

Summary of Juz 20

Surat Al-Naml continued

A question is asked, who saves you when you are in hardship? Another section follows in which the question of the creator is raised, is there another God besides Allah? They accept Allah is the absolute creator with immense knowledge. So, why not believe? A mysterious creature is mentioned: "When the judgement against them comes to pass, We shall bring out a creature from the Earth that will speak to them; indeed people did not believe in our signs" (82). It is the prediction of the Quran and the books of hadith that hint when this creature comes it will trigger the beginning of the end of the world.

Surat Al-Qasas - The Story

Juz 20 continues with Surat Al-Qasas. It was revealed before the Ascension of the Prophet ﷺ in the 10th year of his mission. It relates several stories from the life of Musa to show that history keeps repeating itself. A convincing consolation for the Messenger ﷺ and his followers. It opens by describing the Pharaoh oppressing the Israelites, and his policy of "divide and rule". This is a story of the survival of baby Musa at a time of Pharaoh's policy to kill all newborns. The Pharaoh, Ramses II ruled Egypt in the thirteenth century BC. Allah protected Musa and nurtured him in the opulent palace of the Pharaoh. The story highlights the weakness of a worldly king, who is unable to distinguish between friend and foe, yet claims to be an "Almighty god".

Next, Musa kills an Egyptian in self-defence of an Israelite. Musa is nearly arrested but manages to escape. He hurriedly leaves Egypt and travels to Madyan in the Arabian Desert. He is given asylum by an elderly man. Musa agrees to live and work for him in return for marriage to his daughter. Musa, who had been raised as a prince in a palace, now becomes a poor shepherd in the desert - a sharp contrast in lifestyle. The Divine Plan has its own way of unfolding reality. As a shepherd, Musa was being trained for the role of leadership. Looking after a flock of sheep is not much different from caring for a complaining and undisciplined community.

After ten years, Musa returns to Egypt. On the way, he passes Mount Sinai, where he is commissioned as a prophet to invite the Pharaoh to accept guidance. After relating his story in detail, the Quran reminds the Prophet ﷺ, "You weren't present on the western side of the mountain when we ordained Musa with the Commandments" (44). The Quran asks, isn't this proof the Prophet ﷺ receives revelation.

The Quran rejects the request of the Makkans for a written Quran and reminds them Musa had the Torah written on tablets, but still, people denied it. However, the Quran goes on to praise those people who believed in it from the Arabs, the Jews and the Christians: (53-54).

After a lengthy commentary that describes the fate of the idolaters in the Hereafter, (54-75) the Surah returns to the story of Musa with an account of Qarun, the wealthiest Israelite in Egypt. It describes his pompous lifestyle, his miserly attitude and pride. The stories of Pharaoh and Qarun, expose the human craving for worldly power and wealth and contrast them with Musa's humble efforts. The cold-hearted way Pharaoh maintained a tight grip on his people and the miserliness of Qarun show human greed at its worst. He ascribed his wealth to his knowledge and expertise in business and prudence in worldly affairs. Similarly, the leaders of Makkah refused to believe, like them, they feared losing control of the Kaaba and the wealth it brought. Such reasoning continues today, as many of us fail to live by the Quran due to fear of worldly losses.

Surat al-Ankabut - The Spider

Juz 20 continues with Surat al-Ankabut. This is the last surah revealed in Makkah. Its confrontational character is tempered by rational and historical evidence warning the people of Makkah against their folly. The intense persecution made it dangerous to be followers of the beloved Messenger ﷺ. The Surah opens with a reminder to the believers that life is full of tests and success comes by passing them. The reward for jihad, hard work and tireless effort is victory. What lies between the two ends are details and processes for achieving success.

The central theme is the constant confrontation between belief and disbelief - truth and falsehood, symbolised by the antagonism between Ibrahim and Nimrod; the tussle between Musa and Pharaoh, and the struggle between Nuh and his people. So, the Prophet ﷺ is encouraged to face the hostility from the likes of Abu Jahl and Abu Lahab.

The metaphor of the spider's web is used to convey the weak nature of worldly power, in contrast to the enduring nature of Allah's religion. The Quran says, "An example of people who take supporters beside Allah is like a spider making a web. Indeed, the weakest of homes is a spider's web" (41). Sharp criticism of idolatry, love of the world and denial of the truth. But what is at stake is so precious, that the Quran employs such devices to awaken the dead conscience of idolaters and people drunk with the material world.