

Surah al-Mutaffifin (83)

سورة المطففين

'The Short-Sellers'

The surah has been given its name due to the prominence of the word *al-mutaffifin*, meaning the defrauders. It seems that the surah is composed of Makkan and Madinan *ayaat*, as it contains references to the Islamic order as well as to matters of belief. Just as Surah al-Infithar concluded with an account of the resurrection and of humankind's conditions thereupon, so this surah has a similar content.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah, ... Beginning by the name of Him to whom belongs the dominion, and who is the First of all things; for what is more worthy than beginning by the name of the Generous?

... the Compassionate, the Merciful. who in His mercy blesses the servants and completes the deficiencies of every person.

Woe to the short-sellers, (1)

وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ ﴿١﴾

'Woe' (*wayl*) signifies an evil condition, while 'short-sellers' is given for *mutaffifin*, meaning those who give short measure in weight or in volume. Thus the verse means that there is an evil condition for those who give short measure.

Then Allah, glory be to Him, clarifies the mutaffifin as follows ...

Who, when they take measure from people, take it in full, (2)

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ ﴿٢﴾

That is, when they take measure of people's goods which they want for themselves, like paying money so as to purchase some wheat, for example, they make sure they take the correct measure which is their right. And since measuring by weight and measuring by volume are in essence the same, the mention of one serves the purpose of mentioning the other.

But when they measure out for them, or weigh for them, they give loss. (3)

وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَوْ وَّزَنُوهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ ﴿٣﴾

When they wish to sell a weight of wheat to people and take its price in return, they give less than the weight they are supposed to give. It is clear that the transaction is not forbidden in itself, but it is loathsome to give less, just as it is not forbidden to praise people to their faces, though when it is coupled with criticizing them behind their backs it becomes ugly and loathsome indeed. Such a person is called two-tongued (*dha>lisabayn*), and on the day of resurrection will have two tongues of fire, as is recorded in the narrations.

The thread then turns to warn them, with His word:

Do they not suppose that they will be raised (4)

أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُولَئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ ﴿٤﴾

'They ...suppose' is given for *yadhunnu*, indicating that even the supposition of such a day is enough to lead a person to abstain from such a vice; how much more, then, when a person has knowledge?

For a tremendous day? (5)

لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿٥﴾

The tremendous day (*yawm al-^ladhim*) is the day of resurrection, when every person will face the reckoning of his actions.

The day when mankind stands for the Lord of the worlds. (6)

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٦﴾

They will stand from the graves for Allah's reckoning and His recompense.

Nay, indeed the book of the brazen is in 'eternal prison'; (7)

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْفَجَارِ لَفِي سِجِّينٍ ﴿٧﴾

That is, nay, the affair is not as they claim it to be, with no reckoning and no recompense, but that each person will there receive the recompense of his actions. 'The brazen' is given for *al-fujjar*, those who are disobedient towards God, be it through disbelief or through sin. What is meant by their book is the register of their names and their particulars. 'Eternal prison' is given for *al-sijjin*. It means that Allah has prepared for them an eternal prison. Saying their book is in an eternal prison is because that is where they shall be, like saying of someone that his book is amongst the criminals, when what is meant is that he is counted as a criminal.

And what will make thee comprehend what is 'eternal prison'? (8)

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سِجِّينٌ ﴿٨﴾

The thread has changed to incite dread of the eternal prison. The address is in the singular, so it is directed at each individual, or at the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family*.

A book inscribed. (9)

كِتَابٌ مَّرْقُومٌ ﴿٩﴾

The book is inscribed, written down and complete; it cannot be substituted and it cannot be altered. No brazen one can have his name removed from it and recorded in the book of the righteous.

Woe that day to the beliers, (10)

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

Woe to them, that is, on the day of resurrection.

These persons who say that the truth is a lie are then defined, in His word:

Those who belie the day of requital; (11)

الَّذِينَ يُكَذِّبُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ ﴿١١﴾

That is, the day of resurrection. 'Requital' is given for *din*, meaning recompense; while belying the resurrection entails belying the other principles of faith.

And none belie it but every sinful aggressor: (12)

وَمَا يُكَذِّبُ بِهِ إِلَّا كُلُّ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ ﴿١٢﴾

An aggressor (*mu'tad*) is someone who is unjust and exceeds the limits; sinful (*athim*) is a person who is profligate in sin and here denotes a person excessive in transgression.

When Our signs are recited to him he says: 'Fables of the ancients'. (13)

إِذَا تُلِيَتْ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٣﴾

That is, when such a transgressor is presented proofs of the Divinity and of the Divine oneness and the other principles of belief – or perhaps by signs (*ayaat*) are meant the portents of the sacred Qur'an – he calls them mere fictitious stories of the ancient, less sophisticated people. Today they call religion 'reactionary', another term for 'fables of the ancients'.

Nay, but what they were earning has prevailed over their hearts; (14)

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

Nay, the signs are not fictitious fables, but rather their hearts have been overcome by the effect of their sins and offences, and their disobedience has caused their hearts to harden and to turn to stone. Thus they see the truth only as false, and the signs or *ayaat* as fables. Imam al-Shādiq has said: 'The heart tends to become rusty, so when you remind it of Allah, it is polished.'

Nay, indeed that day they are veiled from their Lord. (15)

كَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَحْجُوبُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

Nay, they will not remain in goodness and comfort forever, though the disbelievers imagine they will be blessed with the beneficence and grace of Allah there too, saying 'And if I am returned to

my Lord I will certainly find better than this as a place of return.' [18: 36] But on the day of resurrection they shall find themselves concealed from, hindered and prevented from, the grace and mercy of their Lord.

Then indeed they burn in the inferno; (16)

ثُمَّ إِنَّهُمْ لَصَالُوا الْجَحِيمِ ﴿١٦﴾

After being denied the grace and kindness of Allah, they will be thrust into the fire, and shall remain there.

Then it is said, 'This is what ye used to belie.' (17)

ثُمَّ يُقَالُ هَذَا الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

Once they have entered the raging fire they will be rebuked and censured with the words given. This means the punishment they taste. They called it a lie while they were in the world, for they said that there is no paradise, no fire, no account and no requital.

Nay, the book of the righteous is in 'far heights': (18)

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْأَبْرَارِ لَفِي عَلِيٍّ ﴿١٨﴾

Nay, things are not as they claimed, in that they claimed themselves to be blessed with the Divine favour, for the Divine favour is for the righteous (*abraḥ*), meaning those whose beliefs and deeds are excellent. Their book – in which their names are recorded and their lofty stations specified – is on the far heights (*‘illiyyiḥ*), for it is written in their record that that is their station.

The argument then turns to magnify their station, in His word:

And what will make thee comprehend what are 'far heights?' (19)

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا عَلِيُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

The address is to the individual human being, or perhaps to the Messenger.

A book inscribed, (20)

كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

The book is inscribed and recorded and the name of the righteous will not be erased from it.

Witnessed by those brought near. (21)

يَشْهَدُهُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

The book is known and its value appreciated by the elite angels who are brought nearest to Allah, glory be to Him. This is another merit and honour for the righteous, for man would like the people to see his good deeds and achievements.

The thread then turns to specify the condition of the righteous whose books state that they are in the far heights:

Indeed the righteous are in bliss, (22)

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

They are in luxury and enjoyment.

On couches gazing, (23)

عَلَى الْأَرَآئِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٢٣﴾

'Couches' is given for *araḥik*, meaning the seats luxuriously prepared for a bride to sit on. Gazing means looking about this way and that, taking enjoyment from their sight just as they take enjoyment from their other senses.

Thou know in their faces the radiance of bliss; (24)

تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ نَضْرَةَ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٢٤﴾

When a person is in bliss and ease there appears on his face brightness and radiance.

They are given to drink of a nectar, sealed, (25)

يُسْقَوْنَ مِنْ رَحِيقٍ مَخْتُومٍ ﴿٢٥﴾

Those who bear them their drinks are the angels, by His command, glory be to Him. 'Nectar' is given for *rahīq* which is a drink pure of all impurity and blemish. Sealed, so that nothing can affect it from without, just as drinks and preserves are sealed in cans in the world.

Its sealing is with musk, so for that the contenders should contend; (26)

خَتَمَهُمْ مِسْكًَ وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

The substance of the seal is musk; this is mentioned for encouragement and to show the extent of the comforts and bliss awaiting the righteous. It is for that bliss that those who strive should strive – in undertaking the obedience to Allah, glory be to Him. 'Contend' is given for *tanāfus*, meaning to compete for something, for the bliss of paradise is worthy of being competed for by mankind, in that everyone set out to perform the good actions so as to attain to that bliss, rather than contending over the bounties of the world, which are temporal.

And its admixture is from Tasnim, (27)

وَمَرَا جُهُ مِنْ تَسْنِيمٍ ﴿٢٧﴾

The nectar is mixed with the pure water of the spring or fountainhead called Tasnim, which is given its name on account of it being so high, from *sanama* meaning to be high.

A spring from which drink those brought near. (28)

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

Tasnim is a spring for the refreshment of those who are near to the satisfaction and pleasure of Allah, the Most High, on account of their good deeds.

The thread then turns to explain that whatever is experienced there by the goodly and by the sinners is only the recompense of their actions:

Indeed the criminals used to laugh at those who believed, (29)

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا كَانُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا يَضْحَكُونَ ﴿٢٩﴾

﴿٢٩﴾

Those who sinned and offended in the world used to mock and scorn the believers.

And as they passed them they winked, (30)

وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِهِمْ يَتَغَامَزُونَ ﴿٣٠﴾

That is, when the believers passed by them, the disbelievers would wink at each other and nod towards the believers mockingly. It is reported that Imam Ali was amongst those whom the hypocrites would mock in this fashion, and accordingly there are narrations that explain the verse in this way, but this is a case of an application (*misḥaḥ*) of a particular instance embodying its universal truth. [ref. Bihār 8/114, 18/115, 18/172, 36/66, 39/260, 64/58. Ibn ʿAbbas is among those who report this event, and Saʿid ibn Saʿd al-Balkhi – a prominent Sunni scholar confirmed it.]

And when they returned to their folk they returned laughing, (31)

وَإِذَا أُنْقَلَبُوا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمْ أَنْقَلَبُوا فَكِهِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

That is, when the guilty returned to their homes, they returned happy and merry from their having mocked the believers, as is always the way with the ignorant.

And when they saw them they said, 'Indeed, those are astray', (32)

وَإِذَا رَأَوْهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّ هَٰؤُلَاءِ لَضَالُّونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

That is, when the disbelievers saw the believers they would say amongst themselves that the believers were astray, for having strayed from the path of worldly enjoyment for the sake of alleged bliss in the afterlife, and is it logical to exchange what exists for what is promised? Such were their words.

And they were sent not as minders over them;
(33)

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حَفِظِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

That is, the disbelievers were not sent as guardians over the believers, to be concerned with their progress or their error.

So this day those who believed are laughing at the disbelievers, (34)

فَالْيَوْمَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ يَضْحَكُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

That is, on the day of resurrection. A fitting requital after the disbelievers laughed at the believers in the world. For certain evil circumstances afflicting a person cause his opponent to laugh.

On couches gazing; (35)

عَلَى الْأَرَآئِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

On their luxurious seats the believers will be gazing at the disbelievers, while they tumble in the fire.

Here the tone becomes one of mockery towards the disbelievers in return for their mocking the believers:

Are the disbelievers rewarded for what they were doing? (36)

هَلْ تُؤْتَوْنَ أَجْرًا مِمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

Yes, they are rewarded, for they are tumbling in the fire.