

Sūrah 78: an-Naba'

Period of Revelation

As we have explained in the introduction to Sūrah al-Mursalat, the themes of all the Sūrahs, from al-Qiyamah to an-Naziat, closely resemble one another, and all these seem to have been revealed in the earliest period at Makkah.

Theme and Subject Matter

Its theme also is the same as of Sūrah Al-Mursalat, i.e. to affirm the Resurrection and Hereafter, and to warn the people of the consequences of acknowledging or disacknowledging it.

When the Prophet first started to preach Islām in Makkah, his message consisted of three elements:

1. That none be held as an associate with God in Godhead;
2. That God had appointed him as His Messenger;
3. That this world will come to an end one day and then another world will be established when all the former and the latter generations will be resurrected with the same bodies in which they lived and worked in the world; then they will be called to account for their beliefs and deeds and those who emerge as believing and righteous in this accountability will go to Paradise and those who are proved to be disbelieving and wicked will live in Hell for ever.

Of these, although the first thing was highly unpleasant for the people of Makkah, yet in any case they were not disbelievers in the existence of God. They believed in His Being the Supreme Sustainer, Creator and Providence and also admitted that all those beings whom they regarded as their deities, were themselves God's creatures. Therefore, in this regard the only thing they disputed was whether they had any share in the attributes and powers of Divinity and in the Divine Being itself or not.

As for the second thing, the people of Makkah were not prepared to accept it. However, what they could not possibly deny was that during the 40 years life that the Prophet had lived among them before his claim to Prophethood, they had never found him a lying deceitful person or the one who would adopt unlawful methods for selfish ends. They themselves admitted that he was a man possessed of wisdom, righteousness and moral superiority. Therefore, in spite of charging him with a thousand false accusations, to say nothing of making others believe, they were finding it difficult even for themselves to believe that although he was an honest and upright man in every other affair and dealing of life, yet, God forbid, a liar only in his claim to be a Prophet.

Thus, the first two things were not in fact so perplexing for the people of Makkah as the third thing. When this was presented before them, they mocked it most of all, expressed unusual wonder at it, and regarding it as remote from reason and impossible, started talking against it as incredible, even inconceivable, in their assemblies. But in order to bring them to the way of Islām it was absolutely essential that the doctrine of the Hereafter should be instilled into their minds, for without belief in this doctrine, it was not at all possible that they could adopt a serious attitude with regard to the truth and falsehood, could change their standard of values in respect of good and evil, and giving up worship of the world, could be inclined to follow the way that Islām urged them to follow. That is why in the earliest Sūrahs revealed at Makkah the doctrine of the Hereafter has been impressed and stressed more than anything else. However, the arguments for it have been given in such a way that the doctrine of the Oneness of God (Tawhid) also is impressed on the minds automatically. This also contains brief arguments, here and there, to confirm the truth of the Holy Messenger of God and the Qur'ān.

After understanding well why the theme of the Hereafter has been so frequently repeated in the Sūrahs of this period, let us now have a look at the subject matter of this Sūrah. In it first of all, allusion has been made to the common talk and the doubts that were being expressed in every street of Makkah and in every assembly of the people of Makkah on hearing the news about Resurrection. Then, the deniers have been asked: "Don't you see this earth which We have spread as a carpet for you? Don't you see the high mountains which we have so firmly placed in the earth? Don't you consider your own selves how We have created you as pairs of men and women? Don't you consider your sleep by which We make you seek a few hours rest after every few hours labor and toil so as to keep you fit for work in the world? Don't you see the alternation of the night and day which We are so regularly perpetuating precisely according to your needs and requirements? Don't you see the strongly fortified system of the heavens above you? Don't you see the sun by means of which you are receiving your light and heat? Don't you see the rains which fall from the clouds and help produce corn and vegetables and luxuriant gardens? Do these things only tell you that the power of the Almighty Being Who has created them, will be unable to bring about Resurrection and establish the Next World? Then, from the supreme wisdom which is clearly working in this world around you, do you only understand this that although each part of it and each function of it is purposive, yet life is meaningless? Nothing could be more absurd and meaningless than after appointing man to the office of foreman and granting him vast powers of appropriation, in this workhouse, when he leaves the world after fulfilling his role, he should be let off without any accountability. He should neither be rewarded and granted pension on satisfactory work, nor subjected to any accountability and punishment on unsatisfactory performance of duty.

After giving these arguments it has been emphatically stated that the Day of Judgment shall certainly come to pass on its appointed time. No sooner is the Trumpet sounded than whatever is being foretold shall appear before the eyes, and whether you believe in it today, or not, at that time you will come out in your multitudes from wherever you would be lying dead and buried to render your account. Your denial cannot in any way avert this inevitable event.

Then, in v. 21-30; it has been stated that every single misdeed of those who do not expect any accountability to take place and have thus belied Our Revelations, lies reckoned and recorded with Us, and Hell is ever lying an ambush to punish them and punish them fully for all their doings. Then, in v. 31-36, the best rewards of those who lived as responsible people in the world and have provided for their Hereafter beforehand have been mentioned. They have been reassured that they will not only be rewarded richly for their services but in addition they will also be given sufficient gifts.

In conclusion, the Divine Court in the Hereafter has been depicted, making it plain that there will be no question of somebody's being adamant in the matter of getting his followers and associates forgiven, none will speak without leave, and leave will be granted on the condition that intercession be made only for the one to whom leave of intercession will have been given, and the intercessor will say only what is right. Moreover, leave for intercession will be given only for those who had acknowledged the Truth in the world but were sinners; rebels of God and rejecters of the Truth will deserve no intercession at all.

The discourse has been concluded with this warning: The Day the coming of which is being foretold, shall certainly come to pass. Do not think it is yet far off, it is close at hand. Now, whoever wills, let him believe in it and take the way towards his Lord. But he who disbelieves, in spite of the warning, "will have all his deeds placed before him: and he will exclaim regretfully: "Oh, would that I were not born in the world!" At that time, his regrets will be about the same world of which he is so enamored today!

Sūrah 78: an-Naba'¹⁶⁹¹

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

1. About what are they asking one another?
2. About the great news¹⁶⁹² -
3. That over which they are in disagreement.
4. No! They are going to know.
5. Then, no! They are going to know.
6. Have We not made the earth a resting place?
7. And the mountains as stakes?¹⁶⁹³
8. And We created you in pairs
9. And made your sleep [a means for] rest
10. And made the night as clothing¹⁶⁹⁴
11. And made the day for livelihood
12. And constructed above you seven strong [heavens]
13. And made [therein] a burning lamp
14. And sent down, from the rain clouds, pouring water
15. That We may bring forth thereby grain and vegetation
16. And gardens of entwined growth.
17. Indeed, the Day of Judgement is an appointed time -
18. The Day the Horn is blown and you will come forth in multitudes
19. And the heaven is opened and will become gateways
20. And the mountains are removed and will be [but] a mirage.
21. Indeed, Hell has been lying in wait
22. For the transgressors, a place of return,
23. In which they will remain for ages [unending].
24. They will not taste therein [any] coolness or drink
25. Except scalding water and [foul] purulence -
26. An appropriate recompense.¹⁶⁹⁵
27. Indeed, they were not expecting an account
28. And denied Our verses with [emphatic] denial.
29. But all things We have enumerated in writing.
30. "So taste [the penalty], and never will We increase you except in torment."¹⁶⁹⁶
31. Indeed, for the righteous is attainment¹⁶⁹⁷ -

¹⁶⁹¹ *An-Naba'*: The News (or Happening).

¹⁶⁹² i.e., the Resurrection.

¹⁶⁹³ To stabilize the land and balance the earth.

¹⁶⁹⁴ Covering and concealing you in its darkness.

¹⁶⁹⁵ In proportion to and comparable with their crimes.

¹⁶⁹⁶ This announcement will be made to the companions of Hell.

¹⁶⁹⁷ Of security, success and reward, including escape and safety from Hell.

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32. Gardens and grapevines
33. And full-breasted [companions] of equal age
34. And a full cup.¹⁶⁹⁸
35. No ill speech will they hear therein or any falsehood -
36. [As] reward from your Lord, [a generous] gift [made due by] account,¹⁶⁹⁹
37. [From] the Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, the Most Merciful. They possess not from Him [authority for] speech.¹⁷⁰⁰
38. The Day that the Spirit [i.e., Gabriel] and the angels will stand in rows, they will not speak except for one whom the Most Merciful permits, and he will say what is correct.
39. That is the True [i.e., certain] Day; so he who wills may take to his Lord a [way of] return.¹⁷⁰¹
40. Indeed, We have warned you of a near punishment on the Day when a man will observe what his hands have put forth¹⁷⁰² and the disbeliever will say, "Oh, I wish that I were dust!"

¹⁶⁹⁸ Of wine which is delicious and does not intoxicate.

¹⁶⁹⁹ i.e., as a result of both their own righteous deeds and the limitless generosity of God. Another meaning is a "gift calculated [to be adequate]."

¹⁷⁰⁰ None of God's creatures can plead with Him on the Day of Judgement except by His permission.

¹⁷⁰¹ i.e., a direct route through correct beliefs and righteous deeds.

¹⁷⁰² i.e., the deeds he did in this world, which await him in the Hereafter.