



الدُّخَان Ad-Dukhan

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

Name

The Surah takes its name from the word *dukhan* which occurs in verse 10.

Period of Revelation

Its period of revelation could not be determined from any authentic tradition, but the internal evidence of the subject matter shows that this Surah was revealed in the same period in which Surah Zukhruf and a few other earlier Surahs had been revealed. However, this Surah was sent down somewhat later. Its historical background is this: When the disbelievers of Makkah became more and more antagonistic in their attitude and conduct, the Prophet (peace be upon him) prayed: O God, help me with a famine like the famine of Joseph. He thought that when the people would be afflicted with a calamity, they would remember God, their hearts would soften and they would accept the admonition. Allah granted his prayer, and the whole land was overtaken by such a terrible famine that the people were sorely distressed. At last, some of the Quraish chiefs among whom Abdullah bin Masud has particularly

mentioned the name of Abu Sufyan came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and requested him to pray to Allah to deliver his people from the calamity. On this occasion Allah sent down this Surah.

Subject Matter and Topics

The introduction to the address revealed on this occasion for the admonition and warning of the people of Makkah contained some important points, which are as follows:

1. You, O People of Makkah, are wrong in thinking that the Quran is being composed by Muhammad (peace be upon him). This Book by itself bears the clear testimony that it is not the composition of a man but of Allah, Lord of the worlds.
2. You are making a wrong estimate of the worth of this Book. You think it is a calamity that has descended on you, whereas the Hour when Allah, out of sheer mercy, decided to send His Messenger and His Book to you was highly blessed.
3. You are foolishly involved in the misunderstanding that you will fight this Messenger and this Book and will win, whereas the fact is that the Messenger has been raised and the Book sent down in that particular Hour when Allah decides the destinies, and Allah's decisions are not so weak that they may be changed to a person's liking, nor are they based on ignorance and folly that there may be the likelihood of a mistake or error or weakness in them. They are rather the firm and unalterable decisions of the Ruler of the Universe, Who is All Hearing, All Knowing and All Wise. Therefore, they cannot be treated lightly.

4. You yourselves acknowledge that Allah alone is the Master and Lord of the earth and heavens and of everything in the Universe and also admit that life and death are only in His power, yet you insist on making others your deities, for which the only argument you offer is that that had been the practice since the time of your forefathers, whereas if a person has the conviction that Allah alone is the Master, Sustainer and Giver of life and death, he can never entertain the doubt that there can also be other gods beside Him, who can be worthy of worship. If your forefathers had committed this folly, there is no reason why you also should continue committing it blindly. As a matter of fact, their Lord too was only One God, Who is your Lord, and they also should have worshiped only Him, Whom you should worship.

5. The only demand of Allah's Providence and Mercifulness is not this that He should feed you, but also this that He should arrange guidance for you. For this very guidance He has sent His Messenger and His Book.

After this introduction, the question of the famine that was raging in Makkah has been discussed. As already mentioned, this famine had occurred on the Prophet's (peace be upon him) prayer, and he had prayed for it so that when the calamity befell it would break the stubbornness of the disbelievers and then they would listen to the rebuke. It looked as if this expectation was being fulfilled to some extent, for some of the most stubborn enemies of the truth, on account of the severities of the famine, had cried out: O Lord, avert this torment from us

and we will believe. At this, on the one hand, the Prophet (peace be upon him) has been foretold: These people will not learn any lesson from such calamities. When they have turned away from the Messenger, whose life, character, works and speech clearly show that he is Allah's true Messenger, how will a mere famine help remove their disbelief? On the other hand, the unbelievers have been addressed, so as to say: You lie when you say that you will believe as soon as the torment is removed from you. We shall just remove it to see how sincere you are in your promise. There is a graver disaster about to fall upon you. You need a much more crushing blow. Minor misfortunes cannot set you right.

In this very connection, a reference has been made a little below to Pharaoh and his people, implying that those people also had met with precisely the same trial as the chiefs of the disbelieving Quraish are now afflicted. To them also a similar noble and honorable Messenger had come. They also had seen those express pointers and signs which clearly showed that he had been appointed by Allah. They also had gone on witnessing one sign after the other but they did not give up their stubbornness, till at last they made up their mind to put an end to the Messenger's life, and they met their doom, which has since become an object lesson for the people forever.

After this the theme of the Hereafter has been taken up, which the disbelievers of Makkah vehemently denied. They said: We have never seen anyone rising back to life after death. Raise our forefathers back to life if you are true in

your claim about the life Hereafter. In response to this, two arguments for the Hereafter have been presented briefly:

(1) That the denial of this creed has always proved destructive for the morals.

(2) That the universe is not a plaything of a thoughtless deity, but it is a wise system and no work of wisdom is ever vain or useless. Then the disbelievers demand to bring their forefathers back to life has been answered, thus: This cannot be done every day to meet the demand of the individuals, but Allah has appointed a time when He will resurrect all mankind simultaneously and will subject them to accountability in His court. If one has to protect himself there, one should think about it here. For, no one will be able to save himself there by his own power, nor by the power of any one else.

In connection with this court of Allah, mention has been made of the fate of those who will be declared as culprits and of the rewards of those who will be declared as successful. The discourse has been concluded with this warning: This Quran has been revealed in simple language in your own tongue so that you may understand it. Yet if you do not understand it and insist on seeing your evil end, you may wait. Our Prophet is waiting too. Whatever is to happen, will happen at its own appointed time.

1. Ha. Mim.	حَم ﴿١﴾
2. By the lucid Scripture.	وَالْكِتَابِ الْمُبِينِ ﴿٢﴾
3. Indeed, We sent it down in a blessed night. Indeed,	إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ إِنَّا

We are ever warning.*1

كُنَّا مُنذِرِينَ

*1 The meaning of taking an oath by the lucid Scripture has been explained in E.N.1 of Surah Az-Zukhruf. Here also what has been sworn by is that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is not the author of this Book but We are the author, and this Book by itself is enough to provide a proof of that. Furthermore, it has been said that the night in which it was revealed was full of blessings. That is, the foolish and ignorant people, who have no idea of their own well being or otherwise, regard the revelation of this Book as a disaster for themselves and are deeply anxious as how to get rid of it. But, as a matter of fact, the Hour when We decided to send down this Book to arouse the heedless, was highly blessed for them and for all mankind.

Some commentators have expressed the opinion that the meaning of sending down the Quran in that night is that its revelation began during that night, and some others think that the whole of the Quran was transferred from Umm-ul-Kitab and entrusted to the bearers of revelation (angels), and then revealed to the Prophet (peace be upon him) as and when required and demanded by the occasion and circumstances during 23 years. As to what actually happened Allah alone has the best knowledge.

The night implies the same night which has been called *lailat-ul-qadr* in Surah Al-Qadr, Ayat 1, There it has been said: We sent it down in a night of glory, and here: We sent it down in a blessed night. It was the night of the month of Ramadhan, as it is said in Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayat 185:

Ramadhan is the month in which the Quran was revealed.

4. Wherein is made distinct every wise command.*2

فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ

*2 The word *amr-in-hakim* as used in the text has two meanings:

(1) That the command is entirely based on wisdom: there is no likelihood of any error or weakness in it.

(2) That it is a firm and stable decision: it lies in no one's power to change it.

5. A command from Us.*3
Indeed, We are ever sending.

أَمْرًا مِّنْ عِنْدِنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ



*3 In Surah Al-Qadr, this same thing has been expressed thus: The angels and the Spirit (Angel Gabriel) descend in it with every decree, by the leave of their Lord. This shows that it is such a night in the divine administration of Allah in which He decides the destinies of the individuals and nations and countries and entrusts His decisions to His angels, who then implement them accordingly. Some commentators among whom Ikrimah is most prominent, have been involved in the misunderstanding that this is the 15th night of Shaban, for in some traditions it has been said that the destinies of people are decided during that night. But Ibn Abbas, Ibn Umar, Mujahid, Qatadah, Hasan Basri, Saeed bin Jubair, Ibn Zaid, Abu Malik, Dahhak and many other commentators agree that this is the same night of Ramadan, which has been called *lailat-ul-qadr*, for the Quran itself has stated this, and where any Quranic

statement exists, no other view can be formed on the basis of random reports. Ibn Kathir says: The traditions that Imam Zuhri has related from Uthman bin Muhammad that destinies are decided from one Shaban to the next Shaban is an indirect tradition and such traditions cannot be cited as against the clear texts of the Quran. Qadi Abu Bakr Ibn al-Arabi says: No Hadith in respect of the 15th of Shaban is reliable, either in respect of its merit, or about this that decisions with regard to the destinies are taken in it; therefore, they do not merit attention, (Ahkam ul-Quran).

6. A mercy from your Lord.^{*4}
Indeed, He is the All Hearer,
the All Knower.^{*5}

رَحْمَةً مِّن رَّبِّكَ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ
السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

^{*4} That is, it was not only a demand of wisdom to send a Messenger with this Book but also of Allah's mercy, for He is the Provider, and Provider requires that not only should arrangements be made for nourishing the servants' bodies but they should also be afforded right guidance by knowledge, that they should be made aware of the distinction between right and wrong and that they should not be left wandering in darkness.

^{*5} The object of mentioning these two attributes of Allah in this context is to warn the people of the truth that He alone can give correct knowledge for He alone knows all the realities. Not to speak of one man, even if all men join to determine a way of life for themselves, there can be no guaranty of its being the right way, for even the entire mankind together cannot become all-hearing and all-

knowing. It does not lie in its power to comprehend all those realities whose knowledge is essential for determining a correct way of life. This knowledge is only with Allah. He alone is All-Hearing and All-Knowing. Therefore, He alone can tell what is guidance for man and what is falsehood, what is the truth and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil.

7. Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them. If you believe with certainty.*⁶

رَبِّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا
بَيْنَهُمَا إِنَّكُمْ مُوقِنِينَ

*⁶ The Arabs themselves admitted that Allah alone is the Lord (Master and Provider) of the Universe and of everything in it. Therefore, it has been said to them: If you are not admitting only verbally but are really conscious of His being the Provider and are convinced of His being the Master, you should admit that:

(1) It is the very demand of His Mercifulness and Providence that He should send a Book and a Messenger for the guidance of man.

(2) It is His right as the Master and your duty as His servants that you should obey every guidance and submit to every command that comes from Him.

8. There is no god but Him.*⁷ He gives life and causes death.*⁸ Your Lord and Lord of your forefathers before.*⁹

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ
رَبُّكُمْ وَرَبُّ آبَائِكُمُ الْأَوَّلِينَ



***7** The real God Who alone has the right that He should be worshiped and served.

***8** That is, there is no god other than Allah, nor can there be. Therefore, it is against reason that you should disdain the worship of Him Who breathed life into dead matter and made you a living man. And Who possesses full powers to keep you alive as long as He likes and bring your life to an end whenever He likes. So, it is against reason that you serve any other than Him, or start worshiping others besides Him.

***9** There is a subtle allusion in it to this: He is also Lord of those of your ancestors who took other gods besides Allah; they had not done the right thing by giving up their real Lord and serving others that you should be justified in imitating them and regard their conduct as an argument for the soundness of your creed. They ought to have served only Him, because He alone is their Lord.

9. But they are in doubt, playing. ^{*10}

بَلْ هُمْ فِي شَكٍّ يَلْعَبُونَ

***10** In this brief sentence an allusion has been made to an important truth. Even atheists or polytheists do come across occasions when their being from within says: There is somewhere some weakness in the creed that we have adopted. The atheist may apparently be very firm in his denial of God, his heart at one or the other time does bear the testimony that this wonderful and wise system which extends from the particle of dust to the galaxies and from a blade of grass to the creation of man, could not come into existence without an All-Wise Designer. Likewise, a

polytheist may be deeply submerged in his polytheism, his heart also sometimes cries out: Those whom you have adopted as deities cannot be God. But this testimony of the heart neither leads the atheist nor the polytheist to the conviction about the existence and Oneness of God, nor to conviction and satisfaction about their creed of atheism and polytheism itself. Instead, their religion, in fact, is based on doubt, no matter how convinced they might appear to be of its truth. As for the question: Why doesn't this doubt make them restless and why don't they seek the truth seriously so as to obtain a satisfactory ground for their convictions? The answer is: they lack seriousness in religious matters. What they really regard as important are the worldly earnings and acquisitions and their enjoyment, in search of which they expend all their powers and abilities of the heart and mind and body. As for the religious matters, they are in fact no more than fun, a mere pastime, amusement, or a mental diversion for them, for which they cannot spare even a few moments of serious study. Religious rites are being performed as an entertainment; discussions about denial and atheism are being engaged in as an amusement. No one can spare a few moments from his worldly pursuits to consider whether he has turned away from the truth, and if so, what would be its consequences.

10. Then wait for the Day (when) the sky will bring forth a visible smoke.

فَارْتَقِبْ يَوْمَ تَأْتِي السَّمَاءُ
بِدُخَانٍ مُّبِينٍ



11. That will cover the people. This is a painful punishment.

يَغْشَى النَّاسَ هَذَا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

12. “Our Lord, relieve us of the punishment, indeed we are believers.”

رَبَّنَا اكْشِفْ عَنَّا الْعَذَابَ إِنَّا مُؤْمِنُونَ

13. How can there be for them an admonition, and indeed there has come to them a clear Messenger.*11

أَنَّى لَهُمُ الذِّكْرَى وَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ مُّبِينٌ

*11 *Rasul-i-mubin* has two meanings:

- (1) His being a Messenger is quite evident from his character, his morals and his works.
- (2) He has made every effort to make the truth plain and clear.

14. Then they turned away from him and said: “One taught (by others), a madman.”*12

ثُمَّ تَوَلَّوْا عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا مُعَلَّمٌ مَجْنُونٌ

*12 What they meant was: this was a simple man, some others have incited and deceived him. They secretly forge and teach him verses of the Quran, and he comes and recites them before the people. They sit back in peace and leave him alone to receive the abuses and be pelted with stones. They would make a mockery of all the arguments, the admonitions and the serious teachings which the

Prophet (peace be upon him) had been presenting since several years and was growing weary. Neither they paid any attention to the rational things being expressed in the Quran nor recognized the extraordinary character of the man who was presenting them, nor took any trouble to think what nonsense they were uttering when they imputed such things to the Prophet (peace be upon him). Obviously, if there had been another person who gave secret instruction to the Prophet (peace be upon him), he could not have remained hidden from Khadijah and Abu Bakr, Ali and Zaid bin Harithah and other early Muslims, who were the closest and constant companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Then, how it is that these very people only became his most devoted and dedicated followers, whereas if the business of prophethood had depended on the secret instruction of some other person, these very people would have been in the forefront to oppose him (For further explanation, see Surah An-Nahl, Ayat 103; Surah Al-Furqan, Ayats 4-6 and the corresponding E.Ns).

15. Indeed, We shall remove the punishment for a while. Indeed, you will revert.

إِنَّا كَاشِفُو الْعَذَابِ قَلِيلًا إِنَّكُمْ عَائِدُونَ

16. The Day We shall seize with the greatest seizure. Indeed, We shall take vengeance.*13

يَوْمَ نَبْطِشُ الْبَطْشَةَ الْكُبْرَىٰ إِنَّا مُنْتَقِمُونَ

*13 The commentators have seriously disputed the meaning of these verses, and the difference of opinion existed even in

the time of the companions. Masruq, the well-known student of Abdullah bin Masud, states: One day when we entered the mosque of Kufah, we saw a preacher addressing the people. He recited the verse: *Yauma tatis-sama-u bidukhan-im-mubin*, then asked: Do you know what kind of smoke it is? This smoke will appear on the Day of Resurrection and will make the disbelievers and the hypocrites blind and deaf, but the believers will be affected only to the extent as if they had caught cold. Hearing this commentary we went to Abdullah bin Masud and reported to him what the preacher had said. Abdullah at that time was lying down. On hearing this commentary he sat up startled and said: When a person does not have the knowledge, he should ask those who have it. The fact is that when the people of the Quraish went on refusing to accept Islam and continued to oppose the Prophet (peace be upon him), the Prophet (peace be upon him) prayed: O God, help me with a famine like the famine of Joseph (peace be upon him); consequently, a very severe famine overtook Makkah and the people were forced to eat bones, skins and carrion. The conditions became so bad that whoever looked up to the sky would see nothing but smoke due to intensity of hunger. At last, Abu Sufyan came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: You tell the people to treat their kindred kindly, your own people are starving, kindly pray to God to remove this calamity. This was the time when the people of the Quraish had started saying: O God, if You remove this torment from us, we will believe. This same event has been referred to in these verses; and the severest

blow implies the calamity that was inflicted on the Quraish in the Battle of Badr. This tradition has been related by Imam Ahmad, Bukhari Tirmidhi, Nasai, Ibn Jarir and Ibn Abi Hatim from Masruq with several chains of authorities. Besides Masruq, Ibrahim Nakhai Qatadah, Asim and Amir have also related that Abdullah bin Masud had given the same commentary of this verse. Therefore there cannot be any doubt that Ibn Masud actually held this same opinion. Among the immediate followers of the companions, Mujahid, Qatadah. Abul Aliyah, Muqatil, Ibrahim Nakhai, Dahhak and Atiyyah al-Aufi and others have also concurred with Ibn Masud in this commentary.

On the contrary, scholars like Ali, Ibn Umar, Ibn Abbas, Abu Saeed Khudri, Zaid bin Ali, and Hasan Basri say that in these verses mention has been made of the time just before Resurrection, and the smoke that has been foretold will envelop the earth at that time. This commentary is further strengthened by the traditions that have been reported from the Prophet (peace be upon him). Hudhaifah bin Asid al-Ghifari says: One day when we were talking about Resurrection, the Prophet (peace be upon him) came out to us and said: Resurrection will not be established till ten signs have appeared one after the other: Rising of the sun in the west, smoke, the beast, emergence of Gog and Magog, descent of Jesus son of Mary, sinking of the earth in the East, in the West and in the Arabian Peninsula, and the appearance of a fire from Yemen, which will drive the people away. (Muslim) This is confirmed by Abu Malik Ashari's tradition which has been related by Ibn Jarir and

Tabarani, and Abu Said Khudri's tradition which has been related by Ibn Abi Hatim. Both these traditions show that the Prophet (peace be upon him) regarded the smoke as one of the signs of Resurrection and also said that when that smoke will spread, it will affect the believer only like a cold, but will infuse every nerve of the disbeliever and come out from every part of his body.

A study of the verses under consideration can remove the disparity between the two commentaries. As for the commentary of Abdullah bin Masud, it is a fact that a severe famine had hit Makkah resulting from the Prophet's (peace be upon him) prayer and it had unnerved the disbelievers considerably and they had requested the Prophet (peace be upon him) to pray for its removal, as referred to at several places in the Quran. (See Surah Al-Anaam, Ayat 43; Surah Al-Aaraf, Ayats 94-95; Surah Yunus, Ayat 21; Surah Al-Muminun, Ayats 75-77 and the corresponding E.Ns). In these verses also there is a clear pointer to the same conditions. The disbeliever are saying: Our Lord, remove this torment from us, we will believe. Allah is saying: How can they rid themselves of their heedlessness? Even when a manifest Messenger came to them, they paid no heed to him, and said: He is a madman taught by others. Then Allah is saying: Were We to remove the torment a little, you would revert to the same that you were doing before. All this can be relevant only if it refers to the conditions of the Prophet's (peace be upon him) time. To apply them to what will happen near the time of Resurrection, is not correct. Therefore, in view of this,

Abdullah bin Masud's commentary seems to be correct, but its this part that "the smoke" also had appeared in that very time, in that when the people in their extreme state of hunger looked up to the sky, they could see nothing but smoke, does not seem to be correct. It also does not conform to the apparent words of the Quran and is against the traditions as well. The Quran does not say: The sky brought forth the smoke and it spread over the people; but it says: Wait for the day when the sky will appear with a visible smoke, and it will envelop mankind. A study of the subsequent verses clearly points to this meaning: When you do not believe even after the Messenger's admonition, nor take heed from the warning given in the shape of the famine, then you should wait for Resurrection. At that time when you see your doom confronting you, you will fully realize what was the truth and what was falsehood. Therefore, as for the smoke, the correct view is that it has nothing to do with the time of the famine, but it is a sign of Resurrection and the same is also confirmed by the Hadith.

17. And indeed, We tried before them Pharaoh's people, and there came to them a noble messenger.*14

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمَ
فِرْعَوْنَ وَجَاءَهُمْ رَسُولٌ
كَرِيمٌ

*14 The words *rasul-un karim* in the original imply a man who is characterized with most noble traits of character and highly praiseworthy qualities.

18. “That^{*15} render to me the slaves of Allah.^{*16} Indeed, I am to you a messenger, trustworthy.”^{*17}

أَنْ أَدُّوْا إِلَيَّ عِبَادَ اللَّهِ^ص إِيَّيْكُمْ
رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ

***15** One should note that the sayings of the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) being cited here, are not parts of a continuous address delivered by him at any one time, but they are a summary in a few sentences of what he said to Pharaoh and his courtiers on different occasions during many years. (For the details, see Surah Al-Aaraf, Ayats 103-136; Surah Younus, Ayats 75-92; Surah TaHa, Ayats 45-76; Surah Ash-Shuara, Ayats 10-68; Surah An-Naml, Ayats 7-14; Surah AlQasas, Ayats 32-42; Surah Al-Mumin, Ayats 23-46; Surah Az-Zukhruf, Ayats 46-56; and the corresponding E.Ns.)

***16** That is, leave the children of Israel to go with me. This demand is synonymous with the demand made in Surah Al-Aaraf, Ayat 105; Surah TaHa, Ayat 47 and Surah Ash-Shurra, Ayat 17. Another translation that has been reported from Abdullah ibn Abbas is: Servants of Allah, fulfill my right, i.e. accept what I say, believe in me, follow my guidance. This is my right on you from Allah. The following sentence: I am a trustworthy Messenger to you is more in keeping with the second meaning.

***17** That is, I am a reliable Messenger: I do not forge anything from myself, nor am I the one who would present something based on personal interest or desire, or forge a command or law, in the name of Allah. Rest assured that I shall convey to you intact only that which my Sender has

commanded. It should be noted that these two sentences belong to the time when the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) first started preaching Allah's message.

19. "And that exalt not against Allah. Indeed, I bring to you a manifest authority."*18

وَأَنْ لَا تَعْلُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ ^ص إِنِّي
ءَاتِيكُمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٩﴾

*18 In other words, it means: Your rebellion against me is in fact rebellion against Allah, for what annoys you is not what I say but what Allah says, and I only present those things as His Messenger. If you doubt whether I have really been sent by Hun or not, I present before you a clear authority of my appointment from Allah. This authority does not imply any one miracle but a long series of the miracles which the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) continued to show to Pharaoh and his people for years since the time he came in the court of Pharaoh till his last days in Egypt. Whatever sign they denied, was followed up by a greater sign of authority by him. (For explanation, see E.Ns 42, 43 of Surah Az-Zukhruf).

20. "And indeed, I seek refuge in my Lord and your Lord lest you stone me."

وَإِنِّي عُدْتُ بِرَبِّي وَرَبِّكُمْ أَنْ
تَرْجُمُونِ ﴿٢٠﴾

21. "And if you do not believe in me, then leave me alone."*19

وَإِنْ لَمْ تُؤْمِنُوا لِي فَأَعْرِضُونِ ﴿٢١﴾

*19 This was said at the time when, as against all the signs

presented by the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him), Pharaoh was still showing stubbornness, but was feeling upset and confounded at the realization that all classes of the Egyptian society were rapidly being influenced by those signs. In that period, first of all he made the speech before his packed court as mentioned in verses 51-53 of Surah Az-Zukhruf (see E.Ns 45 to 49), then, when he felt the ground slipping from under his feet, he made up his mind to kill Allah's Messenger. At that time the Prophet (peace be upon him) said the words as mentioned in Surah Al-Mumin, Ayat 27 to the effect: I have taken refuge in my Lord and your Lord against every arrogant person who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning. Here, the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) is referring to that same thing and telling Pharaoh and his chiefs: Look, I have sought Allah's refuge against all sorts of violence from you, now you cannot harm me. But if you wish yourselves well, do not harm me. If you do not want to believe what I say, you may not, but you should never lay your hands on me, otherwise you will meet with catastrophic consequences.

22. So he called upon his Lord, (saying): "Indeed, these are the people who are criminals."^{*20}

فَدَعَا رَبَّهُ أَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ قَوْمٌ
مُجْرِمُونَ



*20 This is the final report that the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) presented before his Lord, saying: These are the people who are criminals. That is, their being the criminals has been confirmed finally and absolutely. They have exhausted every chance of concession and respite for

reformation. It is time that the final fatal decision be passed against them.

23. (Allah said): “Then set out with My servants by night.*²¹ Indeed, you will be followed.”*²²

فَأَسْرِ بِعِبَادِي لَيْلًا إِنَّكُمْ
مُتَّبَعُونَ



***21** With my servants: With all those people who have believed, including both the Israelites and the Egyptian Copts who had become Muslims since the time of the Prophet Joseph till that of the Prophet Moses (peace be upon them), and those also who had been influenced by the signs shown by Moses (peace be upon him) and His preaching and accepted Islam from among the Egyptians. (For explanation, see Surah Yousuf: E.N. 68).

***22** This was the initial command given to the prophet Moses (peace be upon him) for the migration. (For explanation, see Surah TaHa, Ayat 77; Surah Ash-Shuara, Ayats 52-68 and the corresponding E.Ns).

24. “And leave the sea at rest. Indeed, they are a host to be drowned.”*²³

وَأَتْرِكِ الْبَحْرَ رَهَوًّا إِنَّهُمْ
مُغْرَقُونَ



***23** This command was given when the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) had crossed the sea along with his caravan and wanted that he should restore the sea to its former state by smiting it with the staff so that Pharaoh and his hosts should not pursue them on the dry path created by the miracle. At that times it was said: Leave the sea divided as it is, so that Pharaoh and his armies should

descend into it. Then the sea will be restored and they will be drowned all together.

25. How many they left behind, of gardens, and water springs.

كَمْ تَرَكُوا مِنْ جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ



26. And crops and noble sites.

وَزُرُوعٍ وَمَقَامٍ كَرِيمٍ



27. And pleasant things wherein they took delight.

وَنَعْمَةٍ كَانُوا فِيهَا فَيَكْهِنُونَ



28. Thus, and We made it an inheritance for other people.*24

كَذَلِكَ وَأَوْرَثْنَاهَا قَوْمًا آخَرِينَ



*24 Hasan Basri says that “other people” here implies the children of Israel, whom Allah made heirs of the land of Egypt after Pharaoh’s people, and Qatadah says it implies the other people who inherited Egypt after the people of Pharaoh, for the history does not make any mention that the Israelites ever returned to Egypt after the exodus and inherited it. This same point has been disputed by the later commentators also. (For a detailed discussion, see Surah Ash Shuara, Ayats 57-59 and the E.Ns on it).

29. So the heaven and the earth wept not for them, and they were not given any respite.*25

فَمَا بَكَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّمَاءُ

وَالْأَرْضُ وَمَا كَانُوا مُنظَرِينَ



*25 That is, when they were the rulers, they were known

for their glory and grandeur, hymns were sung of their praise, flatterers flattered them to such an extent as if the whole world was devoted to them for their excellences and indebted to them for their favors and there was none more popular in the world than they. But when they fell, there was none to shed a tear on their fall, rather the world felt relieved that a cause of distress had been removed. Obviously, they had neither done any good to the people that the dwellers of the earth might weep on them, nor anything for the sake of Allah's pleasure that the dwellers of the heavens might grieve over their ruin. As long as Allah continued to give them respite by His will, they enjoyed life as they pleased; but when they transgressed all limits in their crimes, they were cast aside like rubbish.

30. And indeed, We saved the Children of Israel from the humiliating punishment.

وَلَقَدْ نَجَّيْنَا بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ مِنَ
الْعَذَابِ الْمُهِينِ

31. From Pharaoh.^{*26} Indeed, he was an arrogant among the transgressors.^{*27}

مِن فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ كَانَ عَلِيًّا
مِّن الْمُسْرِفِينَ

***26** That is, Pharaoh by himself was an abasing torment for them and all other torments were indeed offshoots of the same great torment.

***27** There is a subtle satire in it on the chiefs of the disbelieving Quraish. It means to say this: You do not enjoy any place of distinction among the transgressors against Allah. Pharaoh indeed was a rebel of the highest order who

was ruling on the throne of the largest kingdom of the time as a god. When he was swept away like straw, how can you prevent the divine wrath?

32. And indeed, We chose them by knowledge above the nations.*28

وَلَقَدْ آخَرْنَا نَهُمْ عَلَىٰ عِلْمٍ عَلَىٰ
الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٣٣﴾

*28 That is, Allah was well aware both of the qualities and of the weaknesses of the children of Israel. He had not chosen them blindly. For when he chose them from among the contemporary nations to become the standard bearers of His message and His Tauhid, they were the most suitable people in His knowledge for the purpose.

33. And We gave them of signs that in which there was a manifest trial.*29

وَأَاتَيْنَاهُمْ مِّنَ الْآيَاتِ مَا فِيهِ
بَلَاءٌ مُّبِينٌ ﴿٣٣﴾

*29 For explanation, see Surah Al-Baqarah, Ayats 49-74; Surah An-Nisa, Ayats 153-160; Surah Al-Maidah, Ayats 20-26; Surah Al-Aaraf, Ayats 138-171; Surah TaHa, Ayats 80-97 and the corresponding E.Ns.

34. Indeed, these are saying:

إِنَّ هَٰؤُلَاءِ لَيَقُولُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

35. “There is nothing except our first death, and we shall not be raised again.”*30

إِنَّ هِيَ إِلَّا مَوْتَتُنَا الْأُولَىٰ وَمَا
نَحْنُ بِمُنشَرِينَ ﴿٣٥﴾

*30 That is, when we die the first time, we shall be

annihilated: there will be no other life after that.

36. “So bring (back) our forefathers, if you are truthful.”^{*31}

فَاتُوا بِآبَائِنَا إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ



***31** This was their reasoning: We have never seen a dead person resurrected to life. Therefore, we believe that there will be no other life after death. If you claim that there will be another life, then resurrect our forefathers from their graves, so that we are convinced of the life after death. If you do not do this, we would think that your claim is false. This was, as they thought, a very strong argument for the refutation of life after death, whereas it was absurd. Nobody had told them that the dead would return to this very world after being raised back to life, nor the Prophet (peace be upon him), nor any Muslim had ever claimed that he could raise the dead back to life.

37. Are they better, or the people of Tubba^{*32} and those before them. We destroyed them. Indeed, they were criminals.^{*33}

أَهُمْ خَيْرٌ أَمْ قَوْمُ تُبَعِّعٍ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ أَهْلَكْنَاهُمْ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا



***32** Tubba was the title of the kings of the Himyarites, like the titles of Khosroes, Caesar, Pharaoh etc. which have been associated with the kings of different countries. They were a branch of the Sabaeans, who attained domination over Saba in 115 B.C. and ruled it until 300 A.D. They have

been a well known people of Arabia for centuries. (For details, see E.N. 37 of Surah Saba).

***33** This is the first answer to the disbelievers' objection; it means: Any individual group or nation which denies the Hereafter becomes criminal. Perversion of the morals is its inevitable result, and human history bears evidence that whichever nation adopted this view of life ultimately perished. As for the question: Are they better or the people of Tubba or the people before them? It means this: The disbelievers of Makkah have not been able to attain to the prosperity and splendor that became the lot of the people of Tubba and of the people of Saba and of the people of Pharaoh and others before them. But this material prosperity and worldly splendor could not save them from the consequences of their moral degeneration. How will then the chiefs of the Quraish be saved from destruction on the strength of their puny resources and wealth? (For details, see E.Ns 25 to 36 of Surah Saba).

38. And We created not the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, for play.

وَمَا خَلَقْنَا السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ
وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا لَعِبِينَ

39. We did not create them except with truth, but most of them do not know. ^{*34}

مَا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَكِنَّ
أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

***34** This is the second answer to their objection; it means: Whoever denies life after death and the rewards and punishments of the hereafter, in fact, regards this world as

a plaything. This is why he has formed the view that man, after raising all sorts of the storms in the world, will end up in the dust one day and none of his good or bad acts will bear any fruit. The fact, however, is that this universe is the creation of an All-Wise Creator and not of a frivolous being, and it cannot be expected from an All-Wise Creator that he would perform a useless and vain act. (For a detailed explanation, see Surah Al-Anaam, Ayat 73; Surah Yunus, Ayats 5-6; Surah Al-Anbiya, Ayats 16-18; Surah Al-Muminun, Ayat 115; Surah Ar-Room, Ayats 8-9 and the corresponding E.Ns).

40. Indeed, the Day of Decision^{*35} is the time appointed for them all.

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ مِيقَاتُهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ



***35** This is the answer to their demand: Bring back our forefathers if you are truthful. It means: Life-after-death is not a trivial matter, it cannot be that whenever somebody denies it, a dead person may be raised immediately from the graveyard and presented before him. For it a time has been fixed by the Lord of the worlds, when He will resurrect to life all the former and the latter generations, gather them together in His court and will decide their cases. You may believe in it or may not, but this will in any case happen on its own pre-ordained time. If you believe in it, it will be to your own advantage, for, being forewarned, you will make preparations to fare well in that court. If you do not believe in it, you will incur loss for yourselves, for you will spend your whole life in the misunderstanding that

good and evil are confined only to this worldly life; after death there is going to be no court where our good or bad deeds might have to be judged for any permanent results.

41. The day when a friend cannot avail a friend anything,^{*36} nor will they be helped.

يَوْمَ لَا يُغْنِي مَوْلَى عَنْ مَوْلَى
شَيْئًا وَلَا هُمْ يُنصَرُونَ

*36 The Arabic word *maula* is used for a person who supports another person either because of kinship, or friendship, or some other relationship.

42. Except him on whom Allah has mercy. Indeed, He is the All Mighty, the Most Merciful.^{*37}

إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ
الرَّحِيمُ

*37 These sentences portray the nature of the court that will be established on the Day of Decision. It will be a court where nobody's help or support will help rescue any culprit nor have his sentence reduced. All powers will rest with the real Sovereign Whose decisions cannot be withheld from being enforced nor influenced by any power. It will entirely depend on His own discretion whether He forgives somebody mercifully, or awards him a lesser punishment. It indeed behooves Him to exercise justice mercifully and not mercilessly, but whatever decision He gives in any case, will be enforced entirely and completely. After this portrayal of the nature of the divine court, in the following few sentences it has been stated what will be the fate of those who will be found guilty in that court, and what will be conferred on those about whom it will be established

that they had been refraining from Allah's disobedience in the world out of fear of Him.

43. Indeed, the tree of zaqqum.^{*38}

إِنَّ شَجَرَتَ الزَّقُّومِ ﴿٤٣﴾

*38 For details of *zaqqum*, see E.N. 34 of Surah As-Saaffat.

44. The food for the sinner.

طَعَامُ الْأَثِيمِ ﴿٤٤﴾

45. Like boiling oil,^{*39} it will boil in the bellies.

كَالْمُهْلِ يَغْلِي فِي الْبُطُونِ ﴿٤٥﴾

*39 The word *al-muhl* in the original has several meanings: molten metal, pus-blood, molten tar, lava, dregs of oil. These are the different meanings given by the lexicographers and commentators, but if this word is understood with reference to *zaqqum* (cactus), it may mean its juice which will probably be like the dregs of oil.

46. Like the boiling of scalding water.

كَغَلِي الْحَمِيمِ ﴿٤٦﴾

47. "Seize him and drag him into the midst of hell."

خُذُوهُ فَاعْتَلُوهُ إِلَىٰ سَوَاءِ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿٤٧﴾

48. "Then pour upon his head the punishment of scalding water."

ثُمَّ صُبُّوا فَوْقَ رَأْسِهِ مِنْ عَذَابِ الْحَمِيمِ ﴿٤٨﴾

49. "Taste. Indeed, you were the mighty, the noble."

ذُقْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْكَرِيمُ ﴿٤٩﴾

50. “Indeed, this is what you used to doubt.”

إِنَّ هَذَا مَا كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تَمْتَرُونَ



51. Indeed, the righteous will be in a place secured.*40

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي مَقَامٍ أَمِينٍ



*40 A secure place: A place safe from every kind of fear, grief, worry and danger, hardship and trouble. According to a Hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said: It will be proclaimed to the dwellers of Paradise: You will remain in good health, will never fall ill, will live forever, will never die, will ever remain happy and prosperous and will never meet with a misfortune, will ever remain youthful, will never become old. (Muslim, on the authority of Abu Hurairah and Abu Saeed Khudri).

52. Amid gardens and springs.

فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَعُيُونٍ



53. Dressed in silk and silk embroidery,*41 facing each other.

يَلْبَسُونَ مِنْ سُندُسٍ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٍ



مُتَقَابِلِينَ

*41 *Sundus* and *istabraq* in the original are fine silk cloth and thick silk cloth respectively.

54. Thus. And We shall marry them to fair ones with lovely eyes.*42

كَذَلِكَ وَزَوَّجْنَاهُمْ بِحُورٍ عِينٍ



*42 In the original, *hur-un ein* means fair complexioned, large-eyed women. (For further explanation, see E.Ns 26,29)

of Surah As-Saaffat).

55. They will call therein for every (kind of) fruit in safety.*43

يَدْعُونَ فِيهَا بِكُلِّ فَاكِهَةٍ
ءَامِنِينَ

*43 That is, they will order the attendants in Paradise to bring anything they would like in any measure they would demand, and it will be presented before them. In this world, a man cannot ask for a thing in an inn, or even his own things in his own house, with the freedom and satisfaction as he will ask for these in Paradise. For, in the world nothing is found anywhere in unlimited measure, whatever man uses here, he has to pay for it. In Paradise, things will belong to Allah, and the servants will enjoy full freedom to use them. Neither will there be the danger of the failure of the supply, nor the necessity of a bill to pay.

56. They will not taste death therein except the first death (of this world). And He will save them from the punishment of the blazing Fire.*44

لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا الْمَوْتَ
إِلَّا الْمَوْتَ الْأُولَىٰ
وَوَقَّاهُمْ
عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ

*44 Two things are worthy of notice in this verse. First, after mentioning the blessings of Paradise, special mention has been made of being secure from Hell separately whereas a person's entry into Paradise by itself amounts to his being safe from Hell. This is because man can feel the worth of the reward of obedience fully only when he is informed what end the disobedient people have

met and from what evil end he himself has been saved. Secondly, Allah is mentioning those people's safety from Hell and their entry into Paradise as a result of His own grace. This is meant to warn man of the truth that this success cannot be achieved by any person unless he is blessed by Allah's grace. Although man will be rewarded for his own good deeds, in the first place he cannot do good unless favored by Allah's succor; then even the best deed that man is able to perform, cannot be absolutely perfect and none can claim that it is flawless and faultless. It is only Allah's bounty that He should overlook the servant's weaknesses and defects in his actions and accept his services and bless him with rewards; otherwise if He resorts to minute accountability, no one can dare claim to win Paradise only on the strength of his own deeds. The same thing has been said by the Prophet (peace be upon him) in a Hadith to the effect: Act and try to act as righteously as you possibly can, but know that the action of a person alone will not make him enter Paradise. It was asked: What about your own action, O Messenger of Allah? He replied: Yes, even I won't enter Paradise on the strength of my actions, unless of course, my Lord covers me up in His mercy.

57. A bounty from your Lord. That is the supreme triumph.

فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكَ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ
الْعَظِيمُ

58. Then indeed, We have made this (Quran) easy in

فَإِنَّمَا يَسَّرْنَاهُ بِلِسَانِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ

your tongue, that they may remember.

يَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

59. Wait then (O Muhammad). Indeed, they (too) are waiting.^{*45}

فَأَرْتَقِبْ إِنَّهُمْ مُّرْتَقِبُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

***45** That is, if they do not accept the admonition even now, you should wait to see how they are visited by their doom; and they are also waiting to see what becomes of the message that you are giving them.

