

Surah al-Ghashiyah (88)

سورة الغاشية

'The Enveloper'

This surah is called al-Ghashiyah on account of the prominence of the word *ghashiyah*, meaning 'enveloper'. Like the other Makkan surahs it deals with matters of belief. As Surah al-A'la contained reference to the division of mankind into two groups, so this surah presents a similar theme.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah ... Beginning by the name of the Owner of all things, for that is the best to begin with.

... the Compassionate, the Merciful He who bestows His mercy upon all the servants.

Has there come to thee the account of the Enveloper? (1)

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْعَاشِيَةِ ﴿١﴾

That is, has there come to you, O Messenger, or O listener, news of the resurrection. The name Enveloper (*al-ghashiyah*) is given to the day of resurrection on account of humankind being enveloped by the terror of that day. The question form is used not to seek an answer, but for emphasis and to incite passion.

Faces on that day are humble, (2)

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَاشِعَةٌ ﴿٢﴾

On the day of resurrection faces will be lowered in disgrace on account of their actions in disbelieving and committing sins. The humiliation is attributed to faces since that is where it will be apparent.

Labouring, exhausted, (3)

عَامِلَةٌ نَاصِبَةٌ ﴿٣﴾

They laboured, and exhausted their efforts in that that would end up in fire, yet their toil and exhaustion will not profit them, rather their world became a cause of their chastisement.

Burning in a raging fire, (4)

تَصَلَّىٰ نَارًا حَامِيَةً ﴿٤﴾

They will be thrust into the fire, never to come out. And the fire will be stoked up until its heat is severe and intense.

Given to drink at a boiling spring, (5)

تَسْقَىٰ مِنْ عَيْنٍ آٰبِيَةِ ﴿٥﴾

Those faces will be made to drink at a spring whose water is intensely hot. 'Faces' in these portents refers to their possessors, just as 'neck' is used for a person.

That is their drink, but what is their food?

They have no food save darġ, (6)

لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ ضَرِيعٍ ﴿٦﴾

In a report from the Prophet, "darġ is something in the fire more bitter than aloes, with a smell worse than putrefying meat, and hotter than fire."

It fattens not nor relieves from hunger; (7)

لَا يُسْمِنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْجُوعِ ﴿٧﴾

It does not nourish those who eat it, and they will be just as hungry after eating it as they were before they ate it.

That is the condition of the sinners, now we turn to the conditions of the people of conviction:

Faces on that day are blessed, (8)

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاعِمَةٌ ﴿٨﴾

On the day of resurrection people will be delighted by the various delights and pleasures, their faces showing all the signs of their felicity and joy.

Content with their effort, (9)

لَسَعِيهَا رَاضِيَةٌ ﴿٩﴾

They will be more than happy that they strived in the world, for that is the reason for their attaining to their felicity in paradise.

In a high garden, (10)

فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ ﴿١٠﴾

High in location and status, for its acres and palaces are in the most lofty sphere.

They hear within it no vanity. (11)

لَا تَسْمَعُ فِيهَا لَغِيَةً ﴿١١﴾

That is, those fortunate hear no useless, base talk.

Within it a flowing spring. (12)

فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ ﴿١٢﴾

All those who pass it may partake of it. Flowing water is the most refreshing to drink and the most pleasing to the eye.

Within it elevated couches, (13)

فِيهَا سُرُرٌ مَّرْفُوعَةٌ ﴿١٣﴾

That is, elevated in position, value and status.

And glasses placed, (14)

وَأَكْوَابٌ مَّوْضُوعَةٌ ﴿١٤﴾

Small, beautiful glasses placed at the side of the streams, to drink from. The rhyming nature of these two portents is an instance of delightful eloquence.

And cushions in rows, (15)

وَمَنَارِقُ مَصْفُوفَةٌ ﴿١٥﴾

Cushions to recline upon, set in rows one next to the other.

And carpets laid out. (16)

وَزَرَائِبُ مَبْثُوثَةٌ ﴿١٦﴾

Rich and luxurious carpets laid out to be sat upon.

Following the mention of these conditions of the paradise and the fire, the surah turns to demonstrating proofs of the Divinity, so as to mobilise man in the direction of the eternal good fortune:

Have they not looked to the camel, how it is created? (17)

أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ ﴿١٧﴾

Have the disbelievers not stopped to consider the camel, the precision and perfection with which it is created? No animal is particular in being a proof of Allah, for all animals are signs demonstrating the existence of God and His attributes; the camel is mentioned on account of it being a sign well-known to the Arabs. And it is in harmony with what is mentioned in the subsequent *āyaṭ* or verses: the elevated sky, the solid mountains and the expansive earth; for the camel is adapted to journey across the desert where there is nothing but the ground, the sky above and mountains.

And at the sky, how it is elevated? (18)

وَأِلَى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ ﴿١٨﴾

Sky is all that is in space above and beyond the earth. By the sky is meant the stars, or the orbits, or that kaleidoscope presented to the eye by differences in weather.

And at the mountains, how they are fixed? (19)

وَإِلَىٰ أَعْيَالٍ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ ﴿١٩﴾

Mountains fixed in the earth like pegs, so that they remain fixed and steady.

And at the earth, how it is laid? (20)

وَإِلَىٰ الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ ﴿٢٠﴾

It is laid out to facilitate routes and pathways for people. The meaning of these portents is to ask those addressed whether they do not reflect on these signs and so deduce from them His existence, glory be to Him, and His other attributes. The question form is used as a reproach.

So remind – for thou are but a reminder; (21)

فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ ﴿٢١﴾

Remind humankind, O Messenger, of these signs. For your role is to explain to them the realities placed in their nature concerning the Divinity, the Return and suchlike.

Thou are not empowered over them (22)

لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

They are not in your power, O Messenger, for you to be responsible for their deviation. The station of the Prophets is to remind and exhort, so whoever wills shall be guided and whoever wills shall go astray.

So remind, for the reminders benefit ...

Save him who turns away and disbelieves, (23)

إِلَّا مَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ وَكَفَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾

The reminders do not profit him who turns away from the truth and disbelieves in Allah and the resurrection. And he shall not escape the grip of Allah, glory be to Him.

So Allah will chastise him, the greatest chastisement. (24)

فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ ﴿٢٤﴾

That is, in the hereafter.

Indeed unto Us is their return, (25)

إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا إِيَابَهُمْ ﴿٢٥﴾

That is, to Our reckoning and recompense is their return after death.

Then indeed upon Us is their reckoning. (26)

ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ ﴿٢٦﴾

After their return they will be reckoned by all that they did, and they will be recompensed, evil for evil, good for good.