

Chapter 7, Al-A'raaf (The Heights) (part 1 of 3)

Description: A brief commentary of Chapter 7 (verses 1 to 58) of the Holy Quran. These verses are both an invitation to do good and a warning from being arrogant and disobedient.

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Introduction

This chapter is one of the longer chapters found at the beginning of the Quran. It is generally accepted that it was revealed in Mecca. It is named after the height of the barrier that will divide the saved and the damned on the Day of Judgement. It begins by reassuring Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, that the stories about disobedient communities of the past should serve as encouragement to the believers to take heed and repent before the great Day is upon them.



Verses 1- 10 Take lessons from history

God addresses Prophet Muhammad telling him not to feel any distress. He (God) reassures him that this book (the Quran) has been revealed as a warning and a reminder to those who believe. Follow, (and tell the people), what has been sent down and do not follow any other master apart from God alone. How often have previous civilisations been destroyed? But still humankind does not heed the warnings. Some were taken at night, others when they rested in the heat of the day. When the punishment was upon them they admitted their wrongdoing.

God will surely question those to whom a message was sent and those who carried the message. Humankind will be questioned by God who has full knowledge of their deeds, both good and bad. The weighing of the deeds on that Day will be just. Those whose scales are heavy (with good deeds) will be successful and those whose scales are light will be lost.

Verses 11 " 18 The story of Adam and Satan

God established humankind in the earth and provided a means with which to make a livelihood. Humankind is ungrateful yet it is God who created you, and shaped you into human form. The angels were asked to prostrate before the first of your kind, Adam. The angels obeyed; all except Iblis.[1] Iblis (Satan) proceeded to argue with God, when asked why he did not obey God's instructions. Satan considered himself better than the Adam. He was created from smokeless fire whereas Adam was created from clay.

God ordered Satan to descend from Paradise stating that it was not an abode for the

arrogant and that Satan would henceforth be one of the contemptible ones. Satan asked for a reprieve (from judgment and punishment) until the Day of Resurrection. The reprieve was granted. In his arrogance Satan told God he planned to deceive mankind, to lie in wait for them on the straight path and come at them from all sides. You, Satan said to God, will find most of them ungrateful. God ordered Satan out and swore to fill Hell with Satan and those who followed him.

Verses 19 " 25 Acceptance of repentance

Adam and his wife were directed to live in Paradise and eat from wherever they will. There was however one exception, the tree which God pointed out to them. Satan whispered to Adam and Eve to make them aware of their nakedness, he also encouraged them to eat from the forbidden tree; saying to do so would make them immortal or angels. Satan swore to be a sincere advisor to them. After eating from the tree their nakedness became clear to them and Adam and Eve tried to gather leaves to cover themselves. God questioned them as to why they disobeyed Him and did not take His warning to stay away from Satan. Adam and Eve admitted their wrongdoing and asked for forgiveness. Earth became their abode, where they would live, die and be raised back to life.

Verses 26 " 32 A warning

God then addresses the children of Adam (humankind). He explains that they have garments to cover their nakedness, and as an adornment, but the best garment of all is the garment of God-consciousness. This is a sign He says. Again they are warned that Satan is a sworn enemy so be not deceived. The evil ones are allied to those who do not believe. God did not order immorality, thus what your forefathers did is not an excuse. God commanded righteousness, therefore direct your worship to Him alone and be devoted entirely to Him. God created humankind and will repeat the process on the Day of Judgment. Some are guided but some are doomed because they take the evil ones as their masters.

God advises the children of Adam to dress well, when and wherever they pray, and to eat and drink from what He has provided. However He warns them not to be extravagant for He does not love those who do so. Prophet Muhammad is then advised to ask his followers as to who forbids them from what God has provided. They are for humankind to enjoy but will be for the believers alone on the Day of Resurrection.

Verses 33 " 41 The closed gates

Prophet Muhammad is advised to tell the believers that God forbids disgraceful deeds, those openly done as well as those hidden away. Every nation's life span is set, it cannot be hastened nor can it be delayed for even an instant. When the messengers come, those who believe will be saved but those who ignore the warnings will abide in the Fire. The most unjust is the one who invents lies about God or denies the revelations. They will live out their days, and the ones they used to invoke besides God will not help them; they will abide in the Fire. They will curse and blame each other as they are herded into the Fire

to face a double punishment. The gates of Heaven will not be opened to those who deny the verses or are arrogant towards them. Even if a rope was to be threaded through the eye of a needle they would not enter the Everlasting Garden. This is the punishment for the guilty and the evildoers.

Verses 42 " 58 A Day of Fulfilment (Judgment)

Those who believe and do good deeds are the people of the Garden. They will not be burdened with what they are unable to bear and the gates of Heaven will be open to them. They will praise God because of the Paradise they have inherited and call out to the people of the Fire that the promise of God was true. The people of the Fire reply that they too have found the promise to be true. Next a caller will announce that the curse of God is upon the wrongdoers. There will be a partition between both parties. The people of the Heights will recognise each other and call out to each other. The inmates from Hell then beg for food and water from the inmates of Paradise, but their answer is that God has forbidden them sustenance. They will be forgotten just as they had forgotten the inevitability of this Day which is the fulfilment of what was promised in the Quran.

The Lord God created the universe and then rose over the Throne in a manner that suits His Majesty, so call upon him with humility, and invoke Him with fear and hope. He is the one who sends the wind and the rain bringing forth all kinds of fruit, likewise He will raise the dead. Vegetation emerges by the permission of God.

Endnotes:

[1] It is generally accepted by the scholars of Islam that Satan was a jinn, whose knowledge and devotion was of such a high standard he was permitted to worship with the angels.

Chapter 7, Al-A'raaf (The Heights) (part 2 of 3)

Description: A brief commentary of Chapter 7 (verses 59 to 147) of the Holy Quran. In this part we learn important lessons from the lives of the prophets and long gone civilisations.

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Verses 59 " 73 The stories of Noah and Hud

God sent Noah to his people and he asked them to worship God alone. They denied Noah so God saved him and those with him in a ship, the others, who denied God's signs, were drowned. Prophet Hud was sent to the people of Aad, saying worship God alone but they denied him.

They called him a liar and a fool when he was giving them sincere advice. Hud reminded them of the people of Noah

and of the favours God has bestowed upon them, he warned them of a terrible punishment but they taunted him and asked Hud to bring on the punishment. Hud said he would wait with them for the decision from God. The disbelievers were annihilated; Hud and his companions were saved by the mercy of God.



Verses 74- 94 The stories of Saleh, Lot and Shuaib

Then, to the people of Thamud, God sent Prophet Saleh. He asked them to worship God alone. Saleh asked them to protect the she-camel sent from God and reminded them that they were the inheritors of Aad, capable of building great mansions in valleys and carving out homes from the sides of mountains. Remember God's blessings Saleh told his people, however the arrogant ones asked the believers if they really thought Saleh was sent from God. They answered yes but the arrogant ones rejected this and hamstringed the camel they had been charged with protecting. So bring us this promise (of God's wrath) they said, so an earthquake seized them and they fell down dead. Saleh turned away.

Lot was sent to his people and confronted them with the promise of punishment for the indecent acts they performed with each other, but their only response was to try to evict Lot and his family from their city. God saved Lot and all his family, except for his wife who was among the evildoers, when the rain of stones destroyed them.

Shuaib was sent to the people of Midian and he asked them to worship God alone. He asked them to cease their corrupt business practices and to stop waylaying visitors and wayfarers in their cities. He reminded them that God increased their numbers and of the shocking ends to some previous nations but they did not want to heed the warning. Instead of being grateful to God they attributed changing fortunes to the passage of time. The people of Midian were stuck down by an earthquake, those who had disbelieved Shuaib's warning ceased to exist. Shuaib turned away without grieving for the disbelieving people.

Verses 95 " 100 A lesson to learn

Whenever God sent a prophet to a town (or nation) he afflicted the people with adversity and misfortune in order that they might humble themselves before Him. Then God changed their hardship to prosperity but the people did not recognise God's grace. Had they believed they would have been showered with riches but they did not so they were seized for their misdeeds. God asks, did those people feel secure at night, or in the day? The only people who feel secure from the plan of God are those doomed to destruction. Do people not understand, from the stories of those before them, that God

can afflict them for their sins and seal their hearts?

Verses 101 " 126 God sends Moses to Pharaoh

The people in the cities in the previous verses were sent messengers with warnings but they refused to believe in them. Then God sent Moses to Pharaoh and his priests but they too treated the message unjustly. See then what happened to those who spread corruption. Moses told Pharaoh that he (Moses) was a messenger from the Lord of all the worlds and Pharaoh asked for a sign. Moses threw his staff to the ground and it turned into a slithering serpent. Then he pulled his hand out from under his robe and it was shining white and radiant. The leaders around Pharaoh said that Moses was a sorcerer and suggested a competition. Pharaoh's sorcerers arrived and were promised a place in the inner circle if they won.

The sorcerers threw their sticks and they turned into snakes. God inspired Moses and he threw down his staff that turned into a snake that devoured all the snakes the sorcerers had conjured. The sorcerers were defeated; the truth was clear so they fell to their knees saying that they believe in the Lord of the worlds, the Lord of Moses. Pharaoh declared that he would cut off their hands and feet on opposite sides and crucify them all because they believed before he (Pharaoh) had given his permission for them to do so. They cried out to God asking Him to keep them steadfast and let them die devoted to Him alone.

Verses 127 " 137 Plagues afflict Egypt

The leaders amongst Pharaoh's people asked if he intended to let Moses and his people cause corruption in the land. He answered that he would put their sons to death and spare their daughters. Moses advised his people to be steadfast and turn to God for help. Moses' people complained that they were used to persecution before and are still being persecuted, but Moses gives them hope.

Pharaoh's people were afflicted with several years of famine in the hope that they would come to their senses but they thought good provision their right and bad circumstances were due to Moses (an evil omen). Their fortune however was in the hands of God but still they did not recognise it.

Next the people of Pharaoh were inflicted with a flood, followed by plagues of locusts, and lice, and frogs, and blood. Pharaoh's people asked Moses to intervene with his Lord and have Him remove the punishment, saying that if he did so they would let the enslaved people of Israel go. However when the punishment was removed they broke their promise. God drowned them and caused those who had been oppressed to inherit the land.

Verses 138 " 143 God rescues the Children of Israel and talks to Moses

God took the Children of Israel across the sea where they came across people who

worshipped idols. The children of Israel asked Moses to make them an idol to which he replied that they were an ignorant people. He told them the cult the idol worshippers were following was doomed to destruction. God summoned Moses on the mountain for forty nights. He asked his brother Aaron, who had been with him from the beginning, to take his place to lead the people and being careful to keep them away from the idol worshippers. Moses arrived at the appointed time and asked God to show Himself. God answered, you will not see Me, but look at the mountain, if it can look at me and remain in place you will see me. The mountain crumbled before Moses' eyes and he fell down unconscious. When he recovered he said to God, 'Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance! I am the first to believe!'

Verses 144 " 147

God told Moses that he was chosen, from amongst all of humankind, to be the one who could hear God and receive His message, thus he should be grateful for such an honour.

God inscribed all details and instructions on the tablets, saying hold firmly to them. Those who deny the signs of God will be kept distracted. The deeds of those who deny the signs and the meeting in the Hereafter will become worthless.

Chapter 7, Al-A'raaf (The Heights) (part 3 of 3)

Description: A brief commentary of Chapter 7 (verses 148 to 206) of the Holy Quran. In these final verses we discover that Prophet Muhammad was mentioned in both the Torah and Gospel and the warnings in previous parts are reiterated.

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Verses 148 " 156 The wrath of God

While Moses was gone the people began worshipping a shape like a calf made from their jewellery and ornaments but they perceived that they were doing wrong and when Moses returned they said if God does not forgive us we will be among the losers. Moses was angry and upset with them but especially his brother Aaron. He threw down the tablets, seized his brother by the hair and pulled towards him. Aaron said, "Oh son of my mother, (reminding Moses of their kinship) they would have overpowered me and killed me". Moses asked God to forgive both his brother and himself.



Those who worshipped the calf would gain the anger of their Lord but those who

realised their misdeeds and repented would be forgiven. When Moses had calmed down he picked up the tablets on which were inscribed guidance and mercy for those who feared their Lord. Moses chose 70 men from among their number and they came towards Moses fearful and shaking. They were supposed to apologise and beg forgiveness for worshipping the calf but instead they demanded to see God. The mountain convulsed in a massive earthquake and they fell down dead. Moses prayed for forgiveness and God's mercy encompasses all things. Mercy is for those who are God conscious, pay the prescribed alms and believe in the revelations.

Verses 157 " 158 Mohammad in the Torah and Gospel

Special mercy will be assigned to those who follow the unlettered Prophet who they will find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel. He enjoins them to good and forbids them from evil. He makes good things lawful and bad things unlawful. He relieves them of their burdens. Those who follow him will succeed. God says to Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, to declare to the people that he is the Messenger of God sent by the one who controls the heavens and the earth and that there is no true deity worthy of worship except God.

Verses 159 " 168 The Children of Israel are tested

In the nation of Moses there were some who were guided and thereby established justice. God divided them into twelve tribes. When the thirsty people asked for water God revealed to Moses where to strike the rock with his staff. Twelve springs gushed forth and each tribe had its own drinking place. God sent down mana (pure things) from heaven for them to eat. They rebelled, but they did not harm God by their rebellion; they harmed only themselves.

God said to them, reside in this town, eat whatever you please, ask for forgiveness and enter the gate with humility. God would then forgive their sins and multiply the reward of the good-doers but there were wicked amongst them who changed the wording of God's commandment. So God sent down upon them a scourge from heaven. God tells Prophet Muhammad to ask them about the town by the sea and what happened when they transgressed the laws of the Sabbath. They were tested because of their disobedience. On the Sabbath the fish came easily but did not appear on other days. Ask them also, God said, about the warners and why they preached to a people who surely would be destroyed or punished by God. The warners said they wanted to discharge their duty to God and they hoped some would take admonition. However they disregarded the warning, continued with their behaviour and God said to them "Be thee detested apes".

Remind them also that God said he would raise against them those who would inflict them with grievous harm right up until the Day of Resurrection. God broke their unity as a nation and dispersed them all over the world. Some are righteous and others are not, they were tested with both blessings and misfortunes.

Verses 169 " 180 Including the covenant with the descendants of Adam.

Then they were succeeded by an evil generation. They enjoyed a low life thinking everything would be forgiven. Why do they not see that the Hereafter is better? Those who follow the Book and establish the prayer will never have their deeds go to waste. And mention to them the mountain that was suspended over them as if it were an umbrella. They thought it was going to fall on them but God said hold fast to what we have given to you and remember so that you will return to God consciousness.

Remind them Oh Prophet about the time when God brought into existence every single descendant of Adam (every human) and made them testify asking, "Am I not your Lord?" God did this, in case on the Day of Resurrection, anyone said, "but we were not aware". Or in case they should try to blame their ancestors for idolatry or ascribing partners to God, saying we just followed our forefathers. Everything is made clear.

Tell them also the story of the man in the time of Moses to whom we gave our stories but he chose to ignore them and Satan pursued him until he became one of the deviators. He would have been exalted through the revelations but he clung to his earthly life. He was like a dog; if you chase him he pants, if you leave him he still pants. Tell them the stories that they may reflect, whomever God guides is truly guided, whoever he forsakes is a loser.

God says He created Hell for those of the jinn and humankind who have hearts but do not understand, eyes but do not see and ears but do not hear. They are worse than animals because they are heedless. And to God belong the best names, so invoke Him by them. And leave the company of those who use them improperly.

Verses 181 " 188

God created a community (the followers of Prophet Muhammad) who guide to the truth and establish justice. Those who deny God's revelations are drawn step by step towards destruction. Their companion (Prophet Muhammad) is not mad, but he is a warner. What could they believe in if they do not believe in this? Whoever God leads astray cannot be guided, He leaves them wandering blindly. When they ask (you, Prophet Muhammad) about the Hour say, "Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him. It lays heavily upon the heavens and the earth. It will not come upon you except unexpectedly." Prophet Muhammad is told to tell the people he has no power to benefit or avert harm from himself and that he is nothing more than a warner and bearer of good news for those who believe.

Verses 189 " 206 God created everything " worship Him

It is God who created everyone from one soul (Adam). The people are ungrateful and set up partners with God but He is far exalted above the partners they ascribe to Him. God says to Prophet Muhammad, say that your protector is God who sent the Quran and protects the righteous. Be tolerant and say what is right, if Satan should tempt you seek

protection with God. When those who fear God are tempted by Satan they only need to remember God and they will know the right course of action.

Tell them Muhammad that you follow only what is revealed from God; the Book (Quran) is a guidance and a blessing. When you hear it recited, be silent and listen. Remember God with humility and reverence in the morning and in the evening. Do not be heedless; those who are close to God are never too proud to worship Him. Glorify Him and bow down before Him.

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