

# 1

## Clear Solid Evidence

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.*

*Closer to people draws their reckoning, yet they continue to blithely turn away. (1)*

*Whenever there comes to them any new reminder from their Lord, they listen to it but take it in jest; (2)*

*their hearts set on pleasure. Yet, concealing their inner thoughts, the wrongdoers say to one another: 'Is this man anything but a human being like yourselves? Will you, then, follow his sorcery with your eyes open?' (3)*

*He says: 'My Lord knows whatever is spoken in heaven and earth. He is the One who hears all and knows all.' (4)*

*'Nay,' they say, 'it is but a medley of dreams!' – 'Nay, he has invented it himself!' – 'Nay, he is only a poet!' – 'Let him, then, bring us some sign, as the prophets of old were sent with.' (5)*

*Not one of the communities whom We destroyed in bygone days would ever believe. Will these, then, believe? (6)*

أَقْتَرَبَ لِلنَّاسِ حِسَابُهُمْ وَهُمْ فِي غَفْلَةٍ  
مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿١﴾

مَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِّنْ ذِكْرٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ مُّحَدَّثٍ  
إِلَّا اسْتَمَعُوهُ وَهُمْ يَلْعَبُونَ ﴿٢﴾

لَاهِيَةً قُلُوبُهُمْ ۗ وَأَسْرَأُ النَّجْوَى الَّذِينَ  
ظَلَمُوا هَلْ هَذَا إِلَّا بَشْرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ  
أَفْتَاتُونَ السِّحْرَ وَأَنْتُمْ تُبْصِرُونَ

﴿٣﴾

قَالَ رَبِّي يَعْلَمُ الْقَوْلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ  
وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ﴿٤﴾

بَلْ قَالُوا أَضْغَثٌ أَحْلَمَ بَلِ افْتَرَاهُ بَلْ  
هُوَ شَاعِرٌ فَلْيَأْتِنَا بِآيَةٍ كَمَا أُرْسِلَ

الْأَوَّلُونَ ﴿٥﴾

مَا ءَامَنَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ مِّن قَرْيَةٍ أَهْلَكْنَاهَا

Before your time, We never sent [as Our messengers] any but men whom We inspired. Hence, ask the followers of earlier revelations if you do not know this. (7)

Neither did We give them bodies that did not eat food, nor were they immortal. (8)

In the end, 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. (9)

We have now revealed for you a book bringing you respect. Will you not, then, use your reason? (10)

How many a community that persisted in evil-doing have We dashed into fragments, and raised another people in their stead? (11)

And as soon as they began to feel Our might they took to their heels and fled. (12)

Do not run away. Return to all your comforts and to your dwellings, so that you might be called to account. (13)

They said: 'Woe betide us! We were indeed wrongdoers!' (14)

And that cry of theirs did not cease until We caused them to become like a field mown down,

أَفْهَمَ يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦﴾

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا قَبْلَكَ إِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي إِلَيْهِمْ  
فَسْأَلُوا أَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا  
تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٧﴾

وَمَا جَعَلْنَاهُمْ جَسَدًا لَا يَأْكُلُونَ  
الطَّعَامَ وَمَا كَانُوا خَالِدِينَ ﴿٨﴾

ثُمَّ صَدَقْنَاهُمُ الْوَعْدَ فَأَنْجَيْنَاهُمْ وَمَنْ  
نَشَاءُ وَأَهْلَكْنَا الْمُسْرِفِينَ ﴿٩﴾

لَقَدْ أَنْزَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ كِتَابًا فِيهِ ذِكْرُكُمْ  
أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

وَكَمْ قَصَمْنَا مِنْ قَرْيَةٍ كَانَتْ ظَالِمَةً  
وَأَنْشَأْنَا بَعْدَهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ ﴿١١﴾

فَلَمَّا أَحْسَوْا بِأَسْنَانَا إِذَا هُمْ مِنْهَا يَرْكُضُونَ  
﴿١٢﴾

لَا تَرْكُضُوا وَارْجِعُوا إِلَىٰ مَا أُتْرِفْتُمْ فِيهِ  
وَمَسْكِنِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَسْأَلُونَ ﴿١٣﴾

قَالُوا يَنْوِيلُنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

فَمَا زَالَتْ تِلْكَ دَعْوَاهُمْ حَتَّىٰ جَعَلْنَاهُمْ

*still and silent as ashes. (15)*

*We have not created the heavens and the earth  
and all that is between them in mere idle play.  
(16)*

*Had We willed to indulge in a pastime, We  
would indeed have found one near at hand; if ever  
We were to do so! (17)*

*Nay, but We hurl the truth against falsehood,  
and it crushes the latter, and behold, it withers  
away. But woe to you for all your false claims.  
(18)*

*To Him belong all those who are in the heavens  
and on earth. Those that are with Him are never  
too proud to worship Him and never grow weary  
of that. (19)*

*They extol His limitless glory by night and day,  
tirelessly. (20)*

*Or have they taken for worship some earthly  
deities who can restore the dead to life? (21)*

*Had there been in heaven or on earth any deities  
other than God, both would surely have fallen  
into ruin! But limitless in His glory is God, Lord  
of the Throne, and exalted is He above all that  
they attribute to Him! (22)*

*He cannot be questioned about whatever He*

حَصِيدًا خَلْمِدِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَاءَ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا  
لَعِبِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

لَوْ أَرَدْنَا أَنْ نَتَّخِذَ هَوًا لَاتَّخَذْنَاهُ مِنْ  
لَدُنَّا إِنْ كُنَّا فَاعِلِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

بَلْ نَقْذِفُ بِالْحَقِّ عَلَى الْبَاطِلِ فَيَدْمَغُهُ  
فَإِذَا هُوَ زَاهِقٌ وَلَكُمْ الْوَيْلُ مِمَّا تَصِفُونَ  
﴿١٨﴾

وَلَهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَنْ  
عِنْدَهُ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَلَا  
يَسْتَحْسِرُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

يُسَبِّحُونَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ لَا يَفْتُرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾

أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا ءِالِهَةً مِنَ الْأَرْضِ هُمْ يُنْشِرُونَ  
الْمَيِّتِينَ ﴿٢١﴾

لَوْ كَانَ فِيهِمَا ءِالِهَةٌ إِلَّا اللَّهُ لَفَسَدَتَا  
فَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَرْشِ عَمَّا يَصِفُونَ  
﴿٢٢﴾

does, whereas they shall be questioned. (23)

Or have they taken for worship some deities besides Him? Say: 'Produce your convincing proof. This is the message of those who are with me and the message of those before me.' But nay, most of them do not know the truth, and so they stubbornly turn away. (24)

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. (25)

They say: 'The Most Merciful has taken to Himself a son!' Limitless is He in His glory! No; they are but His honoured servants. (26)

They do not speak until He has spoken, and they act at His behest. (27)

He knows all that lies before them and all behind them. They do not intercede for any but those whom He has already graced with His goodly acceptance, since they themselves stand in reverent awe of Him. (28)

If any of them were to say, 'I am a deity beside Him,' We shall requite him with hell. Thus do We reward the wrongdoers. (29)

Are the unbelievers unaware that the heaven and the earth were once one single entity, which We then parted asunder? We have made out of water every living thing. Will they not, then, believe? (30)

We have also set firm mountains on earth, lest it sway with them, and We have cut out there broad

لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

أَمْ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِهِ ءِالِهَةً قُلْ هَاتُوا بُرْهَانَكُمْ هَذَا ذِكْرٌ مِنْ مَعِيَ وَذِكْرٌ مِنْ قَبْلِي بَلْ أَكْثَرُهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ الْحَقَّ فَهُمْ مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ ﴿٢٥﴾

وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَلَدًا سُبْحٰنَهُ بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُكْرَمُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنْ ارْتَضَىٰ وَهُمْ مِنَ خَشِيَّتِهِ مُشْفِقُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

وَمَنْ يَقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَهٌ مِنْ دُونِهِ فَذٰلِكَ نَجْزِيهِ جَهَنَّمَ كَذٰلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّٰلِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَآءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

وَجَعَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيًا أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِهِمْ

*paths, so that they might find their way, (31)*

*and We have set up the sky as a well-secured canopy. Yet they stubbornly turn away from all its signs. (32)*

*It is He who has created the night and the day and the sun and the moon: each moves swiftly in its own orbit. (33)*

*Never have We granted life everlasting to any man before you. Should you yourself die, do they, perchance, hope to live forever? (34)*

*Every soul shall taste death. We test you all with evil and good by way of trial. To Us you all must return. (35)*

وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا فِجَاجًا سُبُلًا لَّعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ

﴿٣١﴾

وَجَعَلْنَا السَّمَاءَ سَقْفًا مَّحْفُوظًا وَهُمْ عَنْ

ءَايَاتِهَا مُعْرِضُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ وَالشَّمْسَ

وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا لِبَشَرٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ الْخُلْدَ أَفَإِن

مِتَّ فَهُمُ الْخَالِدُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَنَبْلُوكُم بِالشَّرِّ

وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

### Reckoning Drawing Close

The *sūrah* is distinguished by a very powerful opening that shakes the careless who are preoccupied with the petty concerns of this world while the reckoning draws ever closer to them. Signs and indicators are given to them while they continue to turn their backs on divine guidance. The situation is grave, yet they remain totally unaware of its seriousness. Whenever they receive a new Qur'ānic warning, they respond with ridicule, persisting in their playful negligence. Their hearts can only attend to their own pleasure. It should be pointed out here that in Qur'ānic usage, the term, 'heart', is synonymous with mind as it refers to the faculty of contemplation, reflection and thought. "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. Yet, concealing their inner thoughts, the wrongdoers say to one another: Is this man anything but a human being like yourselves? Will you, then, follow his sorcery with your eyes open?" (Verses 1-3)

This is a picture of hearts that know no seriousness, jesting when the situation is most serious, and trifling with what is sacred. The reminder given to them here originates with 'their Lord', yet they are playful as they listen to it, showing no

respect whatsoever. A soul that knows no seriousness, respect or sacredness ends up in a condition of barren triviality which makes it unsuitable for the fulfilment of any task of merit. Its life seems devoid of respect, cheap. A spirit which cares little or nothing for what is held as sacred is sick. Carelessness is the opposite of endurance. The latter is a serious effort indicating strength, while the former indicates insensitivity.

Such people responded inappropriately to Qur'ānic revelations that are meant to be a constitution regulating human life, and form a code for human dealings. They are hence warned of the imminent reckoning, but still they remain oblivious to it. Such people can be seen at all times. Whenever a person's spirit is devoid of seriousness and respect, it ends up in such a sick state that it makes of life a matter of jest, lacking real purpose.

By contrast, the believers received this *sūrah* with a due seriousness that made them care little for this world. In his biographical notes on `Āmir ibn Rabī`ah, al-Āmidī says that he once received a bedouin guest and was typically very hospitable to him. Some time later, the Bedouin called on him after having acquired a plot of land. He said to him, 'The Prophet has given me a valley in a nearby place of the Arab land. I would like to give you a piece of it to be yours to bequeath to your heirs.' `Āmir said: "I have no need for your gift, because today a *sūrah* has been revealed which leaves us oblivious to all concerns of this life.

It is the *sūrah* that starts with, "*Closer to people draws their reckoning, yet they continue to blithely turn away.*" This is the marked difference between a living heart which interacts with what it receives and a dead one which covers its lifelessness in a shroud of jest and play. The latter type does not respond to reminders because it is devoid of the elements of life.

"*Yet, concealing their inner thoughts,*" they plot among themselves and encourage one another in adopting an attitude that denies God's message. In reference to God's Messenger (peace be upon him), "*the wrongdoers say to one another: 'Is this man anything but a human being like yourselves? Will you, then, follow his sorcery with your eyes open?'*" (Verse 3)

Dead as their hearts were, they could not but be shaken by the Qur'ān. Hence they try to resist its influence with false excuses. They whisper to one another that Muhammad is a man, and wonder how they could believe a message preached by a human being like themselves. They allege that what he says is plain magic, and ask how they could surrender themselves to sorcery when they have eyes with which to look.

The Prophet is instructed to leave the whole matter between him and the unbelievers to God, making it clear that He knows what they secretly say among

themselves. He also informs him of their scheming by which they tried to divert the effect of the Qur'ān on themselves and on other people.

*"He says: My Lord knows whatever is spoken in heaven and earth. He is the One who hears all and knows all."* (Verse 4) Whatever people may say in private is known to God, because He knows everything that takes place in heaven and earth. When they conspire and scheme, He is fully aware of their scheming. Nothing escapes His knowledge. They were at a loss as to how they should describe the Qur'ān in order to neutralize its appeal. Hence they variously alleged that it was sorcery, a series of confused dreams related by Muhammad, poetry, or mere fabrication. The Qur'ān reported their claims as they uttered them. They say: *"Nay, it is but a medley of dreams! - Nay, he has invented it himself - Nay, he is only a poet!"* (Verse 5) They could not agree on any one view or description to explain the magnetism the Qur'ān had on people. None of their allegations or justifications had any value. Hence, they roamed from one claim to another, betraying their puzzlement. Feeling themselves at a terrible loss, they decided to get around the whole question by demanding a miracle similar to those given to some early prophets: *"Let him, then, bring us some sign, as the prophets of old were sent with."* (Verse 5)

Miraculous signs and events were given in the past, but the communities to which they were shown did not believe as a result. Hence they were destroyed in accordance with God's law which seals the fate of any community which continues to reject the truth after having been given a miraculous sign of it. *"Not one of the communities whom We destroyed in bygone days would ever believe."* (Verse 6) When stubborn rejection of the truth reaches a point that it continues even after a tangible, physical, miraculous sign is given, then all excuses are invalid. People who continue with such rejection seal their own fate and they are destroyed as a result.

Miracles were given in plenty, but people still rejected the truth, and they were destroyed, one community after another. Is it likely then that those Arabs, similar as they were to earlier communities, would submit to miraculous evidence and accept the truth? *"Will these, then, believe?"* (Verse 6)

### **The Messengers God Sends**

*"Before your time, We never sent [as Our messengers] any but men whom We inspired. Hence, ask the followers of earlier revelations if you do not know this. Neither did We give them bodies that did not eat food, nor were they immortal."* (Verses 7-8) In His infinite wisdom, God chose His messengers from among human beings. They received His revelations and called on people to believe in Him on the basis of such revelations. Those noble messengers of God were men with human bodies. God did not make them of a special type, so as not to eat food. Food is a basic necessity for human

survival, and God's messengers, who were human, were not immortal. Such is the law God has set, and if those Arabs were unaware of it, then they should ask the people who received earlier revelations, because they knew earlier prophets.

Moreover, God chose His messengers from among human beings because He wanted them to experience human life. Thus, their own practical lives would demonstrate the practicality of divine law, and their daily actions set the example of what they called for. When words are confirmed by practice, they are far more effective, because people see their effect as they are implemented. Had God's messengers been of a different species, needing no food to eat, no going about in the markets to obtain their needs, and no intimacy with women, and had they had no experience of human emotion, they would have had no empathy with other people, and no understanding of their feelings and motives. In which case, people would not find in them relevant examples to follow.

Any advocate of a cause who does not interact with the people he addresses, neither sharing their feelings, nor letting them share his, remains on the margin of their lives, experiencing no mutual sympathy with them. Regardless of what he says to them, he will not be able to motivate them because of their mutual isolation. Likewise, an advocate whose actions do not endorse his words will not be able to reach people's hearts, no matter how lucid and eloquent he may be. Indeed a simple word that is felt to be genuine and endorsed by action is the one that motivates people to act.

Those who in times past suggested that God's messenger should be an angel, like their successors who today suggest that such a messenger of God should be far above human earthly feelings, indulge in futile argument. Furthermore, they are all oblivious to the fundamental fact that angels do not, by their very nature, experience human life. They do not experience neither the physical needs and interactions of the human body, nor human feelings, emotions or concerns. A messenger from God must know all such feelings and motives, experiencing them in his own daily life so that he is able to provide practical guidance to those who respond to his message.

Furthermore, were the messenger to be an angel, people would have no motivation to follow his example in their life's details. They would feel that he belonged to a different race with a totally different nature. They will remain unable to follow his suit in their daily life. Needless to say, God's messengers have always provided their peoples with a good example to follow.

Furthermore, such a suggestion betrays ignorance of the honour God has bestowed on mankind. For He chose His messengers from among them, providing them with contact with the Supreme Society of heaven as they received instructions and revelations from Him.

For all these reasons, God, in His infinite wisdom, selected His messengers from among human beings, subjecting them to all that a human being experiences from the moment of birth to the moment of death, including emotions, reactions, hopes, pains, eating food, marriage, etc. It is God's wisdom that determined that the final and most perfect messenger to deliver His last and everlasting message should be the one who provided the most perfect example of human life on earth; a life full of motivation, experience, action and emotion.

Such has been God's law in selecting His messengers, and His law in saving them with their followers when He destroyed the wrongdoers who rejected the truth embodied in their messages: *"In the end, 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)

This is, then, a law set in operation, like that of sending God's messengers. He promised to save them along with those who truly believed in them and gave credence to their faith by action. He fulfilled His promise to them and destroyed those who were oppressors, transgressing all the bounds He set.

### **The Book Giving Distinction to Arabs**

God reminds the pagan Arabs who oppressed the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), denying his message and persecuting him and his followers, that they are subject to His law for their transgression. He also makes it clear to them that it is an aspect of the grace He bestows on them that He has not sent them any physical miracle, because that would have spelt their doom if they continued to reject the truth as older communities did. Instead, He sent them a book which imparts honour to them, since it is in their own language. This book sets their life on the right footing and makes of them a community entitled to lead mankind and be respected by them. Moreover, this book invites thinking people to reflect on it and elevate themselves by implementing it: *"We have now revealed for you a book bringing you respect. Will you not, then, use your reason?"* (Verse 10)

The miracle of the Qur'an is open to all generations. Thus, it is unlike the physical miracles given at a particular time and place. For the Arabs, the Qur'an brought respect, honour and glory as they delivered its message to all people. Prior to the Qur'an, the Arabs barely received mention in humanity's records. They had nothing to give humanity so as to ensure they were remembered. But as long as they upheld their book, they were honoured by the rest of mankind. Indeed, they assumed the leadership of humanity over many centuries, bringing happiness to themselves and to the rest of mankind. Then when they abandoned it, humanity left them aside, and they lost their position of respect. They were then at the tail end of humanity,

suffering aggression from different quarters, in stark contrast with their glorious past when they enjoyed security while others suffered fear and anxiety.

The Arabs have nothing of value and no sound idea to give to humanity other than this guidance and the ideas it contains. Therefore, when they present their book to the world, they are known by it and they are given the honour they deserve, because humanity knows that they have what is of benefit to it. But when they present themselves as mere Arabs, such questions as – who are Arabs? – are asked. And what is the value of their ancestry when they do not have their book? Mankind has never accorded the Arabs any position of respect except when they showed themselves to be advocates of a faith which they implemented and conducted their affairs by and according to its teachings. By contrast, their being merely Arabs had no value in human history and no entry in the records of civilization. They are known only by being the standard-bearers of Islamic values, ideals and civilization. In history, this certainly has great value.

It is to this fact that the Qur'ān refers when it says to the Arab idolaters who rejected every idea it put to them and denied its truth: *"We have now revealed for you a book bringing you respect. Will you not, then, use your reason?"* (Verse 10)

It was an act of divine grace that God revealed the Qur'ān to them, rather than giving them the miracle they demanded. Had such a miracle been sent to them and had they continued to deny the truth, a calamity like those that destroyed earlier unbelievers would have brought about their doom. At this point the *sūrah* portrays a scene of total destruction and annihilation:

*How many a community that persisted in evil-doing have We dashed into fragments, and raised another people in their stead. And as soon as they began to feel Our might they took to their heels and fled. Do not run away. Return to all your comforts and to your dwellings, so that you might be called to account. They said: 'Woe betide us! We were indeed wrongdoers!' And that cry of theirs did not cease until We caused them to become like a field mown down, still and silent as ashes. (Verses 11-15)*

The Arabic term *qaṣamnā*, rendered here as 'dashed into fragments', carries strong connotations of a strike that splits something into pieces. Moreover, its sound adds further connotations of complete destruction. Those communities persisted in their evil and met a sudden fate that left no trace of them. *"And [We] raised another people in their stead."* We note also that the Arabic text uses the word *qaryah* which means village or town with the verb denoting the breaking into fragments, but it uses *qawm*, or 'people', when it speaks of raising a new community, because it is such people who build a new civilization. In this way, the destruction is rendered more powerful, which is in line with the distinctive characteristics of the Qur'ānic style.