

Surah al-Qalam (68)

‘The Pen’

سورة القلم

The surah derives its name from the prominence within it of the word *al-qalam*, meaning ‘the pen’. Like the other Makkan surahs, it deals with matters of faith and the principles of Divinity, Prophethood and the Return. Just as Surah al-Mulk concluded on the theme of the disbelievers and their belying the truth, so this surah opens on a similar theme.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah ... We seek help by the name of Allah, for Allah is too majestic and sublime for the reader to seek help through Him, and the seeking of help is but through the name, just as it is said, ‘The poor take refuge at Thy doorstep’.

... the Compassionate, the Merciful. He bestows mercy on all things, and on everyone, for His mercy embraces all things.

Nūn. By the pen, and what they notate. (1)

ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ ﴿١﴾

Nūn is the name of the Arabic letter that has the sound of the English ‘n’. Here, it signifies the species of letters – the Arabic alphabet – of which the miraculous Qur’an is composed, such that were the jinn and mankind to combine to produce the like of it, they would not be able to do so. Or the letter has a secret significance shared by Allah and the Messenger. In narrations it is said to be the name of a river in paradise that congeals to become ink, and by that ink and ‘the Pen’ (*al-qalam*), all that happens and will ever happen until the day of resurrection is written on ‘the Protected Tablet’ (*al-Lawh al-Mahfūdh*).

By the pen ... An oath by the pen, by which people write. The oath is sworn by it on account of what has been stated about all of Allah’s creation being grand and magnificent, and that Allah binds covenants by various aspects of His creation, thus indicating the magnificence with which it is endowed. Or what is meant is the Pen that writes on the *Lawh al-Mahfūdh*.

... and what they notate. The oath is also by what they write and notate, meaning what people write, or what the angels notate. ‘Notate’ is given for *satāra*, so as to differentiate it from *kataba*, to write.

Thou are not, by the blessing of thy Lord, mad. (2)

مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ ﴿٢﴾

Thou are not ... The address, in the singular, is to Allah’s Messenger *may Allah bless him and his family*.

... by the blessing of thy Lord, mad. By the blessing and favour of Allah, he was not mad, as the disbelievers maintained. For they called him mad, on account of his being favoured with messengership.

And indeed for thee is certainly a reward without end. (3)

وَإِنَّ لَكَ لَأَجْرًا غَيْرَ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٣﴾

The Messenger had the good news of an unending wage as a reward for his undertaking the labours of his prophethood.

And truly thou are certainly on a magnificent disposition. (4)

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾

That is, the Messenger endured the difficulties of delivering his message with perfect magnanimity. And the Messenger was tormented to the extent that he said, ‘No Prophet has suffered annoyance the way I have suffered annoyance.’

Soon thou shall see and they shall see (5)

فَسْتُبْصِرُ وَيُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٥﴾

That is, you, O Messenger, and they, the disbelievers who call you mad.

Which of ye is the demented. (6)

بِأَيِّكُمْ الْمَفْتُونُ ﴿٦﴾

That is, whether madness is to be attributed to thee, O Messenger, or to them, for their turning away from the reality – for is it not madness to desert what is beneficial and take what is harmful? ‘Demented’ is given for *maftuṅ*, in contrast to the more common *majnuṅ*, for which we have put ‘mad’.

Indeed thy Lord – He knows best who strays from His path and He knows best who is the guided. (7)

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ

بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿٧﴾

Indeed thy Lord ... The address remains in the singular.

... He knows best who strays from His path ... He knows who strays from His path: whether it was the Messenger, as the disbelievers said, or whether it was the disbelievers, as indeed was the reality. ‘Straying from His path’ means to deviate from the path that He has laid down, glory be to Him, for man to reach fulfilment in the world and in the hereafter.

... and He knows best who is the guided. That is, those guided to the correct path, the path of Islam.

And since the clear path has been explained to you:

So obey not the believers; (8)

فَلَا تَطِعِ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿٨﴾

That is, follow not, O Messenger, those who belie your call to monotheism and your legislative path, or *sharfah*, but rather leave them to themselves.

They would love thee to compromise, so they would compromise. (9)

وَدُّوا لَوْ تَدَّهِنُ فَيَدَّهِنُونَ ﴿٩﴾

They would love thee to compromise ... The disbelievers would love it for you to be pliant, O Messenger, to be courteous with them and incline towards them.

... so they would compromise So, if he were to be pliant with them, they would have compromised with him, and maintained courteous relations with him, so as to lessen the impact of his call on themselves.

And obey not any base oath-monger, (10)

وَلَا تَطِعِ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَّهِينٍ ﴿١٠﴾

‘Oath-monger’ is given for *hallaḥ*, meaning someone who swears many false oaths, due to lack of considerations. ‘Base’ is given for *mahin*, meaning low, ignoble and base. And these are amongst the qualities of the disbelievers for they find no path other than asserting their error, and so they clutch at oaths. Such people feel within themselves a sense of impotence and humiliation, despite their fits of excitement, their loud words, boasts and expansive swearing of oaths.

Defamer, walking about with slander, (11)

هَمَّازٍ مَّشَاءٍ بِنَمِيمٍ ﴿١١﴾

‘Defamer’ is given for *hammad*, meaning to be a persistent slanderer of people. ‘Slander’ is given for *namin*, meaning the vicious slander that is intended to give rise to dissension. The ayah is about those who go amongst the people sowing corruption and disharmony by the telling of slanderous lies, so as to incite violence and disorder.

Hinderer of the good, a violator, a persistent sinner, (12)

مَنَّاعٍ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿١٢﴾

Hinderer is given for *mannāʿ*, meaning one who persistently hinders. Whenever such a person sees the people intending to do some good, he stops them out of the baseness of his own spirit. He is a transgressor who violates the truth, and who persistently sins and is disobedient.

Coarse, after all that, ignoble. (13)

عُتْلٌ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ زَنِيمٌ ﴿١٣﴾

That is, besides the qualities already given he is rough-tempered and coarse (*ʿutull*). 'Ignoble' is given for *zanīm*, meaning an individual of illegitimate birth who is associated with a tribe to whom he does not belong by birth. It is said that the ayah was sent down with reference to al-Walīd ibn al-Mughayrah. These qualities generally combine among the evils of those who hinder the truth and practice every evil. And we have seen them in our own time. It seems that when the spirit deviates from the path of guidance, all these qualities combine within it.

That he is a holder of wealth and sons, (14)

أَنْ كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

That is, because he has been granted wealth and sons he belies the divine signs and portents – returning evil for goodness – by referring to those ayah as “Fables of the ancients”.

When Our portents are recited to him he says, 'Fables of the ancients!' (15)

إِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالِ اسْطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

When the portents or ayah of the Qur'an are recited to him he calls them the stories of ancient peoples woven together bearing no serious principle. 'Fables' is given for *asatīr*, meaning empty, imaginary tales that have no reality. And it is amongst the wonders how closely this word of the detractors of the age of the Messenger resembles what the detractors of the present age say, that Islam is archaic and reactionary.

We shall brand him on the muzzle. (16)

سَنَسِمُهُ عَلَى الْخُرْطُومِ ﴿١٦﴾

That is, a portent or sign shall be applied to him on the day of resurrection by which it shall be known that he is guilty. The sign shall be applied to his muzzle, given for *khurṭum*, the trunk of an elephant, which word is used for belittlement. Indeed, their being branded on the trunk is on account of how the nose is the point of one's dignity and honour.

Indeed We tried them just as We tried the companions of the garden, when they swore they would pluck it in the morning, (17)

إِنَّا بَلَوْنَهُمْ كَمَا بَلَوْنَا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ إِذْ أَقْسَمُوا لَيَصْرِمُنَّهَا

مُصْبِحِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

Indeed We tried them ... That is, the people of Makkah.

... just as We examined the companions of the garden. It was an orchard near Sānaʿ in the Yemen. From the Imam al-Baqir, *peace be upon him*, we have it that the people of Makkah were tried with hunger like the companions of the garden; and the garden was in this world, located in the Yemen and called Ridwān, at about nine miles from Sānaʿ

The story of the companions of the garden, as narrated by al-Shaykh al-Qummi from Ibn ʿAbbas, is that there was an old man who possessed a garden, and he was such that not a thing passed from the garden into his house before all rights from it and dues had been given. When the old man died, he was inherited by his sons, of whom there were five.

The harvest that year, the first harvest after the death of their father, was a bumper harvest the like of which had never occurred before. So they were self-congratulatory on account of their orchard. After the afternoon prayer they were gazing on their harvest and the bumper crop that was far better than anything produced during the life of their father, and they exalted and transgressed. One of them said to the others, 'Our father was an old man and his reason and mind was gone, so come on, let us swear among ourselves that this year we will give nothing to any of

the poor muslims – that is, Muslims of their era – so that we become rich and our wealth multiply. Then we will do so in future years (i.e. give to the poor).

Four of the brothers agreed to this, the fifth was silent – it was he about whom Allah says, ... *The middle one of them said, 'Did I not say to ye, should ye not glorify?'*

He said to them, 'Fear Allah and remain on the path of your father: surrender and prosper.' But they began to strike him and beat him, until he realised that they would kill him, and so he agreed to go along with their intention, reluctantly and with abhorrence. So they returned home and swore by Allah that they would return in the morning and pick the fruit, though they did not say if Allah wills. And so Allah afflicted them for their sin, and came between them and that provision upon which they had gazed. And they are spoken of in the Book, from the words 'Surely We try them ...' until the end of the account that follows.

Perhaps the similarity between the disbelievers of Makkah and these brothers was that they were ungrateful for the blessings of Allah, glory be to Him, and so He tried them with drought and scarcity, just as when the brothers intended to deny the poor in opposition to His command, glory be to Him, He tried them with the fire that burned their garden.

... when they swore they would pluck it in the morning,

They swore by Allah that they would pick its harvest early in the morning before daybreak, so as to keep the affair hidden from the poor and the destitute.

And they made not the exception. (18)

وَلَا يَسْتَنْبِئُونَ ﴿١٨﴾

That is, they swore their oath without saying the words 'If Allah is willing' (*InSha>Allah*). This term is called the exception (*al-istithna*) for it is said by a speaker who means I will do such and such except if Allah denies me. That is the meaning of *InSha>Allah*. And by not making this exception they offended with two evils. Firstly by their intention to bar the poor; and secondly by their failing to make the exception in relation to what they intended in the future.

So a visitation from thy Lord visited it, while they were sleeping, (19)

فَطَافَ عَلَيْهَا طَآئِفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

An instance of chastisement visited the orchard, from the direction of your Lord, O Messenger, while they were sleeping in their beds. It is said that Allah sent a fire to the orchard, and it burned down.

So that in the morning it was as if plucked. (20)

فَأَصْبَحَتْ كَالصَّرِيمِ ﴿٢٠﴾

In the morning it was as if the produce of the garden had been picked. 'Plucked' is given for *shrim*, which means 'cut off', though the ayah may also mean, "... it was like the darkness of night", on account of both night and day being termed *shrim*, as each is cut off by the other.

Then they called each other in the morning, (21)

فَتَنَادَوْا مُصْبِحِينَ ﴿٢١﴾

When morning arrived some of the brothers called to the others.

To 'Be early to your tilth if ye would pluck!' (22)

أَنْ أَعْدُوا عَلَيَّ حَرْثَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَارِمِينَ ﴿٢٢﴾

They called each other to hurry and get to the orchard early, if they wanted to gather the harvest.

So they departed, conspiring: (23)

فَأَنْطَلَقُوا وَهُمْ يَتَخَفَتُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

They left for the orchard, all the while whispering furtively between themselves. 'Conspiring' is given for *yatakhafatun*, from *khafata*, 'to conceal', as in *khafata nafsah*, 'he concealed himself'.

***'That no destitute person shall enter the garden upon ye this day.'* (24)**

أَنْ لَا يَدْخُلَهَا الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَسْكِينٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

They were whispering so as not to alert any of the poor and bring them to the garden that day when they were harvesting its produce.

In this manner they made their way until they reached their garden.

***So they went early empowered for denial.* (25)**

وَعَدَوْا عَلَىٰ حَرْدٍ قَادِرِينَ ﴿٢٥﴾

That is, they were determined to deny the harvest to the poor. But their morning was such that they only had the power to be denied the harvest, instead of having the power to gather it. The style is one of mockery, just as it is said that a man's hand is full of air, instead of being full of wealth. It means that their morning was such that they were denied the harvest, for they had not the power to gather it, only to be denied it.

***So when they saw it, they said, 'Indeed we are truly astray!'* (26)**

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهَا قَالُوا إِنَّا لَضَالُّونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

They saw the orchard in its ruined condition. Some of the brothers said to others, 'We have lost our way and gone astray, this is not our garden.'

After they had considered and realised that it was indeed their orchard, they corrected their earlier reaction and said,

***'Nay, we are deprived!'* (27)**

بَلْ لَحْنٌ مَّحْرُومُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

That is, deprived of the harvest and the produce of the orchard, for it had burned down.

***The middle one of them said, 'Did I not say to ye: should ye not glorify?'* (28)**

قَالَ أَوْسَطُهُمْ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ لَوْلَا تُسَبِّحُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

The middle one is given for *awsḥt*, middling, by which is meant the wisest, for the wisest is called the middle or middling one, since the wise refrains from the two extremes. He pointed out that he had warned them when they were talking of denying the poor, and had said to them, 'Should ye not glorify Allah, and magnify His purity.' For he had said to them when they were agreeing to deny the poor, 'O brothers, glorify Allah and magnify His transcendence of all that is ugly, for He is far above granting to the rich while denying the poor!' So he said to them 'Yet ye acted rashly and turned your backs on good advice. So this is the reward of your evil intention.'

Then, when all had come to an end,

***They said, 'Glory be to our Lord! Indeed, truly we were wrongful.'* (29)**

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَ رَبِّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

They did not hold Allah to blame for destroying their orchard; rather, they realised that they themselves were unjust in intending to deny the poor their rights.

***So some of them turned on others, blaming each other;* (30)**

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَلَمَّظُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

Each was blaming the other for what they had done between them: the evil intention.

***They said, 'O, woe is ours! Indeed we were transgressors.'* (31)**

قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

'Woe' is put for *wayl*; it means an awful, atrocious condition, and stands for 'O people, bring us an awful condition' or 'O awful condition, come, for now is your time.' The word 'transgressors' is put for *tḥghia*, plural of *tḥghi*, meaning one who violates the limits in injustice.

'Might it be that our Lord will exchange us better than it, indeed of our Lord we are

عَسَىٰ رَبُّنَا أَنْ يُبَدِّلَنَا خَيْرًا مِنْهَا إِنَّا إِلَىٰ رَبِّنَا رَاغِبُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

requesters.' (32)

That is, they hoped that Allah, glory be to Him, would give them better than the garden they had lost. They placed their desires and their hopes in Him and sought His forgiveness, and asked Him to restore to them a replacement for the orchard.

Just so is the chastisement, and the chastisement of the hereafter is greater, had they known. (33)

كَذَلِكَ الْعَذَابُ وَالْعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةُ أَكْبَرُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ



Just so is the chastisement ... That is, the chastisement of the sinners in the world is just like the chastisement of the companions of the orchard.

... and the chastisement of the hereafter is greater, ... The chastisement in the afterlife is greater than the chastisements of this world.

... had they known. If they knew anything about the proportions of the chastisement of the hereafter they would know that it is greater than the chastisement of this world.

In contrast to these are the guardful:

Indeed for the guardful with their Lord are gardens of blessings. (34)

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٍ النَّعِيمِ

Indeed for the guardful ... It means those who are guardful against disbelief and sin, in that they fear the punishment of Allah, glory be to Him.

... with their Lord are gardens of blessings ... The reward of the guardful is in the hereafter. It is termed as being 'with their Lord' on account of how they are close to His contentment and satisfaction, rather than close to Him physically. The gardens of blessings are called this because it is within them that the blessings are bestowed.

So, shall We put the muslims as the offenders? (35)

أَفَنَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْجَاهِلِينَ

Muslims are those who submit to Allah, glory be to Him, [this applies to anyone who submits to the will of the Almighty by accepting and following the correct teachings of the messenger of Allah of their respective times. Today the *muslims* are those who follow the teachings of the Almighty's final messenger, the Prophet Muhammad *may Allah bless him and his family.*] *Muslims* shall not be treated the same as those who sin and offend before Him. The effect of the question form is to assert this denial. It means: 'How can we treat the muslim and the offender the same in the hereafter?' The disbelievers used to say that if there was to be a resurrection they would be raised in a condition better than the condition of the Prophet Muhammad and his companions.

What is with ye? How do ye judge! (36)

مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ

The ayah is addressed to the disbelievers. What is with you? O disbelievers; how do you judge that the offenders are like the muslims before Allah, glory be to Him? Is such a judgement the fruit of reason?

Or have ye a scripture in which ye study? (37)

أَمْ لَكُمْ كِتَابٌ فِيهِ تَدْرُسُونَ

Or is the judgement not your own, but rather you have a revealed book sent down upon previous Prophets, in which you have studied and read that the offender and the muslim are equal?

Clearly ye have in it what ye choose! (38)

إِنَّ لَكُمْ فِيهِ لَمَا تَخْتَرُونَ

... and that in such a book you can choose for yourselves whatever reward in the hereafter you like? The style is one of mockery.

Or have ye oaths against Us extending unto the day of resurrection? Indeed yours is whatever ye judge! (39)

أَمْ لَكُمْ أَيَّمَنُ عَلَيْنَا بَلِغَةُ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ إِنَّ لَكُمْ لَنَا
تَحْكُمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

That is, have you a pact with Allah, a sworn promise from Him that will last throughout the ages and cover you on the day of resurrection? Such a set of oaths promising you whatever you decide, from your equality with the believers to your entering the paradise.

Ask them: which of them is of that a guarantor? (40)

سَلِّمُوا أَيُّهُمْ بِذَلِكَ زَعِيمٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

That is, ask them, O Messenger: who amongst them is a guarantor of those things they said, e.g. to be treated like the *muslims*? Who will guarantee to them that they shall have what the Muslims shall have? As it is clear that they have no book, no pact and no guarantor, they should realise that their words are mere vanities empty of any authority and proof.

Or have they partner-gods? So let them present their partner-gods, if they are truthful! (41)

أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ فَلَْيَأْتُوا بِشُرَكَائِهِمْ إِنْ كَانُوا صَادِقِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

'Partner-gods' is given for *shuraka* meaning partners or associates, and here what is meant is partners with Allah in Divinity. The question is whether the disbelievers have other gods to deliver to them what Allah will deliver to the believers. So let them bring their other gods on the day of resurrection and let them take from them (their gods) – the words are again words of mockery and derision – if they are truthful in saying that they shall have the like of what the believers shall have.

Yes, let them bring their partner-gods at the time when:

The day the leg is bared, and they are called to prostrate but shall be unable; (42)

يَوْمَ يُكْشَفُ عَن سَاقٍ وَيُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ فَلَا
يَسْتَطِيعُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

The day the leg is bared, ... When fear is paramount it is said that a person bares his legs, by raising his clothes and making it easier for himself to flee, so that the loose clothing does not get caught up in his legs. The expression indicates terror.

... and they are called to prostrate but shall be unable; That day those disbelievers will be summoned to prostrate themselves, for they shall endure the disgrace of being called to prostrate, but shall be unable to do so on account of their vertebrae being locked and set solid so that they are unable to bend and perform the prostration; as is clear in the narrations.

Humble is their sight, lowliness overcomes them; and they had certainly been called to prostration while they were well. (43)

خَشِيعةً أَبْصَرُهُمْ تَرَهِقُهُمْ ذَلَّةٌ وَقَدْ كَانُوا يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى
السُّجُودِ وَهُمْ سَلِيمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

Humble is their sight ... Their gaze that day shall not rise above the ground, out of disgrace, humiliation and dread.

... lowliness overcomes them ... They shall be covered in abasement and humiliation, for its signs will be evident in their movements, their being still and on their cheeks.

... and they had certainly been called to prostration while they were well. Those disbelievers had been called while they were in the world to prostrate and be humble towards Allah while they were healthy, but they did not prostrate. And so they are rewarded with the humiliation, and with their being unable to prostrate on the day of resurrection.

So leave Me and whosoever belies this pronouncement: soon We shall gradually lead them on from whence they know not. (44)

فَذَرْنِي وَمَنْ يُكَذِّبُ بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِّنْ
حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

So leave me with whosoever belies this pronouncement ... ‘pronouncement’ is given for *hādīth*, which in this context means the Holy Qur’an. The command is in the singular, addressed to the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family*. The meaning is that he was to leave to Allah, glory be to Him, whoever disputed the truth of what he was telling them about Monotheism, Messengership and the Return. That is, he was to leave them to Allah, glory be to Him, to deal with. It is a warning, meaning: We shall requite them.

... soon We shall gradually lead them on ... ‘Gradually lead them on’ is given for *nastadrijuhūm*, from *istidraj* to seek a thing gradually, step by step, until it reaches the desired end. It means that Allah shall set them up for the punishment by giving them life and wealth so that they advance in disbelief and disobedience, and make themselves deserving of the severest chastisement.

... from whence they know not. They shall not know that they are being led to punishment and chastisement; they consider they are blessed with blessings, health, wealth and position.

And I respite them; indeed My plot is solid.

(45)

وَأْمَلِي لَهُمْ إِن كِيدِي مَتِينٌ ﴿٤٥﴾

Allah, glory be to Him, respites them and bears with them, for His plan is solid. That is, that which He has prepared for the chastisement of the evil is firm, unyielding; it will never break apart and no fault or imperfection shall ever affect it.

Then, conjunctive to the ayah, ‘Or have you a book ...’ comes His word:

Or do thou ask them a reward, and they are weighed down by the fine? (46)

أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ أَجْرًا فَهُمْ مِّن مَّعْرَمٍ مُّثْقَلُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

That is, have you, O Messenger, asked these disbelievers for a wage in return for carrying out the Messengership and calling them to Islam. So that they, under the burden of the price or ‘fine’ (*maghram*), its necessity and the necessity of the wealth sought from them, are brought low by it? And so they wish to flee from it?

To sum up: their lack of faith – is it on account of their believing that there is no benefit in faith, as they have read in scripture and they are sure that they shall be in gardens like the Muslims? Or is it that they know there is a benefit to faith and that the gardens depend upon it, but that faith has a fine, and they are fleeing from this fine?

Or is the unseen with them, so that they write?

(47)

أَمْ عِنْدَهُمُ الْغَيْبُ فَهُمْ يَكْتُبُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

Has the revelation (*wahy*) descended upon them, to the effect that their disbelief and disobedience is correct? And they have written it down and learned it? That is, ‘Is it that they do not yield to Islam on account of their having revelation and a book just as thou have revelation and a book?’

And since, O Messenger of Allah, you see the disbelievers armed with only contingencies and accidentals, without any proofs:

So be restrained for the affair of thy Lord, and be not like the companion of the whale, when he called while he was in restraint. (48)

فَأَصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُن كَصَاحِبِ الْحُوتِ إِذْ نَادَىٰ

وَهُوَ مَكْظُومٌ ﴿٤٨﴾

So be restrained for the affair of thy Lord, ... The Messenger was to endure with patience and be steadfast in delivering the message, and to bear the difficulties along the way.

... and be not like the companion of the whale, ... The Messenger Jonah (Yūnus), *peace be upon him*, who sought chastisement for his people and deserted them when he saw no benefit in continuing to calling them. This was ‘forsaking the best’ (*tark al-awla*) in consideration of the station of prophethood.

... **when he called** ... He called Allah, glory be to Him, to send chastisement on his tribe.

... **while he was contained**. 'Contained' is given for *makdhum*, for he had 'contained' (*kadhama*) his anger at his tribe, had 'imprisoned it', and was therefore *makdhum al-ghaidh*, 'one whose anger is contained'.

Had a blessing from his Lord not caught up with him, he would have been cast to the wilderness in blame. (49)

لَوْلَا أَنْ تَدَارَكَهُ نِعْمَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِ لَنُبِذَ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ مَذْمُومٌ

٤٩

Had a blessing from his Lord not caught up with him, ... The blessing of his repentance and his seeking forgiveness – for repentance is a blessing from Allah, glory be to Him, upon the servant.

... **he would have been cast to the wilderness** ... He would have been cast from the belly of the whale into a 'wilderness' (*araḥ*), meaning a barren land empty of life and shelter, where he would have died of the heat and the cold and hunger.

... **in blame**. And he was blameworthy – in making the supplication against his people he failed "to perform the best possible", and though not a sin as such, yet it is incongruous with the station of the Prophets, and so he needed to repent from that and be cleansed of it.

And when the blessing of his Lord reached him:

So his Lord chose him and put him among the virtuous. (50)

فَأَجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَجَعَلَهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

So, ... That is, after the blessing of Allah had reached him and he had repented and sought forgiveness,

... **his Lord chose him** ... Allah accepted his repentance and chose him and raised him and restored him to his former station.

... **and put him among the virtuous**. He placed him among the virtuous (*al-salihin*), those with the virtues necessary to implement the divine mission.

So be patient, O Messenger of Allah, for thy Lord's affair, and be not like Yunus, and realise that the disbelievers wish an end to your call:

And verily the disbelievers will almost strike thee down with their glances, when they hear the reminder, and they say, 'Surely he is mad.' (51)

وَإِنْ يَكَادُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَرِهِمْ لَمَّا سَمِعُوا

الذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ لَمَجْنُونٌ

And indeed it seems the disbelievers almost make thee stumble with their looks ... That is, the disbelievers almost make you fall on the ground so that you cannot stand up to deliver the message. It is a metaphor, since to fail to stand for the delivery of the message is like a person fallen over rather than standing on two legs. And this was done with their eyes, for they would give dark malicious looks to the Messenger – the look of enmity that causes a person to give up what he intended, for when a person notices anger on his listener's face he gives up what he wanted to say.

... **As soon as they hear the reminder** ... That is, the Qur'an.

... **they say, 'Indeed he is mad.'** They would say that the Messenger is mad, his reason is damaged and gone, and his words are nonsense and meaningless.

While it is nought but a reminder for the worlds! (52)

وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

This Qur'an is nought else than a reminder to the worlds, reminding them of what was placed innate within them: monotheism, the return, and suchlike.