

## Surah Nuh}(71)

### 'Noah'

## سورة نوح

The surah derives its name from the prominence within it of the name and story of Noah, *peace be upon him*. Like the other Makkan surahs it deals with matters of faith, but in the form of a narrative. While Surah al-Ma<sup>c</sup>a<sup>r</sup>i<sup>j</sup> concluded with a warning to the disbelievers, this surah opens on the theme of Noah, and the resistance he met from his people, thereby constituting a consolation for the Messenger, and a warning for the disbelievers.

*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, that He assist us in the important affairs, and in this affair we are beginning, in particular.

*... the Compassionate, the Merciful.* He bestows mercy on whoever seeks from Him mercy and ease in matters.

*Indeed We sent Noah to his people, that 'Warn thy people before there comes to them a painful chastisement.'* (1)

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرْ قَوْمَكَ مِن قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١﴾

That is, the Messenger Nuh}(Noah), was sent as a Messenger for his people, and words of revelation descended upon him thus: 'Warn thy people, that if they persist in disbelief and disobedience they will be afflicted with the chastisement in the world and the chastisement of the hereafter, and be subjected to great pain.'

Noah, obeyed the command:

*He said, 'O my people, indeed I am for ye a clear warner, (2)*

قَالَ يَاقَوْمِ إِنِّي لَكُمْ نَذِيرٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٢﴾

He told his people that he was a clear warner for them.

*'That ye worship Allah and be guardful of Him and obey me; (3)*

أَنِ اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاتَّقُوهُ وَأَطِيعُوا أَمْرًا

He called his people to worship Allah and not disbelieve in Him, to be guardful of Him and not disobey Him, and to obey the directives of Noah, that constituted the divine code (*shari<sup>c</sup>ah*).

*'He will forgive ye your sins, and defer ye until a stated term; surely Allah's term, when it comes, is not deferred, were ye knowing.'* (4)

يَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ مِن ذُنُوبِكُمْ وَيُؤَخِّرْكُمْ إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۚ إِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ إِذَا جَاءَ لَا يُؤَخَّرُ ۗ لَوْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

*He will forgive ye your sins, ...* He told them that were they to worship Allah and be guardful towards Him, He would forgive them all their sins. 'your sins' is given for *min dhububikum* – the word *min* designates the genus of their sins, i.e. all your (past) sins.

*... and defer ye until a stated term; ...* That is, instead of quickly destroying them, He would have given them some respite until 'a stated term' (*ajalin musamma*), meaning a period stated in His book; in contrast to the disbeliever who faced the chastisement of death.

*... surely Allah's term, when it comes, is not deferred, ...* The term of Allah, the term determined by Allah, is subject to no delay once its time arrives. So they were to be quick about believing and repenting before the time was up.

*... were ye knowing.'* That is, If only they acted rightly they would have known all this.

Noah called his people for a lengthy period with guidance and advices like this, yet his calling had no affect on them, so he turned to Allah, glory be to Him, and supplicated:

He said, 'My Lord! Indeed I have called my people by night and by day, (5)

قَالَ رَبِّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُ قَوْمِي لَيْلًا وَنَهَارًا ﴿٥﴾

He said, 'My Lord! Indeed I have called my people ... Noah had summoned his people to belief.

... by night and by day, At all times.

'But my calling has not increased them except in flight; (6)

فَلَمْ يَزِدْهُمْ دُعَائِي إِلَّا فِرَارًا ﴿٦﴾

His summoning them only led the disbelievers to arrange their ranks, and pronounce their disbelief, their disobedience and their flight from the truth.

'And indeed, whenever I called them that Thou forgive them, they placed their fingers in their ears, covered themselves with their garments, persisted, and they sought hauteur, haughtily.' (7)

وَإِنِّي كُلَّمَا دَعَوْتُهُمْ لِتَغْفِرَ لَهُمْ جَعَلُوا أُصْغُرَهُمْ فِي  
ءَأْذَانِهِمْ وَاسْتَعْصَمُوا بِثِيَابِهِمْ وَاصْرُورُوا وَاسْتَكْبَرُوا اسْتِكْبَارًا ﴿٧﴾

'And indeed, whenever I called them that Thou forgive them, ... The more he called them to the belief and to obedience for Allah to forgive them on account of their believing and being obedient,

... they placed their fingers in their ears, ... They would simply put their fingers in their ears so as not to hear him,

... covered themselves with their garments, ... They would wrap their garments around their heads and faces so as not to see him.

... persisted, ... They would continue in their disbelief and disobedience.

... and they sought hauteur, haughtily.' They would arrogantly and scornfully disdain from accepting the truth. 'Haughty' is given for *istikbar*, which seems to indicate that they sought greatness, while in reality they were not great.

Thereupon, 'Indeed I called to them publicly.' (8)

ثُمَّ إِنِّي دَعَوْتُهُمْ جِهَارًا ﴿٨﴾

'Thereupon' (*thumma*), denotes order in speech, not in the topic itself. 'Publicly' is given for *jihāran*, meaning that he called to them aloud, at the top of his voice.

Thereupon, 'I proclaimed for them and I spoke in confidence to them, in secret.' (9)

ثُمَّ إِنِّي أَعْلَنْتُ لَهُمْ وَأَسْرَرْتُ لَهُمْ إِسْرَارًا ﴿٩﴾

He summoned them in proclamations and he spoke to them privately, secretly. The meaning is that he called them in every way possible. Calling them publicly (*jihr*) is covered by proclamation (*ilān*), of which it is a type, so there is no repetition in the use of *ilān* (proclamation) after *jihar* (in full voice).

'And I said, "Seek forgiveness from your Lord, indeed He is greatly-forgiving.' (10)

فَقُلْتُ اسْتَغْفِرُوا رَبَّكُمْ إِنَّهُ كَانَ غَفَّارًا ﴿١٠﴾

He called on the people to seek the forgiveness of their Lord through belief and obedience; reminding them that He is *Ghaffar*, greatly-forgiving of those who seek His forgiveness.

Had they sought His forgiveness:

'He will send the sky upon ye in torrents. (11)

يُرْسِلِ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا ﴿١١﴾

'Torrents' is given for *midra*, meaning plenteous rain. It is said that rainfall had been denied them, until they had reached the point of being afflicted by drought, and so Noah sought to encourage them in this way.

**And will extend ye in wealth and in sons, and will put for ye gardens and will put for ye rivers. (12)**

وَيُمَدِّدْكُمْ بِأَمْوَالٍ وَبَيْنٍ وَبِجَعَلْ لَكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ وَبِجَعَلْ لَكُمْ أَنْهَارًا ﴿١٢﴾

That is, increase their wealth and increase their male children. [as the male siblings were nominally considered by society to be able to produce wealth.] By means of the rain and their wealth they would have acquired gardens, and rivers would have watered their gardens. Rain when it is plenteous gathers in the earth, and then it bursts out of springs, which form rivers.

**'What is with ye, that ye hope not for dignity in Allah? (13)**

مَا لَكُمْ لَا تَرْجُونَ لِلَّهِ وَقَارًا ﴿١٣﴾

What is with ye, O community of disbelievers, that you do not recognise Allah, glory be to Him, as dignified, as great? 'dignity' is given for *(waqar)*, and 'hope for' is given for *raja* in that one hopes for something that is good and desirable. Thus whoever sees no greatness and dignity in a person has no hope in that person. So it seems he said: what is with you that you have no hope in Allah? Do you not acknowledge His dignity, His greatness, His magnificence?

**'While He certainly created ye in diverse states? (14)**

وَقَدْ خَلَقَكُمْ أَطْوَارًا ﴿١٤﴾

'Diverse states' is given for *atjwar*, plural of *tjwr* meaning state, or appearance. The verse therefore means man passes from one state to another until arriving at the state he is in. Or the meaning is that He created man in diversity, each person different to the other; in what signifies His perfect capability.

*And just as the signs of the magnificence of Allah, glory be to Him, are evident within yourselves, so they are evident in the external world:*

**Do ye not see how Allah created seven skies in levels? (15)**

أَلَمْ تَرَ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا ﴿١٥﴾

The address is plural to the disbelievers. In 'do ye not see' it is meant 'do ye not know'. 'Skies' in this context is in reference to the planetary orbits. 'In levels' is given for *tjbaqan* meaning one above another. [The planetary orbits are referred to as seven in this verse since the number of planets orbiting the sun was considered by the people at the time to be seven.]

**'And put the moon amidst them as a light and put the sun as a lamp? (16)**

وَجَعَلَ الْقَمَرَ فِيهِنَّ نُورًا وَجَعَلَ الشَّمْسَ سِرَاجًا ﴿١٦﴾

'Amidst them' means amidst the skies. The moon is a light that gives light by its radiance. The sun is a lamp whose rays light up the darkness of the world.

**'And Allah had ye grow from the earth as vegetation? (17)**

وَاللَّهُ أَنْبَتَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ نَبَاتًا ﴿١٧﴾

The human being grows out of the earth much like a plant grows out of the earth. The difference is that the earth turns into vegetation, while man eats vegetation that becomes sperm and then a human being, while the plants are vegetation from the beginning. In reality the human is the animated vegetation of the earth, just as plants are the inanimate or stationary vegetation of the earth.

**'And then He returns ye in it, and He brings ye out, a bringing forth. (18)**

ثُمَّ يُعِيدُكُمْ فِيهَا وَيُخْرِجُكُمْ إِخْرَاجًا ﴿١٨﴾

He returns us into the earth, for without delay the corpse decays and becomes earth, as it was before. And He brings us out of the earth again on the day of resurrection. The repetition is to convey emphasis and the fact that it is a real event, with no room for doubt.

**'And Allah made for ye the earth outstretched? (19)**

وَاللَّهُ جَعَلَ لَكُمْ الْأَرْضَ بِسَاطًا ﴿١٩﴾

The earth is such that man is enabled to walk upon it and build upon it, and fulfil his other purposes with it.

The thread then explains one of the favours Allah has prepared for the human being by His spreading wide the earth:

**'That ye journey its wide paths.' (20)**

لَتَسْلُكُوا مِنْهَا سُبُلًا فِجَاجًا ﴿٢٠﴾

'Wide' is given for *fijajan*, meaning paths that are wide and various. The meaning of the ayah is: so that you are enabled to travel the variety of the earth's pathways for your needs here and there.

Yet after all such reminders and indications of these great blessings, still the people did not accept Noah's call, and so Noah directed himself to his Lord:

**Said Noah, 'My Lord, indeed they disobeyed me and followed him whose wealth and children increase him in nothing but loss. (21)**

قَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ إِنَّهُمْ عَصَوْنِي وَأَتَّبَعُوا مَن لَّمْ يَزِدْهُ مَالُهُ

وَوَلَدُهُ إِلَّا خَسَارًا ﴿٢١﴾

Noah's people disobeyed him by not believing in Allah, and by not accepting Noah's commands. Instead, they were following the leading men of their people, who were the head of corruption. The more they were increased in wealth the more they disposed of it in evil, and the more they were increased in children the more they deviated them from the path of truth; and so their wealth and children increased them in nothing but loss and damage; that is, in things that would lead to their increase in punishment and chastisement.

**And they plotted great plots, (22)**

وَمَكْرُوا مَكْرًا كُبْرًا ﴿٢٢﴾

They plotted against Noah, and their plots were great in consideration of their purpose; for the containment of the teachings of the Messenger requires sophisticated strategies. Otherwise, mankind in their natural simplicity are inclined to follow the truth. Those who plotted were either the leaders of that people, indicated by the word 'him' (*man*) in the previous ayah, or that people in general.

**And they said "Be sure not to leave your gods", and, "Be sure not to leave Wadd, and not Suwaʿ, and not Yaghuth, Yaʿuq and Nasr." (23)**

وَقَالُوا لَا تَدْرُنَّ ءَالِهَتِكُمْ وَلَا تَدْرُنَّ وِدًّا وَلَا سُوعَا وَلَا

يُغُوثَ وَيَعُوقَ وَنَسْرًا ﴿٢٣﴾

The plotters said to the rest of the people: do not turn away from your idols in obedience to Noah and his call for you to worship the one God. They then listed by name those of their gods who were the major idols among them: Wadd, Suwaʿ, Yaghuth, Yaʿuq and Nasr. The omission of 'not' (*la*) between these last two is on account of the flow of eloquence. These were the names of idols they worshipped instead of Allah, glory be to Him. And it has been stated that these names were originally the names of righteous men: after they died, statues were made of them and these were honoured on account of them being symbols of those great men – then, lured by the devil, they worshipped those statues.

**And truly they have sent many astray. And increase not the wrongful except in straying.' (24)**

وَقَدْ أَضَلُّوا كَثِيرًا وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا ضَلَالًا ﴿٢٤﴾

**And truly they have sent many astray ...** Attributing to the idols the act of sending astray is on account of how they were the means of that act.

**... And increase not the wrongful ...** The wrongful (*al-dhahimīn*) were those who wronged themselves through disbelief and disobedience, and wronged others by leading astray and increasing corruption.

**... except in straying.'** That is, in nothing but deviation, as the recompense of their stubbornness and persistence in corruption. The increase in deviation would be by depriving them of the hidden graces.

The flow then explains the end in store for these disbelievers, in His word:

**For their errors they were drowned, then they were made to enter fire, and they shall find for themselves besides Allah no succourers. (25)**

مِمَّا حَطَبْتَهُمْ أَغْرِقُوا فَادْخُلُوا نَارًا فَلَمْ يَجِدُوا لَهُمْ مِنْ  
دُونِ اللَّهِ أَنْصَارًا ﴿٢٥﴾

**For their errors they were drowned, ...** On account of the sins of these disbelievers they were drowned in water in the world.

**... then they were made to enter fire, ...** They were put into the fire in the hereafter; and so they were subjected to the two contrasting chastisements.

**... and they shall find for themselves besides Allah no succourers** Those disbelievers will find for themselves no one to ward off the chastisement of God, for those who promised them their succour will not be with them.

**And said Noah, 'My Lord, leave upon the earth not an inhabitant from among the disbelievers!' (26)**

وَقَالَ نُوحٌ رَبِّ لَا تَذَرْ عَلَيَّ الْأَرْضَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ دَيَّارًا  
﴿٢٦﴾

**And said Noah, 'My Lord, ...** This was his prayer against them before they drowned. It is placed after the drowning in the discourse on account of how it was the straying that expedited the chastisement, as if between the straying and the chastisement there were no interval.

**... leave upon the earth not an inhabitant from among the disbelievers!** His prayer was to leave and let live not a person from amongst the disbelievers to be 'an inhabitant' (*dayyaḥ*), or settle in an habitation, but to let the chastisement encompass them all.

Noah, then explains the cause of this prayer against them, in the Word.

**'Indeed, if Thou leave them they will send astray Thy servants, and will breed none but brazen, extreme disbelievers. (27)**

إِنَّكَ إِنْ تَذَرَهُمْ يُضِلُّوا عِبَادَكَ وَلَا يَلِدُوا إِلَّا فَاجِرًا  
كَفَّارًا ﴿٢٧﴾

They would send astray the offspring of the believers, and themselves would raise no offspring save those brazen in disobedience and extreme in disbelieving, corrupt in both belief and action, with no good in them. This was known to Noah, through the process of revelation.

**'My Lord, forgive me, and my parents, and those who enter my house believing, and the believers and the believeresses; and increase not the wrongful save in annihilation. (28)**

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِوَالِدَيَّ وَلِمَنْ دَخَلَ بَيْتِيَ مُؤْمِنًا  
وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ وَلَا تَرِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا تَبَارًا ﴿٢٨﴾

**My Lord, forgive me ...** It has already been seen that seeking forgiveness on the part of the Messengers and Imams is on account of what essential permitted, but not laudable, works they have done, for they see such works as incongruous with proper behaviour before Allah, the magnificent sovereign. It is much like the man who is forced to lie down before a king [or a respected guest, say], due to illness or suchlike, sees his lying down as improper, and excuses himself for doing so.

**... and my parents ...** The prayer for his parents was for forgiveness for their sins.

**... and those who enter my house believing, ...** He prayed for those who entered his house as believers. It seems as if 'entering into his house' was indicative of their entering the ranks of his followers and supporters, as those who believed in him, were a small number between seventy and eighty, according to what has been related.

**... and the believers and the believeresses ...** He prayed for the believers, male and female, of other nations, both before his time and after it. .

**... and increase not the wrongful save in annihilation.** He prayed that the disbelievers might be increased in nothing but destruction and loss, by the withdrawal of grace from them, so that their continued existence would be the cause of their increased punishment and diminishment, in return for their obstinacy.