a trust and a trial in this life. The other boasted of nothing: his trust was in Allah. The worldly wealth of the first was destroyed, and he had nothing left. The second was the happier in the end.

"More wealth have I  
Than you, and more honour  
And power in (my following  
Of) men."<sup>2376</sup>

35. He went into his garden  
While he wronged himself.<sup>2377</sup>  
He said, "I deem not  
That this will ever perish,"

36. "Nor do I deem  
That the Hour (of Judgment)  
Will (ever) come:  
Even if I am brought back  
To my Lord. I shall  
Surely find (there)  
Something better in exchange."<sup>2378</sup>

37. His companion said to him,  
In the course of the argument  
With him: "Dost thou deny  
Him Who created thee  
Out of dust, then out of  
A sperm-drop, then fashioned  
Thee into a man?"<sup>2379</sup>

وَدَخَلَ جَنَّتَهُ وَهُوَ ظَالِمٌ لِّنَفْسِهِ قَالَ مَا أَظُنُّ  
أَنْ يَبِيدَ هَٰذِهِ أَبَدًا ﴿٢٥﴾

وَمَا أَظُنُّ السَّاعَةَ قَائِمَةً وَلَئِنْ رُودْتُ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي  
لَأَجِدَنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهَا مُنْقَلَبًا ﴿٢٦﴾

قَالَ لَهُ صَاحِبُهُ وَهُوَ يُحَاوِرُهُ أَكَفَرْتَ بِالَّذِي  
خَلَقَكَ مِنْ تُرَابٍ ثُمَّ نَطَقَهُ ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ رَجُلًا ﴿٢٧﴾

2376. The two men began to compare notes. The arrogant one was puffed up with his possessions, his income, and his large family and following, and thought in his self-complacency that it would last for ever. He was also wrong in looking down on his Companion, who, though less affluent, was the better man of the two.

2377. It was not wealth that ruined him, but the attitude of his mind. He was unjust, not so much to his neighbour, as to his own soul. In his love of the material, he forgot or openly defied the spiritual. As verse 37 shows, he took his companion with him, to impress him with his own importance, but the companion was unmoved.

2378. Here comes out the grasping spirit of the materialist. In his mind "better" means more wealth and more power, of the kind he was enjoying in this life, although in reality, even what he had, rested on hollow foundations and was doomed to perish and bring him down with it.

2379. The three stages of man's creation: first dust, or clay, itself created out of nothing and forming the physical basis of his body; then, out of the produce of the earth as incorporated in the parents body, the sperm drop (with the corresponding receptive element), and then when the different elements were mixed in due proportion, and the soul was breathed into him, the fashioned man. Cf. lxxxvii. 2, and xv. 28-29.



38. "But as for my part  
Allah is my Lord,  
And none shall I  
Associate with my Lord.
39. "Why didst thou not,  
As thou wentest into  
Thy garden, say: 'Allah's Will  
(Be done)! There is no power  
But from Allah!' If thou<sup>2380</sup>  
Dost see me less than  
Thee in wealth and sons,
40. "It may be that my Lord  
Will give me something  
Better than thy garden,  
And that He will send  
On thy garden thunderbolts  
(By way of reckoning)  
From heaven, making it  
(But) slippery sand!-
41. "Or the water of the garden  
Will run off underground  
So that thou wilt never  
Be able to find it."<sup>2381</sup>
42. So his fruits  
Were encompassed (with ruin),  
And he remained twisting

لَنَكْنَاهُ اللَّهُ رَبِّي وَلَا أَشْرِكُ بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا ﴿٣٨﴾

وَلَوْلَا إِذْ دَخَلْتَ جَنَّتِكَ قُلْتَ مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَقُوَّةَ  
إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ إِنْ تَرَىٰ أَنَا أَقْلَ مِنْكَ مَا لَوْ لَدَا ﴿٣٩﴾

فَعَسَىٰ رَبِّي أَنْ يُؤْتِيَنِي خَيْرًا مِنْ جَنَّتِكَ وَيُرْسِلَ  
عَلَيْهَا حُسْبَانًا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَتُصْبِحَ صَعِيدًا  
زَلَقًا ﴿٤٠﴾

أَوْ يُصْبِحَ مَأْوَاهَا غَوْرًا فَلَنْ نَسْتَطِيعَ لَهُ طَلَبًا ﴿٤١﴾

وَأُحِيطَ بِشَمْرِهِ، فَاصْبَحَ يُغْلِبُ كَفَيْهِ عَلَىٰ مَا أَنْفَقَ فِيهَا

2380. The companion's argument divides itself into five parts. (1) He remonstrates against the proud man denying Allah. (2) He, from his own spiritual experience, proclaims that Allah is One and that He is good. (3) He points out to him the better way of enjoying Allah's gifts, with gratitude to Him. (4) He expresses contentment and satisfaction in Allah's dealings with him. (5) He gives a warning of the fleeting nature of this world's goods and the certainty of Allah's punishment for inordinate vanity.

2381. The punishment was that of thunderbolts (*husbānan*), but the general meaning of the word includes any punishment by way of a reckoning (*hisāb*), and I think that an earthquake is also implied, as it alters water-courses, diverts channels underground, throws up silt and sand, and covers large areas with ruin.

And turning his hands  
Over what he had spent<sup>2382</sup>  
On his property, which had  
(Now) tumbled to pieces  
To its very foundations,  
And he could only say,  
"Woe is me! Would I had  
Never ascribed partners  
To my Lord and Cherisher!"<sup>2383</sup>

وَهِيَ خَاوِيَةٌ عَلَى عُرُوشِهَا وَيَقُولُ يَلَيْتَنِي  
لَمْ أُشْرِكْ بِرَبِّي أَحَدًا ﴿٤٢﴾

43. Nor had he numbers  
To help him against Allah,  
Nor was he able  
To deliver himself.<sup>2384</sup>

وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ فِتْنَةٌ يَنْصُرُونَهُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ  
وَمَا كَانَ مُنْصِرًا ﴿٤٣﴾

44. There, the (only) protection comes  
From Allah, the True One.  
He is the Best to reward,  
And the Best to give success.<sup>2385</sup>

هُنَالِكَ الْوَلَايَةُ لِلَّهِ الْحَقِّ هُوَ خَيْرٌ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ عُقْبًا ﴿٤٤﴾

#### SECTION 6

45. Set forth to them  
The similitude of the life  
Of this world: it is like  
The rain which We send  
Down from the skies:  
The earth's vegetation absorbs it,

وَأَضْرِبْ لَهُمْ مَثَلًا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا كَمَاءٍ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ  
مِنَ السَّمَاءِ فَأَخْلَطَ بِهِ نَبَاتَ الْأَرْضِ  
فَأَصْبَحَ حُشَيْمًا تَذُرُّهُ الرِّيحُ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ  
عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ مُقَدِّرًا ﴿٤٥﴾

2382. "Fruits", "spent", "twisting of the hands", should all be understood in a wide metaphorical sense, as well as the literal sense. He had great income and satisfaction, which were all gone. What resources he had lavished on his property! His thoughts had been engrossed on it; his hopes had been built on it; it had become the absorbing passion of his life. If he had only looked to Allah, instead of to the ephemeral goods of this world!

2383. In this case, in his mind, there was his own Self and his Mammon as rivals to Allah!

2384. He had built up connections and obliged dependants, and was proud of having his "quiver full". But where were all things when the reckoning came? He could not help himself; how could others be expected to help him!

2385. All else is vanity, uncertainty, the sport of Time. The only hope or truth is from Allah. Other rewards and other successes are illusory: the best Reward and the best Success come from Allah.

But soon it becomes  
Dry stubble, which the winds<sup>2386</sup>  
Do scatter: it is (only) Allah  
Who prevails over all things.

46. Wealth and sons are allurements  
Of the life of this world:  
But the things that endure,  
Good Deeds, are best  
In the sight of thy Lord,  
As rewards, and best  
As (the foundation for) hopes.<sup>2387</sup>

47. On the Day We shall  
Remove the mountains, and thou  
Wilt see the earth  
As a level stretch,<sup>2388</sup>  
And We shall gather them,  
All together, nor shall We  
Leave out any one of them.

48. And they will be marshalled  
Before thy Lord in ranks  
(With the announcement),  
"Now have ye come to Us  
(Bare) as We created you"<sup>2389</sup>  
First: aye, ye thought  
We shall not fulfil

الْمَالُ وَالْبَنُونَ زِينَةُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَالْبَاقِيَاتُ  
الصَّالِحَاتُ خَيْرٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ ثَوَابًا وَخَيْرٌ أَمَلًا ﴿٤٦﴾

وَيَوْمَ نُسَوِّرُ الْجِبَالَ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ بَارِزَةً  
وَحَشَرَ نَفْسُهُمْ فَلَمْ تَقَادِرْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٧﴾

وَعَرَّضُوا عَلَى رَبِّكَ صَفًا لَقَدْ جِئْتُمُونَا كَمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ  
أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ بَلْ زَعَمْتُمْ أَلَّنْ نَجْعَلَ لَكُمْ مَوْعِدًا ﴿٤٨﴾

2386. Rain-water is a good thing in itself, but it does not last, and you can build no solid foundations on it. It is soon absorbed in the earth, and produces the flourishing appearance of grass and vegetation-for a time. Soon these decay, and become as dry stubble, which the least wind from any quarter will blow about like a thing of no importance. The water is gone, and so is the vegetation to which it lent a brave show of luxuriance temporarily. Such is the life of *this* world, contrasted with the inner and real Life, which looks to the Hereafter. Allah is the only enduring Power we can look to, supreme over all.

2387. Other things are fleeting: but Good Deeds have a lasting value in the sight of Allah. They are best as (or for) rewards in two ways: (1) they flow from us by the Grace of Allah, and are themselves rewards for our Faith: (2) they become the foundation of our hopes for the highest rewards in the Hereafter.

2388. On the Day of Judgment none of our present landmarks will remain.

2389. We shall stand as we were created, with none of the adventitious possessions that we collected in this life, which will all have vanished.

The appointment made to you  
To meet (Us)!":<sup>2390</sup>

49. And the Book (of Deeds)  
Will be placed (before you);  
And thou wilt see  
The sinful in great terror  
Because of what is (recorded)  
Therein; they will say,  
"Ah! woe to us!  
What a book is this!  
It leaves out nothing  
Small or great, but  
Takes account thereof!"  
They will find all that they  
Did, placed before them:  
And not one will thy Lord  
Treat with injustice.<sup>2391</sup>

#### SECTION 7.

50. Behold! We said  
To the angels, "Prostrate"<sup>2392</sup>  
To Adam": they prostrated  
Except Iblis. He was  
One of the Jinns,<sup>2393</sup> and he  
Broke the Command  
Of his Lord

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ  
وَيَقُولُونَ نَوْنِلْنَا مَالِ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يَغَادِرُ  
صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا  
حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظِلُّمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا ﴿٤٩﴾

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا  
إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ  
أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَهُ وَذُرِّيَّتَهُ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِ  
وَهُمْ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ يَبْغِي لِلظَّالِمِينَ بَدَلًا ﴿٥٠﴾

2390. The sceptics will now at length be convinced of the Reality which will be upon them.

2391. Personal responsibility, for all deeds in this life will then be enforced. But it will be done with perfect justice. Expressed in the forms of this world, it will amount to a clear statement of all we did in this life; the record will be put before us to convince us. As it will be a perfect record, with no omissions and no wrong entries, it will be perfectly convincing. Where there is punishment, it has been earned by the wrong-doer's own deeds, not imposed on him unjustly.

2392. Cf. ii. 34, where the story is told of the fall of mankind through Adam. Here the point is referred to in order to bring home the individual responsibility of the erring soul. Iblis is your enemy; you have been told his history; will you prefer to go to him rather than to the merciful Allah, your Creator and Cherisher? What a false exchange you would make!

2393. Cf. vi. 100, n. 929.

Will ye then take him  
And his progeny<sup>2394</sup> as protectors  
Rather than Me? And they  
Are enemies to you!  
Evil would be the exchange<sup>2395</sup>  
For the wrong-doers!

51. I called them not  
To witness the creation  
Of the heavens and the earth,  
Not (even) their own creation:  
Nor is it for Me  
To take as helpers  
Such as Lead (men) astray!<sup>2396</sup>

52. On the Day He will say,  
"Call on those whom ye  
Thought to be My partners."  
And they will call on them,  
But they will not listen  
To them; and We shall  
Make for them a place  
Of common perdition.<sup>2397</sup>

53. And the Sinful shall see  
The Fire and apprehend  
That they have to fall  
Therein: no means will they  
Find to turn away therefrom.

﴿ مَا أَشْهَدُهُمْ خَلْقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلَا خَلْقَ  
أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَمَا كُنْتُ مُتَّخِذَ الْمُضِلِّينَ عَضُدًا ﴾

وَيَوْمَ يَقُولُ نَادُوا شُرَكَاءِيَ الَّذِينَ زَعَمْتُمْ  
فَدَعَوْهُمْ فَلَمْ يَسْتَجِيبُوا لَهُمْ وَجَعَلْنَا بَيْنَهُمْ  
مَوْبِقًا ﴿٥٢﴾

وَرَأَى الْمَجْرِمُونَ النَّارَ فَظَنُّوا أَنْهُمْ مُوَاقِعُوهَا  
وَلَمْ يَجِدُوا عَنْهَا مَصْرِفًا ﴿٥٣﴾

2394. *Satan's progeny*: we need not take the epithet only in a literal sense. All his followers are also his progeny.

2395. Out of the limited free-will that man has, if he were to choose Evil instead of Good. Satan instead of Allah, what a dreadful choice it would be! It would really be an evil exchange. For man is Allah's creature, cared for and cherished by Him. He abandons his Cherisher to become the slave of his enemy!

2396. Allah wants man's good: how can He take Evil for His partner?

2397. Some Commentators construe: "And We shall make a partition between them": i.e., the Evil ones will not even be seen by their misguided followers, much as the latter may go on calling on them.

## SECTION 8.

54. We have explained  
In detail in this Qur-ān,  
For the benefit of mankind,  
Every kind of similitude:  
But man is, in most things,<sup>2398</sup>  
Contentious.
55. And what is there  
To keep back men  
From believing, now that  
Guidance has come to them,  
Nor from praying for forgiveness  
From their Lord but that  
(They wait for) the ways  
Of the ancients to overtake<sup>2399</sup>  
Them, or the Wrath  
Be brought to them  
Face to face?
56. We only send the Messengers  
To give glad tidings  
And to give warnings.<sup>2400</sup>  
But the Unbelievers dispute  
With vain argument, in order  
Therewith to weaken the truth,

وَلَقَدْ صَرَّفْنَا فِي هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لِلنَّاسِ مِنْ كُلِّ  
مَثَلٍ وَكَانَ الْإِنْسَانُ أَكْثَرَ شَيْءٍ جَدَلًا ﴿٥٤﴾

وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمْ الْهُدَىٰ  
وَيَسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمْ سُنَّةٌ  
الْأُولَىٰ أَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ قُبُلًا ﴿٥٥﴾

وَمَا نُرْسِلُ الْمُرْسَلِينَ إِلَّا مُبَشِّرِينَ وَمُنذِرِينَ  
وَيُجَادِلُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِالْبَاطِلِ لِيُدْحِضُوا بِهِ  
الْحَقَّ وَاتَّخَذُوا آيَاتِنَا وَمَا نُنذِرُوا هُزُوًا ﴿٥٦﴾

2398. If men had not cultivated the habit of contention and obstinacy, they would have found that the parables and similitudes of Scripture had fully met their difficulties, and they would gladly have obeyed the call of Allah.

2399. But man's obstinacy or contrariness asks or calls for a repetition of what happened to the wicked and those who rejected Faith in ancient times. Out of curiosity, or by way of challenge, they seem to court the Punishment and ask that it be brought to pass at once. But it will come soon enough, and then they will think it too early!  
Cf. xiii. 6 and n. 1810.

2400. The Prophets of Allah are not sent to humour us with dialectics or satisfy the vulgar curiosity for miracles or dark unusual things. There is no "crookedness" (xviii. 1) in their preaching. They come to preach the Truth,—not in an abstract way, but with special reference to our conduct. They give us the good news of salvation lest we despair in the presence of Sin, and to warn us clearly of the dangers of Evil. Vain controversies about words only weaken their mission, or turn it into ridicule. The ungodly have a trick also of treating the earnest preaching to them itself as a jest and ridiculing it.

And they treat My Signs and warnings  
As a jest.

57. And who doth more wrong  
Than one who is reminded  
Of the Signs of his Lord  
But turns away from them,  
Forgetting the (deeds) which his  
hands<sup>2401</sup>

Have sent forth? Verily We  
Have set veils over their hearts  
So that they understand this not,  
And over their ears, deafness.  
If thou callest them  
To guidance, even then  
Will they never accept guidance.

58. But your Lord is Most Forgiving,  
Full of Mercy. If He were  
To call them (at once) to account  
For what they have earned,  
Then surely He would  
Have hastened their Punishment:  
But they have their appointed  
Time, beyond which<sup>2402</sup> they  
Will find no refuge.

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ فَأَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا  
وَلَيْسَ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ  
أَكِنَّةً أَنْ يَفْقَهُوهُ وَفِي آذَانِهِمْ وَقْرًا  
وَإِنْ نَدَعُهُمْ إِلَى الْهُدَى  
فَلَنْ يَهْتَدُوا إِذًا أَبَدًا ﴿٥٧﴾

وَرَبُّكَ الْغَفُورُ ذُو الرَّحْمَةِ لَوْ يُؤْخَذُكُمْ  
بِمَا كَسَبُوا لَعَجَّلَ لَهُمُ الْعَذَابَ بَلْ لَهُمْ  
مَوْعِدٌ لَنْ يَجِدُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ مَوْيلاً ﴿٥٨﴾

2401. Considering the power of sin, and how it gets hold of the hearts of men, and considering all the wrongs that men have done, it is the height of folly and injustice on their part to turn away from warnings which are given expressly for their good. But a stage of callousness is reached, when, by their own choice, they have rendered themselves impervious to Allah's Grace. At that stage a veil is put over their hearts and they are left alone for a time, that they may commune with themselves and perhaps repent and seek Allah's Mercy again. If they do not, it is their own loss. See next verse.

2402. *Min dūni-hi*: should we take the pronoun to refer to "the appointed time." or to "your Lord" mentioned at the beginning of the verse? Most Commentators take the former view, and I have translated accordingly. But I agree with those who take the latter view, and the better translation would be: "But they have their appointed time, and except with Allah, they will find no refuge." That means that even during the period allowed them, when they are left to wander astray as they have rejected Allah's Grace, Allah's Mercy is open to them if they will repent and return; but nothing but Allah's Mercy can save them.

59. Such were the towns  
We destroyed when they  
Committed iniquities; but  
We fixed an appointed time  
For their destruction.<sup>2403</sup>

وَتِلْكَ الْقُرَىٰ أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ لَمَّا ظَلَمُوا  
وَجَعَلْنَا لِهَٰئِهِمْ مَّوْعِدًا ﴿٥٩﴾

#### SECTION 9.

60. Behold, Moses said<sup>2404</sup>  
To his attendant, "I will not  
Give up until I reach  
The junction of the two<sup>2405</sup>  
Seas or (until) I spend  
Years and years in travel."<sup>2406</sup>

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِفَتَاهُ لَا أَبْرَحُ حَتَّىٰ  
أَبْلُغَ مَجْمَعَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ أَوْ أَمْضِيَ حُقُبًا ﴿٦٠﴾

61. But when they reached  
The Junction,<sup>2407</sup> they forgot

فَلَمَّا بَلَغَا مَجْمَعَ بَيْنَهُمَا نَسِيَا حُوتَهُمَا  
فَاتَّخَذَا سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ سَرَبًا ﴿٦١﴾

2403. The instances of exemplary Punishment in former times were also subject to this rule, that Allah gives plenty of rope to the wicked, in case they might turn, repent, and obtain His Mercy.

2404. This episode in the story of Moses is meant to illustrate four points. (1) Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. Even so that wisdom did not comprehend everything, even as the whole stock of the knowledge of the present day, in the sciences and the arts, and in literature, (if it could be supposed to be gathered in one individual), does not include all knowledge. Divine knowledge, as far as man is concerned, is unlimited. Even after Moses received his divine mission, his knowledge was not so perfect that it could not receive further additions. (2) Constant effort is necessary to keep our knowledge square with the march of time, and such effort Moses is shown to be making. (3) The mysterious man he meets (xviii. 65 and n. 2411), to whom Tradition assigns the name of *Khidhr* (literally, Green), is the type of that knowledge which is ever in contact with life as it is actually lived. (4) There are paradoxes in life; apparent loss may be real gain; apparent cruelty may be real mercy; returning good for evil may really be justice and not generosity (xviii. 79-82). Allah's wisdom transcends all human calculation.

2405. The most probable geographical location (if any is required in a story that is a parable) is where the two arms of the Red Sea join together, viz., the Gulf of 'Aqaba and the Gulf of Suez. They enclose the Sinai Peninsula, in which Moses and the Israelites spent many years in their wanderings.

2406. *Huqub* means a long but indefinite space of time. Sometimes it is limited to 80 years.

2407. Literally, 'the Junction of (the space) between the two,' i.e., the point at which the two seas were united.



(About) their Fish,<sup>2408</sup> which took  
Its course through the sea  
(Straight) as in a tunnel.

62. When they had passed on  
(Some distance), Moses said  
To his attendant: "Bring us  
Our early meal; truly  
We have suffered much fatigue<sup>2409</sup>  
At this (stage of) our journey."

63. He replied: "Sawest thou  
(What happened) when we  
Betook ourselves to the rock?  
I did indeed forget  
(About) the Fish: none but  
Satan made me forget  
To tell (you) about it:<sup>2410</sup>  
It took its course through  
The sea in a marvellous way!"

64. Moses said: "That was what  
We were seeking after:  
So they went back  
On their footsteps, following  
(The path they had come).

65. So they found one<sup>2411</sup>  
Of Our servants.

فَلَمَّا جَاوَزَا قَالَ لِفَتَاهُ إِنَّا غَدَاءَنَا  
لَقَدْ لَقِينَا مِنْ سَفَرِنَا هَذَا نَصَبًا ﴿٦٢﴾

قَالَ أَرَأَيْتَ إِذْ أَوَيْنَا إِلَى الصَّخَرَةِ فَإِنِّي نَسِيتُ  
الْحُوتَ وَمَا أَنَسَنِيهِ إِلَّا الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ أَذْكُرَهُ  
وَاتَّخَذَ سَبِيلَهُ فِي الْبَحْرِ عَجَبًا ﴿٦٣﴾

قَالَ ذَلِكَ مَا كُنَّا نَبِغُ فَأَرْتَدَّاعْتَىءَانَارِهِمَا  
قَصَصًا ﴿٦٤﴾

فَوَجَدَا عَبْدًا مِنْ عِبَادِنَا آتَيْنَاهُ رَحْمَةً

2408. Moses was to go and find a servant of Allah, who would instruct him in such knowledge as he had not already got. He was to take a fish with him. The place where he was to meet his mysterious Teacher would be indicated by the fact that the fish would disappear when he got to that place.

2409. When they came to the Junction of the Seas, Moses forgot about the fish, and his attendant forgot to tell him of the fact that he had seen the fish escaping into the sea in a marvellous way. They passed on, but the stages now became heavier and heavier, and more fatiguing to Moses.

2410. The attendant actually saw the fish swimming away in the sea, and yet "forgot" to tell his master. In his case the "forgetting" was more than forgetting. Inertia had made him refrain from telling the important news. In such matters inertia is almost as bad as active spite, the suggestion of Satan.

2411. *One of Our servants*: his name is not mentioned in the Qur-ān, but Tradition gives it as *Khidr*. Round him have gathered a number of picturesque folk tales, with which we are not here concerned. "*Khidr*" means "Green": his knowledge is fresh and =

On whom We had bestowed  
Mercy from Ourselves  
And whom We had taught  
Knowledge from Our own<sup>2412</sup>  
Presence.

مَنْ عِنْدَنَا وَعَلَّمْنَاهُ مِنْ لَدُنَّا عَلِمًا ﴿١٧﴾

66. Moses said to him:  
"May I follow thee,  
On the footing that  
Thou teach me something  
Of the (Higher) Truth  
Which thou hast been taught?"<sup>2413</sup>

قَالَ لَهُ مُوسَى هَلْ أَتَّبِعُكَ عَلَى أَنْ تُعَلِّمَني  
مِمَّا عُلِّمْتَ رُشْدًا ﴿١٨﴾

67. (The other) said: "Verily  
Thou wilt not be able  
To have patience with me!"<sup>2414</sup>

قَالَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿١٩﴾

68. "For how canst thou  
Have patience about things<sup>2415</sup>  
Which are beyond your knowledge?"

وَكَيْفَ تَصْبِرُ عَلَى مَا لَمْ تُحِطْ بِهِ خُبْرًا ﴿٢٠﴾  
قَالَ سَتَجِدُنِي إِِنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ صَابِرًا

69. Moses said: "Thou wilt  
Find me, if Allah so will,

وَلَا أَغْصِي لَكَ أَمْرًا ﴿٢١﴾

= green, and drawn out of the living sources of life for it is drawn from Allah's own Knowledge. He is a mysterious being, who has to be sought out. He has the secrets of some of the paradoxes of Life, which ordinary people do not understand, or understand in a wrong sense, as we shall see further on. The nearest equivalent figure in the literature of the People of the Book is Melchizedek or Melchisedek (the Greek form in the New Testament). In Gen. xiv. 18-20, he appears as king of Salem, priest of the Most High God: he blesses Abraham, and Abraham gives him tithes.

2412. Khidhr had two special gifts from Allah: (1) Mercy from Him, and (2) Knowledge from Him too. The first freed him from the ordinary incidents of daily human life; and the second entitled him to interpret the inner meaning and mystery of events, as we shall see further on.

2413. Moses, not understanding the full import of what he was asking, makes a simple request. He wants to learn something of the special Knowledge which Allah had bestowed on Khidhr.

2414. Khidhr smiles, and says that there will be many things which Moses will see with him, which Moses will not completely understand and which will make Moses impatient. The highest knowledge often seems paradoxical to those who have not the key to it.

2415. Khidhr does not blame Moses. Each one of us can only follow our own imperfect lights to the best of our judgment, but if we have Faith, we are saved many false steps.

(Truly) patient: nor shall I  
Disobey thee in aught."<sup>2416</sup>

70. The other said: "If then  
Thou wouldst follow me,  
Ask me no questions  
About anything until I  
Myself speak to thee  
Concerning it."

#### SECTION 10.

71. So they both proceeded:  
Until, when they were  
In the boat, he scuttled it.<sup>2417</sup>  
Said Moses: "Hast thou  
Scuttled it in order  
To drown those in it?  
Truly a strange thing  
Hast thou done!"

72. He answered: "Did I not  
Tell thee that thou canst  
Have no patience with me?"

73. Moses said: Rebuke me not  
For forgetting, nor grieve me  
By raising difficulties  
In my case."

74. Then they proceeded:  
Until, when they met  
A young boy, he slew him.<sup>2418</sup>  
Moses said: "Hast thou  
Slain an innocent person  
Who had slain none?"

قَالَ فَإِنْ أَتَّبَعْتَنِي فَلَا تَسْأَلْنِي عَنْ شَيْءٍ  
حَتَّى أُحَدِّثَ لَكَ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا ﴿٧١﴾

فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّى إِذَا رَكِبَا فِي السَّفِينَةِ خَرَقَهَا قَالَ  
أَخْرِقْنَهَا لِتَغْرِقَ أَهْلَهَا لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا إِمْرًا ﴿٧٢﴾

قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ مَعِيَ صَبْرًا ﴿٧٣﴾

قَالَ لَا تُؤْخَذْنِي بِمَا نَسِيتُ وَلَا تَزِدْفَنِي  
مِنْ أَمْرِي عُسْرًا ﴿٧٤﴾

فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّى إِذَا لَقِيَا غُلَامًا فَقَتَلَهُ قَالَ أَقْتَلْتِ  
نَفْسًا زَكِيَّةً بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ لَقَدْ جِئْتَ شَيْئًا نُكْرًا ﴿٧٥﴾

2416. Moses has Faith. He adopts the true attitude of the learner to the Teacher, and promises to obey in all things, with the help of Allah. The Teacher is doubtful, but permits him to follow him on condition that he asks no questions about anything until the Teacher himself mentions it first.

2417. The explanation follows in xviii. 79.

2418. The explanation follows in xviii. 80-81.

Truly a foul (unheard-of) thing  
Hast thou done!"

75. He answered: "Did I not  
Tell thee that thou canst  
Have no patience with me?"

76. (Moses) said: "If ever I  
Ask thee about anything  
After this, keep me not  
In thy company: then wouldst  
Thou have received (full) excuse  
From my side.

77. Then they proceeded:  
Until, when they came  
To the inhabitants of a town,  
They asked them for food,  
But they refused them<sup>2419</sup>  
Hospitality. They found there  
A wall on the point of  
Falling down, but he  
Set it up straight.  
(Moses) said: "If thou  
Hadst wished, surely thou  
Couldst have exacted some  
Recompense for it!"<sup>2420</sup>

78. He answered: "This is  
The parting between me  
And thee: now will I

﴿٧٥﴾ قَالَ الرَّاقِلُ لَكَ إِنَّكَ لَنْ تَسْتَطِيعَ

مَعِيَ صَبْرًا

﴿٧٦﴾ قَالَ إِنْ سَأَلْتُكَ عَنْ شَيْءٍ بَعْدَ هَذَا فَلَا تُصَحِّحْنِي

فَدَلَّغْتَ مِنْ لَدُنِّي عَذْرًا

فَانْطَلَقَا حَتَّى إِذَا أَنْبَأَا أَهْلَ قَرْيَةٍ اسْتَطَعَمَا أَهْلَهَا

فَأَبَوْا أَنْ يُضَيِّقُوهُمَا فَوَجَدَا فِيهَا جِدَارًا يُرِيدُ

أَنْ يَنْقَضَ فَأَقَامَهُ، قَالَ لَوْ شِئْتَ لَتَّخَذْتَ

عَلَيْهِ أَجْرًا ﴿٧٧﴾

﴿٧٨﴾ قَالَ هَذَا فِرَاقُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكَ سَأُنَبِّئُكَ بِمَا وُضِعَ

لَكَ فَتَسْتَطِيعَ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا ﴿٧٨﴾

2419. The inhabitants were churlish. They broke the universal Eastern rule of hospitality to strangers, and thus showed themselves beyond the pale of ordinary human courtesies. Note that they would have been expected to *offer* hospitality of themselves, unasked. Here Moses and his companion actually had to ask for hospitality and were refused point-blank.

2420. As they were refused hospitality, they should, as self-respecting men, have shaken the dust of the town off their feet, or shown their indignation in some way. Instead of that, *Khidhr* actually goes and does a benevolent act. He rebuilds for them a falling wall, and never asks for any compensation for it. Perhaps he employed local workmen for it and paid them wages, thus actually benefiting a town which had treated him and his companion so shabbily! Moses is naturally surprised and asks, "Could you not at least have asked for the cost?"

Tell thee the interpretation  
Of (those things) over which  
Thou wast unable  
To hold patience.<sup>2421</sup>

79. "As for the boat,  
It belonged to certain  
Men in dire want:  
They plied on the water:  
I but wished to render it  
Unserviceable, for there was  
After them a certain king  
Who seized on every boat  
By force.<sup>2422</sup>

80. "As for the youth,  
His parents were people  
Of Faith, and we feared  
That he would grieve them  
By obstinate rebellion  
And ingratitude (to Allah)<sup>2423</sup>

81. "So we desired that  
Their Lord would give them  
In exchange (a son)

أَمَّا السَّفِينَةُ فَكَانَتْ لِمَسْكِينٍ يَعْمَلُونَ  
فِي الْبَحْرِ فَأَرَدْتُ أَنْ أَعِيبَهَا وَكَانَ وَرَاءَهُمْ  
مَلِكٌ يَأْخُذُ كُلَّ سَفِينَةٍ غَصْبًا ﴿٧٩﴾

وَأَمَّا الْغُلَامُ فَكَانَ أَبَوَاهُ مُؤْمِنَيْنِ فَخَشِينَا  
أَنْ يُرْهِقَهُمَا طُغْيَانًا وَكُفْرًا ﴿٨٠﴾

فَأَرَدْنَا أَنْ يُبَدِّلَهُمَا رَبُّنَا خَيْرًا مِنْهُ زَكَاةً  
وَأَقْرَبَ رُحْمًا ﴿٨١﴾

2421. The story and the interpretation are given with the greatest economy of words. It would repay us to search for the meaning in terms of our own inner and outer experience.

2422. They went on the boat, which was plying for hire. Its owners were not even ordinary men who plied for trade. They had been reduced to great poverty, perhaps from affluent circumstances, and deserved great commiseration, the more so as they preferred an honest calling to begging for charity. They did not know, but Khidhr did, that that boat, perhaps a new one, had been marked down to be commandeered by an unjust king who seized on every boat he could get—it may have been, for warlike purposes. If this boat had been taken away from these self-respecting men, they would have been reduced to beggary, with no resources left them. By a simple act of making it unseaworthy, the boat was saved from seizure. The owners could repair it as soon as the danger was past. Khidhr probably paid liberally in fares, and what seemed an unaccountably cruel act was the greatest act of kindness he could do in the circumstances.

2423. This seemed at first sight even a more cruel act than scuttling the boat. But the danger was also greater. Khidhr knew that the youth was a potential parricide. His parents were worthy, pious people, who had brought him up with love. He had apparently gone wrong. Perhaps he had already been guilty of murders and robberies and had escaped the law by subtleties and fraud. See next note.

Better in purity (of conduct)  
And closer in affection.<sup>2424</sup>

82. "As for the wall,  
It belonged to two youths,  
Orphans, in the Town;  
There was, beneath it,  
A buried treasure, to which  
They were entitled; their father  
Had been a righteous man.<sup>2425</sup>  
So thy Lord desired that  
They should attain their age<sup>2426</sup>  
Of full strength and get out  
Their treasure—a mercy  
(And favour) from thy Lord.  
I did it not of my own<sup>2427</sup>  
Accord. Such is the interpretation  
Of (those things) over which  
Thou wast unable  
To hold patience."

وَأَمَّا الْجِدَارُ فَكَانَ لِغُلَامَيْنِ يَتِيمَيْنِ فِي الْمَدِينَةِ  
وَكَانَ تَحْتَهُ كَنْزٌ لَهُمَا وَكَانَ أَبُوهُمَا صَالِحًا  
فَأَرَادَ رَبُّكَ أَنْ يَبْلُغَا أَشُدَّهُمَا وَيَسْتَخْرِجَا  
كَنْزَهُمَا رَحْمَةً مِن رَّبِّكَ وَمَا فَعَلْتُهُ عَنْ أَمْرِي  
ذَلِكَ تَأْوِيلُ مَا لَمْ تَسْطِعْ عَلَيْهِ صَبْرًا ﴿٨٢﴾

2424. The son was practically an outlaw,—a danger to the public and a particular source of grief to his righteous parents. Even so, his summary capital punishment would have been unjustified if Khidhr had been acting on his own. But Khidhr was not acting on his own: see the latter part of the next verse. The plural "we" also implies that he was not acting on his own. He was acting on higher authority and removing a public scourge, who was also a source of extreme sorrow and humiliation to his parents. His parents are promised a better-behaved son who would love them and be a credit to them.

2425. The wall was in a ruinous state. If it had fallen, the treasure buried beneath it would have been exposed and would certainly have been looted, among so churlish and selfish a people. See n. 2419 above. The treasure had been collected and buried by a righteous man. It was not, in any sense of the word, ill-gotten gains; it was buried expressly in the interests of the orphans by their father before his death. It was intended that the orphans should grow up and safely take possession of their heritage. It was also expected that they would be righteous men like their father, and use the treasure in good works and in advancing righteousness among an otherwise wicked community. There was thus both public and private interests involved in all the three incidents. In the second incident Khidhr uses the word "we", showing that he was associating in his act the public authorities of the place, who had been eluded by the outlaw.

2426. Age of full strength: Cf. xvii. 34 and n. 2218.

2427. Those who act, not from a whim or a private impulse of their own, but from higher authority, have to bear the blame, for acts of the greatest wisdom and utility.

## ECTION 11.

83. They ask thee concerning  
Zul-qarnain.<sup>2428</sup> Say,  
"I will rehearse to you  
Something of his story."
84. Verily We established his power  
On earth, and We gave him  
The ways and the means  
To all ends.<sup>2429</sup>
85. One (such) way he followed,
86. Until, when he reached  
The setting of the sun,<sup>2430</sup>  
He found it set  
In a spring of murky water:  
Near it he found a People:  
We said: "O Zul-qarnain!

وَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنْ ذِي الْقَرْنَيْنِ قُلْ سَأَتْلُوا  
عَلَيْكُمْ مِنْهُ ذِكْرًا ﴿٨٣﴾

إِنَّمَا مَكَّنَّا لَهُ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَءَاتَيْنَاهُ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَسِيلًا ﴿٨٤﴾

فَاتَّبَعَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٨٥﴾  
حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَغْرِبَ الشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَغْرُبُ فِي عَيْنٍ  
حَمِئَةٍ وَوَجَدَ عِنْدَهَا قَوْمًا قُلْنَا يَا ذَا الْقَرْنَيْنِ  
إِمَّا أَنْ تُعَذِّبَ وَإِمَّا أَنْ تَتَّخِذَ فِيهِمْ حُسْنًا ﴿٨٦﴾

2428. Literally, "the Two-horned one", the King with the Two Horns, or the Lord of the Two Epochs. Who was he? In what age, and where did he live? The Qur-ān gives us no material on which we can base a positive answer. Nor is it necessary to find an answer, as the story is treated as a Parable. Popular opinion identifies Zul-qarnain with Alexander the Great. An alternative suggestion is an ancient Persian King, or a pre-historic Himyarite King.

Zul-qarnain was a most powerful king, but it was Allah, Who, in His universal Plan, gave him power and provided him with the ways and means for his great work. His sway extended over East and West, and over people of diverse civilisations. He was just and righteous, not selfish or grasping. He protected the weak and punished the unlawful and the turbulent. Three of his expeditions are described in the text, each embodying a great ethical idea involved in the possession of kingship or power.

2429. Great was his power and great were his opportunities ("ways and means"), which he used for justice and righteousness. But he recognised that his power and opportunities were given to him as a trust by Allah. He had faith, and did not forget Allah.

2430. This is the first of the three episodes here mentioned, his expedition to the west. "Reaching the setting of the sun" does not mean the extreme west, for there is no such thing. West and East are relative terms. It means a western expedition terminated by a "spring of murky water." This has puzzled Commentators, and they have understood this to mean the dark, tempestuous sea. If Zul-qarnain is Alexander the Great, the reference is easily understood to be to Lychnitis (now Ochrida), west of Macedonia. It is fed entirely by underground springs in a limestone region, where the water is never very clear.

(Thou hast authority,) either  
To punish them, or  
To treat them with kindness."<sup>2431</sup>

87. He said: "Whoever doth wrong,  
Him shall we punish; then  
Shall he be sent back<sup>2432</sup>  
To his Lord; and He will  
Punish him with a punishment  
Unheard-of (before).

قَالَ أَمَّا مَنْ ظَلَمَ فَسَوْفَ نَعَذِّبُهُ ثُمَّ يُرَدُّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ  
فَيُعَذِّبُهُ عَذَابًا نَّكَرًا ﴿٨٧﴾

88. "But whoever believes,  
And works righteousness,—  
He shall have a goodly  
Reward, and easy will be  
His task as we order it  
By our command."<sup>2433</sup>

وَأَمَّا مَنْ آمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُ جَزَاءٌ  
الْحَسَنَىٰ وَسَنَقُولُ لَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِنَا يُسْرًا ﴿٨٨﴾

89. Then followed he (another) way,  
90. Until, when he came  
To the rising of the sun,<sup>2434</sup>  
He found it rising  
On a people for whom

ثُمَّ اتَّبَعَ سَبِيلًا ﴿٨٩﴾  
حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ مَطْلِعَ الشَّمْسِ وَجَدَهَا تَطْلُعُ عَلَىٰ قَوْمٍ  
لَّمْ يَجْعَلْ لَهُم مِّن دُونِهَا سِتْرًا ﴿٩٠﴾

2431. He had great power and a great opportunity. He got authority over a turbulent and unruly people. Was he going to be severe with them and chastise them, or was he going to seek peace at any price, i.e., to wink at violence and injustice so long as it did not affect his power? He chose the better course, as described in the next verse. To protect the weak and the innocent, he punished the guilty and the headstrong, but he remembered always that the true Punishment would come in the Hereafter—the true and final justice before the throne of Allah.

2432. Though most powerful among kings, he remembered that his power was but human, and given by Allah. His punishments were but tentative, to preserve the balance of this life as he could appraise it. Even if his punishment was capital ("wrong doer sent back to his Lord") it was nothing compared to the dire consequences of sin, in the final Justice of Allah.

2433. He never said like Pharaoh. "I am your Lord Most High!" (Ixxix. 24). On the contrary his punishments were humbly regulated as not being final, and he laid more stress on the good he could do to those who lived normal lives in faith and righteousness. His rule was easy to them: he imposed no heavy tasks because of his power, but gave every opportunity to rich and poor for the exercise of virtue and goodness. Such is the spiritual lesson to be learned from the first episode.

2434. We now come to the second episode. This is an expedition to the east. "Rising of the sun" has a meaning corresponding to "setting of the sun" in xviii. 86, as explained in n. 2430.



We had provided  
No covering protection<sup>2435</sup>  
Against the sun.

91. (He left them) as they were:  
We completely understood  
What was before him.<sup>2436</sup>

92. Then followed he (another) way,

93. Until, when he reached  
(A tract) between two mountains,<sup>2437</sup>  
He found, beneath them, a people  
Who scarcely understood a word.<sup>2438</sup>

94. They said: "O Zul-qarnain!  
The Gog and Magog (people)<sup>2439</sup>  
Do great mischief on earth:  
Shall we then render thee  
Tribute in order that  
Thou mightest erect a barrier  
Between us and them?"

كَذَلِكَ وَقَدْ أَحَطْنَا بِمَا لَدَيْهِ خُبْرًا ﴿١١﴾

ثُمَّ اتَّخَذَ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٢﴾

حَتَّىٰ إِذَا بَلَغَ بَيْنَ السَّدَّيْنِ وَجَدَ مِنْ دُونِهِمَا قَوْمًا  
لَا يَكَادُونَ يَفْقَهُونَ قَوْلًا ﴿١٣﴾

قَالُوا يٰذَا الْقَرْنَيْنِ إِنَّا بَأْجُوجٌ وَمَأْجُوجٌ  
مُفْسِدُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَهَلْ نَجْعَلُ لَكَ خَرْجًا  
عَلَىٰ أَنْ تَجْعَلَ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَهُمْ سَدًّا ﴿١٤﴾

2435. The people here lived very simple lives. Perhaps the climate was hot, and they required neither roofs over their heads, nor much clothing to protect them from the sun. What did he do with them? See next note.

2436. They were a primitive people. He did not fuss over their primitiveness, but left them in the enjoyment of peace and tranquillity in their own way. In this he was wise. Power is apt to be intolerant and arrogant, and to interfere in everything that does not accord with its own glorification. Not so Zul-qarnain. He recognised his own limitations in the sight of Allah: man never completely understands his own position, but if he devoutly looks to Allah, he will live and let live. This is the spiritual lesson from the second episode.

2437. Cf. xxi. 96.

2438. It does not mean that they had no speech. It means that they did not understand the speech of the Conqueror. But they had parleys with him (through interpreters), as is evident from the verses following (xviii. 94-98).

2439. What we are mainly concerned with is its interpretation. The Conqueror had now arrived among a people who were different in speech and race from him, but not quite primitive, for they were skilled in the working of metals, and could furnish blocks (or bricks) of iron, melt metals with bellows or blow-pipes, and prepare molten lead (xviii. 96). Apparently they were a peaceable and industrious race, much subject to incursions from wild tribes who are called Gog and Magog. Against these tribes they were willing to purchase immunity by paying the Conqueror tribute in return for protection. The permanent protection they wanted was the closing of a mountain gap through which the incursions were made.

95. He said: "(The power) in which  
My Lord has established me  
Is better (than tribute):<sup>2440</sup>  
Help me therefore with strength  
(And labour): I will  
Erect a strong barrier  
Between you and them:

قَالَ مَا مَكَّنِّي فِيهِ رَبِّي خَيْرٌ فَأَعِينُونِي بِقُوَّةٍ أَجْعَلْ بَيْنَكُمْ  
وَبَيْنَهُمْ رَدْمًا ﴿٩٥﴾

96. "Bring me blocks of iron."<sup>2441</sup>  
At length, when he had  
Filled up the space between  
The two steep mountain-sides,  
He said, "Blow (with your bellows)"  
Then, when he had made<sup>2442</sup>  
It (red) as fire, he said:  
"Bring me, that I may  
Pour over it, molten lead."

ءَاتُونِي زُبَرَ الْحَدِيدِ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا سَاوَىٰ بَيْنَ الصَّدَفَيْنِ  
قَالَ انْفُخُوا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَعَلَهُ نَارًا قَالَ ءَاتُونِي أُفْرِغْ  
عَلَيْهِ قِطْرًا ﴿٩٦﴾

97. Thus were they made  
Powerless to scale it  
Or to dig through it.<sup>2443</sup>

فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا أَن يَظْهَرُوهُ  
وَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا لَهُ نَقْبًا ﴿٩٧﴾

98. He said: "This is  
A mercy from my Lord:<sup>2444</sup>

قَالَ هَذَا رَحْمَةٌ مِن رَّبِّي فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ رَبِّي جَعَلَهُ دَكَّاءَ

2440. Zul-qarnain was not greedy and did not want to impose a tribute to be carried away from an industrious population. He understood the power which Allah had given him, to involve duties and responsibilities on his part—the duty of protecting his subjects without imposing too heavy a taxation on them. He would provide the motive force and organising skill. Would they obey him and provide the material and labour, so that they could close the gap with a strong barrier, probably with well-secured gates? The word *radm*, translated "Barrier," does not necessarily mean a wall, but rather suggests a blocked door or entrance.

2441. I understand the defences erected to have been a strong barrier of iron, with iron Gates. The jambs of the Gates were constituted with blocks or bricks of iron, and the interstices filled up with molten lead, so as to form an impregnable mass of metal. It may be that there was a stone wall also, but that is not mentioned. There was none in the Iron Gate near Bukhārā.

2442. *Made it (red) as fire*: what does "it" refer to? Probably to the iron, either in sheets or blocks, to be welded with the molten lead.

2443. The iron wall and gates and towers were sufficiently high to prevent their being scaled and sufficiently strong with welded metal to resist any attempt to dig through them.

2444. After all the effort which Zul-qarnain has made for their protection, he claims no credit for himself beyond that of discharging his duty as a ruler. He turns their =

But when the promise  
Of my Lord comes to pass,  
He will make it into dust;  
And the promise of  
My Lord is true."

وَكَانَ وَعْدُ رَبِّي حَقًّا ﴿١٨﴾

99. On that day We shall  
Leave them to surge  
Like waves on one another.<sup>2445</sup>  
The trumpet will be blown,  
And We shall collect them  
All together.

وَتَرَكْنَا بَعْضَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَمُوجُ فِي بَعْضٍ  
وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَجُمِعْنَاهُمْ جَمْعًا ﴿١٩﴾

100. And We shall present  
Hell that day for Unbelievers  
To see, all spread out,<sup>2446</sup>

وَعَرَّضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْكَافِرِينَ عَرَضًا ﴿٢٠﴾

101. (Unbelievers) whose eyes  
Had been under a veil  
From Remembrance of Me,  
And who had been unable  
Even to hear.<sup>2447</sup>

الَّذِينَ كَانَتْ أَعْيُنُهُمْ فِي غِطَاءٍ عَنْ ذِكْرِي  
وَكَانُوا لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ سَمْعًا ﴿٢١﴾

#### SECTION 12.

102. Do the Unbelievers think  
That they can take  
My servants as protectors

أَفَحَسِبَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنْ يَتَّخِذُوا عِبَادِي مِنْ دُونِي  
أَوْلِيَاءَ إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا جَهَنَّمَ لِلْكَافِرِينَ نُزُلًا ﴿٢٢﴾

= attention to Allah, Who has provided the ways and means by which they can be helped and protected. But all such human precautions are apt to become futile. The time must come when they will crumble into dust. Allah has said so in His Revelation; and His word is true.

And so the lesson from the third episode is: Take human precautions and do all in your power to protect yourselves from evil. But no protection is complete unless you seek the help and grace of Allah. The best of our precautions must crumble to dust when the appointed Day arrives.

2445. And so we pass on to the Last Days before the Great Summons comes from Allah. All human barriers will be swept away. There will be tumultuous rushes. The Trumpet will be blown, and the Judgment will be set on foot.

2446. If men had scoffed at Faith and the Hereafter, their eyes will be opened now, and they will see the terrible Reality.

2447. Those very men who refused to see the many Signs of Allah which in this world convey His Message and to hear the Word of the Lord when it came to them, will then see without any mistake the consequences fully brought up before them.

Besides Me? Verily We  
Have prepared Hell  
For the Unbelievers  
For (their) entertainment.

103. Say: "Shall we tell you  
Of those who lose most  
In respect of their deeds?"<sup>2448</sup>

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا ﴿١٠٣﴾

104. "Those whose efforts have  
Been wasted in this life,  
While they thought that  
They were acquiring good  
By their works?"<sup>2449</sup>

الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ  
يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا ﴿١٠٤﴾

105. They are those who deny  
The Signs of their Lord  
And the fact of their  
Having to meet Him  
(In the Hereafter): vain  
Will be their works,  
Nor shall We, on the Day  
Of Judgment, give them  
Any Weight.<sup>2450</sup>

أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَلِقَائِهِ  
فَحِطَّتْ أَعْمَالُهُمْ فَلَا نُقِيمُ لَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وَزَنًا ﴿١٠٥﴾

106. That is their reward,  
Hell; because they rejected  
Faith, and took My Signs  
And My Messengers

ذَٰلِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ جَهَنَّمَ بِمَا كَفَرُوا وَتَوَلَّوْا آيَاتِي  
وَرُسُلِي هُزُوا ﴿١٠٦﴾

2448. That is, those who prided themselves on their works in this life, and now find that those works are of no avail. Their loss is all the greater because they had a misplaced confidence in their own deeds or in the assistance of false "protectors". Allah is the only Protector: no one else's protection is of any use.

2449. Many people have such a smug sense of self-righteousness that while they go on doing wrong, they think that they are acquiring merit. So, in charity, all the elements that make for outward show or selfishness (as to get some worldly advantage) nullify the deed of charity. In the same way hypocrites sometimes affect to be surprised that their declared effort for somebody's good is not appreciated, when they are really seeking some hidden gain or false glory for themselves. The sincere are only those who believe in their spiritual responsibility and act as in Allah's sight.

2450. What weight can be attached to works behind which the motives are not pure, or are positively evil? They are either wasted or count against those who seek to pass them off as meritorious!

By way of jest.<sup>2451</sup>

107. As to those who believe  
And work righteous deeds,  
They have, for their entertainment,  
The Gardens of Paradise,<sup>2452</sup>
108. Wherein they shall dwell  
(For aye): no change  
Will they wish for from them.
109. Say: "If the ocean were  
Ink (wherewith to write out)  
The words of my Lord,<sup>2453</sup>  
Sooner would the ocean be  
Exhausted than would the words  
Of my Lord, even if we  
Added another ocean  
Like it, for its aid."
110. Say: "I am but a man  
Like yourselves, (but)  
The inspiration has come  
To me, that your God is  
One God: whoever expects  
To meet his Lord, let him  
Work righteousness, and,  
In the worship of his Lord,  
Admit no one as partner."<sup>2454</sup>

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ  
الْفِرْدَوْسِ نُزُلًا ﴿١٧﴾

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَبْغُونَ عَنْهَا حِوَلًا ﴿١٨﴾

قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ الْبَحْرُ مَدَادًا لَكُنَّتُ رَبِّي لَنَفِدَ الْبَحْرُ قَبْلَ  
أَنْ نَفِدَ كَلِمَتُ رَبِّي وَلَوْ جِئْنَا بِمِثْلِهِ مَدَدًا ﴿١٩﴾

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُكُمْ يُوحَى إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهٌ  
وَاحِدٌ فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا  
وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا ﴿٢٠﴾

2451. False motives, pretence, deception, and hypocrisy, flourish because people do not take the higher life seriously. In effect they treat it as a jest. Signs and Messengers are sent as a special and personal Mercy from Allah, and for such things the first person singular is used as in this verse, even when it involves a sudden transition from the first person plural as in the last verse.

2452. *Firdaus* in Persian means an enclosed place, a park. In technical theological language the word is used for the inner circle of Heaven, or the highest Heaven, the destination of those who perfectly fulfil both requirements, viz.; a sound faith, and perfectly righteous conduct. Small faults in either respect are forgiven; the Mercy of Allah steps in.

2453. The Words and Signs and Mercies of Allah are in all Creation, and can never be fully set out in human language, however extended our means may be imagined to be.

2454. Righteousness and true respect for Allah—which excludes the worship of anything else, whether idols, or deified men, or forces of nature, or faculties of man, or Self—these are the criteria of true worship.