

## Chapter 18, Al-Kahf (The Cave) (part 1 of 2)

**Description:** The story of the sleepers in the cave and a parable.

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### Introduction

This 110 verse chapter was revealed in Mecca. It takes its name from the story of the people who fell asleep in a cave, told in verses 9 to 26. It contains three stories and a parable while opening, and closes with references to the Quran itself. It is believed to have been revealed as a comfort because the fledgling Muslims were suffering ongoing



torment and persecution at the hands of the ruling classes of Mecca. It was also sent down to answer three questions that had been put to Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, in order to test him.

### Verses 1 " 13 A straightforward book

Praise be to God who has revealed an uncomplicated book; a book that does not deviate from the straight path. It warns of a severe punishment, but also gives good news to those who do good deeds of an excellent and everlasting reward. It warns those who declare that God has an offspring by telling them that they have no evidence of such a monstrous lie. Prophet Muhammad is told that he is in danger of worrying himself to death over the people who do not believe in his message. However the fact of the matter is the earth has been filled with attractive things in order to test people and in the end everything will be reduced to dust.

Do you think that the story about the sleepers in the cave is a wonder?[\[1\]](#) The young men sort refuge in the cave, praying that God, the most merciful, would guide them to a way out of their predicament. God put them into a deep sleep and awakened them after a long period of time. How long they had been sleeping is argued about by believers and nonbelievers alike but now God reveals the truth of the matter. They were young men with strong faith and God gave them even more guidance.

### Verses 14 " 26 The sleepers in the cave

(Before taking refuge in the cave) They declared that God was the Lord of the heavens

and the earth and they would never call upon any deity other than Him. Those who have taken other deities have done so without any clear authority and there is nothing more wicked than a person who lies about God. They discussed it amongst each other and withdrew to the cave knowing that God would cover them with His mercy and guide them out of the ordeal they found themselves in.

And if you had been there with the sleepers you would have seen that the sun rose on their right and set on their left. All the while they lay in an open space within the cave. This is one of God's signs. Some are rightly guided while others are left to go astray. If you looked at the sleepers you might have thought that they were awake, they turned from one side to the other and their dog lay stretched out at the entrance to the cave.

If you had seen them you would have ran away filled with terror. In the same way that He put them to sleep God woke them up. The youths began to question one another, asking, how long have we been sleeping. It felt like only a day or part of a day and they agreed that only God knew for sure how much time had passed. One of them went to the town with a silver coin to look for food. The others warned him to be cautious and not disclose their whereabouts. If he was caught he would be stoned to death or worse he would be forced to change to their religion.

So God brought them to people's attention so that everyone may know that His promises of Resurrection and the Last Hour were true. The people who found them argued and disputed amongst themselves and those who prevailed decided to build a house of worship over them. The people who heard the story argued about how many sleepers there were, but they guess at the unseen because only a few people have any real knowledge.

Therefore adhere to what is clear and never say that you will do something without saying God willing. If you do forget then remember God and hope that He will guide you to even better conduct. Some say they stayed in the cave for 300 years, others say 309, but Prophet Muhammad is told to say that only God knows exactly how long they were there, because He is the one who knows all the secrets of the heavens and the earth. There is no protector besides God and He does not let anyone share in His rule.

## **Verses 27 " 31 Make a choice**

Prophet Muhammad is told to recite what has been revealed to him and there is no authorisation to change anything in any way. Be content to be among those who seek God's approval and do not let the notable people of Mecca drive away the weak and humble among your followers. Tell them that now the truth has come; let the people choose whether to believe it or deny it. The wrongdoers will end up surrounded by Fire with nothing but a wretched drink or and a pain filled resting place. Good works will never be wasted; they will be rewarded with gardens of bliss with flowing streams. They will wear garments of silk and golden bracelets and recline on soft couches in a pleasant resting place.

## Verses 32 " 44 A moral tale

Tell them, Prophet Muhammad, about the parable of two men both with beautiful gardens and land for cultivation. Both gardens produced abundantly and there was a river between the two properties. One man told the other that he was wealthier and had more followers than the other, and he walked into his garden saying that this will never end and the Last Hour will never come and even if it did God would reward him with something even better. The other man asked, do you disbelieve in the One who created you, for I do not, and you should have said that all is as God willed and no one has power except Him. Although I have less, God might give me something better and destroy what you have. And so it was that the first man's fertile property was destroyed and he wished he had not attributed his prosperity to himself rather than God. Then he realised that the only real protection comes from God.

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Endnotes:

[1] The word Ar-Raqeem is also mentioned here and this may refer to the name of their dog, or the tablet on which their names were inscribed or the mountain in which the cave is situated.

## Chapter 18, Al-Kahf (The Cave) (part 2 of 2)

**Description:** More stories and lessons for those who ponder.

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## Verse 45- 59 Reminders

And give them an example. The life of this world is like vegetation that flourishes but then dries up and withers away, blown in the wind. Here one day gone the next. Your wealth and your children are only adornments in this life, but your good deeds hold the promise of everlasting reward. A day will come when the earth will be flat and bare and all humankind



will be gathered together. They will stand in rows before God and their book of deeds will be held out to them. Some people will be in great terror for nothing is missing from their records.

Remind the people about when the angels prostrated to Adam. Iblees (Satan, one of the *jinn*) was amongst them and he refused. Taking Satan and his offspring as Masters would be a grave mistake. Be warned that anything that you declare as an offspring of or partner to God will not respond to you on the Day of Judgement. The wrongdoers will see the Fire and realise what is going to happen. There is no escape.

Quran is full of examples to make people understand, but humankind is quarrelsome. Guidance has come and nothing prevents you from believing. The messengers are sent to bring good tidings and to warn the people, yet there are those who make fun and ridicule these warnings. There is no one more unjust than the one who is reminded of the verses, proofs and lessons sent by His Lord but turns away from them and forgets the evil he has done. They will have veils cast over their hearts and their ears are deaf. There is an appointed time for their punishment.

## Verses 60 " 82 Moses and Khidr

Moses said that he would never give up travelling until he reached the appointed place but he and his servant boy forgot about the fish and missed the junction. The place where the fish was forgotten was the appointed place, so they turned back and there was the man they were looking for, Khidr. He was very knowledgeable and Moses hoped to learn from him but Khidr expressed doubts that Moses would have the patience he needed.

They set off in a boat but Khidr made a hole in the boat. Moses forgot his promise not to question Khidr about his actions. They travelled on until they met a boy and Khidr killed him. Again Moses questioned him as to why he kill an innocent child. Khidr reminded him of his promise not to question anything. They travelled on until they came to a town where they asked for food but the townspeople refused to help or feed them. Nevertheless Khidr and Moses repaired a wall that was falling down. Moses told Khidr

that he could have asked for payment for the work, to which Khidr replied that this was the end of their time together.

Before Moses left, Khidr explained to him the reasons behind his actions. The boat belonged to poor people. There was a King who was seizing every boat; if their boat was defective they would be able to keep it and repair it. The boy's parents were true believers and he would have grown up to incite them to wickedness and disbelief. God planned to replace him with a better and purer child. The wall belonged to two orphans and there was buried treasure underneath it. Their father had been a righteous man, so God intended that the treasure remain buried, safe from the orphan's caregivers until they reached maturity. Khidr said he did not do these things of his own accord, he was following God's plan.

## **Verses 83 " 102 Dhul Qarnayn**

Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, is told that when the people ask about Dhul Qarnayn<sup>[1]</sup>, he should tell them about him. He had been given power and the means to achieve many great things. Once on an expedition he came across a group of people. God told him to either punish them or show kindness to them. Dhul Qarnayn chose to punish the ones who had done evil and noted that they would also be punished a second time by God. He spoke gently to the ones who were not doing evil.

Then he set out on another expedition. He came upon another group of people for whom God had not provided any shelter. And so it was; he travelled on until he came to a point between two mountains. Dhul Qarnayn could barely communicate with the people there. The people managed to ask him if they could pay him to build a wall. The wall was to keep out Gog and Magog who were destroying their land. Dhul Qarnayn said that what God provided him with was better than any tribute they could pay him but if they provided him with men to help he could put up a fortification.

They filled the gap between the mountains with iron and poured molten copper over it. Gog and Magog could not scale it or tunnel through it. This is a mercy from God, Dhul Qarnayn said, but one day God will flatten it to the ground, this is a promise from God. Know that on that day the two parties, (Gog and Magog) will surge against each other like waves. This is one of the signs that the Day of Resurrection is near. On Judgment Day, Hell will be shown to the disbelievers, because they thought they could take God's servants as their Masters. They will rest in Hell.

## **Verses 103 " 110 Worship is for God Alone**

Prophet Muhammad is told to tell the people that the person who loses the most, by his or her actions, is the one whose efforts are lost even though they think they are doing well. These people disbelieve in God's verses and signs, and deny that they will ever come face to face with Him. This disbelief renders their deeds worthless. All they will gain is Hell. On the other hand, those who believe and do good deeds will find themselves in the gardens of Paradise, where they will live forever and never have any desire to leave.

If all the oceans were ink for writing, the ink would run dry before the words of God's attributes, grandeur, and knowledge were exhausted. Even if another amount of ink just like it were to be added it would not be enough. Prophet Muhammad is told to say that he is just a human being, the same as everyone else, and it has been revealed to him that the Lord God is One. Everyone amongst the people who fears their meeting with God should do good deeds and never let anyone else or anything share in the worship that is due to God alone.

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Endnotes:

[1] Some scholars believe this to be Alexander the Great however Quran does not reveal his identity.

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