

Summary of Juz 21

Surat al-Ankabut continued

The Juz opens with two instructions; perform the prayer regularly and be polite. The prayer is a protector, "recite what is revealed to you from the Book and perform the prayer; indeed, the prayer protects from indecency and evil. Allah's remembrance is greatest! Allah knows what you are doing. Do not argue with the People of the Book; be polite" (45-46).

Surat al-Rum - The Romans

Juz 21 then, continues with Surat al-Rum. This was revealed in the fifth year of the mission of the Prophet ﷺ, at a time when tensions between the Muslims and the Quraysh were problematic. The Surah opens with a remarkable prediction: "The Romans were defeated in a nearby country, but within a few years of their defeat they will be victorious." (2-4). In 615 CE, the Persians defeated the Romans. Their defeat made the Quraysh happy. They saw it as an omen that the Muslims who were closer to the Christians would be defeated too. The idea that the Romans would recover from this terrible defeat was not credible to the Quraysh. However, the Quran predicted otherwise and indeed the Quranic prediction was fulfilled on the same day as the Battle of Badr (624 CE).

The central theme of the Surah is the creative power of Allah that reinforces the belief in the resurrection. It explains the underlying problem with the disbelievers' materialistic mindset, "They know the outward nature of this worldly life well but are ignorant of life Hereafter" (7).

Fitrah is the natural human state: "Stand firmly for the religion of Islam dedicated only to Allah. This is the natural human character; all humanity is created with it" (30). This is the human potential that flourishes when Islamic teachings are practised. It is the inborn, intuitive ability to discern between right and wrong, true and false, and sense God's existence and oneness (Asad). A positive, pure and near-perfect vision of humanity and a far cry from Thomas Hobbes image of beastly, brutal and selfish humanity.

We can't fail to see all around us wonderful and awesome signs that point to Allah's creative power. Some are brought to our attention: the creation of humanity from the elements, the love between husband and wife, differences in language and people's colour, the functions of night and day, the lightning and the winds. These natural phenomena point to their Creator, and the Quran urges readers to progress onto the next stage - recognise Allah as the Creator, worthy of worship.

The second prediction of this Surah is "Corruption has appeared on land and sea, an outcome of people's actions, so they may taste something of the fruits of their actions" (41). A possible reference to the environmental crisis we face today.

A third remarkable prediction is "On the Day of the Final Hour, the guilty will swear, they didn't stay on Earth but an hour; that's how they were deceived in worldly life. Those who were given knowledge and faith will say, "You were slow in accepting what Allah has revealed until the Day of Resurrection; this is the Day of Resurrection" (55-56). This foretells that Islam will continue

until the end of time and the true believers will be on earth till the Last Day. Good news, that despite setbacks, the Ummah will flourish.

The Messenger ﷺ is given encouraging advice: "Therefore, be patient. Indeed, Allah's promise is true, so let not the disbelievers frighten you" (60). The Surah closes with a positive message just as it opened with a prediction.

Surat Luqman - Luqman the Wise

Surat Luqman is next in Juz 21. Luqman was a legendary sage, a black Nubian and a wise man from Southern Egypt. By narrating his polite and instructive teachings, the Quran is promoting diversity of cultures, races and languages. The Surah opens with a vivid description of the 'devout Muslim': he benefits from the teachings of the Quran; stays away from useless activities that distract from the worship of Allah.

Sometimes the blessed Messenger ﷺ would teach the Quran sitting around the Kaaba, a Makkan storyteller, Nadhar ibn Harith, would also gather people around him to entertain them with Persian stories and dancers. The Quran condemned him.

People enjoy Allah's visible and invisible gifts so, "What have the idols created?" Luqman teaches his son the truthful beliefs about Allah, how to worship Him, how to behave justly with others, especially parents, and how to be humble. The final passage describes the natural world and several signs of Allah's creative power and contrasts it with human feebleness.

Surat al-Sajda - the Prostration

Juz 21 continues with Surat al-Sajda. At a time when debates raged about three key beliefs of Islam. The Surah opens with a confident assertion that refutes the disbeliever's objection that Muhammad ﷺ fabricated his message. The central theme is that Allah, the Supreme Ruler, the Absolute Governor and Commander, has full control. The disbelievers are warned of the punishment to be meted out, not only in the Hereafter but in this life. When they see Hellfire they will believe, but it will be too late then. On the other hand, the unimaginable delights awaiting the believers are highlighted to motivate people: "No one knows what blissful delights are hidden for them as a reward" (17).

Finally, the Prophet ﷺ is likened to Musa both recipients of Divine Revelation. The Surah reminds us of the constant confrontation between truth and falsehood and compares the glorious Quran with life-giving rain; the latter gives life to dry, parched land. Similarly, the Quran gives life to dead hearts and the dry minds of the disbelievers.

Surat al-Ahzab - the Confederates

Juz 21 finishes with Surat al-Ahzab. This Surah was revealed in the fifth year of Hijrah (626 CE). After the indecisive Battle of Uhud, the Makkans wanted to defeat the Muslims, so in collaboration with the expelled Jews of Banu Nadhir, living in Khyber, they planned to attack Madinah. They gathered an army of 10,000 strong, consisting of many tribes, the confederates.