

**INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAT *Al-Ma'ārij*, 70.**

This is another eschatological Sūra closely connected in subject-matter with the last one. Patience and the Time will show the ways that climb to Heaven. Sin and Goodness must each eventually come to its own.

Chronologically it belongs to the late early or early middle Makkan period, possibly soon after S. lxix.

*Al-Ma'ārij, or the Ways of Ascent.*

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

1. A questioner asked<sup>5675</sup>  
About a Chastisement  
To befall—
2. The Unbelievers,  
The which there is none  
To ward off,—
3. (A Penalty) from Allah,  
Lord of the Ways  
Of Ascent.<sup>5676</sup>
4. The angels and  
The Spirit<sup>5677</sup> ascend  
Unto Him in a Day<sup>5678</sup>  
The measure whereof  
Is (as) fifty thousand years:



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَاقِعٍ

لِلْكَافِرِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَافِعٌ

مِنَ اللَّهِ ذِي الْمَعَارِجِ

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ  
مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ

5675. Any one might ask. When will Judgment come? That question usually implies doubt. The answer is: the knowledge of Time is beyond man's comprehension. But there is something which touches him closely and concerns his conduct and his future welfare; and that is explained in four propositions. (1) Judgment is sure to come, and none can ward it off; (2) it will exact a dreadful Penalty from Unbelievers, but the righteous have nothing to fear; (3) it will be a Penalty from Allah, the Lord of both Justice and Mercy; it will not be merely a blind calamity of fate; and (4) further we are reminded of another title of Allah, "Lord of the Ways of Ascent"; which means that though He sits high on His Throne of Glory, He is not inaccessible, but in His infinite Mercy has provided ways of ascent to Him; see next note.

5676. *Ma'ārij*: stair-ways, ways of ascent. In xliii. 33, the word is used in its literal sense: "silver stair-ways on which to go up". Here there is a profound spiritual meaning. Can we reach up to Allah Most High? In His infinite grace He gives that privilege to angels. But the way is not easy, nor can it be travelled in a day. See the next two notes.

5677. *Rūh*: "The Spirit". Cf. lxxviii. 38, "the Spirit and the angels"; and xcvi. 4, "the angels and the Spirit". In xvi. 2, we have translated *Rūh* by "inspiration". Some Commentators understand the angel Gabriel by "the Spirit". But I think a more general meaning is possible, and fits the context better.

5678. Cf. xxxii. 4-5, and notes 3632 and 3634.

5. Therefore do thou hold  
Patience,—a Patience  
Of beautiful (contentment).<sup>5679</sup>

فَأَصْبِرْ صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا ﴿٥﴾

6. They see the (Day) indeed  
As a far-off (event):

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا ﴿٦﴾

7. But We see it  
(Quite) near.<sup>5680</sup>

وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا ﴿٧﴾

8. The Day that  
The sky will be like  
Molten brass,<sup>5681</sup>

يَوْمَ تَكُونُ السَّمَاءُ كَالذَّهَبِ الْمَذْهَبِ ﴿٨﴾

9. And the mountains will be  
Like wool,<sup>5682</sup>

وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ ﴿٩﴾

10. And no friend will ask  
After a friend,<sup>5683</sup>

وَلَا يَسْتَلْ حَمِيمٌ حَمِيمًا ﴿١٠﴾

11. Though they will be put  
In sight of each other,—

يَبْصُرُونَهُ يَوْمَ الْمُنْجَمِ ثَوْبَةً بَارِئَةً بِرَوْنٍ  
يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ الْمَبْثُورِ ﴿١١﴾

5679. The prophet of Allah, persecuted and in trouble with the world, should yet hold Patience—not the sort of patience which goes with complaints expressed or suppressed, but the sort of patience that is *content* with the ordering of Allah's world, for he believes and knows it to be good, as did the holy Prophet Muhammad. Such a patience is akin to Good pleasure, for it arises from the purest faith and trust in Allah.

5680. The men of evil may see the just retribution for their sins so far off that they doubt whether it would ever come. But in Allah's sight, and on the scale of the Universal Plan, it is quite near; for time as we know it hardly exists in the next world. It may come even in this life: but it is bound to come eventually.

5681. Cf. xviii. 29 (where the wrong-doer will have a drink like melted brass in Hell); and xlv. 45, (where his food will be like molten brass). Here the appearance of the sky is compared to molten brass, or, as some understand it, like the dregs of oil. What is conveyed by the metaphor is that the beautiful blue sky will melt away.

5682. Cf. ci. 5. where the metaphor of carded wool is used. The mountains which seem so solid will be like flakes of wool driven by the carder's hand.

5683. The world as we know it will have so completely passed away that the landmarks in the heavens and on earth will also have vanished. Not only that, but the human relationships of mind and heart will have been transformed by sin into something ugly and dreadful. The sinners will be so overcome with terror at the realisation of their personal responsibility that they will desert their most intimate friends, and indeed their very sight of each other will add to their agony.

The sinner's desire will be:  
Would that he could  
Redeem himself from  
The Chastisement of that Day<sup>5684</sup>  
By his children,

12. His wife and his brother,  
13. His kindred who sheltered him.

14. And all, all that is  
On earth,—so it could  
Deliver him:<sup>5685</sup>

15. By no means!  
For it would be  
The Blazing Fire—

16. Plucking out (his being)  
Right to the skull!—<sup>5686</sup>

17. Inviting (all) such  
As turn their backs<sup>5687</sup>  
And turn away their faces  
(From the Right),

وَصَنَجَتِهِ وَأَخِيهِ (١٢)

وَفَصِيلَتِهِ الَّتِي تُتَوَكَّلُ عَلَيْهَا (١٣)

وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ نُنْجِيهِ (١٤)

كَلَّا إِنَّهَا لَأُظْلَمُ (١٥)

نَزَاعَةً لِّلشَّوْءِ (١٦)

تَدْعُوا مَنْ أَدْبَرَ وَتَوَلَّى (١٧)

5684. The sinner will offer his children, his family, his kinsmen, who had sheltered and protected him,—in fact everything on earth that he could—as a ransom for himself. Such would be his selfishness and his agony.

5685. What would not the sinner give for his own deliverance! But nothing could save him. The Fire of Hell would be roaring for him!

5686. It would be a Fire not only burning his body, but reaching right up to his brains and his understanding and—as is said in civ. 7—his heart and affections also. In other words the Fire will burn into his inmost being.

5687. The analysis of sin is given in four master-strokes, of which the first two refer to the will or psychology of the sinner, and the last two to the use he makes of the good things of this life. (1) Sin begins with turning your back to the Right, refusing to face it squarely, running away from it whether from cowardice or indifference. (2) But Conscience and the sense of Right will try to prevent the flight; the Grace of Allah will meet the sinner at all corners and try to reclaim him; the hardened sinner will deliberately turn away his face from it, insult it, and reject it. (3) The result of this psychology will be that he will abandon himself to greed, to the collection of riches, and the acquisition of material advantages to which he is not entitled; this may involve hypocrisy, fraud, and crime. (4) Having acquired the material advantages, the next step will be to keep others out of them, to prevent hoarded wealth from fructifying by circulation, to conceal it from envy or spite. This is the spiritual Rake's Progress.

18. And collect (wealth)  
And hide it (from use)!
19. Truly man was created,  
Very impatient;<sup>5688</sup>
20. Fretful when evil  
Touches him;
21. And niggardly when  
Good reaches him;<sup>5689</sup>
22. Not so those devoted  
To Prayer:<sup>5690</sup>
23. Those who remain steadfast  
To their prayer;
24. And those in whose wealth  
Is a recognised right
25. For the (needy) who asks  
And him who is deprived  
(For some reason from asking);<sup>5691</sup>

- وَجَمَعَ فَأَوْعَى ﴿١٨﴾  
 إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا ﴿١٩﴾  
 إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا ﴿٢٠﴾  
 وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا ﴿٢١﴾  
 إِلَّا الْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٢٢﴾  
 الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾  
 وَالَّذِينَ فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ مَّعْلُومٌ ﴿٢٤﴾  
 لِلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَرْغُورِ ﴿٢٥﴾

5688. Man, according to the Plan of Allah, was to be in the best of moulds (xcv. 4). But in order to fulfil his high destiny he was given free-will to a limited extent. The wrong use of this free-will makes his nature weak (iv. 28), or hasty (xvii. 11), or impatient, as here. That becomes his nature by his own act, but he is spoken of as so created because of the capacities given to him in his creation.

5689. In adversity he complains and gets into despair. In prosperity he becomes arrogant and forgets other people's rights and his own shortcomings. Cf. xli. 49-50.

5690. The description of those devoted to Prayer is given in a number of clauses that follow, introduced by the words "Those who...". "Devoted to Prayer" is here but another aspect of what is described elsewhere as the Faithful and the Righteous. Devotion to prayer does not mean merely a certain number of formal rites or prostrations. It means a complete surrender of one's being to Allah. This means an earnest approach to and realisation of Allah's Presence ("steadfastness in Prayer"); acts of practical and real charity; and attempt to read this life in terms of the Hereafter; the seeking of the Peace of Allah and avoidance of His displeasure; chastity; probity true and firm witness; and guarding the prayer. (verse 34).

5691. See n. 5001 to li. 19. True charity consists in finding out those in real need, whether they ask or not. Most frequently those who ask are idle men who insolently wish to live upon others. But all cases of those who ask should be duly investigated, in case a little timely help may set the erring on the way. But the man with wealth or talent =

26. And those who hold  
To the truth of the Day  
Of Judgment;
27. And those who fear<sup>5692</sup>  
The punishment of their Lord,-
28. For their Lord's punishment  
Is not a thing  
To feel secure from:-<sup>5693</sup>
29. And those who guard  
Their chastity,
30. Except with their wives  
And the (captives) whom<sup>5694</sup>  
Their right hands possess,-  
For (then) they are not  
To be blamed,
31. But those who trespass  
Beyond this are transgressors;-
32. And those who respect  
Their trusts and covenants;<sup>5695</sup>

وَالَّذِينَ يُصَدِّقُونَ بَيِّنَاتِ اللَّهِ

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّهِمْ مُشْفِقُونَ

إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّهِمْ غَيْرُ مَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ

إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ  
غَيْرُ مُلْتَمِسِينَ

مَنْ أَبْغَىٰ ذِلَّةً فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمْتِنَتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ

= or opportunity has the further responsibility of searching out those in need of his assistance, in order to show that he holds all gifts in trust for the service of his fellow-creatures.

5692. A true fear of Allah is the fear of offending against His holy Will and Law, and is therefore akin to the love of Allah. It proceeds from the realisation that all true peace and tranquillity comes from attuning our will to the universal Will and that sin causes discord, disharmony, and displeasure,-another name for the Wrath of Allah.

5693. I.e., that the punishment of sin may come suddenly at any time, when you least expect it.

5694. Cf. iv. 24.

5695. For obligations of trusts and covenants, express or implied, see n. 682 to v. 1. They are just as sacred in ordinary everyday life as they are in special spiritual relationships. In addition, our life itself, and such reason and talents as we possess, as well as our wealth and possessions are trusts, of which we must fulfil the duties punctiliously.

33. And those who stand firm  
In their testimonies,<sup>5696</sup>

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ يَشْهَدَتِهِمْ فَأَيْمُونُ ﴿٣٣﴾

34. And those who (strictly) guard  
Their worship;<sup>5697</sup>

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

35. Such will be  
The honoured ones  
In the Gardens (of Bliss).

أُولَئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُّكْرَّمُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

## SECTION 2.

36. Now what is  
The matter with the Unbelievers  
That they rush madly  
Before thee<sup>5698</sup>

فَأَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قِبَلَكَ مُمْهِطِينَ ﴿٣٦﴾

37. From the right  
And from the left,  
In crowds?

عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ عِزِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

38. Does every man of them  
Long to enter  
The Garden of Bliss?

أَيُّطْمَعُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُدْخَلَ جَنَّةَ نَعِيمٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

39. By no means!  
For We have created them  
Out of the (base matter)  
They know!<sup>5699</sup>

كَلَّا إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِمَّا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

5696. If we know any truth of any kind, to that we must bear witness, as affecting the lives or interests of our fellow-beings,—firmly, not half-heartedly, without fear or favour, even if it causes loss or trouble to us, or if it loses us friends or associates.

5697. We began with "steadfastness in prayer" in verse 23 above, and after a review of various aspects of the good man's life, close with the guarding of worship.

5698. *Before thee.* The Unbelievers did not believe in a Hereafter. When the Bliss of the Hereafter was described, as in the last verse, they ridiculed it and pretended to be running in for it as in a race. They are here rebuked in the same tone of sarcasm.

5699. The animal part of man is nothing to be proud of, and they know it. It is by spiritual effort, and long preparation through a good life that a man can rise above the mere animal part of him to his high dignity as a spiritual being, and his noble destiny in the Hereafter.

40. Now I do  
Call to witness<sup>5700</sup>  
The Lord of all points  
In the East and the West<sup>5701</sup>  
That We can certainly—<sup>5702</sup>
41. Substitute for them  
Better (men) than they;  
And We are not  
To be defeated  
(In Our Plan).
42. So leave them  
To plunge in vain talk<sup>5703</sup>  
And play about,  
Until they encounter  
That Day of theirs which  
They have been promised!—
43. The Day whereon  
They will issue  
From their sepulchres  
In sudden haste  
As if they were  
Rushing to a goal-post  
(Fixed for them),—<sup>5704</sup>

فَلَا أَقِيمُ رَبِّي الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ إِنَّا لَقَدِيرُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

عَلَى أَنْ نُبَدِّلَ خَيْرَ مَنْهُمْ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوقِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

فَذَرُهُمْ يُخَوِّضُوا وَيَلْعَبُوا حَتَّى يُلَاقُوا يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِي يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

يَوْمَ يُخْرِجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا كَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَى

نُصْبٍ يُوقُضُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

5700. For the form of adjuration, cf. lxix. 38, n. 5665; also lvi. 75. Here the witness placed before us by Allah is His own power and glory manifested in the splendour of sunrise and sunset at different points through the solar year.

5701. See n. 4034 to xxxvii. 5. If Allah has such power in the wonderful phenomena of the rising of the sun at varying points, repeated year after year, can you not see that He can easily substitute better men than you Unbelievers and blasphemers?

5702. The transition from the singular "I" to the plural "We" may be noted. See n. 56 to ii. 38.

5703. Their talk, their scepticism, is vain, because all spiritual evidence is against it; it is like the foolish play of people who do not think seriously. But the tremendous Day of Judgment and Reality will come, as described in the next two verses.

5704. Now there will be a definite Goal-post or Banner or Standard of Truth fixed, which all must acknowledge. But they will acknowledge it in shame and dejection. For the time for their repentance and amendment will then have passed.



44. Their eyes lowered  
 In dejection,-  
 Ignominy covering them  
 (All over)!  
 Such is the Day  
 The which they  
 Are promised!

خَشَعَةً أَبْصَرُهُمْ تَرَهِقُهُمْ ذَلَّةٌ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ الَّذِي  
 كَانُوا يُوعَدُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾