

Surah al-Muddaththir (74)

سورة المدثر

'The Encloaked'

The surah derives its name from the prominence within it of the word *al-muddaththir*, meaning one who has covered himself with a cloak or blanket around his clothing. Like the other Makkan surahs it deals with the principles of belief. Whereas Surah al-Muzzammil concluded on the theme of the prayer, the reciting and the other forms of goodness, this surah opens by mentioning its other forms – carrying out the conveyance of the message, magnifying Allah, and cleansing.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

We seek help by the name of Allah, that it be an aid for us in our affairs.

... **the Compassionate, the Merciful.** Him who bestows mercy and profusion upon His creatures.

O thou the encloaked, (1)

يٰٓأَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ

The address is to the Messenger of Allah, *may Allah bless him and his family*. 'The encloaked' is given for *al-muddaththir*, from *iddaththar*, itself from *tadaththur*. It means one who cloaks himself in a *dithar* – an outer garment worn for warmth over the clothes that are in touch with his body. Thus clothing called *dithar* is in contra-distinction to the clothing called *shifar*, which is the clothing next to the body and called by that name because they are next to the hair (*shar*) of the body.

It is narrated that the Messenger, at the time of his receiving the revelation was overcome by trembling due to the awe of the situation. He therefore said to his beloved wife Khadijah, *peace be upon her*, 'Cover me!' and she covered him. And so the call came: 'O thou the encloaked!'

Stand! And warn! (2)

قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ

The Messenger was to rise up from his resting; and warn the people of the punishment if they were to continue in their disbelief and disobedience.

And thy Lord, so magnify. (3)

وَرَبِّكَ فَكَبِّرْ

The Messenger, was to magnify (*kabir*) Allah, glory be to Him, and declare His magnificence, alone, without the idols.

And thy clothes, so cleanse. (4)

وَتِيَابَكَ فَطَهِّرْ

The Muslim must cleanse his heart of the filth of polytheism by magnifying Allah, glory be to Him, and must cleanse his clothes from getting dirty by shortening their lengths, so they are not made dirty, and by washing them of the unclean things (*najasa*). And it has been narrated that the meaning of the ayah is to cleanse of the unclean things and to cleanse by cutting short. This is because the meaning is general to them both. In a tradition we are told, 'Let your clothes not be too long; that is more guardful, more pure, and longer lasting.'

And the contamination, so shun. (5)

وَالرُّجْزَ فَاهْجُرْ

And the contamination ... 'Contamination' (*rujz*) here means all kinds of unclean things: idols, material forms of filth and vices.

... **so shun.** It means to be distant from them.

And make not beholden, that thou gain increase. (6)

وَلَا تَمُنَّنِمْ تَسْتَكْبِرُ

And make not beholden ... ‘Make not beholden’ (*la-tamnun*) applies to acts of bestowal. It means giving without expectation, and without doing or saying anything to make the recipient of your good deed feel beholden. We are not to give seeking thereby an increase, or a reward in return, but we must do so purely for the sake of Almighty God, as narrated from Imam Baqir peace be upon him. It could also mean, ‘not imposing a feeling of being beholden on people when giving to them, for whatever is given sincerely for the sake of Allah will result in increase’. Or the meaning may be that we should not consider whatever we have given as great.

And for thy Lord, persevere. (7)

وَلِرَبِّكَ فَاصْبِرْ ﴿٧﴾

The Messenger was to persevere for the sake of Allah, glory be to Him, in the face of the persecution of the disbelievers and polytheists, and not be put off by them.

For their day is coming, the day when revenge will be taken from them:

For when the trumpet is blown, (8)

فَإِذَا نُفِثَ فِي النَّاقُورِ ﴿٨﴾

This is in reference to the second blowing of the trumpet, by the angel Israfil, when the dead are resurrected as a result.

That day, is a day of hardship; (9)

فَذَلِكَ يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ ﴿٩﴾

For the day on which the trumpet is sounded will be a day of extreme difficulty.

Upon the disbelievers, not easy. (10)

عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ غَيْرٌ يَسِيرٌ ﴿١٠﴾

That day will not be easy for those who disbelieve in Allah, His Prophet and what he came with from Him, for they will be chastised that day. This emphasizes the previous ayah, and informs us that the difficulty that day is only for the disbelievers, not for the righteous believers.

Leave Me with him I created alone, (11)

ذَرْنِي وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا ﴿١١﴾

The Messenger was to leave Allah to deal with the man whom He created alone, on his own with no wealth or sons. It means that He was promising, glory be to Him, to be a sufficiency for the messenger against that man’s evil, and to take revenge from the man for his belying the Messenger of Allah *may Allah bless him and his family*.

And I put for him extensive wealth (12)

وَجَعَلْتُ لَهُ مَالًا مَمْدُودًا ﴿١٢﴾

That is, He created him such that he had nothing, and then gave him extensive wealth and sons. The man about whom the ayah came down was Waliid ibn Mughayrah, who was extremely wealthy.

And sons, present; (13)

وَبَنِينَ شُهُودًا ﴿١٣﴾

Waliid had been granted sons and they were present, for it is a blessing itself that a man’s sons are with him and not absent and away somewhere.

And I facilitated for him, total facilitation: (14)

وَمَهَّدْتُ لَهُ تَمْهِيدًا ﴿١٤﴾

That is, He made things smooth for him, so that he became important in his tribe, well-situated in the land, and generally well furnished and supplied.

Then he lusts that I increase! (15)

ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ ﴿١٥﴾

That person could then only desire more wealth and sons.

Nay, he was towards Our portents obstinate.
(16)

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ كَانَ لِآيَاتِنَا عَنِيدًا ﴿١٦﴾

Nay, ... It means that nothing more was to be granted him after that.

... **he was towards Our portents ...** He had denied Allah, and had given the place of gratitude to ingratitude.

... **obstinate.** It is given for ^{ʿaniḍ}. Stubbornly, fanatically, he denied the truth of the arguments and presentations. He denied them and disbelieved out of his obstinacy.

I shall overtake him with an ascending. (17)

سَأَرْهُقُهُ صَعُودًا ﴿١٧﴾

That is, Allah was to appoint for him the most difficult aspects of the chastisement, which he would be unable to bear. For whoever is assigned to the 'ascending' finds the going very difficult.

It is narrated with regard to the circumstances of the descent of these and the subsequent *ayah* that, in the words of al-Qummi, they were about al-Waliḍ ibn Mughayrah, a tribal chief and a man of intelligence and cunning. He was among those who used to mock the Messenger of Allah. The Messenger used to sit within the compound of "Isma'il's Hġjr" (Ishmael's tomb) – which is by the Ka'bah – in the Sacred Mosque, reciting the Qur'an. The assembled dignitaries gathered around al-Waliḍ ibn Mughayrah, and said, 'O Aba 'Abd Shams [al-Waliḍ's *kunyah* or agnomen], what is it Muhammad is saying? Is it poetry, is it sorcery, or is it prose?'

Al-Waliḍ said, 'Let me listen to his word.' Then he went to the Messenger and sat with him, and said, 'O Muhammad, recite to me some of your poetry.'

He said, 'It is not poetry, but the word of Allah bestowed on His angels, His Messengers and His Prophets.'

So he said: 'Chant some of it to me.' The Messenger of God recited the surah of Sajdah (or Prostration #32); when he came to the line {... *if they turn away, then say, 'Indeed I warn ye of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt of 'Ad and Thamud.'*} At this al-Waliḍ was overtaken by a shivering, and the hairs on his head and of his beard stood on end. He went to his house and did not return to the Quraysh that day.

The group went to Abu Jahl, another chief of Quraysh and a fierce opponent of the prophet, who was the prophet's uncle too. They told him that al-Waliḍ had turned to the religion of Muhammad, for he had left without joining them. Next morning, Abu Jahl went to al-Waliḍ and asked him: 'O uncle, have you made our heads bow (in shame) and disgraced us? Is it that you take pleasure in our misery and have joined the religion of Muhammad?'

He said, 'I have not joined his religion, but I heard from him some words that make the skin crawl.'

Abu Jahl asked him, 'Is it prose?'

He said, 'No, prose is uninterrupted speech but this speech is rhythmic and not all of a piece.'

'So is it poetry?' Abu Jahl asked him.

'No,' he replied, 'for I have heard all the different types of the poetry of the Arabs, and this is not poetry.'

'So what is it?' he asked.

Al-Waliḍ said, 'Leave me to think about it.'

The next day they asked him what he had to say about what they were saying. He said, 'Say that it is sorcery, for it takes away a person's heart.'

Then Allah sent down about this the *ayah*, '*So leave Me with him I created alone.*' al-Waliḍ is referred to as 'alone' because he used to boast to the nobles that he alone provided the cover for the Ka'bah in alternate years, while the entire Quraysh provided the cover in the other years. He

had much wealth and orchards, and had ten sons in Makkah. He also had ten slaves each equipped with a thousand dinars with which to engage in trade on his behalf.

Indeed he thought and determined; (18)

إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَقَدَّرَ ﴿١٨﴾

That is, al-Waliḍ deliberated about the Qur'an and decided.

So slain be he, how he determined! (19)

فَقُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿١٩﴾

An invocation against him, meaning: may Allah slay him! His decision accorded to the base desires of the disbelievers and the general superstition, for the people were quick to attribute sorcery to anything out of the ordinary. The tone is one of indignation at his deliberation and decision.

Thereupon, slain be he, how he determined! (20)

ثُمَّ قُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿٢٠﴾

The repetition denotes the severity of the indignation.

Then he speculated, (21)

ثُمَّ نَظَرَ ﴿٢١﴾

He regarded the question of how to belittle the Qur'an. Regarded (*nadhara*) here means pondered.

Then he frowned and scowled, (22)

ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَسَكَرَ ﴿٢٢﴾

His face showed these expressions of displeasure and disgust.

Then he turned around and was haughty, (23)

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ وَأَسْتَكْبَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾

He turned away from the truth, his pride denying him from speaking the truth.

And he said, 'This is nothing but transmitted sorcery; (24)

فَقَالَ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ يُؤْتَرُ ﴿٢٤﴾

That is, the Qur'an is nothing but sorcery passed on from a witch or a sorcerer.

'This is nothing but the word of the mortals.' (25)

إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٥﴾

That is, he said that the Qur'an was nothing more than human speech, and was not inspiration or revelation from on high.

The current then turns to warn him about the lying claims he invented. For were it sorcery, sorcerers would have been able to produce its like, and the legislators of the world would have been able to legislate and devise laws similar to it. But it is the word of Allah, and they knew that, but they were prevented from admitting it by their pride and insolence.

I shall enter him in Saqar! (26)

سَأُصَلِّيهِ سَقَرَ ﴿٢٦﴾

That is, he shall be thrust into hell, to remain there.

And what shall make thee comprehend what is Saqar? (27)

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سَقَرُ ﴿٢٧﴾

The address, in the singular, is to the listener. The meaning is that you cannot understand the ferocity of the chastisement, for it is impossible for man to know what it is really like.

It neither lets survive nor leaves alone; (28)

لَا تُبْقِي وَلَا تَذَرُ ﴿٢٨﴾

It neither lets survive ... The fire respites nothing that is thrown into it; it consumes flesh, skin and bone.

... nor leaves alone; This is either a repetition for emphasis, or it means that it does not let them die and in that way escape from the chastisement.

Scorching the skins. (29)

لَوَاحَةٌ لِّلْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٩﴾

‘Scorching’ is given for *lawwāḥḥ*, from *talwih*, meaning to change the colour of, as an effect of the sun and suchlike. ‘Skins’ is given for *bashar*, plural of *bashrah*, meaning the surface of the skin.

Over it are nineteen. (30)

عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ ﴿٣٠﴾

That is, the angels assigned to hell are nineteen. There is nothing impossible about this number, and there is no reason to ask why they are neither more nor less; for whatever their number the same questions could be asked. The same applies to other given numbers, such as the ‘eight doors of paradise’, the ‘seven doors to hell’, the ‘seven skies in levels’, and so on.

And We have put not companions for the fire save angels, and We put not their number save as a trial for those who disbelieve,

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّةَهُمْ إِلَّا

So that those given the Book become certain, and for the believers to increase in belief, and that those given the Book and the believers vacillate not,

فِتْنَةً لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيَقِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَزِدَّ

الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِيمَانًا وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ

وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَلِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ

And that those in whose hearts is a disease and the disbelievers may say, ‘What is it that Allah means by this metaphor?’ Thus does Allah lead astray whom He wills, and He guides whom He wills; and none knows the armies of thy Lord except Him;

مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ

وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَمَا هِيَ

إِلَّا ذِكْرَى لِّلْبَشَرِ ﴿٣١﴾

And this is nothing but a reminder to mankind. (31)

And We have put not companions for the fire save angels, ... Only angels are deputed to guard over hell as they are stronger, and have no connections to the people in the fire, as people would have.

... and We put not their number save as a trial for those who disbelieve, ... Their number – nineteen – has been set simply as a test for the disbelievers, so as to clarify whether they believe in it or whether they laugh at this number, saying that it is far too small a number to chastise the vast numbers of disbelievers and disobedient. For His creations, glory be to Him, are to be tested, whether with plenty or with affliction in the world or the hereafter, whether by a thing itself or by its characteristics or by its status.

... So that those given the Book become certain ... The number of angels is mentioned in the Qur’an so that those given the Book, that is the Jews and Christians, may be certain that the Messenger is true; that they experience him informing them of those parts of their scriptures that they keep secret to themselves, and do not teach to anyone. For when a person informs them of what is in their books though he has not studied them and not been taught by them, of necessity they identify him as being true and as having learned of such matters through inspiration.

... and for the believers to increase in belief, ... And so that those who believe in the Messenger are increased in their faith, in that they see the people of the Book (the learned amongst them) confirming the truth of the Messenger. This naturally increases faith.

... and that those given the Book and the believers vacillate not, ... That is, so that those given the Book and the believers do not doubt about the Messenger. This emphasizes the former ayah. The Book-folk who believed in their hearts, and the others who believed openly in the Messenger, were subject to doubt, as is normal with every inner quality. So when they saw this confirmation their faith strengthened, and they were no more subject to doubt.

Thus the purpose of letting the number of the guardians of hell be known is two-fold. First, for the faith of the believers to be increased, and for the Book-folk to learn that the Messenger was true. Second, that the hypocrisy of the hypocrite and the disbelief of the disbelief be intensified.

... And that those in whose hearts is a disease and the disbelievers may say, 'What is it that Allah means by this metaphor?' ... Those in whose hearts is a disease, meaning the hypocrites, and the disbelievers in the Messenger, would say, 'What does Allah mean by this metaphor?' As if they considered this particular number to be a metaphor or similitude, rather than the clear truth in accordance to the actual number of the fire's guardians. And so they sought clarification; for the position of the stubborn opponent is that he only seeks clarification of a word when he wishes to overcome that word, for the contorted condition of his heart leads him to see all things as equal.

The thread then turns to answer their question:

... Thus does Allah lead astray whom He wills, ... That is, by clarifying the realities, like the clarification of the number of hell's guardians, Allah sends astray whom He wills: for whenever the truth is brought up some of the people dislike it, and so it sends them astray.

... and He guides whom He wills; ... Others hold on to faith and it becomes a guidance for them. For guiding and leading astray are not matters of compulsion, but mean that sending down an ayah or explaining an ordinance causes people either to be guided or to go astray, it being a test for them.

In keeping with the exposition of the number of His troops assigned to guard over hell, the flow now turns to explain the general truth of this:

... and none knows the armies of thy Lord except Him; ... for none knows the troops of your Lord but Him, glory be to Him. That is, the numbers of His angels deputed to oversee creation is known to Him alone, glory be to Him; save as far as He teaches such matters to some of His servants. And so none can say that the troops of a particular affair are more or less than He has informed us.

... And this is nothing but a reminder to mankind. The mention of the hell (*Saqar*) is nothing but a reminder to mankind. It means that it is mentioned to remind them of the chastisement, so that they may tear themselves from disobedience. Or it may mean that this surah is a reminder for them.

Nay, by the moon, (32)

كَلَّا وَالْقَمَرِ ﴿٣٢﴾

Nay, ... That is, the affair is not as those disbelievers imagine it to be, in that there is no account and no requital.

... by the moon; That is, an oath sworn, by the moon.

And the night when it turns around, (33)

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا أَدْبَرَ ﴿٣٣﴾

And the oath is by the night, and its passing on and giving way to the day.

And the morning when it shines, (34)

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا أَسْفَرَ ﴿٣٤﴾

The oath is by the morning when it arrives and spreads its brightness.

Indeed it is one of the grand. (35)

إِنِّهَا لِأَحَدَى الْكَبْرِ ﴿٣٥﴾

That is, the *Saqar*, the subject of the discourse, is one of the Grand portents or signs. He who can create such signs as the moon, the night and the morning, is clearly able to create the fire and hell to chastise thereby the disbelievers and the non-believers. Perhaps the selection of these things for swearing the oath is meant to suggest that it is like the darkness that is dissipated by any form of light. In the same way, the stagnancy of these things suggests the stagnancy of the people of the fire, who will be as if dead, so dread will be their lives, in contrast to the believers who will be joyfully alive.

A warning to mankind, (36)

نَذِيرًا لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٣٦﴾

That is, while hell is a grand sign, it is also a warning for mankind, warning them that if they do not believe they will be afflicted with it.

For whosoever wills among ye to step forward or lag behind. (37)

لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَتَقَدَّمَ أَوْ يَتَأَخَّرَ ﴿٣٧﴾

That is, for whoever of you, O mankind, who wishes to go forward to goodness and be saved, or to lag behind in disobedience and be punished. It is for each person to choose his path: either to paradise or to the fire.

Every soul for what it earns is held in pledge, (38)

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

The metaphor is of a security that is kept against a loan. If the loan is paid off, the security is released, otherwise not. And so it is with everyone who honours what is expected from them – belief and obedience – they will be freed and rewarded. Otherwise their destination is the fire and perpetual imprisonment.

Save for the companions of the right hand: (39)

إِلَّا أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ ﴿٣٩﴾

These will be given their books in their right hands, and they will be led by the right, on the day of resurrection, to the Gardens. They will have freed themselves from their pledge by their virtuous deeds.

In gardens, enquiring (40)

فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

That is, they will be asking each other, or they will ask the angels, or they will ask the offenders themselves . . .

About the offenders: (41)

عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

In accordance to the first two possibilities, they turn to the sinners after the questioning – as given in 37:50 – and in the third possibility, which is the likely option, it is the sinner who initially is asked. 37: 50-56 state:

Then they will turn to one another and question one another. One of them says: "I had an intimate companion (on the earth), who used to say, "art thou amongst those who bear witness to the truth (of the Message)? When we die and become dust and bones, shall we indeed receive rewards and punishments?" He then says: "Would ye like to look for (him)?" Then he looked down and saw him in the midst of the Fire. He said: "By Allah! thou wast little short of bringing me to perdition!"

'What has brought ye to the Saqar?' (42)

مَا سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرٍ ﴿٤٢﴾

That is, they will ask the offenders what brought them into the terrible fire.

They say, 'We were not amongst the prayers, (43)

قَالُوا لَمْ نَكُ مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

'The prayers' is given for *musḥallia*, meaning people who pray. In reply the offenders will say that while they were in the world they did not perform the obligatory prayers.

'And we did not feed the destitute, (44)

وَلَمْ نَكُ نُطْعِمُ الْمَسْكِينِ ﴿٤٤﴾

That is, they did not fulfil their obligations of feeding the poor, by paying the *zakaṭ* and suchlike.

'And we would plunge with the plungers, (45)

وَكَانُوا نَخُوضُ مَعَ الْخَائِبِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

That is, they used to plunge into the falsehood with others who plunged into the false. 'Plunge' is given for *khawdh*, meaning to immerse one's whole body in something, as if the false (*baḥl*) is something one immerses in.

'And we would belie the day of requital, (46)

وَكُنَّا نَكْذِبُ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿٤٦﴾

That is, they did not admit the day of resurrection, but said that it was a lie, and that it would not happen.

'Until the certainty came to us.' (47)

حَتَّىٰ آتَيْنَا الْيَقِينَ ﴿٤٧﴾

That is, until death come to them, meaning that they did not repent before they died. Death is called 'the certainty' on account of how it causes that world to become apparent for man, so that he becomes certain it is there.

And since that is how they were in the world:

So the intercession of the intercessors will not profit them. (48)

فَمَا تَنْفَعُهُمْ شَفِيعَةُ الشَّفِيعِينَ ﴿٤٨﴾

That is, the Messengers, the angels and the learned and suchlike who mediate or intercede on the sinners' behalf, will not be allowed to mediate for them, as these sinners are beyond the level of intercession. No mediation will profit them as none will mediate for them.

The thread then turns to express amazement at their headstrong clinging to the false:

What is it with them, that from the reminder they turn away? (49)

فَمَا هُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكَرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾

What is with these disbelievers that they turn from the Qur'an that reminds them of the realities and bears so much of benefit to them? What good is there for them in their turning away?

As if they are startled asses (50)

كَأَنَّهُمْ حُمُرٌ مُسْتَنْفِرَةٌ ﴿٥٠﴾

'Startled' is put for *mustanfiraḥ* – it seems to denote that they seek flight from themselves, due to the fear they witness. The disbelievers' being likened to asses is on account of their lack of perception and their stupidity.

Fleeing from a lion. (51)

فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ ﴿٥١﴾

An ass will flee on witnessing a lion. In the same way the disbelievers flee from the Messenger.

Yet, every one of them wishes to be given open scripture. (52)

بَلْ يُرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِّنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتَىٰ صُحُفًا مُّنشَرَةً ﴿٥٢﴾

That is, each wishes to receive inspiration and have a book sent down to him from Allah, glory be to Him. It is as He says, 'And they say, "Why does an angel not descend to us?"' [11: 26]. Or the meaning is that despite all their turning from the truth, they wish to be given their book on the day of resurrection spread open and full of good deeds. The books which record the evil deeds will be kept closed that day, so that others cannot read them, while books recording good deeds will be kept open as a mark of honour and pride.

'Yet' is given for *bal*, which signifies the absurdity of their expectation in consideration of their disbelief.

Nay, but they do not fear the hereafter. (53)

كَلَّا بَلْ لَّا تَخَافُونَ الْآخِرَةَ ﴿٥٣﴾

Nay, they shall not be given an open book, for they did not do what would make them deserving of that. They did not believe in the hereafter, for them to enter the ranks of the believers and thus be granted an open book in their hands.

Perhaps what is meant is that since they did not believe in the hereafter, they turned away from the reminder:

Nay, indeed it is a reminder; (54)

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ تَذَكُّرٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

Nay, ... The affair is not as they imagined; that to turn away would be better for them.

... **indeed it is a reminder;** The Qur'an reminds them.

So whoever wills recalls it. (55)

فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ ﴿٥٥﴾

He who wills to be reminded and guided to goodness shall be reminded and admonished by it (the Qur'an). He who does not wish to remember, that is up to him.

And they will not recall unless Allah wills, He is One to be feared, and One who forgives. (56)

وَمَا يَذْكُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ هُوَ أَهْلُ التَّقْوَى وَأَهْلُ

الْمَغْفِرَةِ ﴿٥٦﴾

And they will not recall unless Allah wills, ... Being reminded has two aspects: a. the will of Allah, glory be to Him, by His sending Prophets and guiding the people; and b. the acceptance of the person. So their being reminded depends on the will of Allah, and He certainly wills it, glory be to Him, for He has guided; and so it remains for them to accept the guidance.

... **He is One to be feared, ...** He is deserving of being feared; for man only fears one who is powerful and aware of any transgressions and will punish them, and all of this is true of Him, glory be to Him.

... **and He is One who forgives.** He forgives the sins of whoever fears Him and comes to the path. So fear Him, O people, and He will forgive ye.