

Surah al-Naba' (78)

سورة النبا

'The Announcement'

This surah has been named *al-Naba'*, and also *'amma*, on account of the prominence within it of the words *al-naba'*, meaning 'the announcement', and *'amma*, meaning 'about what'. While the previous surah (al-Mursalat) concluded by mentioning the resurrection and by warning those who deny it, this surah opens on the same theme.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah ... Beginning with the name of Allah – He who is first before all things.

... the Compassionate, the Merciful. He favours His servants by bestowing on them all that benefits them, and by forgiving them their offences.

Of what ask they each other? (1)

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿١﴾

'What is it the disbelievers ask amongst themselves, some of them of others?' For it is related in *Majma' al-Bayan* that when the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad, *may Allah bless him and his family*¹, was raised by the Almighty and informed humankind of the Oneness of Allah, the Most High, and of the resurrection after death, and recited to them the Qur'an, they pretended to question each other – in a manner of denial and mock amazement – saying: 'What is this which Muhammad has brought and what is it that has started him off?' The inquiry was actually to serve the purpose of astonishment, just as you might ask, 'What a story is this!' when you wish to esteem it.

It is narrated in several narrations that what is meant by the magnificent announcement is Amir al-Mu'minin, Commander of the Believers, Imam Ali *peace be upon him*². [al-Kafi, vol. 1, pp 207, 417. Bihār, vol. 24 / p 352; vol. 36 / pp1-4.] This is in the sense of application of the verse in general, while it is also the case through the inner meaning of the verse if the "magnificent announcement" is taken to be the resurrection only.

Then comes the reply:

Of the magnificent announcement (2)

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

That is, an important piece of news; namely, that which concerns the origin and the return.

Over which they are in disagreement. (3)

الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Some people confirmed it on account of their following the Book (of the Jews and Christians) or suchlike, while others denied it.

Nay, soon they shall know! (4)

كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

Nay, things are not as they said and supposed, in their denying Allah, the message and the return. They shall soon know the result of their lying, and the veracity of the Prophet, *may Allah bless him and his family*.

Again nay, soon they shall know! (5)

ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥﴾

¹ *shallallah 'alayhi wa alih*, meaning 'may Allah bless him and his family'. It is a mark of piety and devotion to use this salutation when mentioning the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad.

² *'alayhis-salam*, meaning 'peace be upon him'. It is a mark of piety and devotion to use this salutation when mentioning the name of one of the prophets or the one of the *ma'sum* Imams from the household (the Ahl al-Bayt) of the Holy Prophet.

'Again' is put for *thumma*, a word denoting order. Nay, it is not as they suppose, for upon their deaths or upon the day of resurrection they will learn that things are as told by the Prophet, and that they were lost and astray. This constitutes a warning upon a warning.

Here the thread turns to mentioning aspects of His favours – glory be to Him – as evidence of His existence and of His other attributes, as a conclusive proof (hujjat) for the disbelievers:

Have We not put the earth as a place of rest? (6)

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهْدًا ﴿٦﴾

That is, firm and safe, ready for utilisation, like a cradle in which a baby may be settled safe from harm.

And the mountains as pegs? (7)

وَالْجِبَالَ أَوْتَادًا ﴿٧﴾

As grounding devices so that the ground does not slide about or shake, like the pegs or nails that hold planks of wood together.

And created ye in pairs? (8)

وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا ﴿٨﴾

We are created in types and varieties, with differences in colour, language and manners of perception, and other differences.

And put your sleep as a repose, (9)

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا ﴿٩﴾

That is, a break in activity, so as to rest.

And put the night as a garment, (10)

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا ﴿١٠﴾

That is, a covering, that covers everything like a garment covers the body. And this serves the wisdom of rest and leisure from work, for were the night like the day the human being would not break from work and would not benefit from rest. Furthermore, the darkness of the night facilitates rest and sleep.

And put the day as a livelihood, (11)

وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا ﴿١١﴾

The day is the time we turn to seeking the means of sustenance and survival. It is called a livelihood (*ma'ash*) in a figurative sense, for the day is the time for seeking livelihood, not livelihood itself.

And built over ye a strong seven, (12)

وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شَدِيدًا ﴿١٢﴾

That is: We built over you, O humankind, seven skies. They are strong, of firm construction, inviolable in their order and design.

And put a blazing lamp, (13)

وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا ﴿١٣﴾

That is, in the skies; and it means the sun. 'Blazing' is for being brilliant and energetic.

And from the pressurizers sent down water in torrents, (14)

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً نَّجَّاجًا ﴿١٤﴾

What is meant by the pressurizers (*al-mu'asirah*) are the clouds, for they are subject to their own pressure, in that they have been made to contain forces and pressures that force out the rain, like a washing machine that squeezes drops of water from the clothes. Or it may be that what is meant by pressurizers are the winds that bring pressure to bear on the clouds. 'In torrents' is given for *thajajan*, meaning heavy rainfall that descends in successive waves or rushes; from *thajja*, meaning to rain heavily.

***So that We bring forth by it grains and plants,
(15)***

لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا ﴿١٥﴾

That is: 'We have made the rain descend so that We bring forth with the water of the rain grains, like wheat or corn and suchlike, and all types of cultivated plants.'

And verdurous gardens. (16)

وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا ﴿١٦﴾

These are brought forth with that water. 'Verdurous' is given for *alfaʿ*, the plural of *laff*, which means a tree some of whose parts are wrapping round other trees. 'Gardens' is put for *jannaʿ*, that are so-called for their being concealed by trees.

After the mention of these proofs of the Divinity, the thread turns to explain the return:

Indeed the day of separation is a pact: (17)

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَتًا ﴿١٧﴾

The creatures shall be separated from one another, for each of them to receive the recompense of what they have done, good and bad, and this is on the day of resurrection. It is an appointment in both time and place, set for the reckoning and the recompense that Allah, glory be to Him, has given His word to. 'Pact' is given for *miqaʿ*, meaning an appointment in both time and place, like each of the *mawaqit* (plural of *miqaʿ*) of the hajj.

This is then explained with His word:

***The day the trumpet is blown and ye shall come
in troops, (18)***

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا ﴿١٨﴾

The day is the day of separation. The trumpet will be blown by Israfil for the creatures to spring up into life after death, as a trumpet is blown for a band of travellers or a military force or suchlike to move into action. And that is the second blowing of the trumpet. [At the first blowing all living creatures will die.] And then you shall come forth from your graves, O humankind, enlivened, in groups upon groups; as if each group is to be made up of those similar in actions.

And the sky shall open and be gated, (19)

وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا ﴿١٩﴾

The sky shall split and gateways will appear, and each sky will be transformed into gates from which angels will descend for the reckoning and the recompense and obedience to affairs.

***And the mountains shall be put in motion and
then become a mirage; (20)***

وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا ﴿٢٠﴾

They shall move from their position after being plucked off, and it is Allah, glory be to Him, who shall make them move. Mirage is put for *sarab*, the imaginary perception of water in the desert heat when the sun is high. For when a person looks at the mountains he will imagine they are still there and solid as they were before, but they shall be like dust: you see something as solid and it is not solid, like a mist seen from afar is counted as something solid, when it is not.

Indeed hell is a watchtower, (21)

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا ﴿٢١﴾

That is, like a place from which one maintains a surveillance to defend one's house or lands, or suchlike, for verily it is a place from which the angels keep a look-out on humankind, so that they see there which people are offenders and deserve the fire, and which are the good-doers who do not deserve it. 'Ambush' is given for *mirshad*, and that is a 'Vantage point' or a place from where the enemy is watched.

For the transgressors a home, (22)

لِلطَّٰغِيْنَ مَقَابَاً ﴿٢٢﴾

That is, the place to which those who rebel against God and transgress the Divine limits return. 'Home' is given for *ma'ab*, from the root 'aba, meaning 'to return'. It means a home, and the reason the home is called *ma'ab* is that whenever one departs from it he returns to it.

Remaining therein for ages, (23)

لَسِيْنٍ فِيْهَا اَحْقَابًا ﴿٢٣﴾

The transgressors will remain alive in hell for ages: *ahqab*, plural of *hjqbah*, meaning extremely long ages or periods. It is narrated from Imam Shadiq, *peace be upon him*, that:

The ages (*ahqab*) are meant eight *ahqab*, and each *hjqbah* is eighty years, and each year is three hundred and sixty days, and each of these days is like a thousand years of your reckoning.³

Yet the fanatically stubborn amongst the people of error will never come out; while the sinners will leave hell after lengthy periods, according to the differences in their offences.

They shall not taste cold therein, nor a drink, (24)

لَا يَذُوْقُوْنَ فِيْهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا ﴿٢٤﴾

In hell, there are no cool breezes, no cool food, nothing at all shall be cold for them; and they shall have no drink to slake their increasing thirst.

Save boiling water and pus, (25)

إِلَّا حَمِيْمًا وَّغَسَّاقًا ﴿٢٥﴾

That is, they shall taste only boiling water and their own pus, but shall have nothing cool and no drink.

An appropriate recompense. (26)

جَزَاءً وَّفَاقًا ﴿٢٦﴾

The recompense of their disbelief and sin, proportionate to their misdeeds.

The thread now turns to explain their actions that made them deserve such punishment:

Indeed they had no expectation of a reckoning, (27)

اِيْمَهُمْ كَانُوْا لَا يَرْجُوْنَ حِسَابًا ﴿٢٧﴾

While alive in this world they had no expectation of a reckoning. They did not expect the resurrection. Rather they denied it and called it a lie. The words 'they had no expectation' signify how whoever expects something holds the probability of being successful in what he expects.

And belied Our signs, belying! (28)

وَكَذَّبُوْا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَابًا ﴿٢٨﴾

That is, the signs of the creation, the message and the return. They rejected them and called them false.

Did they imagine they could escape from their misdeeds?

While We have counted all things in a book: (29)

وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ اَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا ﴿٢٩﴾

Counted: everything they have ever done has been collected, counted and explained, not merely verbally, but recorded in a book.

'So taste, We shall increase ye in nothing but torment.' (30)

فَذُوْقُوْا فَلَنْ نَّزِيْدَكُمْ اِلَّا عَذَابًا ﴿٣٠﴾

Therefore in hell it will be said to them: 'So taste', that is, taste this punishment and torment as recompense for your evil deeds. And: 'We shall increase ye in nothing but torment.' That is, the affair is not such to admit the probability of being halted, but rather that the pain and torment will be increased day after day and hour after hour. This is on account of how each day the

³ i.e. the ages of *ahqab* are thus of the order of 230 million earth years!

punishment of that day is added to that of the previous days, even if in quality it is of the same type.

After having been made aware of the condition of the offenders in the hereafter, we are now informed about the believers:

Indeed for the guardful is an achievement: (31)

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا ﴿٣١﴾

Those who are guardful and vigilant (*al-muttaqin*) are the believers who are careful of not offending Allah and so do not sin. Theirs shall be the achievement of success and salvation.

Gardens and vineyards, (32)

حَدَائِقٍ وَأَعْنَابًا ﴿٣٢﴾

'Gardens' is given for *al-hadda>iq*, plural of *hddiqah*, an arranged garden enclosed by a wall, normally small though it can be large. Vineyards are mentioned in particular as an example, and because grapes are especially delightful.

And maidens, like of age, (33)

وَكَوَاعِبَ أُنثَىٰ ﴿٣٣﴾

Maidens (*kawāʿib*): young women with breasts swelling in the initial stages of maturity. Some of them the same age as others, or perhaps the same age as their spouses, so that they will be neither older nor younger than their spouses.

And a brimming cup, (34)

وَكَأْسًا دِهَاقًا ﴿٣٤﴾

A cup so full that it can hold no more water or wine.

They hear therein no vain talk and no belying, (35)

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِدَابًا ﴿٣٥﴾

Those on their guard in this world will hear no vain talk in the Garden, nor will some of them call others liars.

Yes, the believers will be in this eternal bliss as,

A recompense from thy Lord, a reckoned gift, (36)

جَزَاءً مِّن رَّبِّكَ عَطَاءً حِسَابًا ﴿٣٦﴾

The address is to the Prophet of Allah, for the pronoun is singular. A gift according to a reckoning; calculated; the affair is not arbitrary.

Then your Lord explains things that show His magnificence, glory be to Him, with His word:

Lord of the skies and the earth and that between them, the Compassionate, with whom they have no right to converse (37)

رَبِّ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمٰنِ لَا يَمْلِكُوْنَ

مِنْهُ خِطَابًا ﴿٣٧﴾

Lord of the skies and the earth and that between them, ... Everything is His creation, He elevates and raises everything.

... the Compassionate ...: This attribute is used here to denote that He is forgiving towards His servants and bestows on them forgiveness and kindness, and that they deserve the reward due to His kindness, rather than to their actions.

... with whom they have no right to converse No one has the power to talk to Allah, glory be to Him, or intercede for anyone without His permission. For He is Compassionate, Generous and Glorious; not like one who is compassionate in this world, who may be manipulated or dominated by someone for whom his heart has formed an attachment.

The words 'with whom they have no right to converse' are then clarified by His word:

On the day the Spirit and the angels stand in rows; they speak not save him whom the Compassionate has permitted, and who speaks aright. (38)

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ
أُذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا ﴿٣٨﴾

The 'Spirit' is the great angel, as has been recorded in the narrations. The angels shall stand like an army on parade before a king; and this is to increase the awe and gravity of the resurrection. Neither the spirit nor the angels, nor any speaker shall speak. All will be silence, save for the voice of him who has been given leave to speak, in any circumstance. For it seems that this is about certain stages of the day; while at other stages everyone may speak true or false, as Allah says: '*Regard how they lie against themselves.*' [6:24] And it may be that what is meant by speaking is intercession.

That day is the reality, so whosoever wills it takes unto his Lord a home. (39)

ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ الْحَقِّ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَنَابِتًا ﴿٣٩﴾

The day that has been described is a reality, existing in actuality and not merely in potential. 'The reality' is given for *al-haqq*, it being said that when a report conforms to the actuality as far as it conforms to what is actual it is called 'the truth' (*al-siddq*), whereas as far as the reality conforms to the report it is called *al-haqq*. So whoever from amongst mankind wills it – he takes with his Lord's satisfaction and rewards a home of faith and obedience; as if the believer is taking a home with his Lord, while the disbeliever takes a home with other than his Lord, in that he distances himself from His grace and compassion through disbelief and disobedience, and so his home is not with his Lord.

Indeed We warn ye of a nigh chastisement, the day when man will look at what his hands have sent before him, and the disbeliever will say, 'O, would that I were dust!' (40)

إِنَّا أَنْذَرْتَنكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ
وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ بَلَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُرَابًا ﴿٤٠﴾

O humankind, be warned: the hereafter is near, however people may suppose it to be distant, just as Allah has said: '*They see it as distant and We see it as near.*' That day man will see the recompense of his action and meet it. The emphasis on hands is because they are the most active part in human activities. That day the disbeliever will be in terror of the chastisement he sees, and will wish that he had been dust in the world, and not a human being to disbelieve and be afflicted with the terrible chastisement. Yet his wishing will do him no good, just as the wishing of every criminal is useless at the time of punishment.