

∞ IN THE ∞
Shade
∞ OF THE ∞
Qur'ān

The Martyr
(Inshā' Allāh)

SAYYID QUṬḬB

Vol XII
Sūrahs 21-25

Contents

Contents	II
Transliteration Table	VI
Al-Anbiyā'	1
<i>Prologue</i>	<i>1</i>
1 <i>Clear Solid Evidence</i>	5
Reckoning Drawing Close.....	9
The Messengers God Sends.....	11
The Book Giving Distinction to Arabs.....	13
Still, Silent and Lifeless.....	15
Vanquishing Falsehood	16
Proof Is Required.....	18
Claiming a Son for God.....	20
Universal Evidence of God's Oneness	21
The Inevitable End of All People	24
2 <i>A Warning Not to be Ignored</i>	26
Overview	28
Protection to be Sought	28
Unheeded Warnings	31
Accurate Scales Ensuring Absolute Justice.....	31
3 <i>One Community of Believers</i>	33
Overview	39
Guidance and Light for Moses	39
Questioning People's Beliefs.....	40
A Debate to Open People's Eyes.....	42
When the Fire Was Made Cool	44
Endowed with Knowledge and Wisdom	46
A Special Gift to a Special Man	48
A Test of Hardship for a Prophet.....	50
Swallowed by the Whale.....	52
One Community Throughout History.....	54
4 <i>A Mercy for Mankind</i>	57
Overview	59
Rules That Never Fail.....	60
One Destiny for Idol and Worshipper	61
Who Inherits the World	63
A Manifestation of Grace	65
An Appeal for Judgement.....	67
Al-Hajj	69
<i>Prologue</i>	<i>69</i>
A Starting Jolt.....	<i>70</i>
1 <i>The Pilgrimage</i>	<i>73</i>
A Fear-Striking Opening	<i>77</i>
The Way Leading to Error.....	<i>78</i>
The Stages of Man's Creation	<i>78</i>
The Ultimate Truth.....	<i>82</i>
A Conditional Approach to Faith	<i>84</i>

Judgement Between All Creeds.....	86
Widely Divergent Ends	88
Overview	93
The First Sanctuary.....	93
Establishing the Sanctuary.....	95
Announcing the Pilgrimage.....	96
The Pilgrimage Conference.....	98
Fall, Snatch and the Deep End.....	100
A Sacrifice of Distinction.....	101
Permission to Fight.....	104
In Defence of the Believers	107
Assured Victory.....	108
When Victory is Granted.....	110
3 The Sights, Blind Hearts.....	112
Overview	114
Past Communities Punished	115
A Parting of the Ways	117
Foiling Satan's Efforts.....	119
Messengers' Great Hopes.....	121
Hasty Hopes	124
4 Abraham's Choice of Name.....	126
Overview	129
A Fitting Reward.....	130
Absolute Truth.....	132
Mercy Without Limit.....	133
No Room for Argument.....	135
Powerless Man	137
Striving for the Right Cause	139
Al-Mu'minūn.....	143
Prologue.....	143
1 Man, Faith and the Universe.....	146
Success Guaranteed by Faith.....	148
Social and Moral Qualities	150
Qualities Guaranteeing Admission to Heaven.....	152
The Origins of Man	153
Different Stages in the Creation of Man.....	155
Further Aspects of Creation.....	157
Blessings All Around Us.....	158
2 One Message for All Mankind.....	161
Overview	164
The First Messenger	165
Drowned in a Great Flood	166
Along the Same Way to Ruin.....	168
Facing the Same Rejection	170
3 A Book Stating the Truth.....	173
Overview	178
Competing in Good Works.....	178
Will They Not Reflect?	180
The Line the Truth Follows.....	182
Inspiring Signs.....	184
Questions with One Answer.....	186
The True Concept of God.....	188

4 Justice and Grace.....	191
Overview	193
As Death Approaches	193
The Basic Issue of Faith	196
Al-Nūr	198
Prologue.....	198
1 The Mandatory Punishment for Adultery.....	201
An Unusual Beginning	205
Is Hard Punishment Justified?	208
Measures Against False Accusation	210
When a Husband Accuses His Wife.....	212
Legislation is Given When Needed	214
A False Accusation Against the Prophet’s Wife	216
As the Prophet Faces False Accusations	221
How the False Story Was Circulated.....	224
Two Steps for Proof.....	226
When Falsehood Circulates.....	227
Further Warnings, More Grace.....	229
Attaining the Sublime.....	230
2 Measures to Preserve Decency.....	233
Overview	235
Before Entering a House.....	235
Visiting People When They Are Not Ready.....	236
Good Manners and High Morals	239
Proper Control of a Natural Desire	239
Prompt Compliance with Divine Orders	242
Promoting Easy Marriage.....	245
Financial Help for Marriage	246
Fair Treatment for the Least Privileged.....	247
3 The Light of Heaven and Earth	250
Overview	252
God’s Radiant Light	253
An Example Portraying God’s Light.....	253
Deeds That Come to Nothing	256
All Glorify God	257
Snatching Eyesight	258
4 Guidance to the Straight Path.....	262
Overview	264
Contrasting Attitudes.....	264
The Road to True Success	267
God’s True Promise.....	269
Not Included in God’s Promise	272
5 Perfect Manners.....	274
Overview	276
Good Manners at Home.....	277
Rules Relaxed.....	278
Good Manners with the Prophet.....	280
A Stern Warning to the Disobedient.....	282
Al-Furqān	284
Prologue.....	284
1 To Distinguish Right from False.....	289

The Purpose of Qur'ānic Revelations	292
Accusations without Basis	297
Honouring Mankind	299
Denying Resurrection	302
Entrusting God's Message to Man	304
<i>2 Below Animal Level</i>	<i>306</i>
Overview	309
Ominous Prospects for the Unbelievers	309
What Use is Regret?	313
A Complaint by God's Messenger	314
The Time Span of Qur'ānic Revelations	316
The Fate of Earlier Unbelievers	318
Ridiculing God's Messenger	319
When Desire is Worshipped	322
<i>3 Raising Support Against God</i>	<i>324</i>
Overview	326
Moving Shadows, Still Night	327
<i>Jihad</i> by Means of the Qur'ān	329
Separating Types of Water	332
The Great Miracle of Life	333
In League Against God	334
In Whom to Trust	336
Setting the Universe to Order	337
<i>4 God's True Servants</i>	<i>339</i>
Overview	341
The Distinctive Features of Faith	341
Steering Away from Sin	343
Erasing Sin Through Repentance	344
Further Qualities of True Believers	345
Destined for the Finest Abode	346

Transliteration Table

Consonants. Arabic

Initial: unexpressed medial and final:

ء	'	د	d	ض	ḍ	ك	k
ب	b	ذ	dh	ط	ṭ	ل	l
ت	t	ر	r	ظ	ẓ	م	m
ث	th	ز	z	ع	'	ن	n
ج	j	س	s	غ	gh	ه	h
ح	ḥ	ش	sh	ف	f	و	w
خ	kh	ص	ṣ	ق	q	ي	y

Vowels, diphthongs, etc

Short:

ِ	i	َ	a	ُ	u
---	---	---	---	---	---

Long:

ِي	ī	َا	ā	ُو	ū
----	---	----	---	----	---

Diphthongs:

َي	ay	َو	aw
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SŪRAH 21

Al-Anbiyā'

(The Prophets)

Prologue

Revealed in Makkah, this *sūrah*, as with all other parts of the Qur'ān revealed in that period, deals with the issue of faith. It does so under three main headings: namely, God's oneness, His message, and mankind's resurrection.

The flow of the *sūrah* deals with its subject matter, referring to a number of great universal phenomena and linking them with faith. The point of this is that faith is part of the universal structure, and the same phenomena apply to it. It illustrates the truth which is at the heart of the heavens and the earth and their constitution. It reflects the seriousness with which their affairs are conducted. It is neither a matter of play nor a question of falsehood, in the same way as the universe was not created for play, nor was any element of falsehood mixed with its creation: *"We have not created the heavens and the earth and all that is between them in mere idle play."* (Verse 16)

The *sūrah* concentrates people's eyes, hearts and minds on the universe and its great phenomena: the heavens and the earth, mountains and valleys, night and day, sun and moon. It draws their attention to the unity of the laws that govern all these and conduct their affairs, and how this unity provides powerful evidence of the unity of the Creator who owns this vast universe. No partner has He in His kingdom, in the same way as He has no partner in its creation: *"Had there been in heaven or on earth any deities other than God, both would surely have fallen into ruin!"* (Verse 22)

The *sūrah* also draws our attention to the unity of the phenomena which govern life on earth and the unity of the source of life: *"We have made out of water every living thing."* (Verse 30) All living things will face the same end: *"Every soul shall taste*

death." (Verse 35) They will then arrive at the same destiny: "To Us you all must return." (Verse 35)

Faith is closely linked to these major universal phenomena. It is the same faith, even though many messengers have been sent to convey it to people: "Before your time We never sent a messenger without having revealed to him that there is no deity other than Me. Therefore, you shall worship Me alone." (Verse 25) It is God's will that all messengers were human beings: "Before your time, We never sent [as Our messengers] any but men whom We inspired." (Verse 7)

Just like faith is closely linked to major universal phenomena, the same applies to what the advocates of faith may encounter in this world. The rule that never fails is that the truth will ultimately triumph and falsehood will be wiped out, because the truth is a universal reality and its victory is a divine law: "We hurl the truth against falsehood, and it crushes the latter, and behold, it withers away." (Verse 18) By the same token, the wrongdoers who deny the truth are bound to be destroyed, but God will save His messengers and the believers: "We fulfilled Our promise to them, and We saved them and all whom We willed [to save], and We destroyed those who transgressed beyond bounds." (Verse 9) God's devoted servants are the eventual heirs of the earth: "We wrote in the Psalms, after the Reminder [given to Moses] that 'the righteous among My servants shall inherit the earth.'" (Verse 105)

The *sūrah* then presents a quick review of the single community that has followed God's messengers. It pauses long to reflect on the stories of Abraham, David and Solomon, but makes only brief references to Noah, Moses, Aaron, Lot, Ishmael, Idrīs, Dhu'l-Kifl, Jonah, Zachariah, John and Jesus, (peace be upon them all). Some of the issues, already tackled in the *sūrah* as general rules and phenomena, are reflected again in this review in the form of practical events encountered by God's messengers and their followers.

The flow of the *sūrah* also includes some scenes of the Day of Judgement in which we find the same meanings and concepts reflected again as part of the reality of that great day.

We see, then, how varying cadences employed in the *sūrah* serve the same purpose of alerting the human mind so that it recognizes the truth of the faith preached by the last of God's messengers. For people cannot receive the message while indulging in play, turning away and paying little heed to it, as they are described in the opening verses: "Closer to people draws their reckoning, yet they continue to blithely turn away. Whenever there comes to them any new reminder from their Lord, they listen to it but take it in jest; their hearts set on pleasure." (Verses 1-3)

This message of Islam is both true and serious, in the same way as this universe is true and serious. Therefore, there may be no jest and play in receiving God's

message, as in making demands for miraculous evidence. Evidence of a miraculous nature is available everywhere in the universe and its operative phenomena. It all confirms that God is the only creator who has power over all things, and that the message comes from Him alone.

As for its mode of expression and its rhythm, the *sūrah* employs factual statements which best suit its subject matter and ambience. This is clearly apparent when we compare its style with that employed in the preceding two *sūrahs*, *Maryam* and *Ṭā Hā*. In both these, the rhythm is soft, and hence more suited to their overall atmosphere. Here the rhythm is stronger, to fit its message. This is even clearer when we look at the way the story of the Prophet Abraham is related in *Maryam* and in this *sūrah*. In the former, the episode is given in the form of an expansive dialogue between Abraham and his father, whereas here we see Abraham's destruction of the idols worshipped by his people, and his subsequently being thrown in the fire. Thus, the subject matter, the style and the cadence achieve complete harmony in both instances.

This *sūrah* flows in four distinctive rounds. The first starts with a powerful opening that creates strong beats to shake people's hearts and alert them to the danger they will shortly face, while they remain oblivious to it: "*Closer to people draws their reckoning, yet they continue to blithely turn away.*" (Verse 1) This is followed by a scene of the fate suffered by earlier communities for turning their backs on God's messages, leading a life of wrongdoing: "*How many a community that persisted in evil-doing have We dashed into fragments, and raised another people in their stead?*" (Verse 11) Both the message of Islam and the system that governs the universe are based on truth and seriousness, which are here linked to the faith based on God's oneness and to the phenomena operating in the universe. The *sūrah* also links all this with the unity of the Creator who is in control of all things, the unity of the divine message and faith, and the unity of the source of life, its end and destiny.

The second round examines the unbelievers who hurled ridicule at God's Messenger while the matter he spoke to them about was very serious. Everything around them calls for close attention and alertness. They call for their punishment to be hastened, when it is close at hand. At this point the *sūrah* portrays a scene of the Day of Judgement, drawing their attention to what befell those before them who ridiculed God's messengers and their messages. It tells them very clearly that they enjoy no protection against God's punishment. It calls on them to reflect on God's power as He shrinks the earth from its edges, reducing its area. Should they so reflect, they may wake up to what awaits them after having long been oblivious to it.

This round concludes with a directive to the Prophet to outline his task: "*Say: I do but warn you on the strength of divine revelation!*" (Verse 45) He also alerts them to the danger to which they expose themselves by being so oblivious: "*But the deaf cannot*

hear this call, however often they are warned.” (Verse 45) The result is that they will continue to pay no attention to what is presented to them until they are called to account on the Day of Judgement.

The third round provides a review of the single community of believers who followed God’s prophets. This review reflects the unity of the message and the faith. It also portrays the grace God bestows on His righteous servants and His punishment of those who deny the truth.

In the fourth and final round, everyone’s eventual destiny is described in an eventful scene of the Day of Judgement. The *sūrah* closes with a strong beat, a clear warning before leaving the unbelievers to their inevitable doom.