

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.

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