

Summary of Juz 22

Surat al-Ahzab continued

Background to the Battle of the Trench

When the Prophet ﷺ heard about the Makkah plan, he called a war council to discuss the impending danger. Salman, the Persian, suggested digging a trench between the long stretches of fortress-like houses on the outskirts of the city, whilst in the northwest, there were high rocks that were difficult to cross. So, a trench five meters wide, five meters deep, and seven kilometres long was dug in three weeks.

When the army of Confederates reached the outskirts of Madinah, they were baffled to see the trench. They camped outside the city near Uhud and laid siege. The only way to enter the city was if the Jews of Banu Qurayda were to attack from the inside. So, the Quraysh and the Jews of Banu Nadhir put together a strategy to win over Banu Qurayda and eventually a pact was agreed. But the plan went horribly wrong, and the confederates received no help from them. The siege was difficult to maintain, and the winter nights were long and bitterly cold. A violent sandstorm blew the tents. The camels and the horses of the Makkah forces ran wild. After three weeks, they fled. This Divine Intervention saved the Muslims.

This was a testing time for the Muslims. It required wise and brave leadership and committed followers. A large part of the Surah deals with the personal life and wonderful character of the Prophet ﷺ, and his relationships with the disciples and his family. He is addressed on six occasions with the refrain "O Prophet!" to bolster his morale, reassuring him of his unique position in Allah's sight, and encouraging him to lead confidently. The following verse is also revealed:

In the Messenger of Allah, there is a beautiful example for you... We sent you as a witness, giver of good news and a Warner, one who invites to Allah by his permission and you are a light-giving lamp (21-46).

True followers practice self-control - a key to success in life. Special advice is offered to the disciples, who faced all kinds of tests; criticism from the hypocrites, the siege, lack of food and water and the continuous threat of attack. They had to control their anger, frustration and fear. The challenge was to resist Satan's whispers and refrain from losing self-control. The Surah highlights the qualities of the believers. They had unwavering faith in the mission of the Prophet ﷺ, they were grateful to Allah, truthful and honest.

The Surah ends by clarifying the purpose and meaning of human life, the proper use of "free will" and "moral responsibility". How we fulfil this responsibility will determine our eventual fate, Hell or Heaven.

Surat al-Saba - the Kingdom of Saba

Juz 22 continues with Surat al-Saba. The central theme is the evidence for the resurrection. The scenes of Judgement Day are described vividly as though they are unfolding before the reader's eyes. Allah's Glory and Power are emphasised as humanity will stand in the Divine court.

Dawud and Sulayman were gifted by Allah. They were appreciative so, Allah rewarded them even more. By contrast, the people of Saba, who were blessed with a dam, dykes, fertile land and economic prosperity, were ungrateful. Thus inviting Divine retribution. The dam burst and the overwhelming flood destroyed everything in its wake. This devastated the agricultural land and that left them impoverished. Since the Makkans were familiar with this story the Quran doesn't give too much detail.

The outline of a conversation between disbelievers on Judgement Day reveals the horrific scene. At the end the Messenger ﷺ is proclaimed as a prophet for all humanity: "We sent you to all the people as the messenger of good news and a warner, but most people do not know this." (28). This is the declaration of the universality of Islam.

Surat al-Fatir; the Originator of The Universe

Juz 22 continues with Surat al-Fatir. This is an early Makkan Surah. The central theme is Allah's countless gifts: the wonders of His creation in nature are a manifestation of his Kindness. "People remember Allah's gifts. Is there a Creator besides Allah who provides you from heaven and the Earth?" (3). Intelligent people can't fail to see the created world as the handiwork of Allah. For them, Allah is everywhere, "Of all his servants, only the knowledgeable fear Allah. Allah is the Almighty, the Forgiver" (28).

The Makkan people were stubborn in their denial of the Prophet ﷺ, so he is reassured, this is the wretched face of humanity: "If they deny you, don't worry; those before them also denied the messengers who came with clear signs, books and enlightening revelation" (25). He is told to be patient and resilient since Allah gives respite and time for people to think again and again. The stubborn disbelievers are given a warning whilst He is the Kindest, He is an Avenger who takes exact retribution. "Were Allah to punish people for the wrong they did; He wouldn't have left a single creature on the surface of the Earth" (45).

The three grades of believers are described in this verse: "Some wronged themselves, others were good and some by the grace of Allah were foremost in good works," (32). To clarify, the three groups of believers are the "zalim" who make mistakes and are careless about their duties. The "muqtasid", or the moderates who fulfil religious obligations and avoid the forbidden but are slow with regards to voluntary activities. And thirdly, the "al-sabiq", the committed who seek the pleasure of Allah, avoid worldly luxuries and never forget Allah. This invites us to reflect on our own condition and to assess ourselves. Which one are you?