

Sūrah 68: al-Qalam

Period of Revelation

This too is one of the earliest Sūrahs to be revealed at Makkah, but its subject matter shows that it was sent down at the time when opposition to the Prophet had grown very harsh and tyrannical.

Theme and Subject Matter

It consists of three themes: Replies to the opponents objections, administration of warning and admonition to them, and exhortation to the Prophet to patience and constancy.

At the outset, the Prophet has been addressed, to the effect: “The disbelievers call you a madman whereas the Book that you are presenting and the sublime conduct that you practice, are by themselves sufficient to refute their false accusations. Soon they will see as to who was mad and who was sane; therefore, do not at all yield to the commotion of opposition being kicked up against you, for all this is actually meant to intimidate you and make you resort to a compromise with them.”

Then, in order to enlighten the common people the character of a prominent man from among the opponents, whom the people of Makkah fully well recognized, has been presented, without naming him: At that time, the Prophet’s pure and sublime conduct was before them, and every discerning eye could also see what sort of character and morals were possessed by the chiefs of Makkah, who were leading the opposition against him. Then, in v. 17-33, the parable of the owners of a garden has been presented, who after having been blessed by God turned ungrateful to Him, and did not heed the admonition of the best man among them when it was given them. Consequently, they were deprived of the blessing and they realized this, when all they had lay devastated. With this parable the people of Makkah have been warned to the effect: “With the appointment of the Prophet to Prophethood, you, O people of Makkah, too, have been put to a test similar to the one to which the owners of the garden had been put. If you do not listen to him, you too will be afflicted with a punishment in the world, and the punishment of the Hereafter is far greater.”

Then, in v. 34-47 continuously, the disbelievers have been admonished, in which the address sometimes turns to them directly and sometimes they are warned through the Prophet. A summary of what has been said in this regard, is this: Well being in the Hereafter inevitably belongs to those who spend their lives in the world in full consciousness of God. It is utterly against reason that the obedient servants should meet in the Hereafter the same fate as the guilty. There is absolutely no basis of the disbelievers misunderstanding that God will treat them in the manner they choose for themselves, whereas they have no guarantee for this. Those who are being called upon to bow before God in the world and they refuse to do so, would be unable to prostrate themselves on the Day of Resurrection even if they wanted to do so, and thus would stand disgraced and condemned. Having denied the Qur’ān they cannot escape Divine punishment. The rein they are being given, has deluded them. They think that since they are not being punished in spite of their denial, they must be on the right path, whereas they are following the path of ruin. They have no reasonable ground for opposing the Messenger, for he is a preacher without any vested interest: he is not asking any reward of them for himself, and they cannot either make the claim that they know with certainty that he is not a true Messenger, nor that what he says is false.

In conclusion, the Prophet has been exhorted to the effect: “Bear with patience the hardships that you may have to face in the way of preaching the Faith till God’s judgment arrives, and avoid the impatience which caused suffering and affliction to the Prophet Jonah.”

Sūrah 68: al-Qalam¹⁵⁹⁶

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,
the Most Merciful

1. Nūn.¹⁵⁹⁷ By the pen and what they inscribe,
2. You are not, [O Muhammad], by the favor of your Lord, a madman.
3. And indeed, for you is a reward uninterrupted.
4. And indeed, you are of a great moral character.
5. So you will see and they will see
6. Which of you is the afflicted [by a devil].
7. Indeed, your Lord is most knowing of who has gone astray from His way, and He is most knowing of the [rightly] guided.
8. Then do not obey the deniers.
9. They wish that you would soften [in your position], so they would soften [toward you].
10. And do not obey every worthless habitual swearer
11. [And] scorner, going about with malicious gossip -
12. A preventer of good, transgressing and sinful,
13. Cruel, moreover, and an illegitimate pretender.¹⁵⁹⁸
14. Because he is a possessor of wealth and children,
15. When Our verses are recited to him, he says, "Legends of the former peoples."
16. We will brand him upon the snout.¹⁵⁹⁹
17. Indeed, We have tried them as We tried the companions of the garden, when they swore to cut its fruit in the [early] morning
18. Without making exception.¹⁶⁰⁰
19. So there came upon it [i.e., the garden] an affliction from your Lord while they were asleep.
20. And it became as though reaped.
21. And they called one another at morning,
22. [Saying], "Go early to your crop if you would cut the fruit."
23. So they set out, while lowering their voices,
24. [Saying], "There will surely not enter it today upon you [any] poor person."
25. And they went early in determination, [assuming themselves] able.¹⁶⁰¹

¹⁵⁹⁸ i.e., claiming a particular lineage falsely. The description given in these verses is of al-Waleed bin al-Mugheerah (see also 74:11-25) or possibly, as asserted by Ibn Katheer, al-Akhnas bin Shurayq.

¹⁵⁹⁹ Literally, "trunk," meaning the nose of an elephant or pig.

¹⁶⁰⁰ i.e., without conceding that nothing can be accomplished unless God wills, saying, "...if God wills ('in-shā'-Allāh'). See 18:23-24.

¹⁶⁰¹ To carry out their plan, confident of their ability.

¹⁵⁹⁶ *Al-Qalam*: The Pen.

¹⁵⁹⁷ See footnote to 2:1.

26. But when they saw it, they said, “Indeed, we are lost;
27. Rather, we have been deprived.”
28. The most moderate of them said, “Did I not say to you, ‘Why do you not exalt [God]?’”¹⁶⁰²
29. They said, “Exalted is our Lord! Indeed, we were wrongdoers.”
30. Then they approached one another, blaming each other.
31. They said, “O woe to us; indeed we were transgressors.
32. Perhaps our Lord will substitute for us [one] better than it. Indeed, we are toward our Lord desirous.”¹⁶⁰³
33. Such is the punishment [of this world]. And the punishment of the Hereafter is greater, if they only knew.
34. Indeed, for the righteous with their Lord are the Gardens of Pleasure.
35. Then will We treat the Muslims like the criminals?
36. What is [the matter] with you? How do you judge?
37. Or do you have a scripture in which you learn
38. That indeed for you is whatever you choose?
39. Or do you have oaths [binding] upon Us, extending until the Day of Resur-
- rection, that indeed for you is whatever you judge?
40. Ask them which of them, for that [claim], is responsible.
41. Or do they have partners?¹⁶⁰⁴ Then let them bring their partners, if they should be truthful.
42. The Day the shin will be uncovered¹⁶⁰⁵ and they are invited to prostration but they [i.e., the disbelievers] will not be able,
43. Their eyes humbled, humiliation will cover them. And they used to be invited to prostration while they were sound.¹⁶⁰⁶
44. So leave Me, [O Muhammad], with [the matter of] whoever denies this statement [i.e., the Qur’ān]. We will progressively lead them [to punishment] from where they do not know.¹⁶⁰⁷
45. And I will give them time. Indeed, My plan is firm.
46. Or do you ask of them a payment, so they are by debt burdened down?
47. Or have they [knowledge of] the unseen, so they write [it] down?

¹⁶⁰⁴ i.e., those to whom they attribute divinity other than God or partners from among themselves.

¹⁶⁰⁵ i.e., when everyone will find before him great difficulty. In accordance with authentic *hadiths*, “the shin” might also refer to that of God, before which every believer will prostrate on the Day of Judgement. See footnote to 2:19.

¹⁶⁰⁶ During worldly life.

¹⁶⁰⁷ God will increase His favours to them in this world by way of trial, whereby they will sink deeper into sin and thus into destruction.

¹⁶⁰² i.e., remember or mention Him by saying, “...if God wills.” An additional meaning is “praise” or “thank” Him for His bounty.

¹⁶⁰³ Of His mercy, forgiveness and bounty.

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48. Then be patient for the decision of your Lord, [O Muhammad], and be not like the companion of the fish [i.e., Jonah] when he called out while he was distressed.
 49. If not that a favor [i.e., mercy] from his Lord overtook him, he would have been thrown onto the naked shore while he was censured.¹⁶⁰⁸
 50. And his Lord chose him and made him of the righteous.
 51. And indeed, those who disbelieve would almost make you slip with their eyes [i.e., looks] when they hear the message, and they say, "Indeed, he is mad."
 52. But it is not except a reminder to the worlds.

¹⁶⁰⁸ But instead, God accepted his repentance and provided means for his recovery. See 37:139-148.