

Surah al-Takwīr (81)

'The Rolling-Up'

سورة التكوير

The surah has been given its name from the prominence of the verb it contains derived from the infinitive *al-takwīr*, meaning 'to roll up'. Like the other Makkan surahs this surah deals with the three major principles of faith. As Surah 'Abasa concluded with an account of the resurrection, so this surah begins with an account of its characteristics.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah, ... Beginning in the name of He who is the originator of all things, for from Him, glory be to Him, is the whole of existence, and towards Him is the progression of creation.

The Compassionate, the Merciful towards all things: in creating, nurturing and beneficence.

When the sun is rolled up, (1)

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ ﴿١﴾

That is, when its light ceases and it becomes dark. Rolled up is given for *kuwwirat* which implies that its light will be rolled up, and its extension towards the horizons will go, and it will become black and dark.

And when the stars become dingy, (2)

وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ ﴿٢﴾

Their light and brightness will also fade.

And when the mountains are set in motion, (3)

وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ ﴿٣﴾

Allah will pluck them from their places and despatch them as dust through the atmosphere.

And when the pregnant camels are abandoned, (4)

وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ ﴿٤﴾

'Pregnant camels' is given for *al-isha*, meaning she-camels that are big with young, and the she-camels whose period is completed and are about to enter labour. 'Neglected' is given for *'utjilat*, meaning left untended, with no herdsman or guard. The signification is that the dread of that day will be such that it will cause man to overlook his most valued possessions.

And when the beasts are assembled, (5)

وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ ﴿٥﴾

'Beasts' is given for *wuhush*, meaning wild animals that are free and have not been domesticated; or perhaps all animals. They will be assembled that day for the retribution of the wronged amongst them against those who wronged them.

And when the seas are blazed, (6)

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ ﴿٦﴾

The seas shall be transformed into fire, as an oven is fired up and blazed.

And when the souls are paired, (7)

وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ ﴿٧﴾

Each person will be linked to whoever is similar to him, the believer with the believer, the disbeliever with the disbeliever. Or the believing souls will be coupled with 'the beauties of Paradise' (*hūr al-'ayn*), while the disbelievers are coupled with devils (*shayāṭin*). Or the believers will be reunited with their dear ones after having been separated from them at the time of death.

And when the girl buried alive is asked, (8)

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ ﴿٨﴾

The Arabs would bury alive their daughters from fear of poverty and dishonour.

For what crime she was killed? (9)

بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ ﴿٩﴾

That is, those who buried alive their daughters will be asked for what crime committed by their daughters did they kill them, as they were innocent and had committed no crime.

And when the scrolls are dispersed, (10)

وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتْ ﴿١٠﴾

The records of people's actions will be opened for each to read his account and be informed of the good and the bad it contains, so as to be recompensed and requited for what he has done.

And when the sky is ripped away, (11)

وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ ﴿١١﴾

'Ripped away' is given for *kushitāt*, meaning plucked out with violence; as if the sky is a skin that will be ripped away from the world of existence. This signifies the catastrophic change of the order the universe so that man will see the sky other than the sky, just as he sees a body with its skin ripped off other than in its previous form.

And when the Inferno is fired up, (12)

وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِرَتْ ﴿١٢﴾

The fire of hell will be fired up; its blaze will be increased so that its heat and its terror will be intensified.

And when the Paradise is brought near, (13)

وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُرْلِفَتْ ﴿١٣﴾

As if the paradise is distant in space and is then made to descend to the ground where the resurrection has taken place and humankind are standing. Or what is meant is its proximity to the believers in time.

A soul will know what it has presented. (14)

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ ﴿١٤﴾

When these things happen everyone will know their actions they have performed in the world, their good deeds and their evil works, and the felicity and the misery they have prepared for the day of resurrection. They will know the actions they have done, for they will be requited for them.

The thread then turns to the affirmation of the issue of prophethood, and to explain that the Qur'an is not the word of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his family, in contrast to what was supposed by the disbelievers:

So I swear not by the vanishers, (15)

فَلَا أَقْسِمُ بِالْخُنُوسِ ﴿١٥﴾

It has been explained that the word 'not' (*la*) is for negation. Yet it is used to denote respect and honour for what follows, to magnify the oath and hint at it but without the oath actually taking place. 'The vanishers' is given for *al-khunnas*, meaning something that disappears and reappears, and what are meant are the planets. Thus the verse reads: So I swear not by the planets that disappear when they set, or as the sky gives way to daylight.

The coursers, the disappearers, (16)

الْجَوَارِ الْكُنُوسِ ﴿١٦﴾

'Coursers' is given for *jawaæ*, the plural of *jaæiya*, meaning something that is in motion. The planets appear to move through the sky. 'Disappearers' is given for *kunnas*, the plural of *kanis*, meaning something that conceals itself in its place, like a gazelle conceals itself in its home. So it reads 'I swear not by the planets in motion that return to their heavenly station and run their orbit and then conceal themselves in their places.' For in the beginning of the night one sees the planets have returned from their concealment, then he sees their movement and thereafter their disappearance.

And the night when it swarms, (17)

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ ﴿١٧﴾

'swarms' is used for the word "عَسْعَسَ", which is used for the time of night when it is not quite dark yet, i.e. when night approaches after sunset, as well as when it begins to depart before sunrise.

And the morning when it breathes, (18)

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ ﴿١٨﴾

That is, when the morning approaches and daylight breaks.

Then comes the consequent of these vows, in His word:

Indeed it is the word of a noble messenger, (19)

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ ﴿١٩﴾

That is, this noble Qur'an is the word of a noble messenger, whom is meant is Jabra'il or the archangel Gabriel, *peace be upon him*, as opposed to it being the invention of the Prophet, as supposed by the disbelievers. That it is the word of Gabriel is meant to indicate that it is from Allah, glory be to Him, not that it is Gabriel's own word, as is clear.

Powerful in the sight of The Enthroned One, of high station, (20)

ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

Descriptions of Jabra'il or Gabriel: possessor of strength that is both physical and intellectual, for he is able to come down from the skies to the earth and deliver the message of Allah to the Prophet perfectly, with no additions and no omissions; and he has a great station with the Holder of the Trellis (*al-'arsh*) who is Allah, Owner of the whole of existence. He is firmly alongside the Holder of the Trellis in the sense of having prestige.

Obeyed there, trusty. (21)

مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ ﴿٢١﴾

The angels obey archangel Gabriel up there, because of the greatness of his rank. 'There' is given for *thamma*, which means up there in the lofty station (*al-mala' al-'ala*). He is 'trusty' (*amin*) in that he was entrusted with the revelation, and neither erred with too little nor with too much.

The Qur'an is therefore the word of Allah, exalted be He. As for the Messenger:

And your companion is not mad, (22)

وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

The address is to the disbelievers. That their companion, the Messenger of God, who lived amongst them, is not mad; he has not lost his reason, as the disbelievers said of him.

And indeed he saw him on the clear horizon, (23)

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ ﴿٢٣﴾

That is, the Messenger of Allah saw Gabriel in an easterly direction on a clear horizon. It was not imaginary and not implanted within him by jinn, or suchlike, as they supposed.

And he is not begrudging of the unseen, (24)

وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

The Prophet, *may Allah bless him and his family*, is not grudging of the unseen (*al-ghaib*), by which is meant the revelation of Allah, glory be to Him. 'Begrudge' is given for *dhanin*, meaning to suspect; i.e. to lie, or to be stingy.

And it is not the word of an outcast devil, (25)

وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

The Qur'an is not the word of a cast-out *shaytan* who has been stoned or bombarded with curses, like those 'prophecies' that are the words of devils received by witches, soothsayers, fortune-tellers and the like.

So where go ye? (26)

فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

O disbelievers? How is it you do not believe when the Qur'an is its own honest evidence? For it is not the word of a madman, and not the word of a devil, and it is not that it has additions or shortcomings due to the Prophet being niggardly in presenting the revelation completely. It is from its sender, Allah, and from he to whom it was sent, the Prophet. The best book of guidance. How is it, then, that you will not believe?

It is nought but a reminder for the worlds; (27)

إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٧﴾

The Qur'an is not but a reminder for all peoples and all worlds, the world of men and the world of jinn, reminding them of what has been placed in their natures about the Divinity and existence of Allah, the message, the return, righteous ethics and so forth.

For whosoever among ye wills to be straight; (28)

لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ ﴿٢٨﴾

That is, be straight in your beliefs and your actions, without deviating to right or left. Those who will are singled out in particular as it is they who will benefit from the reminder, just as it might be said to a class, 'This is the teacher for whoever wishes to learn from him,' meaning whoever wishes to take benefit from him, whereas he is there to teach them all.

But ye will it not save that Allah wills it, Lord of the worlds. (29)

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

That is, you do not will to be straight unless Allah wills it, for man is unable to be guided except after the will of Allah in His setting up the proofs, which He, glory be to Him, certainly wills. For He dispatched the Prophet and sent down the Book, so that all that remains is the will of man to accept the guidance and follow the path. In this there is an incitement for the servants to form the will, for clearly Allah, glory be to Him, wills it. Is it fit and proper, therefore, for man not to will it?