Summary of Juz 18

Surat al-Muminun - The Believers

Juz 18 opens with Surat al-Muminun, the central theme is faith in Allah and the resurrection. Both are interwoven into the purpose of life. This explains why a true believer is contemplative and socially active, unlike the "armchair" believer. The true believer is faithful, generous, responsible and humble. Avoids useless pursuits and is sexually pure. Honours contracts and yearns for closeness to the Divine. These traits reflect true faith, a generous spirit and firm conscience. A tranquil soul is ready to produce good works. This is the description of the truthful and self-sacrificing soul. The reward is Paradise.

Then follows a catalogue of proofs in the universe of Allah's creative power. The seven stages of fetal development in the mother's womb are vividly presented, like an ultrasound scan. This is followed by a history of disobedience and humanity's rejection of many prophets. The disbeliever's seven traits are that they believe Prophets are only human and there is no life after death. They show nothing but contempt for the prophets, rely on false hopes and even hate the truth. They are stubborn and follow their whims.

Their criticism of the prophets is rejected as baseless, arising from their arrogance and confusion. They doggedly follow their whims. The life stories of some prophets inform the blessed Messenger ﷺ that the Makkans are behaving like the ancient people. (23-80). It points to the unity of the universal message of the prophets.

The disbelievers frequently called for the punishment to come quickly, but such demands were rejected. Allah gives them time to reform. Those who continued asking for miracles were also refused and told to use their Allah-given faculties of hearing, seeing and feeling. Finally, they were cautioned against the severe punishment of Hell.

Three questions are asked: "Who owns the earth?"; "Who is the Lord of the Seven Heavens?"; and "In whose hands lies the control of all things?". Their response is "Allah", so they're asked why not accept the resurrection? The Surah concludes by highlighting the success that awaits believers and reiterates the purpose of life as a time of preparation for the Hereafter (109-118).

Surat Al-Nur – The light

Juz 18 continues with Surat Al-Nur, revealed in Madinah in 5 AH. The central theme is social manners. The aim is to lay down firm foundations for building relationships between men and women based on modesty and respect. The penalty for adultery and slander against innocent people is given. There is a severe penalty for adultery. The mixing of men and women is proscribed. Hijab is the principle of modesty and includes behaviour as well as the dress code for men and women. Personal privacy inside and outside the home is sacred. These rules aim to develop a pure and decent environment, free of sexual exploitation. If sexuality is not controlled, it can cause disorder in family life and chaos in the wider society. These rules are powerful preventative measures that restrict shameful behaviour. Ignoring them leads to the spread of all kinds of sexual exploitation, indecency, pornography and prostitution.

The story of the false accusation against Aisha - the Mother of the Believers - highlights the importance of these social regulations. The story concludes by declaring her innocence and recommends six social rules; don't spread rumours, punish those who spread indecency, forgive, ask permission to enter houses, hijab for women in public and support single people to get married.

The parable of 'light' (35) brings us to Allah's guidance. In this parable the niche is the human heart, the lamp the Quranic guidance, the glass is the human intellect and the olive oil, the emotions. The example shows every person has the potential to accept the truth. Indeed, there is an inherent desire to know the truth. Like petrol, a spark can set it aflame. So, whenever the Divine guidance (the light) is presented, a person is moved to accept it. As we witness marvellous phenomena in the physical world, such as rain, rainbows and earthquakes, we are filled with awe that leads to belief in Him and we yearn for guidance.

Then an example of the disbeliever is given. He thinks and behaves well, has morals and manners that are pleasing. He believes he would reap the full reward for his deeds. What he fails to realise is that in a state of disbelief his deeds are worthless and have no spiritual value. Like a lonely, thirsty traveller he sees a glimmer of water in the distance, so he runs towards it. There he finds nothing because it was just an illusion. There is another type of disbeliever who is engrossed in the world, drowned in lust and the pursuit of wealth and status. He's sunk in hedonistic pleasures, lives in the pitch darkness of self-indulgence. He can't receive the light. The example describes the four layers of darkness: the darkness of the night; the cover of the clouds; the depth of the sea and tides upon tides. However, the disbelievers are told, "Anyone Allah deprives of light, shall have no light" (40). This spiritual passage comes in the middle of a legal discussion, the point being made is that religious laws are only meaningful and effective if Allah is at the centre of them. This is followed by a passage that stresses the power of the Almighty, and why we need to observe His rules. Devout believers are promised; "He will indeed make them successors on land as he made those before you successors" (55).

Four more social manners are pronounced. Visiting others, concessions in Hijab for mature women, eating together and the company of the Messenger ﷺ. The Surah concludes with a stern warning, "Let those who oppose His orders be aware, lest they are afflicted by suffering or receive painful punishment" (61).

Surat al-Furqan - The Benchmark for Right and Wrong

Juz 18 continues with Surat al-Furqan. It opens by declaring the power and might of the exalted Lord, the Controller of the universe. Then provides the arguments for the Oneness of God (Tawhid), the communication of His Message (Risala) and life after death (Akhira). These beliefs were most at odds with pagan beliefs.

In Makkah, the Messenger ﷺ was constantly criticised. The Makkans were puzzled as to why the Quran was revealed gradually, rather than all at once. They accused the Messenger ﷺ of lying and argued that he was merely telling stories of the ancient people. Similarly, they targeted his person, why would a messenger of Allah be a mere mortal?