

INTRODUCTION TO SŪRAT AL-*Ankabūt*, 29.

This Sūra is the last of the series begun with S. xvii, in which the growth of the man as an individual is considered, especially illustrated by the way in which the great Prophets were prepared for their work and received their mission, and the nature of Revelation in relation to the environments in which it was promulgated. (See Introduction to S. xvii). It also closes the sub-series beginning with S. xxvi, which is concerned with the spiritual Light, and the reactions to it at certain periods of religious history. (See Introduction to S. xxvi.)

The last Sūra closed with a reference to the doctrine of the *Ma'ād*, or final Return of man to Allah. This theme is further developed here, and as it is continued in the subsequent three Sūras, it forms a connecting link between the present series and those three Sūras.

In particular, emphasis is laid here on the necessity of linking actual conduct with the reception of Allah's revelation, and reference is again made to the stories of Noah, Abraham, and Lot among the Prophets, and the stories of Midian, 'Ād, Thamūd, and Pharaoh among the rejecters of Allah's Message. This world's life is contrasted with the real Life of the Hereafter.

Chronologically the main Sūra belongs to the late Middle Makkan period, but the chronology has no significance except as showing how clearly the vision of the Future was revealed long before the Hijrat, to the struggling Brotherhood of Islām.

Summary.—Belief is tested by trial in life and practical conduct: though Noah lived 950 years, his people refused Faith, and Abraham's generation threatened to burn Abraham (xxix. 1-27).

Lot's people not only rejected Allah's Message but publicly defied him in sin; the 'Ād and the Thamūd had intelligence but misused it, and Qārūn, Pharaoh, and Hāmān perished for their overweening arrogance: they found their worldly power as frail as a spider's web (xxix. 28-44).

The Qur-ān as a revelation stands on its own merits and is a Sign: it teaches the distinction between Right and Wrong, and shows the importance and excellence of the Hereafter (xxix. 45-69).

Al-'Ankabūt, or the Spider.

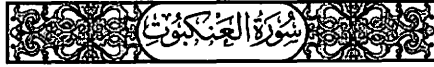
*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful.*

1. A. L. M.³⁴²²

2. Do men think that
They will be left alone
On saying, "We believe",³⁴²³
And that they will not
Be tested?

3. We did test those
Before them, and Allah will
Certainly know³⁴²⁴ those who are
True from those who are false.

4. Do those who practise
Evil think that they
Will outstrip Us?
Evil is their judgment!³⁴²⁵



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

الْم

أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ

لَا يُفْتَنُونَ ﴿١﴾

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ

صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ ﴿٢﴾

أَمْ حَسِبَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ أَنْ يَسْفِهُنَا

سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٣﴾

3422. We are asked to contrast, in our present life the real inner life against the outer life, and learn from the past about the struggles of the soul which upholds Allah's Truth, against the environment of evil, which resists it, and to turn our thoughts to the Ma'ād, or man's future destiny in the Hereafter.

3423. Mere lip profession of Faith is not enough. It must be tried and tested in the real turmoil of life. The test will be applied in all kinds of circumstances, in individual life and in relation to the environment around us, to see whether we can strive constantly and put Allah above Self. Much pain, sorrow, and self-sacrifice may be necessary, not because they are good in themselves, but because they will purify us, like fire applied to a goldsmith's crucible to burn out the dross.

3424. The word "know" is used here more in the sense of testing than of acquiring knowledge. Allah is All-Knowing: He needs no test to increase His own knowledge, but the test is to burn out the dross within ourselves, as explained in the last note.

3425. If the enemies of Truth imagine that they will "be first" by destroying Truth before it takes root, they are sadly at fault, for their own persecution may help to plant Allah's Truth more firmly in men's hearts.

5. For those whose hopes are
In the meeting with Allah,³⁴²⁶
The Term (appointed)
By Allah is surely coming:³⁴²⁷
And He hears and knows
(All things).

مَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ اللَّهِ فَإِنْ أَجَلَ اللَّهُ لَاتٍ
وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٥﴾

6. And if any strive (with might
And main), they do so
For their own souls.³⁴²⁸
For Allah is free of all
Needs from all creation.

وَمَنْ جَاهَدَ فَإِنَّمَا يُجَاهِدُ لِنَفْسِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
لَغَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦﴾

7. Those who believe and work
Righteous deeds,—from them
Shall We blot out all misdeeds
That they have committed,³⁴²⁹
And We shall reward
Them according to
The best of their deeds.

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ
سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَحْسَنَ الَّذِي كَانُوا
يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٧﴾

3426. The men of Faith look forward to Allah. Their quest is Allah, and the object of their hopes is the meeting with Allah. They should strive with might and main to serve Him in this life, for this life is short, and the Term appointed for their probation will soon be over.

3427. The Term (*ajal*) may signify: (1) the time appointed for death, which ends the probation of this life; (2) the time appointed for this life, so that we can prepare for the Hereafter; the limit will soon expire. In either case the ultimate meaning is the same. We must strive *now* and not postpone anything for the future. And we must realise and remember that every prayer we make to Allah is heard by Him, and that every unspoken wish or motive of our heart, good or bad, is known to Him, and goes to swell our spiritual account.

3428. All our striving enures to our own spiritual benefit. When we speak of serving Allah, it is not that we confer any benefit on Him. For He has no needs, and is independent of all His Creation. In conforming to His Will, we are seeking our own good, as in yielding to evil we are doing harm to ourselves.

3429. In striving to purify our Faith and our Life, we are enabled to avoid the consequences of our misdeeds for Allah will forgive any evil in our past, and help to the attainment of a Future based on the best of what we have done rather than on the poor average of our own merits. The atonement or expiation is by Allah's Mercy, not by our merits or the merits or sacrifice of anyone else.

8. We have enjoined on man
Kindness to parents: but if
They (either of them) strive
(To force) thee to join
With Me (in worship)
Anything of which thou hast
No knowledge,³⁴³⁰ obey them not.
Ye have (all) to return
To Me, and I will
Tell you (the truth)
Of all that ye did.³⁴³¹

9. And those who believe
And work righteous deeds,—
Them shall We admit
To the company of the
Righteous.³⁴³²

10. Then there are among men
Such as say, "We believe
In Allah"; but when they suffer
Affliction in (the cause of) Allah,
They treat men's oppression
As if it were the Wrath
Of Allah! And if help
Comes (to thee) from thy Lord,

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَلَدَيْهِ حُسْنًا وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ
لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا
إِلَىٰ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٨﴾

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ
فِي الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٩﴾

وَمِنَ النَّاسِ مَن يَقُولُ ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ فَإِذَا أُوذِيَ فِي اللَّهِ
جَعَلَ فِتْنَةَ النَّاسِ كَعَذَابِ اللَّهِ وَلَئِن جَاءَ
نَصْرٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ لَيَقُولُنَّ إِنَّا كُنَّا مَعَكُمْ أَوْ لَيْسَ
اللَّهُ بِأَعْلَمَ بِمَا فِي صُدُورِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

3430. That is, no certainty. In matters of faith and worship, even parents have no right to force their children. They cannot and must not hold up before them any worship but that of the One True God.

3431. Children and parents must all remember that they have all to go before Allah's tribunal, and answer, each for his own deeds. In cases where one set of people have lawful authority over another set of people (as in the case of parents and children), and the two differ in important matters like that of Faith, the latter are justified in rejecting authority: the apparent conflict will be solved when the whole truth is revealed to all eyes in the final Judgment.

3432. The picking up again of the words which began verse 7 above shows that the same subject is now pursued from another aspect. The striving in righteous deeds will restore fallen man to the society of the Righteous.

They are sure to say,³⁴³³
 "We have (always) been
 With you!" Does not Allah
 Know best all that is
 In the hearts of all Creation!

11. And Allah most certainly knows
 Those who believe, and as certainly
 Those who are Hypocrites.³⁴³⁴

12. And the Unbelievers say
 To those who believe:
 "Follow our path, and we
 Will bear (the consequences)³⁴³⁵
 Of your faults." Never
 In the least will they
 Bear their faults: in fact
 They are liars!

13. They will bear their own
 Burdens, and (other) burdens
 Along with their own,³⁴³⁶

وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا
 وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ ﴿١١﴾

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّبِعُوا
 سَبِيلَنَا وَلْنَحْمِلْ خَطَايَكُمْ وَمَا هُمْ بِحَامِلِينَ
 مِنْ خَطَايَاهُمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِنَّهُمْ لَكَاذِبُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

وَلَيَحْمِلُنَّ أَثْقَالَهُمْ وَأَثْقَالًا مَعَ أَثْقَالِهِمْ وَلَيَسْئَلُنَّ

3433. Cf. ix. 56, and other passages where the cunning of the Hypocrites is exposed. The man who turns away from Faith in adversity and only claims the friendship of the Faithful when there is something to be gained by it, is worthy of a double condemnation: first because he rejected Faith and Truth, and secondly because he falsely pretended to be of those whom he feared or hated in his heart. But nothing in all creation is concealed from Allah.

3434. Cf. xxix. 3 above. The general opposition between Truth and Falsehood is now brought down to the specific case of the Hypocrites, who are against the Faith militant but swear friendship with it when it seems to be gaining ground. The argument is rounded off with the next two verses.

3435. Besides the hypocrite there is another type of man who openly scoffs at Faith. 'Take life as we take it,' he says; 'we shall bear your sins.' As if they could! Each soul bears its own burdens, and no one else can bear them. The principle also applies to the type of man who preaches vicarious atonement, for, if followed to its logical conclusion, it means both injustice and irresponsibility, and puts quite a different complexion on the nature of sin.

3436. Besides the burden of their own infidelity, they will bear the burden of deluding others with falsehood.

And on the Day of Judgment
They will be called to account
For their falsehoods.

SECTION 2.

14. We did send Noah
To his people, and he tarried
Among them a thousand years³⁴³⁷
Less fifty: but the Deluge
Overwhelmed them while they
(Persisted in) sin.
15. But We saved him
And the Companions
Of the Ark, and We made
The (Ark) a Sign
For all Peoples!
16. And (We also saved)
Abraham: behold, he said³⁴³⁸
To his people, "Serve Allah
And fear Him: that
Will be best for you—
If you understand!

يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ فَلَبِثَ

فِيهِمْ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ إِلَّا خَمْسِينَ عَامًا

فَأَخَذَهُمُ الطُّوفَانُ وَهُمْ ظَالِمُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُ وَأَصْحَابَ السَّفِينَةِ وَجَعَلْنَاهَا

آيَةً لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

وَإِذْ هَمَّ إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاتَّقُوهُ

ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

3437. The story of Noah and his Flood is not told here. It is told in other places; e.g., see xi. 25-48 or xxvi. 105-22. It is only referred to here to point out that Noah's period lasted a long time, 950 years. (Cf. Gen. ix. 28-29, where his whole age is declared to have been 950 years, of which 350 years were after the Flood). In spite of this long period, his contemporaries failed to listen, and they were destroyed. But the story of the Ark remains an everlasting Sign and Warning to mankind—a Sign of deliverance to the righteous and of destruction to the wicked.

3438. The story of Abraham has been told in various phases in different passages. The ones most germane to the present passage are: xxi. 51-72 (his being cast into the fire and being saved from it); and xix. 41-49 (his voluntary exile from the home of his fathers). Here the story is not told but is referred to in order to stress the following points; (1) Abraham's people only responded to his preaching by threatening to burn him (xxix. 16-18, 24); (2) evil consorts with evil but will have a rude awakening (xxix. 25); (3) the good adhere to the good, and are blessed (xxix. 26-27). Note that the passage xxix. 19-23 is a parenthetical comment, though some Commentators treat a portion of it as part of Abraham's speech.

17. "For ye do worship idols
Besides Allah, and ye invent
Falsehood. The things that ye
Worship besides Allah have
No power to give you sustenance:
Then seek ye sustenance³⁴³⁹
From Allah, serve Him,
And be grateful to Him:
To Him will be your return.

إِنَّمَا تَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْثَنًا وَتَخْلُقُونَ
إِفْكًَا إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَعْبُدُونَ مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ
لَا يَمْلِكُونَ لَكُمْ رِزْقًا فَابْتَغُوا عِندَ اللَّهِ الرِّزْقَ
وَاعْبُدُوهُ وَاشْكُرُوا لَهُ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٧﴾

18. "And if ye reject (the Message),
So did generations before you:
And the duty of the messenger
Is only to preach publicly
(And clearly)."

وَلِإِن تَكْذِبُوا فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ أُمَمٌ مِّن قَبْلِكُمْ
وَمَا عَلَى الرَّسُولِ إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿٨﴾

19. See they not how Allah
Originates creation, then³⁴⁴⁰
Repeats it: truly that
Is easy for Allah.
20. Say: "Travel through the earth³⁴⁴¹
And see how Allah did
Originate creation; so will
Allah produce a later creation:
For Allah has power
Over all things.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا كَيْفَ يُبْدِئُ اللَّهُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ
يُعِيدُهُ ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿٩﴾

قُلْ سِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ
بَدَأَ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ اللَّهُ يُنشِئُ النَّشْأَةَ الْآخِرَةَ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٠﴾

3439. *Sustenance*: in the symbolic as well as the literal sense. Seek from Allah all that is necessary for your upkeep and development, and for preparing you for your future Destiny. Lay all your hopes in Him and in no one else. Dedicate yourselves to His worship. He will give you all that is necessary for your growth and well being, and you should show your gratitude to Him by conforming your will entirely to His.

3440. The originating of creation is the creation of primeval matter. The repetition of the process of creation goes on constantly, for at every moment new processes are being called into being by the creative power of Allah, and according to His Laws. And the final creation as far as man is concerned will be in the Ma'ād, when the whole world as man sees it will be entirely newly created on a different plane. As far as Allah is concerned, there is nothing final,—no first and last, for He is infinite. He was before our First and will be after our Last.

3441. *Travel through the earth*: again, literally as well as symbolically. If we actually go through this wide earth, we shall see the wonderful things in His Creation—the Grand Canyon and the Niagaras in America, beautiful harbours like that at Sydney in Australia, =

21. "He punishes whom He pleases,
And He grants mercy to whom
He pleases, and towards Him
Are ye turned.³⁴⁴²

يُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَرْحَمُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَإِلَيْهِ
تُقْلَبُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

22. "Not on earth nor in heaven
Will ye be able (fleeing)
To frustrate (His Plan),
Nor have ye, besides Allah,
Any protector or helper."

وَمَا أَنْتُمْ بِمُعْجِزِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ
وَمَا لَكُمْ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مِنْ وَلِيٍّ وَلَا نَصِيرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

SECTION 3.

23. Those who reject the Signs
Of Allah and the Meeting
With Him (in the Hereafter),-
It is they who shall despair
Of My mercy: it is they³⁴⁴³
Who will (suffer)
A most grievous Chastisement

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَلِقَائِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ
يَسْأَوْنَ مِنْ رَحْمَتِي وَأُولَٰئِكَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

= mountains like Fujiyama, the Himalayas, and Elburz in Asia, the Nile with its wonderful cataracts in Africa, the Fiords of Norway, the Geysers of Iceland, the city of the midnight sun in Tromsø, and innumerable wonders everywhere. But wonders upon wonders are disclosed in the constitution of matter itself, the atom, and the forces of energy, as also in the instincts of animals, and the minds and capacities of man. And there is no limit to these things. Worlds upon worlds are created and transformed every moment, within and presumably beyond man's vision. From what we know we can judge of the unknown.

3442. I think *ilaihi tuqlabūn* is better translated "towards Him are ye turned" than "towards Him will be your return", as it implies not only the return of man to Allah in the Hereafter (*turja'un* in verse 17 above) but also the fact explained in verse 22 that man's needs are always to be obtained from Allah: man cannot frustrate Allah's designs, and can have no help or protection except from Allah: man has always to face Allah, whether man obeys Allah or tries to ignore Allah. Man will never be able to defeat Allah's Plan. According to His wise Will and Plan, He will grant His grace or withhold it from man.

3443. The emphasis is on "they" (*ulāika*). It is only the people who ignore or reject Allah's Signs and reject a Hereafter, that will find themselves in despair and suffering. Allah's Mercy is open to all, but if any reject His Mercy, they must suffer.

24. So naught was the answer
Of (Abraham's) people except
That they said: "Slay him
Or burn him." But Allah
Did save him from the Fire.³⁴⁴⁴
Verily in this are Signs
For people who believe.

25. And he said: "For you,
Ye have taken (for worship)
Idols besides Allah, out of
Mutual love and regard³⁴⁴⁵
Between yourselves in this life;
But on the Day of Judgment
Ye shall disown each other
And curse each other:
And your abode will be
The Fire, and ye shall have
None to help."

26. But Lūt believed him:³⁴⁴⁶
He said: "I will leave
Home for the sake of
My Lord: for He is
Exalted in Might, and Wise."

فَمَا كَانَتْ جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا اقْتُلُوهُ
أَوْ حَرِّقُوهُ فَأَنْجَاهُ اللَّهُ مِنَ النَّارِ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ
لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

وَقَالَ إِنَّمَا اتَّخَذْتُم مِّن دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْثَانًا مَّوَدَّةَ
بَيْنِكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ثُمَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
يَكْفُرُ بَعْضُكُم بِبَعْضٍ وَيَلْعَنُ
بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا وَمَأْوَاكُمُ النَّارُ
وَمَا لَكُم مِّن نَّاصِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

﴿٢٦﴾ فَآمَنَ لَهُ لُوطٌ وَقَالَ إِنِّي مُهَاجِرٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّي
إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٢٦﴾

3444. See xxi. 66-70. Abraham was cast into the fire, but he was unhurt, by the grace of Allah. So righteous people suffer no harm from the plots of the wicked. But they must leave the environment of evil even if they have to forsake their ancestral home, as Abraham did.

3445. In sin and wickedness there is as much log-rolling as in politics. Evil men humour each other and support each other; they call each other's vice by high-sounding names. They call it mutual regard or friendship or love; at the lowest, they call it toleration. Perhaps they flourish in this life by such arts. But they deceive themselves, and they deceive each other. What will be their relations in the Hereafter? They will disown each other when each has to answer on the principle of personal responsibility. Each will accuse the others of misleading him, and they will curse each other. But there will then be no help, and they must suffer in the Fire.

3446. Lot was a nephew of Abraham. He adhered to Abraham's teaching and faith and accepted voluntary exile with him, for Abraham left the home of his fathers in Chaldaea and migrated to Syria and Palestine, where Allah gave him increase and prosperity, and a numerous family, who upheld the flag of Unity and the Light of Allah.

27. And We gave (Abraham)
Isaac and Jacob, and ordained
Among his progeny Prophethood³⁴⁴⁷
And Revelation, and We
Granted him his reward
In this life; and he will be
In the Hereafter
Of the Righteous.³⁴⁴⁸

وَوَهَبْنَا لَهُ إِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي ذُرِّيَّتِهِ
الْنُّبُوَّةَ وَالْكِتَابَ وَآيَيْنَاهُ أَجْرَهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا
وَلَنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لِمِنَّ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

28. And (remember) Lūt: behold,
He said to his people:
"Ye do commit lewdness,
Such as no people in Creation³⁴⁴⁹
(Ever) committed before you.

وَلُوطًا إِذْ قَالَ لِقَوْمِهِ إِنَّكُمْ لَنَافُونَ
الْفَحْشَةَ مَا سَبَقَكُمْ بِهَا مِنْ أَحَدٍ
مِّنَ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٨﴾

29. "Do ye indeed approach men,
And cut off the highway?³⁴⁵⁰
And practise wickedness
(Even) in your councils?"
But his people gave no answer
But this: they said:
"Bring us the Wrath of Allah
If thou tellest the truth."³⁴⁵¹

أَإِنَّكُمْ لَنَافُوتُ الرِّجَالَ وَتَقَاطِعُونَ السَّبِيلَ
وَتَأْتُونَ فِي نَادِيَكُمُ الْمُنْكَرَ فَمَا كَانَ
جَوَابَ قَوْمِهِ إِلَّا أَن قَالُوا أَفَتُبَاعِدَابِ
اللَّهِ إِن كُنْتُمْ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

3447. Isaac was Abraham's son and Jacob his grandson, and among his progeny was included Ismā'il the eldest son of Abraham. Each of these became a fountain-head of Prophecy and Revelation, Isaac and Jacob through Moses, and Ismā'il through the holy Prophet Muhammad. Jacob got the name of "Israel" at Bethel: Gen. 32:28; 35:10, and his progeny got the title of "The Children of Israel".

3448. Cf. xxix. 9, and iv. 69, n. 586.

3449. Cf. vii. 80. A discreet reference is made to their unspeakable crimes, which were against the laws of all nature.

3450. They infested highways and committed their horrible crimes not only secretly, but openly and publicly, even in their assemblies. Some Commentators understand "cutting off the highway" to refer to highway robberies: this is possible, and it is also possible that the crimes in their assemblies may have been injustice, rowdiness, etc. But the context seems to refer to their own special horrible crime, and the point here seems to be that they were not ashamed of it and that they practised it publicly. Degradation could go no further.

3451. This is another instance of their effrontery, in addition to that mentioned in vii. 82: the two supplement each other. Here the point emphasised is that they did not believe in Allah or His Punishment, and dared Allah's Prophet Lot to bring about the Punishment if he could. And it did come and destroy them.

30. He said: "O my Lord!
Help Thou me against people
Who do mischief!"

قَالَ رَبِّ انصُرْنِي عَلَى الْقَوْمِ
الْمُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٣٠﴾

SECTION 4.

31. When Our Messengers came
To Abraham with the good news,³⁴⁵²
They said: "We are indeed
Going to destroy the people
Of this township:³⁴⁵³ for truly
They are wicked men."

وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا
إِنَّا مُهْلِكُوا أَهْلَ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ إِنِ أَهْلُهَا
كَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

32. He said: "But there is
Lūt there." They said:
"We know well who
Is there: we will certainly
Save him and his following,-
Except his wife: she is
Of those who lag behind!"³⁴⁵⁴

قَالَ إِنَّ فِيهَا لُوطًا قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ فِيهَا
لَنَنْجِيَنَّهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا أَمْرًا تُهْكَأُ كَانَتْ
مِنَ الْفَافِرِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

33. And when Our Messengers
Came to Lūt, he was
Grieved on their account,
And felt himself powerless³⁴⁵⁵
(To protect) them: but they said:
"Fear thou not, nor grieve:

وَلَمَّا أَن جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِئَاءَ بِهِمْ
وَضَافَ بِهِمْ ذُرْعًا وَقَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ
إِنَّا مُنْجُونَكَ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا أَمْرًا تَكْ
كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَافِرِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

3452. See xi. 69-76. The angels, who were coming on the mission to destroy the people who were polluting the earth with their crimes, called on their way on Abraham to give the good news of the birth of a son to him in his old age. When they told him their destination, he feared for his nephew who he knew was there. They reassured him and then came on to Lot.

3453. By translating "township" I imply the two neighbouring populations of Sodom and Gomorrah, who had already gone too far in their crime, their shamelessness, and their defiance, to profit by any mercy from Allah.

3454. She was not loyal to her husband. Tradition says that she belonged to the wicked people, and was not prepared to leave them. She had no faith in the mission either of her husband or of the angels who had come as his guests.

3455. This part of the story may be read in greater detail in xi. 77-83.

We are (here) to save thee
And thy following, except
Thy wife: she is
Of those who lag behind.

34. "For we are going to
Bring down on the people
Of this township a Punishment³⁴⁵⁶
From heaven, because they
Have been wickedly rebellious."

35. And We have left thereof
An evident Sign,³⁴⁵⁷
For any people who
(Care to) understand.

36. To the Madyan (people)
(We sent) their brother Shu'aib.
Then he said: "O my people!
Serve Allah, and fear the Last
Day: nor commit evil
On the earth, with intent
To do mischief."

37. But they rejected him:
Then the mighty Blast³⁴⁵⁸
Seized them, and they lay
Prostrate in their homes
By the morning.

إِنَّا مُنْزِلُونَ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ رِجْزًا
مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

وَلَقَدْ تَرَكْنَا مِنْهَا آيَةً بَيِّنَةً لِّقَوْمٍ
يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

وَإِلَىٰ مَدْيَنَ أَخَاهُمْ شُعَيْبًا فَقَالَ يٰقَوْمِ
اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَارْجُوا الْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَلَا تَعْنُوا
فِي الْأَرْضِ مُفْسِدِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الرَّحْفَةُ
فَاصْبَحُوا فِي دَارِهِمْ جَثْمِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

3456. The Punishment was a rain of brimstone, which completely overwhelmed the Cities, with possibly an earthquake and a volcanic eruption (see xi. 82).

3457. The whole tract on the east side of the Dead Sea (where the Cities were situated) is covered with sulphureous salts and is deadly to animal and plant life. The Dead Sea itself is called in Arabic the Bahr Lūt (the sea of Lot). It is a scene of utter desolation, that should stand as a Symbol of the Destruction that awaits Sin.

3458. The story of Shu'aib and the Madyan people is only referred to here. It is told in xi. 84-95. Their besetting sin was fraud and commercial immorality. Their punishment was a mighty Blast, such as accompanies volcanic eruptions. The point of the reference here is that they went about doing mischief on the earth, and never thought of the Ma'ād or the Hereafter, the particular theme of this Sūra. The same point is made by the brief references in the following two verses to the 'Ād and the Thamūd, and to Qārūn, =

38. (Remember also) the 'Ād
And the Thamūd (people):³⁴⁵⁹
Clearly will appear to you
From (the traces) of their buildings
(Their fate): Satan
Made their deeds alluring³⁴⁶⁰
To them, and kept them back
From the Path, though they
Were keen-sighted.

39. (Remember also) Qārūn,³⁴⁶¹
Pharaoh, and Hāmān: there came
To them Moses with Clear Signs.
But they behaved with insolence
On the earth; yet they
Could not overreach (Us).

40. Each one of them We seized
For his crime: of them,
Against some We sent
A violent tornado (with showers)³⁴⁶²

وَعَادًا وَثَمُودًا وَقَدْ تَبَيَّنَ لَكُمْ
مِّن مَّسْكِنِهِمْ وَزَيَّنَ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ
أَعْمَالَهُمْ فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ
وَكَانُوا مُسْتَبْصِرِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾

وَقَارُونَ وَفِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ
مُوسَىٰ بِآلِهَتِهِمْ فَاسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ
وَمَا كَانُوا اسْمِعِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾

فَكُلًّا أَخَذْنَا بِذُنُوبِهِمْ فَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِ
حَاصِبًا وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ أَخَذَتْهُ الصَّيْحَةُ

= Pharaoh, and Hāmān, though the besetting sin in each case was different. The Midianites were a commercial people and trafficked from land to land; their frauds are well described as spreading "mischief on the earth".

3459. For the 'Ād people see vii. 65-72, and n. 1040, and for the Thamūd, vii. 73-79, and n. 1043. The remains of their buildings show (1) that they were gifted with great intelligence and skill; (2) that they were proud of their material civilisation; and (3) their destruction argues how the greatest material civilisation and resources cannot save a People who disobey Allah's moral law.

3460. They were so arrogant and self-satisfied, that they missed the higher purpose of life, and strayed clean away from the Path of Allah. Though their intelligence should have kept them straight, Evil made them crooked and led them and kept them astray.

3461. For Qārūn see xxviii. 76-82; Pharaoh is mentioned frequently in the Qur-ān, but he is mentioned in association with Hāmān in xxviii. 6; for their blasphemous arrogance and defiance of Allah see xxviii. 38. They thought such a lot of themselves, but they came to an evil end.

3462. For *hāsib* (violent tornado with showers of stones), see xvii. 68; this punishment as inflicted on the Cities of the Plain, of which Lot preached (liv. 34). Some Commentators think that this also applied to the 'Ād, but their punishment is described as by a violent and unseasonable cold wind (xli. 16; liv. 19 and lxix. 6), such as blows in sand-storms in the Aḥqāf, the region of shifting sands which was in their territory.

Of stones); some were caught
By a (mighty) Blast;³⁴⁶³ some
We caused the earth³⁴⁶⁴
To swallow up; and some
We drowned (in the waters):³⁴⁶⁵
It was not Allah Who
Wronged them:
They wronged themselves.

41. The parable of those who
Take protectors other than Allah
Is that of the Spider,
Who builds (to itself)
A house; but truly
The flimsiest of houses³⁴⁶⁶

وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ حَسَفْنَا بِهِ الْآرْضَ
وَمِنْهُمْ مَّنْ أَغْرَقْنَا وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُظْلِمَهُمْ
وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ
كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتًا
وَأِنَّ أَوْهَنَ الْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ
لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

3463. For *saihat* (Blast) see xi. 67 and n. 1561, as also n. 1047 to vii. 78 and n. 1996 to xv. 73. This word is used in describing the fate of (1) the *Thamūd* (xi. 67); *Madyan* (xi. 94); the population to which *Lūt* preached (xv. 73); and the Rocky Tract (*Hijr*, xv. 83), part of the territory of the *Thamūd*; also in the Parable of the City to which came three Prophets, who found a single-believer (xxxvi. 29).

3464. This was the fate of *Qārūn*: see xxviii. 81. Cf. also xvi. 45 and n. 2071.

3465. This was the fate of the hosts of Pharaoh and *Hāmān* (xxviii. 40) as well as the wicked generation of Noah (xxvi. 120).

3466. The Spider's house is one of the wonderful Signs of Allah's creation. It is made up of fine silk threads spun out of silk glands in the spider's body. There are many kinds of spiders and many kinds of spider's houses. Two main types of houses may be mentioned. There is the tubular nest or web, a silk-lined house or burrow with one or two trap-doors. This may be called his residential or family mansion. Then there is what is ordinarily called a spider's web, consisting of a central point with radiating threads running in all directions and acting as tie-beams to the quasi-circular concentric threads that form the body of the web. This is his hunting box. The whole structure exemplifies economy in time, material, and strength. If an insect is caught in the net, the vibration set up in the radiating threads is at once communicated to the spider, who can come and kill his prey. In case the prey is powerful, the spider is furnished with poison glands with which to kill his prey. The spider sits either in the centre of the web or hides on the under-side of a leaf or in some crevice, but he always has a single thread connecting him with his web, to keep him in telephonic communication. The female spider is much bigger than the male, and in Arabic the generic gender of '*Ankabut*' is feminine.

Is the Spider's house;-³⁴⁶⁷
If they but knew.

42. Verily Allah doth know
Of (every thing) whatever³⁴⁶⁸
That they call upon
Besides Him: and He is
Exalted (in power), Wise.

43. And such are the Parables
We set forth for mankind,
But only those understand them
Who have Knowledge.³⁴⁶⁹

44. Allah created the heavens
And the earth in truth:³⁴⁷⁰
Verily in that is a Sign
For those who believe.

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ
وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿٤٢﴾

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَلُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ
وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

خَلَقَ اللَّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِالْحَقِّ
إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّلْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٤٤﴾

3467. Most of the facts in the last note can be read into the Parable. For their thickness the spider's threads are very strong from the point of view of relativity, but in our actual world they are flimsy, especially the threads of the gossamer spider floating in the air. So is the house and strength of the man who relies on material resources however fine or beautiful relatively; before the eternal Reality they are as nothing. The spider's most cunning architecture cannot stand against a wave of a man's hand. His poison glands are like the hidden poison in our beautiful worldly plans which may take various shapes but have seeds of death in them.

3468. The last verse told us that men, out of spiritual ignorance, build their hopes on flimsy unsubstantial things (like the spider's web) which are broken by a thousand chance attacks of wind and weather or the actions of animals or men. If they cannot fully grasp their own good, they should seek His Light. To Him everything is known,—men's frailty, their false hopes, their questionable motives, the false gods whom they enthrone in their midst, the mischief done by the neglect of Truth, and the way out for those who have entangled themselves in the snares of evil. He is All-Wise and is able to carry out all He wills, and they should turn to Him.

3469. Parables seem simple things, but their profound meaning and application can only be understood by those who seek knowledge and by Allah's grace attain it.

3470. Cf. vi. 73 and n. 896. In all Allah's Creation, not only is there evidence of intelligent Purpose, fitting all parts together with wisdom, but also of supreme Goodness and cherishing Care, by which all needs are satisfied and all the highest and truest cravings fulfilled. These are like beckoning signals to lead on those who pray and search in Faith.

SECTION 5.

45. Recite what is sent³⁴⁷¹

Of the Book by inspiration
To thee, and establish
Regular Prayer: for Prayer
Restrains from shameful
And evil deeds;
And remembrance of Allah
Is the greatest (thing in life)
Without doubt. And Allah knows
The (deeds) that ye do.

46. And dispute ye not

With the People of the Book,
Except in the best way,³⁴⁷² unless
It be with those of them
Who do wrong³⁴⁷³
But say, "We believe
In the Revelation which has
Come down to us and in that
Which came down to you;

أَتْلُ مَا أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ
إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ
وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ وَاللَّهُ
يَعْلَمُ مَا تَصْنَعُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

وَلَا تَجِدُوا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ إِلَّا يَأْتِي
هِيَ أَحْسَنَ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْهُمْ وَقُولُوا آمَنَّا
بِالَّذِي أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَأُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ
وَالْهِنَاوَالْهُكْمُ وَجِدْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

3471. The *tilawat* of the Qur-ān implies: (1) rehearsing or reciting it, and publishing it abroad to the world; (2) reading it to ourselves; (3) studying it to understand it as it should be studied and understood (ii. 121); (4) meditating on it so as to accord our knowledge and life and desires with it. When this is done, it merges into real Prayer, and Prayer purges us of anything (act, plan, thought, motive, words) of which we should be ashamed or which would work injustice to others. Such Prayer passes into our inmost life and being, for then we realise the Presence of Allah, and that is true *zikr* (or remembrance), for remembrance is the bringing to mind of things as present to us which might otherwise be absent to us. And that is the greatest thing in life. It is subjective to us: it fills our consciousness with Allah. For Allah is in any case always present and knows all.

3472. Mere disputations are futile. In order to achieve our purpose as true standard-bearers for Allah, we shall have to find true common grounds of belief, as stated in the latter part of this verse, and also to show by our urbanity, kindness, sincerity, truth, and genuine anxiety, for the good of others, that we are not cranks or merely seeking selfish or questionable aims.

3473. Of course those who are deliberately trying to wrong or injure others will have to be treated firmly, as we are guardians of each other. With them there is little question of finding common ground or exercising patience, until the injury is prevented or stopped.

Our God and your God
Is One; and it is to Him
We submit (in Islam).³⁴⁷⁴

47. And thus³⁴⁷⁵ (it is) that We
Have sent down the Book
To thee. So the People
Of the Book believe therein,³⁴⁷⁶
As also do some of these³⁴⁷⁷
(Pagan Arabs): and none
But Unbelievers reject Our Signs.

وَكَذَلِكَ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ فَالَّذِينَ
ءَانِثْنَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَمِنْ هَؤُلَاءِ
مَنْ يُؤْمِنُ بِهِ وَمَا يَجْحَدُ بِآيَاتِنَا
إِلَّا الْكَافِرُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

3474. That is, the religion of all true and sincere men of Faith is, or should be, one; and that is the ideal of Islam.

3475. It is in this spirit that all true Revelation comes from Allah. Allah is One, and His Message cannot come in one place or at one time to contradict His Message in another place or at another time in spirit, though there may be local variations according to the needs or understanding of men at any given time or place.

3476. The sincere Jews and Christians found in the holy Prophet a fulfilment of their own religion. For the names of some Jews who recognised and embraced Islam, see n. 3227 to xxvi. 197. Among the Christians, too, the Faith slowly won ground. Embassies were sent by the holy Prophet in the 6th and 7th years of the Hijrat to all the principal countries round Arabia, viz., the capital of the Byzantine Empire (Constantinople), the capital of the Persian Empire (Madāin), the Sāsānian capital known to the West by the Greek name of Ctesiphon, (about thirty miles south of modern Bagdād), Syria, Abyssinia, and Egypt. All these (except Persia) were Christian countries. In the same connection an embassy was also sent to Yamāma in Arabia itself (east of the Hijāz) where the Banū Hanīfa tribe was Christian, like the Hārith tribe of Najrān who voluntarily sent an embassy to Madinah. All these countries except Abyssinia eventually became Muslim, and Abyssinia itself has a considerable Muslim population now and sent some Muslim converts to Madinah in the time of the Prophet himself. As a generalisation it is true that the Jewish and the Christian peoples as they existed in the seventh century of the Christian era have been mainly absorbed by Islam, as well as the lands in which they predominated. Remnants of them built up new nuclei. The Roman Catholic Church conquered new lands among the northern (Germanic) Pagans and the Byzantine Church among the eastern (Slavonic) Pagans, and the Protestantism of the 16th century gave a fresh stimulus to the main ideas for which Islam stands, viz., the abolition of priestcraft, the right of private judgment, the simplification of ritual, and the insistence upon the simple, practical, everyday duties of life.

3477. The Pagan Arabs also gradually came in until they were all absorbed in Islam.

48. And thou wast not (able)
To recite a Book before
This (Book came), nor art thou
(Able) to transcribe it
With thy right hand:³⁴⁷⁸
In that case, indeed, would
The talkers of vanities
Have doubted.

49. Nay, here are Signs
Self-evident in the hearts
Of those endowed with
knowledge:³⁴⁷⁹
And none but the unjust
Reject Our Signs.³⁴⁸⁰

50. Yet they say: "Why
Are not Signs sent down
To him from his Lord?"

وَمَا كُنْتَ تَتْلُو مِنْ قَبْلِهِ مِنْ كِتَابٍ وَلَا تَخْطُّهُ
بِيَمِينِكَ إِذَا لَا زُنَابَ الْمُبْطِلُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

بَلْ هُوَ آيَاتٌ بَيِّنَاتٌ فِي صُدُورِ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا
الْعِلْمَ وَمَا يُجْحَدُونَ آيَاتِنَا
إِلَّا الظَّالِمُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

وَقَالُوا لَوْلَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِ
قُلْ إِنَّمَا الْآيَاتُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَإِنَّمَا أَنَا نَذِيرٌ
مُبِينٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

3478. The holy Prophet was not a learned man. Before the Qur-ān was revealed to him, he never claimed to proclaim a Message from Allah. He was not in the habit of preaching eloquent truths as from a Book, before he received his Revelation, nor was he able to write or transcribe with his own hand. If he had had these worldly gifts, there would have been some plausibility in the charge of the talkers of vanities that he spoke not from inspiration but from other people's books, or that he composed the beautiful verses of the Qur-ān himself and committed them to memory in order to recite them to people. The circumstances in which the Qur-ān came bear their own testimony to its truth as from Allah.

3479. "Knowledge" (*'ilm*) means both power of judgment in discerning the value of truth and acquaintance with previous revelations. It implies both literary and spiritual insight. To men so endowed, Allah's revelations and Signs are self-evident. They commend themselves to their hearts, minds, and understandings, which are typified in Arabic by the word *ṣadr*, "breast".

3480. Cf. the last clause of verse 47 above. There the argument was that the rejection of the Qur-ān was a mark of Unbelief. Now the argument is carried a stage farther. Such rejection is also a mark of injustice, a deliberate perversity in going against obvious Signs, which should convince all honest men.

Say: "The Signs are indeed
With Allah: and I am
Indeed a clear Warner."³⁴⁸¹

51. And is it not enough
For them that We have
Sent down to thee
The Book which is rehearsed
To them? Verily, in it
Is Mercy and a Reminder
To those who believe.³⁴⁸²

أَوَلَمْ يَكْفِهِمْ أَنَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ
يَتْلَى عَلَيْهِمْ آیَاتُ فِي ذَلِكَ لِرَحْمَةٍ
وَذِكْرَى لِقَوْمٍ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٥١﴾

SECTION 6.

52. Say: "Enough is Allah
For a Witness between me
And you: He knows
What is in the heavens³⁴⁸³
And on earth." And it is
Those who believe in vanities
And reject Allah, that
Are the losers.³⁴⁸⁴

قُلْ كَفَى بِاللَّهِ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ شَهِيدًا يَعْلَمُ
مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالَّذِينَ
ءَامَنُوا بِالْبَاطِلِ وَكَفَرُوا بِاللَّهِ أُولَٰئِكَ
هُمُ الْخَاسِرُونَ ﴿٥٢﴾

3481. See last note. In the Qur-ān, as said in verse 49, are Signs which should carry conviction to all honest hearts. And yet the Unbelievers ask for Signs! They mean some special kinds of Signs or Miracles, such as their own foolish minds dictate. Everything is possible for Allah, but Allah is not going to humour the follies of men or listen to their disingenuous demands. He has sent a Messenger to explain His Signs clearly, and to warn them of the consequences of rejection. Is it not enough?

3482. The perspicuous Qur-ān, explained in detail by Allah's Messenger, in conjunction with Allah's Signs in nature and in the hearts of men, should be enough for all. It is mere fractious opposition to demand vaguely something more. Cf. also vi. 124, and n. 946.

3483. The test of a Revelation is whether it comes from Allah or not. This is made clear by the life and teachings of the Messenger who brings it. No fraud or falsehood can for a moment stand before Allah. All the most hidden things in heaven and earth are open before Him.

3484. If Truth is rejected, Truth does not suffer. It is the rejecters who suffer and perish in the end.

53. They ask thee
To hasten on the Punishment³⁴⁸⁵
(For them): had it not been
For a term (of respite)
Appointed, the Punishment
Would certainly have come
To them: and it will
Certainly reach them,—
Of a sudden, while they
Perceive not!
54. They ask thee
To hasten on the Punishment:³⁴⁸⁶
But, of a surety,
Hell will encompass
The rejecters of Faith!—
55. On the Day that
The Punishment shall cover them
From above them and
From below them,³⁴⁸⁷
And (a Voice) shall say:
“Taste ye (the fruits)
Of your deeds”!³⁴⁸⁸

وَيَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِالْعَذَابِ وَلَوْلَا أَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى
لَجَاءَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ وَلَيَأْتِيَنَّهُمْ بَغْتَةً وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

يَسْتَعْجِلُونَكَ بِالْعَذَابِ
وَإِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ لَمُحِيطَةٌ بِالْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٥٤﴾

يَوْمَ يَغْشَاهُمْ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَمِنْ تَحْتِ
أَرْجُلِهِمْ وَيَقُولُ ذُوقُوا مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٥٥﴾

3485. Cf. xxii. 47 and n. 2826. The rejecters of Faith throw out a challenge out of bravado: “Let us see if you can hasten the punishment on us!” This is a vail taunt. Allah’s Plan will take its course, and can neither be delayed nor hastened. It is out of His Mercy that He gives respite to sinners,—in order that they may have a chance of repentance. If they do not repent, the Punishment must certainly come to them—and on a sudden, before they perceive that it is coming! And then it will be too late for repentance.

3486. The challenge of the wicked for Punishment was answered in the last verse by reference to Allah’s merciful Respite, to give chances of repentance. It is answered in this verse by an assurance that if no repentance is forthcoming, the Punishment will be certain and of an all-pervasive kind. Hell will surround them on all sides, and above them and below them.

3487. Cf. a similar phrase in vi. 65.

3488. This is not merely a reproach, but a justification of the Punishment. “It is you who brought it on yourselves by your evil deeds: blame none but yourselves. Allah’s Mercy gave you many chances: His Justice has now overtaken you!”

56. O My servants who believe!
Truly, spacious is My Earth.³⁴⁸⁹
Therefore serve ye Me—
(And Me alone)!

يَعْبَادِيَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّ أَرْضِي وَاسِعَةٌ
فَإِنِّي فَأَعْبُدُونِ ﴿٥٦﴾

57. Every soul shall have
A taste of death.³⁴⁹⁰
In the end to Us
Shall ye be brought back.

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَاقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

58. But those who believe
And work deeds of righteousness—
To them shall We give
A Home in Heaven,³⁴⁹¹
Lofty mansions beneath which
Flow rivers,—to dwell therein
For aye;—an excellent reward
For those who do (good)!—

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُبَوِّئَنَّهُمْ
مِّنَ الْجَنَّةِ غُرًّا فَاصَّحَىٰ مِنْ تَحْتِهَا أَلَّا تَنْهَرُ خَلْدِينَ
فِيهَا نِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

59. Those who persevere in patience,
And put their trust
In their Lord and Cherisher.

الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

3489. There is no excuse for any one to plead that he could not do good or was forced to evil by his circumstances and surroundings, or by the fact that he lived in evil times. We must shun evil and seek good, and Allah's Creation is wide enough to enable us to do that, provided we have the will, the patience, and the constancy to do it. It may be that we have to change our village or city or country; or that we have to change our neighbours or associates; or to change our habits or our hours, our position in life or our human relationships, or our callings. Our integrity before Allah is more important than any of these things, and we must be prepared for exile (or *Hijrat*) in all these senses. For the means with which Allah provides us for His service are ample, and it is our own fault if we fail.

3490. Cf. iii. 185, n. 491, and xxi. 35 and n. 2697. Death is the separation of the soul from the body when the latter perishes. We should not be afraid of death, for it only brings us back to Allah. The various kinds of *hijrat* or exile, physical and spiritual, mentioned in the last note, are also modes of death in a sense: what is there to fear in them?

3491. The goodly homes mentioned in xvi. 41 referred to this life, but it was stated there that the reward of the Hereafter would be greater. Here the simile of the Home is referred to Heaven: it will be beautiful; it will be picturesque, with the sight and sound of softly-murmuring streams; it will be lofty or sublime; and it will be eternal.

60. How many are the creatures
That carry not their own³⁴⁹²
Sustenance? It is Allah
Who feeds (both) them and you:
For He hears and knows
(All things).

وَكَايْنٍ مِّنْ دَابَّةٍ لَا تَحْمِلُ رِزْقَهَا اللَّهُ يَرْزُقُهَا
وَإِيَّاكُمْ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿١٠﴾

61. If indeed thou ask them³⁴⁹³
Who has created the heavens
And the earth and subjected³⁴⁹⁴
The sun and the moon
(To His Law), they will
Certainly reply, "Allah".
How are they then deluded
Away (from the truth)?

وَلَيْن سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَسَخَّرَ
الشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ فَأَنَّى يُؤْفَكُونَ ﴿١١﴾

62. Allah enlarges the sustenance
(Which He gives) to whichever
Of His servants He pleases,³⁴⁹⁵
And He (similarly) grants
By (strict) measure, (as He pleases):
For Allah has full knowledge
Of all things.

اللَّهُ يُبْسِطُ الرِّزْقَ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ وَيَقْدِرُ لَهُ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٢﴾

3492. If we look at the animal creation, we see that many creatures seem almost helpless to find their own food or sustain their full life, being surrounded by many enemies. Yet in the Plan of Allah they find full sustenance and protection. So does man. Man's needs—as well as helplessness—are by many degrees greater. Yet Allah provides for him as for all His creatures. Allah listens to the wish and cry of all His creatures and He knows their needs and how to provide for them all. Man should not therefore hesitate to suffer exile or persecution in Allah's Cause.

3493. Cf. xxiii. 84-89. "Them" in both passages refers to the sort of inconsistent men who acknowledge the power of Allah, but are deluded by false notions into disobedience of Allah's Law and disregard of Allah's Message.

3494. Cf. xiii. 2, and xxiii. 85. The perfect order and law in Allah's universe should be Signs to man's intelligence to get his own will into tune with Allah's Will; for only so can he hope to attain his full development.

3495. Cf. xiii. 26. Unequal gifts are not a sign of chaos in Allah's universe. Allah provides for all according to their real needs and their most suitable requirements, according to His perfect knowledge and understanding of His creatures.

63. And if indeed thou ask them³⁴⁹⁶
Who it is that sends down
Rain from the sky,
And gives life therewith
To the earth after its death,
They will certainly reply,
"Allah!" Say, "Praise be
To Allah!" But most
Of them understand not.

SECTION 7.

64. What is the life of this world
But amusement and play?³⁴⁹⁷
But verily the Home
Of the Hereafter,—that is
Life indeed, if they but knew.
65. Now, if they embark
On a boat, they call
On Allah, making their devotion
Sincerely (and exclusively) to
Him;³⁴⁹⁸

وَلَيْنَ سَأَلْتَهُمْ مَنْ نَزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَحْيَا
بِهِ الْأَرْضَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِهَا لَيَقُولُنَّ اللَّهُ
قُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهُوٌّ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ
الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

فَإِذَا رَكِبُوا فِي الْفُلِ دَعَوْا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ
فَلَمَّا بَجَحَتْهُمْ إِلَى الْبَرِّ إِذَا هُمْ يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾

3496. In xxix. 61 above, the point was that there is a certain type of man that realises the power of Allah, but yet goes after false ideas and false worship. Here the point is that there is another type of man to whom the goodness of Allah is made clear by rain and the gifts of nature and who realises the daily, seasonal, and secular changes which evidence Allah's goodness in giving us life (physical and spiritual) and reviving us after we seem to die,—and who yet fails to draw the right conclusion from it and to make his own life true and beautiful, so that when his period of probation in this transitory life is ended, he can enter into his eternal heritage. Having come so far, such men fail at the crucial stage. At that stage they ought to have praised and glorified Allah and accepted His Grace and Light, but they show their want of true understanding by failing to profit by Allah's gifts.

3497. Cf. vi. 32. Amusement and play have no lasting significance except as preparing us for the serious work of life. So this life is but an interlude, a preparation for the real Life, which is in the Hereafter. This world's vanities are therefore to be taken for what they are worth; but they are not to be allowed to deflect our minds from the requirements of the inner life that really matters.

3498. Cf. vii. 29, where I have slightly varied the English phrase according to the context.

But when He has delivered
Them safely to (dry) land,
Behold, they give a share
(Of their worship to others)!-

66. Disdaining ungratefully Our gifts,
And giving themselves up³⁴⁹⁹
To (worldly) enjoyment! But soon
Will they know.

67. Do they not then see
That We have made
A Sanctuary secure, and that
Men are being snatched away
From all around them?³⁵⁰⁰
Then, do they believe in that
Which is vain, and reject
The Grace of Allah?

لِيَكْفُرُوا بِمَا آتَيْنَاهُمْ وَلِيَتَمَنَّوْا فُسُوقَ
يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا جَعَلْنَا حَرَمًا مَّأْمُونًا وَّيُخَفَّفُ
النَّاسُ مِنْ حَوْلِهِمْ أَفَبِالْبَاطِلِ يُؤْمِنُونَ
وَبِنِعْمَةِ اللَّهِ يَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٦٧﴾

It was shown in the last verse that the life of this world is fleeting, and that the true life—that which matters—is the Life in the Hereafter. In contrast with this inner reality is now shown the shortsighted folly of man. Where he faces the physical dangers of the sea, which are but an incident in the phenomenal world, he actually and sincerely seeks the help of Allah; but when he is safely back on land, he forgets the Realities, plunges into the pleasures and vanities of fleeting phenomena, and his devotion, which should be given exclusively to Allah, is shared by idols and vanities of his own imagination.

3499. Such folly results in the virtual rejection (even though it may not be express) of Allah and His Grace. It plunges man into the pleasures and vanities that merely delude and are bound to pass away. This delusion, however, will come to an end when the true Reality of the Hereafter will shine forth in all its splendour.

3500. If they want evidences of their folly in the phenomenal world itself, they will see sacred Sanctuaries where Allah's Truth abides safely in the midst of the Deluge of broken hopes, disappointed ambitions and unfulfilled plans in the world around. The immediate reference was to the Sanctuary of Makkah and the gradual progress of Islam in the districts surrounding the Quraish in the midst of the trying Makkan period. But the general application holds good for all times and places.

68. And who does more wrong³⁵⁰¹

Than he who invents
A lie against Allah
Or rejects the Truth
When it reaches him?
Is there not a home
In Hell for those who
Reject Faith?

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ
بِالْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُ ۚ أَلَيْسَ فِي جَهَنَّمَ مَثْوًى
لِّلْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾

69. And those who strive³⁵⁰²

In Our (Cause),—We will
Certainly guide them
To Our Paths:³⁵⁰³
For verily Allah
Is with those
Who do right.

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا
وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ ﴿٦٩﴾

3501. Cf. vi. 21. Even from a worldly point of view those who reject Allah's Truth are at a disadvantage. But those who deliberately invent lies and set up false gods for worship,—what punishment can we imagine for them except a permanent deprivation of Allah's grace, and a home in Hell?

3502. "Strive in Our Cause." All that man can do is to strive in Allah's Cause. As soon as he strives with might and main, with constancy and determination, the Light and Mercy of Allah come to meet him. They cure his defects and shortcomings. They provide him with the means by which he can raise himself above himself. They point out the Way, and all the Paths leading up to it. See next note.

3503. The Way of Allah (*ṣirāt-ul-Mustaqim*) is a Straight Way. But men have strayed from it in all directions. And there are numerous Paths by which they can get back to the Right Way, the way in which the purity of their own nature, and the Will and Mercy of Allah require them to Walk. All these numerous Paths become open to them if once they give their hearts in keeping to Allah and work in right Endeavour (*Jihād*) with all their mind and soul and resources. Thus will they get out of the Spider's web of this frail world and attain to eternal Bliss in the fulfilment of their true Destiny.