

Sūrah 74: al-Muddathir

Period of Revelation

The first seven verses of this Sūrah belong to the earliest period at Makkah. Even according to some hadith which have been related in Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Musnad Ahmad, etc., on the authority of Jabir bin Abdullah, these are the very earliest verses of the Qur'ān to be revealed to the Prophet. But the Muslim Ummah almost unanimously agreed that the earliest revelation to the Prophet consisted of the first five verses of Sūrah al-Alaq (96) However, what is established by authentic hadith that after this first Revelation, no Revelation came down to the Prophet for quite some time. Then, when it was resumed, it started with the verses of Sūrah al-Muddathir - Imām Zuhri has given the following details of it:

“Revelation to the Prophet remained suspended for quite some time, and it was such a period of deep grief and distress for him that he started going early to the tops of the mountains to throw himself down from them. But whenever he stood on the edge of a peak, the Angel Gabriel would appear and tell him that he was God’s Prophet. This would console him and restore to him full peace of mind.” (Ibn Jarir). After this Imām Zuhri relates the following tradition on the authority of Jabir bin Abdullah; “The Messenger of God describing the period of *falrat al-wahi* (break in revelation) said: One day when I was passing on the way, I suddenly heard a call from heaven. I raised my head and saw that the same Angel who had visited me in the Cave of Hira was sitting on a throne between heaven and earth. This struck terror in my heart, and reaching home quickly, I said: ‘Cover me up, cover me up’. So the people of the house covered me up with a quilt (or blanket). At that time God sent down the Revelation: *Ya ayyuhal-Muddathiru...* From then on revelation became intense and continuous.” (Bukhari, Muslim Musnad Ahmad, Ibn Jarir).

The rest of the Sūrah (v. 8-56) was revealed when the first Hajj season came after public preaching of Islām had begun in Makkah.

Theme and Subject Matter

As has been explained above, the earliest Revelation to the Prophet consisted of the first five verses of Sūrah Al-Alaq:

Recite in the name of your Lord who created. Created man from a clinging substance. Recite, and your Lord is the most Generous. Who taught by the pen. Taught man that which he knew not.

This was the first experience of Revelation by the Prophet. In this message it was not told what great mission he had been entrusted with and what duties he had to perform in future. He was only initiated into it and then left alone for a time so that the great strain this experience had caused should pass away and he should mentally become prepared to receive the Revelation and perform the prophetic mission in the future. After this intermission when Revelation was resumed, the first seven verses of this Sūrah were revealed: In these he was for the first time commanded to arise and warn the people of the consequences of the way of life they were following and to proclaim the greatness of God in the world where others were being magnified without any right. Along with that he was given this instruction: The demand of the Unique mission that you have to perform, now is that your life should be pure in every respect and you should carry out the duty of reforming your people sincerely irrespective of any worldly gain. Then, in the last sentence, he was exhorted to endure with patience, for the sake of his Lord, all the hardships and troubles that he might have to face while performing his mission.

In the implementation of this Divine Command when the Messenger of God began to preach Islām and recite the Qur’ānic Sūrahs revealed successively, the people of Makkah felt alarmed, and it provoked a great storm of opposition and hostility. A few months passed in this state until the Hajj season approached. The people of Makkah feared that if Muhammad started visiting the caravans of the pilgrims coming from all

over Arabia at their halting places and reciting the spellbinding and unique Revelations of the Qur'ān in their assemblies on the occasion of Hajj, his message would reach every part of Arabia and influence countless people. Therefore, the Quraysh chiefs held a conference and settled that they would start a propaganda campaign against the Prophet among the pilgrims as soon as they arrived. After they had agreed on this, Walid bin al-Mughirah said to the assembled people: *'If you said contradictory things about Muhammad, we all would lose our trust among the people. Therefore, let us agree upon one opinion, which we should all say without dispute.* Some people said that they would call Muhammad a soothsayer. Walid said: *'No, by God, he is not a soothsayer. We have seen the soothsayers: what they murmur and what they utter has no remote resemblance with the Qur'ān.'* Some other people said: *'Then we say he is possessed.'* Walid said: *'He is not a possessed one: we have seen bad and insane people; the way one talks disjointedly and behaves foolishly in that state is known to all: who would believe that what Muhammad presented was the incoherent speech of a madman?'* The people said: *'Then we say he is a poet.'* Walid said: *'No, he is not a poet, for we know poetry in all its forms, and what he presents conforms to no form of it.'* The people said: *'Then he is a sorcerer.'* Walid said: *'He is no sorcerer either: we have seen sorcerers and we also know what methods they adopt for their sorcery. This also does not apply to Muhammad.'* Then he said: *'Whichever of these things you said about Muhammad, it would be known to be a false accusation. By God, his speech is sweet, his root is deep and his branches are fruitful.'* At this Abu Jahl, urging on Walid, said: *'Your people will never be pleased with you unless you say something about Muhammad.'* He said: *'Let me think over it awhile.'* Then, after prolonged thought and consideration, he said: *'The nearest thing to the truth is that you tell the Arabs that he is a sorcerer, who has brought a message by which he separates a man from his father; and from his brother, and from his wife and children, and from his family.'* They all agreed on what Walid had proposed. Then, according to a scheme the men of Quraysh spread among the pilgrims in the Hajj season and they warned everyone they met of the sorcery of Muhammad and of his stirring up divisions in the families by it. But the result was that by their this plan the Quraysh chiefs themselves made the name of the Messenger known throughout Arabia. That Walid had made this proposal on the insistence of Abu Jahl has been related by Ibn Jarir in his Tafsir on the authority of Ikrimah.

In conclusion, it has been explicitly stated: God does not stand in need of anybody's faith that He may fulfill his conditions. The Qur'ān is an admonition that has been presented before the people openly; now whoever wills may accept it. God has a right that the people should fear His disobedience and He alone has the power to forgive the one who adopts piety and an attitude of God consciousness even though one may have committed many acts of disobedience in the past.

Sūrah 74: al-Muddathir¹⁶⁵⁸

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

1. O you who covers himself [with a garment],¹⁶⁵⁹
2. Arise and warn
3. And your Lord glorify
4. And your clothing purify
5. And uncleanness¹⁶⁶⁰ avoid
6. And do not confer favor to acquire more¹⁶⁶¹
7. But for your Lord be patient.
8. And when the trumpet is blown,
9. That Day will be a difficult day
10. For the disbelievers - not easy.
11. Leave Me with the one I created alone¹⁶⁶²
12. And to whom I granted extensive wealth
13. And children present [with him]
14. And spread [everything] before him, easing [his life].
15. Then he desires that I should add more.
16. No! Indeed, he has been toward Our verses obstinate.
17. I will cover him with arduous torment.
18. Indeed, he thought and deliberated.¹⁶⁶³
19. So may he be destroyed [for] how he deliberated.
20. Then may he be destroyed [for] how he deliberated.
21. Then he considered [again];
22. Then he frowned and scowled;
23. Then he turned back and was arrogant
24. And said, "This is not but magic imitated [from others].
25. This is not but the word of a human being."
26. I will drive him into Saqar.¹⁶⁶⁴
27. And what can make you know what is Saqar?
28. It lets nothing remain and leaves nothing [unburned],
29. Altering [i.e., blackening] the skins.
30. Over it are nineteen [angels].

¹⁶⁵⁸ *Al-Muddathir*: The One Who Covers Himself (with a garment).

¹⁶⁵⁹ Referring to the Prophet.

¹⁶⁶⁰ Specifically, idols or generally, bad conduct and morals.

¹⁶⁶¹ An alternative meaning is "Do not consider any favour you have conferred to be great."

¹⁶⁶² i.e., without wealth or children. The reference is to al-Waleed bin al-Mugheerah, who after inclining toward the Qur'ān, denied it publicly in order to win the approval of the Quraysh.

¹⁶⁶³ About what he would say concerning the Qur'ān and how he might discredit the Prophet.

¹⁶⁶⁴ One of the proper names of Hell.

31. And We have not made the keepers of the Fire except angels. And We have not made their number except as a trial for those who disbelieve - that those who were given the Scripture will be convinced and those who have believed will increase in faith and those who were given the Scripture and the believers will not doubt and that those in whose hearts is disease [i.e., hypocrisy] and the disbelievers will say, "What does God intend by this as an example?" Thus does God leave astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except Him. And it [i.e., mention of the Fire] is not but a reminder to humanity.
32. No! By the moon
33. And [by] the night when it departs
34. And [by] the morning when it brightens,
35. Indeed, it [i.e., the Fire] is of the greatest [afflictions]
36. As a warning to humanity -
37. To whoever wills among you to proceed¹⁶⁶⁵ or stay behind.
38. Every soul, for what it has earned, will be retained¹⁶⁶⁶
39. Except the companions of the right,¹⁶⁶⁷
40. [Who will be] in gardens, questioning each other
41. About the criminals,
42. [And asking them], "What put you into Saqar?"
43. They will say, "We were not of those who prayed,
44. Nor did we used to feed the poor.
45. And we used to enter into vain discourse with those who engaged [in it],
46. And we used to deny the Day of Re-compense
47. Until there came to us the certainty [i.e., death]."
48. So there will not benefit them the intercession of [any] intercessors.
49. Then what is [the matter] with them that they are, from the reminder, turning away
50. As if they were alarmed donkeys
51. Fleeing from a lion?
52. Rather, every person among them desires that he¹⁶⁶⁸ would be given scriptures spread about.¹⁶⁶⁹
53. No! But they do not fear the Hereafter.
54. No! Indeed, it [i.e., the Qur'ān] is a reminder
55. Then whoever wills will remember it.

¹⁶⁶⁵ To righteousness by acceptance of the warning.

¹⁶⁶⁶ i.e., subject or held responsible.

¹⁶⁶⁷ i.e., the righteous who receive their records in their right hands.

¹⁶⁶⁸ Instead of Prophet Muhammad

¹⁶⁶⁹ i.e., made public. Much of their refusal of his message was due to envy and jealousy of the Prophet.

56. And they will not remember except that God wills. He is worthy of fear and adequate for [granting] forgiveness.